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FIFA fires ex-Blatter deputy Jerome Valcke



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MPs SUPPORT LEADERSHIP IN BOYCOTT-HIT SESSION

E-MEDIA, ANTI-GRAFT LAWS PASSED, DEFENSE BUDGET APPROVED



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By B Izzak

KUWAIT: All nine Shiite MPs yesterday boycotted the National Assembly session apparently in protest over court rulings against 25 Kuwaiti Shiites and an Iranian for belonging to an Iran-linked terror cell. None of the nine MPs said explicitly they staged the boycott to protest the rulings, but MP Abdulhameed Dashti published on his Twitter account comments supporting the boycott to "protest the repressive verdicts".

MP Saleh Ashour, another Shiite MP, complained in statements published on Twitter of what he called discrimination against Shiites, saying that their anger has reached its peak, especially when "they are being publicly accused of being agents for Iran and Hezbollah". He said that at the same time, the government is not taking any action against those fighting in Iraq and Syria, a clear reference to Sunni jihadist groups. Other Shiite MPs who boycotted the session include Adnan Abdulsamad, Ahmad Lari, Khalil Abul, Khalil Al-Saleh, Faisal Al-Duwaisan, Abdullah Al-Tameemi and Yousef Al-Zalzalah.

Sunni Islamist MP Ahmad Al-Azemi said that the Shiite lawmakers staged the boycott to protest against the rulings. "They want to send a message which we reject. The rulings of the court must be respected," Azemi told reporters after speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem did not allow him to speak during the session. The criminal court on Tuesday sentenced a Kuwaiti and an Iranian to death and 19 Kuwaitis to between five and 15 years for spying for Iran and joining Hezbollah and plotting attacks against Kuwait.

Continued on Page 13

KRCS MARKS GOLDEN JUBILEE



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives a memento from Kuwait Red Crescent Society Chairman Dr Hilal Al-Sayer during its golden jubilee celebrations at Bayan Palace yesterday. — KUNA (See Page 3)



This frame grab from a video shows the detention of American Navy sailors by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards in the Arabian Gulf on Tuesday. — AP

IRAN FREES US SAILORS

TEHRAN: Iran moved yesterday to head off a potential crisis days before the expected implementation of its nuclear deal with world powers by releasing 10 US Navy soldiers it had detained in the Gulf. A dramatic series of events started with the sailors - nine men and a woman - being taken into custody after

their two patrol boats drifted into Iranian territory late on Tuesday. US and Iranian officials scrambled to defuse the situation, which unfolded as the nuclear accord edged toward its final steps, with a top Iranian official saying the deal should be implemented by Sunday.

Continued on Page 13



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KUWAIT PLAYS LEADING ROLE IN AIDING REFUGEES: UN AGENCY

IICO TO HOST 4TH NGOS PLEDGING CONFERENCE

KUWAIT: Kuwait plays a leading role in aiding the Syrian refugees, Head of the UN refugee agency office in Kuwait Dr Hanan Hamdan said yesterday. Speaking to KUNA, Dr Hamdan said that Kuwait's hosting of three donors' conferences for the Syrian refugees reflected the country's strong conviction in helping these people, adding that Kuwait also played an integral role in garnering international attention to the upcoming conference, to be held in London next February.

In 2015, Kuwait helped some 2.4



Head of the UN refugee agency office in Kuwait Dr Hanan Hamdan

million Syrian refugees with its generous nearly \$120 million donation to the UN agency, she said. Displaced Syrians and refugees in nearby countries to Syria also benefited from Kuwait's donations, said Dr Hamdan, noting that in 2013, Kuwait had given a donation of about \$110 million to countries hosting Syrian refugees which included Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and Egypt.

She went on saying that Kuwait's donations to the UN agencies had surpassed \$1.3 billion with the UN Refugee Agency gaining the most out of this sum of donations. Kuwait's leadership and people played an important role in rallying the international community into the cause of aiding the Syrian refugees, said the official, noting that the UN naming of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah as the 'Humanitarian Leader' and honoring Kuwait as a the global 'Humanitarian Center' were befitting titles.

Protection measures

Regarding the challenges facing aid work for Syrians, Dr Hamdan said that providing adequate protection measures during humanitarian missions within Syria was the biggest obstacles facing the UN refugee agency. She added that the any instance when the agency faced a budget deficit was another issue to consider, stressing that nations should abide by their pledges to able to help the refugees.

The agency has a budget of \$7 million which will hopefully cover the expenses for now, said Dr Hamdan. She said that the agency also played part in resettling the refugees if all other measures failed, indicating that usually refugees were sent to Scandinavian countries, the US, or Canada for resettlement.

The resettlement process goes through various phases in cooperation with the host countries mostly responsible for the security background check of refugees, said the official who affirmed that the agency made it paramount that the refugees it is hosting would not become a security liability for the agency or any other countries willing to accommodate them.

Pledging conference

In other news, the International Islamic Charitable Organization (IICO) announced plans to host the fourth international pledging conference for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to support the Syrians will be held on January 28th. IICO Chairman and advisor at the Amiri Diwan Abdullah Al-Maatouq told the press yesterday that this conference comes in line with Kuwait's endeavors to help alleviate the suffering of the Syrian refugees and the displaced; it also precedes Kuwait's co-chairmanship of the fourth donors' conference to support the Syrians, which will be held in London early February.

"The tragedy of the Syrians is skin cringing; hence, humanitarian efforts should be intensified," Al-Maatouq, who is also UN Secretary General's Envoy for Humanitarian Affairs said. The conference will see the participations of dozens of NGOs from Arab and Islamic countries. They will pledge anew to add on previous promises made in past conferences. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Osama Al-Tahous registers as a candidate for by-elections in the third electoral constituency. — Photos by Fouad Al-Shaikh



Jassim Abul Al-Kandari



Abdulaziz Al-Samhan

TEN CANDIDATES REGISTER FOR BY-ELECTIONS ON FIRST DAY



Waleed Al-Sharrah

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: Ten male candidates yesterday applied to the elections committee, filing nominations to run for by-elections in the third electoral constituency, said informed sources, pointing out that nominations would be accepted until Jan 22 and elections would be held on Feb 20.

Candidate Jassim Abul Al-Kandari declared he was independent and that he did not belong to any political movement or bloc, though he respects them all. Kandari added that his electoral agenda focuses mainly on issues of great interest to Kuwaiti public opinion, namely development, housing welfare and social issues like bedoons, retirees and divorced women.

Candidate Osama Al-Tahous stressed that his participation in the election was a duty aimed at supporting democracy. He also noted that disagreements for greater good were acceptable. He also noted that time was too short in view of the challenges facing Kuwaiti youth.



Khaled Al-Hamad

Candidate Abdulaziz Al-Samhan said much focus was needed on various issues such as housing welfare, education, subsidies, fuel prices and oil prices. "The current parliament has less than a year in office and this period might not be enough to evaluate lawmakers' performance, but observers can do that by watching their performance inside the parliament hall," he underlined.

Meanwhile, former Municipal Council member and member of the annulled parliament Hisham Al-Baghli yesterday announced running for the by-elections. He stressed that his agenda focuses on reform, in addition to several other major issues such as the economy, oil prices, subsidies and public services.

Open for all

Candidate Waleed Al-Sharrah said that the 'arena' was open for all those who feel capable of serving the nation to run for elections, and that this was why he is running. Sharrah said that more focus should be given to boosting the economy.



Taheer Al-Failakawi

Candidate Hassan Al-Osaimi said he is running to work on various projects and issues including economic projects, aspirations to unite GCC states and improving citizens' conditions.

Candidate Khaled Al-Hamad said that the remaining period of this parliament's tenure is insufficient and does not help MPs achieve the many aspirations of the Kuwaiti people. "Therefore, we will be keen on group work," he underlined. Candidate Taheer Al-Failakawi said that there were too many issues to tend to and solve such as the housing problem and disabled people's rights.

Lieutenant Colonel Salah Al-Shatti, elections department manager at the Ministry of Interior (MoI) said that registration is open until Feb 12. He added that the total number of voters in the 3th constituency is 18,218 that can vote in 20 schools - 10 for male and 10 for female voters. Notably, MoI's relations and security media has set up a special media center with all facilities needed for both candidates and media figures.

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KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and top state officials attend the golden jubilee celebration of Kuwait Red Crescent Society. — Amiri Diwan photos



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah tour a photo gallery showing KRCS activities around the world, with KRCS Board Chairman, Dr Hilal Al-Sayer.

AMIR PATRONIZES KUWAIT RED CRESCENT SOCIETY'S GOLDEN JUBILEE CELEBRATION

CHAIRMAN ANNOUNCES DONATION CAMPAIGN TO SYRIA'S MADAYA

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah patronized and attended the golden jubilee celebration of Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS), which was hosted at Bayan Palace yesterday. His Highness the Amir was greeted upon arrival at the ceremony venue by the KRCS Board Chairman Dr Hilal Al-Sayer, and the founding member and board member Saad Al-Nahed.

The ceremony was attended by His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanim, senior Sheikhs, His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Deputy Minister of the Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah, Deputy Premier and Minister of Defense Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah and senior State officials.

Generous contributions

Dr Sayer addressed the attendees, expressing deep gratitude to His Highness the Amir for sponsoring the



KRCS Board Chairman Dr Hilal Al-Sayer addresses the attendees.

late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah. "On this great occasion, I declare that Kuwait has proven with the establishment of the Kuwait Red Crescent Society that it has become a minaret for institutionalized humanitarian action, considering that the global humanitarian work is in dire need for such an association."



Saad Al-Nahed, KRCS board member speaks at the ceremony.

of the world and international organizations to such diplomatic humanitarian role that was capped with the granting of the title, the 'Humanitarian Leader' to His Highness, and naming of Kuwait as the 'Humanitarian Center' by the UN," he said. Teams of the KRCS have raised Kuwait's flag aloft, presenting themselves as good ambassadors of the country abroad, and an example that should be followed at the humanitarian action level, the society chairman added. The society will pursue its relief, humanitarian, educational and development activities which it had launched 50 years ago reaching 68 countries worldwide, he said.

Donation to Madaya

Dr Sayer declared launch of a donation campaign at the KRCS headquarters to aid inhabitants of the stricken Syrian town Madaya, which has been under tight siege. "Undoubtedly there are real tragedies and starvation experienced by 42,000 people in the encircled Madaya - where people are eating salt and tree leaves and children are dying due to hunger and cold as well the siege imposed by the oppressive regime." A large number of Madaya's inhabitants have lost their lives due to severe malnutrition - mostly of them elderly and children, he confirmed. Scores of others "are on the verge of death."

86 nations

Saad Al-Nahed, the Society board member, addressed a statement on behalf of the KRCS founders, saying in part that the society, since its proclamation in January 1966, has been supported by the government to secure aid for catastrophes' stricken nations worldwide, disclosing that more than 86 nations have benefited from the Kuwaiti help. Paying tribute to the founders who had contributed to the society founding with money and effort, he mentioned the late Abdulaziz Hamad Al-Saqer, Yousef Abdulaziz Al-Flajj, Mohammad Yousef Al-Nisef, Yousef Ibrahim Al-Ghanim, Abdulaziz Al-Shaya, Dr Abdulrahman Al-Awadhi, Yousef Al-Hajji, in addition to others who had generously and diligently helped in launching the society-proclaimed in an Amiri Decree in 1966.

Recalling excerpts of the KRCS history, Nahed said the first board was headed by the late, Abdulaziz Hamad Al-Saqer. The Society has a special status, different from that of other public welfare associations. First article of its bylaw stipulates the principle of volunteering; where it acts as a back-up authority for official authorities, particularly with respect of provision 26 of the first 1949 Geneva Convention, in addition to other international conventions, adopted during conferences by the Red Crescent and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

"Today while we celebrate the Society 50th anniversary, I praise continuing grass-root donations on all occasions, namely by companies, financial institutions and individuals. Even schools have played noticeable role in offering aid to the society on all occasions; in another indication of the inherent inclination for doing good among the people of Kuwait," he said.

The United Nations' crowning of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-

Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah with the highest award, the designation as the 'Humanitarian Leader', and the naming of Kuwait as the 'Humanitarian Center' are boastful accomplishments for Kuwait and its people, Nahed said.

Pioneers honored

During the ceremony, KRCS honored a special group of pioneers on Wednesday, an elite fraternity that has made exemplary contributions to KRCS for the last 50 years. In statements to KUNA, some of the honorees in a gala commemorating the 50th anniversary of KRCS's inception, said that they are elated to have been feted, underscoring Kuwait's rich history of philanthropy.

Abdulrahman Al-Awadhi, one of KRCS's pioneers, said that the celebrations reflected the Kuwaiti leadership's steadfast commitment to humanitarian causes. Muneera Al-Mutawa, another honoree who accepted a posthumous award on her father's behalf, described the reward as a "great honor."

In September 2014, United Nations (UN) Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon paid tribute to Kuwait by naming the country a 'Humanitarian Center' and His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah a 'Humanitarian Leader.' — KUNA



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is pictured with KRCS Board Chairman Dr Hilal Al-Sayer.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah honors Abdulrahman Al-Awadhi, a KRCS pioneer.

event, noting His Highness' generous contributions to humanitarian and relief works, also recalling the humanitarian deeds by the late Amir, Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad, and the Father Amir, Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah.

The society was established according to an Amiri Decree during era of the

Dr Sayer noted that the society, in response to guidance by His Highness the Amir, has aided nations at hard times and hurriedly dispatched assistance at times of crises to a long chain of countries. "Undoubtedly, Kuwait's efforts under the leadership of His Highness the Amir has drawn attention



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah (right) and Sheikh Faisal Al-Saud Al-Sabah are seen in attendance.

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FINANCE MINISTER AFFIRMS COMPANIES' SALE FLAWLESS

'KUWAIT TO NAME THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR DEFECTIVE ROADS'

KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister of Finance and Acting Minister of Oil Anas Al-Saleh said yesterday that there were no violations regarding the selling of companies of Agricultural Food Products Company (K.S.C) and Kuwait Motoring Company (K.M.C.). In response to MPs' questions during a National Assembly session yesterday, the minister explained that he personally checked all the selling documents and did not find any violations, "except for some remarks that have been refuted by the Public

cern on recurrence of such accidents, emphasizing that any civil servant or official who has not done his job properly in this respect will be punished. The minister said his predecessors had referred the issue of such recurring accidents, flying pebbles on the streets, to the Public Prosecution. He explained that the former ministers had reported about contractors and companies that had failed to abide by standing standards for asphaltting the roads. This issue is currently under

issue has been referred to the judiciary." Essa made the statement in response to an MP's question during the session, pertaining to "Masters' Degree scholarships given to ineligible students at the Institute of Public Authority for Applied Education and Training." "The issue is currently being investigated and will be sorted out in due time," Essa said. "Since the issue has been referred to the judiciary, we have no right to discuss or investigate it."

tioned will face strict punishment. He stressed that "the Municipality had already raided these cafes since the beginning of this phenomenon," adding that he would continue to follow up on this issue.

Special needs

The National Assembly yesterday approved proposals to revise some provisions of Law No. 8/2010 on the rights of people with special needs during the first and second deliberation, and, then, forwarded it to the government.

The first article states: "A person with special needs is the one who suffers from permanent total or partial disorders that lead to physical, mental or sensory abilities which may prevent him or her from securing life needs or participating effectively in society."

The ninth article of the law says that "the government is committed to providing educational services for people with disabilities, including those who have learning difficulties. The rights and needs of people with disabilities should be taken into account in all tests and interviews conducted by government or civil agencies, according to the same article.

The 10th article urges the government to take all the administrative and organizational effective arrangements required to integrate handicapped people, including slow learners and learning difficulties in different educational levels within the educational and rehabilitation courses.

Sports facilities

Also yesterday, Minister of Information, Minister of State for Youth Affairs Sheikh Salman Sabah Al-Salem Al-Humoud Al-Sabah said the government is very much keen on building as many installations as possible for youth activities and sports exercises in southern regions.

Reacting to remarks by an MP during yesterday's session, the minister alluded in particular to recent proclamation of Burgan Club in Ali Sabah Al-Salem district. The government is very much concerned and willing to build sports stadiums for the youth in various regions of the country, he said, also indicating at current coordination with the Ministry of Housing to establish a large sports stadium in Sabah Al-Ahmad district. —KUNA



BEIRUT: Lebanon's Prime Minister Tammam Salam meets a delegation from Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development. —KUNA

LEBANON'S PRIME MINISTER MEETS KFAED DELEGATION

BEIRUT: Lebanon's Prime Minister Tammam Salam received a delegation from Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) yesterday to discuss social and developmental projects in Lebanon. The meeting also tacked a grant agreement that was recently signed between the two parties to help Lebanon easing off some of the responsibility it shoulders as a host country for

Syrian refugees, KFAED Chairman Abdulwahab Al-Bader said. The grant, worth of \$30 million, is part of Kuwait's commitment in a pledge it made during the third donors' conference in support for the Syrians, which was held in Kuwait last year. The grant aims at improving public services: health, education, social affairs, water supplies and waste management. —KUNA



KUWAIT: MPs take part in a parliament session at the National Assembly in Kuwait City yesterday. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Investment Authority." Saleh also presented to the parliamentary committee for Protection of Public Funds all the needed documents concerning sales of government-owned companies. The companies will not change their activities after the selling deals, he affirmed.

Defective roads

Meanwhile, Minister of Public Works Ali Al-Omair vowed to punish those responsible for defective roads namely recurring accidents caused by flying pebbles. During the same session, Omari, also Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs, affirmed that his ministry is following up with con-

examination by the prosecution, he said, affirming that not a shred of information would be concealed in this respect. All required documents are in possession of the ministry, which is also under examination of the National Assembly, the minister said, expressing readiness to take part in sessions of the relevant parliamentary committees for cooperation on such issues.

Scholarships irregularities

In another topic, Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education Dr Bader Al-Essa said that there have been some irregularities concerning Masters' Degree scholarships given to students at an educational institution, adding that "the

Enclosed cabins

In the meantime, Minister of State for Municipal Affairs and Minister of Communications Essa Ahmad Al-Kandari affirmed yesterday that he had issued instructions for immediate implementation to the Municipality to raid cafes with enclosed cabins, namely those suspected of curtaining indecent acts.

Responding to MPs' queries, Minister Essa said that the cabins in the cafes are legal and have been established according to municipality regulations. "However, misuse of this license will be strictly dealt with," he said, warning that cafes with enclosed chambers where indecent or immoral acts are prac-

CABINET GIVES TOP PRIORITY TO HANDLING DEMOGRAPHIC IMBALANCE DEAD DOG SHUTS RUNWAY

By A Saleh and Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: The cabinet is expected to discuss special measures to handle Kuwait's demographic imbalance soon as a top priority in the new development plan, said official sources. The sources explained that the measures would include restricting the appointment of expats in government bodies and ministries, namely in administrative positions that can be filled by citizens. "Many ministerial sectors would be clearly instructed to ban the appointment of further expats and to annually lay off 25 percent of those already appointed to replace them with Kuwaitis," they said.

The sources, however, explained that expats would still be needed in medical and education sectors and accordingly, MoE will only lay off expat teachers in subjects that can be taught by citizens, GCC national and bedoons. "Extensive plans are needed to make Kuwaitis work in medicine, namely as nursing and other supporting medical staff," they said. However, the sources explained that with the general tendency to privatize public hospitals, appointing expat doctors and nurses in the public sector would drop and lessen state budget burdens in this regard. Further, the sources said that a meeting would be held by the Manpower and Government Restructuring Program, the chamber of commerce, banks and investment companies to agree on increasing the number of citizens appointed in the private sector after qualifying and training them. "Laid off expats will not be given new residency visas or hired in other places, otherwise Kuwait's demography would remain the same," the sources underlined.

Flights diverted

Four incoming flights were yesterday redirected to land in Bahrain and UAE after a dog's carcass was found on Kuwait airport's only operational runway, said informed sources, noting that

flights resumed after the carcass was removed. Notably, the airport's western runway is currently under maintenance and the eastern runway is the only one operational until the end of this month.

Judge steps down

The judge hearing a case filed against cleric Othman Al-Khamees for slandering Shiites yesterday stepped down, writing a request to the judicial council asking to be replaced. The judiciary council is expected to convene soon to decide on the substitute judge. Notably, Khamees had been sentenced to a KD 20,000 fine.

Ruling upheld

The court of misdemeanor yesterday upheld a ruling sentencing media figure Saud Al-Asfour to a one-month prison term and KD 200 fine to suspend the verdict for slandering chancellor Nasr Salem Aal Haid through his Twitter account.

Citizenship forgery

The public prosecution yesterday released three people accused of forging Kuwaiti citizenship on bail pending referral to court. Informed sources said that the suspects, who were originally Syrians, had paid a citizen KD 35,000 to add their children's names to their citizenship files.

Driver killed

An Egyptian truck driver was instantly killed when a Pakistani truck driver deliberately ran him over at Nuwaiseeb land border exit, said security sources. Case papers indicate that the two drivers argued over the right to enter the border exit area and that the Egyptian driver stepped off asking the other driver to back off, but he ran him over.

Bad truffle

Capital municipality inspectors confiscated and destroyed 130 kilograms of foul truffles on display at the truffle market.



A chalet set ablaze in Julaiya.



Flames come out of the window of a 3rd floor apartment in Jabriya.

FIREMAN INJURED IN SERIES OF FIRES

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: A fireman was injured in a series of fires reported yesterday around Kuwait. The injury took place while firefighters were tackling a blaze that broke out at Julaiya chalets. The fireman was injured in the foot and was taken to hospital for treatment.

In Rumaithiya, a fire took place in a building's warehouse. Salmiya and south Salmiya fire centers dealt with the case.

Meanwhile, a fire broke out in a Ferdous intermediate school, prompting Ardhiya fire center to respond. The fire was in the mathematics department. The fire was put out and no injuries were reported. In Jabriya, Hawally and Salmiya firemen put out a fire that broke out in a 3rd floor apartment.

Swimmer rescued

The fire department received a call about two persons in danger of drowning at the beach near Kuwait Towers. Rescue teams found a 58-year-old in an abnormal condition who was swept away when he was swimming in the cold weather and refused to be helped. He then was pulled out and handed to police.



A rescuer approaches a man who was swept away while swimming near Kuwait Towers.

Driver injured

A vehicle flipped over on the Seventh Ring Road, trapping the driver inside. Sabhan firemen freed him and handed him to paramedics, who took him to the hospital for treatment from fractures he sustained.

Weapons found

Weapons detectives launched a campaign in Jahra stables as part of the interior ministry's strategy to maintain security. Nine shotguns were found, while a man sentenced



Firefighters tackle a fire in a building's warehouse in Rumaithiya.

for two years and two wanted men were arrested.

Expired cheese

Kuwait Municipality destroyed 715 cheese tins as tests showed they were not fit for human consumption. They said the total amount of spoiled food confiscated was 7.865 tons during field campaigns by the inspection and follow up department at Mubarak Al-Kabeer municipality. The raids included several food plants in Subhan and resulted in issuing 19 citations.



A vehicle pictured following an accident at the Seventh Ring Road yesterday.



KUWAIT: Abdullah Al-Muqlid, Chairman of the Retired Officers Association (left) speaks during a press conference organized by the association's board to announce its declaration. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

RETIRED OFFICERS ASSOCIATION OFFICIALLY ANNOUNCES DECLARATION

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: The Retired Officers Association held a press conference at the Kuwait Journalists Association yesterday to announce its declaration by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor. The association includes retired officers from the police department, army and the National Guard. "The membership requirements are to be a Kuwaiti citizen, be a retired officer from the police, army or national guard, not be sentenced on security charges and have shown good conduct. The applicant just needs to submit his ID and other personal documents," said Hamed Al-Snafi, Deputy Chairman of the newly-declared association.

Civil association

Abdullah Al-Muqlid, Chairman of the Retired Officers Association, said the association will serve retired officers as well as the entire community. "This is a civil association although its members are former officers, which is the first of its kind in Kuwait. I'm glad it was declared on the 25th anniversary of the liberation of Kuwait, as we, the founding members, had all participated in that war. We are all equal in this association and we don't have titles as we are now civilians," he noted, recounting some stories of his colleagues during the war.

The association is not providing any financial benefits. "There won't be any salaries paid to members or other finan-

cial benefits. Also, we don't have sectarian views. We know that there are dangers surrounding the region and we just aim to provide support to the government if needed. Yet, the association will bring its members some benefits, such as discounts on airline tickets with some airlines, and special services provided by banks and other facilities," Muqlid added.

Retirees' experiences

Snafi said that the main reason behind founding this association is to benefit from the experiences of the retired officers. "It's a pity that these officers who all are highly educated, as each of us has at least a master's degree, just sit at home doing nothing. There are many projects in Kuwait that they can be useful for, that can benefit from their long experience, such as developing Boubyan Island, building the railroad and many other projects," he pointed out.

Abdulrahman Al-Saqer, member of the founding board of the association, stated that the association can be useful for various institutions in different fields. "Besides giving a great chance to retired officers from various departments to meet, members can provide their services for many activities. We can utilize our experience by providing training courses and consultation services, and be a connection between the police, army and National Guard and the community with its institutions and individuals," he explained.

KUWAITIS WITH US PASSPORTS MUST COMPLY WITH FATCA

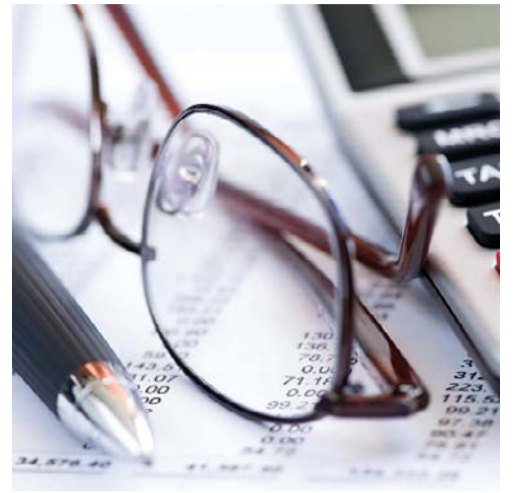
KUWAIT: Kuwaiti citizens who possess US passports need to straighten out their US tax status to avoid the penalty of having their US passports scrapped, said Abdulaziz Al-Anjeri, head of the American Tax Bureau in Kuwait. Technically Kuwaitis are barred from holding dual citizenship but many are suspected of holding a second passport, including a large number with US citizenship.

The US government has lately passed a law invalidating the US passport of anyone who does not pay their due taxes in accordance with the requirements of the US Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act (FATCA), said Anjeri in a press statement carried by Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) yesterday. The law stipulates that anyone incurring back taxes in the amount of \$50,000 or more is subject to have their passport revoked,

he said, stressing that US tax authorities are dogged about collecting due taxes on time and will go to the limit in enforcing penalties on tax dodgers.

Abiding by FATCA requirements mainly concerns US citizens who work abroad and also foreign financial institutions who keep bank accounts or other financial assets of US citizens and therefore must report to US tax authorities the particulars of these accounts and assets, said Anjeri.

He added that the loss of a US passport entails its bearer to face possible criminal charges. He urged all Kuwaiti citizens, bearers of US passports, to pay serious heed to FATCA requirements and conditions and to comply promptly with US tax laws in order to avoid problems.



KNPC spokesman Khalid Al-Asousi

KUWAIT TO PERMANENTLY SHUT HEAVY OIL UNIT AT SHUAIBA: KNPC

KUWAIT: Kuwait has decided to permanently shut its heavy oil cracking unit at its Shuaiba refinery which has been shut since a fire at the unit in August, a spokesman for the state refiner said yesterday. The closure of the unit has reduced the gasoil sales of Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) by around 50,000 barrels per day, KNPC spokesman Khalid Al-Asousi said.

That would mean more crude sales by parent company Kuwait Petroleum Corp (KPC), he said. "The H-Oil start-up will not be economical as it will take time and Shuaiba refinery will be closed by April 2017," Asousi said. Shuaiba is Kuwait's smallest refinery. It has a capacity of 200,000 bpd, but has been running at less than full capacity since the fire. —Reuters

KUWAIT AMONG COUNTRIES WITH LOWER RATES OF AIDS: UN REPORTS

KUWAIT: Reports from United Nations (UN) and World Health Organization (WHO) reports ranked Kuwait among countries with lower rates of AIDS cases, Undersecretary for Public Health Affairs at the Ministry of Health (MoH) Dr Majda Al-Qattan said yesterday.

Qattan made this remark at Permanent National Committee to Fight AIDS celebration. The celebration honored participants of a national AIDS campaign, which aimed at preventing and combating AIDS. She said the campaign was a "success" because society and government were working alongside in promoting awareness and spreading knowledge on this disease.

Meanwhile, Head of the Permanent National Committee to Fight AIDS Dr Hind Al-Shomar said that combating this disease requires joint efforts, adding that the continuous support for the campaign showed "an ability to fight this disease and to ease off burden not only on the country's health sectors but also on families and individuals." —KUNA



DIVERS REMOVE BUOY FROM SOUTHERN SEA

KUWAIT: A buoy weighing one ton has been removed by the Kuwait Dive Team from a southern sea region of the country, after mounting waves had pushed the float ashore, a member of the team said yesterday. The buoy was endangering sea navigation and could belong to a developmental sea project, Faisal Al-Harban said, adding that a probe has been called to uncover the details behind the abandoned float. Harban also called on sea goers to notify the authorities in case of spotting any suspicious material that could endanger sea navigation. —KUNA

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التقاسم
THE GOVERNMENT KNIFE

By Khalid Al-Tarrah

The government has accustomed the citizen to the consumption culture, and the accumulation of loans to the citizen, even by those of limited or below average income, and now seeks to reduce subsidies. The citizen may accept the reduction "knife" when citizens of all categories see "knife-like" government decisions to stop the government's "squandering and spending".

The state budget during the reign of the former prime minister jumped from nearly KD 9 billion to nearly KD 21 billion, while the budgets of some official bodies are in a historically unprecedented form, without the citizen knowing the justification for that.

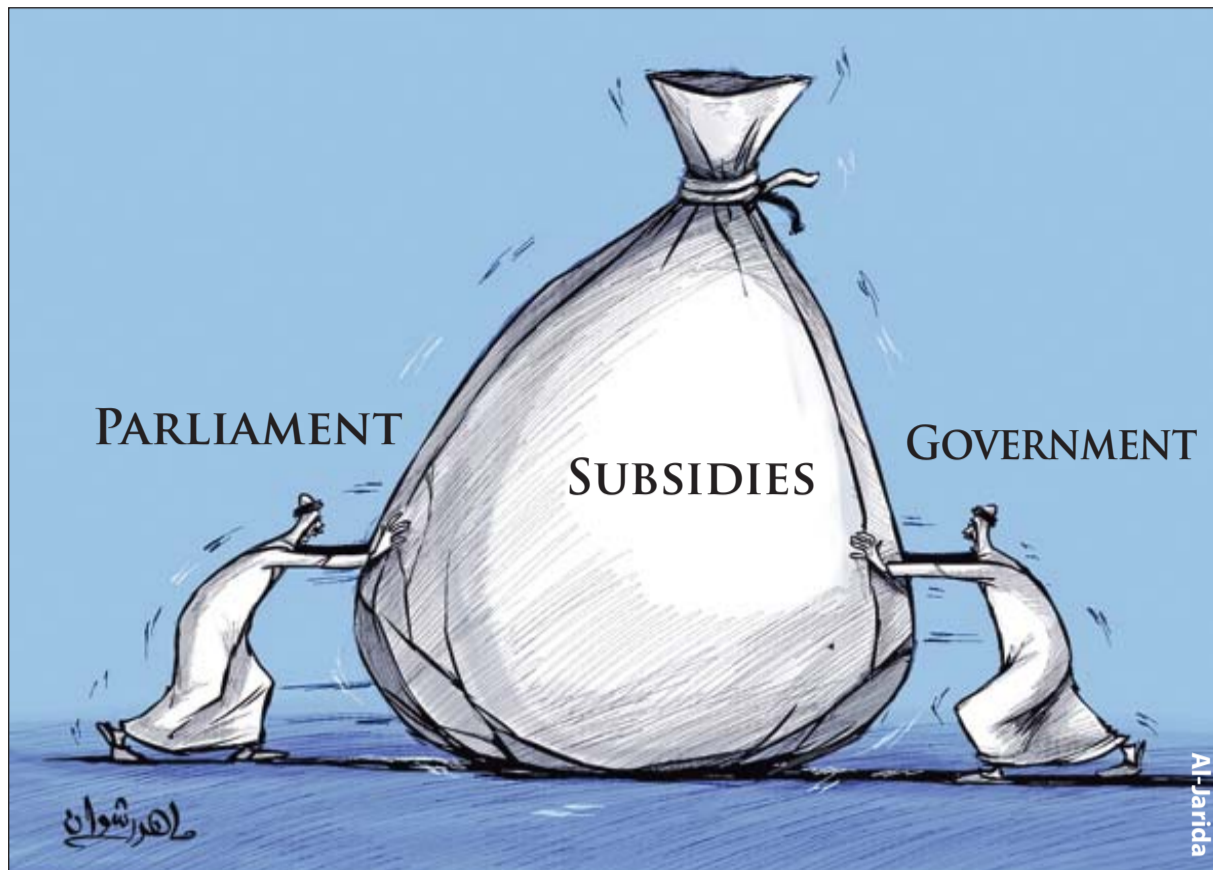
An example that I keep repeating - the proposal of privatizing Kuwait Airways (KAC) went through many decisions, and many sides were consulted in exchange of highly expensive contracts, while Kuwait Airways remained outside the range of privatization. Rather on the country, the government approved the withdrawal of KD 600 million from the general reserve to support KAC's capital, which drained funds without any return other than bragging about the remains of the "Blue Bird."

State authorities must start with rationalization, so that the citizen can trust the seriousness of reform and stop squandering and corruption. Among the simplest matters that it can start with is to reduce the use of private planes during official and non-official missions, because these planes consume fuel and other costs, and the state treasury is more deserving of it. The number of delegation members accompanying the minister must be reduced too by taking undersecretaries and leaders on missions that do not require this number of companions.

The government must review the cost of the authorities that were established lately, besides the number of leaders' decrees that were issued lately and the advantages for all those and its effect on the inflation of the government apparatus and the budget, as the good example is rationalization of government spending before restricting people.

When Abdullah Al-Taweel was commerce minister, he was keen on using commercial planes, not private ones, for most of his trips with a very limited number of companions, including his trip to Europe and America to encourage investment. The government wasted many solutions and opportunities since liberation until today in dealing with squandering and inflation of the government apparatus, and the current situation calls for reform in the direction of government spending and raising the quality of public services in order to gain a positive popular understanding of the policy of reducing subsidies.

— Translated by Kuwait Times



الانباء
MILLIONAIRES

Al-Anbaa

By Saad Al-Motesh

Everything in this universe is measurable in certain ways. We know some of them and know nothing about many of them. Let us take money for example and the figures used to measure them. Individuals' fortunes are measured by how much they have in their bank accounts and those with a million (or plus) in banks are usually called millionaires. Those who have a billion plus are entitled to be called billionaires.

Millionaires owning bank accounts in some strong currencies can be deemed billionaires in other countries according to the change in currency rates. It is also said that some people are far wealthier than billionaires and are known as zillionaires or other figure-related names that I know

nothing about. However, they all have endless zeros to the right. I know that many people look forward to becoming millionaires, but I personally look forward to becoming a billionaire and only pray to Almighty Allah not to become a mortgager.

Thanks be to Almighty Allah's blessings, we have a wise leadership in Kuwait under His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, which made our currency one of the strongest and dearest worldwide and made us all millionaires compared to most peoples in the world. So, thank Almighty Allah for his many blessings and pray to him to preserve this wealth.

Millionaires owning bank accounts in some strong currencies can be deemed billionaires in other countries

— Translated by Kuwait Times

التقاسم
WHOM TO BLAME?

By Qais Al-Usta

Despite the enormity of the matter of loose gravel flying on streets because of the rain and smashing the windshield of your car, we have become accustomed with this, and may Allah help everyone. The report of in a newspaper about flying gravel on the runway at Kuwait International Airport, and the confirmation of this by the communications minister is something that raises worries.

This is a confirmation that the safety of Kuwait International Airport is on the edge, because the defect in the runway means that there is a problem with the

Is there not an engineering department that supervises the reception of runways at the Civil Aviation?

safety of aircraft and international authorities may decide to close the airport altogether. Ministry of Public Works or Directorate General of Civil Aviation - whom to blame for this catastrophe? The Ministry of Public Works signed contracts with the company that built this runway, and the civil aviation, in cooperation with public works, received the runway from the company that built it.

Is there not an engineering department that supervises the reception of runways at the Civil Aviation? And if the runways have some irregularities, is it allowed to extend the runway for takeoff and landing of civil planes with capacities that reach 600 passengers? What if gravel flew into an aircraft engine or all of them? A pilot in New York landed on the Hudson River when a bird got into the engine of an A320 plane he was flying, because the situation did not allow him to return.

Whom to blame... ourselves, Civil Aviation, Public Works Ministry or the government that is not good at doing anything, or the National Assembly? Whom to blame? A question that we put forward, so may be one may read and answer, or may even think?

Was the message delivered? I hope so.
— Translated by Kuwait Times

Crime

Report

Woman commits suicide in Qusoor

KUWAIT: A Filipina woman stabbed herself to death in Qusoor, according to the police report. Police officers and detectives from Mubarak Al-Kabeer found her in a pool of blood. The body was recovered by the coroner and investigations are ongoing.

Players charged

A member of the Kuwait Basketball Club accused three players from Qadisiya Club of beating him up during a match between the two sides that was held last Sunday. A security source said the player submitted a medical report stating injuries to the neck, back and face, and named those who beat him. Investigations are ongoing.

Transformer missing

The Ministry of Electricity and Water (MEW) reported the disappearance of a transformer from Sulaiybiya farms. A security source said an MEW employee went to Sulaiybiya police station and told them the missing transformer gave them its description. Jahra detectives are investigating.

Mall brawl

Capital police broke up a fight between two persons in a mall and both were taken to Sharq police station. The two are citizens and were fighting over previous disputes. — Al-Rai

KD 10,000 HEALTH INSURANCE FOR POLICE

KUWAIT: An informed source at the Interior Ministry said a study calls for the allocation of KD 10,000 as health insurance for every police officer in the ministry. The source said Deputy Premier and Interior Minister Sheikh Mohammad Al-Khaled plans to take the study to the Cabinet to discuss it and estimate its financial cost, and if approved, it will be sent to the National Assembly to issue it as a law. Meanwhile, Sheikh Mohammad issued a ministerial decree to stiffen punishments for some traffic violations, that warrant revoking licenses. Among such violations is driving vehicles with smoky exhausts, running red lights and driving without license plates. — Al-Anbaa

FUEL, ENERGY FARE INCREASE COULD RAISE PRODUCT PRICES

KUWAIT: Increasing the prices of fuel and electricity will lead to increased prices of certain products due to the subsequent rise in production cost, the Ministry of Finance said in a recent report. The ministry had studied the effects of applying recommendations of a recent Ernst & Young study which recommended lifting subsidies on energy and gas directed to certain categories of the Kuwaiti society, the report said. The ministry also indicated that a program was needed to "alleviate the impact" of inflation on families with lower incomes, who might be forced to spend more on energy, gas and some food products, thus hindering their ability to spend on other basic material. — Al-Qabas



AGREEMENT TO RESUME PRODUCTION AT KHAFJI

KUWAIT: Informed oil sources said that Kuwait and Saudi Arabia have agreed on principle to resume production at Khafji field during the last quarter of this year. The sources said the agreement aims at resuming production in the field, but with a lesser capacity of around 100,000 barrels per day, 50,000 bpd for each side, which agrees with Saudi environmental laws as far as burning the gas and emissions are concerned.

The sources said an idea of producing 300,000 bpd in the first stage until the Khafji field becomes compliant with Saudi environmental conditions was not agreed

upon, then it was agreed on the 100,000 bpd, so the burning percentage will not exceed 1 percent, while previous production levels of 300,000 bpd will be restored when the technical issues are dealt with. As for preparations for the resumption of production, sources expected it will be done during few days, to start the removal of insulation that was done previously on pipes and nitrogen lines in preparation for restoration of production. About the fate of Wafra field, they said "all indications are positive," and hoped the two sides will reach a final solution soon.

— Al-Qabas

MESH'AL ALRODHAN GROUP JOINS HORECA 2016 AS SILVER SPONSOR

KUWAIT: Mesh'al Alrodhan Group, a subsidiary of Mo'ayyad Alrodhan Group, announced its participation in the Horeca Kuwait 2016 exhibition as a silver sponsor. The conference takes place in January 18-19, 2016 under the patronage of Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Sheikh Salman Sabah Al-Salem Al-Humoud Al-Sabah.

In this regard, Hassan Bahsoun, the Executive Manager of Mesh'al Alrodhan Group, announced that Horeca 2016 had proved its great ability to develop the hospitality, food industries and hotel sector, adding that it had been attracting an unprecedented number of participating companies. He added that the exhibition is a golden opportunity for Mesh'al Alrodhan Group to take part in major hospitality, foodstuff and hotel equipment exhibitions in order to get closer to its clients, and meet managers of other local and international companies to eventually activate commercial exchanges and develop the sector in general.

Bahsoun added that Mesh'al Alrodhan Group products included the products of the Spanish Calidad Pascual company, which was the first Spanish company to introduce Tetra Brik Packaging and to launch non-fat milk in Spain. Its core activity is the processing and packaging of milk, yogurts and other dairy products,

juices, mineral water, functional beverages and soy-based drinks. "Pascual is the leading company in Spain and one of the best in Europe in general," he said, adding that the company also provides the finest British organic flavored green tea, the French Truffles Chocolate and many other products.

Bahsoun concluded his statement by noting that Mesh'al Alrodhan Group supplies various supermarkets, cooperative societies, as well as fancy restaurants and hotels with its products that proved successful as basic ingredients in special dieting and healthy meals. Bahsoun also invited the public and various specialized companies to visit his company's section at Horeca 2016 exhibition to benefit from exclusive offers there. Horeca Kuwait 2016 is organized by Leaders Group Company for Consulting and Development in collaboration with the Hospitality Services Company. It takes place at Badriya Ballroom in Jumeirah Messilah Beach Hotel and Spa.



Hassan Bahsoun

NUWASEEB PROJECT TO PRODUCE 6,000 MW

KUWAIT: An official source at the Ministry of Electricity and Water (MEW) said MEW plans to introduce a tender for the Nuwaseeb power generation project in April. The source said "the ministry completed the structural plan of the project land expected to produce 3,000 megawatt in its first stage out of 6,000 MW, the total production capacity of the project, by the municipality." He said the Environment Protection Authority approved the study of the environmental impact of the project, adding that the ministry went a long way in the procedural steps for the project in order to introduce it in April. He said the execution of Nuwaseeb station will coincide with the projects of constructing stations supervised by the public and private sector partnership authority, including Al-Zour north station (second stage) with a capacity of 1,800 MW, Al-Khairan station (1,500 MW) and Abdaliya solar station, as tenders for it are to be opened. — Al-Rai



KUWAIT: Director of the South Zoor Power Plant Salah Al-Saleem welcomed officers from the Kuwait Fire Services Directorate (KFSD) yesterday, and the two sides discussed ways of promoting coordination especially with regards to securing easy access for firefighters in case of fire. — By Hanan Al-Saadoun



Korea president urges global response to test

DANISH LAWMAKERS DEBATE SEIZING REFUGEES' VALUABLES

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OBAMA TELLS US TO EMBRACE CHANGE

FAREWELL STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS DRAWS SHARP CONTRAST

WASHINGTON: President Barack Obama told Americans nervous about terror and a changing economy that they should not fear the future, in a farewell State of the Union address Tuesday that drew sharp contrast with Republicans.

In a primetime address that bubbled with 2016 election politics, Obama assailed Republicans for talking up the threat posed by the Islamic State group and talking down the American economy. A self-assured and optimistic Obama cast himself as the foil of foes who warn the country is going in the wrong direction because of his seven years in office.

Hailing an epoch of "extraordinary change" laden with risk and opportunity, Obama called for a new "moon-shot" to cure cancer, a shift away from dirty energy to power the world's biggest economy and for a thaw in the last remnants of the Cold War by ending the embargo on Cuba. Obama insisted "America has been through big changes before," as he took thinly veiled shots at Donald Trump, Ted Cruz and other leading Republican presidential candidates.

"Each time, there have been those who told us to fear the future, who claimed we could slam the brakes on change, promising to restore past glory if we just got some group or idea that was threatening America under control. And each time, we overcame those fears."

With less than three weeks until the Iowa caucuses—the first votes cast in the process to replace him—Obama berated Republican economic rhetoric, saying "anyone claiming that America's economy is in decline is peddling fiction." But some of his toughest words were for Republican statements over the rise of the Islamic State group.

World War III

He painted the jihadists as "masses of fighters on the back of pickup trucks, twisted souls plotting in apartments or garages." He admitted that the extremists, who have overrun large areas of Syria and Iraq, pose an "enormous danger," but made clear: "They do not threaten our national existence."

"Our answer needs to be more than tough talk or

calls to carpet-bomb civilians. That may work as a TV sound bite, but it doesn't pass muster on the world's stage," he said pointedly. "Over-the-top claims that this is World War III just play into their hands." And in a volley clearly aimed at Trump, Obama warned that "when politicians insult Muslims... that's not telling it like it is. It's just wrong. It diminishes us in the eyes of the world." The Republican frontrunner Trump was not impressed, describing the speech on Twitter as "really boring, slow, lethargic - very hard to watch!"

Tuesday's address was arguably Obama's last big opportunity to sway a national audience and frame the 2016 White House race. Around 30 million viewers were expected to watch live, a nationwide audience that may only be matched in political terms during the Democratic nominating convention later this year. But it risked being overshadowed by news that 10 US Navy personnel had been taken to an Iranian naval base in the Gulf.

Senior US officials said they had received assurances the crews would sail onwards come first light, but Republicans held up the crisis up as evidence that Obama was naive to engage Tehran. Overall, it was an unorthodox speech that eschewed the typical laundry list of legislative priorities as Obama tried to lift the country's gaze beyond the next year, and beyond his presidency. But he also tacitly, and explicitly, admitted mistakes.

There was no mention of the racial tensions that have dogged the tenure of the first black president. There was only a fleeting reference, and a symbolic empty seat in the chamber, to gun control and the awful toll of American gun violence.

'Angriest voices'

Obama did take some blame for Washington's hyper partisan politics. "It's one of the few regrets of my presidency — that the rancor and suspicion between the parties has gotten worse instead of better," he said in a moment of personal candor. "There's no doubt a president with the gifts of Lincoln or Roosevelt might have better bridged the divide, and I guarantee I'll keep try-



WASHINGTON: Vice President Joe Biden and Speaker Paul Ryan of Wisconsin applaud President Barack Obama during the State of the Union address before a joint session of Congress on Capitol Hill. — AFP

ing to be better so long as I hold this office."

South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley said in the traditional Republican rebuttal of Obama's address that "the president's record has often fallen far short of his soaring words." "As he enters his final year in office, many Americans are still feeling the squeeze of an economy too weak to raise income levels." She also cited "chaotic unrest in many of our cities" and "the most dangerous

terrorist threat our nation has seen since September 11." But Haley, the daughter of Indian immigrants, also jabbed at Trump over his views on immigration.

"During anxious times, it can be tempting to follow the siren call of the angriest voices," she said. "We must resist that temptation. No one who is willing to work hard, abide by our laws, and love our traditions should ever feel unwelcome in this country." — AFP



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ISRAEL BANISHES PALESTINIANS FROM OWN TOWN

JERUSALEM: Israel has detained two Palestinian men who refused to heed a military expulsion order from their hometown of Jerusalem over unspecified security concerns, in what rights groups slam as collective punishment. "It's the city where I was born, where I have all my memories," said 28-year-old freelance journalist Samer Abu Eiseh, who was given a five-month expulsion order.

Construction worker Hijazi Abu Sbeih, 33, who has a wife and three young children, was banished for six months. Both men live in the walled Old City of Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem. They refused to obey the ban and were arrested at a protest camp they had set up at the offices of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Jerusalem.

The order was based on a rarely used emergency statute from 1945, when Britain ruled Palestine prior to Israel's establishment in 1948. It was often used against clandestine Jewish groups battling the British. Expulsions are among punitive measures criticized by rights groups that also include the demolition of Palestinian attackers' homes and detention without trial of suspects.

According to Palestinian rights group Addameer, seven Palestinians received such orders in 2015, and as many each year since 2011 for varying time periods. Addameer calls it "collective punishment in violation of international law" and a measure aimed at "empty-

ing Jerusalem of its Palestinian residents".

The letters Israeli authorities sent Abu Eiseh and Abu Sbeih in December say the pair pose "a danger" to security. A map is attached showing where the men were permitted to relocate for the duration of the ban. The Shin Bet domestic security agency said the pair were among "a certain number of terrorist activists" who have been given such orders, without providing further details. It linked their expulsions to the Palestinian knife, gun and car-ramming attacks that have targeted Israelis since October.

The two men say they have never been convicted for terrorism or any other violent crime and can only guess at the details of the accusations against them. Abu Eiseh was sentenced to nearly two months of house arrest by Israel in 2015 after taking part in Arab forums in Lebanon, an Israeli enemy, and believes his expulsion is a result of his activism. Abu Sbeih says he can't explain the decision to ban him.

'I will not leave'

After arresting the men on January 6, Israeli authorities offered to free them on bail and then expel them from Jerusalem, their relatives said, but they refused. Abu Eiseh, who spoke to AFP at the Red Cross office before his arrest, said that he would do whatever possible to "complicate the task" of

expelling him. "Whatever happens, I will continue to say no," said the young man with a carefully cropped beard. "No to banishment, no to racism, no to the occupation."

Abu Sbeih spoke in similar terms, saying "I will not leave my land to the occupier. It is them who must leave, not me." Beyond human rights concerns, such orders also further stoke Palestinian suspicions over Israel's intentions in east Jerusalem.

The Jewish state sees the entire city as its indivisible capital, while Palestinians see mainly Arab east Jerusalem as the capital of their future state. Israel occupied east Jerusalem in the 1967 Six-Day War and later annexed it in a move never recognized by the international community. Israeli settlements have since expanded there.

According to the Civic Coalition for Palestinian Rights in Jerusalem, over the past 15 years the Palestinian cultural and political presence in the eastern sector of the city has been considerably reduced. Around 30 Palestinian institutions have been closed, in many cases after Israel alleged they were affiliated with the Palestinian Authority, which is prohibited from activities in Jerusalem.

Palestinian residents of Jerusalem have "permanent resident" status, in which they "are required to pay all Israeli taxes, entitled to receive Israeli social benefits and



JERUSALEM: Samer Abu Eiseh (left) and Hijazi Abu Sbeih, two Palestinians from Jerusalem sit in tents they installed in the courtyard of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) headquarters in the Israeli-occupied East-Jerusalem to defy a ban order by the Israeli military from entering their hometown for several months. — AFP

travel documents, and can participate in Israeli municipal but not national elections," the coalition says. It notes that east Jerusalem Palestinians cannot automatically pass on Jerusalem residency to their

children or bring their relatives to the city. Permanent resident status can also be revoked, with Israeli authorities having done so for more than 14,400 Palestinians in nearly 50 years. — AFP



ISTANBUL: Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu (right) and his wife Sare Davutoglu arrive to place flowers in tribute to the victims at the site of yesterday's attack in the city's tourist hub of Sultanahmet. — AFP

TURKEY ARRESTS ONE AFTER ISTANBUL TOURIST ATTACK

'I SEE NO REASON TO REFRAIN FROM TRIPS TO TURKEY'

ISTANBUL: Turkey said yesterday it had arrested one person in connection with a deadly suicide bombing that ripped through the historic heart of Istanbul, killing 10 tourists, most of them Germans. Ankara has said that Tuesday's attack was carried out by a 28-year-old Syrian who belonged to the Islamic State (IS) group and had recently entered Turkey from Syria.

One person was arrested on Tuesday evening in connection with the bloodshed, Interior Minister Ertan Ala said on Wednesday, without explaining the suspect's role in the strike. In the wake of the attack, Turkish security forces rounded up 68 suspected IS members across the country, state media said, but it was not clear if any of them were directly connected to the Istanbul bombing.

"The investigation is continuing in a very intensive way," Ala told a news conference in Istanbul alongside German Interior Minister Thomas de Maiziere. De Maiziere said there was "no indication" the attack specifically targeted Germans, saying there was no need to cancel travel plans. "It was an attack against humanity," he said. "I see no reason to refrain from trips to Turkey." But the German foreign ministry has advised its nationals to keep away from large groups in public places and tourist attractions in Istanbul. German tourism giant TUI said customers who had booked trips to Istanbul can switch destina-

tion without paying a penalty.

Posing as a refugee?

Turkey has been hit by a string of deadly attacks blamed on jihadists over the last year, including a double suicide bombing in October in Ankara that killed more than 100 people. But Tuesday's bombing was the first time in recent memory tourists had been targeted in the heart of Istanbul.

The bomber, identified as Nabil Fadli, detonated his charge on Sultanahmet Square which is home to Turkey's most visited historic sites including the Ottoman-era Blue Mosque and Hagia Sophia church. The explosion went off by the Obelisk of Theodosius, a monument from ancient Egypt that was re-erected by the Roman Emperor Theodosius and is one of the city's most iconic landmarks.

The Sabah daily said the bomber had entered Turkey as a refugee from Syria on January 5. He was then fingerprinted by the Turkish migration service, explaining why the authorities were able to identify the bomber so rapidly after the attack. The Hurriyet daily said Turkey's spy agency had twice issued warnings over the risk of a suicide attack in Istanbul.

'Pray for the victims'

Police yesterday removed a cordon preventing

access to the area of the attack, which was quickly thronged by media and some tourists, an AFP correspondent said. Some placed red roses by the obelisk, which appeared to have sustained no damage in the bombing.

Almost all of the victims were German, with Ankara giving the figure of nine while Berlin put the number at eight. Peru also said one of its nationals had died in the attack. Another 15 people were wounded, most of them Germans but also Norwegians, Peruvians and at least one Turk. Two Germans were in serious condition.

The tourists were part of a group of 33 who had been staying at a boutique hotel in the upmarket Galata district and had been bussed to Sultanahmet that morning, media reports said. "I saw the young man pull the pin and I shouted 'run!' in German. Then we started to run away, and the bomb instantly exploded," the group's tour guide Sibel Satrioglu told investigators, the Hurriyet newspaper said.

In impromptu remarks at his weekly audience, Pope Francis called on all believers to pray for the victims. "May the Lord, the merciful, bring eternal peace to the departed, comfort to their families, the solidarity of all society and may he convert the hearts of violent men," he said. — AFP

POST-REVOLT TUNISIA A TARGET AND EXPORTER OF EXTREMISTS

TUNIS: The 2011 revolution that toppled Tunisia's regime has awoken extremism in the country after decades of repression, turning it into a target for attacks and a key exporter of jihadists. Analysts say the current state of affairs is a result of the legacy of ousted president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's 23 years of iron-fisted rule, as well as Tunisia's porous borders.

