



Private schools pressure union to negotiate tuition fee hike



Tearful Kerber stuns Williams to win first major title



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OPPOSITION HEADS TO PEACE TALKS IN GENEVA

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NEARLY 40 MIGRANTS DROWN OFF TURKEY

AYVACIK, Turkey: The Turkish coastguard yesterday recovered the bodies of women and children washed up on a beach after yet another migrant boat sank while trying to reach Europe, leaving at least 37 dead. In harrowing scenes reminiscent of the death of Aylan Kurdi, the Syrian toddler photographed lying dead on a Turkish beach in September, the body of a small child could be seen among those strewn over a beach near the town of Ayvacik in northwestern Canakkale province, an AFP photographer at the scene said.



AYVACIK, Turkey: A Turkish paramilitary police officer holds the dead body of a migrant boy from the shoreline near this Aegean town yesterday. — AP

An AFP picture showed the dead child dressed in dark trousers and a blue top, face covered with a small hat. In another image, a Turkish gendarme is seen lowering the body of an older child into a body bag. Another young child was also found dead in the water, according to the AFP photographer. A number of other children also drowned after the boat ferrying them and their families - some from Syria, others from Afghanistan and Myanmar - to the nearby Greek island of Lesbos sank just off the Turkish coast.

A Turkish official, contacted by AFP, said the Turkish coastguard recovered 37 bodies including children. The incident comes two days after 25 migrants, including 10 children, drowned off the Greek island of Samos. In an earlier statement the Turkish coastguard said 75 people had been rescued. The Turkish coastguard also said it could not give an exact number of migrants in the boat based on the testimony of the rescued migrants, adding that the rescue operation was continuing. AFP's photographer counted at least 19 bodies. "We are sad. At least 20 friends are still missing," a weeping woman who was among the survivors said earlier.

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GENEVA: Syria's main opposition body headed to Switzerland yesterday to demand progress on the dire humanitarian situation before formally joining peace talks, as the starvation death toll in the besieged town of Madaya rose. The High Negotiations Committee (HNC) late Friday begrudgingly bowed to US and Saudi pressure to at least show up in Geneva to test the waters for joining the biggest push to date to end a five-year-old civil war. But the body insisted it will not engage in negotiations, even indirectly, with President Bashar Al-Assad's regime until UN Security Council resolutions requiring an end to sieges of towns are adhered to.

Highlighting the dire situation, medical charity MSF yesterday raised the death toll from starvation to at least 46 since Dec 1 in Madaya, one of more than a dozen Syrian towns blockaded by regime or rebel forces. "We will not sit down at the negotiating table if our people continue to be massacred," HNC spokesman Salem Al-Meslet said Friday after the group finally announced its attendance in Geneva after four days of wrangling in Riyadh.

On Friday, the scheduled start of a planned six months of talks under an ambitious roadmap set out in Vienna in November, protesters highlighted the plight of ordinary Syrians with "siege soup" of grass and leaves. The HNC are also pressing for bombardments of civilians to cease. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said yesterday that Russian air strikes, which began in late September to support Assad, have killed 3,578 people in total including 1,380 civilians.

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NO MORNING ASSEMBLIES AT SCHOOLS DUE TO CHILL

KUWAIT: Minister of Education Dr Badr Al-Essa announced canceling the morning assembly at all schools today due to the sharp decrease in temperatures. The Kuwait Meteorological Center at the Directorate General of Civil Aviation has predicted

'extreme cold' weather today, with cold winds and a minimum temperature of 2 degrees C. Kuwait is experiencing a cold wave described as the most extreme in years, with subzero temperatures resulting in frost in some areas. — KUNA



JAGHORI, Afghanistan: Afghan boy and Lionel Messi fan Murtaza Ahmadi, 5, wears a plastic bag jersey as he plays football on Friday. — AFP

AFGHAN BOY IN PLASTIC MESSI JERSEY BECOMES INTERNET STAR

JAGHORI, Afghanistan: A five-year-old Afghan boy living in an insurgency-prone area has become an online sensation after pictures of him dressed in an improvised Lionel Messi jersey - made out of a plastic bag - went viral. Murtaza Ahmadi idolises the Argentine soccer star but a jersey of his favorite player is beyond the means of his poor family in rural Ghazni province southwest of Kabul. His elder brother Homayoun, 15, made him the plastic shirt with Messi's name scrawled in marker pen and posted the photos of Murtaza wearing it on Facebook two weeks ago.

"Our neighbor had thrown away grocery bags and Murtaza brought me one to make a Messi jersey," Homayoun, a high school student and himself a FC Barcelona fan, told AFP. Jorge Messi, Lionel's father, told AFP the footballer was aware of the photos that made waves on social media and "wants to do something" for his young fan. Murtaza, whose father admitted he could not afford to buy him a replica jersey, said he only had a punctured ball to play with in his village in Taliban-infested Ghazni.