"Ben Ali's monopolization of the religious sphere and neglect of socioeconomic issues opened the door to radicalization," the Carnegie Middle East Centre says in a report. "These factors, combined with the disillusionment of the youth and the mishandling of Salafists after the revolution, have resulted in escalating violence in Tunisia and the export of jihadists to Syria, Iraq, and Libya," it said.

According to the United Nations, more than 5,500 Tunisians, mostly aged between 18 and 35, have joined jihadist organizations in conflict-riddled Syria, Iraq, Libya, Yemen and Mali. Many are fighting in the ranks of the Islamic State group, which claimed three major attacks in Tunisia last year alone, two of them killing a total of 60 people, all but one of them foreign tourists.

Dozens of policemen and soldiers have also been killed since the 2011 revolt while two opposition politicians were assassinated in 2013. The Carnegie report—"Market for Jihad: radicalization in Tunisia"—said the fall of Ben Ali's regime "created a vacuum that allowed radical groups to preach their ideas and recruit new members".

During Ben Ali's rule thousands of his political opponents as well as Islamists were imprisoned and many others forced into exile, giving him a free hand to bolster repression. "Ben Ali strengthened state security's control over mosques and imposed legal restrictions on the hijab and Islamic dress. Political, or even any public, expression of religiosity was considered a threat," the report said. Five years since his overthrow, Tunisia is "paying the price of Ben Ali's mistaken policies towards religion," said a senior security official who declined to be named.

'Porous borders'

Many Tunisians "turned to social networks and foreign religious satellite television stations, particularly from the mid-1990s, thus provoking the expansion of Wahhabi thought," he added. Wahhabism has been accused of fuelling deadly Sunni extremism around the world, including the murderous drive of IS militants.

Tunisia's struggling economic situation worsened after the revolution-unemploy-

ment now stands at more than 15 percent and analysts say this has fuelled radicalization. In a report dedicated to Tunisia's "porous borders", the International Crisis Group think-tank drew a correlation between the rise of jihadism and contraband across the frontiers with Algeria and Libya.

Smuggling operations have long served as an informal economy in Tunisia, providing a livelihood for many people in poor regions, even before Ben Ali. But with conflict raging across the border in Libya, the frontier has also served as a gateway for jihadists and weapons.

"The war in Libya... has had security repercussions and armed groups in border areas have conducted attacks against members of the National Guard, army and police," said the ICG. "The aftermath of the Tunisian uprising and of the Libyan war has provoked a reorganisation of contraband cartels... thereby weakening state control and paving the way for far more dangerous types of trafficking."

The think-tank warned the situation could eventually lead to "the emergence of a so-called Islamo-gangsterism". This, in turn, "could contribute to the rise of groups blending jihadism and organized crime within contraband networks operation at the borders or worse, to activate cooperation between cartels and jihadists."

'Social promotion'

The Carnegie report notes that jihadists have succeeded in wooing recruits in Tunis suburbs and farther away in the hinterland of Tunisia, saying the feeble economy helped feed extremism. The Tunisian Institute for Strategic Studies said in a recent study that there is a "clear link on the map of jihadist Salafist expansion" between "social exclusion and the economy".

Omeyya Naoufel Seddik, analyst with the Tunisian Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, says some people have joined IS seeking "social promotion". He said these recruits believe that the jihadist group could provide them with a "better standard of living".

According to the UN, jihadist recruiters can earn between 2,700 and 9,000 Euros for each recruit, depending on the competence of the fighter. But Tunisia, which the ICG says has turned into a "strategic hinterland and a recruitment base for jihadists", did not become radicalized overnight. Tunisians have fought in Afghanistan, Bosnia and Chechnya, and two of them, posing as reporters, assassinated in 2001 anti-Taliban figure Ahmad Shah Massoud in Afghanistan. — AFP

ACTIVIST SISTER OF JAILED SAUDI BLOGGER RELEASED

DUBAI: The activist sister of prominent jailed Saudi blogger Raif Badawi was released yesterday after being detained in the kingdom, Human Rights Watch said. Amnesty International said earlier that Samar Badawi was arrested on Tuesday in the Saudi city of Jeddah with her two-year-old daughter and questioned by police for four hours before being transferred to prison.

"She's OK," HRW's Adam Google said. "Technically she was bailed out in the morning. Then she had to go for mandatory questioning," he said, adding she had since been released. Badawi could not immediately be reached for comment. She is the sister of Raif Badawi, the blogger arrested in 2012 and later sentenced to 1,000 lashes and 10 years in prison for insulting Islam, a decision which generated worldwide outrage.

Only the first 50 lashes of the punishment have been administered, in January last year. Samar Badawi is also the ex-wife of her brother's lawyer, Waleed Abu Al-Khair, a rights activist who himself is serving a 15-year prison sentence. She has campaigned tirelessly for his release. A source familiar with her case told AFP that "they suspect she was running Waleed's account" on Twitter. She remains under investigation.

HRW said she was questioned on Tuesday "about her human rights activism generally and whether she controls Al-Khair's Twitter account. Badawi denied that she controls the account." Raif Badawi's wife, Ensaf Haidar, earlier posted on Twitter that her sister-in-law was detained for allegedly managing Khair's account.

A source with knowledge of Samar Badawi's activities said she had stopped tweeting from her own account about a month ago. Philip Luther, director of Amnesty's Middle East and North Africa program, said her arrest "demonstrates the extreme lengths to which the authorities are prepared to go in their relentless campaign to harass and intimidate human rights defenders into silent submission."

Rights groups say she has been under a travel ban since December 2014. "The arrest... is the latest example of Saudi Arabia's utter contempt for its human rights obligations and provides further damning proof of the authorities' intent to suppress all signs of peaceful dissent," London-based Amnesty said. Raif Badawi co-founded the Saudi Liberal Network Internet discussion group, which promoted free speech and sought an end to the influence of religious leaders on public life in one of the world's most conservative countries. — AFP

ONCE ACCOMMODATING NEIGHBORS, LEBANON TURNS BACK ON REFUGEES

BEIRUT: After taking in a million Syrian refugees, Lebanon has quietly changed course in recent months, forcing refugees to return to Syria - where they are at risk of persecution or death - or stay illegally, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

The situation is drawing attention at a time when Turkey and Jordan have also tightened their admission policies. A Human Rights Watch report published Tuesday warned that Lebanon's new regulations have "set the stage for a potentially explosive situation." Even as conditions in Syria deteriorate in a fifth year of war, Lebanon last week forcibly repatriated 407 Syrians who were stranded at Beirut's airport after Turkey tightened its visa restrictions with little notice. It was by far the largest such forced repatriation to date.

'International obligations'

Amnesty International called the action "an outrageous breach of Lebanon's international obligations," which require that it not return vulnerable people to a conflict zone. "Syrians have no value here. They've closed the door on us," said a 34-year-old refugee from Raqqa, the Islamic State group's de-

facto capital in northeastern Syria, who is now living and working as a doorman in Beirut. He refused to be named for fear of expulsion.

Lebanon in 2015 reversed a long-standing open-door policy for Syrians that allowed them to enter the country and reside there relatively unencumbered. At a minimum, they must now pay \$200 per adult for a permit that

lasts between six and 12 months, obtained through an onerous bureaucratic process that accompanies each application. Nadim Houry, deputy Middle East director for Human Rights Watch, said most of refugees have lost their legal status over the past year because of the new regulations. "That's not just an abstract notion. If you don't have legal status, you basically cannot



BEKAA VALLEY: Syrian refugee children walk in mud after a heavy rain at a refugee camp in the town of Hosh Hareem. — AP

cross any checkpoints. So men cannot leave the house," said Houry.

Security checkpoints dot the country's Bekaa Valley and the north, where most Syrians are living. "That means you have to send the kids to work, because they aren't usually stopped. It also means if a woman gets sexually harassed, she cannot complain to the police, because she will be arrested," Houry said. The situation is similar in Jordan, which insists it has kept its borders open to Syrian refugees since the start of the conflict in 2011 but has increasingly tightened its admissions policy.

'Security is first priority'

A remote stretch of desert between Syria and Jordan has been the only land access route for Syrian refugees since mid-2013. In recent months, growing numbers of refugees have amassed in an area near a berm, awaiting entry. Government spokesman Mohammed Momani said earlier this week that about 16,000 refugees are gathered there. He said 50 to 100 are allowed in each day, with priority given to women, children, the elderly and the ill, adding that "security is the first priority." — AP



DUBUQUE: Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton speaks to supporters during a campaign stop at the Charles and Romona Myers Center at University of Dubuque. — AP

WITH DEMOCRAT RACE NARROWING, CLINTON RIPS INTO RIVAL SANDERS CLAIMS SANDERS OFFERING UNREALISTIC POLICIES

AMES, Iowa: Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, facing a narrowing primary contest, ripped into rival Bernie Sanders on Tuesday, saying the Vermont senator was offering unrealistic policies and overstating his anti-establishment credentials.

For days, the former Secretary of State has cast Sanders as a less forceful advocate for gun control, targeting a 2005 vote he cast that gave immunity to gun manufacturers. On Tuesday, she broadened her critique, arguing that if Sanders wouldn't combat the National Rifle Association, the nation's largest gun lobby, he can't be trusted to take on other special interests. "If you're going to go around saying you stand up to special interests then stand up to that most powerful special interest - stand up to the gun lobby," she said, as she accepted the backing of a major gun control advocacy group.

Sanders campaign spokesman Michael Briggs said the senator had "spent a career standing up to powerful special interests whether they be Wall Street, big banks or Big Oil or the pharmaceutical industry, you name it." Briggs added, "He has also stood up to the National Rifle Association," noting that Sanders lost a 1988 congressional race in part because he supported a ban on assault weapons.

'Political revolution'

The fresh critique marks an effort by Clinton to undermine the central argument of Sanders' campaign - that the Vermont Senator is an outsider offer-

ing liberals a "political revolution." With a touch of sarcasm, Clinton said President Barack Obama's work to pass an overhaul to the nation's health care system was a major accomplishment and derided Sanders' plans for a single-payer system.

Clinton also touted her foreign policy credentials, drawing another, more implicit, contrast with Sanders, who has made tackling economic inequality the focus of his campaign. "I'm prepared to do all parts to the job," she said, after offering voters a detailed account of her time in the Situation Room during the killing of Osama bin Laden.

Though Clinton has the backing of Democratic leaders and top donors, polls show a narrowing contest in the lead-off Iowa caucuses on Feb. 1 and Sanders with a slight lead in New Hampshire, which borders his home state of Vermont. Losses in both early voting states would set off alarms among Democrats about her strength against Sanders, who started the campaign as an obscure senator polling in the single digits.

A poll released yesterday by Quinnipiac University showed Sanders winning 49 percent of likely Democratic caucus-goers in Iowa, compared to 44 percent for Clinton. The same survey showed Clinton leading in a 51-40 percent match-up just a month ago. Clinton has long resisted directly targeting Sanders, fearing that such attacks would alienate his passionate supporters. Should she win the nomination, Clinton will need that kind of liberal enthusiasm to boost her

to victory in the November general election.

Gun control

Her fresh assault came as she picked up the backing of the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence - an endorsement that came just a day after Clinton won support from leading gun control advocate Gabby Giffords, the former Arizona congresswoman and her husband Mark Kelly. Sanders has expressed his support for President Barack Obama's use of executive actions to curb gun violence and has said he would revisit his position on the liability issue. But in a Democratic forum on Monday night, he doubled down on his defense of his vote on the controversial bill. "It's not a mistake. Like many pieces of legislation, it is complicated," he said. "But on the issue of guns, let me be very clear I support the president."

Sanders racked up his own endorsement on Tuesday, receiving the backing of MoveOn.org, a grassroots organization that has been at the forefront of liberal causes. Meanwhile on Tuesday, Chelsea Clinton made her debut appearance in the race, making three stops in New Hampshire where she told personal anecdotes and discussed detailed policy points while campaigning for her mother.

Hillary Clinton recently deployed her husband, former President Bill Clinton, and now her daughter, as she seeks to cover more ground and maintain her early lead in the increasingly-narrowing race against Sanders. — AP

180 US-BOUND CUBANS FINALLY TAKE FLIGHT OUT OF COSTA RICA

SAN LUIS TALPA: A group of 180 Cuban migrants took a step closer to a new life in the United States early yesterday after flying out of Costa Rica in a trial plan designed to blaze a path for thousands of stranded compatriots to follow.

In what they nervously hope will be the successful conclusion to a months-long odyssey through South and Central America, the Cubans landed in El Salvador and then boarded four buses in the early hours destined for the border with Guatemala.

The 109 men and 71 women are ultimately bound for the United States, which has a longstanding policy of accepting Cuban migrants. If their arduous plane-and-bus trip is successful, other flights will follow as early as next week, transporting more of the 7,600 other Cubans stranded in Costa Rica.

The air bridge, organized by Latin American governments and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), became necessary when Costa Rica's northern neighbor Nicaragua - a Cuban ally - closed its border to Cuban migrants in mid-November. The 180-strong group boarded a chartered aircraft in Liberia, a northern Costa Rican city near Nicaragua's border.

They arrived just over an hour later at El Salvador's international airport southeast of the capital San Salvador, disembarking with smiles and small bags, and soon after were on their way to the Guatemala border on buses accompanied by a police escort. After crossing Guatemala, the Cubans are to be dropped off at the border with Mexico with 20-day visas to make their own way to the US border and to what they hope will be new lives in America.

Joy and fear

Elation and trepidation gripped the Cubans ahead of their flight out of Costa Rica, where many have languished for weeks or even months. "I still can't believe it. We could be arriving and I still won't believe it," said Liana Cabezas Gonzalez, a 28-year-old interpreter who left Havana seven months ago aiming to join her parents already in Miami.

She and the others paid \$555 (512 Euros) for the trip to Mexico's border. The governments involved insisted the migrants bear the entire cost of their trip. But their joy was tempered by fears about running the gauntlet of Mexico's fearsome narco-gangs. "We've heard a lot that in Mexico there are gangs like the Zetas that make attacks on roads and that there are dangerous zones," said Yordani Casanova, a 33-year-old

who left his herbal drinks business in Cuba to make the journey to America with his wife. Cabezas said she planned to minimize that risk by taking a domestic flight inside Mexico to a town close to the US border.

US welcome

At American border posts the Cubans can expect a relatively easy entry, despite not having American visas. Under a Cold War-era law, America welcomes Cubans under a scheme that gives fast-track access to permanent residency. Costa Rican officials were visibly relieved that there is finally movement to clear out some of the thousands of Cubans who have been piling up in shelters on its territory. Foreign Minister Manuel Gonzalez said after the plane's departure that the trip was organized for

"humanitarian" reasons and he was confident of its success. But the chief of its migration service, Katia Rodriguez, told some of the migrants that those left behind and unable to pay for flights would have to wait for a solution.

Costa Rica on December 19 stopped giving visas to any more arriving Cubans and threatened deportation for any found entering clandestinely. As a result, some 2,000 other Cubans are now stranded farther south, in Panama. They have no access to the air bridge being organized and their fate has not been resolved. In shelters set up in churches and school grounds in northern Costa Rican towns, other migrants waiting for their own exit played with balls or washed clothes or relaxed on mattresses on the floor — activities that have marked their long weeks of limbo.

— AFP



SAN LUIS TALPA: A group of Cubans pose at the park of La Cruz, Guanacaste, Costa Rica, on January 12, 2016, before boarding a bus to take them to the airport of the neighboring city of Liberia. — AFP

'EL CHAPO' INFATUATION WITH ACTRESS LED TO RECAPTURE

MEXICO CITY: Mexican drug lord Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman was infatuated with actress Kate del Castillo and his desire to see her again contributed to his downfall after six months on the run, officials said Tuesday. Del Castillo, a Mexican-American who played a drug kingpin in a television series, brokered the now-notorious meeting between Guzman and US actor Sean Penn at an undisclosed jungle clearing in October, three months before the fugitive's capture.

The government officials said investigators had monitored Penn and Del Castillo, taking photographs of the actors when they landed in Mexico, before their get-together with Guzman. Following the meeting, troops entered Guzman's remote mountain stronghold in northwestern Mexico in order to flush him out "toward a city," a government official said on condition of anonymity.

Marines nearly captured Guzman in the mountains straddling the states of Sinaloa and Durango on October 6. But Guzman grabbed his cook's daughter and used her "as a human shield," holding her in front of him as a helicopter hovered overhead, prompting the soldier to hold fire, the official said.

Guzman eventually made his way last week to the seaside city of Los Mochis in his native Sinaloa state, where he was captured Friday in a deadly military operation. The other factor that led Guzman to Los Mochis was that he was "really very interested in meeting the actress again," the official told reporters.

"This was an almost obsessive interest that turned into another incentive to go down to the city, where he wanted to meet with her," the official said, adding that Guzman did not see the 43-year-old actress again. Another official said Guzman, 58, used the codename "hermosa" ("beautiful") when referring to the actress, who became famous for her role as a drug lord in the TV series "The Queen of the South."

DVDs of the show were found in the house that marines raided in Los Mochis. Guzman fled the house through a tunnel during a gunfight between troops and his henchmen, but he was caught later after he had stolen a car, capping a months-long manhunt involving 2,500 investigators and federal forces, officials said.

Meeting investigated

One of the world's most-wanted criminals was returned to the same prison he escaped from six months ago when his henchmen dug a 1.5-kilometer tunnel that opened into a hole in his cell's shower. Guzman is regularly being moved to new cells in different floors and a guard is posted in front of it 24 hours per day to prevent him getting away once more.

Penn, in an article published by Rolling Stone magazine on Saturday, said del Castillo had been in contact with Guzman while he was in prison through letters after the kingpin's attorney approached her. The drug lord wanted to make a film about himself but "would entrust its telling only to Kate," Penn wrote.

President Enrique Pena Nieto's spokesman, Eduardo Sanchez, said the clandestine meeting between the actors and Guzman was under investigation. "What's being investigated is the actions. People are not being investigated," Sanchez said. Sanchez said the government "regrets any acts of collaboration between any citizen and members of organized crime" or that a Mexican citizen "does not share" information that would help arrest a criminal.

Legal experts doubt that the actors will face charges, especially if their meeting with Guzman is seen as journalistic work. But they could face money-laundering charges if there was a transaction for a film made with "money from illegal sources," legal expert Juan Velazquez said. Del Castillo sparked uproar in 2012 when she wrote on Twitter that she believes "more in Chapo Guzman than the governments." She later said that her messages to Guzman were "ironic" but Penn wrote in Rolling Stone that the kingpin sought to send her flowers afterwards. Guzman is now back at the Altiplano maximum-security prison some 90 kilometers west of Mexico City while authorities seek to extradite him to the United States. As well as moving him from cell to cell, officials said other steps have been taken to prevent Guzman who escaped from another prison in 2001 — from breaking out a third time. After his July 11 escape, a dozen prison officials were detained and security was increased with extra surveillance cameras and metal rods in the floors to prevent new tunnels. "Each and every one of the flaws have been fixed," an official said. — AFP

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POLISH PM CALLS FOR UNITY AGAINST FOREIGN 'SLANDER'

WARSAW: Polish Prime Minister Beata Szydlo yesterday called on the country's centrist opposition to join her conservative government in presenting a united front against what she called "slander" from abroad. "Poland has been unfairly accused of things that don't exist in our country... of breaking the principles of the rule of law. That's not true. Democracy is alive and well in Poland," Szydlo told parliament.

"Today we need to put our quarrels aside, join forces and discuss what to do to stabilize the situation abroad."

She spoke as the European Commission was holding a debate in Brussels on the state of rule of law in Poland, which could lead to potentially punitive measures. The Commission took the unprecedented move because of concern over the Polish government's controversial legal maneuvers

to gain control over the country's top court and public broadcasters.

Relations between Brussels and Warsaw have been strained since the Law and Justice party (PiS), led by the euro skeptic Jaroslaw Kaczynski, returned to power in October after eight years in opposition. The European Parliament will also debate the state of rule of law in Poland in Strasbourg on January 19, with Szydlo

in attendance.

She said yesterday that she was not planning "to humbly listen" to criticism of Poland while in Strasbourg. Szydlo's comments drew strong words from opposition lawmakers, including liberal Ryszard Petru, who said the conservatives were "reaping the harvest of their own actions".

"It's not Poland that is being slandered, nor its citizens. It's our partners

who are concerned by your actions," added Rafal Trzaskowski, a lawmaker from the liberal Civic Platform (PO) party that lost the general election to the PiS. Addressing the conservatives, he added: "It is you yourselves who are mounting power grabs against the constitutional court, state media, the civil service, who today are preparing another power grab against prosecutorial independence." —AFP

DANISH LAWMAKERS DEBATE SEIZING REFUGEES' VALUABLES

GOVT FACING WAVE OF CRITICISM OVER PROPOSAL

COPENHAGEN: Denmark's parliament was yesterday to begin debating a controversial plan to seize refugees' valuables, with the bill widely expected to pass a January 26 vote after being backed by a majority of lawmakers.

The bill, proposed by Prime Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen's right-wing Venstre party, would allow Danish authorities to seize migrants' cash exceeding 10,000 kroner (1,340 Euros, \$1,450), as

to secure a majority for the vote. But the bill, even in its amended form, was criticized yesterday by a group of 10 local and regional members of the ruling Venstre party.

"It is not just a matter of proper policy and humanity, but also Denmark's international reputation," they wrote in the Berlingske daily. "When focusing on symbolic actions rather than real content, you forget that politics is about real people of flesh and blood,"

January 26 vote on the bill. A European lawmaker for Venstre last month left the party over its ever-tighter migration policies, which have included delaying family reunification times and advertising in Lebanese newspapers to deter refugees from coming to Denmark. But observers believe the party's leadership is unlikely to be influenced by critics of Integration Minister Inger Stojberg's hardline policies.

"It is not at the centre of the

Syria, said he thought police would find little of value during their migrant searches. "We almost paid everything to come here. Like a house, like a restaurant we owned before," he said. A police search of his bags would turn up "maybe 100 Euros," he laughed.

The level of public support in Denmark for seizing migrants' valuables was hard to gauge, but there was widespread backing for tighter asylum rules in general, according to Steensbeck. A survey by pollster Megafon on December 20 found that 51 percent of Danes were in favor of delaying family reunifications by three years, while 29 percent said they were against it.

Other respondents were unsure or said they were neither for nor against the move. International media have compared the searches to Nazi Germany's seizing of gold and valuables from Jews and others during World War II.

Bill is a 'signal'

Steensbeck said that although the government had clearly taken note of the international criticism, it was unlikely to have an impact on its policy. "Lars Lokke Rasmussen has to be elected in Denmark... not (by) the international media," he said.

UN refugee agency UNHCR said earlier this month it feared that Denmark's new immigration bill "could fuel fear, xenophobia and similar restrictions that would reduce—rather than expand—the asylum space globally."

The bill includes delaying family reunifications for some refugees by up to three years, as well as making it harder to obtain permanent residency and shortening temporary residence permits. A spokesman for the far-right Danish People's Party told AFP in December that the bill was intended as a "signal" to dissuade migrants from coming to Denmark, and not aimed at actually raising money. Denmark received 21,000 refugees last year, compared to 163,000 in neighboring Sweden, which until recently had some of Europe's most generous asylum rules. —AFP



COPENHAGEN: This file photo taken on September 10, 2015 shows migrants sitting in a train with direction to the Swedish town Helsingborg leaving Copenhagen. —AFP

well as any individual items valued at more than 10,000 kroner. Wedding rings would be exempt, along with other items of sentimental value, such as engagement rings, family portraits and medals.

The government has faced a wave of criticism over its proposal, which had initially put the limit for migrants at 3,000 kroner. It has since backtracked, and finally reached agreement with other parties in parliament on Tuesday

they said. Denmark already had laws that could be used to require wealthy migrants to support themselves, they argued. "What is new is... expanded powers to search refugees' luggage for money and valuables," they said.

Widespread criticism

The proposal is part of a bigger immigration bill. The debate yesterday afternoon was the first of several to be held ahead of the

party that this debate is taking place," Bjarne Steensbeck, a political commentator at public broadcaster DR said. Three Social Democratic lawmakers have said they are prepared to vote against their own party on the issue. Migrants themselves have been sceptical about the proposal.

At the Auderod asylum centre 60 kilometers northwest of Copenhagen, Tarek Issa, a 25-year-old law student from Hama in

VENEZUELA SINKING DEEPER INTO MESSY POLITICAL CRISIS

CARACAS: Venezuela sank deeper into a messy political crisis Tuesday as the opposition-controlled National Assembly suspended its session after the Supreme Court declared it null and void. Speaking before a nearly empty chamber, speaker Henry Ramos Allup, a fierce opponent of President Nicolas Maduro, declared the National Assembly lacked a quorum and would reconvene yesterday morning.

The temporary legislative vacuum further complicates the tumultuous political scenario in reeling oil giant Venezuela. The opposition won a landslide election victory last month but is fighting what it calls a biased Supreme Court to cling to its powerful two-thirds majority. The court invalidated the current legislature Monday on grounds that Ramos Allup ignored its judges' ruling by swearing in three opposition lawmakers from Amazonas state, where an investigation is

underway into alleged vote-buying. At stake in the power struggle between the legislature and judiciary is the opposition's "super-majority," which it has vowed to use to force Maduro from office within six months. The two-thirds majority also gives it the power to remove judges from the Supreme Court, which the opposition accuses Maduro of packing with his allies.

In defiance

The opposition had initially vowed to press ahead with the legislative session Tuesday in defiance of the Supreme Court's latest ruling. But no lawmakers from Maduro's United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) were in the legislature and just a handful of deputies from the opposition Democratic Unity Roundtable (MUD) were there.

Legislative sources said the opposition was consult-

ing its lawyers to decide how to respond to the Supreme Court. In what could be a sign of a more conciliatory approach by the Maduro administration, Ramos Allup said he had spoken twice on the phone with Vice President Aristobulo Istariz.

"I think the vice president will be a facilitator in communications between the government and the opposition, between the branches of government and above all between the executive and the legislature. We're hoping that line of communication will remain open," he said. But Maduro's right-hand man, former speaker Diosdado Cabello, struck a more confrontational tone, proposing the Supreme Court could take over legislative powers amid the standoff. "We're going to go to the Supreme Court of Justice... to request clarification and see what happens with a legislative void, because the president isn't going to violate the constitution," Cabello told journalists. Under Venezuela's constitution, Maduro must present his annual report to the National Assembly by Friday—which he may not be able to do if the legislature is not in session.

Political prisoners bill

Organization of American States Luis Almagro called the Supreme Court ruling a "direct blow" to the will of voters, and warned of an "erosion of democracy" in the country. "All of this constitutes an erosion of democracy, which contravenes the fundamental pillars" of the OAS, Almagro said in an open letter to Maduro.

Venezuela, the country with the world's largest proven oil reserves, has sunk ever deeper into economic crisis as crude prices have plunged in recent months. A deep recession and what analysts say is the world's highest inflation rate have fueled discontent with Maduro, whose term runs until 2019. The opposition's landmark win in the December 6 legislative elections has triggered a crisis for Maduro and the "revolution" launched by his late mentor Hugo Chavez in 1999.

The Supreme Court has emerged as a powerful player as Venezuela embarks on a new era of divided government. A week before the 167-member legislature's inauguration, the court barred the three opposition lawmakers from taking their seats, effectively scrapping MUD's two-thirds majority. Ramos Allup swore them in anyway, setting up a messy political and legal battle. —AFP



CARACAS: In this Jan 8, 2016 photo, National Assembly President Henry Ramos Allup, (center) is surrounded by lawmakers and journalists as he arrives for a news conference at the legislature. —AP



MARSEILLE: Armed French soldiers secure the access to the 'La Source' Jewish school. —AFP

TEEN JIHADIST 'PROUD' OF JEWISH TEACHER ATTACK

MARSEILLE: A 15-year-old supporter of the Islamic State group who slashed a Jewish teacher with a machete in southern France has said he was "proud" of his attack, ahead of a court appearance yesterday. The teenager, an ethnic Kurd from Turkey, told police he did not regret the assault on a Jewish teacher in Marseille, the latest in a string of such attacks in recent months.

A source close to the investigation told local media the boy had said he was "ashamed" that he did not manage to kill the 35-year-old teacher, Benjamin Amsellem. The teenager, who was to appear in front of a judge on Wednesday where he faces terrorism charges, said he became interested in jihadist theories in March 2014 after seeing documentaries arguing that Muslims were persecuting Westerners.

Identifying their religion

"One thing led to another and he came upon jihadist websites" arguing that in fact it was Westerners that were persecuting Muslims and he "agreed," said the police source. "I don't represent Daesh, they represent me," the teenager reportedly told investigators. Prosecutors have described the teenager as a good student, from a normal background who self-radicalized via the Internet, highlighting the challenge to French authorities in identifying extremists.

The attack has sparked debate in France's Jewish community over whether men and boys should stop wearing the skullcap identifying their religion. Zvi Ammar, the leader of Marseille's Jewish community, urged male Jews to stop wearing the kippa "until better days", because of fears for their safety. "Unfortunately for us, we are targeted," he said. "As soon as we are identified as Jewish we can be assaulted and even risk death."

However other Jewish leaders rejected the call, with France's chief rabbi Haim Korsia telling AFP: "We should not give an inch, we should continue wearing the kippa." The attack was the third in recent months on Jews in Marseille, the Mediterranean city that is home to the second-largest Jewish population in France after Paris with some 70,000.

In October a knife-wielding, drunken assailant attacked three Jews near a synagogue in the city. In November, another Jewish teacher was stabbed by people shouting anti-Semitic obscenities and support for the Islamic State group. France's Jewish community has grown used to living under the surveillance of armed soldiers around synagogues and schools since being targeted in a jihadist attack in Paris last January. Last weekend, the country marked a year since the attacks which left 17 people dead, including four Jews gunned down in a kosher supermarket. —AFP

BAFFLEMENT AS LONDON TRAIN DELAY BLAMED ON 'SUNLIGHT'

LONDON: London commuters were left baffled after a rail company blamed delays on "strong sunlight" in the midst of cold and wintry weather this week. "Apologies we are having issues dispatching trains due to the strong sunshine this morning," Southeastern railway company informed travelers through its Twitter account Tuesday, blaming the "low winter sun".

While delays due to snow or wet leaves on the tracks are familiar to commuters in Britain, many responded to this new reason with humor and disbelief. "Train delayed due to sunlight!" wrote Twitter user Zuzanna Sojka, telling the train company: "I admire your creativity!" User Paul Malyon called it "the weakest excuse ever" while others responded to ask whether trains might next be delayed due to "too many clouds" or "moonlight".

"How do they go on in hot countries where they have sunshine all the time?" asked Julie Clarke. Britain experienced just a few hours of sunlight on Tuesday, and temperatures between -2.3 and 8.6 degrees Celsius according to the Met Office, but it was enough to delay trains in the southeast London district of Lewisham.

A spokesman for Southeastern explained that the glare from the low angle of the Sun "made it impossible for some drivers to see the full length of their train in their mirrors before leaving stations". "When this happens they have to get out and check to ensure everybody has got on or off their train safely before they can move," the spokesman explained. "This can take a little more time but thankfully for all it doesn't happen very often." —AFP

12 DEAD IN CAMEROON MOSQUE SUICIDE BLAST

YAOUND: A suicide bomber killed 12 worshippers yesterday at a northern Cameroon mosque, security officials said, hitting an area regularly targeted by Nigeria's Boko Haram Islamists. The blast struck the mosque in the village of Kouyape, in Kolofata district north near the Nigerian border, at around 5:30 am (0430 GMT) during morning prayers, a security source said.

Since July last year Cameroon's far north has been hit by a series of attacks blamed on Boko Haram, which has pledged allegiance to the Islamic State group. "Eleven worshippers were killed at the scene. A twelfth died of their wounds in hospital," the security source said, adding that the attacker was praying alongside other worshippers when he blew himself up. Another source close to the security services confirmed the blast killed 12 people and the bomber. "The suicide bomber was praying with the others," the source said, adding that the imam of the mosque figured among the victims.

The bombing came after two people were killed overnight in the same area in another attack blamed on Boko Haram, the security source said. Cameroon has beefed up its military presence along the Nigerian

border as part of a regional coalition, after years of doing little to stop Boko Haram fighters using its territory as a rear base to arm and equip themselves.

Since late November the Cameroon army has carried out operations in several border areas aimed at weakening Nigerian jihadists who have been very active in the region. Sources say these operations have significantly weakened Boko Haram's capability, forcing the insurgents to turn away from direct confrontations with the military in favor of suicide attacks.

Boko Haram in the past year stepped up cross-border attacks in Niger, Chad and Cameroon while also continuing to mount shooting and suicide assaults on markets, mosques and other mostly civilian targets within Nigeria itself. The group's six-year campaign for a hardline Islamic state in northeast Nigeria has killed at least 17,000 people and made more than 2.6 million others homeless. Despite the offensives launched by regional forces, the group maintains strongholds in areas that are difficult to access, such as the Sambisa forest, the Mandara Mountains and the numerous islands of Lake Chad. —AFP

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PAKISTAN ARRESTS MILITANTS OVER ATTACK ON INDIAN AIR FORCE BASE

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan said yesterday it has arrested several militants belonging to the group believed to be behind a fatal attack on an Indian air base, a move that could help soothe irritated relations with New Delhi.

The announcement came as Islamabad said it was considering sending a team to investigate the January 2 attack on the Pathankot air base, in what observers hailed as a "genuine" bid to salvage a nascent peace process between the nuclear-armed rivals.

The attack—a rare targeting of an Indian military installation outside disputed

Kashmir—threatened to undermine improving relations with Pakistan after decades of fractious ties. It came just a week after Prime Minister Narendra Modi became the first Indian leader to visit Pakistan in 11 years.

India says the assault, which left seven soldiers dead, was carried out by the banned Pakistan-based group Jaish-e-Mohammed. Yesterday, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said Pakistan had arrested "several individuals belonging to Jaish-e-Mohammed", adding that progress was being made in the investigation. It was not clear what role they are believed to

have played in the attack.

Sharif's statement also said that Pakistan was considering sending a special team to Pathankot to seek "additional information" to spur the investigation, adding the decision was being made in consultation with the Indian government. It is the first time Pakistan has suggested it could send a team to join the probe into the attack.

'Cooperate with India'

In 2008, Islamabad turned down New Delhi's demand it dispatch the head of its intelligence agency to India after Pakistani

militants carried out a series of high-profile attacks across Mumbai that left 166 people dead. Security analyst Talat Masood said the suggestion Pakistan could send a team shows Islamabad was making a "genuine and sincere" effort to find out who was responsible, and "wants to fully cooperate with India".

Sharif's statement came after a meeting chaired by the Prime Minister and attended by top government and military officials including army chief General Raheel Sharif. Pakistan's military typically takes a hawkish attitude to India. The meeting noted "considerable progress" in

the Pathankot investigation, and said the offices of Jaish-e-Mohammed—which staged a 2001 attack on the Indian parliament that brought the two countries to the brink of war—are being sealed.

"The meeting reiterated that in line with our decision to counter and completely eliminate terrorism, Pakistan would remain engaged with India on this issue," Sharif's statement said. Modi had urged his Pakistani counterpart to take "firm and immediate action" against those behind the attack, adding that New Delhi had passed on "specific and actionable information" about the incident. — AFP



SEOUL: South Korea's President Park Geun-hye addresses the nation at the Presidential Blue House. — AFP

S KOREA PRESIDENT URGES TOUGH GLOBAL RESPONSE TO NORTH'S TEST

TROOPS FIRE AT SUSPECTED NORTH KOREAN DRONE

SEOUL: South Korean President Park Geun-Hye yesterday pushed China to back harsh sanctions on Pyongyang over its latest nuclear test, as troops fired at a suspected North Korean drone that crossed the tense inter-Korean border. The defense ministry said the drone effected a brief incursion, but swiftly returned to the North side when South Korean troops fired a series of warning shots.

Any shooting on what is probably the world's most heavily militarized border is rare and a cause for concern, but there was no exchange of fire and the incident showed no immediate sign of escalating. But it fuelled already heightened tensions on the frontier, where the South has been blasting high-decibel propaganda broadcasts into the North as punishment for last week's nuclear test.

Earlier in the day, President Park told an annual press conference that last week's nuclear test was an "unacceptable challenge" to global security that had to be met with unprecedented severity. "The international community's countermeasures... must differ from the past," Park said. As well as working with the United Nations to adopt the "strongest" resolution to penalize North Korea, Seoul would also discuss additional "punitive sanctions" with the United States and its allies, she added.

China must 'act'

The president stressed that China, North

Korea's main ally and economic benefactor, would be critical in securing an effective Security Council resolution. Noting Beijing's public admonishments of Kim's regime over its nuclear programme, Park said it was time for China to move beyond rhetoric.

"I believe China is aware that if its strong determination is not put into actual, necessary actions, we will not be able to prevent a fifth or sixth nuclear test," she said. Her comments echoed those last week of US Secretary of State John Kerry, who had urged China to take a tougher line with North Korea, warning in a call to his Beijing counterpart that it cannot be "business as usual".

Park's entreaties went largely ignored at the regular foreign ministry briefing in Beijing, where the spokesman reiterated China's standard line about working with all interested parties to resolve the issue and achieve a "durable peace" in the region. North Korea says last week's test was of a miniaturized hydrogen bomb—a claim dismissed by experts who argue the yield was far too low for a full-fledged thermonuclear device.

But whatever the nature of the device, it was North Korea's fourth nuclear test since 2006, and further evidence of Pyongyang's intention to continue developing its nuclear weapons capability in the face of international censure. "An additional North Korean provocation can take place any time," Park said, adding that Seoul and Washington were discussing the

transfer of further US "strategic assets" to the peninsula. A nuclear-capable US B-52 bomber flew a highly-visible mission to the peninsula on Sunday, and the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan, as well as B-2 stealth bombers and F-22 stealth fighter jets, are understood to be among the additional deployments being considered.

Nuclear war clouds

In a meeting with his nuclear scientists in Pyongyang on Tuesday, North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un said the talk of sanctions and movement of strategic weapons was "bringing dark clouds of a nuclear war" to the peninsula. And he urged them to build up a nuclear force "capable of making nuclear strikes at the US-led imperialists anytime," the official KCNA news agency reported.

The North's military muscle-flexing was slightly deflated Wednesday by expert analysis of its most recent submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) test in December. Pyongyang hailed the test as a great success and released a video which, researchers at the California-based James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies concluded, had been heavily doctored and edited to cover up a "catastrophic" failure. North Korea "manipulated the footage in an attempt to obscure this result, but one clip plays for two frames too long. The rocket appears to explode," said Catherine Dill, a research associate at the centre. — AFP

IS CLAIM PAKISTAN'S AFGHAN CONSULATE ATTACK, 7 KILLED

KABUL: The Islamic State group claimed responsibility for an attack on a Pakistani consulate in eastern Afghanistan yesterday, which Afghan officials said left at least seven members of the security forces dead.

In a statement translated by the SITE Intelligence Group, U.S. monitors of militant groups, the "Khorasan Province of the Islamic State" said three of its "soldiers" attacked the consulate in Jalalabad, capital of the volatile province of Nangarhar, which borders Pakistan. It claimed to have killed "dozens" of consulate staff.

Afghan officials said seven members of the security forces were killed in the attack. Attaullah Khyogani, spokesman for the governor of Nangarhar province, said another seven people were injured during the attack, which began when a suicide bomber detonated explosives outside the consulate in the provincial capital Jalalabad and ended with a gun battle between Afghan security forces and militants.

He said that three attackers were killed, including the one who had detonated explosives on his body at around 9 am. The siege ended when the two gunmen, who had taken position in a guesthouse close to the consulate, were killed at around 12.30 pm local time, Khyogani said.

Hazrat Hussein Mashraqiwal, the spokesman for the provincial police chief, said the dead included three police and two intelligence service officers, one each from the army

administration for more than 14 years.

The scene of the attack is close to a hospital and schools as well as the Indian consulate. The schools were evacuated, officials said. The Pakistani consulate is usually busy during morning rush hour as people queue for visas. The suicide bomber joined the visa queue before blowing himself up, officials said. The embassy official said all consular staff were evacuated.

In Islamabad, the foreign affairs ministry condemned what it called "the terrorist attack" on its Jalalabad consulate and requested a thorough investigation. One official at the consulate was slightly injured by broken glass, it said in a statement. Nangarhar is home to a number of insurgent groups and criminal gangs who benefit from the proximity to the Pakistan border. Insurgent attacks are not uncommon in Jalalabad.

The Islamic State group has established a presence in the province, having fought with Taliban gunmen in recent months to take control of at least four border districts. The attack comes two days after Islamabad hosted a meeting of representatives of Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and the United States to discuss ending the Taliban's 14-year insurgency.

Taliban split

Pakistan is widely believed to support the Taliban through its security service, though the Pakistani government denies the claim. The Taliban has split in recent months, with



JALALABAD: An Afghan man assists two schoolgirls in the vicinity of an attack from a building close to the Pakistan consulate. — AFP

and border police. Seven people were wounded, including three civilians, he said.

Insurgent-style

It was the first insurgent-style attack on a Pakistan embassy or consulate in Afghanistan, an official at the Pakistani embassy said, speaking on condition of anonymity as he was not authorized to speak to the media. Pakistani government properties have come under attack in the past during protests by Afghans angry at Islamabad's perceived support for the Taliban, who have waged war on the Kabul

insurgents divided over their support for a peace process. The attack is the latest in a spate of violence since the start of 2016, which could be a tough year for Afghanistan as insurgents are expected to escalate the violence in order to enter into any peace negotiations from a position of strength. During the first week of January a restaurant frequented by foreigners in Kabul and a contractor camp on the outskirts of the capital were attacked, and the Indian consulate in the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif was besieged for more than 24 hours. — AP

CHINA'S FEMINISTS EMBRACE ELECTION OF TAIWAN'S TSAI

BEIJING: Feminists in China are embracing Taiwan's presidential front-runner Tsai Ing-wen as a role model in a country where the last woman leader was the empress dowager more than a century ago. If elected, Tsai, the leader of Taiwan's independence-leaning Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), will be the first woman president of the Chinese-speaking world. Earlier this month, she topped the last opinion poll before a polling blackout began ahead of the Jan. 16 elections.

Tsai's victory "will be a source of great encouragement for feminists on the mainland," said Zeng Jinyan, a Chinese activist who has written about women's rights. "In terms of the political participation of women in the Chinese world, she has set an example and is a role model." Zeng said she hoped that Tsai's victory would lead to cooperation and exchanges between feminists on the mainland and in Taiwan.

"When I watch her speeches, I think she has many feminist ideas," said Wu Rongrong, a women's rights activist. "To be a female leader, I think it's an admirable thing." Democratic Taiwan, viewed by Communist Party rulers in China as a renegade province, has made some of the greatest strides in women's rights in Asia. Taiwan's ruling Nationalists had initially put forward a woman, Hung Hsiu-chu, as a presidential candidate but later replaced her

with Eric Chu. The government has imposed quotas to ensure that women are represented in politics.

While Chairman Mao Zedong famously proclaimed that women hold up half the sky, in today's China, top government positions often remain out of their reach. All seven members of the ruling Communist Party's apex of power, the Politburo Standing Committee, are men. Only two women sit on the Politburo, a top decision-making body.

The proportion of women on the party's 205-strong central committee is less than five percent, lower than in Mao's time. But back then, the women in power, such as Jiang Qing, Mao's wife, only attained their positions due to their marriages. "In Taiwan, many female political candidates came from the feminist movement," said Zheng Churan, a women's rights activist. "On the mainland, there does not appear to be any space for people involved in social movements to enter the political

system." Last year, Chinese authorities detained Zheng, Wu and three other prominent Chinese feminists on International Women's Day, accusing them of provoking trouble. They released them on bail after a vocal campaign. "Under Taiwan's social environment, the external conditions are more conducive for women's organizations to speak out," said Feng Yuan, a veteran women's rights activist. "The space for civil society organizations here is quite limited." — Reuters



NEW TAIPEI CITY: Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) presidential candidate Tsai Ing-wen (right) waves to supporters as she campaigns yesterday. — AFP

HK LEADER LEUNG HECKLED OVER MISSING PUBLISHERS

HONG KONG: Democratic lawmakers heckled Hong Kong's leader in parliament yesterday, slamming him for not speaking out over five missing booksellers feared to have been detained by authorities in mainland China. The five from Mighty Current publishing house, known for books critical of Beijing, disappeared last year, stoking fears that Chinese control is tightening in semi-autonomous Hong Kong.

The latest to vanish is Lee Bo, 65, last seen in Hong Kong on December 30. Three others went missing in southern China and one in Thailand, all in October. Hong Kong leader Leung Chun-ying was lambasted as he delivered a key policy speech, with several democratic lawmakers shouting at him before they were removed by security.

"Where is Lee Bo? Why don't you answer Hong Kong people," Labour Party's Lee Cheuk-yan yelled. Pro-democracy lawmakers, activists and some residents believe the publishers were kidnapped by Chinese mainland authorities, and the disappearances have triggered outrage and protests in recent weeks amid fears freedoms in the city are eroding.

'One country, two systems'

Critics accuse Beijing of trampling on the "one country, two systems" agreement under which Hong Kong was guaranteed civil liberties when it was returned by Britain to China in 1997. "This is the important matter. Any other

policy is meaningless if the 'one country two systems' is finished," Lee said. Another lawmaker, Raymond Chan, shouted: "Even the basic safety of Hong Kong people can disappear, why aren't you talking about this?"

Dozens of demonstrators also gathered outside the legislative council building where Leung was speaking. "He does not make Hong Kong people's well-being a priority," activist James Hon said. "He should immediately take action to rescue the five people from the... bookstore." Hong Kong officials have said they requested information on the booksellers' whereabouts from Chinese authorities, but have not received an answer.

Jasper Tsang, the parliament's speaker, has also spoken out against the disappearances. "We have one country, two systems... our way of life is such that no one should disappear suddenly," he told Hong Kong's South China Morning Post on Tuesday. In his speech, Leung also warned of "obstacles" ahead for the city's economy amid a global economic slowdown, triggered by tumult in China, that hit Hong Kong's trade sector last year.

Residents of the city are increasingly discontent over soaring property prices and lagging wages, taking a further toll on the government's popularity. Leung's approval rating has plunged to a low of 37.5 percent, according to an opinion poll released by the University of Hong Kong on Tuesday. — AFP



A Jordanian bedouin smokes a cigarette as he rests on The King's Highway on the outskirts of Amman yesterday. — AP

MPs BACK LEADERSHIP IN BOYCOTT-HIT SESSION

Continued from Page 1

The Assembly meanwhile held a closed-door debate to discuss the latest regional developments and its impact on the country. Ghanem said after the debate that Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah delivered a speech outlining Kuwait's foreign policy. The speaker then read a communique approved unanimously by the house which rejected all practices that undermine the security and stability of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, especially Saudi Arabia, in reference to the attacks on Saudi diplomatic missions in Iran.

The communique declared the Assembly's total and unlimited support for Saudi Arabia for taking any measures to safeguard its interests. It also called for national unity and for uniting around the political leadership. The communique did not mention Iran by name.

The Assembly then continued its session until after 9 pm to debate and approve a series of important legislations. MPs approved the Anti-Corruption Authority law to replace legislation that was scrapped by the constitutional court last month. The lawmakers urged the government to reappoint the same staff in the authority and overcome legal obstacles to do this.

The Assembly also passed by an overwhelming majority a new law to regulate all web-based publica-

tions including electronic news services, bulletins, websites of newspapers and televisions and the likes. Under the legislation, all these services must obtain a license from the government before they can operate. Those in existence have one year to comply with the law. Violations committed by these services will be looked in court under the press and publications law, which stipulates hefty jail terms for several offences.

MP Jamal Al-Omar, who voted against the law, said this is yet another legislation like others that will be used by the government to curb freedoms, adding that it can be easily challenged in the constitutional court. Information Minister Sheikh Salman Al-Humoud Al-Sabah however insisted the law is aimed at regulating electronic media and it will not apply to personal accounts like those of bloggers.

Amnesty International on Tuesday denounced a "repressive" cybercrimes law in Kuwait, warning that it would further muzzle free speech. The law, which took effect on Tuesday, criminalizes online expression including criticism of the government, religious figureheads or foreign leaders. Dozens of people in Kuwait have already been arrested and prosecuted - some jailed - under other legislation for comments made on social media sites such as Twitter.

The National Assembly also approved a government request for an additional defense budget of KD 3 billion

to be spent over the next 10 years to modernize the country's defenses. Defense Minister Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah told the Assembly the funds are needed to upgrade the weapons of the Kuwaiti armed forces, which received its last shipment just after the 1991 liberation from Iraq. Sheikh Khaled said they needed the funds to buy new fighters, tanks and air defense systems, adding that although Kuwait has defense pacts with most superpowers, it needs to modernize its

armed forces. He added that the ministry has already signed contracts worth KD 200 million.

The Assembly then unanimously passed a law granting the government KD 3 billion in additional funding to purchase arms to be spent over the next 10 years. The Assembly will approve other funding as part of the annual budget to the tune of another KD 3 billion if the economic situation allows. Ghanem then adjourned the 12-hour session until Jan 26.

IRAN FREES US SAILORS

Continued from Page 1

The detention of the sailors raised alarm in Washington but after informal talks with Tehran, Iran's Revolutionary Guards said they had been set free. "Following their apology, they have been released to international waters in the Gulf," said a statement read out on state television, noting the sailors had not entered Iranian waters intentionally and had no "hostile intent". Video footage showed the Navy personnel with their hands on their heads as they were apprehended. But other footage showed them eating a meal and drinking water, some smiling, while sitting on Persian rugs.

The Pentagon confirmed they had been freed. "There are no indications that the sailors were harmed during their brief detention," it said, adding: "The Navy will investigate the circumstances that led to the sailors' presence in Iran." Admiral Ali Fadavi, the naval commander of the Guards, said an investigation established that "this trespassing was not hostile or for spying purposes". Instead "a broken navigation system" had led them astray, he said.

US officials had said one or both of the boats experienced mechanical problems and they had been taken to Farsi Island, which lies roughly midway between Iran and Saudi Arabia in the Gulf and houses a base of the Guards, which has its own naval units. Radio contact was lost with the two vessels - riverine patrol boats under 20 m in length - while they were en route from Kuwait to Bahrain.

Washington and Tehran have no diplomatic relations, but US Secretary of State John Kerry called Iranian counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif five times about the issue on Tuesday. Kerry told him the sailors' release could be turned into a "good story" for both sides, according to a senior US official. "That this issue was resolved peacefully and efficiently is a testament to the critical role diplomacy plays in keeping our country safe, secure, and strong," Kerry said in a statement.

Zarif said on Twitter: "Happy to see dialog and respect, not threats and impetuosity, swiftly resolved the #sailors episode. Let's learn from this latest example." His tweet seemed a barb aimed at US lawmakers who had quickly jumped on the incident as an example of Iranian hostility. Kerry and Zarif developed a close working relationship during the nuclear talks, which concluded in July with a deal between Iran and the P5+1 powers of the United States, Britain, China,

France, Russia and Germany.

The nuclear accord foresees Iran scaling back its activities to put an atomic bomb outside its reach in exchange for relief from crippling international sanctions. Iran's deputy foreign minister Abbas Araghchi was quoted by Iranian media as saying that UN nuclear inspectors would issue a report on Friday that would be followed by announcement of the deal's implementation by Sunday. Kerry, who has been criticized by President Barack Obama's opponents in the US congress as too soft on Tehran, last week said the agreement would be implemented "in the coming days".

Those rivals used the incident in the Gulf to hammer on this point, calling on Obama make a statement and warning Iran must release the sailors. "Iran is testing the boundaries of this administration's resolve," Republican presidential hopeful Marco Rubio said. The US House of Representatives yesterday passed a measure aimed at blocking the nuclear deal, but abruptly cancelled the vote because nearly one third of lawmakers were absent.

The Iran Terror Finance Transparency Act, which would bar the US administration from lifting certain sanctions against Iran, passed by a vote of 191 to 106, a low total by any measure in the 435-member chamber. The vote is to be rescheduled for the week of Jan 25. Iran's Guards often take a tough approach in what it considers the "Persian Gulf". Relations with Washington were strained by claims last month that Iran fired rockets close to a US aircraft carrier in the Gulf.

Last year, Iranian patrol boats seized the Maersk Tigris, a cargo ship sailing under the Marshall Islands flag, which meant it was under US protection. And in March 2007, Iranian patrols captured 15 British Royal Navy and Royal Marines personnel, interrogated them and held them for 13 days before releasing them.

US Vice President Joe Biden, speaking later to "CBS This Morning," denied that Americans made any apology. "There's nothing to apologize for," Biden said. "When you have a problem with the boat you apologize the boat had a problem? No, and there was no looking for any apology. This was just standard nautical practice." US Defense Secretary Ash Carter said he was pleased with the sailors' release and he thanked Kerry for his diplomatic efforts. "Around the world, the US Navy routinely provides assistance to foreign sailors in distress, and we appreciate the timely way in which this situation was resolved," Carter said. — Agencies



KUWAIT: National Assembly guards stand outside the Abdullah Al-Salem Hall at the parliament after Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem announced a closed-door session to discuss regional developments. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

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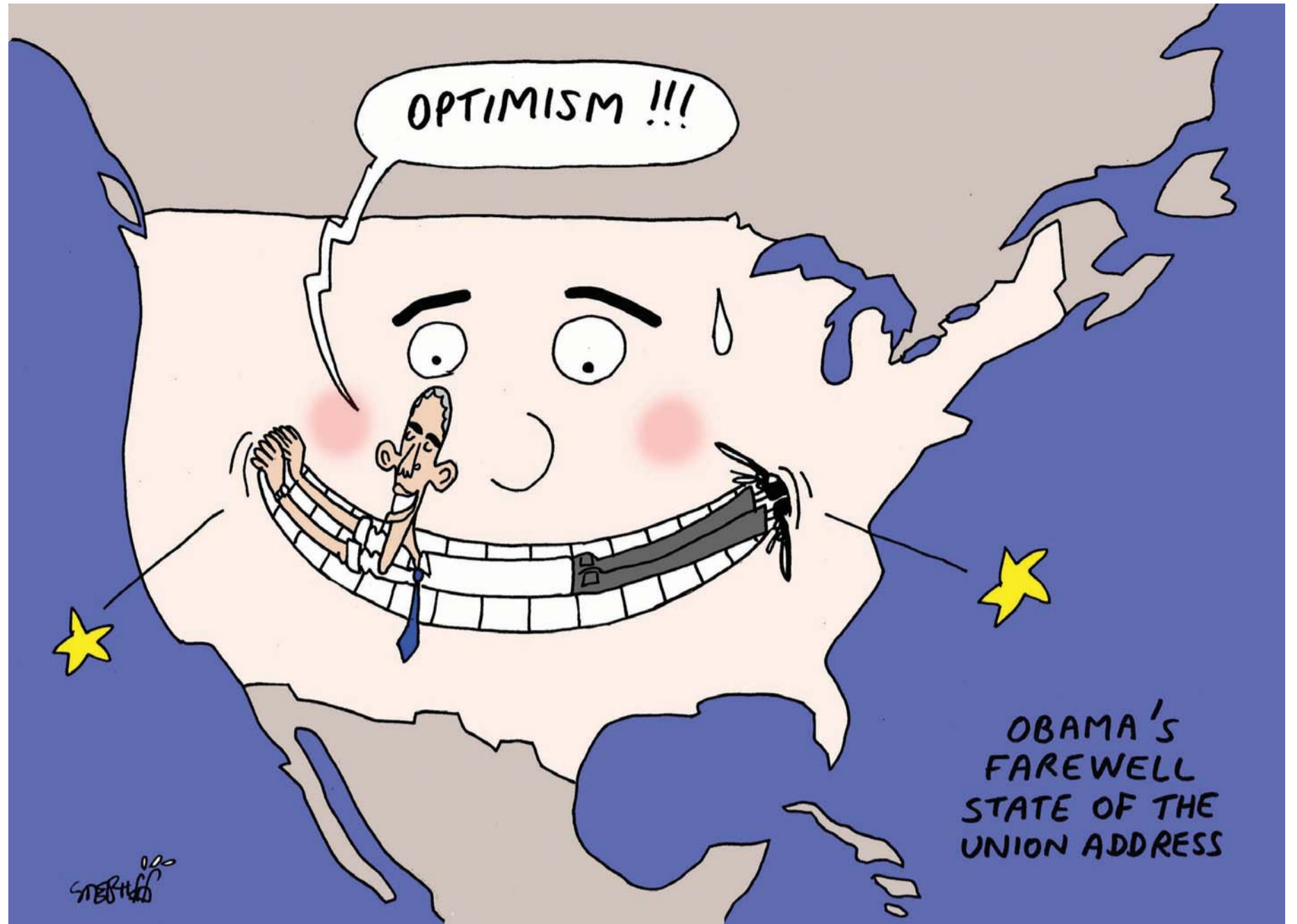
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OBAMA IN CAMPAIGN FORM IN FINAL ADDRESS

By Kathleen Hennessey

US President Barack Obama opened his State of the Union speech saying he'd keep it short, in what must have seemed music to the ears of some in the chamber eager to return to their campaigns to succeed him. Obama was eager to challenge biting criticism from Donald Trump, Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio, Jeb Bush and other Republicans. Anyone who says the economy is declining is "peddling fiction," he argued. The president characterized skepticism about science as absurd. And claims that US stature in the world is shrinking is "political hot air".

"The United States of America is the most powerful nation on earth. Period. It's not even close. It's not even close!" the president declared. Obama's final annual address to both houses of Congress was his most high-profile entry yet into the presidential race to succeed him. He showed he was more than ready to defend his record and happy to show Democrats how he thinks it should be done.

His legacy will be shaped by whether Americans in November choose a Democrat to succeed him and cement his signature health care law, environmental policies and immigration programs. Obama breezed through his remaining priorities - raising the minimum wage, overhauling the immigration system, tightening gun laws - even as he acknowledged they were unlikely to get done. He highlighted a few possible proposals with better

chances - criminal justice reform and fighting prescription drug abuse. "Who knows? We might surprise the cynics again," Obama said.

Obama also took some clear shots at the Republicans who've used him as a target for

months. He defended his handling of the rise of Islamic extremism and tried to temper anxieties about the Islamic State group. "Over-the-top claims that this is World War III just play into their hands," Obama said. "We don't need

to build them up to show that we're serious, and we sure don't need to push away vital allies in this fight by echoing the lie that ISIL is somehow representative of one of the world's largest religions."

With an expected audience of some 30 million viewers, the speech was Obama's first of two chances to make a high-profile case for a Democratic successor. Not until his speech at the Democratic convention this summer will he likely have such undivided attention again. The president and his aides have been marveling for months at what they described as Republicans' gloom-and-doom vision for America. In trying to present an optimistic alternative, Obama's speechwriters were mindful of not taking a victory lap. Americans hardly share his confidence in America's upward trajectory, polls show. In touting the economic recovery, in particular, Obama risks seeming out of touch.

"The president's record has often fallen far short of his soaring words," South Carolina Gov Nikki Haley said in the Republican rebuttal. "As he enters his final year in office, many Americans are still feeling the squeeze of an economy too weak to raise income levels. We're feeling a crushing national debt, a health care plan that has made insurance less affordable and doctors less available, and chaotic unrest in many of our cities." But the president showed he was ready to rebut such comments - once Democrats pick a candidate and he's unleashed on the campaign trail. —AP



US Vice President Joe Biden and House Speaker Paul Ryan listen as President Barack Obama gives his State of the Union address to a joint session of Congress on Capitol Hill in Washington on Tuesday. —AP

SPAIN AT CROSSROADS AS OLD ORDER CHALLENGED

By Angus MacSwan and Angus Berwick

Vanesa Sanchez, the mayor of this forlorn town on the plains of central Spain, is an angry and exasperated woman. She is working all hours of the day without pay to keep Villanueva de la Torre alive, she says. A decade ago, Villanueva was full of young couples strolling with pushchairs and enjoying their new modern homes, built like an American suburb and bought on generous credit. Then came Spain's economic crisis. Banks closed in on mortgages, money ran out, and now neat rows of houses stand empty, their front windows bricked up, the streets deserted.

If Villanueva's plight is emblematic of the broken dreams of a generation of Spaniards who came of age after the end of the Franco dictatorship, it also helps to explain the new political dynamic. The old order that has long ruled is being challenged by younger forces channelling despair and disgust. Some people are talking about "The Second Transition". "The political class in Spain is rotten," said Sanchez, mayor since May and a leader of the grassroots Ahora Villanueva de la Torre party which is affiliated to the new leftist Podemos party. Health, education and social services had all been cut, she said in her office in the town hall, but politicians had not cut back their wages or their privileges. "But now is a new era," Sanchez said.

The next few weeks will see if that will indeed be the case. In an inconclusive election last month, the conservative People's Party (PP) which had ruled for the past four years took most parliamentary seats but lost its outright majority. Its support had ebbed over a slew of corruption scandals and austerity measures deployed to combat a long recession in the European Union's fifth-largest economy. The Socialist Party (PSOE), which has alternated in power with the PP since the transition from dictatorship in the late 1970s, came second but also with much reduced support. Two new parties, the anti-austerity Podemos and the centrist Ciudadanos, made strong showings on the back of the desire for change.

Now the parties are manoeuvring to form a coalition government - a new concept on the national level - with acting Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy proposing a Grand Coalition with PSOE and Ciudadanos, while the Socialists want a "progressive coalition" of the left, which would mean a significant role for Podemos. A new election is also a distinct possibility. "I'm very optimistic about the future, we have ended the system of two-party rule and we have presented an alternative," Sanchez said. "But the path forward is not easy."

Spain's politics are now fractured in a way not seen since the early years of the transition from Franco's rule. In that time, the country left behind its status as a backward and repressed corner of Europe to become a thriving democracy

and enjoy a cultural renaissance. It also suffered years of a Basque separatist war, now all but defeated. However, a strong push for independence by the Catalonia region, albeit non-violent, is also complicating the current scene.

Caught Out

Luciano Busto was one of those caught out in Villanueva. Lying about 50 km east of Madrid, it grew in size from 600 people in 2003 to almost 6,500 as developers built a dormitory town of chalets and neat streets. Banks offered easy credit and homes were snapped up. Busto bought a four-bedroom house with his partner for 300,000 euros with 200,000 euros in credit from Spanish bank Bankia. He worked as an administrator in a metal company and as an actor. But he was put out of work when the company closed in 2008. He opened a wine shop but after a few years of struggle he "lost everything".

His partner also became unemployed and returned home to Ecuador, suffering from cancer. When he failed to pay his mortgage for the third month in a row in 2013, Bankia began to foreclose. He is trying to delay the house's auction and refuses to give back the keys to Bankia until it provides him somewhere else to live. A spokesman for Bankia said eviction was "always the last and most desperate solution" and the bank did its utmost to avoid such an outcome.

In all 54 families are facing eviction in Villanueva and a typical house price has dropped from 350,000 euros to 130,000 euros in what is known as Spain's most heavily-mortgaged town. Busto, 48, is now involved with Stop Desahucios, a group that fights foreclosures, and lives with his mother. "In every city there are two Spains," he said. "It is a divided country." He saw the entrenched political elite as a lingering legacy of the Franco era. "Rooting out corruption will take a long time," he said. Busto has found part-time work as a drama teacher in Madrid but unemployment in Villanueva runs at 33 percent - above the national rate of 21 percent.

Heads in the 21st Century

Unemployment has been a huge reason for the despair of the past few years. Although the figures have improved recently, a "Lost Generation" poses a long-term problem. Young Spaniards, many of them with university degrees, have left Spain in their thousands to find work overseas, a good number holding down such jobs as bar staff in London. One who stayed is Dani Aguilera, a 26-year-old barber and musician in Madrid. He was born nearly a decade after the 1981 coup attempt that marked the last throw of the dice of Francoist military men, and grew up in the good times.

But Spain is going through a tense period again, he said.

"There are still people with the old way of thinking. The old political parties - the truth is, they are not in the 21st century. We need people with their heads in the 21st century." Aguilera earns about 700-800 euros per month working 20 hours a week at a barber shop by Madrid's Plaza Mayor. At night he works as a singer, performing a fusion of rap, flamenco and blues with lyrics that tell of daily life and hardship.

Chatting before a show at the Bar Calvario in Lavapiés - an area that is home to young artists and Arab and African immigrants - he also bemoaned the corruption. "There is no punishment, no one goes to jail," he said. He explained Spain's decline lyrically. "When you have that first drink, you don't worry about things. But if you have too much, you get drunk. Then you have a hangover."

Broad Impulse

The fraught environment is also causing consternation in other sectors. Businessman Agustin Maiz, 50, summed up the state of Spanish politics in one word: "Mierda" (Crap). The current uncertainty was damaging to business, said Maiz, 50, who owns a company manufacturing heat exchangers and described himself as a libertarian. "My impression is that unless we find a stable political situation, it will be hard. Everyone is stopping investments, everyone is cautious. People are scared," he told Reuters.

A leftist government could be dangerous and previous Socialist administrations had spent vast amounts of public funds, he said. But even that would be preferable to unending instability. Maiz wanted to see labour reforms. The costs of firing inefficient workers were crushing and he would be happy to pay good new workers more. But such laws "are tattooed into the Spanish mentality," he said. The new impulse comes not only from the left. The business-friendly Ciudadanos, offers a less clench-fisted alternative. "The first transition took us from dictatorship to a political system dominated by two strong parties," said Ignacio Aguado, a 32-year-old former lawyer who now sits in the Madrid Assembly. "What we want now is a second transition that bases the system on people, not parties."

Podemos' rise was based on indignation fueled by a desire for radical change, he said. Ciudadanos was more rational. The new era would require parties reaching agreements and building coalitions, something that is common elsewhere in Europe but unusual in Spain, he said. Some coalitions have already been formed at a municipal and regional level. Ciudadanos and the PP have a pact in Madrid. "There is a new generation of politicians that are tired of what they have seen over the years. Spain's democracy has matured a lot over the last 30 years but we demand better. What we propose is to correct the mistakes, not start again and return to the 1980s." —Reuters

Focus

FEARS OF ILLIBERAL CENTRAL EUROPE AXIS MAY BE OVERBLOWN

By Paul Taylor

Poland's crackdown on the judiciary and public media, emulating Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban's accumulation of power, has raised fears in the European Union of a new illiberal axis based on the Visegrad group of central European states. But diplomats say that beyond an occasional joint effort to block an unpopular EU policy, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia have too little in common to form a coherent bloc to resist deeper EU integration or dismantle liberal values.

They differ on such major issues as relations with Russia - their former communist master - ties with Germany, membership of the euro currency and the place of religion in their societies. Nearly 12 years after they joined the EU, the four states have little interest in being lumped together in the eyes of investors as an awkward squad of ex-communist countries. "Visegrad is overblown," said a senior Slovak diplomat. "For each of us, our bilateral relationship with Germany is far more important than our shared interests in Visegrad." Each has become embedded in the German economy's extended production line. Slovakia - the biggest auto assembler in the region - has joined the euro area, but the others have so far kept their national currencies. Poland has taken the toughest line against Russia since Vladimir Putin's 2014 annexation of Crimea and support for rebels in eastern Ukraine, while Hungary has gone ahead with deeper energy and political ties with Moscow, and Prague and Bratislava have been cautious on EU sanctions.

The perception of a populist wave of Eurosceptic nationalism sweeping central Europe strengthened last year when the four states united to oppose being forced to take mandatory quotas of refugees flooding into the EU. The former Polish government did eventually agree to accept a share on a voluntary basis. The October election victory of Polish conservative Jaroslaw Kaczynski's Law and Justice (PiS) party with its Eurosceptic rhetoric and moves to shackle the constitutional court and public media, combined with talk of building up the Visegrad group, raised warning flags in Brussels and Berlin.

The European Commission will discuss Poland's media and constitutional court legislation and the framework for the rule of law in Europe on Wednesday. An EU diplomat said the mere fact that the EU executive was discussing the issue was in itself a punishment, even if no disciplinary procedure is launched.

But diplomats say there is less than meets the eye to the grouping founded in the mediaeval Visegrad Castle in Hungary in 1991 to sweep away the remnants of communism, overcome historic animosities and join the European integration process. "Visegrad is effective when we agree with each other, but unlike the Franco-German partnership, it doesn't create pressure to find a common denominator when we differ," a Czech aide said.

Expanding Visegrad?

Before taking office as foreign and Europe ministers, PiS politicians Witold Waszczykowski and Konrad Szymanski talked of building up the Visegrad Group as a counterweight to the Franco-German alliance that has long dominated the EU. But this idea - along with a possible enlargement of the group to include the three Baltic states, Romania and Bulgaria - was still-born. Diplomats said Poland hoped to build a so-called blocking minority within the 28 member states after losing voting clout when the EU reformed its decision-making system in the 2009 Lisbon Treaty to give greater weight to population size. With a combined population of 63 million, the four countries have fewer citizens than Britain or France, let alone Germany. Neither the Balts nor the east Balkan states showed any enthusiasm for joining an eastern front. Each is more keen to nurture its own ties with Berlin, seen as the EU's power centre.

Even the political friendship between Kaczynski and Orban may be less symbiotic than their recent words have suggested. With Poland under pressure from Brussels over its judiciary and media laws, the two leaders held six hours of talks on a political strategy in a castle in southern Poland last week. Three days later, Orban pledged that he would veto any EU move to impose sanctions on Poland over its civil rights record. "The European Union should not think about applying any sort of sanctions against Poland because that would require full unanimity and Hungary will never support any sort of sanctions against Poland," he told Kossuth Radio.

Kaczynski has tried to turn the dispute with Brussels over the Polish legislation into a battle with Berlin. "No amount of pressure and no words, particularly not German ones, can turn Poland away from its path," he said on Sunday at a ceremony commemorating his twin brother, President Lech Kaczynski, killed in a 2010 air crash near Smolensk, Russia. Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico, a populist social democrat, has rivalled Orban and Kaczynski in anti-migrant rhetoric and blamed Germany for drawing more refugees to Europe by rolling out the red carpet for Syrians. —Reuters

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PAKISTAN DEFERS AKMAL BAN PENDING APPEAL

KARACHI: Pakistan yesterday deferred a one-match ban on Umar Akmal after the controversial batsman appealed the punishment for violating the dress code in a domestic match. The decision means he will now be available for the first Twenty20 international against New Zealand in Auckland tomorrow. The 25-year-old, playing for the Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited, committed a level-one offence when he sported two logos on his kit instead of the one permitted. "The ban would have applied to the next match in which Umar was selected to participate whether domestic or international. Practically this meant the first T20 match between Pakistan and New Zealand," the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) said. "But Umar has advised PCB that he wishes to appeal against the ban. Since Umar has opted to appeal against the decision... the penalty of one match will remain suspended until the decision of appellate tribunal." Pakistan are on a New Zealand tour to play three Twenty20s and three one-day internationals. Umar has a history of disciplinary problems. He was initially dropped from the squad to play England in November last year after being arrested during a dance party. —AP

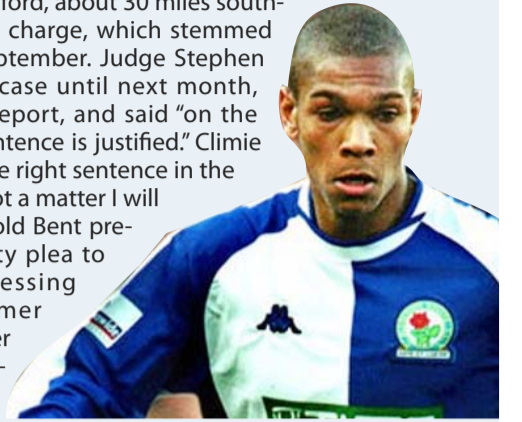


CARROLL INJURY FRUSTRATES BILIC

LONDON: West Ham United manager Slaven Bilic was left frustrated and confused by Andy Carroll's latest injury setback after the striker pulled up with a hamstring problem in Tuesday's 3-1 Premier League win over Bournemouth. The injury-prone England international, who has scored twice in the last three league games, left the pitch after 15 minutes and will be assessed today. "It's a big blow for us because he started this game good," Bilic told the BBC of a player who only returned to first-team action in September after a seven-month spell on the sidelines following knee surgery. "I don't understand it because we're resting the players. We're not training a lot. We can only hope it won't last that long." In Carroll's absence, West Ham were reliant on the talents of midfielder Dimitri Payet, who made his first start since early November after he picked up an ankle injury. The 28-year-old Frenchman came up with a goal and an assist to help his team move up to fifth in the league table. "I'm very happy because I don't play for two months," he said, quoted by the club's website (www.whufc.com). "I'm very happy I can play, and (get a) good goal, good assist. It's my job. I'm very happy." — Reuters

MARCUS BENT FACES JAIL AFTER FIGHT

GUILDFORD: Former Premier League player Marcus Bent is facing a jail term after admitting to taking part in a fight at his home. The former Ipswich, Everton and Charlton striker pleaded guilty at a court in Guildford, about 30 miles southwest of London, to the charge, which stemmed from an incident in September. Judge Stephen Climie adjourned the case until next month, pending a probation report, and said "on the face of it a custodial sentence is justified." Climie adds "whether that is the right sentence in the context of this case is not a matter I will prejudice." The 37-year-old Bent previously entered a guilty plea to one count of possessing cocaine. The former England under-21 player was released on unconditional bail. — AP



BELEN: Peugeot driver France's Cyril Despres, front, co-driver David Castera, left, and co-driver Jean Paul Cottret, try to stop the car of Stephane Peterhansel, during the ninth stage of the 2016 Dakar Rally, in Belen, Argentina Tuesday. — AP

WADA CONCERNED BY NEW FINDINGS IN RUSSIAN DOPING

PARIS: Findings reported by The Associated Press that track and field officials contemplated hiding the full extent of Russian doping before the 2012 London Olympics are "most concerning" and warrant further investigation, the World Anti-Doping Agency said yesterday. The AP reported Tuesday that six years before the International Association of Athletics Federations banned Russia, the governing body knew of doping so out of control it feared Russian athletes could die from abusing blood-boosting drugs and transfusions, and officials considered collaborating with Russians to hide the extent of cheating before the London Games.

The findings came from internal IAAF documents the AP received from a person intimately involved in the IAAF's anti-doping program. The person requested anonymity because he wasn't allowed to release the documents. Two internal IAAF papers before the London Olympics proposed not publishing doping sanctions for lesser-known Russians. That would have violated WADA rules and the notes themselves specified that the proposed non-disclosure would be contrary to usual IAAF practice. The IAAF confirmed the authenticity of the documents but said the proposed hush-up of Russian bans was never carried out.

WADA said its commission that is investigating Russian doping and cover-ups should investigate the findings, if it hasn't already. "The suggestions, if accurate, are most concerning," WADA spokesman Ben Nichols said in a statement to AP. "If this is new information that WADA's Independent Commission has not already examined, it will need to (be) investigated." A second volume of findings from the WADA probe is due to be released Thursday. Its first report last November pointed to Russian government complicity in widespread, systematic doping, leading the IAAF to suspend Russia's track and field athletes from international competition.

FINDINGS RAISED NEW QUESTIONS

Athletes reacted with disgust at the new AP findings that IAAF blood tests as far back as 2009 were already providing shocking insight into the scale and gravity of Russian doping. The findings raised new questions about why the organization waited six years before suspending Russia, which could see its athletes miss the Olympics in Rio de Janeiro in



BEIJING: This file photo taken on August 21, 2015 shows outgoing International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) president Lamine Diack gesturing during a press conference in Beijing, ahead of the 2015 IAAF World Championships. — AFP

August. "It's very disappointing," Australian race walker Jared Tallent said Wednesday in an AP phone interview. "They knew Russia had massive problems back in 2009. Action should have been taken a lot sooner." British javelin thrower Goldie Sayers tweeted: "And so it goes on. Clean athletes also damage their long-term health trying to compete with cheats. Makes me sick."

The IAAF documents reveal how its officials appealed for action from Russia, but also used advances in blood testing against offenders. They shed light on key junctures in Russia's doping crisis, which has been muddied by allegations that IAAF and Russian officials took bribes from athletes to hide doping.

By 2011, the IAAF's blood passport testing regime was flagging so many suspected Russian dopers that officials explored breaking their own rules and the WADA code by dealing with some cases privately, two internal IAAF notes show.

'RAPID AND DISCREET'

They proposed by-the-book sanctions for elite Russians likely to win in London, but "rapid and discreet" handling for lesser-known

athletes whose disappearance from competition would probably go unnoticed.

For athletes who agreed, the IAAF would "undertake not to publish the sanction," which would be shortened to two years from four, according to a Dec. 5, 2011, brief. IAAF spokesman Chris Turner said both notes were sent by the IAAF's anti-doping director at the time, Gabriel Dolle. One was to Habib Cisse, who was legal counsel to then-IAAF President Lamine Diack, the other to Diack himself, Turner told the AP. Turner said a colleague of Dolle's in the anti-doping department objected at the time to the proposed non-disclosure of bans and they were published. "Every suspicious ABP (blood passport) profile was investigated in full accordance with IAAF rules and the World Anti-Doping Code," he told AP. "All confirmed doping cases were publicly sanctioned. Nothing was covered-up." Diack is facing corruption and money laundering charges in France, accused of taking more than 1 million euros (\$1.1 million) in a scheme to blackmail athletes and cover up their doping positives. French magistrats also are investigating Cisse and Dolle for suspected corruption. — AP

RUSSIA WAS WARNED ABOUT DOPING IN 2009

PARIS: The former general secretary of the IAAF confirmed to AFP yesterday that he had written two letters in 2009, "among many others," to the Russian federation warning them about a worrying number of doping cases. Pierre Weiss, who held the position at the International Association of Athletics Federations at the time, said the two letters were sent in June and October 2009, "so before and after the Berlin world championships" of August that year.

The letters, revealed by the Associated Press news agency, warned about the health risks being taken by the athletes taking part in blood doping and urged the Russian authorities to act. "It is true that we have had a recur-

ring problem with doping in Russia," Weiss said.

"The only difference between the current situation and the situation when I was there, is that I was a long way from imagining that the Russian federation was complicit or even taking the initiative."

The IAAF provisionally suspended the Russian athletics federation in November over a bombshell report by a World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) independent commission alleging state-sponsored doping and mass corruption in the sport.

Russia is now trying to clean up its act amid fears that its track and field stars could be sidelined from this summer's Rio de Janeiro Games. The IAAF said Russia could only be reinstat-

ed if it fulfilled strict criteria outlined last month, including compliance with all WADA and IAAF anti-doping rules and requirements.

It said that the Russian athletics federation must "clean house" by showing that none of its directors, officers and staff "has any past involvement in doping" and "must sever ties with anyone who cannot meet this requirement". Further Russian athletics "must introduce a comprehensive code of ethics and reasonable term limits for all of its officials moving forward". The WADA independent commission publishes its second report in Munich today, with co-author and former WADA president Dick Pound promising it to be more explosive than the first. — AFP

CULTURAL REVOLUTION NEEDED TO REBUILD REPUTATION: HANSEN

LONDON: European Athletics president Svein Arne Hansen believes a "cultural revolution" is needed for track and field to be cleansed in the wake of "seismic" doping and corruption allegations that have rocked the sport. Norwegian Hansen said rebuilding the battered reputation of athletics is "likely to be the biggest job we have ever undertaken."

"Make no mistake we are experiencing events of a seismic nature and they are rocking the very foundations of how our sport is organized and governed," he said in a statement yesterday.

"Symbolic gestures and cosmetic measures will not be sufficient, this grave and unprecedented situation calls for fundamental reform," added Hansen. "We believe a cultural revolution will be required for athletics to rebuild its reputation and bring the sport's governance to where it needs to be."

The second part of an explosive Independent Commission (IC) report into allegations of systematic doping and "corruption

and bribery" at the highest levels of international athletics will be released on Thursday.

The first part of the report authored by former WADA (World Anti-Doping Agency) chief Dick Pound was released in November following an investigation that lasted nearly a year, and found a "deeply rooted culture of cheating" in Russian athletics. Pound has said the second part of the report will include further allegations that focus on possible corruption within the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) and will have a "wow" factor.

Former IAAF president Lamine Diack has already been accused by French authorities of corruption while his successor Sebastian Coe is under fire for having taken too long to act on allegations of impropriety within the governing body.

Hansen said his organisation believed Coe was "the right man for the current challenges" the sport faces. "We will give him the support he needs for the extremely tough work he

must now do," Hansen said in the statement titled "Integrity in Athletics."

"But we will also push him, both with our commitment and with our ideas. In what will be a valuable collaboration with President Coe we will make significant contributions to the direction the world governing body takes in the coming months and years."

Hansen has proposed a number of initiatives to complement ideas put forward by the IAAF and member federations and wants to explore imposing longer bans for doping offenders. "Many in Europe have welcomed the World Anti-Doping Code's increase in the length of suspension for serious doping offences to four years but feel it is still not enough," he said. "Although yet to be proven in humans, some believe that doped athletes could benefit even after a four-year ban. "European Athletics will work with interested member federations to explore the possibility of longer bans and then push for the necessary rule changes." — Reuters

HALL OF FAME BASEBALL PLAYER MONTE IRVIN DEAD

HOUSTON: Hall of Famer Monte Irvin, a power-hitting outfielder who starred for the New York Giants in the 1950s in a career abbreviated by major league baseball's exclusion of black players, has died. He was 96.

The Hall of Fame said Irvin died Monday night of natural causes at his Houston home. Irvin was 30 when he joined the Giants in 1949, two years after Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier. Irvin spent seven of his eight big league seasons with the Giants and one year with the Chicago Cubs in 1956. A native of Haleburg, Alabama, Irvin played in the Negro, Mexican and Puerto Rican leagues during his 20s.

Irvin batted .300 or more three times

RBIs. That year Irvin teamed with Hank Thompson and Mays to form the first all-black outfield in the majors. He finished third in the NL's MVP voting. Irvin was rewarded with a contract estimated at \$25,000, a pay raise of almost 100 percent.

FRACTURE

Unfortunately for Irvin he could not repeat his 1951 season in '52. On April 2 in an exhibition game against the Cleveland Indians in Denver, he suffered a compound fracture and dislocation of the right ankle after a hard slide into third base. Four months later, Irvin was back in action. In 1954 he helped the Giants sweep Cleveland to win the World Series.

Irvin's days in a Giants uniform came to end on June 24, 1955, at the age of 36, when his contract was sold to Minneapolis of the minor leagues. He played one final year in the majors with the Cubs before retiring in May 1957 while with Los Angeles of the Pacific Coast League.

Commissioner Rob Manfred called Irvin a leader during a transformational era for baseball. "Monte loved our game dearly, bridged eras of its history and touched many lives," Manfred said. "Major League Baseball will forever be grateful to courageous individuals like Monte Irvin."

After his retirement from baseball, Irvin worked as a scout for the New York Mets and on the public relations staff of a brewery.

On Aug. 21, 1968, Irvin made history when baseball Commissioner William D. Eckert named him assistant director of public relations for baseball, becoming the first black chosen to an executive position in professional baseball's hierarchy. Later, Irvin was named special assistant to Commissioner Bowie Kuhn.

In 1973, Irvin was elected to the Hall of Fame by the Negro League Committee. On Aug. 6, 1973, Irvin entered the Hall along with pitcher Warren Spahn and outfielder Roberto Clemente, who months earlier died in a plane crash.

"My only wish is that major league fans could have seen me when I was at my best ... in the Negro Leagues," Irvin said. "I sincerely believe I could have set some batting records comparable to DiMaggio, Mays, Aaron, Williams - 600 or 700 home runs, that type of thing." During his tenure in the commissioner's office, Irvin attended many baseball gatherings and was often seen at the ballparks around the major and minor leagues.

GENTLEMAN

Despite retiring before the Giants moved to San Francisco, Irvin kept ties with the organization. He had his number retired in 2010, was one of several Hall of Famers to throw out a ceremonial first pitch later that season at the World Series and went to the White House last summer when San Francisco's 2014 World Series championship team was honored.

"Monte was a true gentleman whose exceptional baseball talent was only surpassed by his character and kindness," Giants CEO Larry Baer said.

"He was a great ambassador for the game throughout his playing career and beyond. As the first Giant and one of the first African-American players to help integrate Major League Baseball, he served as a role model and mentor to so many who followed in his footsteps - including Willie Mays." Irvin is survived by daughters Patricia Irvin Gordon and Pamela Irvin Fields and two granddaughters. — AP



SAN FRANCISCO: In this June 26, 2010, file photo, former Giants Hall of Famer Monte Irvin laughs as his jersey was retired by the San Francisco Giants during a special pre-game ceremony before a baseball game against the Boston Red Sox in San Francisco. Irvin, a Hall of Fame power-hitting outfielder who starred for the New York Giants in the 1950s in a career abbreviated by major league baseball's exclusion of black players Monday night, Jan 11, 2016, of natural causes at his Houston home. He was 96. — AP

with a high of .329 in 1953. He finished with a career average of .293 with 99 homers and 443 RBIs, numbers that would have surely been far higher if not for the game's racial segregation.

"Today is a sad, sad day for me," said Hall of Famer Willie Mays, a teammate of Irvin's with the Giants. "I lost someone I cared about and admired very, very much; someone who was like a second father to me. Monte was a kind of guy that you had to be around to get to know. But once you became friends, he always had your back. You had a friend for life."

"Monte Irvin was a great left fielder. Monte Irvin was a great man. I will miss him. There are no words for how I feel today. I could say so much more about Monte, but this is not so easy to do right now."

Irvin was one of the most important contributors during the Giants' amazing pennant drive in 1951 when they overtook the Brooklyn Dodgers after trailing by 13 1-2 games in mid-August. Irvin batted .312 with 24 homers and an NL-leading 121

CLARK HOPES TO HAVE SOLUTION FOR LONG PUTTER

HONOLULU: Tim Clark hopes he has found the solution to the anchoring ban for longer putters, even if it makes it feel as though he is starting over.

"I feel like this is my rookie season because I don't know what to expect," Clark said Tuesday at the PGA Tour's Sony Open. Clark is using a putter from BioMech called "AccuLock" in which the shaft leans forward and allows the grip to rest against the forearm during the stroke. It's a large, square head with a hole the size of the golf ball in the middle, and the shaft is attached to the rear to give it a forward lean.

He said he has worked with it off and on for about six months and it still feels different. "I could have gone with a shovel and it would have felt the same," he said. "I went with what felt the most comfortable. This method felt the best."

No player was more vocal against the ban on the anchored stroke than Clark, whose six victories worldwide include The Players Championship and the national opens in Australia, Scotland, Canada and South Africa.

For 19 years, the American golfer used a long putter that he anchored to his chest. Clark has a congenital problem with his arms in which he can't supinate his wrists, and the long putter was the perfect solution. Instead using it like a pendulum, he used a short putting stroke with the long putter. Frustrated by the US Golf Association's lack of empirical evidence that an anchored putting stroke created an advantage, he traveled to San Diego on his own for a players meeting and gave an elegant speech that helped shape the opinion of several players. A month later, PGA



HONOLULU: Nick Taylor of Canada plays a shot during practice rounds prior to the Sony Open in Hawaii at Waialae Country Club on Tuesday in Honolulu, Hawaii. — AFP

Tour commissioner Tim Finchem said the tour opposed the rule. The USGA and Royal & Ancient passed it anyway and it went to effect at the start of this year. Clark and Carl Pettersson of Sweden have used long putters their entire careers and argued

they could never regain so many years of practice. But with the rule giving them no choice but to change, Clark said his new putter appears to be the best alternative for him. Because of his arm problems, he cannot properly grip a short putter. The new putter allows him to use a "claw" grip with his right hand. "I'm looking forward to the challenge. Who knows? Maybe it will be better," Clark said. "But that was 19 years with the long putter, and one putter that I used for 14 years. I wouldn't say I'm worried. It either works or it doesn't. But you can't wipe away 19 years of habits." — AP



NAIROBI: Kenya's 800m world record Olympic champion David Rudisha (2nd-R) and other Kenyan athletes run during a training session in Iten in the Rift Valley, 329 kms north of Nairobi, yesterday. — AFP

KENYA'S RUDISHA GOING FOR REPEAT OLYMPIC GOLD

ITEN: World 800 metres record-holder David Rudisha told AFP yesterday he had fully recovered from injury and was ready to defend his Olympic title in Rio De Janeiro this summer.

"This is what I'm looking forward to," Rudisha said in Iten, a high altitude training ground for some of the world's best distance runners. "I know it's going to be tough, nothing is easy and everybody is looking for that title, but we are going to do our best."

After dominating the race for two consecutive years, a knee injury took Rudisha out of contention for the whole of 2013 and cast doubt on his Olympic defence. But he bounced back last year to reclaim the world title in Beijing in August.

Rudisha, 27, said his recovery and training were going well. "So far so good. My body has responded very well. That problem was actually

a tough one to overcome physically and mentally," Rudisha said, adding that he still sometimes feels "that nagging pain".

Rudisha's coach, Colm O'Connell, said the runner's confidence was also back. "I think 2015 was important for Rudisha, in the sense that the victory in Beijing did re-establish him," he said. O'Connell said Beijing was "a stepping stone to Rio" and that Rudisha was now "certainly in the mix" although he conceded that the runner "has to fight to regain his position as the king of 800m running".

Hot on Rudisha's heels-or perhaps in front of him-are contenders including former world and Commonwealth champion Nijel Amos of Botswana, Mohammed Aman of Ethiopia and Amel Tuka of Bosnia and Herzegovina, who set the fastest 800m time in the world in 2015. — AFP

SPIETH BEAT WINNERS-ONLY FIELD, FACES RORY MCILROY

HONOLULU: Fresh off an eight-shot victory, Jordan Spieth gets one week of rest before stepping back into spotlight. He leaves this weekend for the Abu Dhabi HSBC Golf Championship and his first meeting of the year with Rory McIlroy.

"I didn't know he was playing. I'll probably withdraw now," Spieth jokingly said Tuesday during a conference call for the Valspar Championship. McIlroy was in Spieth's position a year ago - No. 1 in the world (by a greater margin), a multiple major champion, a great start to the year. What he never saw coming was an ankle injury while playing soccer that kept him out for two months and kept him from defending titles in the British Open and Bridgestone Invitational. He ended the year with a victory in the DP World Tour Championship to win the Race to Dubai.

The ankle injury slowed what could have been an interesting year between Spieth and McIlroy. Three weeks after Spieth won the Masters, McIlroy answered with victories in the Cadillac Match Play and Wells Fargo Championship. Spieth won the US Open. And then McIlroy put on soccer shoes.

"In a season that he considered lost, he still came back and ended up winning the Race to Dubai, the final event. It proves what a player he is," Spieth said. "I'm sure there's very few people working harder than he is to make this season his best season yet, which is scary. Hopefully, I can help prevent that to an extent."

Spieth is playing Abu Dhabi for the first time before going to the Singapore Open. He returns for the AT&T Pebble Beach National Pro-Am and the Northern Trust Open at Riviera before heading to Florida for the World Golf Championship at Doral and his title defense at the Valspar Championship.

That playoff win at the Valspar Championship seems like a long time ago considering all Spieth has done. He mentioned Tuesday that it was his first professional victory when he had to make a big putt on the final hole, in this case a 30-foot birdie on the third extra hole.

That remains true. He won the Masters by four shots and the U.S. Open with a two-putt birdie. He won the John Deere Classic when Tom Gillis hit into the water in a playoff. He won the Tour Championship by five shots. And he won at Kapalua by eight shots.

CADDIE RACE

Jordan Spieth wasn't the only one at Kapalua who turned in a remarkable performance. Mark Urbanek, the caddie for James Hahn, remembers hearing about the time in 2002 that Steve Williams won a bet with Tiger Woods and swing coach Butch Harmon that he could run the back nine of the Plantation Course in under 30 minutes. Williams won handsily, going from the back of every tee and front of every green in 19 minutes, 28 seconds. Urbanek decided to give it a try. He started even with the first tee and ran through the tunnel and up a path to reach the 10th tee, and then touched the back of every tee and a part of every green. He finished in 20 minutes, 15 seconds. If the starting line had been the 10th tee, he would have finished in 19 minutes event.

WHAT INSPIRES SUCH A CHALLENGE?

"I got into running a couple of years ago," Urbanek said. "I love the mental challenge. I hate running more than the next guy, but when you hit that wall and your brain is telling you, 'What are you doing?' I enjoy continuing through that."

SPRAGUE'S MOVE

The president of the PGA of America also has a day job, and for Derek Sprague, that job is changing. Sprague, who had been at Malone Golf Club in upstate New York for the 27 years as general manager and director of golf, has been hired as managing director of Liberty National Golf Club. In a peculiar twist, he will be employed by the PGA Tour as an expanded relationship between Liberty National and the tour.

Here's another way to look at it. Sprague will preside over the Ryder Cup this year as PGA president. He also will be working on the Presidents Cup, which will be played the following year at Liberty National.

The role between the tour and Liberty National came from a 25-year partnership in which the New Jersey golf club, which sits across from Manhattan and the Statue of Liberty, will host up to 10 tournaments. That includes a FedEx Cup playoff event in 2019.

GWAA AWARDS

Dottie Pepper's career didn't end when she stopped playing the LPGA Tour. The 17-time winner with two majors will receive the William D. Richardson Award from the Golf Writers Association of America for her outstanding contributions to the game.

The GWAA also voted Davis Love III for its ASAP Sports/Jim Murray Award for his cooperation with the press, and J.B. Holmes with its Ben Hogan Award for staying active in golf despite a



KUALA LUMPUR: This handout photo taken and received by the World Sport Group yesterday shows Ian Poulter of England hitting a shot out of a bunker during the first practice day at the EurAsia Cup golf tournament at the Glenmarie Golf and Country Club in Shah Alam, west of Kuala Lumpur. — AFP

physical ailment. Pepper was an analyst for NBC Sports after she retired, served on the PGA of America board of directors for two years, went to ESPN and recently was signed by CBS Sports, where she will be the first female to be part of the CBS team at the Masters. Along the way, she has been a strong promoter of junior golf.

Holmes had two operations in 2011 after being diagnosed with brain defects in his cerebellum. One surgery was to remove part of his skull. He has won twice since and played on the Presidents Cup team last year.

"It's a great feeling to be recognized for overcoming adversity," he said. "I am also proud to be affiliated with the great Ben Hogan, whose legacy is one that I admired." They will be honored at the GWAA's annual awards dinner April 6 in Augusta, Georgia.

IRISH MENTORING

The death of Christy O'Connor Jr. allowed Pádraig Harrington to reflect on how much O'Connor and other veterans meant to young Irish players. Harrington turned pro in 1995 and played a few years with O'Connor. He also was close with Des Smyth and Eamonn Darcy.

"We would have had dinner every night of the week - a group of Irish guys - and practice rounds," he said. "They were a big influence. The year I came out, there were six or eight rookies, and these were the elder statesmen. They looked after us and put us right. If you stepped out of line, you were told."

Harrington said he often referred to Smyth as "Dad" because if there was an issue, he would be the one to sort it all out. The social aspect of golf is important, especially for young Europeans coming to America.

Harrington said he felt lucky to have the Irish connection. "It was a big bunch of us at the time, nearly 12 of us at dinner every night," he said. "Socially, it was brilliant. A big part of having the elder guys is we weren't going to get too cocky around them. Des was 'Dad.' Christy and Eamonn were like a double act. They were fantastic."

Dustin Johnson last week became the 20th player to surpass \$30 million in career earnings on the PGA Tour. Only two of those 20 players, Vijay Singh and Davis Love III, are eligible for the Champions Tour. "Improving as an individual player is first and foremost. Also, I'd really, really, really like to get a Ryder Cup win this year." — AP

FROOME TARGETS INCREDIBLE TREBLE AS TOUR AND RIO LOOM

ALCUDIA: Tour de France champion Chris Froome mapped out lofty goals for the year on Tuesday, setting his sights on a remarkable treble of double Olympic gold and another triumphant ride into Paris. The 30-year-old Briton, who claimed his second Tour de France victory last year, having also won it in 2013, will be favourite for a third in July, before heading to Rio de Janeiro's lush coastline to contest the Olympic road race and time trial.

It sounds a tall order, but having completed a recce of Rio's 256.4km road race route, which is littered with steep climbs and cobbles, he liked what he saw. For Froome, the ultimate Grand Tour rider, the more difficult the terrain the better.

The road race takes place on Aug. 6 with the time trial, a hilly 60km dash, four days later and Froome said the quick turnaround will be no problem.

"When I rode Rio and looked at the TT (time trial) course, I thought 'this is fantastic, I'd love the chance to get stuck into this TT'," Froome told reporters at Team Sky's media day in Puerto de Alcudia, Mallorca on Tuesday. "I went and rode the road course the next day and just felt 'if there's a one-day course I could win, it would look something like this'."

"Having said that, it's such a complicated thing, the Olympic road race. Teams of maximum five riders, 260km. You can't rely on too much team work with four team mates. "That amount of climbing. It's almost every man for himself, almost like a junior race. It's going to be a dramatic race when you look at the route. People are going to be on their hands and knees by the last two laps."

BETTER SHAPE

Froome won a bronze medal in the time trial at London 2012, when former Team Sky col-

league Bradley Wiggins took gold, having become Britain's first Tour de France champion 10 days earlier. "It would be lovely (to win gold)," Froome, who became a father for the first time just before Christmas, told reporters in the lobby of the seaside hotel commandeered by Team Sky for their daily training rides in the Tramuntana mountains. "I was fortunate to get Olympic bronze in London. It felt massive even on the back of the Tour we'd had. "It felt enormous. You almost can't believe how overwhelming the Olympics are, bigger than just your sport." Froome says his first priority, however, is the Tour de France and trying to become the first person since Spain's Miguel Indurain (winner from 1991-95) to retain the title, not counting disgraced American Lance Armstrong. He says he is in a far better shape than in 2014, when his hopes of winning back-to-back Tours ended early in a painful crash on a rainy day in northern France. That year his build-up was ruined by nagging injuries and illness, but those problems are now behind him and Froome says he cannot wait to start racing.

"A lot of people say 'defending your title' but I don't feel that's my mindset," said Froome, whose Tour hopes have been boosted by the inclusion of two hilly time trials that will play into his hands.

"I don't feel I am defending something. I am going to get something. It's a different way to look at it. It helps with my motivation. If I compare where I am now to the start of 2014 after I won the previous Tour, I have more experience behind me. "Two years in this leadership position. I feel a lot more at ease. I don't feel the same level of pressure on my shoulders. The pressure is probably still there but I don't feel it. I feel a lot more focused on the job at hand." — Reuters



LONDON: England's International Rugby Union team coach Eddie Jones speaks at a press conference at Twickenham Stadium, London yesterday. Jones has named seven uncapped players in his Six Nations squad and culled 10 from the failed Rugby World Cup campaign. — AP

BEAUMONT JUNIOR GETS CALL TO NEW-LOOK ENGLAND SQUAD

LONDON: Josh Beaumont, son of former captain Bill, was one of seven uncapped players included in Eddie Jones's first England squad yesterday as the Australian called for his team to start a new era by playing with smiles on their faces.

While Jones ushered in a wave of new, young players, he also culled several regulars of the previous regime following England's pool stage exit at the World Cup. Chris Robshaw, captain throughout Stuart Lancaster's near-four-year reign, was retained but will be competing for the blind-side flanker berth. Jones named a 33-man Elite Player Squad, effectively his squad for the Six Nations championship starting next month with England visiting Scotland in their first game on Feb. 6. "I'm looking for these guys to bring enthusiasm, energy and a lot of hard work," Jones told a Twickenham news conference. "We want them to play with a smile on their face and to enjoy it." Sale's Beaumont is a powerful number eight in the mould of his father, a lock forward and one of England's most iconic players who led them to the grand slam in 1980 and captained the British and Irish Lions the same year. He is currently chairman of the Rugby Football Union.

Jack Clifford, who has taken over as open-side flanker at Harlequins from Robshaw, is up against Gloucester's Matt Kvesic for that position. Jones criticised Robshaw during the World Cup as being a "six and a half" player and joked about the reference on Wednesday by saying: "Chris has been doing exceedingly well at six, with half a number off his back."

SURPRISE OMISSION

Jones said he would not name his new captain until he has decided on his starting

XV for the Scotland game. Among the new faces hoping to break in are Wasps centre Elliot Daly, who has a good chance in the absence of injured Henry Slade, and Sam Hill, Paul Hill, Ollie Devoto and highly-rated former England under-20 captain lock/flanker Maro Itoje.

Centre Manu Tuilagi, who last played for England in June 2014 and returned to the Leicester team last week after a 15-month absence with a groin problem, was not included in the squad but will be considered for the latter stages of the Six Nations.

Several players who were regulars under Lancaster have been left out, including centre Luther Burrell, who was a surprise omission from the World Cup squad having been a regular in last year's Six Nations.

Fellow centre Brad Barritt, flanker Tom Wood, lock Geoff Parling, hooker Tom Youngs and number eight Ben Morgan also miss out, as did flyhalf Danny Cipriani, whose international career now looks to be over after never really getting going despite him being one of the most talented players of his generation.

There was better news for Chris Ashton, who has played only two tests since 2013 but has continued to score tries for Saracens, and Harlequins' Marland Yarde, with both recalled wingers hoping to take advantage of the season-ending knee injury of Jonny May.

"The long-term strategy for England is to develop a side who can be the most dominant team in world rugby, so we have chosen a lot of new players on the growth we see in them," Jones said.

"Since 2003 England are ranked fourth in the Six Nations and that's not reflective of the talent in the country so we have to change history." — Reuters

KYRGIOS HIT BY OPEN INJURY SCARE AT KOOYONG

MELBOURNE: Nick Kyrgios suffered an Australian Open scare yesterday when he pulled out of his opening match at the Kooyong Classic with a right foot injury.

The 20-year-old Australian handed David Goffin victory as he retired with the score at 6-7 (5/7), 3-2 to the Belgian. The year's first Grand Slam starts on Monday in Melbourne.

"I felt it in training yesterday," said Kyrgios, the world number 30, after pulling the plug as a precaution at the 12-man Grand Slam

warm-up event. "I started feeling it again today when the treatment wore off. I have to think about next week, I really hate to do this but I had to." The colourful contender finished with 15 aces, including four in his final service game of the second set. "Hate withdrawing, so sorry to everyone @KooyongClassic I just have to make sure I'm right for next week & I will be," he tweeted after. Belgium's Goffin, who had to deal not only with an injured opponent but with the swirling wind which

characterises the club, said he was sorry that the match was unable to be completed.

"Even if it was a set and a half, it was hard to play," he said. "It was very hot on court (around 40 Celsius) and there is always a wind. I understand Nick's worry and the pull-out. He's never easy to play with that big serve and forehand." Spain's Pablo Carreno-Busta earlier beat the 2006 Australian Open finalist Marcos Baghdatis 6-4, 6-4, without dropping a serve. "I had a good finish, I'm very happy," the

Spaniard said. "I played some good tennis against a good player. I tried a few drop shots near the end just to change things a bit and they worked." "It's good to play in the heat which we will be experiencing next week." A final match between German Alexander Zverev and Britain's Kyle Edmund was cancelled. Organisers were vague about the reason, at one point suggesting excessive heat and later citing what they claimed was a shoulder problem for Zverev. In an exhibition

match before a sparse crowd, 2014 champion Kei Nishikori of Japan beat Australian teenage hopeful Omar Jasika 6-1, 6-7 (3/7), 10-4. Asia's top player was cruising 6-1, 4-1 and seemingly in command when his challenger launched a fightback, breaking Nishikori as he served for the match. Jasika took the set into a tiebreak which he won as Nishikori put a backhand long. But Nishikori claimed victory a few minutes later with success in the match-tiebreak. — AFP

'PERFECT' DJOKOVIC RAISES HOPES OF GOLDEN SLAM

MELBOURNE: Novak Djokovic is hitting ever greater heights ahead of the Australian Open-posing problems for his rivals, and raising distant hopes of the first ever men's "Golden Slam".

Picking up where he left off after a blistering 2015, Djokovic destroyed Rafael Nadal in last week's Qatar Open final, in a performance the Spaniard called "stratospheric".

"I played against a player who did everything perfect. I know nobody playing tennis like this ever," said the 14-time Grand Slam-winner.

No male player, and only Steffi Graf on the women's side, has ever achieved the "Golden Slam": winning all four major titles and Olympic singles gold in a single year. Last season Djokovic fell just one victory short of the first calendar-year Grand Slam since Rod Laver in 1969, after losing the French Open final to Stan Wawrinka.

Acknowledging his form, the 28-year-old said in Doha: "I'm hoping that I can actually peak and play as well as I did today in Melbourne."

A strong performance looks likely in Melbourne, Djokovic's most successful Grand Slam where he has won five out of five finals, including last year against Andy Murray.

But the 10-time major champion will not be looking too far beyond the year's opening Grand Slam, which starts on Monday. "My thoughts are only directed to Melbourne and what I need to do there," he said.

'IT'S A HUGE CHALLENGE'

Murray, who will be in the bottom half of the men's draw and seeded to face Djokovic in the January 31 final, sees the Serb as a huge challenge. "What Novak is doing... last year he had an incredible year," he said. "Final of every tournament bar one. It's been tough playing in an era with Novak, Roger (Federer) and Rafa (Nadal) but at the same time to have guys like that to always be trying to catch up to, to have to improve to try and beat them, it's a huge challenge."

Murray carries the baggage of losing

four Melbourne finals-three of them to Djokovic-but is continuing his dogged pursuit of a breakthrough.

"I'm doing everything I can to try and win here," said the 28-year-old Scot, who has promised to leave early if his wife Kim Sears gives birth.

"My number one goal is to try and win here. It'd mean a lot because of how many times I've been close." Federer, as the third seed on rankings, could face either Djokovic or Murray in the semi-finals as the 17-time Grand Slam champion looks to win his first major title since Wimbledon 2012.

CLASSIC FINAL

The Swiss maestro has won four Australian Opens, but lost to Djokovic at last year's Wimbledon and US Open finals. At 34, he is running out of time to add to his all-time record haul of Grand Slam titles.

"Of course, Novak is the favourite for the Australian Open. Plus he's played well there historically," Federer said last week.

Nadal has won once in Australia, over Federer in a classic five-set final in 2009, and has had some of his career low points with tournament-ending injuries in Melbourne. But he maintains he can do well as he pursues his comeback from a disappointing 2015, when he failed to any Grand Slam titles.

"I am playing well, and I'm gonna keep working hard to try to be ready for Australia. And I think I will be. I am motivated for it," the Spanish left-hander said.

Switzerland's Stan Wawrinka will also be a contender after he conquered Djokovic on the way to winning the 2014 Australian Open, and beat him again in last year's French Open final.

The world number four tuned up by beating Croatia's Borna Coric for a third straight Chennai Open title in India last week. Outside the top five, Japan's world number seven Kei Nishikori will be looking to get past the quarters for the first time in Melbourne. Meanwhile, local interest will focus on the antics of talented but wayward young Aussies Bernard Tomic and Nick Kyrgios. — AFP



SYDNEY: Grigor Dimitrov of Bulgaria hits a return to Pablo Cuevas of Uruguay during their men's singles second round match at the Sydney International tennis tournament in Sydney yesterday. — AFP

DIMITROV FACE DOLGOPOLOV IN SYDNEY QUARTERS

SYDNEY: Grigor Dimitrov reached his second consecutive quarter-final of the new season with a straight-sets win over Uruguayan Pablo Cuevas at the Sydney International yesterday. The Bulgarian world number 28, looking for more matches under new coach Franco Davin, ousted Cuevas 7-6 (7/2), 6-4 and will next play Ukraine's Aleksandr Dolgopolov in the quarters.

Dimitrov, who reached a career-high ranking of eight in 2014, lost in three sets to Roger Federer in the quarters of last week's Brisbane International. "I think right now I need to play more matches, as many matches as I can get early on in the year," Dimitrov said.

"It's going to help me with my ranking, but also with the level that I'm trying to achieve. I've worked a lot on a lot of things this off-season, so I just want to make sure I put them into play and just make them as a habit. That's the thing that is very important to me."

Dimitrov took the opening set in 51 minutes after a one-sided tie-break, and then opened the

second set with his only break of the match. That was all he needed as he worked his way to victory in one hour 37 minutes.

The Bulgarian will face Dolgopolov in the quarters after the Ukrainian knocked out American qualifier Alexander Sarkissian 7-6 (8/6), 6-2. "Dangerous player. Never know what to expect. Especially here. The conditions are pretty suitable for him," Dimitrov said of Dolgopolov. "It's a faster court and a little bit windy. So it's going to be definitely a tricky match for me."

Australia's top seed Bernard Tomic claimed a quarter-final spot in the tournament for a fourth straight year with a 6-2 6-2 romp over compatriot Jordan Thompson in just 48 minutes in the evening match. "I think always looking back it was my first title here, so the memory is always there. With the memories comes the confidence," Tomic said. "I feel so good playing on that court. Every time I step on that court I know this is where it all started for me."

The 2013 champion will face Russian Teymuraz Gabashvili in the quarters. In other matches Wednesday, Luxembourg's Gilles Muller was leading second seed Dominic Thiem 7-6 (7/2), 2-2 when the young Austrian retired with blisters on his right foot.

Thiem was coming off a semi-final loss to Federer in Brisbane. Muller, a Sydney semi-finalist last year, has now dropped just seven points on his first serve over two matches, in defeating young guns Thiem and Croatia's Borna Coric.

Muller, who also reached the fourth round of the Australian Open last year, will face Frenchman Jeremy Chardy in the quarters. Sixth seed Chardy ousted Australian James Duckworth 7-6 (7/5), 6-4, while French qualifier Nicolas Mahut downed fifth-seeded Italian Andreas Seppi 6-3, 1-6, 6-3.