"We do not have a football playground near our house

and the only ball I have is punctured," Murtaza told AFP. "I love Messi, he plays really well, and I love the shirt my brother made for me." Kicking the deflated football in his snow-covered village, he added: "I want to be like Messi when I grow up." Mohammad Arif Ahmadi, his father who works as a farmer, said he hopes that his son turns into a great football player one day. "I want my son to become the Messi of Afghanistan," he told AFP. "Murtaza wants to meet Lionel Messi in person one day. He asked me to buy him a jersey but I cannot afford it," Ahmadi, a father of six, said.

When his photos were first posted, Internet users scrambled to identify the boy and it was initially claimed he was an Iraqi Kurd. But Murtaza's uncle Azim Ahmadi, who lives in Australia, revealed to the media that his nephew was the unwitting star of the story. His father only learned about Murtaza's newfound fame from relatives when he recently visited Kabul for medical treatment. Sport was rarely played under Taleban rule, and the football stadium in Kabul was a notorious venue for executions, stonings and mutilations. Football and cricket are the two most popular sports in the war-ravaged country. — AFP

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KUWAIT: (From left) Advisor at His Highness the Prime Minister's Diwan Dr Sheikhha Rasha Al-Humoud Al-Sabah, Deputy Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah and Indian Ambassador to Kuwait Sunil Jain attend the Indian Doctors Forum. — Amiri Diwan photos.



Deputy Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah is pictured with Indian Ambassador to Kuwait Sunil Jain.

KUWAIT SEEKS INDIAN PROFESSIONALS AS IT EXPANDS HEALTH CARE: SHEIKH ALI 'INDIAN DOCTORS FORUM' KICKS OFF UNDER AMIR'S PATRONAGE

KUWAIT: Kuwait is expanding its infrastructure in health care and we look forward to more and more Indian health professionals joining us in the future, a senior government official said yesterday.

Deputy Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah made those statements at the Indian Doctors Forum, which he opened on behalf of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. The forum was held at Regency Hotel late Friday under His Highness the Amir's patron-

age. In his opening remarks, Sheikh Ali Jarrah conveyed the greetings of His Highness the Amir and "good wishes to Indian Doctors Forum and to the Indian community at large." He added that "historical ties between Kuwait and India have been based on strong friendship. Indian Doctors Forum has further strengthened the bond of friendship through the various community welfare and social activities."

"I congratulate members of the forum on their 12th year celebration," he said. "The

contribution of the Indian doctors towards the establishment and development of the health care system in Kuwait is praise worthy." "The services provided by the Indian nurses and technicians are also commendable," he added.

Treasure of knowledge

Furthermore, Sheikh Ali Jarrah praised the annual health guide released by the forum and described it as "a treasure of knowledge aimed at educating and spreading health

awareness among the public."

"Today it gives me great pleasure in releasing the 12th edition of IDF Health Guide titled "Emergency Medicine," he announced. He added "recently the Health Ministry launched a national life-saving campaign purposed to boost public awareness about first aid practices. I am sure that this guide will further assist in achieving that goal."

Meanwhile, President of the Indian Doctors Forum Dr Vinod Grover expressed

his appreciation to His Highness the Amir's sponsorship and his support to Indian doctors and Indian community in general. In the meantime, Advisor at His Highness the Prime Minister's Diwan Dr Sheikhha Rasha Al-Humoud Al-Sabah encouraged for more cooperation and exchange of expertise between the two countries in the field of medicine. Indian Ambassador to Kuwait Sunil Jain lauded the "positive" role of the Indian Doctors Forum in boosting bilateral ties. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Assistant Foreign Minister for Asia Affairs Ambassador Ali Al-Saeed and Indian Ambassador to Kuwait Sunil Jain cut the ceremonial cake. — Photos by Joseph Shagra and KUNA

KUWAIT HAILS GROWING RELATIONS WITH INDIA

KUWAIT: Assistant Foreign Minister for Asia Affairs Ambassador Ali Al-Saeed lauded the good and growing relations between Kuwait and India in various sectors. During a statement to journalists on sidelines of the Indian Embassy's recent celebration of the Indian National Day, Ambassador Al-Saeed valued role of the Indian community in

Kuwait development. Regarding the Indian-Arab Cooperation Forum, recently hosted by Bahrain, he said conferees dealt with various aspects of the political and economic ties between the Asian nation and the Arab world. The forum, co-organized by the Arab League and India, will be hosted on rotation basis by Arab states. —KUNA



Indian Ambassador to Kuwait Sunil Jain welcomes Chinese Ambassador Wang Di.

NOVAK CHOSEN FOR SABAH AL-AHMAD HEALTH AWARD: MINISTER

KUWAIT: Minister of Health Dr Ali Al-Obaidi announced yesterday the selection of Slovakian Michael Novak to win Sabah Al-Ahmad's International health Award 2016 for seniors in recognition for his research, discoveries and achievements in Alzheimer disease and the care for elderly patients.

Upon his arrival from Geneva after heading the Kuwaiti delegation to the Executive Board of the World Health Organization meetings, Obaidi said that the award embodied the international communi-



Dr Ali Al-Obaidi

ty's keenness and that of His Highness the Amir to contribute to science and scientists, particularly in the field of health research. The minister added that the award reflected the directives of His Highness the Amir to care for the elderly, including the establishment of the health care system that would be for their comfort and takes into account their rights and needs. He mentioned that the award of this year came to coincide with the 10th anniversary of His Highness the Amir's assumption of power. — KUNA

FOOD SECURITY MARKS CORE PILLAR FOR NATION: MINISTER

KUWAIT: Food security constitutes a main pillar for Kuwait, Minister of Public Works Ali Al-Omair said yesterday, commending the Kuwait Farmers Union for meeting the food needs of citizens. Meeting the union's head and members, together with a group of farmers, Omair, who doubles as Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs, said he is keen on wiping out all obstacles and problems the farmers are facing. He promised that such problems, primarily continuing power outage, serious shortage of water and lack of manpower, would be carefully considered in order to find swift solutions. The minister added that more meetings would be held with farmers in the near future with a view to following up on the resolution of obstacles they are facing. Meanwhile, Director-General of the Public Authority of Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources Faisal Al-Hasawi stressed the authority's interest in removing all problems bugging farmers and fishermen in order to develop and boost food security in the country. He added that yesterday's meeting with the minister had reflected continuing cooperation and communication between governmental officials and farmers. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Minister of Public Works Ali Al-Omair meets with the Kuwait Farmers Union members. — KUNA

AL-NUWAIR FLOWERS: SYMBOL OF SERENITY AND HAPPINESS

KUWAIT: The omnipresence of daisy flowers known locally as 'Nuwair' has become increasingly conspicuous nowadays, as many regard them as lively emblems of serenity and happiness. Sprung on roadsides and vast areas of barren land in large swaths of the country, these flowers have become ubiquitous.

In comments to KUNA, Kuwaiti astronomer and historian Adel Al-Saadoun said that the 'Nuwair' is not a particular species of flowers, but a class of indigenous, desert plants spherical in shape, illuminating rays of yellow reminiscent of sunshine. Fertile soil brought about by heavy deluges last fall season helped sow the seeds of these flowers along with an assortment of other plants, Saadoun noted. It is with the onset of spring that flowers known locally as 'Al-Hanwa', 'Al-Houthan', 'Al-Zamlouk', 'Al-Marar', 'Al-Atheed' and 'Crow man' fully blossom, Saadoun added.

'Al-Hanwa', a species of flowers that thrives during the months of January and February, is renowned for its orangey scent that can only be sensed in proximity to the flower, Saadoun described. Meanwhile, 'Al-Houthan', is a species of flowers that contains five round petals that are fragmented into three parts, he said.

Moreover, the astronomer depicted the 'Al-Marar' as being 25 centimeters in length with leaves resembling spoons that are yellowish in color with black shades in the middle. 'Crow man' is an herb with numerous branches that are greenish in color, with

abundant yellow leaves that almost conceal the facade of the herb itself. The herb, which blossoms in January, has a mild aroma of perfume, with its name derived from its leaves which are said to resemble a flying creature.

Medicinal effects

This herb, he added, thrives on sandy soils, useful for its medicinal effects and is purportedly potent as an anti-depressant. Herbs known as 'Al-Nuwar', which are species of the 'Al-Nuwar' flowers, are very widespread during rainy seasons with lime green branches that are 15 centimeters in length, encircled by white flowers, he described.

Furthermore, these herbs are known for their anti-inflammatory properties as its flowers are edible, helping add flavor to otherwise bland food. They can be used as palatable substitutes for saffron, best served with rice, he suggested.

'Al-Zamlouk' is scenic in appearance and brightly yellowish in color, largely seen at roadsides and pave walks and are most abundant after downpours. This plant has a very pleasant smell with a taste akin to that of carrots, however, it could shrivel up when exposed to sunlight, Al-Saadoun noted.