Other winners were Gabashvili, 6-3, 6-3 over Argentina's Federico Delbonis, and Serbian third seed Viktor Troicki, 6-1, 6-4 over Spaniard Tommy Robredo. — AFP



MELBOURNE: Novak Djokovic of Serbia hits a return during a practice session ahead of the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne yesterday. — AFP

FERRER LEADS TOP SEEDS INTO AUCKLAND QUARTERS

WELLINGTON: David Ferrer put last week's Doha disappointment behind him with a comfortable straight-sets win in his opening match at the Auckland Classic on Wednesday.

The 6-2, 6-4 victory over Australian qualifier Matthew Barton put the top seed and four-time champion into the quarter-finals to face Czech Lukas Rosol, a surprise winner over fifth seed Benoit Paire of France.

Ferrer had rushed to Auckland for a wildcard entry after his opening-round loss to Ukraine's Ilya Marchenko in the Qatar Open, and immediately showed his class as he won 23 of 26 first-serve points.

The top four seeds all had first-round byes, and all won their opening matches in the second round.

Second seed Jo-Wilfried Tsonga was untroubled as he beat Philipp Kohlschreiber 6-3, 6-4 but it was a different story for the third and fourth seeds,

John Isner and South African Kevin Anderson. Isner took the first set in a tie-break against fellow American Sam Querrey, and then dropped the before fighting back to take the match 7-6 (10/8), 6-7 (4/7), 6-4.

Anderson was also tested in tie-breaks before overcoming Robin Haase of the Netherlands 7-6 (10/8), 7-6 (7/5).

"It was a really tough match," said Anderson. "It was a little windy. It was tough to find your rhythm. But I just stuck with it. It's my first match. Given that, I thought I played pretty well." Anderson, ranked 12th in the world, won the first set on a Haase double fault and was down 1-4 in the second-set tie-break before winning six of the next seven points.

Roberto Bautista Agut reached the last eight with a 6-4, 7-6 (7/3) win over American Donald Young, while Fabio Fognini took just 47 minutes to beat Thiemo de Bakker 6-1, 6-1.

HALEP OVERCOMES PLISKOVA TO REACH SYDNEY SEMIS

SYDNEY: Romania's Simona Halep fought off big-serving Czech Karolina Pliskova to reach the semi-finals of the Sydney International yesterday.

The world number two had been tested in two tight previous matches, and Pliskova again made things difficult for Halep. Halep had early breaks in both sets only to be pulled back, before the tournament top seed closed out for a 6-4, 7-5 win over the Czech fifth seed in one hour and 38 minutes in blistering heat.

"It was tough today. Was very close. She's playing well, and she's strong with the serve," Halep said. "I expected that she's going to hit all the balls, so she did. Against her you don't have rhythm too

much, so that's why it's tough to play."

Halep finished with slightly more winners than Pliskova, 22 to 21, but far fewer errors, 33 to 43. The Romanian is battling an Achilles injury and admitted to feeling pain during her opening victory over Frenchwoman Caroline Garcia late Tuesday. It followed her late withdrawal from the Brisbane International last week.

Halep will face former world number two Svetlana Kuznetsova in the last four after the Russian fought back from 1-5 down in the opening set to knock out Italian Sara Errani 7-6 (7/1), 6-0.

Halep leads Kuznetsova 3-2 in their previous meetings. "I know that she's playing a lot of top-

spin, so it's a different player tomorrow, different style," Halep said of facing Kuznetsova.

"I expected a tough one. Of course every match at this level is very tough, but I believe I have my chance." Elsewhere Puerto Rican qualifier Monica Puig ended Australia's Samantha Stosur's run, 6-4, 6-4 and will face eighth seed Belinda Bencic in the semis after the Swiss beat Russian Ekaterina Makarova 6-0, 2-6, 6-4 in an evening match. "It's a very important win for me coming through three rounds of qualifiers and obviously coming through in the main," Puig said. "I've lost to her twice before, so it was a pretty big win for me today considering the amount of times I played her." — AFP



SYDNEY: Simona Halep of Romania hits a return against Karolina Pliskova of the Czech Republic during their women's singles third round match at the Sydney International tennis tournament in Sydney yesterday. — AFP

KHAWAJA INTO AUSTRALIA SQUAD AS WARNER TAKES PATERNITY LEAVE

SYDNEY: Top order batsman Usman Khawaja was brought into the Australia squad for the next two one-day internationals against India yesterday after opener David Warner was granted paternity leave. Warner scored five runs in Australia's innings as the hosts registered a five-wicket victory in the opening clash of the five-match series in Perth on Tuesday but will

miss matches two and three in Brisbane and Melbourne. Khawaja, who recently made a successful return to test cricket in the home series against New Zealand and West Indies, will replace his fellow left-hander, whose wife Candice is expecting their second child. "Usman has been in fantastic form this season and was unlucky to miss out on a place in our squad ... in the first place," chief

selector Rod Marsh said in a news release. "This call-up is a reward for that form and it is great to have someone of his quality to step into the squad in David's absence. "We wish both David and Candice well and look forward to welcoming David back into the squad when circumstances allow." Khawaja has played only three one-day internationals, the last coming against West

Indies in Perth nearly three years ago. The 29-year-old hopes he can make the opportunity count if he does get one. "The hunger is to play as many forms of the game as possible," he told reporters at Sydney airport. "I've made it clear that I've always wanted to play one-dayers. "But sometimes it's about timing. If I'm going to get my opportunity, I don't know,

but when I do get it hopefully I can take it and be more than just a test cricketer. "At this moment I'm really happy with how I'm hitting the white ball." The second match against India takes place in Brisbane on Friday with the teams meeting at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Sunday before the series concludes with fixtures in Canberra and Sydney. — Reuters

ENGLAND IN POSITION TO CAPITALIZE ON S AFRICA

JOHANNESBURG: The biggest issue for England heading into the third test against South Africa appears to be a virus that has put opening batsman Alex Hales' participation in doubt. Compare that to the top-ranked Proteas, who are in the midst of one of their most unsettled periods in recent times.

Off a first series loss to India in 11 years, Hashim Amla suddenly resigned as South Africa captain midway through this England series, and interim skipper AB de Villiers said yesterday he's not sure if he wants the job permanently. "I'm still very committed (to the team)," De Villiers said. "To the job (of captain), I'm not sure." As well as his doubts over taking the captaincy long-term, De Villiers also said there was "a little bit of truth" in reports that he had been considering retirement after the series. "The two test matches, for now, is all I'm focusing on," he said. In charge for the remainder of the four-match contest, De Villiers' challenge will be to ensure the uncertainty surrounding test cricket's No. 1 team and its best player doesn't affect a young squad ahead of the decisive final two games against England.

The third test starts today at the Wanderers in Johannesburg. England leads 1-0 following a strong win in the series opener in Durban. A victory in Johannesburg or in the final game in Centurion, both pitches with reputations for delivering results, would land England its first series win over South Africa in more than a decade. Significantly, it would only be England's second win in South Africa since the country returned from the sporting isolation of the apartheid years. It would also topple South Africa from the No. 1 ranking - a ranking that appears a little shaky anyway. "It would be a great achievement for this side to come here and beat South Africa away from home, and we're in a position to do that," England captain Alastair Cook said. "The opportunity is there and it's just whether we're good enough to take it.

"It's an exciting time to play on what are probably two result wickets in these next two games. We need to win one to win the series. That is a great situation to be in." The news on Hales, Cook

said, is that the opener has "a bit of a bug." He practiced on Wednesday, albeit alone so he didn't infect the rest of the team, Cook said. Should he not be fit, Gary Ballance would likely come in for England. Other than that, England is content with its progress in the series, where it was the dominant force in Durban and for the first half of the drawn second test in Cape Town.

England also may be in a better position to take advantage of the bouncy, quick, fast-bowler friendly pitches in Johannesburg and Centurion despite sounds from the South African camp that those conditions offer the home team a way back into the series.

With the return to fitness of James Anderson in Cape Town, England's fast bowling attack is at full strength with Anderson, Stuart Broad and Steven Finn, and the added backup of allrounder Ben Stokes.

"If the ball does fly through and seams around we have got a pretty good seam attack ... I am very comfortable with this team playing in any conditions," Cook said. South Africa is again without the injured Dale Steyn and is not the fast-bowling force it used to be. Steyn will miss a second straight match with a right shoulder problem. Morne Morkel will lead the attack in the third test, while his three reinforcements will be chosen from a pretty inexperienced group.

Kagiso Rabada has played just four tests, Chris Morris (one test), Kyle Abbott (six tests) and Hardus Viljoen is uncapped.

South Africa may take a gamble on Viljoen, a muscular fast bowler who has energy and sheer pace and who plays his domestic cricket at the Wanderers. His enthusiasm could give a much-needed lift to an apparently unhappy South African team and its jaded stand-in captain.

"In the last two or three years I've been searching for the right answers to play a little bit less cricket in one way or another, to keep myself fresh and to keep enjoying the game," De Villiers said. "I've found myself on the pitch in the past few years, every now and then, not enjoying myself as much as I should be and that raises concerns within myself." — AP



CHICAGO: Andrew Shaw #65 of the Chicago Blackhawks tries to get off a shot against Pekka Rinne #35 of the Nashville Predators as Shea Weber #6 defends at the United Center on Tuesday in Chicago, Illinois. The Blackhawks defeated the Predators 3-2. — AFP

BLACKHAWKS BEAT PREDATORS FOR EIGHTH STRAIGHT WIN

CHICAGO: Andrew Shaw scored two goals and Chicago held on for a 3-2 win over Nashville on Tuesday. Brent Seabrook also scored for the Blackhawks. Marian Hossa added two assists as Chicago extended its season-long winning streak to eight games. Mike Ribeiro and Filip Forsberg scored for the Predators, who lost their fourth consecutive game.

ISLANDERS 5, BLUE JACKETS 2

Brock Nelson collected his first NHL hat-trick and the New York Islanders snapped out of a two-game offensive slump with a 5-2 win over the Columbus Blue Jackets at Barclays Center. Ryan Strome scored the game's first goal and Brian Strait scored in the third period for the Islanders, who only managed 20 shots on goal in a 4-0 loss to Philadelphia on Saturday. Thomas Greiss recorded 18 saves as the Islanders moved into a tie for second place in the Metropolitan Division with the New York Rangers heading into Thursday's game between the longtime rivals at Barclays Center.

COYOTES 4, OILERS 3 (OT)

Max Domi had his first career hat-trick and Oliver Ekman-Larsson scored a power-play goal with 8.9 seconds remaining in overtime in Arizona's victory over Edmonton at Gila River Arena. Ekman-Larsson, who scored from the left point, has six game-winning goals this season for the Coyotes, who overcame a two-goal deficit in the third period to win their fourth straight. Ekman-Larsson also had three assists. Leon Draisaitl, Benoit Pouliot had a goal and an assist for the Oilers, and Jordan Eberle had three assists. Justin Schultz also scored for Edmonton.

LIGHTNING 4, AVALANCHE 0

Ben Bishop stopped 21 shots for his second shutout of the season, Steven Stamkos had two goals and Tampa Bay beat Colorado. Ondrej Palat and Tyler Johnson also had goals. Vladislav Namestnikov and Victor Hedman had two assists each for the Lightning. Stamkos notched his fifth multi-goal game of the season and 54th of his career.

NHL results/standings

Chicago 3, Nashville 2; Colorado 0, Tampa Bay 4; Arizona 4, Edmonton 3 (OT); St. Louis 5, New Jersey 2; Minnesota 2, Buffalo 3; Winnipeg 1, San Jose 4; NY Islanders 5, Columbus 2; Carolina 3, Pittsburgh 2 (OT).

Eastern Conference						Western Conference						
Atlantic Division						Central Division						
	PL	W	L	OT	GF	GA	PTS					
Florida	43	26	12	5	118	92	51	Dallas	44	29	11	4
Detroit	43	22	14	7	107	112	51	Chicago	45	28	13	4
Montreal	43	23	17	3	122	107	49	St. Louis	46	25	14	7
Tampa Bay	43	22	17	4	111	102	48	Minnesota	43	22	13	8
Boston	41	21	15	5	124	110	47	Nashville	43	19	17	7
Ottawa	43	20	17	6	119	131	46	Colorado	44	21	20	3
Toronto	40	16	17	7	104	112	39	Winnipeg	43	19	21	3
Buffalo	43	17	22	4	100	117	38	Pacific Division				
Metropolitan Division								Los Angeles	42	27	12	3
Washington	42	32	7	3	139	90	67	Arizona	42	22	16	4
NY Rangers	42	23	14	5	123	110	51	San Jose	41	21	18	2
NY Islanders	43	23	15	5	119	109	51	Vancouver	43	17	16	10
New Jersey	44	21	18	5	99	107	47	Anaheim	41	17	17	7
Pittsburgh	42	20	16	6	99	103	46	Calgary	41	19	20	2
Carolina	44	19	18	7	105	120	45	Edmonton	44	17	23	4
Philadelphia	40	18	15	7	91	108	43	Note: Overtime losses (OT) worth 1 pt and not included in loss column (L).				
Columbus	44	15	25	4	111	144	34	BLUES 5, DEVILS 2				

SHARKS 4, JETS 1

San Jose's two third-period goals propelled it past Winnipeg.

Joe Pavelski and Joel Ward scored late to seal the win after Chris Tierney and Joe Thornton scored first-period goals for the Sharks. Nikolaj Ehlers scored the Jets lone goal.

SABRES 3, WILD 2

Buffalo used a trio of first-period goals to spur a victory over Minnesota. Jamie McGinn, Rasmus Ristolainen and Brian Gionta all scored in the opening stanza, as the Sabres built a lead they would not relinquish.

Buffalo snapped a six-game losing streak on Sunday in Winnipeg, and has now won two in a row. Ryan Suter scored shorthanded for Minnesota and added an assist when Thomas Vanek got a goal late.

HURRICANES 3, PENGUINS 2 (OT)

Jeff Skinner scored a power-play goal with 1:58 remaining in overtime as Carolina defeated Pittsburgh at PNC Arena. Eric Staal and Kris Versteeg scored earlier for the Hurricanes, who matched their season-high mark with a three-game winning streak. Cam Ward made 22 saves for Carolina, which is 6-7 in overtime games. Kris Letang and Chris Kunitz had goals for the Penguins while Marc-Andre Fleury stopped 18 shots. — Reuters



MELBOURNE: This file photo taken on December 17, 2011 shows Melbourne Stars English batsman Luke Wright (L) hitting out at a delivery from Sydney Thunder bowler Fidel Edwards (R) during their T20 Big Bash cricket match at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG). Australia's domestic Twenty20 Big Bash League has hit the big time this year, with enormous crowds, controversy and quality cricket propelling it into the mainstream in a threat to the traditional Test format. — AFP

S LANKA SKIPPER PLEDGES ACTION OVER 'MISCONDUCT'

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka skipper Angelo Mathews yesterday promised "no mercy" for any team mates found guilty of misconduct during a disastrous tour of New Zealand after the sports minister raised allegations of drunken behaviour and squabbling.

Dayasiri Jayasekera told AFP he had seen photos of national players at all-night drinking parties just before crucial matches against hosts New Zealand who achieved a virtual clean sweep in the just-ended tour.

Mathews, 28, said an official probe had

begun into the allegations that players attended parties until 3 or 4am, and of tension within the team and with interim coach Jerome Jayaratne.

"I can't deny or accept that these things happened," Mathews told reporters at a post-tournament press conference in Colombo. "But, I can promise that there will be no mercy for any member found guilty of misconduct." He said the team could have done better and admitted the New Zealand tour was "demoralising".

Sri Lankan spectators heckled the national team as it lost the final Twenty20 match while social media sites showed footage of player Tillakaratne Dilshan engaging in an angry exchange with a spectator who asked him to retire.

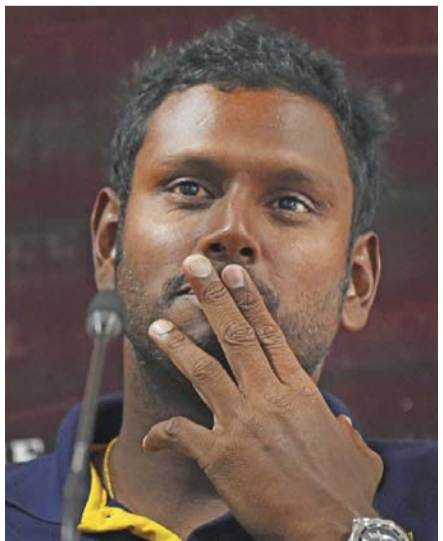
"As players, we don't play to lose and you get hurt when spectators say things like this," Mathews said. "Fans are also hurt when we lose and you have to look at it from both ways."

Sri Lanka went to New Zealand as defending champions of the shortest form of the game, but slipped to third position this month behind the West Indies and Australia after a resounding defeat in the Twenty20 matches.

Sri Lanka also lost the Tests 0-2 and the one-day series 1-3 to the hosts. The sports minister said Sri Lanka would also focus on finding a long-term coach after Marvan Atapattu quit weeks before his contract was due to expire in September last year.

Sri Lanka appointed Jayaratne as interim coach, initially for the home series against the West Indies and then for the New Zealand tour.

Jayaratne, 49, had been head of coaching at Sri Lanka Cricket but his elevation to oversee the national team was seen as a stop-gap arrangement. —AFP



COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's cricket captain Angelo Mathews gestures as he addresses a press conference in Colombo yesterday. Sri Lanka skipper Mathews promised "no mercy" for any team mates found guilty of misconduct during a disastrous tour of New Zealand after the sports minister raised allegations of drunken behaviour and squabbling. — AFP

AUSTRALIA'S BIG BASH HITS THE HEIGHTS

SYDNEY: Australia's Twenty20 Big Bash League has finally hit the big time, with enormous crowds, quality cricket and a dash of controversy putting it firmly in the public eye in what could be a threat to the traditional Test format. Midway through the fifth season of the five-week domestic tournament, interest has never been greater, with a whopping 80,883 people packing the Melbourne Cricket Ground for a recent clash between the Renegades and the Stars. A Sydney derby this weekend between the Thunder and the Sixers is also expected to be a heaving 42,000 sell-out.

This contrasts sharply with waning interest in Test cricket, as seen in Australia's recent series against the West Indies. Even the flagship first day of the Boxing Day Test, also at the cavernous Melbourne Cricket Ground, could only attract some 53,000. "When you get 80,000 at the Big Bash at the MCG and it's more than you've had on day one at the Boxing Day Test, you can see people saying, well, which way is this going? Are the scales tipping?" Cricket Australia boss James Sutherland told reporters. According to Sutherland, it will be a different scenario when stronger Test teams are in town. "In two years' time when the next Ashes series (against England) comes around, people will under-

stand the Big Bash is complementing and living in a symbiotic relationship with international cricket," he said. Federation of International Cricketers' Associations chief Tony Irish is less sure, fearing Test cricket could slowly die unless action is taken as more stars opt for the lucrative, shorter format.

Already several high-profile players have preferred turning out in domestic T20 competitions where commercial interests, and hence wages, are rapidly growing rather than for their country.

The once-formidable West Indies are one of the biggest losers with Chris Gayle, Dwayne Bravo and Darren Sammy all showing off their talents in the eight-team Big Bash League rather than the Test series against Australia. "ICC events are strong because they have context... but bilateral cricket is struggling," Irish told London's Daily Telegraph this week. "Players are starting to turn away from the game because they have an alternative market now." He cited the Big Bash League as an example of the changing trend. "Where are the crowds going? Where is the interest? Where do the players really want to play?"

BIG-HITTING STARS

Illustrating its burgeoning pulling power, the

Sydney Morning Herald reported on Monday that the Big Bash had burst into the top 10 most attended sports leagues in the world alongside the NFL, English Premier League and fellow T20 tournament, the Indian Premier League. To keep Test cricket relevant and interesting in the face of T20's rise, a host of former greats, led by Shane Warne and Greg Chappell, have advocated four-day Tests and abolition of the coin toss.

"I would make it four-day Test cricket, 100 overs a day," said Warne recently.

"I'd have two half-hour breaks rather than a 40-minute lunch break and a 20-minute tea break, (and) I'd extend it by about half an hour to get those 100 overs in. I think that's going to be more appealing for people and it's worth a try."

Former Australian captain Mark Taylor has also suggested a Test Championship, where three points were awarded for a win and one point for a draw, similar to football.

Powerbrokers, in Australia at least, recognise the need to liven up Test cricket and successfully hosted the first ever day-night Test, using a new pink ball, in Adelaide in November in an experiment which could give a new lease of life to the alling five-day game. —AFP

NEYMAR ORDERED TO APPEAR IN COURT OVER BARCELONA TRANSFER

MADRID: Neymar will appear before a judge to testify in an investigation into alleged irregularities involving his transfer to Barcelona, Spain's national court said yesterday.

Neymar's parents, former Barcelona president Sandro Rosell and current president Josep Bartomeu also will have to appear before a judge, according to court documents. The Brazil striker is set to testify on Feb. 2, while Rosell and Bartomeu are expected to be in court on Feb. 1.

The national court last year rejected the request by Neymar and other defendants to throw out a probe into the irregularities. The court is looking into a complaint made by a Brazilian investment group which claims it was financially harmed when Barcelona and Neymar allegedly withheld the real amount of the player's transfer fee from Brazilian club Santos in 2013, in part to avoid paying the full amount of taxes.

Santos' former presidents, Luis Alvaro de

Oliveira and Odilio Rodriguez Filho, also have been asked to appear in court, as well as club representatives of both Barcelona and Santos. The complaint, made in June by investment group DIS, names Neymar, his father and Barcelona as defendants, along with Rosell and Bartomeu.

The court analyzed the complaint and said there were indications of illegal acts by some of the involved parties in an attempt to disguise the total amount that was paid to the Brazilian club. The Brazilian investment group was entitled to 40 percent of Neymar's transfer from Santos, but it claims it received smaller compensation than it should have because part of the transfer fee was concealed.

LAWSUIT

Santos officially received a payment of 17.1 million euros (\$18.5 million) for Neymar's transfer, but investigations in Spain later showed that Barcelona spent



Neymar

nearly 83.3 million euros (\$90 million) to acquire the Brazilian. A separate court in Madrid is hearing a similar lawsuit against

Rosell because of Neymar's transfer fee. Rosell resigned from Barcelona because of the allegations.

FIFA recently said it was also analyzing a complaint related to the transfer. Santos claimed that Neymar and his father broke the terms of the player's contract by starting negotiations with Barcelona without the Brazilian club's consent.

The 23-year-old Neymar has also encountered problems with Brazil's tax office, which last year froze assets related to the player valued at about 189 million Brazilian reals (\$47 million) because of allegations of tax evasion.

Neymar's case isn't the only legal problem affecting Barcelona in Spain. Lionel Messi and his father will stand trial on three counts of tax fraud and could be sentenced to nearly two years in prison if found guilty. A date for the trial is expected to be announced in the next few days. Last year, Barcelona defender Javier Mascherano admitted to a court that he failed to pay nearly 1.5 million euros (\$1.6 million) in taxes owed for 2011 and 2012. — AP

ROMA FIRES GARCIA

ROME: Roma fired coach Rudi Garcia yesterday after only one win in its last 10 matches in all competitions, with the club's American president saying "this is the right time for a change."

While no immediate replacement was announced, Luciano Spalletti was widely expected to be hired for his second stint in charge of the Serie A club. "I'd like to thank Rudi Garcia for all of his hard work since join-



Rudi Garcia

ing the club," said Roma president Jim Pallotta, part of a group of Boston executives who purchased the three-time Italian champions in 2011 to become the first foreign-majority owners in Serie A.

"We've all enjoyed some great moments during his time at Roma but we believe that this is the right time for a change." After beginning the season as an expected title contender, Roma is down to fifth place in the Italian league, seven points behind leader

Napoli. Spalletti, who coached Roma from 2005-09, reportedly flew to Miami to meet with Pallotta to go over contract details. Media reports suggested Roma would hire Spalletti to an 18-month contract at 3 million euros (\$3.2 million) per season.

Roma said that youth club coach Alberto De Rossi would run yesterday's training session. Garcia was hired in 2013 and Roma finished runner-up in his first two seasons. A Frenchman who had previously coached Lille, Garcia quickly endeared himself to Roma fans by guiding the club to 10 straight wins to open the 2013-14 season.

UNIMPRESSIVE

But troubles began this season following Roma's derby win over Lazio in November, and the squad never really recovered from the 6-1 thrashing at Barcelona in the Champions League later that month. Roma managed to advance from the group stage of the Champions League following an unimpressive 0-0 draw with BATE Borisov and will next face Real Madrid in the round of 16.

The rout by Barcelona highlighted Roma's weak defense. The squad has conceded 22 goals in 19 Serie A matches - easily the worst among the top clubs. Garcia's last match was a 1-1 draw at home with AC Milan on Saturday. Three days earlier, Roma wasted a two-goal lead in a 3-3 draw at Chievo Verona. And before the holiday break, Roma was eliminated from the Italian Cup by second-division club Spezia. Spalletti could become the fifth manager for Roma's American owners. The first man the Americans hired was Luis Enrique, who guided Barcelona to the Champions League title last season.

The 56-year-old Spalletti won two Italian Cups and an Italian Super Cup with Roma. He then spent five years with Zenit St. Petersburg before being fired in March 2014. Spalletti also guided Roma to three straight runner-up finishes in Serie A. Then, after a sixth-place finish in 2008-09, he resigned after Roma lost the opening two matches the following season. Roma next faces last-place Hellas Verona on Sunday. — AP



ST JAMES PARK: Newcastle United's Aleksandar Mitrovic, left, scores his goal from a penalty kick during the English Premier League soccer match between Newcastle United and Manchester United at St James' Park, Newcastle, England, Tuesday. — AP

DUMMETT STUNS UNITED IN ST JAMES' PARK THRILLER



NEWCASTLE: Left-back Paul Dummett eclipsed two-goal Wayne Rooney with a last-minute equaliser as Newcastle United secured a pulsating 3-3 home draw against Louis van Gaal's Manchester United on Tuesday.

Rooney appeared to have settled the game with a magnificent 79th-minute strike from the edge of the area after Memphis Depay's run and shot ended with the ball ricocheting off Dummett into the path of the forward.

But the Newcastle full-back had the last word after Daryl Janmaat's cross into the United area was headed out by Chris Smalling, allowing Dummett to unleash an unstoppable drive from the edge of the area that flicked off Smalling and flew high into the visitors' goal.

Rooney and Jesse Lingard had apparently put the visitors in control before Georginio Wijnaldum ended Newcastle's run of 453 minutes without a goal to reduce the arrears. Aleksandar Mitrovic equalised with a 67th-minute penalty, awarded after Smalling wrestled him to the ground at a Newcastle corner.

Rooney had proved United's saviour with a last-minute penalty in the weekend FA Cup vic-

tory over Sheffield United and he was on the mark from the spot again in the ninth minute at St James' Park. Referee Mike Dean judged that Chancel Mbemba had deliberately handled after Marouane Fellaini headed the ball against his outstretched arm. Rooney ignored the protests of the home team and supporters to calmly score for the third consecutive game, low into the right-hand corner.

There was nothing controversial about United's second goal in the 38th minute, a textbook example of counter-attacking football started when Fellaini won the ball just inside his own half. He found Rooney, who powered into the Newcastle area before feeding Lingard with a magnificent reverse pass, allowing the youngster to steer his second goal for United between goalkeeper Rob Elliot's legs.

VAN GAAL DISGUST

But Newcastle had already shown flashes of attacking prowess that suggested they were capable of avoiding a fifth consecutive defeat on an evening that began with an emotional tribute to their former goalkeeper Pavel Srnicek, who died recently of a heart attack.

Their first goal was just as impressive as United's second effort four minutes earlier as Fabricio Coloccini's chip into the area was headed away by Fellaini, only for Wijnaldum to volley past David de Gea from 12 yards. Given the scoring problems experienced by both teams of late, it was an unexpected opening, and there was more to come.

A Daley Blind corner found Fellaini, whose shot was blocked by Dummett, and Rooney rolled a shot inches wide after a good Fellaini challenge allowed Lingard to send his captain free. But Newcastle had appeared capable of forging a path back into the contest well before the Wijnaldum goal, with De Gea saving well from the Dutchman and Coloccini showing great technique with a 25-yard shot that just missed the target.

The timing of Wijnaldum's goal saw Newcastle carry new-found belief into the second half and it was not long before Coloccini found Moussa Sissoko, who darted into the area and beat Ashley Young impressively, only to see his shot blocked by the ever-alert De Gea. Within minutes, however, Lingard should have scored his second goal of the evening after Anthony Martial and Ander Herrera combined. But with the goal at his mercy, the youngster curled over. Van Gaal could not conceal his disgust at that error and might have been further incensed after 63 minutes when Wijnaldum played Jack Colback into a shooting position, only for the midfielder to tumble far too easily under contact from Fellaini.

That proved a signal of things to come, with Mitrovic equalising from the spot two minutes later and Wijnaldum having a goal ruled out for a clear offside soon after that. But as chances were carved out at both ends, Fellaini wasted the best remaining opening with a close-range header that he directed too close to Elliot. — AFP



BOURNEMOUTH: West Ham United's Enner Valencia celebrates scoring his side's second goal against AFC Bournemouth during their English Premier League soccer match at the Vitality Stadium, Bournemouth, England, Tuesday. — AP

VALENCIA AND PAYET SEND WEST HAM FIFTH



BOURNEMOUTH: Enner Valencia scored twice as West Ham United came from behind to win 3-1 at Bournemouth on Tuesday and climb to fifth place in the Premier League table. Bournemouth gave a full debut to £10 million (\$14.5 million, 13.3 million euros) record signing Benik Afobe and took a 17th-minute lead through midfielder Harry Arter.

West Ham lost Andy Carroll to injury in the early stages, but they equalised in the 67th minute courtesy of a memorable free-kick from fit-again French playmaker Dimitri Payet. Payet teed up Valencia for West Ham's second goal in the 74th minute and Valencia added a free-kick of his own six minutes from time as Slaven Bilic's side leapfrogged Manchester United.

The east London club equalled a Premier League record of eight games unbeaten and moved to within a point of the Champions League places.

Eddie Howe's Bournemouth, who are without a win in four league games, remain 16th, three points above the bottom three.

Carroll went into the game looking to score in a third consecutive league game for the first time in his career, but he was to last just 12 minutes.

The one-time England striker pulled up after putting a cross into the box from the West Ham right and was forced off, with Nikica Jelavic replacing him. It was an untimely setback for the visitors and there was more bad news to come five minutes later when Arter put Bournemouth in front. The Republic of Ireland international collected the ball on the edge of the box, shifted it onto his right foot and dispatched a low shot that deceived West Ham goalkeeper Adrian.

It was Bournemouth's turn to lose a player early in the second half, with an injury to Matt Ritchie enabling loan signing Juan Iturbe to come on for his debut.

Although Dan Gosling warmed Adrian's palms from range, there was more caution to Bournemouth's play early in the second half and in the 67th minute West Ham levelled. West Ham badly missed Payet during his two-month absence with an ankle injury and he served a reminder of his importance to them by whipping a picture-perfect free-kick over the wall and into the top-left corner. Payet then produced dazzling skills before crossing for Valencia to sweep home from six yards and the Ecuador international completed the scoring with a free-kick that beat Artur Boruc at his near post. — AFP

VILLA BEAT PALACE TO SNAP 19-GAME WINLESS RUN



BIRMINGHAM: Aston Villa beat Crystal Palace 1-0 to end a nightmare 19-game winless streak in the English Premier League on Tuesday with defender Joleon Lescott the hero of the hour.

With empty claret and blue seats visible all around Villa Park, rock bottom Villa went into their 21st game of the season on just eight points having won only once all season, on the opening weekend against Bournemouth.

But South Londoners Palace had failed to score a goal in their last three Premier League

games, and looked in need of the striker their manager Alan Pardew is aiming to sign in the transfer window.

Lescott's goal came from a 58th minute corner when Palace goalkeeper Wayne Hennessey dropped his routine header, and watched in horror as it first hit his leg before bobbling between his legs and across the goal-line.

Villa proceeded to defend from deep with 20 minutes to go, eventually parking the bus and simply playing for time. It was also French coach Remi Garde's first win in 11 games in the Villa hot-seat since replacing the sacked Tim Sherwood.

Villa captain Micah Richards confronted angry fans after their last game, a 1-1 draw at fourth-tier minnows Wycombe Wanderers.

Garde also spoke to fans and after the game said: "The best apology we could give is

to win the next game and give a better performance." Palace started the match in lively and confident fashion and Wilfried Zaha hit the post inside the first minute, his crisp shot coming back off the woodwork with Villa keeper Mark Bunn so bamboozled by the winger's effort he was sat on the ground.

But Villa grew in confidence and in the first half Jordan Ayew, full of pace and ambition, shot narrowly wide while Jordan Veretout forced a handy save by Hennessey too.

Villa's dire form had sent statisticians scanning the record books but the Midlands are unlikely to be rewriting history for the wrong reasons now. Derby County went an astonishing 32 matches without a win in the 2007/2008 season when they picked up a paltry 11 points. Villa are now eight points from safety and four behind second-from-bottom Sunderland. — AFP

Sports

Halep overcomes Pliskova to reach Sydney semis



Neymar ordered to appear in court over Barcelona transfer



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WADA CONCERNED BY NEW FINDINGS IN RUSSIAN DOPING Page 15



ZURICH: FC Barcelona and Argentina's forward Lionel Messi poses with his five ballon d'Or on Tuesday in Barcelona, one day after receiving his fifth trophy, the 2015 FIFA Ballon d'Or award for player of the year at the 2015 FIFA Ballon d'Or award ceremony at the Kongresshaus in Zurich. —AFP

CAVS WIN 8TH IN ROW, 110-107 OVER MAVS

DALLAS: LeBron James had 27 points and the go-ahead layup in overtime, Kyrie Irving added 22 points and some big 3-pointers and the Cleveland Cavaliers extended their winning streak to eight games with a 110-107 victory over the Dallas Mavericks on Tuesday night. James' layup with a minute left in overtime pushed the Cavs ahead 106-105. After an attempted 3 by Deron Williams rattled out for Dallas, Irving beat the shot clock with a 3-pointer from the top of the key. Cleveland never led until Irving made a 3-pointer with 10 minutes left in regulation to make it 75-74. That was the first of nine lead changes over a span of less than 4 minutes that Irving capped with another 3 to put the Cavs up 85-83. Chandler Parsons led Dallas with 25 points on 10-of-14 shooting.

SPURS 109, PISTONS 99

Tony Parker scored 31 points, LaMarcus Aldridge added 22 points and 13 rebounds, and San Antonio beat Detroit for its ninth straight victory. Detroit had its three-game winning streak broken. Manu Ginobili added 15 points while Tim Duncan had 14 points and nine rebounds for the Spurs, who return to San Antonio trying to extend their 31-game home winning streak Thursday against Cleveland. Kentavious Caldwell-Pope led the Pistons with 25 points, while Andre Drummond added 17 points and 10 rebounds.

KNICKS 120, CELTICS 114

Kristaps Porzingis scored 26 points, Arron Affalo had 20 of his 24 in the second half, and New York beat Boston. Jerian Grant scored 10 of his 16 points in the fourth quarter and added eight assists in the best game of his rookie season as the Knicks held off the Celtics despite losing leading scorer Carmelo Anthony to a sprained right ankle seconds into the third quarter. Isaiah Thomas had 34 points for the Celtics, who lost their fourth straight and fell to 19-19. Jae Crowder had 21.

ROCKETS 107, GRIZZLIES 91

James Harden scored 25 points, Dwight Howard added 17 points and 14 rebounds and Houston beat Memphis. Terrence Jones finished with 20 points for Houston, 10 in the fourth quarter when the Rockets pulled away to win their fourth straight after the game was tied at 83. Marc Gasol led Memphis with 20 points, while Tony Allen added 17. Courtney Lee finished with 16 and Mario Chalmers, Zach Randolph and Vince Carter all scored 10. The Rockets connected on 18 of 35 from outside the arc compared to only 7 of 18 for Memphis.

BUCKS 106, BULLS 101

Giannis Antetokounmpo had 29 points and 10 rebounds, and Milwaukee used a late rally to slip past Chicago. Greg Monroe added 17 points and 12 rebounds for Milwaukee. Jimmy Butler scored 30 points and Nikola Mirotic and Tony Snell added 17 apiece for Chicago, which used a 25-9 run late in the third quarter and early into the fourth to seemingly gain control of the game. The Bulls, who have lost three straight, have scored 100 or more points for 12 consecutive games. But Chicago has allowed at least 100 points in eight of those games.

THUNDER 101, TIMBERWOLVES 96

Kevin Durant shrugged off a slow start to finish with 30 points in Oklahoma City's victory over Minnesota. Durant scored 12 straight for the Thunder in the final three minutes and also had seven rebounds. Russell Westbrook added 22 points, 11 assists and seven rebounds to help the Thunder hold off a late charge from the struggling Wolves, one game after giving up a big lead to the Portland Trail Blazers. The Thunder made 9 of 22 3-pointers to cruise to their seventh win in nine games. Zach LaVine broke out of a miserable slump with 21 points, nine rebounds and four assists. Shabazz Muhammad scored 20 points for the Timberwolves, who have lost seven straight games and 11 of their



DALLAS: Dallas Mavericks forward Chandler Parsons (25) drives against Cleveland Cavaliers forward LeBron James during the second half of an NBA basketball game Tuesday, in Dallas. The Cavaliers won 110-107 in overtime. — AP last 12. Andrew Wiggins scored 20 points for Minnesota, which is 5-17 at home.

PACERS 116, SUNS 117

Paul George had 21 points and seven rebounds, and Indiana pulled away in the fourth quarter to beat Phoenix. Indiana outscored Phoenix 36-21 in the final period, with George scoring nine points. Monta Ellis had all of his 14 points in the second half. George Hill added 20 points and five assists for the Pacers. CJ Miles scored 19 points off the bench and went 4 of 6 from behind the arc. Center Ian Mahinmi added 10 points and five rebounds. Devin Booker and Mirza Teletovic both finished with 19 points for Phoenix, playing the second of a three-game road trip. Markieff Morris added 16.

LAKERS 95, PELICANS 91

Lou Williams scored nine of his 19 points in the fourth quarter, and Los Angeles rallied late to end its four-game losing streak. After Julius Randle hit the go-ahead shot with 43 seconds left, Williams added a clutch running jumper with 18 seconds to play. Los Angeles hung on to win the meeting of the Western Conference's worst teams, surviving a back-and-forth fourth quarter for just its ninth win of the season. Kobe Bryant scored seven points in 16 minutes before leaving for good shortly before halftime due to a sore Achilles tendon. Tyreke Evans scored 21 points for the Pelicans, who lost their fourth straight. New Orleans struggled late without Anthony Davis, who sat out with a bruised back. —AP

NFL APPROVES RAMS MOVE TO LA, CHARGERS OPTION TO JOIN

HOUSTON: The Rams are moving back to Los Angeles, maybe with company. The San Diego Chargers and Oakland Raiders might end up staying put, although the leadership of both NFL teams didn't come close to making that commitment on Tuesday. Or one of them could be headed to L.A., too.

A long day of votes and re-votes ended with 30 of 32 NFL owners approving Rams owner Stan Kroenke's ambitious plan to move his team from St. Louis to the site of the old Hollywood Park racetrack in Inglewood, California, about 10 miles from downtown LA. The Chargers have a yearlong option to join the Rams, followed by the Raiders if the San Diego franchise declines.

The Raiders and Chargers had a competing proposal to share a new stadium in nearby Carson, but neither option got the 24 votes needed for approval. After another negotiating session on Tuesday afternoon, Kroenke's \$1.8 billion project prevailed. The decision ends the NFL's 21-year absence from the nation's second-largest media market.

"I often said over those 21 years what we

need is a great facility," NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell said at a news conference about 11 hours after the meetings began. "I think what happened over the last years is we had two outstanding opportunities, both of these stadium projects were outstanding."

Chargers chairman Dean Spanos was asked if he intended to play in Los Angeles in 2016. "I'm going to take a day off tomorrow I think," Spanos said. "This has really been excruciating for everyone. It's very difficult to say right now I'm going to do this or do that."

Oakland is still in debt from a renovation 20 years ago when the Raiders moved back from Los Angeles. City officials have said they won't seek help from taxpayers with a new stadium and asked the NFL for more time to develop a project in a response to the Raiders' relocation plan. The NFL agreed.

"We'll see where the Raider nation ends up here," said owner Mark Davis. "We'll be working really hard to find us a home. So for our fans and everything else, don't feel bad. We'll get it right." — AP

FIFA FIRES VALCKE

GENEVA: FIFA yesterday said it had fired Sepp Blatter's former right-hand man, Jerome Valcke, the latest casualty in a multi-layered scandal that has brought down the most powerful figures in world football.

Valcke was FIFA's secretary general for nearly a decade, working alongside the body's then president Blatter, who has been banned for eight years over an ethics violation.

Valcke, 55, was himself facing a possible nine-year ban sought by FIFA investigators over his alleged role in a scheme to sell 2014 World Cup tickets on the black market.

In a statement, FIFA said his employment contract had been "terminated", even before a verdict in the ticket case was decided. "The FIFA emergency committee decided, on 9 January 2016, to dismiss Jerome Valcke from the position of FIFA secretary general with immediate effect," the statement said.

Valcke's US-based lawyer Barry Berke said his

client "remains confident that he will be fully vindicated and history will recognise all of his contributions to the sport he loves."

He "is proud of all that was accomplished for the game of football during his long tenure as Secretary General," Berke added in an email sent to AFP. FIFA said that Markus Kattner will continue to serve as acting secretary general, the body's number two post.

FIFA first suspended Valcke on September 17, when ethics committee investigators began probing the ticketing scheme. The suspension was renewed on January 6. Investigators wrapped up that inquiry last week and called for a fine of 100,000 Swiss francs (\$99,000/92,000),

along with the lengthy ban. Valcke has also been linked to a \$10 million payment made by South Africa to corruption-tainted former Caribbean football chief Jack Warner. US investigators reportedly believe this was a bribe to secure votes for the 2010 World Cup. — AFP



Jerome Valcke

Kuwait Times BUSINESS

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Egypt tumbles 4% as foreign traders exit

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UK charges Euribor 6 with six-year rate-rigging plot

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China exports down; better than forecast

CHINA'S TRADE SURPRISE BRINGS RELIEF

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LAHORE: A Pakistani farmer drives a tractor trolley loaded with radishes on the way to the vegetable market in Lahore yesterday. — AFP

CAN CAR CRASHES BECOME THING OF PAST?

AUTOMAKERS IMAGINE A CRASH-FREE WORLD

DETROIT: Automakers are imagining a world where nobody dies in car accidents and they say it is closer than most people think. While they maintain that the real solution to a crash-free world lies in self-driving cars, a host of high-tech safety features are making drivers safer and better-in the meantime. "The long term vision is that cars shouldn't crash," Volvo spokesman Jim Trainor said Tuesday on the sidelines of the Detroit auto show.

Volvo—which has built its reputation on safety leadership—has set a goal that by 2020 nobody will be killed or seriously injured in its new cars. The past decade has seen dramatic development by various automakers in the field of collision-avoidance technology. Blind-spot detectors now watch for oncoming vehicles, adaptive cruise controls reduce speed based on cars ahead, and camera systems warn drivers when they drift out of their lanes. Detectors can even pick up on a drowsy driver's subtle changes in behavior to indicate it's time for a break.

The key to making new safety features desirable to driv-

ers is ensuring that they assist rather than irritate, Trainor said. "If it false brakes too often, people get frustrated and they turn the system off," he said. "We need to calibrate the system so it gives the driver every last possible moment to take action." In addition to accident avoidance, Volvo is developing systems that reduce injuries when crashes are inescapable. Among these is a rear impact mitigation system which senses if a car is approaching too quickly and preconditions the interior for impact by tightening seatbelts and engaging brakes.

Safety for the masses

Initially reserved for high-end luxury vehicles, the cost of safety technology is falling and finding its way into lower-priced automobiles. The new Ford Fusion, which the automaker introduced at the Detroit auto show Monday, contains 20 driver-assistance technologies including a pedestrian-detection system and a steering wheel that vibrates if a driver begins drifting from the lane.

"As we release more vehicles I think you'll anticipate a lot of migration across the lineup," Ford spokesman John Cangany said. GM unveiled a new rear-door monitor in its GMC Acadia crossover Tuesday that reminds drivers to check the back seat for children before leaving the car. The safety feature will eventually be included in all of its models. "Too many children are accidentally left behind in vehicles," Mark Reuss, head of product development at GM, said while introducing the feature. GM is the first automaker to use the alert system and is working on technology that can detect if a child is left behind.

About 30 to 40 children die every year in the United States from heat stroke after being left in a hot vehicle, most because their distracted parents simply forgot they were still in their car seats. "Obviously we want to protect our customers," Rich Latek, who heads marketing for GMC said. "We're really looking at a goal to end up with zero collisions and zero fatalities. It's a lofty goal but it's something that's possible with the technology that's out there." Meanwhile

Toyota recently introduced a new suite of features called Safety Sense which will be offered on nearly all models by 2017. When first introduced on Lexus vehicles it cost an additional \$6,000. Toyota has now managed to bring the price down to \$300 to \$630, spokesman Mike Kroll said.

Scandals hit confidence

Despite the science fiction-like advancements in safety technology, a slew of scandals has undermined trust in the reliability of vehicles. Monday saw the first civil trial over a deadly ignition switch defect which General Motors hid from safety regulators for more than a decade and is linked to at least 124 deaths. Automakers are still working to replace potentially explosive airbags by Japanese supplier Takata in 19 million vehicles in the United States. And Fiat Chrysler and Toyota have each become embroiled in scandal-and handed millions upon millions of dollars in fines-over improperly handling or even covering up defects in millions of vehicles. — AFP

GREECE EXITS DEFLATION

ATHENS: Greece emerged from 33 months of deflation in December, finally seeing some price rises after a bruising period of economic decline and political upheaval. Inflation calculated to European Union norms rose 0.4 percent in December, topping forecasts, data from the country's statistics service showed yesterday. But the headline consumer price index using Greece's local methodology fell 0.2 percent year-on-year in December, although the annual pace of deflation decelerating from the previous month. For years an inflation outlier in the euro zone, Greece has been in deflation mode for the last two-and-a-half years as wage and pension cuts in return for bailout aid and a protracted recession took a heavy toll on Greek households' income.

Deflation in Greece, which signed up to its first international bailout in 2010, hit its highest level in November 2013, when consumer prices registered a 2.9 percent year-on-year decline. Foods, non-alcoholic beverages, healthcare, transportation, hotel and restaurant prices drove the EU-harmonized inflation index higher in December, the data showed. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast an annual rate of 0.2 percent for December. "EU-harmonized inflation is expected to remain in slightly positive territory over the first half of this year, though base effects from the VAT (value added tax) hikes will start to abate from July onwards," said Eurobank economist Platon Monokroussos. — Reuters



NEW DELHI: An Indian cycle rickshaw puller wipes his face as he stands on a busy road in New Delhi, India yesterday. — AP

MODI WOOS RURAL INDIA WITH NEW CROP INSURANCE SCHEME

NEW DELHI: India's cabinet has cleared the launch of the country's first major crop damage insurance scheme from the next fiscal year, a move that would further strain government finances but help Prime Minister Narendra Modi to woo rural voters ahead of key elections. Stung by criticism of ignoring the concerns of rural India where over two-thirds of the country's 1.25 billion people live, the government yesterday fielded as many as three cabinet ministers to underline the importance of the scheme whose budget will more than double in three years.

Modi is trying to placate rural voters after the impact of unseasonal rains and two straight years of drought on agriculture dented his popularity and contributed to a humiliating loss for the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party in elections late last year in the largely rural state of Bihar. Further elections are due in the states of West Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Assam this year. "It is a historic day," Modi tweeted after the scheme was announced by the ministers of agricul-

ture, home and parliamentary affairs.

"I believe the prime minister's crop insurance scheme, inspired by the well-being of farmers, will bring about a huge change in the lives of farmers." Several debt-laden farmers committed suicide last year, and agriculture minister Radha Mohan Singh has said that delays in clearing payouts for crop losses were the "biggest reason for destroying farm families".

The government would now ensure faster settlements by increasing the use of technology, including smartphones to capture crop data. It would also reduce premiums to be paid by farmers to 2 percent for summer-sown crops and 1.5 percent for winter crops. The current premium share for farmers can go as high as 40 percent, which is one of the main reasons that only about a tenth of India's estimated 263 million cultivators opt for crop insurance. New Delhi will more than double the budget for the crop insurance scheme to 77.50 billion rupees (\$1.16 billion) in the fiscal year beginning April 2018. — Reuters

EGYPT TUMBLES 4% AS FOREIGN TRADERS EXIT

DUBAI: Egypt's index made its largest decline in two months to slump to a 25-month low yesterday as foreign funds sold stocks, while most Middle East bourses also fell after giving back early-session gains. Cairo's benchmark dropped 4.0 percent to 6,205 points with all 29 traded stocks down more than 1 percent. The index is down 11.4 percent this year and its close was its lowest since late 2013. The bourse had risen initially, but then plunged suddenly.

"The mid-session sell-off was largely unexpected and caught us off guard," said a Cairo-based stock trader. "The sharp price correction could have been caused by foreign funds which are exiting their positions." Foreigners were net sellers for a fourth day, bourse data

MIDEAST STOCK MARKETS

showed. Saudi Arabia's bourse fell 0.5 percent to its lowest finish since October 2011. Half-way through the session, the mood also turned negative as small and mid-cap stocks were aggressively sold.

Petrochemical stocks were mixed, with sector heavyweight Saudi Basic Industries (SABIC) up 1.5 percent. Saudi Kayan jumped 4.1 percent as investors welcomed a lower-than-expected impact on its production costs from changes to energy and feedstock prices. Small and mid-cap stocks nose-dived to ultimately drag down the bourse. Some insurance companies -

which are considered speculative stocks - such as Al Sagr Cooperative and Solidarity Saudi Takaful each tumbled more than 10 percent. "Traders were cashing out of illiquid stocks because they aren't offering investors attractive valuations, even after the recent sharp price corrections," said a Riyadh-based portfolio manager.

UAE, Qatar

Bourses in the United Arab Emirates and Qatar also failed to hold onto early gains, indicating little investor confidence in a sustained rebound. Doha's exchange fell 0.8 percent to a 28-month

low. Lenders Qatar Islamic Bank and Masraf Al Rayan each lost more than 3 percent. "There is little fresh money entering the markets and what is creating the unsustainable bounces are the day traders chasing a quick profit," said an Abu Dhabi based analyst. Dubai's index managed to close near-flat after it briefly dipped into negative territory. Losers outnumbered gainers 15 to 13, but banks helped steady the bourse. Emirates NBD jumped 1.5 percent in unusually high volumes and Dubai Islamic Bank climbed 0.2 percent. National Bank of Oman tumbled 5.4 percent. The lender on Tuesday posted a 29 percent rise in fourth-quarter net profit. Muscat's index fell 1.7 percent, its largest decline since August 2015. — Reuters



FORD CONDUCTS FIRST AUTONOMOUS VEHICLE TESTS IN THE SNOW-COVERED ENVIRONMENTS

DUBAI: Ford is conducting the industry's first autonomous vehicle tests in snow-covered environments - a major step in the company's plan to bring fully autonomous vehicles to millions of customers worldwide. Unlike other major automakers and technology companies, which have tested autonomous vehicle technology only in dry, mostly sunny climates, Ford knows the future of autonomous driving cannot rely on ideal conditions.

"It's one thing for a car to drive itself in perfect weather," said Jim McBride, Ford technical leader for autonomous vehicles. "It's quite another to do so when the car's sensors can't see the road because it's covered in snow. Weather isn't perfect, and that's why we're testing autonomous vehicles in wintry conditions - for the roughly 70 percent of US residents who live in snowy regions." Ford's winter weather testing takes place in Michigan, including at Mcity - a 32-acre, full-scale simulated real-world urban environment at the University of Michigan.

Fully autonomous driving can't rely on GPS, which is accurate only to several yards - not enough to localize or identify the position of the vehicle. And it's key that an autonomous vehicle knows its precise location, not just within a city or on a road, but in its actual driving lane - a variation of a few inches makes a big difference. LiDAR, on the other hand, is much more accurate than GPS - identifying the Fusion Hybrid's lane location right down to the centimeter. LiDAR emits short pulses of laser light to precisely allow the vehicle to create a real-time, high-definition 3D image of what's around it.

In ideal weather, LiDAR is the most efficient means of gathering important information and metadata - underlying information about the data

itself - from the surrounding environment, sensing nearby objects and using cues to determine the best driving path. But on snow-covered roads or in high-density traffic, LiDAR and other sensors such as cameras can't see the road. This is also the case when the sensor lens is covered by snow, grime or debris. Undaunted by this challenge, Ford and University of Michigan technologists began collaborating toward a solution that would allow an autonomous vehicle to see on a snow-covered road.

How snow autonomy works

To navigate snowy roads, Ford autonomous vehicles are equipped with high-resolution 3D maps - complete with information about the road and what's above it, including road markings, signs, geography, landmarks and topography. "Maps developed by other companies don't always work in snow-covered landscapes," said Ryan Eustice, associate professor at University of Michigan college of engineering. "The maps we created with Ford contain useful information about the 3D environment around the car, allowing the vehicle to localize even with a blanket of snow covering the ground."

An autonomous vehicle creates the maps while driving the test environment in favorable weather, with technologies automatically annotating features like traffic signs, trees and buildings. When the vehicle can't see the ground, it detects above-ground landmarks to pinpoint itself on the map, and then subsequently uses the map to drive successfully in inclement conditions. "The vehicle's normal safety systems, like electronic stability control and traction control, which often are used on slippery winter roads, work in unison with the

autonomous driving software," said McBride. "We eventually want our autonomous vehicles to detect deteriorating conditions, decide whether it's safe to keep driving, and if so, for how long."

A pioneer in autonomy

Winter driving still presents a host of challenges, but Ford's testing marks an important achievement on the road to autonomous driving. That road goes back roughly a decade, to the first-generation autonomous vehicle from Ford - a LiDAR-equipped F-250 Super Duty. In 2013, Ford launched its second-generation autonomous vehicle platform, a Fusion Hybrid sedan using more advanced LiDAR sensors. This past summer, Ford transitioned its fully autonomous vehicle development program from the research to advanced engineering phase, the second of three phases before entering production.

Earlier this month, Ford announced it is taking the next step - tripling its fully autonomous development fleet to 30 vehicles being tested on roads and test tracks in California, Arizona and Michigan. This makes the company's fully autonomous vehicle fleet the largest of all automakers. These third-generation autonomous vehicles continue to be based on a Fusion Hybrid sedan now featuring the first auto-specific LiDAR sensor capable of handling different driving scenarios - thanks in part to its longer range of around 200 meters. Building on more than a decade of Ford autonomous vehicle research, this advancement is a key element of Ford Smart Mobility - the plan to take Ford to the next level in connectivity, mobility, autonomous vehicles, the customer experience, and data and analytics.