'Al-Atheed' is a very lively plant that is 60 centimeters in length, known for its secretion of a white substance and thick flowers. The plant blossoms during the month of February and is so fragile, he said, that it cannot sustain the heat that comes with rising temperatures in the country. —KUNA



News

In brief

Commemorative coins mark Amir's anniversary

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) issued yesterday commemorative coins marking the 10th anniversary of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's assumption to power. A gold-plated coin will be sold for KD 45 and a silver-plated coin will be sold for KD 35 at the Central Bank of Kuwait headquarters starting today. The front face of the coin will carry '10th anniversary of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah ascension to power in the State of Kuwait,' the phrase 'Humanitarian Leader,' picture of His Highness the Amir and the date of his assumption to power, which is January 29, 2016. The back of the coin carries the English translation of the front face. The statement noted that these commemorative versions "represent the utmost expression of compassion and affection to Kuwait's leader. —KUNA

Minister thanks police for carnival success

KUWAIT: Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Mohammad Al-Khaled Al-Sabah praised yesterday efforts of all security men who successfully managed to secure yesterday's Hala February 2016 carnival on the Arabian Gulf Road. Security Media Department of the Ministry said in a press release that Sheikh Mohammad Al-Khaled sent cables to the ministry's employees and volunteers thanking them for making the festivities a success. In the cables, the minister wished Kuwait prosperity under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir, His Highness the Crown Prince and His Highness the Prime Minister. — KUNA

Trade Fair lures investors: Minister

KUWAIT: Minister of Commerce and Industry Yousef Al-Ali said yesterday that the First International Trade Fair scheduled between February 21-27 would support foreign investors and open fresh promotional vistas. The fair due to be held at the Kuwait International Fair Ground is part of efforts to fulfill the supreme desire to convert Kuwait into a regional and global financial and commercial center active and vibrant in the region, the minister said in a press release. The event is expected to attract governmental, local and international organizations and agencies from over 20 Arab and foreign countries. — KUNA

PRIVATE SCHOOLS UNION HOPES NEXT MEETING WITH MINISTRY SETS FEES INCREASE CRITERIA

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Education (MoE) has agreed to increase tuition fees at American and British private schools in Kuwait from the next academic year, before the National Assembly suspended all fee increases until a parliamentary committee reviews the issue with the minister. Meanwhile fee increases at other private schools such as Arabic, Indian, Pakistani and others has not been decided yet. These schools are demanding to increase their fees, calling on the Kuwait Union of Private Schools to negotiate their demands with the education ministry.

After previous requests by private schools owners to increase their tuition fees were rejected many times, the ministry set rules for such increases. The ministry also closely inspects the schools demanding fee increases to evaluate the services provided against the fees charged.

Kuwait Times interviewed the head of the Kuwait Union of Private Schools (KUPS) Omar Al-Ghureir to learn more the role of the union, which was founded in 1975. "The union has about 250 members that include private American, British, bilingual, Indian, Pakistani and special needs schools and cultural institutes," he noted. Some excerpts:



Omar Al-Ghureir

and other institutions that are related to education.

KT: What are the activities of the union?

Ghureir: Awarding excellent high school students, since private school students rank first amongst excellent students from all schools in Kuwait. The administration also participates in various religious, social, cultural, sports and other activities. Internationally, KUPS is a member of the Arab Union of Private Schools.

KT: What are the union's current concerns and issues regarding private education in Kuwait?

Ghureir: There aren't any significant problems with the ministry; rather solving some obstacles in cooperation with the Private Education Department of the ministry. We noticed that many parents transfer their children from public schools to private schools, whether Arabic or foreign language ones, which proves that these schools have a good reputation and are keen to maintain their high-quality education.

KT: What is the union's opinion regarding the MoE's decision to control the raising of tuition fees?

Ghureir: KUPS is completely independent in studying any proposal whether it is related to tuition fees or academic or administrative staff. Regarding increasing the fees, this issue was discussed in many committees based on field experience. For instance, we sent a letter to the undersecretary of the MoE to form a committee after submitting suggestions and studies on fee increases in all schools including Arabic and foreign ones. We hope that during our next meeting with the members of the committee, we can set the criteria and conditions for increasing the fees, as this is an important issue for parents, school owners and teachers.

KT: How does the union work with or connect with parents of students from private schools?

Ghureir: They are both connected due to the students studying in these private schools. Also, the union frequently issues periodicals and directly corresponds with the owners of private schools.

KT: What are some achievements of the union or some problems solved by the union?

Ghureir: The union has solved numerous problems with the MoE through exchanging opinions, including forming a committee to study tuition fees and reach solutions for many issues that concern school owners and the ministry.

KT: How can the union work to ensure fair and reasonable tuition fees (as many parents complain that tuition fees have really gotten out of control)?