National Bank of Kuwait Financial Markets Daily Report At 02:00 PM Previous Day

Global Stock Indices						
Index	Previous Close	Last Price	Change	Daily Performance %	Yearly Performance %	
Dow Jones	16,398.57	16,516.22	117.65	▲	0.77	
NASDAQ	4,638.00	4,685.92	47.92	▲	1.03	
S&P 500	1,923.67	1,938.68	15.01	▲	0.78	
Financial Times	5,929.24	5,996.34	67.10	▲	1.13	
DAX	9,985.43	10,098.30	112.87	▲	1.13	
CAC 40	4,378.75	4,443.81	65.06	▲	1.49	
Swiss	8,332.04	8,448.12	116.08	▲	1.39	
Nikkei 225	17,218.96	17,715.63	496.67	▲	2.88	
Tspx	1,401.95	1,442.09	40.14	▲	2.86	
Hang Seng	19,111.76	19,934.88	223.12	▲	1.13	
Straits Times	2,691.78	2,696.50	4.72	▲	0.18	

MENA Stock Indices						
Index	Previous Close	Last Price	Change	Daily Performance %	Yearly Performance %	
Kuwait	5,357.62	5,352.96	-4.66	▼	-0.09	
Saudi Arabia	6,068.75	6,125.54	56.79	▲	0.94	
Dubai	2,920.83	2,921.70	0.87	▲	0.03	
Abu Dhabi	4,025.26	4,020.22	-5.04	▼	-0.13	
Bahrain	1,196.19	1,201.56	5.38	▲	0.45	
Qatar	9,477.09	9,405.38	-71.71	▼	-0.76	
Oman	5,289.34	5,199.09	-90.25	▼	-1.71	
Lebanon	1,157.28	1,154.42	-2.86	▼	-0.25	
Jordan	2,117.58	2,117.47	-0.11	▼	-0.01	
Egypt	6,463.92	6,277.94	-185.98	▼	-2.88	
Morocco	8,828.91	8,829.51	0.60	▲	0.01	
Tunisia	5,244.15	5,272.86	28.71	▲	0.55	

Global Currencies Exchange Rate								
Currency	Kuwaiti Dinar	Saudi Riyal	US Dollar	Euro	Sterling Pound	Swiss Franc	Japanese Yen	Australian Dollar
Kuwaiti Dinar		12.7385	3.2755	3.0264	2.2691	3.3000	387.37	4.6619
Saudi Riyal	0.08171		0.2676	0.2473	0.1854	0.2696	31.65	0.3809
US Dollar	0.30530	3.7364		0.9240	0.6928	1.0075	118.25	1.4233
Euro	0.33043	4.0439	1.0823		0.7499	1.0904	127.99	1.5406
Sterling Pound	0.44070	5.3935	1.4435	1.3335		1.4547	170.72	2.0547
Swiss Franc	0.30303	3.7086	0.9926	0.9171	0.6874		117.41	1.4127
Japanese Yen	0.00258	0.0316	0.0085	0.0078	0.0059	0.0085		0.0120
Australian Dollar	0.21450	2.6252	0.7026	0.6491	0.4867	0.7079	83.08	

MENA Currencies Exchange Rate								
Currency	US Dollar	Kuwaiti Dinar	Saudi Riyal	Bahraini Dinar	Qatari Riyal	Omani Riyal	Emirates Dirham	Egyptian Pound
US Dollar		0.30530	3.7364	0.3741	3.6269	0.3832	3.6574	7.7201
Kuwaiti Dinar	3.2755		12.2385	1.2254	11.8798	1.2552	11.9797	25.2869
Saudi Riyal	0.2676	0.08171		0.1001	0.9707	0.1026	0.9789	2.0662
Bahraini Dinar	2.6730	0.81607	9.9874		9.6947	1.0243	9.7763	20.6359
Qatari Riyal	0.2757	0.08418	1.0302	0.1031		0.1057	1.0084	2.1286
Omani Riyal	2.6095	0.79669	9.7503	0.9763	9.4645		9.5441	20.1459
Emirates Dirham	0.2734	0.08347	1.0216	0.1023	0.9917	0.1048		2.1108
Egyptian Pound	0.1295	0.03955	0.4840	0.0485	0.4698	0.0496	0.4738	

Global Interest Rates					
Currency	1-Week	1-Month	3-Month	6-Month	1-Year
Kuwaiti Dinar	0.00	1.19	1.44	1.63	1.94
US Dollar	0.38	0.42	0.62	0.85	1.15
Euro	-0.27	-0.21	-0.14	-0.05	0.04
Sterling Pound	0.48	0.51	0.50	0.75	1.03
Swiss Franc	-0.81	-0.78	-0.74	-0.67	-0.60
Australian Dollar	2.05	2.08	2.03	2.00	1.96
Canadian Dollar	0.00	0.86	0.86	0.94	0.99

Global Bond Yields				
Country	2-Year	5-Year	10-Year	30-Year
United States	0.94	1.56	2.13	2.89
Europe	0.39	0.13	0.51	1.32
United Kingdom	0.47	1.09	1.74	2.52

Commodities						
Index	Previous Close	Last Price	Change	Daily Performance %	Yearly Performance %	
Kuwait Oil	24.23	23.90	-0.33	▼	-1.36	
Brent	29.25	29.91	0.66	▲	2.26	
West Texas	30.47	30.37	-0.10	▼	-0.33	
Gold	1086.66	1082.42	-4.24	▼	-0.39	
Silver	13.79	13.84	0.05	▲	0.39	

EXCHANGE RATES

AL-MUZAINI EXCHANGE CO.

ASIAN COUNTRIES

Japanese Yen	2.589
Indian Rupees	4.560
Pakistani Rupees	2.902
Sri Lankan Rupees	2.121
Nepali Rupees	2.860
Singapore Dollar	212.240
Hongkong Dollar	39.230
Bangladesh Taka	3.877
Philippine Peso	6.434
Thai Baht	8.401

GCC COUNTRIES

Saudi Riyal	81.203
Qatari Riyal	83.647
Omani Riyal	83.647
Bahraini Dinar	808.690
UAE Dirham	82.907

ARAB COUNTRIES

Egyptian Pound - Cash	38.936
Egyptian Pound - Transfer	38.936
Yemen Riyal/for 1000	790.930
Tunisian Dinar	149.930
Jordanian Dinar	1.421
Lebanese Lira/for 1000	0.000
Syrian Lira	429.050
Morocco Dirham	31.151

EUROPEAN & AMERICAN COUNTRIES

US Dollar Transfer	304.350
Euro	443.590
Sterling Pound	443.440
Canadian dollar	214.710
Turkish lira	100.070
Swiss Franc	306.030
Australian Dollar	213.500
US Dollar Buying	303.150

GOLD

20 Gram	226.690
10 Gram	116.040
5 Gram	58.700

UAE EXCHANGE CENTRE WLL

CURRENCIES

Australian Dollar	203.08
Canadian Dollar	218.17
Swiss Franc	310.48
Euro	335.10
US Dollar	304.45
Sterling Pound	444.75
Japanese Yen	2.63
Bangladesh Taka	3.881
Indian Rupee	4.560
Sri Lankan Rupee	2.118
Nepali Rupee	2.850
Pakistani Rupee	2.901
UAE Dirhams	0.08285
Bahraini Dinar	0.8091
Egyptian Pound	0.03879
Jordanian Dinar	0.4330
Omani Riyal	0.7906
Qatari Riyal	0.08394
Saudi Riyal	0.08115

DOLLARCO EXCHANGE CO. LTD

Rate for Transfer

US Dollar	304.800
Canadian Dollar	216.885
Sterling Pound	443.575
Euro	334.510
Swiss Franc	304.295
Bahrain Dinar	806.370
UAE Dirhams	83.225
Qatari Riyals	84.445

Saudi Riyals

Jordanian Dinar	81.960
Egyptian Pound	429.370
Sri Lankan Rupees	38.814
Indian Rupees	2.123
Pakistani Rupees	4.563
Bangladesh Taka	2.902
Philippines Peso	3.877
Cyprus pound	6.470
Japanese Yen	580.550
Syrian Pound	3.595
Nepalese Rupees	2.380
Malaysian Ringgit	3.850
Chinese Yuan Renminbi	69.735
Thai Bhat	46.740
Turkish Lira	9.355
	101.100

BAHRAIN EXCHANGE COMPANY

CURRENCY

British Pound	0.435173	0.444173
Czech Korune	0.004219	0.016219
Danish Krone	0.040273	0.045273
Euro	0.325371	0.333371
Norwegian Krone	0.029995	0.035195
Romanian Leu	0.072951	0.072951
Slovakia	0.009097	0.019097
Swedish Krona	0.031625	0.036625
Swiss Franc	0.297680	0.307880
Turkish Lira	0.096096	0.106396

Australasia

Australian Dollar	0.203948	0.215448
New Zealand Dollar	0.193103	0.202603

America

Canadian Dollar	0.208372	0.216872
US Dollars	0.300250	0.304750

US Dollars Mint

	0.300750	0.304750
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Bangladesh Taka

Chinaese Yuan	0.003523	0.004123
Hong Kong Dollar	0.044508	0.048008
Indian Rupee	0.037141	0.039891
Indonesian Rupiah	0.004217	0.004607
Japanese Yen	0.000017	0.000023
Kenyan Shilling	0.002504	0.002684
Korean Won	0.002965	0.002965
Malaysian Ringgit	0.000240	0.000255
Nepalese Rupee	0.066046	0.072046
Nepalese Rupee	0.002885	0.003055
Pakistan Rupee	0.002639	0.002919
Philippine Peso	0.006374	0.006654
Sierra Leone	0.000070	0.000076
Singapore Dollar	0.208000	0.214000

FOREIGN INVESTMENT PLUMMETS IN JUNTA RULED THAILAND

BANGKOK: Foreign investment in Thailand plummeted last year, official data showed, the latest sign that the kingdom's once-vibrant economy continues to falter under prolonged military rule. Total investment applied for by foreign companies between January and November 2015 plunged 78 percent from a year earlier to 93.8 billion baht (\$2.62 billion), according to figures from Thailand's state-run Board of Investment (BoI) sent to AFP late Tuesday. The figures will do little to cheer junta leader Prayut Chan-O-Cha, who seized power in a May 2014 coup vowing to restore stability but who has struggled to kickstart the coun-

try's lackluster economy.

After years of impressive growth, Thailand's economy is struggling, mired in high household debt, stuttering exports and low consumer confidence. It also faces stiff competition from increasingly attractive neighbors like Vietnam, Cambodia and Myanmar. Particularly worrying for Prime Minister Prayut is a significant drop off in investment from Japan—historically the largest investor in Thailand by far—which slumped 81 percent. EU investment also plunged from 86.7 billion baht in 2014 to just 2 billion baht last year. Investment from the United States was also heavily down, while Chinese invest-

ment was only down slightly.

Krystal Tan, an Asia economist with Capital Economics, said the trend was indicative of deeper fissures within the Thai economy, which was among the slowest growing in the region last year. "The 2015 [FDI] figures are very weak, indicating foreign investor confidence in the economy remains fragile," she said. "More broadly, Thailand's economic competitiveness is on the decline," she added. "The country continues to face significant challenges on the political front that have negative repercussions for business and investor confidence."

But BoI deputy secretary general Ajarin

Pattanapanchai said the drop-off was due to new investment incentives, which became effective in 2015, favoring projects that employ high-tech, encourage innovation, or strengthen Thailand's role as a regional and international trading hub. "The projects that we got last year were not much, but almost 70 percent were in our target sector," she told AFP, adding that the Board had expected FDI inflow in 2015 to take a hit. "We understood that it would drop, we prepared for it, but it's still a little bit below what we expected," she said.

Thailand has historically been a top choice for investors in Southeast Asia,

offering liberal economic policies, a skilled workforce and a strategic location as the gateway to the greater Mekong region. But analysts say years of political instability, including two military coups, have hampered the country's economic potential—often referred to locally as the "lost decade". Earlier this month the World Bank forecast that Thailand's GDP growth rate would slip from 2.5 percent in 2015 to just 2 percent this year, by far the gloomiest regional prediction. Nearby Vietnam, on the other hand, reported a record number of foreign investment in 2015 and the fastest growth rate in five years at 6.68 percent. — AFP

News

in brief

Qatar National Bank net profit rises 5.3%

DUBAI: Qatar National Bank (QNB), the Gulf's largest lender, reported a 5.3 percent increase in fourth-quarter net profit yesterday, according to Reuters calculations, but still missed analysts' forecasts. The bank reported a net profit of 2.58 billion riyals (\$708.6 million) in the three months to Dec 31, compared with 2.45 billion riyals in the corresponding period of 2014, Reuters calculated. The bank did not provide a quarterly results breakdown in its earnings statement. Three analysts polled by Reuters had on average forecast QNB would make a quarterly net profit of 2.74 billion riyals. For the 12 month period, net profit in 2015 was 11.3 billion riyals, up from 10.5 billion riyals in the previous year, the bank said in a statement. QNB's board proposed a cash dividend of 3.5 riyals per share and a bonus share dividend which would award two free shares for every 10 shares currently owned, the statement added. That compares with a cash dividend of 7.5 riyals per share the bank paid for 2014.

Omantel launches \$129.9 million debut sukuk issue

DUBAI: Oman Telecommunications Co (Omantel) has opened for subscription its debut 50 million rial (\$129.9 million) sukuk issue, the former monopoly said yesterday. The Islamic bond will have a lifespan of five years, with investors allowed to subscribe in both US dollars and rials, Omantel said in an emailed statement. Subscription will run Jan 11 to Jan 26 inclusive, it said. The telecom operator said on Monday it had mandated HSBC, National Bank of Oman and Standard Chartered as arrangers for the transaction.

Saudi market regulator approves listing rules

DUBAI: Saudi Arabia's market regulator said it had approved rules governing the listing of real estate investment trusts (REITs), funds which could open the door to greater foreign investment in the kingdom's building sector. The Capital Market Authority (CMA) said it would only accept property appraisals by members of the Saudi Authority for Accredited Valuers (Taqeem), which is launching a licensing system for real estate valuation in the kingdom. The trusts are securities which trade on stock markets but invest directly in properties and distribute profits as dividends. They are common investment tools in many markets, but are new to the Middle East, with Emirates REIT becoming the region's first in April 2014. Eskan Bank also announced plans to list a REIT on Bahrain's bourse in July. The approval by the market regulator, announced on state news agency SPA, comes after sources told Reuters in May that it was studying plans to introduce listing rules for REITs.

Norway firm quits \$1.5 bn Nepal hydropower project

KATHMANDU: Norwegian company Statkraft has said it is dropping plans to build a \$1.5 billion hydropower plant in Nepal, citing bureaucratic hurdles and political instability in the troubled Himalayan nation. A vast network of fast-flowing rivers through the Himalayas means Nepal has huge untapped hydropower resources, making it a significant potential supplier to its energy-hungry neighbor, India. Yet the country's total installed power generation capacity is only about 800 megawatts - 1.9 percent of its potential—and fails to fulfill even local demand, meaning Nepalis endure blackouts of up to 15 hours a day. The Norwegian firm entered an agreement in 2007 to build the Tamakoshi III plant and generate 650 megawatts for export to India and other neighbors before transferring ownership to Nepal after 25 years. In a statement released on Tuesday, Statkraft's Nepal country director, Sandip Shah, said the company's decision to quit "reflects the increased bureaucratic hurdles for foreign investments, a fragile political situation and a geopolitical situation leading to a non-conducive project development environment".



QINGDAO: Workers inspect imported vehicles at a container port in Qingdao in eastern China's Shandong province yesterday. China's trade shrank in December but the decline was smaller than November's in a positive sign for lackluster economic growth. — AP

CHINA EXPORTS DOWN; BETTER THAN FORECAST

A RARE BRIGHT SPOT FOR SECOND-LARGEST ECONOMY

BEIJING: Chinese exports exceeded expectations in December, spurring a rally on Asian markets yesterday, in a rare bright spot for the world's second-largest economy which has been hit by slowing growth and saw overall trade drop last year. The Asian giant is key to the world's economic performance, but its imports have been hit by low prices for commodities such as oil and iron ore and the slowdown in China's infrastructure boom, while exports have had to struggle with weakness in partner economies. Even so December's exports were better than expectations, declining 1.4 percent in dollar terms to \$224.2 billion, Customs said—while rising 2.3 percent measured in China's yuan currency.

Economists had forecast a 4.1 percent fall according to Bloomberg News. Higher risk currencies rose in line with the regional stock rally as the upbeat trade report provided much-needed respite from a volatile start to 2016. Beijing has lowered the value of its yuan currency in recent weeks and months, which should make Chinese exports more competitive on world markets, and Customs spokesman Huang Songping said it "should boost exports to some extent." "But the effects will become weaker and weaker because there

are many factors in play," he added.

Trade conditions "remained rather severe" at the start of 2016, he told reporters, adding the outlook for the full year was "not optimistic". Imports fell 7.6 percent to \$164.1 billion in the month, Customs said, an improvement on the pace of decline in November and also better than the Bloomberg prediction of an 11 percent drop. The December trade surplus was \$60.1 billion in dollar terms, a 21.1 percent jump according to previous figures. Markets in Hong Kong, Sydney and Tokyo all closed higher on the trade figures, although Shanghai stocks ended down 2.4 percent down.

But analysts were cautious, warning of challenges ahead. "The depreciation of the yuan helped with exports and overseas demand also strengthened with increasing new export orders," Ma Xiaoping, a Beijing-based analyst at British bank HSBC said. "But it's still uncertain whether this recovery is sustainable or not." The monthly data offer "further signs of the economy stabilizing", Nomura analysts said in a note. "Nevertheless, we still expect growth to resume a downtrend later in the year given ongoing structural headwinds." The European Union, United States and the Association of

Southeast Asian Nations are China's top three trading partners.

Global investors have been alarmed by slowing growth in the world's second-largest economy, which is expected to have expanded last year at its slowest pace in a quarter of a century. Official data on fourth-quarter and annual growth is due to be released next week. Beijing is seeking to transition the country's growth model away from reliance on exports and fixed-asset investment towards a consumer-driven economy, but the reform is proving bumpy. China logged its worst economic performance since the global financial crisis in the third quarter of 2015, with gross domestic product (GDP) rising just 6.9 percent—its lowest level in six years.

Rising share

For 2015 as a whole, China's total trade fell eight percent year-on-year to \$3.96 trillion, Customs said. The figure was far below the government's target of six percent growth and marked the fourth year in a row that external commerce had missed its goal. China's imports slumped 14.1 percent on the previous year to \$1.68 trillion, Customs said, with plunging commodity prices key to the decline, while exports were down 2.8 percent to \$2.28 trillion.

Beijing will not set a numerical target for annual trade growth in 2016, the state-run China Economic Times newspaper reported earlier, saying that commerce minister Gao Hucheng told a meeting that the government would instead aim to have "higher export growth than the world trade growth level". The Chinese figures were initially given in yuan terms, which showed a marginally better seven percent year-on-year fall in annual two-way trade. However, overall global trade contracted last year, Bloomberg News reported, so that China's export performance was relatively strong.

"China actually outperformed the rest of the world in exports, with its share in global exports rising," it cited Larry Hu, head of China Economics at Macquarie Securities in Hong Kong, as saying in a report ahead of the data. In dollar terms, yesterday's statistics are likely to mean China has retained its title as the world's biggest trader in goods. US trade figures will not be released until February, but for the first 11 months of the year it amounted to \$348 trillion on a total balance of payments basis, according to figures from the US census bureau. China's annual trade surplus leaped to \$594.5 billion, Customs said, a 55.4 percent rise according to previous figures. — AFP

IN U-TURN, DAVOS FORUM DISINVITES NORTH KOREA

GENEVA: North Korea's invitation to this month's World Economic Forum meeting in Switzerland has been revoked, after Pyongyang carried out a fourth nuclear test in defiance of a United Nations ban. The World Economic Forum (WEF) said early yesterday that Foreign Minister Ri Su Yong would go to the resort town of Davos for the gathering of the world's business and political elite from Jan 20-23, but later said he was no longer welcome. There was no immediate reaction from

North Korea, which last sent a delegation to the forum in 1998. Philipp Roesler, a member of the WEF managing board, told a Geneva news conference the forum had invited the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) late last year because "there had been some convincing, encouraging signals out of the DPRK that there may be an opportunity for international global dialogue." "But we have all seen what has happened last week," Roesler said, referring to the nuclear explosion.

"We decided after the nuclear test that ... there will be no opportunity for an international global dialogue in the spirit of the World Economic Forum." "Therefore we could not maintain our invitation to DPRK" South Korea warned North Korea yesterday that the United States and its allies were working on sanctions to inflict "bone-numbing pain" after the nuclear test, and called on China to do its part to rein in its isolated neighbor.

South Korea is sending a delegation to Davos which the WEF said would be led by Choi Kyung-hwan, who stepped down as South Korea's finance minister on Tuesday in preparation to run in parliamentary elections in April. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon will attend, as will US Secretary of State John Kerry and Vice President Joe Biden. On Tuesday, the US House of Representatives voted 418-2 to pass legislation that would broaden sanctions on North Korea. Ri spent two decades in Switzerland as ambassador and representative at the United Nations in Geneva. He acted as surrogate father to North Korean leader Kim Jong Un when Kim was a student at a Swiss school. Global security will loom large at the Alpine forum, which will be attended by more than 2,500 people, including business leaders, finance ministers, central bankers, billionaires and celebrities like US actor Leonardo DiCaprio and Irish musician Bono. — Reuters



COLOGNY: World Economic Forum (WEF) founder and executive chairman Klaus Schwab gestures during a news conference on the program of the Davos World Economic Forum WEF annual meeting at the Forum's headquarters in Cologny yesterday. — AFP

CHINA'S MAYOR TIPPED FOR PROMOTION TO HELP MANAGE ECONOMY, MARKETS

BEIJING: The mayor of one of China's most dynamic cities has emerged as the front-runner to become Premier Li Keqiang's lieutenant to help tackle slowing economic growth and turbulent financial markets, sources said. Huang Qifan, 63, mayor of the southwestern metropolis of Chongqing since 2010, is tipped to replace Yang Jing, 62, as secretary-general of the State Council, or cabinet, two sources with ties to the leadership and two financial industry sources said.

"Huang Qifan did an excellent job in Chongqing," one source with leadership ties said. "Hopefully, his appointment would boost investors' confidence and stabilize the stock market." The planned personnel change comes after renewed turmoil in China's stock and currency markets sparked fresh concerns that the regulatory structure was not up to the task of maintaining market stability as economic growth stalls. The central bank's move to soften the exchange rate last week triggered panic selling in shares. The cabinet secretary-general helps the premier oversee the entire spectrum of portfolios from the economy to finance, industry, agriculture, energy, the environment, state planning and technology, among others. The State Council Information Office did not immediately respond to faxed requests for comment and the Chongqing city government declined immediate com-



BEIJING: An investor checks stock prices on her mobile phone at a brokerage house in Beijing. — AP

ment when reached by telephone.

Chongqing revival

Chongqing's economy grew at 11 percent in the first nine months of 2015 from a year earlier, versus 10.9 percent in the whole of 2014, defying overall slowing economic growth in the world's second-largest economy. It also retained its lead among 31 provinces and provincial-level municipalities. If confirmed, Huang would be the sixth most powerful cabinet official after Premier

Li and four vice premiers, the sources said. While the exact nature of his role is unclear, the sources added that Huang would help Li coordinate various ministries and technically have similar, if not more clout than the vice premiers, who have specific portfolios. An announcement could come after a meeting of the elite Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, or parliament, this month or next, or during parliament's annual full session in March. — Reuters

CHINA'S TRADE SURPRISE BRINGS RELIEF

IMPROVED RISK APPETITE LIFTS STOCKS, COMMODITIES

LONDON: Stock markets in Europe and Asia rose and oil prices jumped yesterday after Chinese trade data cooled concerns over the world's second biggest economy, steadying money and currency markets in Shanghai and Hong Kong. Japan's Nikkei index jumped 2.6 percent and futures markets also pointed to a higher opening on Wall Street after China reported exports dipped just 1.4 percent in dollar terms in December, compared with forecasts of an

8-percent drop. A 4-percent fall in imports was also much smaller than many had feared, but the reaction was not uniformly positive. Prices for copper - of which China is the world's biggest consumer - rose, but iron ore prices fell and Shanghai shares themselves fell by about two percent.

Traders said the mood on many markets was still shaky after an extremely volatile start to 2016, driven by worries over conflict in the Middle East, China's finances and

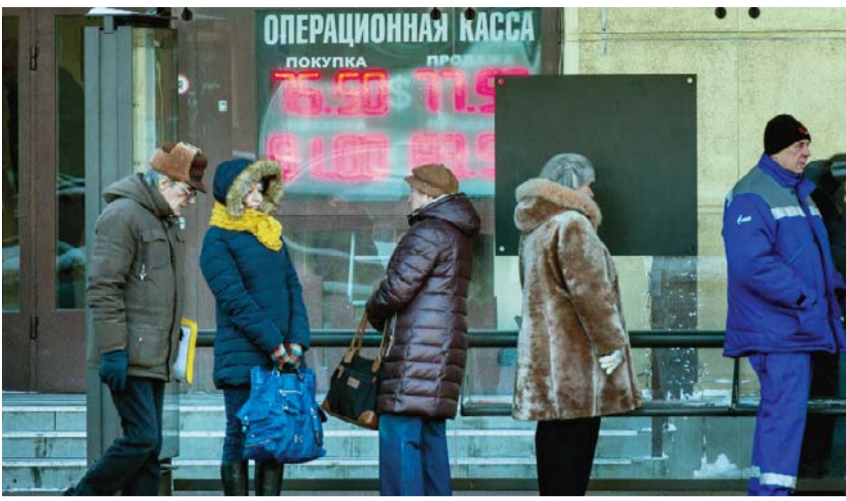
the fallout from low oil prices. "I am generally positive on the global outlook but the basis for that is being sorely tested right now," one London-based investment manager said. "Sentiment is very fragile." All of Europe's major markets gained more than 1 percent while Asian markets saw their first solid rally of the year, suggesting that some believe Beijing has done enough to gain control of the yuan for now. Overnight interest rates in Hong Kong, jacked up to



FUYANG: A woman reacts as she checks stock prices at a brokerage house in Fuyang in central China's Anhui province. — AP

Daily Kuwait Stock Exchange Report															
Wednesday 13 January 2016															
Index	Change	Closing	Last Closing	High	Low										
Price Index	▼ -4.66	5,352.96	5,357.62	5,360.41	5,334.58										
Weighted Index	▲ 0.04	363.25	363.21	363.96	362.20										
KSX 15	▼ -0.64	851.72	852.36	855.11	848.48										
						Volume	72,821,031								
						Value (KWD)	12,432,437								
						Number of Trades	2,328								
Security	High	Low	Volume	Value (KD)	Trades	Last	Change	Security	High	Low	Volume	Value (KD)	Trades	Last	Change
MARIN	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	114	0.0	SOKOUK	38.5	37.0	2036000	75,389	29	37.0	▼ -2.5
IKARUS	83	78	25,889	2,120	4	83	0.0	KRE	52	50	263,760	13,398	7	50	▼ -1.0
IPG	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	320	0.0	URC	95	91	281,710	25,856	15	95	▲ 3.0
NAPESCO	650	650	3,371	2,191	1	650	▼ -30.0	NRE	85	82	677,365	56,967	26	85	0.0
ENERGYH	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	39.0	0.0	SRE	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	360	0.0
GPI	48.0	46.5	2,721,586	128,739	57	47.0	0.0	TAM	610	610	909	554	1	610	0.0
ABAR	118	118	10,000	1,180	2	118	▲ 4.0	AREEC	142	134	21,000	2,902	4	134	▼ -6.0
Oil & Gas			2,760,846	134,230	64	806.06	▼ -11.38	MASSALEH	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	61	0.0
KFOUC	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	208	0.0	ARABREC	29.0	27.5	20,020	553	3	29.0	0.0
BPCC	480	475	122,291	58,541	2	480	0.0	ERESCO	57	54	5,830	330	5	54	▼ -4.0
ALKOUT	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	610	0.0	MABANEE	900	890	59,966	53,420	11	890	▲ 10.0
ALQURAIN	180	180	182,581	32,865	9	180	0.0	INJAZZAT	79	79	145,000	11,455	5	79	▲ 1.0
Basic Materials			304,872	91,405	11	920.35	0.00	INVESTORS	22.5	22.0	1,790,010	39,845	42	22.0	0.0
KCEM	370	370	28,493	10,542	1	370	0.0	IRC	26.0	25.5	21,200	541	4	26.0	▲ 1.0
REFRY	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	300	0.0	ALTUARIA	82	80	2,137,215	171,195	51	81	▲ 2.0
CABLE	340	325	61,169	20,340	11	340	▲ 15.0	SANAM	43.5	43.5	1	0	1	43.5	▲ 2.5
SHIP	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	146	0.0	AYANIRE	76	74	221,650	16,453	12	74	0.0
PCEM	1,020	1,020	10,000	10,200	1	1,020	0.0	AQAR	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	75	0.0
PAPER	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	390	0.0	ALAGARIA	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	19.0	0.0
MRC	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	64	0.0	MZAYA	100	99	286,225	28,337	7	100	▲ 2.0
ACICO	300	285	8,200	2,445	5	300	▲ 15.0	ADNC	22.5	21.5	2,445,150	53,742	54	22.0	▲ 0.5
GMCM	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	490	0.0	THEMAR	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	90	0.0
HCC	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	132	0.0	TLJARA	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	40.5	0.0
KPAK	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	360	0.0	TAAMEER	21.0	20.0	739,899	14,913	42	20.0	▼ -2.5
KBMMC	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	250	0.0	ARKAN	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	110	0.0
NICBM	230	230	1,047	241	3	230	▼ -10.0	ARGAN	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	182	0.0
EQUIPMENT	59	55	1,344,235	75,914	52	55	▲ 1.0	ABYAR	28.0	27.0	465,000	12,678	8	28.0	▼ -0.5
NCCI	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	99	0.0	MUNSHAAT	66	66	566,900	17,415	28	66	▼ -5.0
GYPNUM	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	102	0.0	FIRSTDUBAI	42.5	40.5	99,060	4,022	5	42.0	▲ 0.5
SALBOOH	78	77	14,000	1,082	2	78	▲ 3.0	KBT	40.0	39.0	1,928,100	75,741	58	39.5	▲ 1.0
AGLTY	430	425	771,215	327,912	29	425	0.0	REAM	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	132	0.0
EDU	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	238	0.0	MENA	20.0	19.0	393,509	7,683	19	20.0	0.0
CLEANING	40.5	40.5	215,784	8,739	7	40.5	▲ 2.5	ALMUDON	28.0	27.0	817,300	22,503	21	28.0	▲ 0.5
CITYGROUP	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	405	0.0	MARAKEZ	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	23.5	0.0
KGL	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	40.0	0.0	REMAL	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	34.0	0.0
KCPC	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	218	0.0	MASHAER	100	100	3,500	350	2	100	▼ -6.0
HUMANSOFT	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	900	0.0	Real Estate			15,426,279	725,942	460	867.89	▼ -4.69
NAFAIS	124	124	7,000	868	2	124	▼ -10.0	KINV	98	98	9,950	975	1	98	▼ -1.0
SAFWAN	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	320	0.0	FACIL	152	150	19,500	2,945	3	152	▲ 4.0
GFC	28.5	25.0	52,427	1,375	6	28.5	▲ 1.0	IFA	27.5	26.5	125,700	3,395	17	27.0	▼ -0.5
MAYADEEN	20.0	19.0	1,422,208	27,750	32	19.5	0.0	NINV	78	77	427,199	32,970	22	77	0.0
CGC	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	780	0.0	KPROJ	530	520	2,007,275	1,093,636	33	530	▲ 10.0
MTCC	65	61	757,410	47,894	35	64	▼ -1.0	COAST	29.0	28.0	21,200	605	4	29.0	▲ 2.0
UPAC	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	650	0.0	SECH	30.5	29.5	4,379,860	130,386	94	29.5	▲ 0.5
ALAFCO	204	204	146,218	29,828	1	204	0.0	SGC	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	104	0.0
MUBARRAD	74	73	113,950	8,422	7	73	▼ -2.0	ARZAN	35.0	32.5	4,462	148	2	35.0	▲ 0.5
LOGISTICS	51	50	265,300	13,265	21	51	▲ 1.5	MARKAZ	99	98	306,565	30,150	6	99	0.0
SCEM	87	82	51,000	4,187	3	87	▲ 2.0	KMEFIC	25.0	24.5	32,250	791	9	25.0	▼ -0.5
GCEM	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	76	0.0	ALAMAN	52	49.5	520,000	26,445	11	52	▲ 1.0
QCEM	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	74	0.0	ALOLA	56	53	30,250	1,604	2	56	▲ 3.0
FCEM	71	69	104,011	7,202	4	70	0.0	ALMAL	30.5	30.0	692,500	20,790	18	30.0	▼ -2.5
RKWC	96	96	4,900	470	1	96	▼ -4.0	GIH	24.0	23.5	54,200	1,274	5	24.0	0.0
SPEC	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	88	0.0	AAYAN	45.0	42.0	77,938	3,330	8	44.0	▲ 0.5
Industrials			5,378,567	598,678	223	998.83	▼ -0.60	BAYANINV	32.0	31.0	1,928,100	60,581	28	31.5	▼ -0.5
KSH	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	220	0.0	OSUL	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	36.0	0.0
NSH	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	62	0.0	KFIC	38.0	36.5	9,019	331	3	38.0	0.0
PAPCO	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	106	0.0	KAMCO	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	102	0.0
CATTL	128	124	300	38	3	128	▲ 6.0	NIH	49.0	47.5	2,211,600	105,891	101	48.0	0.0
DANAH	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	80	0.0	ISKAN	26.5	25.5	284,700	7,350	15	26.0	▲ 0.5
POULT	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	196	0.0	MADAR	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	20.5	0.0
FOOD	2,000	2,000	298,614	597,228	5	2,000	0.0	ALDEERA	27.0	25.0	68,257	1,816	4	27.0	▲ 1.0
Consumer Goods			298,914	597,266	8	1070.66	▲ 1.90	ALSALAM	32.0	31.0	408,600	12,750	12	31.5	▲ 1.5
MHC	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	180	0.0	EKTITAB	28.0	27.5	52,830	1,453	8	28.0	▲ 0.5
ATC	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	920	0.0	ALMADINA	32.0	31.0	89,015	2,759	4	32.0	▲ 0.5
YIACO	128	126	35,000	4,460	2	128	▲ 4	NOOR	47.5	45.5	91,000	4,203	6	47.5	0.0
Health Care			35,000	4,460	2	915.28	▲ 2.88	TAMINV	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	410	0.0
KCIN	900	900	432	389	1	900	▼ -50	EXCH	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	130	0.0
KHOT	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	220	0.0	TAIBA	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	300	0.0
SULTAN	60	58	110,000	6,501	9	58	▼ -3	KSHC	24.0	23.0	263,371	6,179	10	24.0	▲ 0.5
CABLETV	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	27.5	0.0	STRATEGIA	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	33.0	0.0
EYAS	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	335	0.0	ASIYA	38.0	35.					

RUSSIA ANNOUNCES NEW BUDGET CUTS AMID OIL SLIDE



MOSCOW: People stand at a bus stop in front of an exchange office sign showing the currency exchange rates of the Russian ruble, US dollar, and euro in Moscow. — AP

MOSCOW: Russia will cut its spending by 10 percent this year, the finance minister said yesterday, as prices for Moscow's key export commodity slumped to new lows. "We have agreed that ministries and (government) agencies... will present their proposals to the finance ministry for optimizing budget expenditure by around ten percent," Finance Minister Anton Siluanov told an economic conference in Moscow, confirming media reports on Tuesday.

"We have to take well thought-out measures on how to bring the budget in accordance with the new realities," he added. "In the current difficult conditions, we must speak of a very thrifty, strict budget policy, in order not to end up with high deficit levels or a high volume of debt," he said. Russia's 2016 budget is based on an oil

price of \$50 a barrel and a deficit of three percent, which President Vladimir Putin has ordered must not be exceeded.

Crude prices on Tuesday dipped below \$30 a barrel for the first time in over 12 years. Siluanov said the oil price would have to rise to \$82 to fully balance this year's budget. Siluanov cautioned against expecting a "price rise (for oil) in the immediate future," while economy minister Alexei Ulyukayev predicted that oil prices would remain low for "a very long time." While last year's budget deficit was only 2.6 percent, this year is expected to be more difficult. The government has been forced to dip heavily into its reserves and abandon support for the ruble, which has slid in value.

The economy has also been pum-

meled by Western sanctions imposed due to Moscow's meddling in Ukraine, as well as Russia's counter-measures which included an embargo on key food imports. Budget cuts have already affected the interior ministry, which announced layoffs of about 10 percent of its workforce. If the government fails to initiate austerity measures, "the same thing will happen as in 1998-99, with the public paying through inflation for our failures in correlating the budget with the new reality," warned Siluanov, referring to a previous economic crisis which saw Russia default on its debt. Annual inflation in 2015 reached 15.5 percent and food prices grew more than 19 percent on average, with fruit and vegetables becoming 29.5 percent more expensive, the state statistics service said this week. — AFP

PC SHIPMENTS PLUNGE AS APPLE BUCKS TREND

SAN FRANCISCO: Last year ended with a record-setting drop in personal computer shipments, with Apple bucking the trend, a report found Tuesday. The International Data Corporation calculated that some 71.9 million personal computers (PCs) were shipped worldwide in the final quarter of 2015, a 10.6 percent drop from the same period a year earlier. The PC market faced challenges including competition from smartphones and tablets, and people waiting longer to buy new machines, according to IDC. "The PC market remains competitive and the economic environment weakened further with the recent drop in the Chinese stock market," IDC Worldwide PC Tracker vice president Loren Loverde said in a statement. "However, PC replacements should pick up again in 2016, particularly later in the year."

Loverde expected an increase in the pace of businesses upgrading to computers powered by new-generation Windows 10 software. Consumers should also be motivated to

upgrade to new PCs for security and performance improvements, according to IDC. "The free upgrade path to Windows 10 allowed some consumers who might otherwise have shopped for new PCs during the holiday season to obtain a 'new' PC experience," said IDC devices and displays research director Linn Huang. "Additionally, the launch of the iPad Pro may have siphoned off some consumer interest in traditional PCs."

Chinese computer maker Lenovo maintained its top position in the market, shipping nearly 15.4 million PCs in the final quarter of last year, according to IDC. US rivals HP and Dell were second and third, shipping approximately 14.3 million and 10.2 million PCs respectively, the report showed. Apple saw its position improve, with shipments climbing 2.8 percent to some 5.66 billion in a year-over-year comparison, according to IDC. The report listed Apple and Asus as essentially tied for fourth place in the market in the quarter. — AFP

UK CHARGES EURIBOR 6 WITH SIX-YEAR RATE-RIGGING PLOT

FIRST EURIBOR TRIAL SET FOR SEPT 4, 2017

LONDON: Six French, German, British and Danish bankers, who have been charged in Britain with being part of a six-year scheme with traders at major banks to manipulate Euribor benchmark interest rates, are set to face a jury trial on Sept 4, 2017. Christian Bittar, once one of Deutsche Bank's most profitable derivatives traders, Achim Kraemer, who is still at that bank and former Barclays traders Philippe Moryoussef, Carlo Palombo, Colin Bermingham and Sisse Bohart are charged with one count each of conspiracy to defraud between 2005 and 2011.

The UK Serious Fraud Office (SFO) alleges they conspired with others at Barclays, Deutsche Bank, Societe Generale and other banks to defraud by rigging Euribor, the Euro interbank offered rate, for profit. Barclays and Deutsche Bank declined to comment. Societe Generale did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

At a hearing yesterday at London's Southwark Crown Court, Judge Nicholas Loraine-Smith scheduled the first dates for the world's first Euribor trial, which is expected to last around three months. The group, aged between 37 and 59 and resident in countries from Singapore to the United States, is the first to be charged in relation to Euribor, the euro counterpart of the London interbank offered rate (Libor) - crucial benchmarks for around \$450 trillion of financial contracts and loans worldwide. A lawyer for Bittar has said previously he would contest criminal proceedings. Representatives of the others have declined comment.

An earlier initial hearing at a lower court ended in confusion on Monday. The SFO had planned to charge 11 bankers, but prosecutors found out at the last minute that five foreign nationals would not show up. The SFO says it is still "considering its position" about how to proceed in its case against the five who did not appear, Germans Andreas Hauschild, Joerg Vogt, Ardan Gharagozlu and Kai-Uwe Kappauf, and Frenchman Stephane Esper. Yesterday's hearing set a date of March 18 for the SFO to tell the court its plans for the bankers who did not appear. "The prosecution is considering what if any steps to take in relation to those absent," Prosecutor James Waddington said.



LONDON: A combination of pictures shows (top row left to right) former employees of Barclays bank, Carlo Palumbo, Sisse Bohart, Colin Bermingham; (bottom row left to right) Philippe Moryoussef, Former employee of Deutsche Bank, Christian Bittar and Deutsche Bank's Achim Kraemer at Southwark Crown Court in London yesterday. — AFP

The SFO has confirmed that the foreign suspects had the right to refuse the initial summons to appear. A lawyer for Vogt noted the banker was not legally obliged to attend Monday's initial hearing. Legal representatives for the other four did not respond to requests for comment about why they stayed away. The six who did appear and were charged yesterday have been freed on bail.

Legal experts expect the SFO to seek a European arrest warrant as a precursor to attempting extradition proceedings against the other five. Since a global investigation was spawned by US regulators in 2008, financial institutions have paid around \$9.0 billion to settle regulatory allegations of rate rigging and around 30 individuals have now been charged. — Reuters

AHLI UNITED BANK ANNOUNCES WINNERS IN ITS 'WEEKLY DRAW'

KUWAIT: Ahli United Bank held its weekly draw of Al-Hassad Islamic Saving program on January 06, 2016. This program offers the biggest prize amount to the largest number of winners. The prize program succeeded in becoming the first and only prize account in Kuwait compliant with the Islamic Shari'a principles. The program has been developed to fulfil the needs of the Bank customers and increase their opportunities in winning sizeable and attractive prizes in addition to enjoying the latest banking advantages that Ahli United Bank provides.

On this occasion, the bank issued the following press release: Al Hassad Islamic Saving program offers the highest amounts of prizes which amount to KD 3.4 Million per year. This Program also offers 26 weekly prizes, with the highest number of weekly winners. The Islamic Hassad Saving Account may be opened by the lowest amount to open an account, which is KD 100.

The winner of the weekly grand prize in the amount of KD 25,000/- is: Abdulnabi Ramadhan Al Rowaish. The winners of the KD 1,000 prize (each) are: Rashid Ahmad Mohammed; Ramadan Abdullah Hassan; Kayed Sandouh Al Defry; Fouzi Jassim Al Sunni; Fahad Mohamad Al Ajmi; Alfahdah Abdulraheem Al Zaabi; Asharf A/Razaq J;

Abdullah Eissa Al Khaleel; Mohalab Abdullah Al Kandari; Issa Deloum Al Deloum; Abdull Karim Ahmed Khaled; Iman Darwesh Ghloom; Athari Yousef Mahmoud; Hanaa Mohd Al Humood; Thamer Hussain Al Sultan; Fadhel Abdulla Ali; Lahib Dhiya Ahmed; Mohammad Akbar Shaheen; Heyam Muneer Deeb; Jaffar Saeed Ebrahim; Abdulkarim Mohammed Ali; K S Menon; Lulwa Mohamed Ahmed; Fadheela Isa Ali and A Rahman Abdulla Janahi.

The Prize program of 'Al Hassad Islamic Saving' from Ahli United Bank offers a weekly grand prize worth KD 25,000 in addition to 25 weekly prizes worth a total of KD 25,000 distributed to 25 prizes, KD 1,000 for each winner. Also, prizes of Al Hassad Islamic saving program from Ahli United Bank offer 4 quarterly grand prizes announced in quarterly draws. Each is a 'Salary for Life' prize which is worth KD 25,000.

In general, Ahli United Bank continues to offer innovative tools and means to meet the needs of its customers to match the Bank's long history of distinctive services which extend over 74 years during which the Bank managed to take the lead among local banks. For further information about 'Al Hassad Islamic Saving' account, customers may call at any Ahli United Bank branch, or call: 'Hayakom' service at Tel: 181 2000.

VIVA BAHRAIN LAUNCHES UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS CLOUD SERVICES

MANAMA: VIVA Bahrain, the Kingdom's most innovative telecom operator, has collaborated with Avaya, a global leader in business communications software, systems and services, to offer Unified Communications-as-a-Service (UCaaS) for businesses across the island. VIVA Bahrain will host Avaya's innovative Unified Communications, Video and Contact Center solutions and make them available to enterprises in a cloud services model, enabling organizations to purchase the capacity and services they require, as and when needed, without large upfront costs. VIVA Bahrain will be offering Unified

Communications-as-a-Service (UCaaS), Video as a service (VaaS) and Call Center as a service (CCaaS).

Through VIVA's UCaaS offerings, businesses in Bahrain will benefit from greater flexibility, enabling them to respond quickly to changing business demands, improve customer experience, and manage costs more effectively. This allows organizations the flexibility to scale their unified communication services deployment up and down as per their requirements, add new features and functionality and benefit from efficient customer service experience.

With enterprises in Bahrain facing challenges to evolve digitally and react agilely in today's increasingly competitive markets, business are increasingly looking to leverage emerging technology trends such as video, mobility, social media and more. This collaboration between Avaya and VIVA Bahrain will help businesses in the Kingdom deliver services to their customers faster at significantly reduced total cost of ownership (TCO) and with a better return on investment (ROI). Eng Ulayian Al Wetaid, VIVA CEO said, "Businesses in Bahrain are looking towards adopting ICT in their daily operations to boost their productivity, growth and drive transformation.

At VIVA, we recognize how this is an important enabler of innovation that embraces new technology to help new products, services and processes. Therefore, through our collaboration with Avaya, VIVA will be introducing first-of-its-kind unified communication solutions in the MENA region and Bahrain. With this, our business customers will be able to experience improved and streamlined access to their data through a consolidated process of IT systems and achieve their business outcomes, through high levels of services delivery."

"Avaya solutions, hosted by VIVA Bahrain, will give businesses in Bahrain the flexibility and agility they require to benefit from the latest technology trends and prepare for digital transformation. Enterprises will be able to get access to Avaya's innovative technology solutions at prices that suit their needs, while benefiting from the reliability and expertise that industry leaders such as Avaya and VIVA Bahrain bring to the market place," said, Nidal Abou Ltaif, Avaya President, Asia Pacific, Middle East, Africa and EU.



GERMANY OVERSHOOTS BUDGET SURPLUS TARGET

BERLIN: Germany clocked up a bigger-than-expected budget surplus of 12.1 billion euros (\$13 billion) in 2015, which it plans to use to cover the costs of taking in so many refugees, the finance ministry said yesterday. "Thanks to the favorable economic trend and our forward-looking budget policy, the government has set aside a provision of 12.1 billion euros," said Finance Minister Wolfgang Schauble.

"We will urgently need this provision to finance the additional costs of accommodating and integrating the refugees," Schauble said. Originally, Berlin had said it would set aside 5.0 billion euros to cover the costs of the refugee crisis. "This year, too, we don't want take up any new debt, if possible," Schauble said. Germany registered 1.1 million asylum seekers in 2015, with refugees from war-torn Syria making up almost 40 percent

of arrivals. It was the second year in a row that Europe's biggest economy has achieved a balanced budget, or what it terms a "black zero" in its public finances.

The ministry said that government spending amounted to 299.3 billion euros in 2015, 2.6 billion euros lower than expected. At the same time, revenues totaled 311.4 billion euros, or 4.5 billion euros more than the government had anticipated. Tax revenues alone came in 1.6 billion euros higher than expected at 281.7 billion euros. The ministry said that, measured against gross domestic product (GDP), the government's underlying or "structural" surplus stood at 0.1 percent. Under EU rules, member states are now allowed to run up public deficits in excess of 3.0 percent of GDP and are obliged to target a balanced budget or even a surplus in the longer-term. — AFP



German Chancellor Angela Merkel

EU OPENS A DEBATE ON CHINA TRADE STATUS TO SEEK US, INDUSTRY VIEWS STATUS MAKES IT HARDER TO IMPOSE ANTI-DUMPING DUTIES

BRUSSELS: The European Commission will consult industry and its trade partners in response to Beijing's demand that trade barriers against it be relaxed, opening a politically charged debate yesterday that will shape future ties with China. The European Union's 28 commissioners discussed for the first time the issue of granting China "market economy status" from December, which Beijing says is its right 15 years after it joined the World Trade Organization.

That status would make it harder for Europe to impose anti-dumping duties on Chinese goods sold at knock-down prices, changing the criteria for determining a fair price. "This issue has to be looked at from all important angles given the subject's importance for international trade and also for the EU's economy," Commission Vice President Frans Timmermans said after the commissioners' meeting. "If there are measures to be taken related to this issue then, of course, these individual measures will have to be assessed for impact. Those are the

rules, but I can't say yet what those measures will be."

In a statement, the Commission said any decision would have an impact on the European economy but gave no details. The EU is China's biggest trade partner, and China is second only to the United States for the EU. Chinese imports to the EU were worth 302 billion euros (\$330 billion) in 2014, more than triple their level at the start of the century. The EU executive, which handles trade issues on behalf of EU governments, said it would fully involve European industry and liaise closely with its biggest trade partners on the issue, acknowledging this would take some time. The bloc is now in a third year of talks with the United States on a free-trade deal and Washington has indicated it sees no need to change its relationship with China.

Job losses

The bloc's decision will be taken with EU governments and the European Parliament. Officials

have told Reuters one compromise might be to agree temporary protection against cheaper Chinese exports to protect EU industry. The steel industry in particular has been a fierce opponent of any loosening of trade barriers against China. The industry association Eurofer, which has lodged a series of complaints against China, said Chinese steel production over capacity was some 400 million tons, more than twice the total EU steel production of 170 million tons.

Chinese steel imports into the EU have doubled in the past 18 months, with prices falling by 40 percent, it said. Aegis Europe, a group of about 30 European manufacturing sectors, including metals, chemicals, ceramics and textiles, said Beijing's aggressively export-led economy encouraged its enterprises to dump on foreign markets. Granting market economy status to China would have a huge negative impact on European industry, it said, citing a study saying that to do so would put 1.7 million to 3.5 million European jobs at risk.—Reuters



MNSS' YOKOHAMA 'SAVE & BE SAFE' PROMOTION ANNOUNCE WINNERS

KUWAIT: Mohamed Naser Al Sayer & Sons Co (MNSS), one of the Al Sayer Group of Companies held the third and the final draw to select the winners of 'Save & Be Safe' promotion at the Yokohama Center in Canada Dry.

Here are the list of winners from the third draw are: (1st prize) Fahad Saad Al-Ajmi; (2nd prize) Suben Narayan; (3rd prize) Mohammad Al-Hajeri; (4th prize) Khaled Nasser Ibrahim; (5th prize) Mohammad Al-Ajmi. Mubarak Naser Al Sayer, CEO Al Sayer Group Holding said "Tires, Oil and Paint division grew at record pace in 2015 driven by innovative selling in a highly competitive market so the 'Save and Be Safe' promotion could not have come at a better time. We are glad to see positive response from customers and we thank them for making this promotion a grand success."

The draw was organized with the presence of Abdul Aziz Ashkanani, Representative

from the Ministry of Commerce & Industry for Consumer protection affairs along with Krishna Kumar, General Manager Al Sayer Tires Oil and Paint division; Inderpal Singh Senior Manager Tire Sales from Al Sayer Yokohama and Mohammad Amin Nasimi Senior Manager After-Sales Marketing.

"Yokohama is a trusted tire brand across the world. Its promising range of products with advanced technology offers great quality and outstanding durability. We will continue to offer our customers better value deals supported with even better service," said Mr. Krishna Kumar, General Manager Al Sayer Tires Oil and Paint division. Yokohama "Save & Be Safe" promotion had commenced on 4 October 2015 and was valid till 4 January 2016. During the offer period for every KD 20 spent on purchasing Yokohama tires customers received a coupon entitling them to enter one of the three monthly draws to win fabulous cash prizes.



LULU OPENS IN SAUDI, OPENS THE 121ST HYPERMARKET IN DAMMAM

DAMMAM: Marching ahead with its aggressive expansion in the Saudi Arabian market, Middle East's retail major, Lulu Hypermarkets has opened its latest outlet in Dammam, the capital city of Eastern province of Saudi Arabia. It's the

6th in the Kingdom and 121st in the GCC. The latest hypermarket was officially inaugurated by HRH Prince Saud Bin Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz yesterday.



The occasion was graced by Engineer Abdullah Al Ahamed, President of Dammam Municipality and several high ranking officials from various government departments, representatives from local business community and

prominent citizens. Speaking at the inauguration, Lulu group chairman Yusuffali M.A. announced the proposed launch of 4 more hypermarkets this year, two in Jeddah and one each in Hail and Hofuf. "In 2017 we will launch 6 more in the Kingdom including in Makkah and Madina" added Yusuff Ali.

The new hypermarket, located in Prince Mohamed bin Fahad Road in Dammam provides a one-stop shopping destination for the growing city dwellers, which include a growing community of Nationals and expatriates. The hypermarket also houses Sparkys family entertainment, food court consisting of authentic Arabic fine dining,

Arabic and Filipino cuisine, and Coffee shops, Pharmacy from ATM and money exchange. Revealing his investment plans, Yusuff Ali said "we have already invested more than SAR 800 million till now and intend to further invest SAR 700 million by the end of 2017, taking our total investment to more than SAR 1.5 billion in the Kingdom".

"We are very confident that this great country will further prosper under the visionary leadership of HRH King Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Crown Prince HRH Muhamed Bin Nayef Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud & Deputy Crown Prince HRH Mohamed bin Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud. "The support and love extended by the Rulers gives us further impetus to serve the growing economy of this country. Lulu is committed to do its bit to help the kingdom by opening more outlets, thereby generating employment opportunities to talented Saudis.

The opening of the Hypermarket in Dammam underscores our increasing presence in the region and our commitment to serve one of the growing and important markets in Saudi Arabia. "We have always believed that it's our duty to nurture the local talent and currently there are more than 1500 Saudis who work with us and our goal is to provide employment to 5000 Saudi nationals by the end of 2017" said Yusuff Ali. Currently Lulu has more than 30% Saudis in their workforce and provides best quality training to absorb them in various managerial and specialized sections.