Ghureir: We respect the opinion of the parents, and they have the right to express their views. We will be discussing this issue during the upcoming meeting with the MoE, so I would rather wait before commenting till the meeting is over. As I said previously, I hope we reach satisfying solutions for all parties including parents, school owners and academic and administrative staff.

KT: How do schools balance the need to be profitable businesses with the need to provide quality education for Kuwait's youth?

Ghureir: The efforts spent by the school in providing a suitable educational environment will help achieve growth in various aspects of students' lives as well affect their marks and achievements. Also, the role of private schools is to complement and support public schools. The results of high school exams is evidence of our quality. Also, the number of Kuwaiti students joining private schools is increasing, which also signifies the high standard of the private schools that provide high-quality education while respecting the rules of the MoE.

In my view

YEAR OF AUSTERITY



By Muna Al-Fuzai

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Predicting oil prices seems like a futile endeavor, since there are many variables that interfere in decisive ways. But for the moment, it seems that 2016 is the year of austerity in Kuwait, where HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah has asked the government to reduce expenses in the budget of the Amiri Diwan and its affiliates in order to rationalize expenditure.

The decision coincides with the low price of a barrel of Kuwaiti oil - from about \$100 in June to \$21.6 at the moment and perhaps less in the coming months. Kuwait pumps 3 million barrels of crude oil a day, and has fiscal surpluses accumulated during the past 16 years. Kuwaitis number 1.3 million people, while financial reserves are estimated to be around \$592 billion, which are invested overseas, especially in the United States. This should be a key point in understanding why Kuwait is safe in the short term from possible change in oil prices.

Gulf states have taken several steps to tackle massive spending to confront falling oil prices. Saudi Arabia, for example, has carried out a number of measures to reduce the 2016 budget deficit, including raising gasoline, electricity and water prices.

Last week, Kuwait announced the new fiscal year budget for 2016-2017, with revenues of around KD 7.4 billion against expenses of KD 18.9 billion, a KD 12.2 billion deficit, or about \$40 billion. KD 700 million in revenues will be deducted for the future generations' fund. It is noteworthy that Kuwait calculates the deficit after deducting allocations for this fund. According to the Institute of Sovereign Funds, this fund is estimated to be worth \$400 billion.

Finance Minister Anas Sale stated in a news conference that the government will not adopt any austerity measures that may affect the implementation of projects in the budget. I hope this would mean the new airport terminal will not be affected because we do need a new airport as soon as possible. Saleh said Kuwait will use its reserves to cover the deficit.

Saleh also commented on the process of rationalization of subsidies on gasoline, water and electricity in line with other Gulf states, saying that this matter will be decided during a National Assembly session on Feb 9. I hope that the MPs will not use this issue as a topic for election use by rejecting austerity measures. The call by HH the Amir was good as a role model - that we must be rational and wasteful spending must be stopped. He pointed out the government intends to implement 287 projects in the next year amounting to KD 3.16 billion.

It is worth noting that with the booming US shale oil industry and growing concern about the strength of the global economy, it is becoming clear that the current decline in oil prices will continue for some time. It's hard to imagine what will happen in the future. But experts seem to agree that improvement will not be great and every nation must stop all forms of government waste and revise its policy to face the future to ensure the financial stability of the country, citizens and interests.

Due to the potential weakness on demand as a result of slowing global economic growth, the price of a barrel of oil will remain below \$100 for years to come. The futures market indicates that the price will improve slowly, up to \$70 per barrel by the year 2019. At the same time, most experts predict prices of \$40-80 a barrel over the next few years. It is futile to speculate on the price with more accuracy.

The oil market is passing through large transformations, and volatility in prices is expected. Reform measures are important and should not be controversial, but they must be gradual and rigorous.

ILLEGAL RESIDENT FAMILIES FAILED TO UPDATE DATA

KUWAIT: Some 400 illegal resident families from the 1956 census failed to update their data despite three months of the new campaign to enable them to adjust their status, said the central apparatus for the remedy of the situation on illegal residents yesterday. Executive at the central apparatus colonel Suleiman Al-Hussainan said that illegal residents were urged to complete their data as soon as possible. He called on them to bring the necessary documents to adjust their situation, noting that the process was within the apparatus' efforts to document illegal residents who are part of the 1965 census. —KUNA

KRCS DISTRIBUTES AID IN TAIZ

KUWAIT: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) said yesterday that it has distributed humanitarian aid to needy families in the Yemeni province of Taiz, in coordination with local organizations despite the imposed sanctions and difficult terrains.

The Taiz province is going through a difficult humanitarian crisis with the ongoing war, shelling, and imposed sanctions on civilian areas, KRCS' Deputy Chairman Anwar Al-Hasawi said in a statement, adding that the Kuwaiti aid included 2,000 food baskets, 2,000 health kits and 2,000 cleaning packages totaling 6,000 baskets.