ABK WINS 'BEST CUSTOMER LOYALTY PROGRAM' AWARD

KUWAIT: Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) recently announced that it has won the 'Best Customer Loyalty Program in Kuwait' award from Banker Middle East, one of the region's leading banking industry magazines. The award, which was won in recognition of the Bank's exceptional ABK Emirates credit and prepaid card program, has been a hit since its launch. The success of ABK Emirates credit and prepaid cards is testament to the Bank's clear understanding of its customers' needs and the excellence in the services it provides.

These include the ABK Emirates Visa Infinite card, the ABK Emirates Visa Signature cards, and the ABK Emirates Visa Gold Prepaid Travel Card, for which the Bank was awarded the 'Prepaid Marketing - Best Use of Segmentation 2015' Award by Visa International. They also include the ABK Emirates credit and prepaid card program, for which the Bank recently announced the 'Billionth Mile' landmark since the launch of the partnership in 2002, in partnership with Emirates Airline.

The ABK Emirates credit and prepaid card program, gives access to an exclusive set of benefits that are specifically designed for premium customers and promises to deliver rewards, recognition and a regular stream of benefits, features and services. As 'Signature' and 'Infinite' cardholders, customers are automatically enrolled in the award-winning frequent flyer program of Emirates Airline; Emirates Skywards, which grants cardholders 'Skyward Miles' that can be used for reward tickets, upgrades, or other rewards offers

by the program. In addition to earning Skywards Miles on local and international spends, new Signature and Infinite Cardholders are rewarded with up to 10,000 bonus Miles.

Customers also receive complimentary airport lounge access at over 550 airports worldwide through the Lounge Key program. Commenting on the Bank's achievement, Garry Ceaplen, AGM Retail Banking at ABK said, "It is an honor for ABK to be presented with the 'Best Customer Loyalty Program in Kuwait' award. We continuously seek partnerships that present our customers with additional benefits to make every experience with the Bank an enjoyable and unique one. I would like to thank the judging committee for recognizing the effort and the success of the program. I would also like to congratulate the ABK team and the Emirates airline team on a job well done in successfully jointly managing this product".

DrNejib Ben Khedher, Senior Vice President, Emirates Skywards said: "Emirates Skywards continues to earn industry and consumer awards thanks to an innovative repertoire of rewards for our members. We also look for ways to add value and further improve our products, and we are confident that our partnership with ABK will continue to grow from strength to strength in Kuwait." For more information on Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait please visit www.eahli.com or contact an ABK representative via 'Ahli Chat' or by contacting a customer service agent via 'AhlanAhli' at 1899899.



MARMORE EXAMINES, ANALYZES THE PRIVATE EQUITY LANDSCAPE

KUWAIT: Marmore MENA Intelligence, a research subsidiary of Kuwait Financial Centre "Markaz", recently released its report on the Private Equity industry in the GCC. In this report, Marmore examines and analyzes the private equity landscape, highlighting deal flows, investment opportunities in various sectors and fund transactions. The report also presents regulatory characteristics and industry challenges, and provides profiles of major players in the region.

The PE industry has come a long way from the doom-and-gloom years post the 2008 financial crisis, to the industry peaking in 2014 due to successive years of zero interest rates and favorable credit conditions. Booming global equity markets lifted the valuations of PE assets, supported by robust corporate profits and improved IPO conditions that allowed for profitable exits. This led to waves of profit distributions, which restored limited partners' confidence in the PE market, and increased their commitment to new PE funds. But

the limited number of viable targets in the PE ecosystem may lead to over spending.

In the GCC, private equity is still at a nascent stage, but had witnessed significant growth between 2002 and 2008. But the onset of global financial crisis stalled growth of the industry. Fundraising had become anemic, despite the sizeable amount of dry powder accumulated over the boom years, and deals had stalled as acquisition finance became expensive and difficult to obtain.

Most PE funds in the GCC region have broad sector focus with investments ranging from healthcare to ICT, infrastructure and hard assets like real estate. Analysis reveals there is a strong focus on consumer spending themes such as restaurants, consumer goods, retail, ICT, leisure and entertainment sectors; and governments focused investments play such as infrastructure, education, healthcare etc. Given the deal scarcity and capital abundance, many of the funds that

were launched earlier as specialized or sector-focused funds six years ago have rolled back their decision and broadened their mandate to become more opportunistic.

In comparison to other GCC markets, UAE is a predominant financial hub and acts as a gateway for entry into the Middle East region. Most PE funds are attracted to the relatively hassle free regulatory regime in the UAE, a consequence of the efforts made by the country to attract foreign investments. Continued government spending and increased focus on the non-oil sector are expected to drive PE growth in the coming years. With the Dubai Expo 2020 and the FIFA World Cup in Qatar looming ahead, the non-oil sector comprising infrastructure, tourism, trade and financial services is expected to get a major boost, which opens up avenues for investment for PE. But PE funds are likely to be confronted with intense competition, not only with fundraising, but also in scouting attractive deals.

State owned enterprises which constitute most of the economic activity in GCC region are rarely privatized. Even under the privatization initiative, only minority stakes in these enterprises are floated in the stock exchange, which usually is reserved for and subscribed by the nationals. Apart from the state enterprises, family owned business form the majority of companies in the GCC region. Family business houses are wealthy, well-established and are often reluctant to sell their stakes to private equity firms.

Islamic PE is constrained by lesser investment opportunities as only Sharia compliant projects are sought after by these funds. Lack of uniformity in the way sharia principles are applied in different countries, due to absence of global sharia standards, leads to multiple regulatory checks and at times can lead to prolonged delays in structuring and increase costs dramatically. Dearth of qualified, trained professionals with expertise in investment strategies, legal docu-

mentation and well versed with sharia standards is a huge deterrent to the development of Islamic finance in general and Islamic private equity in particular.

The nascent legal and regulatory framework in GCC countries, characterized by stringent ownership restrictions, weak bankruptcy laws and high set-up costs, dampen investor enthusiasm. But the recent entry of UAE and Qatar into the MSCI Emerging Markets index has led to many market reforms across the region, especially in Saudi Arabia, aimed at improving disclosures and standardizing corporate governance. Emergence of private equity would be a boon for most SMEs and startup companies, which find it hard to obtain adequate financing from banks due to stringent collateral requirements, including personal guarantees. With nearly 80 per cent of the companies in the space falling in the SME category, private equity can emerge as an alternative funding method.

GOOGLE REVEALS SELF-DRIVING CAR SLIP-UPS



DETROIT: Google Inc Self Driving Car Project CEO John Krafcik speaks at the Automotive News World Congress in Detroit, Michigan. —AFP

SAN FRANCISCO: Google yesterday said that while its self-driving cars have safely driven more than a million miles, there have been times when humans have had to take over to avoid crashing. System "anomalies" caused drivers to take the wheel 272 times in California test cars in the 14 months leading up to December, Google said in a report to the California Department of Motor Vehicles. The test period saw cars travel more than 420,000 miles (676,000 kilometers) across the state. There were an additional 69 occasions when drivers seized control from automated systems based on their own judgment calls, according to the report. The most common cause for intervention occurred when technology did not properly sense a real-world situation, the report indicated.

'Trend looks good'

Google then plays out these situations on a simulator to reveal whether the vehicle would have hit something had the human not taken control, according to Chris Urmson, head of the Internet giant's self-driving car team.

Simulations determined that 13 of the 69 "driver-initiated disengagements" would have resulted in crashes if the car had been steering, the report indicated.

Two of the incidents involved traffic cones and three were blamed on reckless driving by someone in another vehicle. Eight of the near-misses took place over the 53,000 miles traveled in California in 2014, while only five happened as the cars logged a hefty 370,000 miles during the 2015 part of the trial, according to Urmson. "This trend looks good," he said. Urmson cautioned, however, that the number could actually rise as Google self-driving cars are tested in trickier environments such as dangerous weather or traffic.

"On our test track, we run tests that are designed to give us extra practice with rare or wacky situations," Urmson said. Engineers also use a powerful simulator to generate scenarios and variations on circumstances. "Thanks to all this testing, we can develop measurable confidence in our abilities in various environments," Urmson said. "This stands in contrast to the hazy variability we accept in experienced

human drivers - never mind the 16-year-olds we send onto the streets to learn amidst the rest of us." Urmson was not ready to declare self-driving cars safer than those controlled by humans, but believed Google was making progress toward getting them to market.

Drivers still needed

California Department of Motor Vehicles officials last month proposed self-driving car regulations that would mandate that a person be able to take the wheel if needed. California has the potential to set precedent with its rules for self-driving cars, and the proposed regulations were seen as sure to slow down the technology's progression as it heads mainstream. "DMV got it exactly right and is putting our safety first," said John Simpson, director of non-profit Consumer Watchdog Privacy Project. "How can Google propose a car with no steering wheel, brakes or driver when its own tests" show so many failures, he added. Overall Google's self-driving vehicles have logged more than 1.3 million miles (2 million kilometers), the company said. —AFP

COAL INDIA LTD PLANS BIGGEST TECH OVERHAUL TO CHECK RAMPANT THEFT

COMPANY TO SPEND \$52 MILLION ON GPS TRACKING

NEW DELHI: Coal India Ltd is making its biggest tech overhaul in four decades to check rampant theft and shed its image as an inefficient behemoth, spurred by an impending opening up of the sector to private firms for the first time since the 1970s. The state-run company's monopoly had allowed it to delay the use of modern technology common in international mining, but it cannot afford to wait any longer as the government is set to soon announce a plan to allow private competitors like Adani Group to mine and sell coal.

Coal India's productivity is estimated at just one-eighth of its technologically advanced rivals in the United States, and as much as a fifth of its annual output is stolen, costing the company up to \$1 billion each year. Local "coal mafias" have fought for years to control rackets that prey on the industry and feed a vast black market. Tactics range from infiltrating unions and transport operations to bribery, extortion and outright theft of coal. Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government, Coal India has raised output at a record pace, helped by accelerated environmental clear-

ances, though this has prompted criticism that the world's third-largest carbon emitter is not doing enough to check climate change.

To build on those output gains and meet a target to double production to 1 billion tons by 2020, Coal Secretary Anil Swarup is prioritizing tech modernization already implemented at Mahanadi Coalfields, a Coal India unit. Swarup wants all seven of Coal India's producing units to use a GPS-based tracking system for their trucks and Google maps to electronically "fence" mining areas, which will alert managers if a truck diverts from its route. Swarup will review the units' preparedness this month.

Lining up

The upgrade is expected to cost around 3.5 billion rupees (\$52 million) initially, but the attraction of working with the world's largest coal mining company and the promise of follow-on business is luring some major companies. Indian software giants, including Wipro, as well as US firm Honeywell and France's Orange, are lining up for contracts, with fresh tenders to be launched possibly by March, Mahanadi executive Deepak

Srivastava said.

Azim Premji, the billionaire chairman of Wipro, India's third-largest software services exporter, recently met Swarup to offer some of the company's tracking technologies. "This is Coal India's biggest technological overhaul, and its impact would be in billions of dollars," Swarup told Reuters. "The whole shift towards supplying quality coal to customers further increases the use of technology to avoid pilferage." Last year, Mahanadi blacklisted third-party contractors of 36 trucks, each carrying up to 17 tonnes of coal, after managers received telephone alerts of route violations that could have led to theft, said Srivastava.

Changing perceptions

The tech overhaul may also help Coal India change perceptions that it's a slow-moving government giant, deterring investors from buying its shares despite its dominant position in a resource-rich and energy-hungry country. Other local firms such as CMC Ltd, ARS Software Engineering and Arya Omnitalk Wireless Solutions have shown interest in bidding for contracts to sup-

ply Coal India with tracking and monitoring devices, including CCTV.

Srivastava said that when he joined Mahanadi in 2011 there were widespread discrepancies in weighing coal-laden vehicles, and unmonitored loading and offloading that encouraged theft. The company has installed CCTV cameras at shipment sites, hooked up trucks with satellites and fitted them with radio frequency identification tags to automatically transfer data to a control room at the company's headquarters.

It is also replacing static electronic weigh-bridges with in-motion bridges that can gather data without trucks having to stop, easing delivery backlogs. Srivastava said the measures have tightened control over errant truck drivers, and up to 90 percent of the coal mined is now weighed. But there is still scope to improve. "As of now, we can only detect route violations, but there should be a system so an alert goes out if the GPS is removed or tampered with," Srivastava said. "There should also be a way to ensure the weight of coal at the loading site and offloading site is the same." —Reuters



US spy chief James Clapper

US SPY CHIEF'S PERSONAL ONLINE ACCOUNTS HACKED

HACKERS BRING DOWN THAI WEBSITES

WASHINGTON: US spy chief James Clapper's personal online accounts have been hacked, his office confirmed Tuesday, a few months after CIA director John Brennan suffered a similar attack. Clapper's Office of the Director of National Intelligence confirmed the hack but refused to provide details. "We are aware of the matter and we reported it to the appropriate authorities," spokesman Brian Hale said.

A teen hacker who goes by "Cracka" claimed to have hacked Clapper's home telephone and Internet accounts, his personal email, and his wife's Yahoo email, online magazine Motherboard reported. Cracka told Motherboard that he had changed the settings on Clapper's Verizon account so that calls to his home were rerouted to the California-based Free Palestine Movement. Cracka is part of the "Crackas with Attitude" group, which broke into Brennan's personal email account last year. Hackers from the group have said they are teenage high school students.

Thai websites hacked

In another development, international hacking movement Anonymous said it attacked hundreds of Thai government websites yesterday over death sentences handed down to two migrant workers for the murder of two British tourists. A court sentenced Myanmar migrant workers Zaw Lin and Win Zaw Htun, both 22, to death on Dec 24 after finding them guilty of murdering tourists Hannah Witheridge, 23, and David Miller, 24, on a beach on the island of Koh Tao in 2014.

Witheridge had been raped and bludgeoned to death, according to police, and Miller suffered severe head injuries and was left to drown in the surf. But the investigation drew allegations of police incompetence, torture and mishandling of evidence. Police rejected the complaints but

protests erupted in neighboring Myanmar after the verdict, with many people there believing the two workers, who denied killing the tourists, were scapegoats. Some rights workers say they believe police forced the two into confessing under duress. Police denied that.

In a message posted on the 'We Are Anonymous' Facebook page the hacking group said it had shut down Thai judicial websites in protest over the verdict. "Anonymous shuts down all Thai Court of Justice website in protest over the Koh Tao murder verdict. Anonymous is supporting the campaign to ask tourists to boycott Thailand," the group said. It also posted a black and white graphic of a man wearing a Guy Fawkes mask, an image associated with the Anonymous movement, with a blindfold over his eyes and the words: "Failed Law. We Want Justice!"

The group listed more than 200 websites it said it shut down. The Civil Court of Thailand's main website was not immediately accessible but the Courts of Justice website, which the group said it had hacked, was running as normal late yesterday. Police Colonel Somporn Daengdee, deputy chief of the police Technology Crime Suppression Division, said police had not received reports of government websites being hacked but were looking into it.

In an emotionally charged Facebook post on Tuesday, Witheridge's sister criticized the investigation and the police. Miller's family has said it supported the court verdict and the work of the police. This month, Anonymous, a loose-knit international network of activist hackers, said it was responsible for cyber attacks on Thai police websites in protest against the Koh Tao verdict. Police confirmed the attacks but said they were not on confidential data. Reuters was unable to verify who carried out the attacks. —Agencies



CALIFORNIA: A self-driving car traverses a parking lot at Google's headquarters in Mountain View, California. —AFP



IN CALIFORNIA TESTS, SELF-DRIVING VEHICLES STILL NEED HUMAN HELP

LOS ANGELES: Futuristic self-driving cars traveling along California roads have needed plenty of old-fashioned human intervention to stay safe. California's Department of Motor Vehicles on Tuesday released reports filed by seven companies the agency gave permission to test prototype vehicles in public. The documents summarized instances in which a human driver had to take over due to technology problems or other safety concerns. The reports show wildly different levels of success since on-road testing started in September 2014. Experts in the technology said Google, whose cars drove the most by far, performed relatively well, though they also cautioned that the testing typically happened during good weather.

Other companies reported frequent instances in which the person who is required to be in the front seat just in case - had to grab the wheel. Nissan, for example, tested just 1,485 miles in public, but reported 106 cases where the driver had to take control. The automaker has said it plans to have "commercially viable autonomous drive vehicles" by 2020. A spokeswoman did not return a request for comment. Google said its cars needed human help 341 times over 424,000 miles. That would be the equivalent of about 10 times per year, given the 12,000 miles the average US vehicle travels annually.

In 11 of the 341 instances, Google said its cars would have gotten in a crash. The head of the company's self-driving car project said that while the results are encouraging, they also show the technology has yet to reach his goal of not needing someone behind the wheel. "There's none where it was like, 'Holy cow, we just avoided a big wreck,'" said Chris Urmson, Google's self-driving car project leader. "We're seeing lots of improvement. But it's not quite ready yet," Urmson said.

"That's exactly why we test our vehicles with a steering wheel and pedals."

The California Department of Motor Vehicles, which is writing new regulations for the technology, said it was still reviewing the reports. Google reported 272 cases in which the cars' software or onboard sensors failed. Though Google did not release detailed scenarios, the problems included issues with the self-driving cars seeing traffic lights, yielding to pedestrians or committing traffic violations. There were also cases where intervention was needed because other drivers were reckless, and several dozen instances of an "unwanted maneuver" by Google's car.

Bryant Walker Smith, a professor at the University of South Carolina who closely follows self-driving car developments, said Google's rate of potential collisions was "not terribly high, but certainly not trivial." He said it remains difficult to gauge how self-driving cars compare to accident rates among human drivers, since even the best data underreport minor collisions that are never reported to authorities. While Google's problem rate is "impressively low," a trained safety driver should remain in the front seat, said Raj Rajkumar, an engineering professor at Carnegie Mellon University who specializes in self-driving cars. According to data in Google's report, a driver typically took control within one second of the car asking for help.

Drivers at other companies often reacted quickly as well, according to their reports, though Volkswagen Group of America reported that, in one case, it was more than 12 minutes before the person took control of one of its test Audis. Audi of America spokesman Brad Stertz said he was gathering details on the incident, but believed it was a software glitch that did not

affect public safety, and possibly was a false reading. John Simpson, a frequent critic of Google who focuses on privacy issues for the nonprofit group Consumer Watchdog, said the company's report "underscores the need for a driver behind the steering wheel capable of taking control of the robot car."

Google has argued to California regulators that once the company concludes the cars are ready for the public to use, they should not need a steering wheel or pedals because human intervention would actually make them less safe. Google released its report Tuesday before the agency posted reports from other companies in what Google described as an effort to be transparent about its safety record. The company had lobbied against having to report disengagements in the first place, saying the data could be misinterpreted. The other companies testing self-driving cars on California streets are Tesla Motors, Mercedes-Benz, and parts suppliers Bosch and Delphi.

Google's testing mostly involves driving around the company's Silicon Valley headquarters or the streets of Austin, Texas. The company's rate of human intervention has improved in recent months, according to its data, but Urmson cautioned that the rate might again rise as Google subjects the cars to more challenging environments and weather conditions. Google said its cars would have been responsible in eight of the 11 avoided accidents, according to computer modeling the company performed later. In two other cases, its cars would have hit a traffic cone. Google cars have been involved in nine collisions since September 2014. In each case, the other car was responsible, according to an analysis by researchers at Virginia Tech University. —AP

YOUTUBE LAUNCHES PAKISTAN'S VERSION

ISLAMABAD: Google has launched a localized version of YouTube in Pakistan, potentially paving the way for the country's top court to lift a ban on the site over "blasphemous content". The site was blocked after "Innocence of Muslims" was uploaded, an American-made film that depicted the Prophet Mohammed as a thuggish deviant and triggered protests across the Muslim world-including in Pakistan, where more than 20 people died in demonstrations.

Google said Tuesday users in Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka would see a new YouTube homepage featuring local content in native languages. YouTube, owned by California-based Google, has already launched similar initiatives in dozens of other countries. The Supreme Court's ban in place since September 2012 applied to YouTube's global and localized sites.

The new site, youtube.com.pk, is currently live but inaccessible inside Pakistan, and the government and Google hope its creation will mean the Supreme Court will lift the ban, even if only partially. Content on the local site can still be regulated, and a senior gov-

ernment official said yesterday Pakistan's telecommunication authority could ask Google to remove content it deems objectionable. If Google complies, it could meet a condition set by the Supreme Court for lifting the ban. "The understanding is that on the localized version offensive and blasphemous content could be blocked by Google on the government's request," the official said.

A Google spokesman confirmed that governments are allowed to request the removal of YouTube videos that violate local laws. "We have clear community guidelines, and when videos violate those rules, we remove them," the spokesman said. But the Internet giant said it would review requests before taking videos down. "Government requests to remove content will continue to be tracked and included in our Transparency Report." Islamabad has been in intermittent talks with Google for several years over the issue, another source close to the matter said, without providing a specific time-frame for the unveiling of YouTube Pakistan. —AFP

EBOLA: PROFILE OF A PROLIFIC KILLER

MONROVIA: This is a factfile on Ebola ahead of Liberia's expected announcement this week that it is officially free of Ebola transmission, bringing an end to the worst ever outbreak of the disease in West Africa.

Toll

The outbreak started in December 2013 in southern Guinea before spreading to two neighboring west African countries. It has killed more than 11,300 people, out of 29,000 registered cases, according to World Health Organization (WHO) estimates. The real figure may be significantly higher. More than 99 percent of the victims were based in three neighboring nations—Guinea (more than 2,500 dead), Sierra Leone

(more than 3,900) and Liberia (more than 4,800).

Origins

Ebola was first identified in central Africa. The tropical virus was named after a river in the Democratic Republic of Congo—then known as Zaire—where it came to light in 1976. Five species have been identified to date (Zaire, Sudan, Bundibugyo, Reston and Tai Forest), the first being historically the most virulent with death rates that have reached 90 percent among humans.

Transmitting Ebola

The virus's natural reservoir animal is probably the bat, which does not contract the disease itself. Chimpanzees,

gorillas, monkeys, forest antelope and porcupines are also suspected of having transmitted Ebola to humans. Only one certified contact with an animal has been recorded in the current outbreak. It has since been passed among humans. Ebola is transmitted by contact with the blood, body fluids, secretions or organs of an infected or recently deceased person, but not by air. Those infected do not become contagious until the symptoms appear. They then become more and more contagious until just after their death, which poses great risks during funerals.

The symptoms

Following an incubation period of between two and 21 days, Ebola devel-

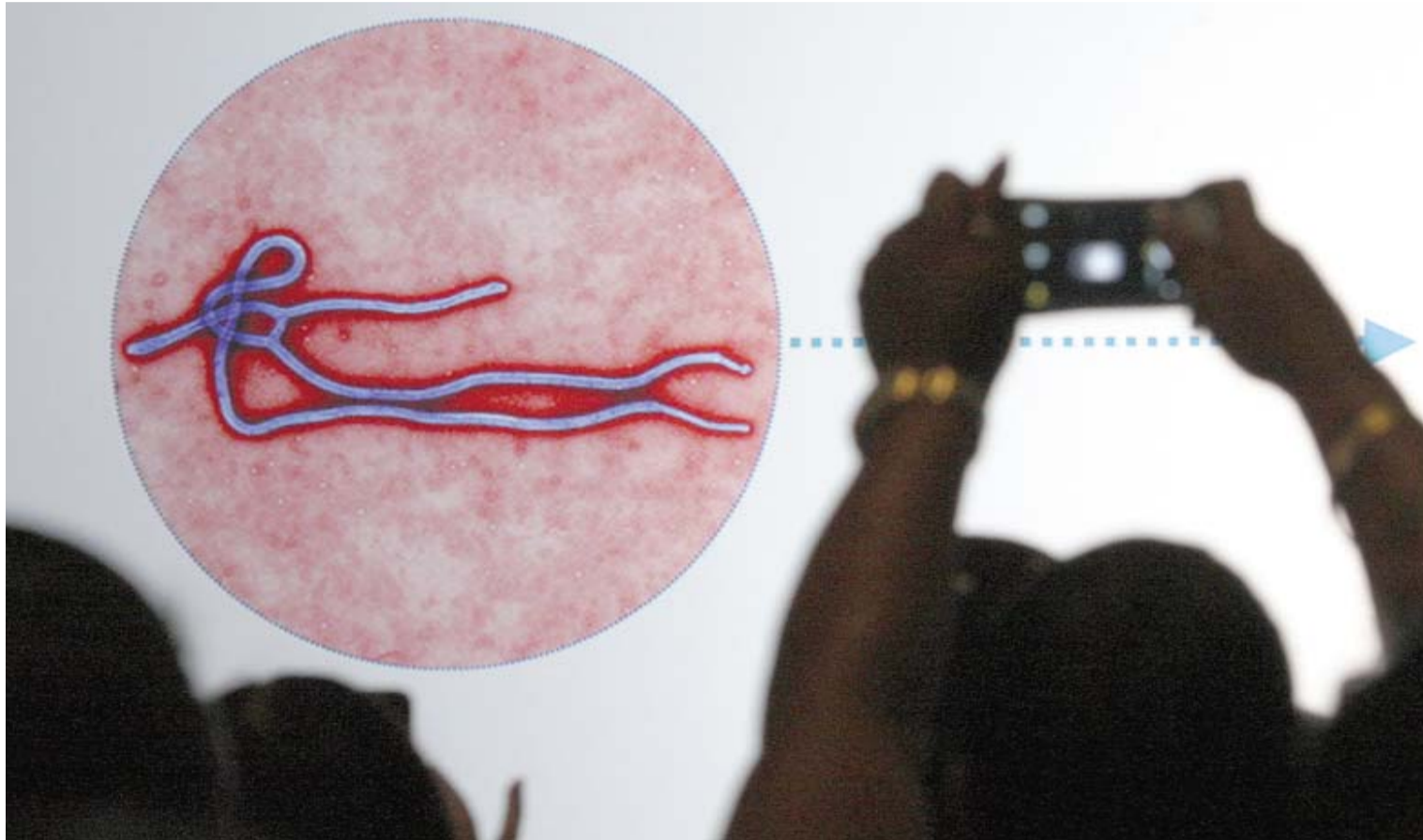
ops into a high fever, weakness, intense muscle and joint pain, headaches and sore throats. That is often followed by vomiting and diarrhoea, skin eruptions, kidney and liver failure, and internal and external bleeding.

Avoiding infection

In the absence of a confirmed vaccine or cure, it is recommended that preventive measures be taken to stop the spread of Ebola—notably through hand-washing and using gel or alcohol-based disinfectants. A distance of several meters (yards) should also be kept from infected people or bodies, and healthcare providers must wear disposable protective clothing that includes masks and gloves.

Possible treatments

Several tests have been carried out with experimental drugs and vaccines during the epidemic in west Africa. Among these are Avigan (favipiravir), an antiviral treatment being developed by the Japanese company Toyama Chemical. The best known is ZMapp, a cocktail of three monoclonal (single cell) antibodies developed through a Canadian/US partnership. The WHO said in July that the world "is on the verge of an effective Ebola vaccine" after Canadian drug VSV-EZEBOV was found in clinical trials in Guinea to provide 100-percent protection from the disease. The drug may therefore become the first licensed vaccine against the disease. — AFP



NEW YORK: This file photo taken on November 07, 2014 shows an audience member photographing a slide showing the likeness of an Ebola virus during an Ebola safety presentation by the US. — AFP

WITH EBOLA IN CHECK, ARE WE READY FOR NEXT OUTBREAK?

'WE KNOW HOW TO STOP THE SPREAD'

MONROVIA: The world will have a collective sigh of relief when west Africa's Ebola epidemic is finally declared at an end after claiming more than 11,000 lives over two years. But with a cure still out of reach, and no vaccine on the market, are we better prepared for next time? Important lessons were learnt the hard way from the unprecedented devastation and suffering wrought on Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone—the countries hardest hit by the outbreak which started in December 2013, say experts. Epidemiological protocols were improved. At first, many infected people were not quarantined fast enough or given the right type of care.

The World Health Organization's (WHO) much-criticized reaction lag led to an overhaul of epidemic response guidelines. Deployment of medical staff, virus-blocking suits, medicines and other material is likely to happen much faster next time. "We know how to stop the spread," Liberia's chief medical officer Francis Karteh told AFP. "Liberia is no longer at risk like the way it was." The WHO is preparing to declare on Friday an official end to this outbreak, which infected more than 28,600 people and killed over 11,300. Before this epidemic, fewer than 2,500 people were known to have been killed by the virus since it was first discovered in 1976.

Lessons learnt

Karteh said local doctors learnt much from organizations such as Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) or Doctors Without Borders, the Red Cross and the WHO, which deployed staff to help contain the epidemic. A key lesson was the need for quick, safe and hygienic burials of people who died from the virus transmitted

through body fluids, and speedily tracing those who had been in contact with them. The new knowledge came in handy after Liberia-declared Ebola-free had two further flare-ups, successfully stopped in their tracks. "During the first outbreak our doctors and healthcare workers were not (familiar with) the disease," said Karteh.

"This is why a good number of them (more than 500) died." An ironic upside of the outbreak's massive scale is that it yielded thousands of survivors for medical research. This led to the discovery that Ebola virus can live for several months in the semen, spinal column and eye fluid of survivors—though the implications and transmission risk are not yet clear. It was also recently found that survivors can suffer vision problems, hearing loss and joint pain for months after being declared cured.

Scramble for drugs

The scale of the outbreak, and the global scare caused when infected doctors started returning home from west Africa to Europe and the United States, provided impetus for the fast-track development of drugs. The resulting pharmaceutical scramble yielded several promising vaccine candidates. But none have yet been tested in general, non-infected populations—the gold standard for proving efficacy.

Similarly, none of the many potential treatments under investigation have so far been proven to work. Many drug studies started when the epidemic was already declining and there were no longer enough patients for clinical trials. Nevertheless, many studies have advanced to the point that testing can continue if there is another outbreak.



KENEMA, Sierra Leone: This file photo taken on November 15, 2014 shows health workers wearing protective equipment dance as they try to cheer up an Ebola patient at Kenema treatment center run by the Red Cross Society on November 15, 2014. — AFP

The frontrunners are ZMapp, a cocktail of three artificial Ebola antibodies made by Mapp Biopharmaceutical in California and Avigan, an antiviral tablet developed by a subsidiary of Japan's Fujifilm Holdings.

Both were given to infected medical workers, though it is not sure that their survival was due to the treatment. A lesser-known compound called GS-5734, developed by US-based Gilead Sciences, was given to a Scottish nurse hospitalized with a serious relapse months after her initial recovery. She recovered. Some treatments did not pan out. A study released last week concluded that transfusions of blood plasma from survivors—despite sky-high expectations—failed to significantly increase

the odds of recovery.

On the upside, doctors recently said a malaria drug given to Ebola patients in Liberia seemed to improve chances for survival. For now, the focus remains rapid response, speedy quarantine, and quality care—including intravenous drip to prevent dehydration—for those infected. "We learnt a lot during this epidemic," said Michel Van Herp of MSF. "The next epidemic will not be as dramatic." Jean-Francois Delfraissy, French immunologist, said keeping an eye on survivors, and boosting African early alert systems, were crucial to breaking the transmission chain. "Continued research into vaccines, treatments and the virus reservoir, both animal and human, is indispensable," he said. — AFP

FDA PANEL FAVORS APPROVAL FOR DRUG-OOZING ADDICTION IMPLANT

WASHINGTON: Federal health advisers recommended approval Tuesday for an experimental implant designed to treat patients recovering from heroin and painkiller addiction. Despite shortcomings in company studies, a majority of Food and Drug Administration advisers said the implant offers important benefits not currently available. The drug-oozing device is intended to be a safer, more reliable approach to controlling cravings and withdrawal symptoms. "Overall the data did have some problems," said Dr. Thomas Grieger, of the Maryland Department of Health. "But I think clearly there was no evidence of significant risk with this agent and there is evidence of significant benefit and hopefully great promise."

The advisers voted 12-5 in favor of the device from Braeburn Pharmaceuticals. The FDA is scheduled to make its formal decision by Feb 27. The matchstick-size implant, dubbed Probuphine, slowly releases a low dose of buprenorphine over six months. Currently buprenorphine is available as a pill or film that dissolves under the tongue. It is considered a safer, more palatable alternative to methadone, the decades-old standard for controlling opioid addiction. Opioids are a powerful family of drugs that mimic the opium poppy, including medications like oxycodone and illicit narcotics like heroin.

More than 2.5 million Americans are addicted to opioids, according to federal estimates. But less than half are receiving medication-based treatment to help control the problem. Braeburn executives told panelists Tuesday that its implant could help reduce cases of relapse among chronic drug abusers. Many recovering addicts struggle to stick with their daily medication, putting them at risk of returning to illicit drug use and overdosing. But panelists questioned whether Braeburn's studies accurately predict Probuphine's success. They cited shortcomings in the company's research including missing urine samples from some study participants. Additionally, many patients received additional drug therapy to control

their cravings and symptoms, clouding the picture of the implant's performance. Ultimately, most panelists said they were swayed by an FDA analysis showing that Probuphine was at least as effective in avoiding relapse as older treatments.

Bleeding and infection

Dr. Rajesh Narendran, of the University of Pittsburgh, said prescribing instructions for the device must be "crystal clear" about which patients should receive it. Braeburn only studied the drug in patients who were already stabilized on low-to-medium doses of buprenorphine. The FDA previously rejected Probuphine in April 2012, judging the drug's dose was too low to reliably help the broad range of opioid-addicted patients. Another concern raised Tuesday involved the complex surgical procedure needed to put in and remove the rod-like implants, which are inserted under the skin of the arm. According to an FDA review, problems like bleeding and infection were more frequent with Probuphine than with contraceptive implants that use similar drug-releasing technology.

Braeburn CEO Behshad Sheldon said Tuesday the company would aim to train 1,500 physicians to perform the procedure in the initial six weeks after launch. "The few, current options are not enough to address the tremendous needs of the vast population dealing with this complex disease," Behshad said in a statement. Princeton, NJ-based Braeburn licensed the US rights to Probuphine from its original developer, Titan Pharmaceuticals.

Heroin and opioid painkillers caused 28,650 fatal overdoses in 2014, the highest number on record in the US. Despite those numbers, experts say buprenorphine remains underused due to federal caps on prescribing, gaps in insurance and a lack of acceptance by doctors. Along with increasing compliance, Probuphine has the potential to address other problems with the oral buprenorphine, including illegal diversion and accidental poisoning in children. — AP

EATING TATERS PRE-PREGNANCY MAY BOOST DIABETES RISK

PARIS: Eating lots of potatoes—especially chips or crisps—is linked to a higher risk for women of developing a type of diabetes that occurs during pregnancy, a study said yesterday. So-called gestational diabetes can have long-term health consequences for both mother and child, including a higher chance of heart disease and other forms of diabetes. Potatoes—consumed massively across the globe—contain important nutrients, including vitamin C and potassium. But compared to other vegetables and carbohydrates, they also contain extra starch, which is associated with a more rapid increase in blood sugar levels.

Generally speaking, diabetes occurs when the body is no longer able to make enough insulin, a hormone that prompts cells in the body to absorb sugar from the blood for energy and storage. Up to now, the possible association between gestational diabetes and eating spuds had not been investigated. To see if there was a link, researchers led by Cuilin Zhang at the National Institutes of Health in Rockville, Maryland used data from the Nurses' Health Study II, which has monitored more than 115,000 women since 1989.

Zhang and colleagues looked at the records for 15,632 women with no history of gestational diabetes or chronic disease who became pregnant between 1991 and 2001. Of 21,693 single-fetus pregnancies, 854 — some four percent—developed gestational diabetes, according to

the study published in the British Medical Journal. The women were asked to report their potato consumption during the year previous to becoming pregnant, rating intake from "never or less than once a month" to "six portions per day".

This data was matched against medical records which showed whether they had developed gestational diabetes. After taking other factors such as age and family history of diabetes into account, the study found a strong link with taters, especially fried and baked. "Higher total potato consumption was significantly associated with an increased risk of gestational diabetes," the researchers concluded. Doctors recommend changes in diet and exercise with the onset of gestational diabetes but in severe cases insulin treatment may be required.

The solution? Eat other vegetables and legumes—a family including beans, peas and lentils—instead of starchy spuds, the authors recommend. Substituting two servings of potatoes a week with other vegetables or whole grain foods yielded an approximately 10 percent reduction in risk, they reported. Despite the statistical evidence, the researchers say that a direct cause-and-effect link between eating potatoes and gestational diabetes "cannot be assumed." But they noted that earlier studies have suggested that spuds can have a detrimental effect on blood sugar levels due to their high starch content. — AFP

RESIDENTS FEAR FOR HEALTH IN CAR-CLOGGED ALBANIAN CAPITAL

TIRANA, Albania: With her sick daughter in the arms, Mira Lela pushes her way through the hallway of the doctor's clinic, crowded with patients ailing from heavy pollution in Albania's capital. "This is an emergency, she has difficulty breathing," said the tearful woman, forcing open the door to the office of Bardhyl Vaqari, who has worked in the specialist Tirana clinic for more than 20 years. "An acute asthma attack," said the doctor on seeing the child. "The number of people with respiratory allergies and cardiovascular problems has greatly increased," he told AFP, adding that the number of patients on the clinic's books has more than doubled to 8,000 in the last four years.

On the noisy and congested streets outside, clapped-out bangers and Hummer trucks cross paths with Mercedes, BMWs and overloaded buses that leave a trail of black smoke and heavy odour. Having been cut off from the world under a strict communist

regime until 1991, the Western Balkan city had just a few hundred cars on its roads in the 1990s. But today, through a mixture of pride, luxury-seeking and necessity, given the lack of public transport, there are more than 190,000 cars circulating in a city of about one million people.

"Albanians take the car even when going to buy bread in a nearby store. That's why the traffic is overloaded all day and this increases pollution levels," said Altin Duka, a despairing 65-year-old shopkeeper. The average age of vehicles on Tirana's roads is around 16 years, twice the European average, according to Gani Cupi, deputy manager of Albania's Road Transport Services. Many of the vehicles do not meet the standards of the European Union, which Albania hopes to join. "The traffic load, the age of vehicles, their technical condition but also the poor quality of fuel are all factors contributing to the capital's pollution," said Cupi.

Taxing dilemmas

In a bid to clean up the air, Albanian authorities considered doubling taxes on ageing vehicles but then dropped such plans. Analysts suggested the cost would weigh too heavily on citizens in one of the poorest countries in Europe. New cars are already exempt from paying annual tax for the first three years, but authorities in 2012 lifted a levy on the import of old vehicles as the EU considered it a "fiscal discrimination".

Tirana's Mayor Erion Veliaj has pledged to battle against the fumes by increasing the number of green spaces, introducing hybrid buses and improving infrastructure in the city, which is crisscrossed by mostly illegal constructions. "The number of vehicles does not stop growing," he told AFP, pointing out that about 500 people die in the city each year "because of respiratory or cardiovascular problems related to pollution". — AFP



TIRANA, Albania: A photo taken on November 12, 2015 shows a panoramic view of Tirana covered in a layer of smog. — AFP

EXPERTS TO STUDY FOOD SAFETY OF OILFIELD WASTEWATER

RANCHO CORDOVA, California: More farmers in drought-stricken California are using oilfield wastewater to irrigate, and a new panel on Tuesday began taking one of the state's deepest looks yet at the safety of using the chemical-laced water on food crops. In the fourth year of California's drought, at least five oilfields in the state are now passing along their leftover production fluid to water districts for irrigation, for recharging underground water supplies, and other uses, experts said. Chevron and the California offshoot of Occidental Petroleum are among the oil companies supplying oil-

field wastewater for irrigating tens of thousands of acres in California. Almond, pistachio and citrus growers are the main farmers already using such water.

California's aging oilfields require intensive drilling methods and generate lots of wastewater. In Central California's San Joaquin Valley, a center of the state's agriculture and oil businesses, oil companies in 2013 produced 150 million barrels of oil - and nearly 2 billion barrels of wastewater. Central California leads the country in food production. It's also the main oil-producing base in California, the country's No. 3 oil-and-gas producing

state. For farmers in California's drought, the question is "where's the water going to come from if you want to maintain agriculture," said Gabriele Ludwig, a representative of Almond Board of California and one of the members of the new panel.

The state officials, academic experts and industry representatives on the panel are charged with studying the safety of irrigating food crops with oilfield wastewater that may contain chemicals and other material from hydraulic fracturing, other intensive drilling methods and oilfield maintenance. The effect of oilfield

chemicals on food is "largely unstudied and unknown," says the nonprofit Pacific Institute, which studies water issues.

Researchers, for example, don't know the long-term toxicity of up to 80 percent of the hundreds of materials used in oilfield production, Pacific Institute researcher Matthew Heberger told panel members. Testing so far has found only negligible amounts of chemicals in the recycled oilfield water, said Clay Rodgers, a manager at the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board, which assembled the panel. At least one local water district also has begun growing

test crops with the oilfield water to study how much of the chemicals wind up in the produce.

As of now, with so many unknowns about the hundreds of chemicals involved and their possible impact on crops, "We're not able to answer the public definitely and say there's no problem," said William Stringfellow, a panel member and environmental engineer at the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory in Berkeley. The regional water board will use the panel's findings to guide its oversight of the recycling of oilfield wastewater, Rodgers said. — AFP



TEXEL, northern Netherlands: In this image released by Ecomare nature museum, seal sanctuary, sea aquarium and a bird sanctuary, five sperm whales that beached on the Dutch island of Texel, northern Netherlands, have died. — AP

5 SPERM WHALES DIE AFTER BEACHING ON DUTCH ISLAND

THE HAGUE, Netherlands: Five sperm whales that beached on a Dutch island have died before anyone could attempt a rescue operation. The whales, ranging in size from around eight to 12 meters

(25-40 feet) were first spotted stranded on a beach on the island of Texel on Tuesday. A museum and wildlife center on the island, Ecomare, says that experts who studied the marine mammals yes-

terday confirmed that all five were dead. It was not clear why the whales beached themselves on the island 100 kilometers (60 miles) north of Amsterdam. Texel is one of a string of islands in the shallow

Wadden Sea off the Dutch coast. In 2012, a 12-meter humpback whale got stuck on a sandbank near the coastal town of Den Helder, close to Texel, and died despite efforts to save the animal. — AP

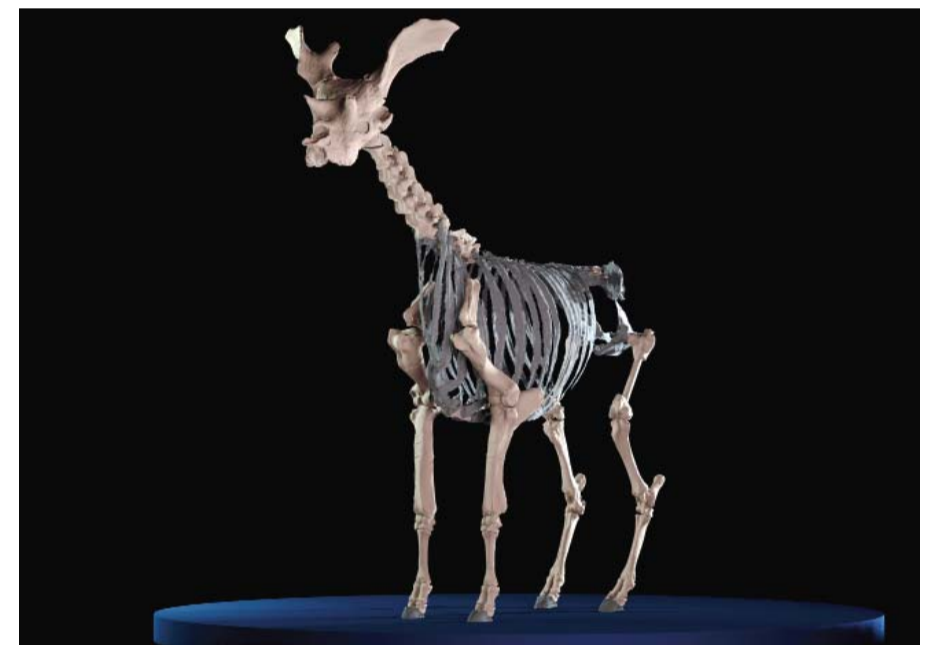
ANCIENT GIRAFFE RELATIVE HAD THICK LEGS, CURLY HORNS

PARIS: An ancient relative of the giraffe was a huge, heavy animal with thick legs, a flat face and massive, curly horns flaring out from its skull, said a study yesterday. Dubbed *Sivatherium giganteum*, the impressive creature would have been shorter than today's giraffe, with a less elongated neck, a trio of British scientists wrote in the Royal Society journal *Biology Letters*. Using bones dug up in India in the 1830s and now in London's Natural History Museum, the team built a computerized 3D reconstruction of an animal they said would have stood about 1.8 meters (5.9 feet) tall at the shoulder and weighed about 1.2 tons.

"This was a heavy animal with thick legs," co-author Christopher Basu told AFP by email. Added to the large, flattened horns or "ossicones" on the top of the skull, each about 70 centimeters (28 inches) long, it also had two smaller, pointy horns just over

the eyes. "It would have been an impressive and strong animal," said Basu. "It's face would have looked very different from a giraffe. Giraffe's have very long, pointed skulls. *Sivatherium* had a very short, flattened skull." It lived somewhere between the last five million and 12,000 years ago. Related to the giraffe and its cousin the okapi, *Sivatherium* was possibly the largest ruminant animal-those with multi-compartmented stomachs-to ever have lived.

The first scientists to study *Sivatherium* bones misclassified the animal as an archaic link between modern ruminants and a long-extinct relative of elephants and rhinoceroses. For the new study, the skeleton was reconstructed using 26 fossil bones from three individual animals. The ribs, back and pelvis are missing. "We estimated what these might look like from giraffe and okapi anatomy-the two living relatives," said Basu. — AFP



PARIS: This handout image from the Royal Veterinary College shows the reconstruction of a skeleton of an extinct giraffe-like animal, assumed to be the biggest ruminant mammal ever to have lived. — AFP

EUROPEANS URGE EMPLOYERS TO EASE MENOPAUSE FOR WOMEN

PARIS: As more women remain in the workforce through their menopausal years, many employers may need to do a better job of adopting policies that help ensure working conditions don't make women's symptoms worse, recent European guidelines urge. Employers need to be sensitive to shifts in physical and mental health that women may experience during menopause, according to recommendations from the European Menopause and Andropause Society (EMAS) recently published in *Maturitas*.

Symptoms like hot flashes, for example, may require cooler workplace temperatures, while

symptoms like insomnia may require flexible schedules or efforts to reduce job-related stress. "Very few employers are talking about menopause in relation to their occupational health and safety policies and procedures, and how they might best support women, and those who manage them, with transitioning through menopause," said Gavin Jack of Monash University in Australia, lead author of a separate research review of workplace policies published in *Maturitas*.

Women go through menopause when they stop menstruating, typically between ages 45 and 55. As the ovaries curb production of the hor-

mones estrogen and progesterone in the years leading up to menopause and beyond, women can experience symptoms ranging from irregular periods and vaginal dryness to mood swings and insomnia. For working women, menopause can also negatively impact job performance because it can impair concentration and memory. Many women are unable or unwilling to request accommodations that might make work easier, Jack and colleagues note in their review.

At the same time, women who are overworked or stressed on the job may experience worse menopause symptoms, the researchers note. High

temperatures, poor ventilation, confined spaces, excessive crowding, and insufficient spaces for rest or bathroom breaks can all contribute to an environment that causes problems for menopausal women, the researchers also note.

While more studies are still needed to determine what specific interventions or policies in the workplace might make remaining on the job easiest for women during menopause, employers in the meantime should move forward with creating a culture that makes women feel comfortable disclosing symptoms or requesting accommodations, the researchers conclude.

Sympathetic manner

In a *Maturitas* article outlining the EMAS recommendations, Amanda Griffiths of the University of Nottingham Innovation Park in the UK and colleagues note that managers might need training in how to support menopausal women and deal with any symptoms in a sympathetic manner. Among other things, employers can provide desk fans, air conditioning and cold drinking water when women have hot flashes, for example, or offer flexible work schedules for women with insomnia and take steps to reduce stress that can exacerbate symptoms, the recommendations also suggest. — Reuters

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A group photo of the participants in the Decision-Making Strategies Under Risk and Uncertainty follow-on session.



Participants at the event.

KFAS HOLDS WORKSHOP ON DECISION-MAKING STRATEGIES



Prof Kessely Hong, lecturer on Public Policy at John F Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and the faculty chair of KFAS customized program at Harvard Kennedy School Executive Education.

The Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) held a follow on workshop in collaboration with Harvard University attended by twenty private sector executives who had participated in the main workshop that was held last May in Boston.

The workshop on decision-making strategies held at the Regency Hotel, was followed by a dinner to honor the seventy 2015 Distinguished Executives who participated in KFAS collaborative programs with Harvard Executive programs during the past year. KFAS Director-General, Dr Adnan Shihab-Eldin, said during the dinner that the Kuwait Program in Harvard Kennedy School Executive Education holds several annual activities that serve private sector executives and researchers at aca-

democratic institutions in Kuwait.

The workshop entitled "Decision-Making Strategies Under Risk and Uncertainty" was chosen to enhance the skills of the private sector in managing risks through a framework that is applicable in all their fields of work, he said. The workshop examined a number of subjects most important of which are multi-party negotiations, innovative leadership and methods of acquiring the right information to make effective executive decisions, he added.

The workshop, held for the first time in Kuwait in collaboration with the Kennedy School, is the follow-on session to the 14th workshop held by KFAS. It is part of a series of executive training workshops in partnership with Harvard, a collaboration that has started 15 years ago. The overall number of partici-

pants since the launch of this international program is 515 participants from both the private and public sectors.

Dr Shihab-Eldin explained that the distinctive partnership between the Foundation and Harvard comprises several activities most important of which is the executive workshop program tailored for senior business executives in Kuwait. Through this program, senior executives are blindly selected on the basis of competitive merit to allow them the chance to diversify their abilities and enhance their potentials and to establish a sustainable foundation for knowledge transfer amongst this network of executives.

The Director-General concluded that the Foundation was keen on establishing the "Office of International Programs", which han-

dles cooperation with internationally renowned institutions and universities. The office aims to facilitate knowledge and technology transfer and introduce best practice in science, public policy, and business management from the developed world to Kuwait and the Gulf region. The office also acts as a venue to solidify cultural and scientific cooperation between Kuwaiti scientists and graduate students and their counterparts in these prestigious institutions in order to enhance development in Kuwait, its region and the world.

The workshop comprises various lectures delivered by Prof Kessely Hong, lecturer on Public Policy at John F Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and the faculty chair of KFAS customized program at Harvard Kennedy School Executive Education.



LULU HYPERMARKET HIGHLIGHTS THE BEST OF AUSTRALIAN FOOD

Lulu Hypermarket, the leading retailer in the region and popular for their exciting promotions, launched 'Australian Fest 2016' on 13 January, in honor of Australia Day which is celebrated on 26 January. The promotion, which is running from 13 - 23 January at all Lulu outlets in Kuwait, is showcasing branded Australian food products at very attractive prices. A range of imported Australian products from a wide spectrum of food categories await patrons at Lulu hypermarket outlets, introducing new additions to the hypermarket's regular offerings.

The promotion highlights several Australian food brands that are well-known for providing quality products, including brands such as Australia's Own, So Natural, Organics and Pure Harvest that are known for their ethical and amazing organic and natural products for the diet

and health conscious consumers. Other brands featured in the Australian Fest 2016 include Bertolli, Carmans, Admiral, Always Fresh, Real Foods, Diegos, Old L Paso, Chicken Tonight, Goldyna, Sanitarium, Freedom Foods and Slendier.

The promotion includes various items in the groceries, chilled and dairy, delicatessen, fruits and vegetables, and meat sections. Presenting the best-of-the-best Australian products, shoppers at the Australian Fest 2016 have the unique opportunity to access flavorful foods that impart a distinctive taste to Australian cuisine.

Lulu Hypermarket, which prides itself on providing customers a value-driven shopping experience, has built an enviable customer base in the country through their commitment to delivering high-quality products at competitive prices, while ensuring the utmost customer satisfaction.

AGILITY ROLLS OUT CHEMICAL SAFETY INITIATIVE FOR SCHOOLS

Agility, a leading global logistics provider, recently conducted a series of educational workshops on chemical safety for 208 students from Qurain Public Middle School, Learners Own Academy, and Carmel School.

Ten Agility employees volunteered to conduct the interactive workshops with the schools over a period of five weeks at Agility's headquarters in Sulaibiya. These workshops were based on training put together by Agility's Chemicals specialty. Each year, thousands of children around the world are accidentally exposed to chemicals that can lead to illness, injury or in some cases even death. Through the chemical safety workshops, Agility aims to reduce the risk of accidental exposure to home chemicals among children.

Siham Nuseibeh, Manager, Corporate Social Responsibility for Agility said: "This is the first time that Agility is bringing such a unique training program to middle and high schools in Kuwait. Agility is a specialist in chemical logistics and we wanted to use our knowledge of chemicals, and in particular hazardous materials, to build awareness among children in Kuwait. By driving such initiatives that grow awareness, we aim to educate young people about the common usage of chemicals and the dangers associated with them in the home."

This community initiative was conducted to support Agility's annual Global Education Drive that aims to support the education of children around the world irrespective of social opportunity. This includes fundraising drives to collect school equipment for less privileged children,



providing these kids opportunities for education, as well as building knowledge among others that are more fortunate.

A part of Agility's Corporate Social Responsibility program, the annual Global

Education Drive forms one of many community volunteer programs that the company runs. Since 2006, Agility has completed over 1,150 community projects in over 80 countries around the world.

CAREER COUNSELING OFFERED AT INDIA EDUCATION EXHIBITION

The ninth edition of India Education Exhibition, which will be held on 15 and 16 January at Ramada Kuwait Hotel in Al Rigga area, is a one-stop information event on the various professional and vocational courses that students in Kuwait can pursue in reputed institutions of



higher learning in India.

The two-day event, which will be open from 11am to 8pm on both days, will provide students and their parents with the unique opportunity to interact directly with faculty members and administrators of some of the top universities in India. This direct contact will help students get the latest updated information on fee structure, eligibility criteria and courses in high-demand at the participating educational

institutions.

Another special feature of the India Education Exhibition 2016, is the participation of independent career counselors who will be holding specialized seminars and one-on-one sessions with interested students and their parents. Among the counselors present during the two-day exhibition will be Sreevidhya Santosh, a leading Indian career counselor, with a proven track-record in team and confidence building.

Ms Sreevidhya has been helping tens of thousands of students to recognize and realize their potential. An innovative and result driven leader, she focuses on providing students with the tools to achieve exceptional results in highly competitive environments that demand continuous improvement.

She has shared her experience as a counselor, motivator and career guide with students at schools across India and the UAE. During the education exhibition in Kuwait, Sreevidhya will be available to help students make better informed education and career choices following their graduation. She will be conducting a series of free seminar on 'Career Planning' on 15 January and individualized sessions on 16 January. Students and their parents, who wish to attend the seminars, while visiting the India Education Exhibition 2016 can register by calling 96969188.



—Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

FATWA & LEGISLATION LAUNCHES LEGAL E-LIBRARY

The Fatwa and Legislation department experimentally launched its Legal Cultural center's e-library last Monday with the aim of facilitating researchers' access to legal information. Speaking at a press conference held for the occasion, the head of the department's technical committee for development, chancellor Fuad Al-Majed said this projects comes within the department's development plan that eventually rhymes with the state's general development one. 'This library and the law books and references it contains are of high value to lawmen and helps them cope with the technological revolution', he stressed.



MARINA HOTEL HOLDS ITS ANNUAL STAFF PARTY

Marina Hotel Kuwait recently held its annual staff party at Salwa Sabah Al Ahmed Theater and Hall. The gathering gave everyone the opportunity to celebrate the success and achievements of 2015 and to welcome the New Year along with the challenges that it will bring.

Nabil Hammoud, General Manager, thanked all the management and employees for their great efforts and dedication throughout 2015 emphasizing the importance of team work to provide excellent service which leads to great results. He also encouraged the staff to aim higher and work better through constant com-

mitment always striving for excellence. The evening was made special by distributing awards in various categories for Employee of the year, Supervisor of the year, long service award, employee of the month, and the best supervisor of the last quarter of 2015. Additional rewards were also distributed during the evening which

included star of the night, best performer and Mr & Ms Marina 2015 who were selected by employees based on professionalism, teamwork and peer relationship. The event included exciting activities and a variety of enjoyable entertaining competitions were many gifts were distributed to participating employees and attendees.

SULTAN TELECOM PARTICIPATES IN THE GULF DEFENSE AND AEROSPACE EXHIBITION

The Gulf Defense and Aerospace (GDA) Exhibition's third edition was opened under the patronage of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and in the presence of HE Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Khalid Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah on the 8th of December 2015. Also present were several delegations of governmental and private companies from various Arab and foreign countries. This exhibition holds a special position as it is one of the largest specialized military exhibitions in Kuwait and the region and it comes under the auspices of the Ministry of Defense. The exhibitors consisted of a large number of major international companies specialized in military and defense technologies and solutions.

The participants in the exhibition - held from 8th to 10th December at the International Fairgrounds-demonstrated a variety of military hardware varying from various sectors; maritime, land and air; including tanks, missile systems, military aircrafts and multipurpose helicopters; offensive and defensive; and for training and simulation programs. Also the latest technological systems were introduced in the field of radar, air and missile defense.

Sultan Telecom, along with its part-

ner OPTOKON, participated in the exhibition with equipment dedicated for the internal military communications. OPTOKON is a leading global



organization providing connectivity and infrastructure solutions for organizations of all sizes. OPTOKON, an ISO 9001:2008 approved company, provides complete networking solutions unrivalled within the industry today. OPTOKON was founded in 1991 with its headquarters in Jihlava in the Czech Republic.

Sultan Telecom, as one of the pioneering companies in the field of communications and communications infrastructure, has made a detailed presentation on modern

devices specialized in the field of communications, fiber-optic cables, processing and infrastructure installation for communications networks.

These communications network cables and components are characterized to operate under a very tight security system that counters piracy and espionage, where any attempt to hack the network is automatically detected and the system's related signals pinpoints espionage attempts.

The fiber optic cable utilizes sensors and sends signals and alerts to a monitoring system if there is any motion around the cable. The motion could be due to life forms like animals or humans, or it could be non-life forms like vehicles. The system monitor gives details on the shape and weight of the body based on its natural thermal image.

At the exhibition, Chairman and Group Managing Director of The Sultan Center Ayman Sultan said: "Our Company's participation in the Gulf exhibition of defense and aviation is a strategic step for our company to serve a vital sector of this region. Our participation in such exhibitions will increase our experiences and information of the company. Sultan Telecom, since its inception, has been one of the first companies that has contributed to the develop-



ment and construction of the infrastructure for the State of Kuwait. We have participated in the development projects for most ministries and we supply the latest technology in the field of telecommunications and information technology." In his turn, Mamoun Swiss CEO Sultan Telecom spoke about the important role that the company

plays in the State of Kuwait, saying: "Sultan Telecom intends to diversify and expand its business in Kuwait and the region, and participating in this exhibition is one of the basic steps to diversify our activities."

Sultan Telecom is one of the major companies in Kuwait in the field of internal and external communications and has been a major contributor to

many of the large projects in the State of Kuwait and abroad. Sultan Telecom along with its subsidiaries, ArabianITS, ATCO and Horizon Telecom offers its services in Bahrain as well. ArabianITS focuses on providing Network Security Solutions to the Banking and Financial Sectors in Kuwait whereas ATCO focuses on providing low-voltage solutions.

OSN SIGNS LONG-TERM EXCLUSIVE DEAL WITH NBC UNIVERSAL INTERNATIONAL

OSN, the leading pay-TV network in the Middle East and North Africa, has signed a new and extended long-term deal with NBC Universal International (NBCUI), a subsidiary of Comcast Corporation, with a valuable portfolio of television series, films, news and entertainment networks.

The long-term deal takes OSN to the next level in home entertainment with first and exclusive access to compelling content from NBCUI and also consolidates OSN's industry position, adding to its growing portfolio of new channels and unbeatable content partnerships.

The deal secures first pay window rights for OSN, in addition to exclusive over-the-top (OTT) content access on OSN Play, the award-winning digital platform that is free to subscribers, and GO, the fast-growing non-subscriber based online TV service.

OSN will now also have exclusive rights to the popular channel, E! Entertainment Television, in Arabic, providing subscribers with unprecedented access to the sought-after world of pop culture. E!'s focus on localized entertainment programming in Arabic will bring news, views and all the celebrity buzz of regional stars - only on E! News. Further, E! will have dedicated primetime programming that is dubbed or subtitled in Arabic.

Additionally, subscribers will have access to a world of science fiction entertainment as OSN secures exclusive rights to Syfy in Arabic, from mid-2016. The launch of the channel will bring Syfy's year-round roster of acclaimed original series, original movies, classic science fiction and fantasy programming to OSN subscriber, with

almost 80 percent of the content in Arabic - either with subtitles or dubbed.

David Butorac, Chief Executive Officer of OSN, said: "The pay-TV industry will be led by those who own the most compelling content, and OSN is dominating the space of original and exclusive

presence in the market but also reflects our commitment to delivering sought-after content first and exclusively to our viewers. We do not operate as just content carriers; we also work with our partners to ensure that we can customize their content for the local market. That is why we will

be focusing on localization and bringing amazing Arabic content - through E! and Syfy." The new agreement also extends OSN's carriage agreement for CNBC.

Belinda Menendez, President, NBC Universal International Distribution & Networks, commented: "We are delighted to expand our pres-

ence in the Middle East and Northern Africa via a long-term agreement with OSN that, for subscribers, boasts new programming localized in Arabic, along with the launch of Syfy and also ensures that OSN's subscribers will continue to enjoy the programming on CNBC and our criti-

cally acclaimed TV series and films." Leading the worldwide box office in 2015 with blockbuster hits such as Minions, Furious 7 and Jurassic World, NBC Universal's momentum continues with stellar upcoming theatrical releases including Ride Along 2, Untitled Next Bourne Chapter, The Huntsman Winter's War

The NBCU portfolio also includes late-night talk shows such as the award-winning The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon and Late Night with Seth Meyers; top news shows including the Today Show; and one of longest running shows on television, Meet the Press, plus many more.



programming through our long-term channel and content partnerships such as with NBC Universal International, which truly opens a universe of unmatched content available now only for OSN subscribers.

He added: "Our partnership with NBC Universal International not only consolidates our

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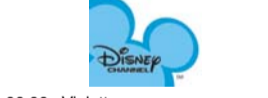
- 00:20 Fast N' Loud
- 01:10 Mythbusters
- 02:00 The Carbonaro Effect
- 02:50 You Have Been Warned
- 03:40 Auction Hunters
- 04:05 The Liquidator
- 04:30 Storage Wars Canada
- 05:00 What Happened Next?
- 05:30 How Machines Work
- 06:00 Ice Cold Gold
- 06:50 Wheeler Dealers
- 07:40 Fast N' Loud
- 08:30 Auction Hunters
- 08:55 The Liquidator
- 09:20 Storage Wars Canada
- 09:45 What Happened Next?
- 10:10 How Machines Work
- 10:35 Mythbusters
- 11:25 The Carbonaro Effect
- 11:50 The Carbonaro Effect
- 12:15 You Have Been Warned
- 13:05 Storage Hunters UK
- 13:30 The Liquidator
- 13:55 Storage Wars Canada
- 14:20 Yukon Men
- 15:10 Wheeler Dealers
- 16:00 Misfit Garage
- 16:50 What Happened Next?
- 17:15 How Machines Work
- 17:40 Predators Up Close With Joel Lambert
- 18:30 Deadly Islands
- 19:20 Manhunt With Joel Lambert
- 20:10 The Liquidator
- 20:35 Storage Wars Canada
- 21:00 What On Earth?
- 21:50 Deadly Islands
- 22:40 Treasure Quest: Snake Island
- 23:30 Wheeler Dealers



- 00:35 Mythbusters
- 01:20 How It's Made
- 01:44 How It's Made
- 02:08 Strip The Cosmos
- 02:55 What Could Possibly Go Wrong?
- 03:42 How The Universe Works
- 04:29 Mythbusters
- 05:16 Strip The Cosmos
- 06:03 What Could Possibly Go Wrong?
- 06:50 Mega Builders
- 07:37 How Do They Do It?
- 08:00 How Do They Do It?
- 08:23 Mythbusters
- 09:08 How The Universe Works
- 09:53 Mega Builders
- 10:38 How It's Made
- 11:00 How It's Made
- 11:23 Food Factory
- 11:45 Food Factory
- 12:08 What Could Possibly Go Wrong?
- 12:53 Mega Builders
- 13:38 Mythbusters
- 14:23 How It's Made
- 14:46 How It's Made
- 15:10 How The Universe Works
- 15:57 Food Factory
- 16:20 Food Factory
- 16:44 What Could Possibly Go Wrong?
- 17:31 Mega Builders
- 18:18 How The Universe Works
- 19:05 Mythbusters
- 19:50 How The Universe Works
- 20:40 What Could Possibly Go Wrong?
- 21:25 How It's Made
- 21:50 How It's Made
- 22:15 How The Universe Works
- 23:00 How The Universe Works
- 23:45 What Could Possibly Go Wrong?



- 00:40 Who On Earth Did I Marry?
- 01:30 The Haunted
- 02:20 Ghost Lab
- 03:00 Scorned: Crimes Of Passion
- 04:00 Deadline: Crime With Tamron Hall
- 04:45 Who On Earth Did I Marry?
- 05:30 The Haunted
- 06:20 Deadly Affairs
- 07:10 True Crime With Aphrodite Jones
- 08:00 Dr. G: Medical Examiner
- 08:50 On The Case With Paula Zahn
- 09:40 Fatal Encounters
- 10:30 Murder Shift
- 11:20 Deadly Affairs
- 12:10 True Crime With Aphrodite Jones
- 13:00 The Will
- 13:50 I Almost Got Away With It
- 14:40 California Investigator
- 15:05 Dr. G: Medical Examiner
- 15:55 Fatal Encounters
- 16:45 On The Case With Paula Zahn
- 17:35 Murder Shift
- 18:25 I Almost Got Away With It
- 19:15 The Will
- 20:05 Deadly Affairs
- 20:55 True Crime With Aphrodite Jones
- 21:45 California Investigator
- 22:10 Who On Earth Did I Marry?
- 23:00 Deadly Affairs



- 00:00 Violetta
- 00:45 The Hive
- 00:50 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
- 01:15 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
- 01:40 Wolfblood
- 02:30 Violetta
- 03:15 The Hive
- 03:20 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
- 03:45 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
- 04:10 Wolfblood
- 05:00 Violetta
- 05:45 The Hive
- 05:50 Mouk
- 06:00 Lolirock
- 06:25 Hank Zipzer
- 06:50 Girl Meets World
- 07:15 H2O: Just Add Water
- 08:05 Austin & Ally
- 08:30 Austin & Ally
- 08:55 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
- 09:20 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
- 09:45 Jessie
- 10:10 Jessie
- 10:35 Geek Charming
- 12:10 Descendants Wicked World
- 12:15 Disney Mickey Mouse
- 12:20 Hank Zipzer
- 12:45 I Didn't Do It
- 13:10 I Didn't Do It
- 13:35 Liv And Maddie
- 14:00 Liv And Maddie
- 14:25 Disney Mickey Mouse
- 14:30 H2O
- 14:55 Jessie
- 15:20 Jessie
- 16:10 Violetta

- 17:00 The Next Step
- 17:25 Liv And Maddie
- 17:50 Jessie
- 18:15 Austin & Ally
- 18:40 I Didn't Do It
- 19:05 Best Friends Whenever
- 19:30 Violetta
- 20:20 The Next Step
- 20:45 Good Luck Charlie
- 21:35 Wizards Of Waverly Place
- 22:00 Binny And The Ghost
- 22:25 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
- 22:50 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
- 23:10 Wolfblood
- 23:35 Wolfblood



- 00:00 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
- 00:55 The Grace Helbig Show
- 01:25 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
- 02:20 E! News
- 03:15 #RichKids Of Beverly Hills
- 04:10 The E! True Hollywood Story
- 05:05 E! Entertainment Special
- 06:00 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
- 06:55 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
- 07:50 Style Star
- 08:20 E! News
- 09:15 Giuliana & Bill
- 11:10 #RichKids Of Beverly Hills
- 12:05 E! News
- 13:05 WAGs
- 14:05 New Money
- 15:00 Kourtney And Khloe Take The Hamptons
- 16:00 Kourtney And Khloe Take The Hamptons
- 17:00 Fashion Bloggers
- 18:00 E! News
- 19:00 House Of DVF
- 20:00 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
- 21:00 Dash Dolls
- 22:00 E! News
- 23:00 The Soup
- 23:30 Sex With Brody



- 00:00 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
- 01:00 Chopped
- 02:00 All Star Academy
- 03:00 Man Fire Food
- 04:00 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
- 05:00 Guy's Grocery Games
- 06:00 Chopped
- 07:00 Man Fire Food
- 08:00 Chopped
- 09:00 Guy's Grocery Games
- 10:00 The Kitchen
- 11:00 Barefoot Contessa: Back To Basics
- 12:00 Chopped
- 13:00 Guy's Big Bite
- 14:00 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
- 15:00 Man Fire Food
- 16:00 Chopped
- 17:00 The Kitchen
- 18:00 Siba's Table
- 18:30 Grandma's Secret Cookbook
- 19:00 Chopped
- 20:00 Guy's Grocery Games
- 21:00 Rev Run's Sunday Suppers
- 22:00 Dinner At Tiffani's
- 23:00 Reza, Spice Prince Of Thailand



- 00:10 Pick Me!
- 01:05 Emmerdale
- 01:30 Coach Trip
- 02:00 Coronation Street
- 02:30 Murdoch Mysteries
- 03:25 The Syndicate
- 04:20 Safe House
- 05:15 The Chase
- 06:10 Paddock To Plate
- 07:05 Coach Trip
- 07:30 The Syndicate
- 08:25 Safe House
- 09:20 Murdoch Mysteries
- 10:15 The Chase
- 11:10 Coach Trip
- 11:35 Pick Me!
- 12:30 Paddock To Plate
- 13:25 Emmerdale
- 13:50 Coach Trip
- 14:20 Coronation Street
- 14:45 Murdoch Mysteries
- 15:35 Pick Me!
- 16:30 Midsomer Murders
- 18:20 Paddock To Plate
- 19:10 Coronation Street
- 19:35 Pick Me!
- 20:30 Midsomer Murders
- 22:20 Coronation Street
- 22:50 Emmerdale
- 23:15 Paddock To Plate



- 00:00 Grace: The Possession-18
- 02:00 Snitch-PG15
- 04:00 Turbulence-PG15
- 06:00 Born To Race: Fast Track
- 08:00 The Assault-PG15
- 10:00 Snitch-PG15
- 12:00 Assassin's Bullet-PG15



- 00:30 Cristela
- 01:00 The Nightly Show With Larry Wilmore
- 02:30 The Big C
- 04:00 Men At Work
- 04:30 The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon
- 05:30 Young & Hungry
- 06:00 Til Death
- 06:30 New Girl
- 07:00 Late Night With Seth Meyers
- 08:00 Men At Work
- 08:30 Young & Hungry
- 10:30 New Girl
- 11:00 The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon
- 12:00 Til Death
- 12:30 Men At Work
- 13:00 Young & Hungry
- 13:30 New Girl
- 15:30 Cristela
- 16:00 The Nightly Show With Larry Wilmore
- 16:30 Til Death
- 17:00 Late Night With Seth Meyers
- 18:00 Last Man Standing
- 18:30 Benched
- 19:30 Baby Daddy
- 20:00 The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon
- 21:00 Cristela
- 21:30 The Nightly Show With Larry Wilmore
- 22:00 Web Therapy
- 22:30 Girls
- 23:00 The Big C
- 23:30 Late Night With Seth Meyers



- 00:00 Salem
- 01:00 Marvel's Agents Of S.H.I.E.L.D.
- 02:00 The Flash
- 03:00 American Horror Story: Hotel
- 04:00 The Fosters
- 05:00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show
- 06:00 Covert Affairs
- 07:00 Switched At Birth
- 08:00 Odyssey
- 09:00 The Fosters
- 10:00 Covert Affairs
- 11:00 Switched At Birth
- 12:00 Coronation Street
- 13:00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show
- 14:00 Odyssey
- 15:00 Live Good Morning America
- 17:00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show
- 18:00 Odyssey
- 19:00 American Idol
- 20:00 The Flash
- 21:00 Blindspot
- 22:00 Empire
- 23:00 Secrets And Lies



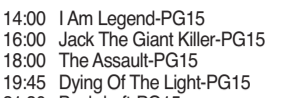
- 00:00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show
- 01:00 Good Morning America
- 03:00 Downton Abbey
- 04:00 Grimm
- 05:00 Good Morning America
- 07:00 Coronation Street
- 08:00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show
- 09:00 Supernatural
- 10:00 Coronation Street
- 11:00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show
- 12:00 C.S.I.
- 13:00 Shark Tank
- 14:00 Supernatural
- 15:00 Franklin & Bash
- 16:00 The Voice
- 18:00 Shark Tank
- 19:00 Supernatural
- 20:00 C.S.I.
- 21:00 Shark Tank
- 22:00 Downton Abbey
- 23:00 Grimm



- 00:00 22 Bullets
- 02:00 Grace: The Possession
- 04:00 Snitch
- 06:00 Turbulence
- 08:00 Born To Race: Fast Track
- 10:00 The Assault
- 12:00 Snitch
- 14:00 Assassin's Bullet
- 16:00 I Am Legend
- 18:00 Jack The Giant Killer
- 20:00 The Assault
- 21:45 Dying Of The Light
- 23:30 Backdraft



- 00:00 Grace: The Possession-18
- 02:00 Snitch-PG15
- 04:00 Turbulence-PG15
- 06:00 Born To Race: Fast Track
- 08:00 The Assault-PG15
- 10:00 Snitch-PG15
- 12:00 Assassin's Bullet-PG15



- 00:00 Pretty Woman
- 02:00 Walk Of Shame
- 04:00 The Nutty Professor (1996)
- 06:00 Chef
- 08:00 A Simple Twist Of Fate
- 10:00 The Nutty Professor (1996)
- 12:00 Almost Christmas
- 14:00 Until She Came Along
- 16:00 A Simple Twist Of Fate
- 18:00 Rush Hour
- 20:00 Multiplicity
- 22:00 We're The Millers



- 01:00 One Last Look-PG15
- 03:00 Deadfall-PG15
- 05:00 Breathless-PG15
- 07:00 Return To Nim's Island-PG
- 09:00 Two Men In Town-PG15
- 11:00 Breathless-PG15
- 12:45 For Greater Glory-PG15
- 15:15 A Promise-PG15
- 17:00 Two Men In Town-PG15
- 19:00 Every Day-PG15
- 21:00 Goodbye World-PG15
- 23:00 Jamesy Boy-18



- 01:00 The Factory
- 03:00 71
- 05:00 Diana
- 07:00 Grand Central
- 08:45 Julie And Julia
- 11:00 Diana
- 13:00 Escobar: Paradise Lost
- 15:00 Serial (Bad) Weddings
- 16:45 Julie And Julia
- 19:00 Waitress
- 21:00 White Bird In A Blizzard
- 22:45 Her



- 01:15 Rage-PG15
- 03:00 The Theory Of Everything
- 05:15 A Gift Of Miracles-PG15
- 07:00 Tarzan-PG
- 09:00 Transcendence-PG15
- 11:00 The Theory Of Everything-PG15
- 13:15 Non-Stop-PG15
- 15:00 The Intruders-PG15
- 16:45 Transcendence-PG15
- 18:45 Dawn Of The Planet Of The Apes-PG15
- 21:00 Annabelle-PG15
- 23:00 Stretch-18



- 01:00 Worms
- 02:45 The Unbeatables
- 04:30 The Elf Who Stole Christmas
- 06:00 Jungle Book: Mowgli's Adventure
- 07:45 Hatching
- 09:45 Miffy The Movie
- 11:15 Mamma Moo And Crow
- 12:45 The Unbeatables
- 14:30 Hatching
- 16:00 Jingle All The Way 2
- 18:00 Miffy The Movie
- 20:00 The Three Dogateers
- 22:00 Marvel's Planet Hulk
- 23:30 Jingle All The Way 2



- 00:00 500 mph Storm-PG15
- 02:00 Good Deeds-PG15
- 04:00 Mr. Peabody & Sherman
- 06:00 Heaven's Door-PG
- 08:00 Tactical Force-PG15
- 10:00 For Better Or For Worse Taken 3-PG15
- 12:00 Tactical Force-PG15
- 14:00 Escape From Planet Earth
- 16:00 Tactical Force-PG15
- 18:00 Maleficent-PG
- 20:00 Good People-PG15
- 22:00 About Last Night-18



- 03:45 Thunderbirds Are Go
- 05:20 Charge Of The Light Brigade
- 07:25 Cannon For Cordoba
- 09:10 Island Of The Lost



ASSASSIN'S BULLET ON OSN MOVIES ACTION HD

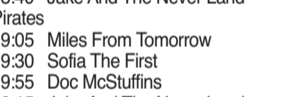
- 10:40 Duplex
- 12:10 Hair
- 14:10 Clifford
- 15:40 Mannequin
- 17:10 Waking Up In Reno
- 18:45 Seven Years In Tibet
- 21:00 Breaking Bad
- 22:00 The Heavenly Kid
- 23:30 Desperately Seeking Susan
- 01:15 The Haunted Palace
- 02:40 The Watsons Go To Birmingham



- 03:05 Calimero
- 03:20 Zou
- 03:30 Loopdidoo
- 03:45 Art Attack
- 04:10 Henry Hugglemonster
- 04:20 Calimero
- 04:35 Zou
- 04:45 Loopdidoo
- 05:00 Art Attack
- 05:25 Henry Hugglemonster
- 05:35 Calimero
- 05:50 Zou
- 06:00 Loopdidoo
- 06:15 Art Attack
- 06:35 Henry Hugglemonster
- 06:50 Calimero
- 07:00 Zou
- 07:20 Loopdidoo
- 07:35 Art Attack
- 08:00 Calimero
- 08:10 Zou
- 08:25 Loopdidoo
- 08:40 Jake And The Never Land Pirates
- 09:05 Sofia The First
- 09:30 Miles From Tomorrow
- 10:05 Mickey Mouse Clubhouse
- 10:35 Doc McStuffins
- 11:00 Sofia The First
- 11:30 Jake And The Never Land Pirates
- 12:00 Miles From Tomorrow
- 12:25 Special Agent Oso
- 12:40 The Hive
- 12:50 Handy Manny
- 13:15 Jungle Junction
- 13:30 Mickey Mouse Clubhouse
- 14:00 Sofia The First
- 14:25 Sofia The First

- 14:50 Miles From Tomorrow
- 15:15 Jake And The Never Land Pirates
- 15:40 Jake And The Never Land Pirates
- 16:05 The Adventures Of The Disney...
- 16:35 Miles From Tomorrow
- 17:00 Sofia The First
- 17:25 Aladdin
- 17:50 Gummi Bears
- 18:15 Chip 'n' Dale's Rescue Rangers
- 18:40 Jake And The Never Land Pirates
- 19:05 Miles From Tomorrow
- 19:30 Sofia The First
- 19:55 Doc McStuffins
- 20:15 Jake And The Never Land Pirates
- 20:45 Sheriff Callie's Wild West
- 21:05 Mickey Mouse Clubhouse
- 21:35 Sofia The First
- 22:00 Lilo And Stitch
- 23:20 Lilo And Stitch
- 23:45 Cars Toons
- 23:50 Zou
- 00:05 Henry Hugglemonster
- 00:20 Calimero
- 00:35 Zou
- 00:50 Loopdidoo
- 01:05 Art Attack
- 01:30 Henry Hugglemonster
- 01:45 Calimero
- 02:00 Zou
- 02:15 Loopdidoo
- 02:30 Art Attack
- 02:55 Henry Hugglemonster

- 07:50 Supa Strikas
- 08:15 Lab Rats
- 08:40 K. C. Undercover
- 09:10 Star vs The Forces Of Evil
- 09:35 Kirby Buckets
- 10:00 Lab Rats
- 10:25 Kickin' It
- 10:50 Mighty Med
- 11:20 Supa Strikas
- 11:45 K. C. Undercover
- 12:10 Penn Zero: Part Time Hero
- 12:35 Annedroids
- 13:00 Jump In
- 14:25 Guardians Of The Galaxy
- 14:30 Phineas And Ferb
- 14:45 Phineas And Ferb
- 15:10 Disney Mickey Mouse
- 15:15 Rocket Monkeys
- 15:40 Penn Zero: Part Time Hero
- 16:05 Star vs The Forces Of Evil
- 16:30 Kirby Buckets
- 16:55 Gamers Guide To Pretty Much Everything
- 17:25 K. C. Undercover
- 17:50 Supa Strikas
- 18:15 Lab Rats
- 18:40 Mighty Med
- 19:10 Annedroids
- 19:35 Kickin' It
- 20:00 K. C. Undercover
- 20:25 Supa Strikas
- 20:55 Lab Rats
- 21:20 Gamers Guide To Pretty Much Everything
- 21:45 Kickin' It
- 22:10 Phineas And Ferb
- 22:40 Super Matrak
- 23:05 Super Matrak
- 23:30 Boyster
- 00:00 Programmes Start At 7.00am KSA



- 03:00 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
- 03:24 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
- 03:48 Henry Danger
- 04:12 Nicky, Ricky, Dicky & Dawn
- 04:36 The Haunted Hathaways
- 05:00 Winx Club
- 05:24 Sanjay And Craig
- 05:48 Sanjay And Craig
- 06:12 SpongeBob SquarePants
- 06:36 SpongeBob SquarePants
- 07:00 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
- 07:24 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
- 07:48 Sanjay And Craig
- 08:12 Harvey Beaks
- 08:36 Breadwinners
- 09:00 Get Blake
- 09:24 Rabbids Invasion
- 09:48 Henry Danger
- 10:12 Nicky, Ricky, Dicky & Dawn
- 10:36 The Haunted Hathaways
- 11:00 Winx Club
- 11:24 SpongeBob SquarePants
- 11:48 SpongeBob SquarePants
- 12:12 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
- 12:36 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
- 13:00 Breadwinners
- 13:24 Breadwinners
- 13:48 Get Blake
- 14:12 Rabbids Invasion
- 14:36 Henry Danger
- 15:00 Nicky, Ricky, Dicky & Dawn
- 15:24 SpongeBob SquarePants
- 15:48 SpongeBob SquarePants
- 16:12 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
- 16:36 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
- 17:00 Sanjay And Craig
- 17:24 Harvey Beaks
- 17:48 Breadwinners
- 18:12 Henry Danger
- 18:36 Nicky, Ricky, Dicky & Dawn
- 19:00 The Haunted Hathaways
- 19:24 Max & Shred
- 19:48 SpongeBob SquarePants
- 20:12 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
- 20:36 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
- 21:00 Breadwinners
- 21:24 Breadwinners
- 21:48 Sanjay And Craig
- 22:12 Sanjay And Craig
- 22:36 SpongeBob SquarePants
- 23:00 SpongeBob SquarePants
- 23:24 Henry Danger
- 23:48 Nicky, Ricky, Dicky & Dawn
- 00:12 Max & Shred
- 00:36 The Haunted Hathaways
- 01:00 Sanjay And Craig
- 01:24 Sanjay And Craig



DAWN OF THE PLANET OF THE APES ON OSN MOVIES HD

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KNCC PROGRAMME FROM THURSDAY TO WEDNESDAY (14/01/2016 TO 20/01/2016)

Time	Movie	Time	Movie	Time	Movie	Time	Movie
1:00 PM	SHARQIA-1 KUNG FU STYLE	11:30 AM	FANAR-2 THE HATEFUL EIGHT	11:30 AM	AVENUES-2 KUNG FU STYLE	12:00 PM	360°-3 EXTRACTION
3:00 PM	KUNG FU STYLE	12:15 PM	FORECLOSURE	12:15 PM	KUNG FU STYLE	1:30 PM	THE HATEFUL EIGHT
5:00 PM	FORECLOSURE	2:15 PM	THE HATEFUL EIGHT	2:15 PM	KUNG FU STYLE	3:15 PM	THE HATEFUL EIGHT
7:00 PM	THE HATEFUL EIGHT	4:15 PM	FORECLOSURE	4:15 PM	KUNG FU STYLE	5:00 PM	THE HATEFUL EIGHT
10:15 PM	FORECLOSURE	6:15 PM	THE HATEFUL EIGHT	6:15 PM	DADDY'S HOME	8:45 PM	THE HATEFUL EIGHT
12:15 AM	THE HATEFUL EIGHT	12:15 AM	THE HATEFUL EIGHT	12:15 AM	DADDY'S HOME	12:05 AM	THE HATEFUL EIGHT
11:30 AM	SHARQIA-2 THE 5TH WAVE	12:15 PM	FANAR-3 KUNG FU STYLE	11:30 AM	AVENUES-3 THE 5TH WAVE	11:45 AM	AL-KOUT.1 THE 5TH WAVE
1:45 PM	RIDE ALONG 2	2:15 PM	KUNG FU STYLE	1:45 PM	EXTRACTION	1:30 PM	RIDE ALONG 2
3:45 PM	RIDE ALONG 2	4:15 PM	KUNG FU STYLE	1:45 PM	THE 5TH WAVE	3:15 PM	RIDE ALONG 2
5:30 PM	RIDE ALONG 2	6:15 PM	THE REVENANT	1:45 PM	THE 5TH WAVE	5:00 PM	RIDE ALONG 2
7:30 PM	THE 5TH WAVE	9:15 PM	THE REVENANT	6:15 PM	THE 5TH WAVE	7:00 PM	RIDE ALONG 2
10:00 PM	RIDE ALONG 2	12:15 AM	THE REVENANT	8:45 PM	THE 5TH WAVE	9:00 PM	RIDE ALONG 2
12:05 AM	THE 5TH WAVE	12:15 AM	THE REVENANT	11:15 PM	THE 5TH WAVE	11:00 PM	RIDE ALONG 2
12:30 PM	SHARQIA-3 THE REVENANT	12:15 PM	FANAR-4 RIDE ALONG 2	11:30 AM	AVENUES-4 THE REVENANT	1:00 PM	AL-KOUT.2 THE 5TH WAVE
1:30 PM	THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE DEAD	2:15 PM	RIDE ALONG 2	2:45 PM	THE REVENANT	1:30 PM	DADDY'S HOME
3:30 PM	THE REVENANT	4:15 PM	RIDE ALONG 2	5:45 PM	DILWALE - Hindi	3:30 PM	DADDY'S HOME
3:30 PM	NANNAKU PREMATHO-Telugu	6:15 PM	RIDE ALONG 2	9:00 PM	THE REVENANT	5:30 PM	DADDY'S HOME
6:30 PM	THE REVENANT	8:15 PM	RIDE ALONG 2	12:15 AM	THE REVENANT	7:30 PM	THE 5TH WAVE
6:30 PM	NANNAKU PREMATHO-Telugu	10:15 PM	RIDE ALONG 2	12:15 AM	THE REVENANT	10:00 PM	THE 5TH WAVE
9:30 PM	THE REVENANT	12:15 AM	RIDE ALONG 2	12:15 AM	THE REVENANT	12:30 AM	THE 5TH WAVE
10:00 PM	NANNAKU PREMATHO-Telugu	11:30 AM	FANAR-5 THE 5TH WAVE	1:45 PM	AVENUES-5 RIDE ALONG 2	11:45 AM	AL-KOUT.3 THE REVENANT
12:30 AM	THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE DEAD	1:45 PM	THE 5TH WAVE	4:15 PM	RIDE ALONG 2	2:45 PM	THE REVENANT
1:15 AM	THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE DEAD	4:15 PM	THE 5TH WAVE	6:30 PM	RIDE ALONG 2	5:45 PM	THE REVENANT
1:00 PM	MUHALAB-1 KUNG FU STYLE	12:45 AM	DILWALE - Hindi	8:30 PM	RIDE ALONG 2	8:45 PM	THE REVENANT
3:00 PM	KUNG FU STYLE	1:00 PM	THE 5TH WAVE	10:45 PM	RIDE ALONG 2	11:45 PM	THE REVENANT
5:00 PM	KUNG FU STYLE	3:00 PM	THE 5TH WAVE	12:45 AM	RIDE ALONG 2	12:30 PM	AL-KOUT.4 KUNG FU STYLE
7:00 PM	NANNAKU PREMATHO-Telugu	5:30 PM	THE 5TH WAVE	12:45 AM	RIDE ALONG 2	2:30 PM	KUNG FU STYLE
7:00 PM	DILWALE - Hindi	7:30 PM	THE 5TH WAVE	12:45 AM	RIDE ALONG 2	4:45 PM	FORECLOSURE
10:15 PM	NANNAKU PREMATHO-Telugu	10:00 PM	THE 5TH WAVE	12:45 AM	RIDE ALONG 2	6:45 PM	FORECLOSURE
1:30 AM	THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE DEAD	12:05 AM	THE 5TH WAVE	12:45 AM	RIDE ALONG 2	8:45 PM	FORECLOSURE
12:45 PM	MUHALAB-2 THE 5TH WAVE	12:45 PM	MARINA-1 FORECLOSURE	12:00 PM	AVENUES-6 DADDY'S HOME	12:45 PM	BAIRAQ-1 RIDE ALONG 2
1:30 PM	THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE DEAD	1:00 PM	THE 5TH WAVE	3:00 PM	DADDY'S HOME	2:00 PM	RIDE ALONG 2
3:30 PM	THE REVENANT	3:00 PM	THE 5TH WAVE	5:30 PM	DADDY'S HOME	2:00 PM	RIDE ALONG 2
3:30 PM	SOOGA DE CHINNI NAYANA -Telugu	5:30 PM	THE 5TH WAVE	7:30 PM	DADDY'S HOME	4:30 PM	RIDE ALONG 2
6:30 PM	THE REVENANT	10:00 PM	THE 5TH WAVE	10:00 PM	NANNAKU PREMATHO-Telugu	4:00 PM	RIDE ALONG 2
6:30 PM	SOOGA DE CHINNI NAYANA -Telugu	12:05 AM	THE 5TH WAVE	10:00 PM	NANNAKU PREMATHO-Telugu	7:00 PM	RIDE ALONG 2
9:30 PM	SOOGA DE CHINNI NAYANA -Telugu	12:45 PM	MARINA-2 RIDE ALONG 2	10:15 PM	NANNAKU PREMATHO-Telugu	10:15 PM	RIDE ALONG 2
11:30 AM	MUHALAB-3 RIDE ALONG 2	12:45 PM	RIDE ALONG 2	1:30 AM	THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE DEAD	1:30 AM	RIDE ALONG 2
1:30 PM	THE REVENANT	2:45 PM	RIDE ALONG 2	1:30 AM	THE REVENANT	2:00 PM	RIDE ALONG 2
1:30 PM	NANNAKU PREMATHO-Telugu	6:45 PM	RIDE ALONG 2	4:30 PM	THE REVENANT	4:00 PM	RIDE ALONG 2
4:30 PM	THE REVENANT	8:45 PM	RIDE ALONG 2	4:30 PM	NANNAKU PREMATHO-Telugu	6:00 PM	RIDE ALONG 2
4:45 PM	NANNAKU PREMATHO-Telugu	10:45 PM	RIDE ALONG 2	4:45 PM	NANNAKU PREMATHO-Telugu	8:00 PM	RIDE ALONG 2
8:00 PM	RIDE ALONG 2	12:45 AM	RIDE ALONG 2	9:45 PM	THE REVENANT	10:00 PM	RIDE ALONG 2
9:45 PM	RIDE ALONG 2	11:45 AM	MARINA-3 KUNG FU STYLE	11:30 AM	AVENUES-7 FORECLOSURE	12:05 AM	BAIRAQ-2 KUNG FU STYLE
11:30 PM	RIDE ALONG 2	1:45 PM	KUNG FU STYLE	1:45 PM	FORECLOSURE	12:05 AM	RIDE ALONG 2
1:15 AM	RIDE ALONG 2	3:45 PM	KUNG FU STYLE	2:30 PM	FORECLOSURE	12:45 PM	THE 5TH WAVE
11:30 AM	FANAR-1 DADDY'S HOME	5:45 PM	THE REVENANT	4:00 PM	FORECLOSURE	2:45 PM	THE 5TH WAVE
1:30 PM	DADDY'S HOME	8:45 PM	THE REVENANT	6:00 PM	FORECLOSURE	5:15 PM	KUNG FU STYLE
3:30 PM	THE REVENANT	11:45 AM	THE REVENANT	8:00 PM	FORECLOSURE	7:15 PM	DADDY'S HOME
3:30 PM	NANNAKU PREMATHO-Telugu	12:45 PM	THE REVENANT	10:00 PM	FORECLOSURE	9:15 PM	THE 5TH WAVE
6:30 PM	NANNAKU PREMATHO-Telugu	12:45 PM	THE REVENANT	12:05 AM	FORECLOSURE	11:45 PM	THE REVENANT
9:45 PM	NANNAKU PREMATHO-Telugu	12:45 PM	THE REVENANT	12:05 AM	FORECLOSURE	12:30 PM	THE REVENANT
1:00 AM	DADDY'S HOME	12:45 PM	THE REVENANT	12:05 AM	FORECLOSURE	1:30 PM	DADDY'S HOME

Available for Rent

Residential Apartments, floors and villas

22466566
96645531
90976777

Accommodation

Accommodation available for a decent non-smoking bachelor/ working lady/couple with a couple in 2BR C-AC in Abbasiya near Integrated school. Contact:66005134. (C 5111) 10-1-2016

Automated enquiry about the Civil ID card is 1889988

EMERGENCY
112



Prayer timings

Fajr: 05:20
Shorook: 06:44
Duhrr: 11:57
Asr: 14:51
Maghrib: 17:11
Isha: 18:32



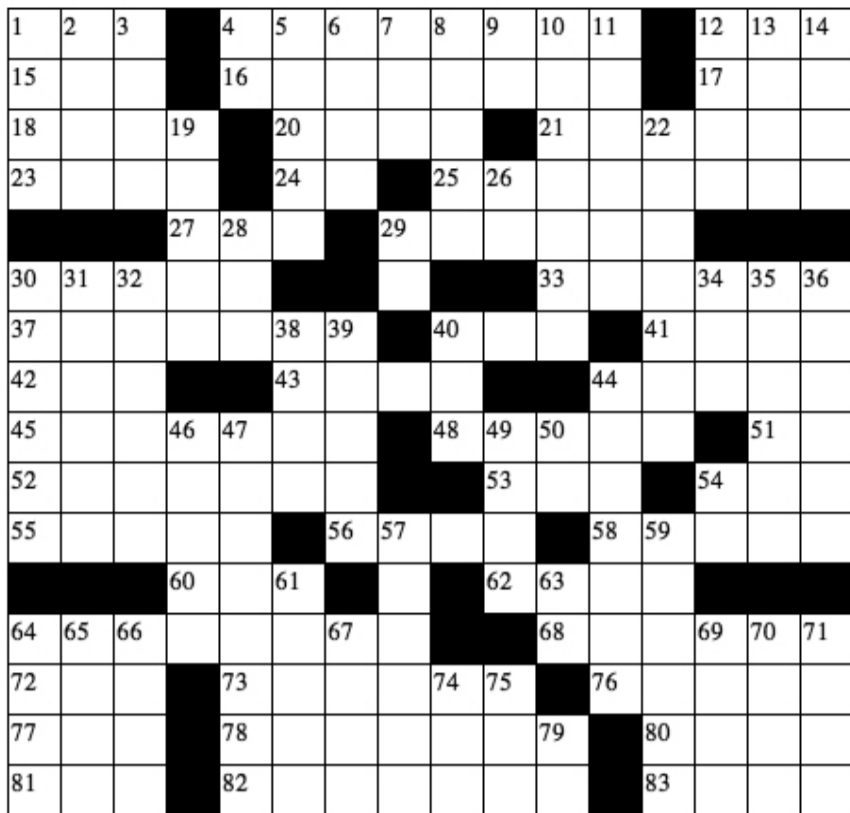
Directorate General of Civil Aviation Home Page (www.kuwait-airport.com.kw)

In case you are not travelling, your proper cancellation of bookings will help other passengers to use seats

Arrival Flights on Thursday 14/1/2016				Departure Flights on Thursday 14/1/2016			
Airlines	Fit	Route	Time	Airlines	Fit	Route	Time
MSC	415	Sohag	00:05	KNE	481	Taif	14:50
KLM	411	Amsterdam/Dammam	00:20	KAC	673	Dubai	15:00
JZR	267	Beirut	00:30	FDB	058	Dubai	15:10
JZR	539	Cairo	00:40	QTR	1079	Doha	15:10
FDB	069	Dubai	00:55	AXB	394	Kozhikode	15:20
RJA	642	Amman	01:05	JZR	188	Dubai	15:40
THY	772	Istanbul	01:05	GFA	222	Bahrain	15:45
SAI	441	Lahore	01:30	KAC	617	Doha	15:45
DLH	635	Doha	01:35	KAC	773	Riyadh	15:50
PGT	858	Istanbul	02:00	KAC	741	Dammam	15:50
UAE	853	Dubai	02:30	KAC	613	Bahrain	15:50
GFA	211	Bahrain	02:30	SVA	505	Jeddah	16:00
OMA	643	Muscat	02:55	KNE	473	Jeddah	16:05
FDB	067	Dubai	03:05	ABY	128	Sharjah	16:25
MSR	612	Cairo	03:10	OMA	646	Muscat	16:30
QTR	1076	Doha	03:15	NIA	252	Alexandria	16:30
KKK	6507	Istanbul	03:20	JAD	302	Amman	16:40
ETD	305	Abu Dhabi	03:25	KAC	563	Amman	16:45
LMU	510	Cairo	04:05	JZR	266	Beirut	17:05
JZR	503	Luxor	04:25	KNE	475	Jeddah	17:25
QTR	8511	Doha	04:40	ETD	304	Abu Dhabi	17:30
DHX	170	Bahrain	05:40	FDB	052	Dubai	17:35
THY	770	Istanbul	05:55	QTR	1073	Doha	17:40
FDB	5061	Dubai	06:30	UAE	858	Dubai	17:45
BAW	157	London	06:40	JZR	538	Cairo	17:45
JZR	529	Asyut	06:50	RUA	641	Amman	17:55
KAC	412	Manila/Bangkok	07:20	SVA	511	Riyadh	18:15
QTR	1086	Doha	07:40	GFA	216	Bahrain	18:20
FDB	053	Dubai	07:45	JZR	184	Dubai	18:40
KAC	302	Mumbai	07:50	MSR	615	Cairo	18:50
SVA	512	Riyadh	07:50	JZR	238	Amman	18:50
KAC	206	Islamabad	08:25	JZR	124	Bahrain	19:10
KAC	352	Kochi	08:30	JZR	554	Alexandria	19:10
KAC	346	Ahmedabad	08:30	FDB	064	Dubai	19:20
KAC	344	Chennai	08:30	ABY	124	Sharjah	19:25
UAE	855	Dubai	08:40	UAE	876	Dubai	19:30
KAC	362	Colombo	08:50	GFA	218	Bahrain	20:15
KAC	332	Trivandrum	08:50	KAC	353	BLR	20:40
IRA	667	Esfahan	09:00	QTR	1081	Doha	20:50
ABY	125	Sharjah	09:00	KAC	351	Kochi	20:50
ETD	301	Abu Dhabi	09:20	KAC	543	Cairo	20:55
QTR	1070	Doha	09:25	KAC	343	Chennai	21:00
FDB	055	Dubai	09:40	MSR	619	Alexandria	21:05
OMA	641	Muscat	10:05	KNE	461	Riyadh	21:10
IRM	1180	Mashhad	10:10	ABY	122	Sharjah	21:15
IRA	673	Ahwaz	10:10	OMA	648	Muscat	21:20
GFA	213	Bahrain	10:40	FDB	062	Dubai	21:20
SYR	341	Damascus	10:55	DLH	634	Doha	21:45
UAE	873	Dubai	11:05	FDB	5054	Dubai	21:50
RBG	553	Alexandria	11:15	DHX	171	Bahrain	21:50
JZR	165	Dubai	11:30	JAI	571	Mumbai	21:55
AGY	682	Asyut	11:40	ETD	308	Abu Dhabi	22:10
NIA	151	Cairo	11:55	KAC	301	Mumbai	22:10
MEA	404	Beirut	11:55	MEA	403	Beirut	22:20
KAC	204	Lahore	12:20	ALK	230	Colombo	22:25
FDB	075	Dubai	12:25	GFA	220	Bahrain	22:30
MSC	401	Alexandria	12:30	UAE	860	Dubai	22:55
JZR	561	Sohag	12:45	QTR	1083	Doha	23:05
JZR	241	Amman	12:50	KLM	417	Dammam/Amsterdam	23:05
UAE	871	Dubai	12:50	KAC	205	Islamabad	23:10
MSR	610	Cairo	13:00	ETD	310	Abu Dhabi	23:15
THY	766	Istanbul	13:45	FDB	060	Dubai	23:35
KAC	382	Delhi	13:50	KAC	411	Bangkok/Manila	23:35
KNE	460	Riyadh	13:50				
QTR	1078	Doha	14:10				
FDB	057	Dubai	14:10				
AXB	393	Kozhikode	14:20				
SVA	500	Jeddah	14:30				
KAC	672	Dubai	14:45				

DIAL161 FOR AIRPORT INFORMATION

CROSSWORD 1137



ACROSS

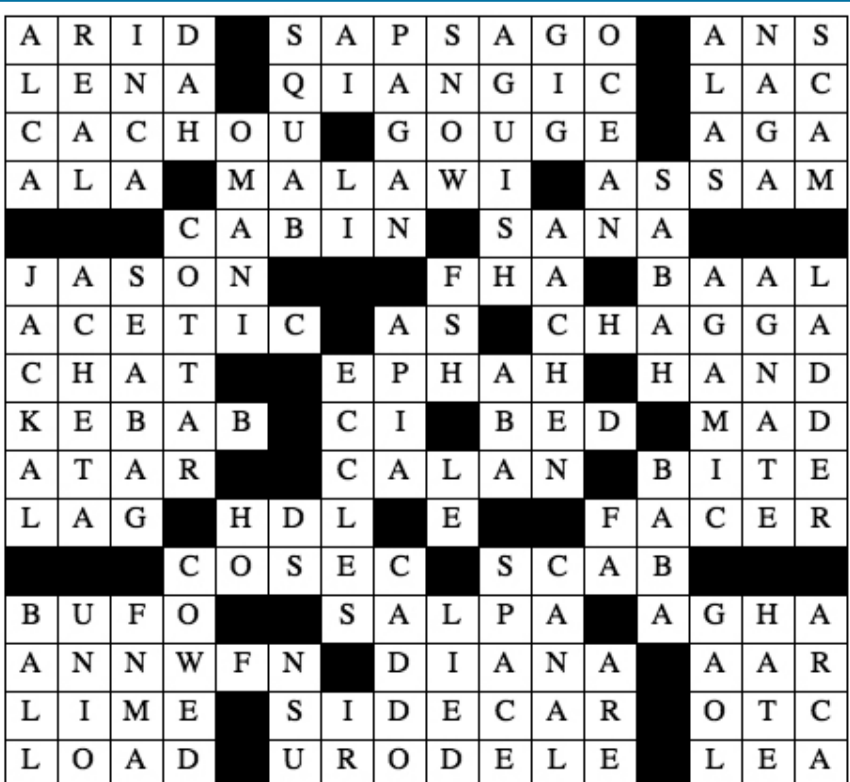
- The molecular weight of a substance expressed in grams.
- Any of several bog orchids of the genus *Arethusa* having 1 or 2 showy flowers.
- A federal agency established to regulate the release of new foods and health-related products.
- Any of various primates with short tails or no tail at all.
- Sludge (rich in organic matter) that accumulates at the bottom of lakes or oceans.
- A unit of absorbed ionizing radiation equal to 100 ergs per gram of irradiated material.
- A transparent optical device used to converge or diverge transmitted light and to form images.
- Move as if through a sieve.
- A major waterfall in southern Africa.
- A fraudulent business scheme.
- A crystalline metallic element not found in nature.
- Someone who copies the words or behavior of another.
- One of the most common of the five major classes of immunoglobulins.
- Eaten as mush or as a thin gruel.
- Having a melody (as distinguished from recitative).
- The condition of not containing or being covered by a liquid (especially water).
- Any of a class of alcohols having 2 hydroxyl groups in each molecule.
- A period marked by distinctive character or reckoned from a fixed point or event.
- A Hindu prince or king in India.
- Communicate electronically on the computer.
- Affect with wonder.
- A public promotion of some product or service.
- Type and genus of the Isoetaceae and sole extant genus of the order Isoetales.
- American prizefighter who won the world heavyweight championship three times (born in 1942).
- A unit of weight for precious stones = 200 mg.
- United States writer (born in Poland) who wrote in Yiddish (1880-1957).
- (folklore) A corpse that rises at night to drink the blood of the living.
- The longer of the two telegraphic signals used in Morse code.
- According to the Old Testament he was a pagan king of Israel and husband of Jezebel (9th century BC).
- A pocket-size case for holding papers and paper money.
- French writer who was the embodiment of 18th century Enlightenment (1694-1778).
- A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.
- Long-legged web-footed black-and-white shorebird with slender upward-curving bill.
- An Italian poet famous for 'The Divine Comedy'—a journey through hell and purgatory and paradise guided by Virgil and his idealized Beatrice (1265-1321).
- A unit of pain intensity.
- A tricycle (usually propelled by pedalling).
- Type genus of the Ranidae.
- A former agency (from 1946 to 1974) that was responsible for research into atomic energy and its peacetime uses in the United States.
- A lack of vitality.
- Consisting of or involving two parts or components usually in pairs.

DOWN

- A master's degree in library science.
- An organization of countries formed in 1961 to agree on a common policy for the sale of petroleum.
- A Russian river.

- A very poisonous metallic element that has three allotropic forms.
- Follower of Rastafarianism.
- Surpassing the ordinary especially in size or scale.
- Hormone released by the hypothalamus that controls the release of thyroid-stimulating hormone from the anterior pituitary.
- One of the 7 gods of happiness.
- Being or moving higher in position or greater in some value.
- A port town on the Atlantic coast of Portugal southeast of Lisbon.
- (zoology) Pertaining to alulae.
- Agitation resulting from active worry.
- Herb of the Pacific islands grown throughout the tropics for its edible root and in temperate areas as an ornamental for its large glossy leaves.
- The sixth month of the civil year.
- Perennial mountain rice native to Mediterranean region and introduced into North America.
- Large family of important mostly marine food fishes.
- A hard brittle gray polyvalent metallic element that resembles iron but is not magnetic.
- Come into the possession of something concrete or abstract.
- A state in north central United States.
- Indian nun and missionary (born in Albania) dedicated to helping the poor in India (1910-1997).
- A person who delivers a speech or oration.
- A slippery or viscous liquid or liquefiable substance not miscible with water.
- Of or relating to the African republic of Somalia or its people or their language and culture.
- Submerged freshwater perennials.
- A member of an Iroquoian people formerly living on the south shore of Lake Erie in northern Ohio and northwest Pennsylvania and western New York.
- Spicy sauce of tomatoes and onions and chili peppers to accompany Mexican foods.
- The cry made by sheep.
- United States physicist and molecular biologist who helped develop the first atom bomb and later opposed the use of all nuclear weapons (1898-1964).
- English economist noted for his studies of international trade and finance (born in 1907).
- A language spoken by the Atakapa people of the Gulf coast of Louisiana and Texas.
- A member of the Siouan people formerly living in the Missouri river valley in NE Nebraska.
- A silvery ductile metallic element found primarily in bauxite.
- Before noon.
- Coins collectively.
- On a ship, train, plane or other vehicle.
- A shelter serving as a place of safety or sanctuary.
- (astronomy) The angular distance of a celestial point measured westward along the celestial equator from the zenith crossing.
- A slender double-reed instrument.
- A fine grained mineral having a soft soapy feel and consisting of hydrated magnesium silicate.
- A sodium salt of carbonic acid.
- Relatively small fast-moving sloth.
- An inactive volcano in Sicily.
- A bluish shade of green.
- Electronic warfare undertaken to prevent or reduce an enemy's effective use of the electromagnetic spectrum.
- Of or relating to or characteristic of Thailand of its people.
- A soft silvery metallic element of the alkali earth group.