Hasawi said the aid covered villages in Al-Shamaitin, Al-Maafir, Al-Asabih, Al-Afa, Al-Quraisha, Beni Ghazi, and Al-Masharqah. He noted that these villages did not receive any humanitarian aid since the start of the Yemeni crisis, adding that despite dangers and difficulties, KRCS ensured delivery of such aid to the needy. Hasawi concluded by saying that the aid distribution comes at the guidelines issued by the Kuwaiti leadership since the start of the Yemeni crisis. —KUNA

LAWMAKER QUESTIONS MINISTERS OVER 'HIRING EXPAT OFFICIALS'

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: MP Abdullah Al-Maayouf continued to slam ministers for appointing expats in senior positions in their offices and departments under them instead of hiring citizens. Following his inquiry from Minister of Social Affairs and Labor Hind Al-Subaih a few days ago about appointing an Egyptian man in her office as a 'senior specialist', he also inquired from the Minister of Justice and Awqaf Yaaqoub Al-Sane about hiring non-Kuwaiti advisors.

Health insurance

The parliament's legislative committee is due to discuss the amendments suggested to article one of a law about establishing the family support fund in its meeting today. The committee is also scheduled to discuss amending article 12 of law number 1/1999 pertaining with health insurance for expats and imposing fees on health services. Meanwhile, the parliamentary financial affairs committee is due to discuss the amendments suggested to the commercial agencies law, added the sources, noting that the committee would meet by the end of this week with Minister of Commerce and Industry Yousif Al-Ali.

E-media law

MP Ahmed Al-Qudhaibi stressed his rejection of the e-media law and called for restudying the law carefully and passing it in accordance to the constitution that highlights freedom

of expression, media and personal liberties within the limits of general laws and regulations. "The law was not given enough time for discussion in parliament and many proposed amendments were ignored," he underlined, pointing out that the law violates articles 36 and 37 of the constitution.

'Ahwaz' nation

MP Majed Moussa Al-Mutairi urged the international community to recognize Ahwaz state and consider it an Arab state that has been occupied by Iran for over 90 years. "People in Ahwaz have been suffering discrimination and genocide since its occupation. People are hung and executed on a daily basis," he underlined, calling for allowing Ahwaz to join the Arab League. He also called for holding an international conference to be attended by all members of the Iranian opposition and Ahwazis.

Egyptian manpower 'OK'

Egyptian Manpower Minister Jamal Sorour stressed that Egyptian laborers working in Kuwait have no problems and that they receive utmost care from the manpower authority. Speaking to reporters after touring Mubarak Al-Kabeer labor department, Sorour said that Egyptians were facing minor problems that were dealt with by the manpower authority. He added that his ministry and the manpower authority would be electronically linked to regulate hiring Egyptians and fight visa trafficking. On his part, Mubarak Al-Kabeer labor department manager Hassan Al-Khodor welcomed



MP Abdullah Al-Maayouf

the minister's visit and said that the minister was briefed on statistics of the services the department provided.

University meeting

Kuwait University's higher council is due to meet on Tuesday under Education Minister Badr Al-Essa. This meeting will be the first for the new rector Dr Hussein Al-Ansari, who was appointed in December. In another concern, the ministry denied any official decision to reduce the number of scholarships.

Frost damage

Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources (PAAAFR) Chairman Faisal Al-Hasawi toured Wafra farms escorted by the Chairman of Kuwait Farmers Association Hadi Al-Watry to inspect the damage caused by the recent frost and report accordingly to compensate farmers.

CHARCOAL SMOKE KILLS WORKERS

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: A citizen reported that two workers at his farm died from inhaling carbon monoxide inside their room. The victims along with a third worker had lit charcoal for heating as they slept in their locked-room, and kept the charcoal

burning due to the extreme cold. According to the citizen, on noticing that the laborers on his farm were not working as usual in the morning, he checked their dormitory where he found two of them dead while a third was in critical condition. The man reported finding a charcoal fire in the room, which suggests that the laborers died

of carbon monoxide poisoning. The third worker was rushed to Jahra Hospital's ICU.

Man hurt in crash

A citizen was seriously injured when he was trapped inside the wreckage of his vehicle along Wafra road outside Sabah Al-Ahmad City, said security sources. Firemen from Wafra rushed to the scene where they cut open the wreckage and extracted the injured man, who was flown to hospital by medevac ambulance, the sources noted. Meanwhile, an Arab man sustained various injuries when he lost control over his vehicle along Abdaly highway, said security sources.