Yesterday's Solution



STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

You're quite sure of your ability to perform the impossible today, even if your energy is dispersed over too many projects. Although your current confidence is refreshing, it might very well seem out of place. You understand you should take your commitments more seriously, but you possess an irrefutable certainty that everything is going to play out just the way you planned. Thankfully for you – and annoyingly to others – your intuition is probably right on the mark. Allowing events to unfold organically now could magically lead to success.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Your uncharacteristic tendency to exaggerate today may turn every little issue into an unnecessary drama. If people push your buttons, you might just tell them exactly what's on your mind, whether or not it makes sense. Fortunately, the outcome could be better than you expect; at least, everyone will know where you stand even if you were planning on keeping some of your misgivings under wraps. Nevertheless, it's still wise to put your opinions out into the open as gently as you can and then step back to give everyone room to respond.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

You are rambling a mile a minute now that loquacious Mercury is receiving loud signals from excessive Jupiter. Although you try to keep the conversation light, you can't shut off the flow of intense information. You may be a bit mentally overstimulated but something keeps drawing you back into the less comfortable emotional realms today. It's tricky business because you don't want to stop talking, but it's wise to know when to hold your tongue. In fact, a silent meditation might be just what the doctor orders to help you regain your balance.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Keeping your thoughts to yourself is challenging today, even if you know that it's prudent to remain quiet. Part of you feels as if it's your personal responsibility to bring the information you have out into the light. Although you may wonder if your disclosure is appropriate, a friend might convince you to talk – and once you start, you won't hold anything back. When in doubt, erring on the side of caution is your safest bet. The better part of valor is discretion.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

Your secret admirer or a spiritual adviser may be the source of good news today. Luckily, you could learn something that opens your mind to an entirely different way of looking at your current circumstances. Even if you believe you should stick to your original agenda, stretch beyond your current point of view and consider what's best for everyone involved. Adopting a less personal and more spiritual perspective paves new paths to success.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

You may be known for your critical thinking, but today your thoughts carry you far past your usual limitations. Although your key planet Mercury is retrograde, its harmonious trine to lucky Jupiter sends your mind to greener pastures. Much to your surprise, you could be less practical and more philosophical in your approach now. Keep in mind that it's not necessary to apply your ideas to something tangible at this time. Write down your colorful visions while they last so you can make good use of them when your feet return to earth.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

You want to be understood by your friends, especially if emotional distance has developed over the past few days. However, explaining yourself clearly is a challenge; others might not understand why you are so passionate today. Nevertheless, you're eager to share your ideas about a variety of things because discussing conceptual ideas feels safer than revealing your feelings. You may be quite a captivating conversationalist, but be careful not to speak in such vague generalities now that you lose touch with your heart.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Meaningful relationships with friends and colleagues offer you the encouragement you seek these days. You might even receive some wonderful news, which can take the pressure off other stresses in your life. However, opportunities that come to you now will likely increase the complexity of your everyday activities, prompting you to wonder if the potential benefits are really worth the extra effort. There's no need to respond too quickly; run through all the logistics and then rely on your intuition to uncover the best answer.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

Your current domestic situation may give you some valid reasons for doubt, but you can rise above the difficulties now. Although you're unsure of your next move, you're lucky enough to receive helpful guidance from someone you can trust. Your key planet Jupiter is blessing your 10th House of Status, bringing you closer to your goals. Instead of worrying about what could go wrong today, acknowledge all that is right in your world; use the power of positive thinking to propel you toward your preferred destination.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

It's all too tempting to swing into action today and take charge of the situation, assuming that your plan is the best one. You know everything will fall into place if you can stick to the program without any outside interference. Thankfully, your dogged attention to details adds to your overall productivity. However, your eagerness to demonstrate your competence might just be a way to cover your emotional vulnerability. Choose a trustworthy friend and share a part of yourself you normally don't let others see.



Aquarius (January 20-February 18)

Opportunity knocks on a variety of strange doors today, offering you a chance to show off your innovative brilliance. However, if someone presents a winning strategy now, it may not be as incredible as you think. Remember, bountiful Jupiter is increasing the lighting on each cloud's silver lining, so everything appears brighter than it actually is. Nevertheless, saying yes is still your best move, as long as you have a concrete end game in place. Blending reality with the seeds of your imagination is a combination that leads to personal growth.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Someone may shock you with unexpected criticism today, refocusing your attention back on reality. If your fantasies have hijacked your goals, embrace the unsolicited advice you receive from others now, instead of rejecting it out of hand. Be sure to establish healthy boundaries so you can maintain your emotional sanity. Nurturing your confidence, not your skepticism, will guide you toward fulfillment.

WORD SEARCH PUZZLE

Canada

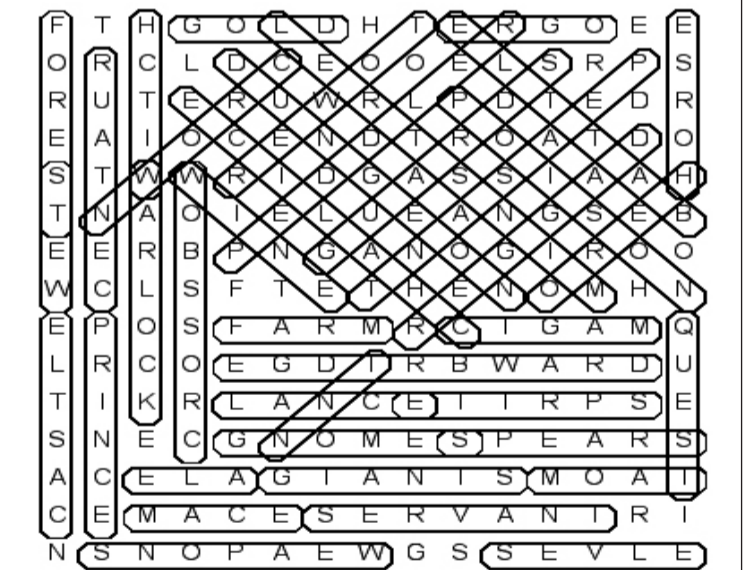
Find and circle all of the words that are hidden in the grid. The remaining 47 letters spell a secret message.



- | | | | |
|------------------|---------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| ALBERTA | HOCKEY | NEWFOUNDLAND | REGINA |
| BEARS | IQUALUIT | NORTHWEST TERRITORIES | SASKATCHEWAN |
| BEAVERS | LABRADOR | NOVA SCOTIA | SNOW |
| BRITISH COLUMBIA | LAKES | NUNAVUT | ST. JOHN'S |
| CARIBOU | LOONIE | OIL | TOQUE |
| CHARLOTTETOWN | MANITOBA | ONTARIO | TORONTO |
| CURLING | MAPLE LEAF | OTTAWA | VICTORIA |
| EDMONTON | MAPLE SYRUP | PRAIRIES | WHITEHORSE |
| FORESTS | MOOSE | PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND | WINNIPEG |
| FREDERICTON | MOUNTAINS | QUEBEC | YELLOWKNIFE |
| GEESSE | NEW BRUNSWICK | RCMP | YUKON |
| HALIFAX | | | |

Yesterday's Solution

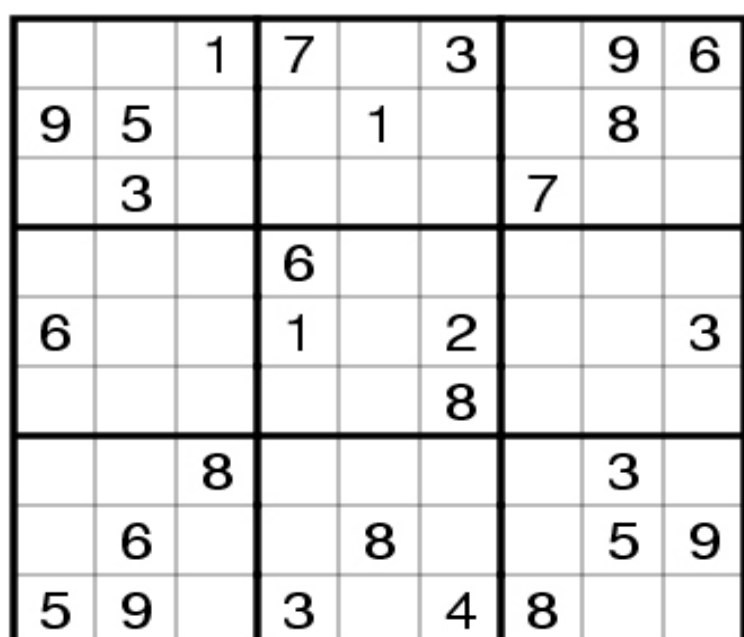
Fantasy World 1



- | | | | |
|------------|--------|----------|---------|
| ALE | ELVES | LANCE | QUEST |
| BATTLE | FARM | MACE | SERVANT |
| CASTLE | FOREST | MAGIC | SPEARS |
| CENTAUR | GIANTS | MINSTREL | SPRITE |
| CHALICE | GNOMES | MOAT | STEW |
| CROSSBOW | GOLD | OGRE | TOWER |
| CROWN | GUARDS | PEASANT | WARLOCK |
| DAGGER | HERO | PEDDLER | WEAPONS |
| DRAWBRIDGE | HORSE | POISON | WINE |
| DUNGEON | INN | PRINCE | WITCH |

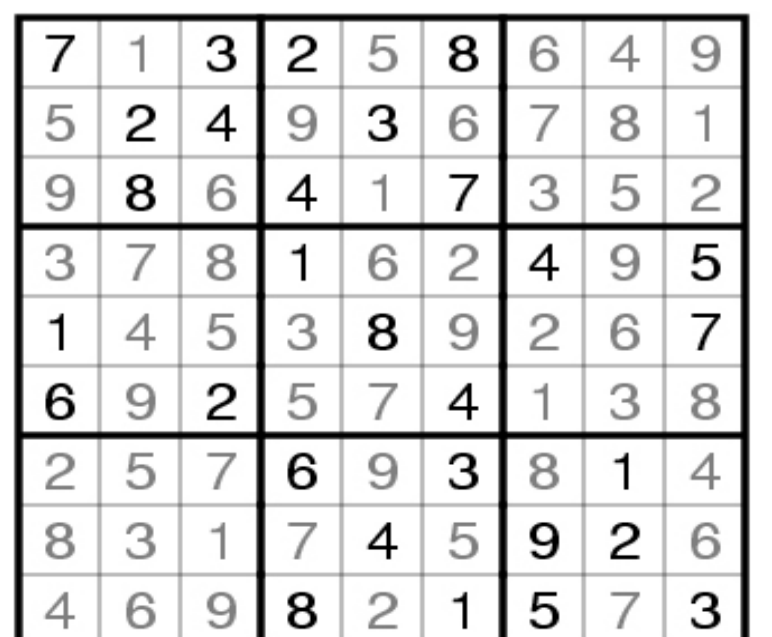
The hidden message is: THE LORD OF THE RINGS

Daily SuDoku



medium

Yesterday's Solution



hard



Isabelle Huppert and Gerard Depardieu

MK2 acquires Huppert, Depardieu's 'Mrs Hyde'

In the run up to the UniFrance Rendez-Vous in Paris, MK2 has acquired international sales rights to Serge Bozon's "Mrs Hyde," a black comedy starring Isabelle Huppert, Gerard Depardieu and Romain Duris. "Mrs Hyde" marks Bozon's follow-up to "Tip Top," the critically-acclaimed comedy with Huppert which world premiered at Cannes' Directors' Fortnight and earned a special mention. Produced by David Thion's Les Films Pelleas, the project is freely inspired by Stevenson's "Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde." Huppert stars as a timid physics teacher despised by her pupils and colleagues in a suburban high school. But after getting struck by lightning, she wakes up with powerful and dangerous

new capabilities.

"We are thrilled to represent this extraordinary new voice in French cinema that Serge Bozon has embodied since he began making films. We anticipate that with this adaptation of a world renowned story and simply the best possible French actors he will be able to spread his disruptive black humor further afield," said MK2. Huppert and Depardieu, two of France's most iconic French thespians, last co-starred in Guillaume Nicloux's "Valley of Love," a critical success which competed at Cannes. Budgeted at 4 million Euros, "Mrs Hyde" will shoot next fall for an expected delivery in 2017. Haut et Court will release in France. —Reuters

Activision taps 'Hateful Eight' producer for studio venture

Activision Blizzard Inc is enlisting the producer of "The Hateful Eight" to help lead its TV and film studio as the "Call of Duty" publisher prepares to take on Hollywood. The Santa Monica, California-based video game company announced yesterday that veteran producer Stacey Sher has been hired to serve as co-president of Activision Blizzard Studios with Nick van Dyk, the former Disney executive who was brought on last year as co-president of the new venture. "The idea of continuing the tradition of inspired creativity that's been the culture of this company for 35 years with some of the greatest intellectual property that hasn't been locked up by other people was incredibly exciting," said Sher.

Sher is a frequent collaborator with filmmakers Quentin Tarantino and Steven Soderbergh. Her credits include "Pulp Fiction," "Django Unchained," "Erin Brockovich," "Contagion" and "Reno 911!" Activision unveiled plans in November to create and release its own TV and film series based on its games. In recent years, Ubisoft and Microsoft similarly launched divisions that were tasked with adapting game franchises to varying degrees of success.

"Activision Blizzard does not release a game unless it's great, so it's not a big leap to take that culture and migrate it to this endeavor," said Sher. "I think that's a sensibility that we all share." Activision's first project is slated to be a TV show inspired by the kid-friendly "Skylanders" toy-game franchise, followed by films based on the "Call of Duty" military shooter series. Could a filmmaker like Tarantino or Soderbergh direct a "Call of Duty" movie? Sher and van Dyk aren't ruling out the possibility.

"Between the quality of our intellectual property and Stacey's relationships, I think we're going to have amazing talent to work with," said van Dyk. Sher and van Dyk said they plan to



Academy Award-winning writer/director Quentin Tarantino, center, poses with actors Kurt Russell, right, and Samuel L Jackson for photos after arriving for the premier of "The Hateful Eight" in Sydney yesterday. —AP

keep the studio small and maintain creative control over projects, similar to Pixar and Lucasfilm. While most video game adaptations haven't been financially or critically well received, they believe they can overcome the genre's flop-filled past. "We understand our intellectual property, fans and the universes better than anyone else," said van Dyk. "The creative sensibility that's involved in making great games is orthogonal to the creative sensibility needed to make great

films and TV. By having the right skill set and controlling intellectual properties, rather than turning them over to third parties, we can ensure creative excellence." Van Dyk and Sher said they're currently working on the vision for an interconnected "Call of Duty" film series. However, they first need to find office space. Activision Blizzard Studios won't be housed in the company's headquarters in Santa Monica, California. —AP

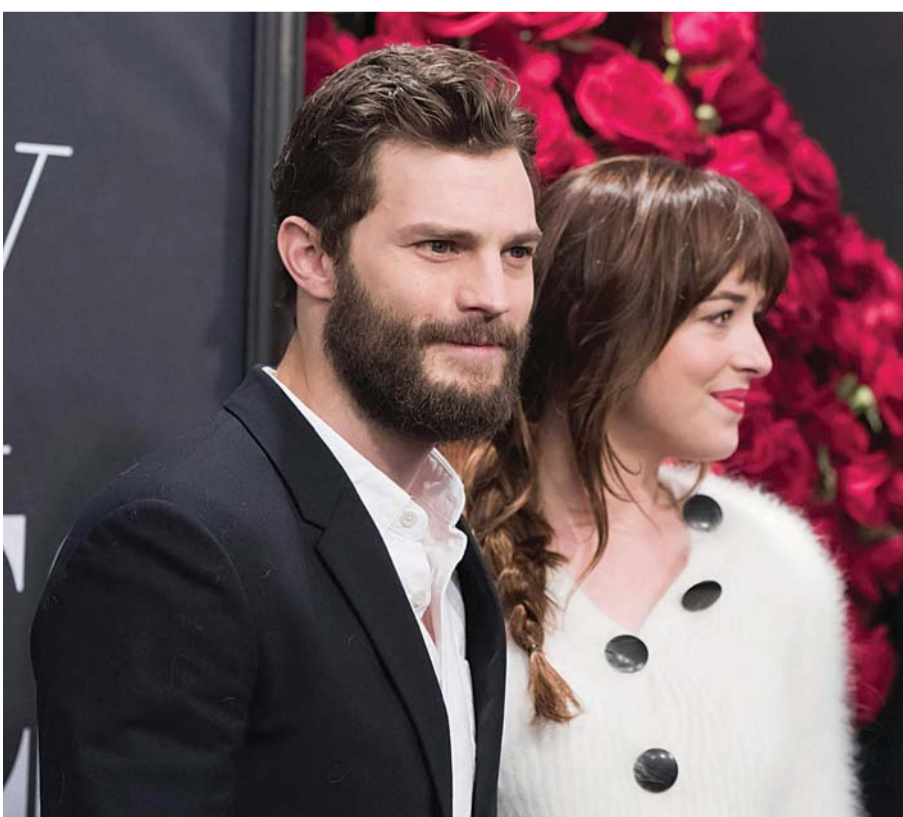
'Fifty Shades' and 'Pixels' among Razzies' 'worst film' nominees



This photo provided by courtesy of Sony Pictures shows, Michelle Monaghan, from left, as Violet, Adam Sandler as Brenner, Josh Gad as Ludlow, and Peter Dinklage as Eddie, arriving outside the command center in Columbia Pictures' "Pixels." —AP photos



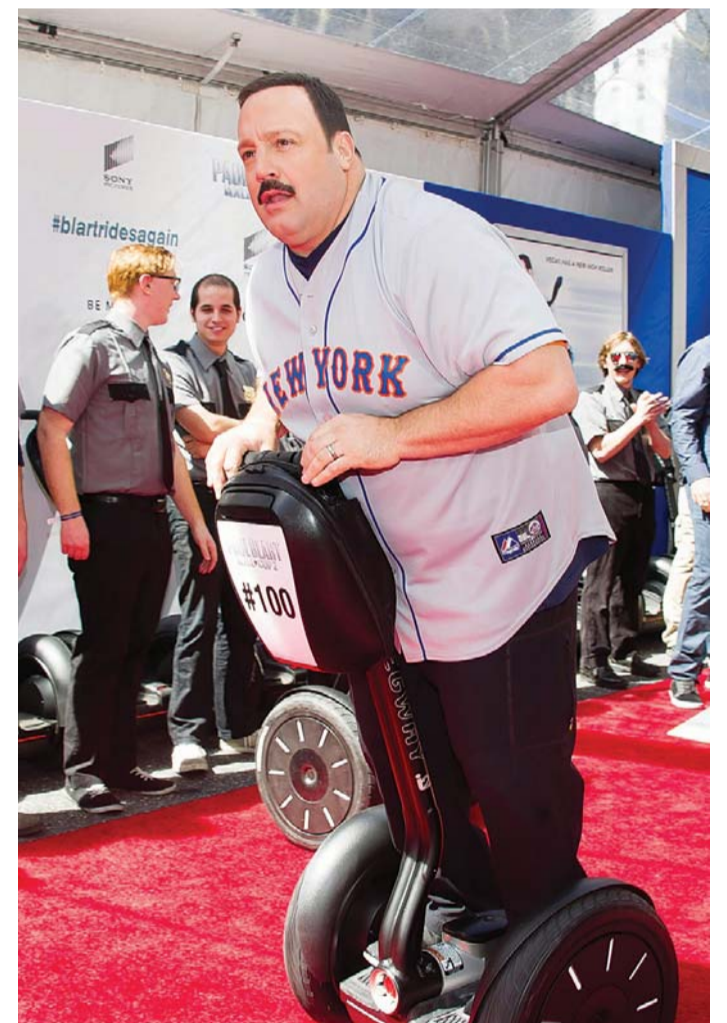
This photo provided by courtesy Twentieth Century Fox shows, The Thing, from left, Michael B. Jordan as Johnny Storm, Miles Teller as Dr Reed Richards, and Kate Mara as Sue Storm, in a scene from the film, "Fantastic Four."



In this Feb 6, 2015 file photo, Jamie Dornan, left, and Dakota Johnson attend a special fan screening of "Fifty Shades of Grey" hosted by The Today Show at the Ziegfeld Theatre in New York.



In this Feb 2, 2015 file photo, Channing Tatum attends the premiere of Warner Bros Pictures' "Jupiter Ascending" at TCL Chinese Theatre in Hollywood, Calif.



In this April 11, 2015 file photo, Kevin James arrives on a Segway to the premiere of "Paul Blart: Mall Cop 2" at AMC Loews Lincoln Square in New York.

As awards season heats up in Hollywood, the annual Razzies Awards yesterday named the year's worst achievements in film with steamy romance "Fifty Shades of Grey" and Adam Sandler's video game adventure "Pixels" among the top nominees, while Sylvester Stallone was honored with a redemption. "Fifty Shades of Grey," "Pixels," sci-fi saga "Jupiter Ascending," comedy "Paul Blart: Mall Cop 2," all of which landed six nominations, and superhero "Fantastic 4," which landed five nods, will compete for the Razzies worst picture award.

The tongue-in-cheek Razzies, created in 1980, serve as an antidote to Hollywood's prestigious Oscars ceremony, as organizers choose to bestow winners of the year's worst films with a gold spray-painted trophy worth \$4.97. Stallone, who won his first Golden Globe last week for reprising his iconic role as Rocky Balboa in "Creed," is nominated for the Razzie Redeemer Award, going from an "all-time Razzie champ to 2015 award contender."

He will compete for the title with Will Smith, nominated for his redeeming role in "Concussion," actor-director Elizabeth Banks for directing the hit "Pitch Perfect 2" and horror filmmaker M Night Shyamalan for directing hit horror "The Visit" after a slew of flops. Winners of the Razzies are voted for online by around 900 members of the Razzies committee, and anyone can sign up to vote, with memberships starting at \$40.

The "tacky" Razzies ceremony are traditionally held in Hollywood on the night before the Feb. 28 Oscars ceremony, and those honored seldom show up. Perennial Razzie favorite Sandler, nominated for five consecutive years, this year scored nods for worst actor in "Pixels" and worst screen combo for "Adam Sandler & Any Pair of Shoes" for his role in "The Cobbler" - about a cobbler who can magically step into the shoes of his customers. Eddie Redmayne, a potential best actor Oscar contender for his role in "The Danish Girl," landed a worst actor Razzie nomination for "Jupiter Ascending," while Rooney Mara, potential Oscar best actress nominee, landed a worst supporting Razzie nod for her role as

A complete list of this year's Razzies nominees

Worst picture: "Fantastic Four," "Fifty Shades of Grey," "Jupiter Ascending," "Paul Blart Mall Cop 2," "Pixels."

Worst actor: Johnny Depp, "Mortdecai"; Jamie Dornan, "Fifty Shades of Grey"; Kevin James, "Paul Blart Mall Cop 2"; Adam Sandler, "The Cobbler" and "Pixels"; Channing Tatum, "Jupiter Ascending."

Worst actress: Katherine Heigl, "Home Sweet Hell"; Dakota Johnson, "Fifty Shades of Grey"; Mila Kunis, "Jupiter Ascending"; Jennifer Lopez, "The Boy Next Door"; Gwyneth Paltrow, "Mortdecai."

Worst supporting actor: Chevy Chase, "Hot Tub Time Machine 2" and "Vacation"; Josh Gad, "Pixels" and "The Wedding Ringer"; Kevin James, "Pixels"; Jason Lee, "Alvin and the Chipmunks: Road Chip"; Eddie Redmayne, "Jupiter Ascending."

Worst supporting actress: Kaley Cuoco-Sweeting, "Alvin and the Chipmunks: Road Chip" and "The Wedding Ringer"; Rooney Mara, "Pan"; Michelle Monaghan, "Pixels"; Julianne Moore, "Seventh Son"; Amanda Seyfried, "Love the Coopers" and "Pan."

Worst remake or sequel: "Alvin and the Chipmunks: The Road Chip"; "Fantastic Four"; "Hot Tub Time Machine 2"; "Human Centipede 3"; "Paul Blart Mall Cop 2."

Worst screen combo: Miles Teller, Michael B Jordan, Kate Mara and Jamie Bell, "Fantastic Four"; Johnny Depp and his glued-on mustache, "Mortdecai"; Jamie Dornan and Dakota Johnson, "Fifty Shades of Grey"; Kevin James and either his Segway or glued-on mustache, "Paul Blart Mall Cop 2"; Adam Sandler and any pair of shoes, "The Cobbler."

Worst director: Andy Fickman, "Paul Blart Mall Cop 2"; Tom Six, "Human Centipede 3"; Sam Taylor-Johnson, "Fifty Shades of Grey"; Josh Trank, "Fantastic Four"; Andy and Lana Wachowski, "Jupiter Ascending."

Worst screenplay: Simon Kinberg, Jeremy Slater and Josh Trank, "Fantastic Four"; Kelly Marcel, "Fifty Shades of Grey"; Andy and Lana Wachowski, "Jupiter Ascending"; Kevin James and Nick Bakay, "Paul Blart Mall Cop 2"; Tim Herlihy and Timothy Dowling, "Pixels."

Razzies redeemer award: Elizabeth Banks, M Night Shyamalan, Will Smith and Sylvester Stallone. —AP

Cosby lawyers to ask Massachusetts judge to seal evidence in sex case

Attorneys for Bill Cosby are due in court yesterday to ask a federal judge in Massachusetts to seal all testimony related to a defamation lawsuit brought by seven women who have accused the comedian of sexual assault. Tamara Green sued Cosby in December 2014, accusing him of lying when he publicly denied having sexually assaulted her, and six other women have since joined in the lawsuit. Cosby, 78, filed a countersuit in US District Court in Massachusetts last month, accusing the women of defaming him.

The seven are among more than 50 women who have come forward to publicly accuse Cosby of sexually assaulting them after plying them with drugs or alcohol in alleged attacks carried out over a number of decades. The accusations toppled Cosby from his pedestal as one of America's most-admired comedians, who built a long career on family-friendly humor. He was best known for his role as the dad Heathcliff Huxtable in the long-running 1980s television hit, "The Cosby Show." Cosby has repeatedly denied wrongdoing. Last month prosecutors in Pennsylvania charged him with a 2004 sexual assault days before the statute of limitations on that alleged crime was to expire.



Bill Cosby arrives at court to face a felony charge of aggravated indecent assault, Wednesday, Dec 30, 2015, in Elkins Park, Pa. —AP

He faces several civil suits. Cosby's attorneys are scheduled to argue before US Magistrate Judge David Hennessy in Worcester, Massachusetts, that any testimony related to the lawsuits be kept under seal until trial. "The law is clear: trial - not discovery - is the 'fact-finding' process in which the public has a common law and constitutional interest," Cosby's attorneys wrote in a filing this week. "Mr. Cosby's undisputed privacy interest and his need for protection from annoyance, embarrassment, and undue prejudice establish good cause to enter the limited protective order he seeks."

Attorneys for the women have argued that the request is unjustified. "Cosby himself has sought out publicity when it suits him - for example, by defaming the plaintiffs as liars in 2014," lawyers for the seven women wrote. "That being so, the public should know all of the material facts surrounding this case, regarding whether defendant Cosby's private conduct comports with his public persona." Cosby testified in 2005 that he had obtained the sedative drug Quaaludes, popular in the 1970s, intending to give them to young women he desired to have sex with, according to court documents unsealed in July as part of a separate legal proceeding. —Reuters



This file photo of the Indian chief of the religious sect Dera Sacha Sauda (DSS) Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh shows him gesturing during a news conference. —AFP

Indian TV comedian arrested for 'offensive' guru act

Indian police have arrested a popular comedian for offending religious sentiments after he mimicked a controversial spiritual guru on a television show, an official said yesterday. Kiku Sharda, 40, was sent to judicial custody for 14 days by a court in northern Haryana state after he was arrested in Mumbai late Tuesday, a senior police officer told AFP. "A police team arrested the accused at a TV studio in Mumbai late last night following a complaint filed by one of the guru's followers," he said on the condition of anonymity.

Sharda, who imitated guru Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh in a TV appearance on December 27, has apologized for his act, saying it was only aimed at entertaining audiences.

"I was given a dress, a script to read and directed to act," he was quoted as saying by the Press Trust of India news agency. Singh, who heads the Dera Sacha Sauda sect, is known as the "guru in bling" for his penchant for garish clothes and jewelry. Dera Sacha Sauda describes itself as a social welfare and spiritual organization with millions of followers in India and abroad. The 48-year-old guru is already under police investigation for allegedly encouraging 400 followers to undergo castrations as his ashram so they could get closer to God.

On its website, the group describes Singh as a saint as well as an author, inventor, scientist, philosopher, philanthropist, peace activist and "the ultimate humanitarian." Singh has also featured in two action movies and many music videos. Many celebrities came out in support of Sharda on Twitter yesterday, calling his arrest "shocking" and "absurd." "I don't see our leaders getting arrested for behaving like comedians every day," tweeted fellow comedian Vir Das. —AFP

Japan boy band SMAP mulling breakup

Japanese pop fans were rocked by news yesterday that evergreen boy band SMAP is mulling a breakup, ending the group's 30-year reign at the top of the music business that has won them legions of fans across Asia. One of Japan's most popular and longest enduring bands, the heartthrobs soared to the top of the charts with sugary pop songs and choreographed dances, but may split following a feud within their agency, according to reports.

News of the quintet's possible breakup emerged on the front pages of major Japanese "sports" newspapers - which also carry entertainment stories - yesterday and quickly spread as mainstream national dailies and public broadcaster NHK rushed to confirm the reports. SMAP was established as just another ubiquitous teenage boy band, but backed by the powerful Johnny & Associates agency its members have flourished as a group and also in their solo careers as actors and fixtures on popular variety shows.

Reports said four members plan to leave Johnny & Associates. "It is true that such talks and negotiations are ongoing," the agency said in a statement, referring to the reports without providing further details. The wrangling was reportedly sparked by tensions between the agent in charge of SMAP and other top Johnny & Associates managers. Speculation about the group's future was top news on social media as forlorn fans lamented the possible split. "SMAP... say it's not true," posted Twitter user @hyougatanaka. Another user wrote emphatically: "Can never accept SMAP breaking up!!!"

Takuya Kimura, the most popular member who starred in the Wong Kar-wai film "2046", is the only member expected to stay with the agency, reports said. SMAP, which cryptically stands for "Sports Music Assemble



This picture taken on December 30, 2015 shows Japanese boy band SMAP members (from left to right) Masahiro Nakai, Tsuyoshi Kusanagi, Shingo Katori, Goro Inagaki and Takuya Kimura in Tokyo. —AFP

People", started out as a fresh-faced boy band in 1988. Despite sometimes obvious musical shortcomings, they are still the top J-pop boy band - even though the members now range in age from 38 to 43. They retain an enormous fan base among women in their 40s who came of age as the band hit the big time, and who remain the core viewers for the formulaic television dramas starring

various members of the quintet.

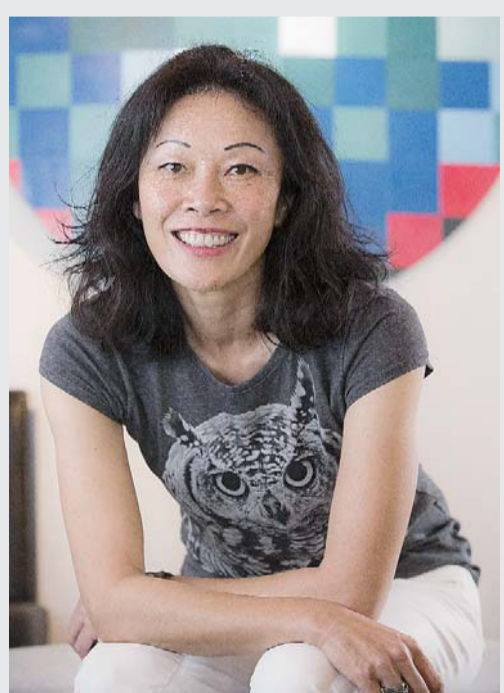
Weekly magazine Shukan Shincho reported in its latest edition published yesterday that SMAP as a group produces annual revenue of 25 billion yen (\$212 million). Their popularity has also reached diplomatic heights, with the band meeting then Chinese premier Wen Jiabao in Tokyo in 2011. —AFP

Herbie Hancock, Jefferson Airplane among Grammy honorees

Jazz legend Herbie Hancock and 1960s countercultural icons Jefferson Airplane will be among the latest recipients of the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award, the Recording Academy announced yesterday. The award is given annually to artists who contributed significantly to the recording industry and the broader culture. The new winners will be honored with a concert sometime in early 2016 separate from the February 15 ceremony of the Grammy Awards, the US music industry's most prestigious prize. Hancock, 75, is one of the most celebrated living jazz artists. A pianist as well as composer, he revitalized rhythm sections to bring a new sense of melody.

Hancock has won 14 Grammy Awards over his five-decade career, which has included crossover hits into pop. Jefferson Airplane helped create the psychedelic sound of the 1960s, with lasting hits such as "White Rabbit" and "Somebody to Love." Bringing a harder rock edge to folk music, Jefferson Airplane offered anthems for the 1967 "Summer in Love" in the band's hometown San Francisco and performed at the era's defining festivals of Monterey and Woodstock.

Other recipients of this year's Lifetime Achievement Award include Celia Cruz, the late Cuban salsa singer who was one of the 20th century's leading artists in Latin America, and Queen of R&B Ruth Brown, who brought a new audience to the genre with a string of hits in the 1950s. The other recipients are Earth, Wind and Fire, who became widely popular by bringing a wider pop audience to R&B; Run-DMC., who were among the pioneers of hip-hop in 1980s New York, and singer Linda Ronstadt, who has won 10 Grammys over a career that has taken her from pop to rock and across many other genres. The Recording Academy also named the latest recipients of its Trustee Award, which recognizes career achievements outside of performance. This year's winners will include the late John Cage, one of the leading US modern composers of the 20th century. —AFP



In this Nov 26, 2014, photo, Geeling Ching poses for a photo in Auckland, New Zealand. —AP



A tribute balloon is pictured in front of a mural of late British singer David Bowie, painted by Australian street artist James Cochran, aka Jimmy C, in Brixton, south London, two days after the announcement of Bowie's death. —AFP

For Bowie, the Thin White Duke, inspiration was black

Sleender and pale, David Bowie counted the dour Thin White Duke among his many incarnations. But his first love was African-American music and his views on race, like his music, were often ahead of their time. After the British rock legend's shock death from cancer on Sunday at age 69, a video went viral online of a dapper Bowie in 1983 accusing then-nascent MTV of ignoring African-Americans, a trend "rampant through American media." Bowie persists politely as MTV host Mark Goodson insists that the network needs to "play the music that we think an entire country is going to like" and appear meaningful to "a 17-year-old" outside big US cities. "I tell you what maybe the Isley Brothers or Marvin Gaye means to a black 17-year-old. Surely he's part of America as well," Bowie said, referring to classic African-American acts.

Bowie, a skilled actor who was an MTV favorite in the 1980s, was hardly risking his career through the interview and, soon afterward, Michael Jackson broke through the network's color barrier. But the episode was just one that showed Bowie to be a leader on racial issues, even as his fan base was largely white. Early in his career as he performed in the American South, which was just ending official discrimination codes, Bowie insisted on playing with

African-American musicians and would whisk the band out of town immediately after concerts to avoid trouble.

In 1975, as he exited his early glam-rock phase, Bowie became one of the first white performers on "Soul Train," the television show that was a must-watch for many African-Americans. Bowie performed two songs that would be among his most famous - "Fame" and "Young Americans." The songs appeared on his "Young Americans" album, recorded at Sigma Sound Studios, the legendary center of soul music in Philadelphia.

From soul to Hitler

The soul phase was not a sudden fad for Bowie, raised in a modest household in the London area. "The one thing that really turned me on to wanting to be a musician, wanting to write, was black music - American black music - Little Richard and John Coltrane in the 1950s," Bowie told Record Collector in a 1993 interview. Bowie said he was eight years old when he first heard Little Richard, the pioneering R&B and funk artist. "I found it all very exciting - the feeling of aggression that came through the arrangements. It was like breaking up the sky - his voice broke out of the skies - an extraordinary voice," Bowie said.

In one of the most visible signs of his comfort on race, Bowie in 1992 married Somali-born supermodel Iman, a relationship that lasted until his death. In a 1993 interview with Arsenio Hall, Bowie said the couple's celebrity status shielded them from bigotry but voiced dismay that interracial couples were more common in Europe than the United States at the time. But Bowie's record on racial equality was marred by a flirtation with a philosophy that could hardly be further removed - Nazism.

Just a year after appearing on "Soul Train," Bowie was detained on the border of the Soviet Union and Poland for a collection of Nazi memorabilia. His Great White Duke persona was grim and consciously Aryan and Bowie described Hitler as an early rock star. Bowie later took pains to distance himself, saying he was out of his mind on drugs. He said he never embraced anti-Semitism but developed a misguided fascination with the Nazis over their search for the mythical Holy Grail in Glastonbury, England.

'My little China Girl'

Bowie definitely declared himself off fascist after transformative years in the late 1970s in West Berlin. During the period Bowie wrote with Iggy Pop the song whose legacy has been among the most

contested - "China Girl." The original lyrics - "I'm a mess without my little China Girl" - were often thought to be metaphorical, using street slang for heroin. But Bowie's 1983 version made no mistake that it was about white male fetishization of Asian women. With a Chinese-inspired guitar riff by Nile Rodgers of Chic fame, Bowie appears in the video dancing in Sydney's Chinatown, trying to woo an Asian woman by slanting his eyes with his fingers.

Bowie described the video as an over-the-top parody of racial stereotypes and an indictment of "invasion and exploitation." But not all were convinced. In a widely read 1993 essay, academic Ellie Hisama acknowledged that Bowie intended irony but said the video still reflected Asian stereotypes by depriving the girl of any voice. The actress herself - Geeling Ng, now a restaurateur in Auckland - told the New Zealand Herald after Bowie's death she remained "utterly proud to be China Girl." Praise for Bowie has also come from prominent African-American artists including rapper Kanye West, who called him "one of my most important inspirations." "So fearless, so creative, he gave us magic for a lifetime," West tweeted. —AFP



Herbie Hancock

Stella McCartney

on trend with star-studded Hollywood soiree



Television personality Nicole Richie arrives at Stella McCartney Autumn 2016 Presentation at Amoeba Music in Los Angeles, California.

Move over New York City, Paris and Milan, there's a new fashionista on the rise: Los Angeles. Stella McCartney made a glitzy, star-studded Hollywood debut Tuesday. The British designer followed on the heels of brands like Burberry and Tom Ford who recently brought their runway shows to the West Coast. "It just really felt like the time to have it in LA," said

McCartney, who has previously presented in New York and London. "It's such a great place for music, for fashion, for film, for entertainment, for the arts, and it just felt like the right time and the right city."

Gwyneth Paltrow, Kate Hudson, Katy Perry, Orlando Bloom and Demi Lovato were among the guests at the presentation held at the record store, Amoeba Music. "It's a movement! I love it!" said celebrity stylist and designer Rachel Zoe. "I do think designers have really fallen in love with LA ... I think everyone's figuring out this is the best place to live and the

best place to be and that there's a huge market out here and a huge client base." McCartney's pre-fall collection included silky dresses, oversized coats and cozy knitwear in playful patterns and animal prints.

Loose-fitting trousers and blouses had blue and gold diagonal stripes or geometric color-blocking, and feminine floral dresses were layered under colorful tulle. "The collection is very much about celebrating the rejuvenation of a woman's wardrobe," said the designer and daughter of former Beatle Paul McCartney. "Looking at pieces that go from day to evening. ... Lots of prints, lots of cats, lots of leopard." Models danced on platforms and played arcade games before performances by Brian Wilson, Pink and Johnny Depp and Marilyn Manson. "I think it's a great," said "Mad Men" actress Kiernan Shipka. "LA is a really, really cool town and I love that Stella knows how to throw party." — AP



Comedian Chelsea Handler



Actress Melanie Griffith



Singer Katy Perry



Actress Amber Valletta



Actress Gwyneth Paltrow (left) and Stella McCartney



Stylist Rachel Zoe



Singer Mary J Blige



Actress Molly Sims



Comedian Sarah Silverman



Model Kate Upton



Singer Demi Lovato



Actress Kate Hudson



Kelly Osbourne



People make their way past a Chinatown bank in San Francisco.



Two women walk past a Chinatown mural in San Francisco. — AP Photos

Step into the world of San Francisco's Chinatown

The best plan for tackling San Francisco's Chinatown is no plan at all. Simply wandering the wide streets and narrow alleys will take you where you need to go. Whether you just happen to be in town or are visiting for something specific like the Super Bowl or Lunar New Year - the Year of the Monkey dawns Feb 8 - spending a few hours in the second-largest Chinatown in the United States (behind New York City) is always worthwhile.

Visit early and you'll feel the rush of everyday life as the food markets and bakeries hum with activity - this is a real community as well as a tourist attraction. Visit at dusk and Chinatown takes on a magical glow, the lanterns strung across Grant Street glowing red and the curio shop windows ablaze in a glitter of possibilities. Here's a quick guide to getting the most out of your stroll.

How to get there

A good place to start is the much-photographed gate at Bush Street and Grant Avenue. This is Instagram central and a short walk from Union Square. You can also ride the cable car to Chinatown via either the Powell-Hyde or Powell-Mason lines. Cable cars make many stops; two possibilities for alighting are at Washington and Mason streets or Powell and California. Tickets, \$7, can be purchased at the turnaround at Powell and Market streets or in advance online. You don't have to queue at the turnaround to board; you can walk a few blocks up the line-look for the brown and white signs indicating stops. Be aware, though,

that you may have trouble getting a seat when it's busy.

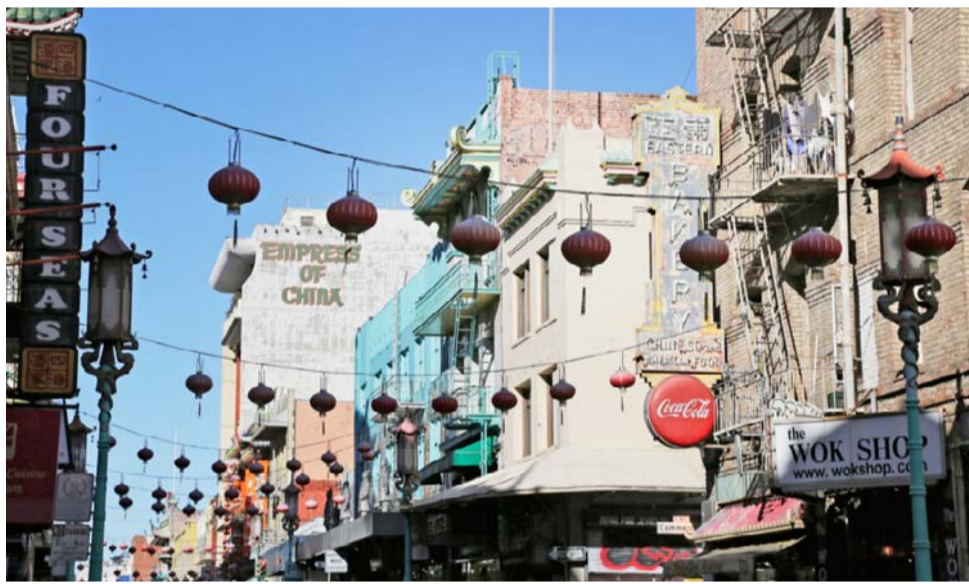
Where to eat

Tourists and locals alike rejoiced when Sam Wo's recently reopened. Before it closed in 2012, the restaurant had operated for more than 100 years on Washington Street and was known as a place for no-frills Cantonese fare where customers were once insulted by the "rudest waiter in the world," the late Edsel Ford Fong. Sam Wo's reopened in October at 713 Clay St, between Grant and Kearny. Try the

"jook," rice porridge served with a variety of toppings. Other standbys include House of Nanking, 919 Kearny St., and Great Eastern Restaurant, 649 Jackson St, known for its Cantonese-style seafood dishes.

What to do

Grant is the main drag, but if you want to see the more workaday side to Chinatown, take a walk on Stockton Street, known for its produce and live animal markets. Explore the tiny side streets where you'll find everything from dive bars to tea houses to traditional



Lanterns hang in Chinatown above Grant Street in San Francisco.



An assortment of hats are shown for sale at a Chinatown shop on Grant Street in San Francisco.

Chinese apothecaries. Waverly Place, between Washington and Sacramento streets, is home to several temples including Tien Hau, which has a different style on each floor culminating with a temple dedicated to the Goddess of Heaven, 125 Waverly Place, free but donations appreciated. Another interested temple is Kong Chow Temple, known for its colorful altars, and in the same building as the Chinatown post office, 955 Stockton St.

The Golden Gate Fortune Cookie Factory, is open seven days a week, 56 Ross Alley. Admission is free, but you need to pay 50 cents to take a picture. Chinese New Year,

understandably, is big here, with banners, fireworks, food and flowers. This year, the two-week celebration wraps up with the traditional parade on Feb 20. This year's flower fair will be held Jan 30-31, from 10 am to 8 pm on Saturday and 9 am to 6 pm Sunday. Location: Grant Avenue from Clay to Broadway, and Pacific, Jackson and Washington streets between Stockton and Kearny.

Looking to add a little scholarship to your stroll? For a deeper dive into Chinatown history, consider one of the guided tours offered by the Chinese Cultural Center. Tickets are around \$30 for adults and reservations are required. —AP

Ideas, products for a primp-perfect bathroom

What makes a great bathroom, one perfect for prepping and primping? A well-considered combination of fixtures, lighting and amenities - the kind we often first experience in a really nice hotel. "Bathrooms are the most private parts of our homes. They're also the most private parts of hotels, our homes away from home," says Los Angeles author Anneli Rufus, who has written travel books among others. It's the sense of a space that's exclusively ours that's appealing, she says, enhanced by fittings



In this photo provided by Duravit, Philippe Starck's Cape Cod vanity for Duravit evokes an easy yet elegant New England coastal vibe, with weathered wood vanities and slim-edge sinks in several shapes.

and fluffy towels. We often want to recreate that luxury-hotel experience when we return home, says Paul Flowers, chief design officer for Lixil, the Tokyo-based parent company of higher-end, bath-product brands like DXV and Grohe. The bathroom, he says, "is moving from a rational space for cleaning and grooming into an emotional space for relaxation and contemplation." Some ways to bring the hotel-style bathroom home:

Light the way

Flicking on that hotel bathroom light switch is often where the magic begins: Complexions look healthier, skin smoother. "Typically, the best type of lighting is layered, because it addresses the



In this photo provided by Duravit, Philippe Starck's Cape Cod vanity for Duravit evokes an easy yet elegant New England coastal vibe, with weathered wood vanities and slim-edge sinks in several shapes. The free standing tub is made of a newly-developed material that has a soft feel that's warm to the touch.

bathroom's different lighting needs," says interior designer Jessica Shankman of Laurel & Wolf in West Hollywood, California.

"I always recommend installing a dimmer to control the light output and create a different atmosphere in the room," she says. That might mean bright lights when you get dressed, for instance, and soft lighting while you soak in the tub. For makeup application, task lighting's your best friend, she says: "I suggest mounting wall sconces on either side of the mirror to provide shadow-free lighting on the face."

LED lighting has had a big impact on bath design. Old-school vanity lighting often involved harsh fluorescents or intrusive marquee lights. Now, the lighting can be embedded in the mirror itself, and the reflection can be warm and flattering. Duravit's L-Cube mirror, for instance, is a frame of LED light that can be dimmed with a touch of the hand.

LEDs have also given product designers new places to put lighting, such as under toilet seat rims and around the perimeters of spa tubs. In

some cases, the lights change color, so the mood of the room can be adjusted, to provide a soothing blue, say, or a zesty yellow/orange glow. Or opt for a color-changing HotelSpa or DreamSpa shower head from ipShower, with colors that shift depending on the water temperature. Designers are also pulling in lighting from other rooms - such as chandeliers and pendants - to amp up the drama and luxe look in a bathroom.

Geared up

High tech and personalization continue to move into the bathroom. American Standard's SpaLet toilet/bidet by DXV features a heated seat, temperature-controlled bidet, automated flush, and a seat that opens and closes via sensor.

Bluetooth-enabled sound systems and vanity mirrors embedded with TVs bring soundtracks and programs into the bathing environment. And Broan-NuTone's Premium Humidity Sensing Control monitors moisture levels and automatically turns on the fan before the mirrors steam up.



In this photo provided by Duravit, this free standing tub, part of Philippe Starck's Cape Cod collection for Duravit, is made of a newly-developed material that has a soft feel that's warm to the touch. — AP photos



This photo provided by Hastings Tile & Bath shows Hastings Tile & Bath's Onda Vanity, part of their Design Flexibility Collection.

Warm and welcoming

Sheila Schmitz, editor at the homes website Houzz.com, sees a trend toward treating the bathroom as more of a "living room."

"Our users love it when they see a bathroom warmed up with vintage and furniture-like details," she says. "Console tables, comfortable chairs, and new or repurposed dressers make a bathroom feel more like a living space than just a place to wash up."

Chameleon Concepts offers bespoke wall-mounted vanities with or without decorative legs. Select your style and finish, and then add a front panel insert like patterned paper, faux

leather, mosaic or marble.

Philippe Starck's Cape Cod vanity features a vessel sink perched on a walnut, oak or beech wood slab, hewn to resemble driftwood. A coordinating free-standing bathtub is crafted of a new material with a satin finish and soft feel.

Undulating curves on the Onda collection of vanities and counter basins have a sensuous and playful vibe.

Designer brand Axor teamed up with Japanese design studio Nendo to create the LampShower, which features an LED light encased in a brass showerhead that looks like a lampshade. — AP

Lifestyle

THURSDAY, JANUARY 14, 2016

Indian TV comedian
arrested for
'offensive' guru act

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A visitor looks at an installation entitled "Untitled (Food For Thought series)" by Maha Malluh, displayed in the Saatchi Gallery in London, during a press preview for the gallery's forthcoming exhibition "Champagne Life". The exhibition is set to run from today up to March 16, 2016 and features work by female artists from around the world. — AFP

Powder horn believed owned by Alexander Hamilton sold



In a Tuesday, Dec 15, 2015 photo, a powder horn that some experts believe was used by Alexander Hamilton is photographed at Antique NJ in Closter, NJ. — AP

A powder horn that some experts believe was used by Alexander Hamilton sold for \$115,620 at auction on what would have been his birthday. Hamilton, the nation's first treasury secretary and one of the country's Founding Fathers, is now the focus of a blockbuster hip-hop Broadway musical called "Hamilton." The owner of the powder horn, a New Jersey dentist, hoped buzz from the show would help boost bids, which started at \$10,000 on Monday at Sterling Associates in Closter, New Jersey.

The auction house owner, Steven D'Atri, said he was happy with the price, but not surprised. He said the buyer did not wish to be identified. Dr

Warren Richman acquired the horn from a patient in 1990 and spent years trying to document its authenticity and studying its etchings, which include a unicorn. A descendant, an arms appraiser and a forensic documents expert said they believe Hamilton used the engraved piece of cow horn to carry gunpowder.

It is inscribed with his name and 1773, the year he entered what today is Columbia University. Hamilton would have used it leading troops during the Revolutionary War and as an aide to Gen. George Washington. Hamilton's birthday is recognized as Jan 11, but historians are not sure whether he was born in 1755 or 1757. He was mortally

wounded in a duel with Aaron Burr in 1804. Hamilton has lately become the unlikely subject of a smash musical that's the hottest ticket in New York. Written by and starring Lin-Manuel Miranda, the show tells the true story of how an orphan emigrant from the Caribbean rose to the highest ranks of American society, as told by a young African-American and Latino cast. Visitation to the Hamilton Grange National Memorial in New York City is up almost 250 percent per month since the Broadway show premiered, John Warren of the National Park Service said. Copyright 2016 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed. — AP

Murderer on vocals: Malawi prison band vies for Grammy glory

ON VOCALS: Convicted murderer Elias Chimenya, on bass guitar; burglar Stefano Nyerenda, and prison guard Thomas Binamo is one of the band's songwriters. Malawi's Zomba Prison Project band has a unique line-up that could grab global success at the recording industry's prestigious Grammy Awards next month. Their 20-track record "I Have No Everything Here" has been nominated in the Best World Music Album category, with the winner to be announced at a gala ceremony in Los Angeles. Musical talent at the Zomba maximum-security prison was unearthed in 2013 when US producer Ian Brennan spent two weeks working with 60 inmates and guards to make the album.

Six hours of recordings were edited down into the final selection of songs, featuring 16 of the prison's musicians, singing mainly in the local Chichewa language. Elias Chimenya, 46, who is serving a life term for killing a man in a quarrel in the 1980s, wrote and sang the haunting ballad "Jealous Neighbor," the album's fifth track. "I am a reformed person, and music has helped me to be cool and deal with the situation of being incarcerated for life," he told AFP at the decrepit prison in the poor southern African nation. "(But) I hope to not die in prison, and instead to be released to take up a music career outside."

'Already made us famous'

More than two years after the recording sessions, news of the award nomination came as a surprise to inmates. "We are baffled because we didn't expect prisoners could be nominated," said Nyerenda, the 34-year-old guitarist, who expects to be freed next year after serving a 10-year sentence for house burglary. The prison already had an all-male band that tours local schools to spread HIV prevention messages. But the Grammy-nominated album includes other inmates and half the songs are by women prisoners living in a separate part of the jail where they have no instruments except hand drums, buckets and pieces of pipe.

Among the songs on the album, which



Malawi's Zomba prison project band vocalists, Malawi Correctional services Sergeant Ines Kaunde (second right) and inmate Elias Chimenya (center) perform during a rehearsal.

was recorded in a makeshift studio next to a noisy carpentry workshop, are tracks called "Last Wishes," "I Am Alone" and "Don't Hate Me." "The nomination alone has inspired us and already made us famous both in Malawi and abroad," said Binamo, the prison guard who wrote the lyrics for a song called "Please. Don't Kill My Child." "Winning an award will be the icing on the cake," he added, as band members wearing white prison uniforms rehearsed a new song in the bare studio under a single light bulb.

"We teach vocals, keyboard, drums and guitar until they become musicians. Playing music can bring relief to them," Binamo said. "Many people have a negative attitude towards the prison authorities. They think we only punish convicts." Brennan, who has worked regularly in US prisons, said he was amazed by how music sessions in the Zomba jail "did not have any rigid boundary between guards and prisoners."

"I was struck by how the voices are unique, unaffected and direct," he added. Brennan also defended the album, which was released last year, against accusations that it celebrated criminals. "This is not about glorifying anyone—it is about human-

izing, and everyone should be humanized," he said. "Some of these prisoners have been proved innocent and released. Others are caught up in bureaucracy for years. But yes, some people are in for life, for murder."

Brennan said the prison, built in the 1930s, was in poor repair but that the pris-



Malawi's Zomba prison project band drummer Ernest Kufandiko, an inmate, performs during a rehearsal at the Central Prison's makeshift music studio. — AFP photos



Members of Malawi's Zomba prison project band pose for a photograph outside the Central Prison's makeshift music studio at the end of a rehearsal.



Malawi's Zomba prison project band vocalists, Malawi Correctional services Sergeant Ines Kaunde (second right) and inmate Elias Chimenya (center) perform during a rehearsal.

oners appeared to be relatively well-treated. "Considering the tremendous shortage of resources, I would say prison officials do

make an effort to rehabilitate prisoners and provide decent conditions," he told AFP. "It is an incredible thing that they were nomi-

nated." The prisoners were paid a small fee for the recording, and any profits will be shared among them—including several who have since been released. "When I heard the news, I said, 'What is a Grammy?'" recalled Little Dinizulu Mtengano, acting chief commissioner of prisons in Malawi.

"Straight from my lunch, I went to the prison to break it to them. They were surprised, but some knew what the Grammys were." No one from the jail is expected to attend the award ceremony on February 15. Also competing in their category are albums by South African choral group Ladysmith Black Mambazo and Indian sitar musician Anoushka Shankar, the daughter of the late sitar maestro Ravi Shankar.

Another of the prisoner performers, Chikondi Salanje, a convicted thief who sings the album's opening track, said the nomination led him to reflect on his time in jail. "This is the place where I discovered my potential," he said. "I always tell myself that if I were outside, I would have been killed or faced something terrible. But I am glad to be part of the people that have put Malawi on the map." — AFP