Car fire

A vehicle caught fire along King Fahd expressway before the Mina Abdullah flyover, said security sources, noting that firemen rushed to the scene and managed to control the fire without any casualties. Separately, a fire broke out in a Khaitan house, said security sources, noting that on arriving at the scene, firemen found that the fire started in a chimney and extended to some waste material left on a nearby roof. The fire was controlled and casualties were reported.

Municipality crackdown

Farwaniya municipality launched an inspection campaign in Ardiya industrial area that resulted in filing 26 citations for hiring laborers without health certificates, 21 for hiring laborers before their health certificates were issued, two for violating cleanliness regulations, three for violating personal hygiene conditions, two for storing items in unhealthy conditions, one for operating a store without license, one for ad violations and four notices were given.



Remains of a vehicle which caught fire along King Fahd expressway.



The wreckage of a vehicle at Wafra road outside Sabah Al-Ahmad City.



Paramedics help a driver after firefighters helped him out of his wrecked vehicle.



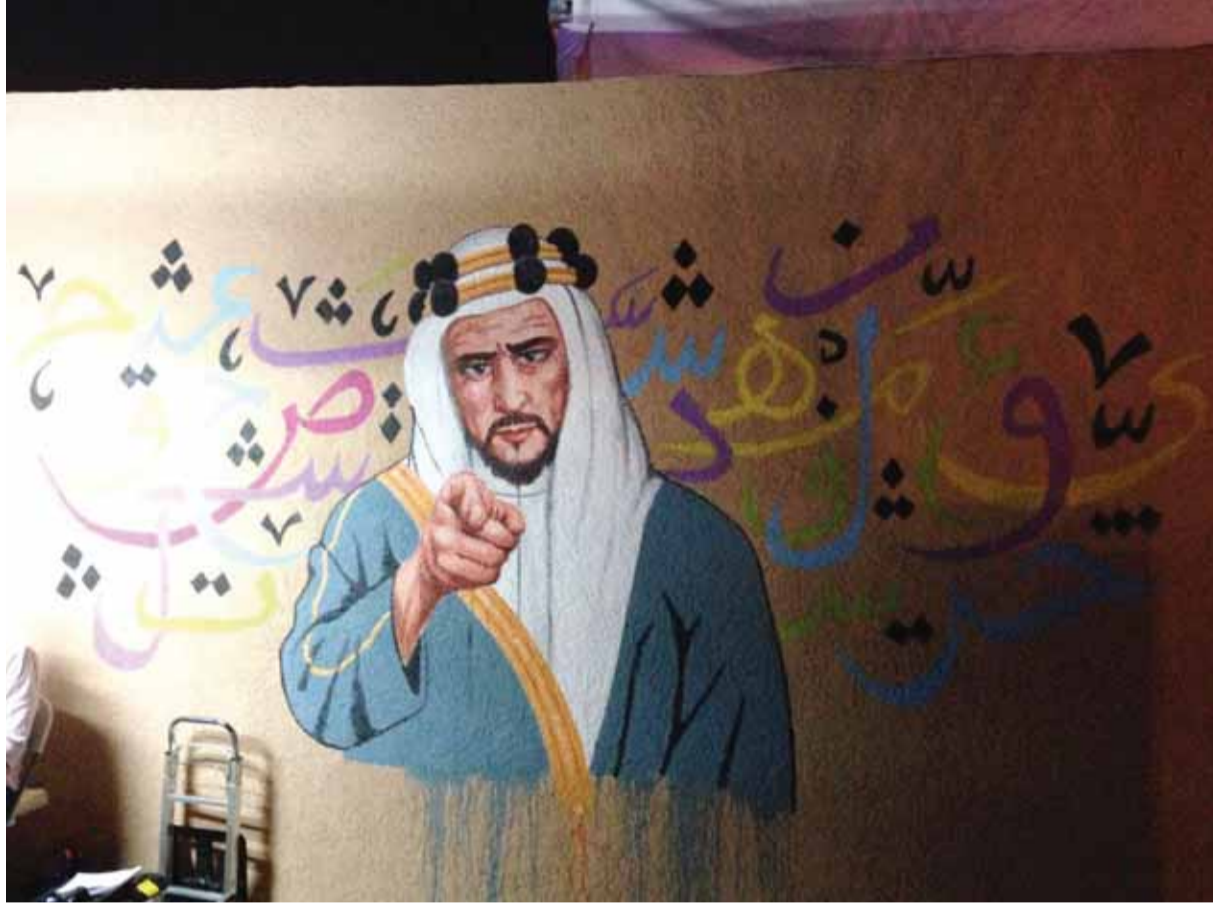
Graffiti artist Abdullah Al-Enzi.



Street art is a platform for public statements.



Power transformer (before).



KUWAIT: Street art inspired by the Kuwaiti culture. —KUNA photo



Power transformer (after).

STREET ARTISTS SPRAY PAINT ON KUWAITI WALLS

KUWAIT: Little kids stopped scribbling on walls and waited, in anticipation, the finishing touches on a beautiful mural that was being painted to cover all the ugly black marks they had left on one of the walls of a power transformer in their neighborhood.



Artist Omar Al-Oraiman

This mural was their first introduction to the growing and the widely controversial of "Street Art." This art, which began in response to young people's socio-political environment, took a turning point in the 1970's and 1980's to become a true form of artistic expression.

The 26-year old Omar Al-Oraiman told KUNA that he experienced first-hand how influential street art could be on his community when he was approached by member of Al-Qairwan Cooperative Society, Nasser Shlayweeh Al-Mutairi, to paint the power transformer that had been vandalized by the little kids.

Kuwaiti tradition

As an amateur, Oraiman was thrilled to try his hand at painting and allowing his art to be seen by the public. He was happy to see this form of art finding its way out of New York streets in the 1920's and 1930's to the world, most particularly, to the Gulf country of Kuwait, where many pieces of street art seen here are inspired by Kuwaiti tradition and culture.

"I was thrilled to volunteer. It was an opportunity that was given to me not only to express myself through art but also to induce a sense of responsibility



Fay Al-Humoud, founder of Streetart Q8.

ty and volunteerism into the little kids who were watching me the whole time I was turning the very wall they had destroyed into a beautiful piece of art," he said. "It was a powerful life lesson for all of us," Oraiman pointed out. "And it was learned through art, most particularly street art, because it can be seen and appreciated by everyone on the street."



Graffiti covering the whole building.

Oraiman's little project brought people together, the government, the artist and the kids, for the best interest of their community. "And that's how much influential the message of street art is," he concluded.

Meanwhile, Abdullah Al-Enezi, has taken up graffiti for its "unlimited and open creativity." "There is no rule that tells you what you should or shouldn't do,"

when it comes to this art, he explained. "I can use no colors or all colors in the rainbow. I can combine any style or genre of art with any feel," Enezi said, who was introduced to this art, one kind of street art, by a classmate at the age of 13.

The 24-year old artist expressed his respect to public property and said he wouldn't paint on any wall unless it was asked of him; otherwise, he would just paint on abandoned properties. After many years of attaching the "gangs" stigma to this art, graffiti is getting the respect it deserves; even though, one of his pet peeves is when someone calls this expression of art as "a bunch of scribbles," Enezi frustratingly said.

Progressive scene

Surprisingly, the scene of street art in Kuwait has become "progressive," Fay Al-Humoud, founder of Q8streetart said to KUNA. "I felt local artists needed support and recognition." Hence, Homoud, driven by the passion for this art which she acquired from her travels, decided in 2012 to create Q8streetart on Instagram, a local platform to document and showcase Kuwait street art. "My efforts are not only focused on showcasing artwork as I am equally passionate about bringing the artist to the forefront."

Homoud went on saying that because of the progressive scene of street art, it has been admirably accepted in the country. "Corporate vendors such as banks and telecom companies as well as other establishments use street art in their numerous events and launches."

Nonetheless, street artists are very respectful of public properties, Homoud clarified. In order to avoid labeling this expression of art as vandalism she said that artists are well aware of the restrictions, rules and regulations set by the municipality. "It is not considered vandalism, if an artist creates a public piece after acquiring all required licenses and documentation." She added that municipality does sometimes refuse drawing on schools, mosques and private residences. —KUNA



Street art reflects Kuwaiti pop culture.



Street art mirrors the society's culture.



A Kuwaiti-inspired piece.

KUWAIT USES PROVISIONS TO CRIMINALIZE VARIOUS MEANS OF EXPRESSION: HRW

- **Kuwait first country to pass law requiring DNA samples, violating people's privacy rights**
- **Cybercrime law includes far-reaching restrictions on Internet-based speech**
- **Officials suggested paying the Comoros Islands to grant citizenship to 'bedoon'**
- **Domestic workers' law lacks key protections found in the general labor law**

KUWAIT: Human Rights Watch (HRW) released its 'World Report 2016,' which provides an overview regarding the human rights' conditions in each country. In its coverage for Kuwait, HRW said that the government aggressively cracked down on free speech throughout 2015, using provisions in the constitution, the national security law, and other legislation to stifle political dissent, as well as passing new legislation criminalizing or increasing penalties for various forms and means of expression.

Furthermore, the report indicates that in an effort to curb local terrorism, according to authorities, Kuwait became the first country to pass a law requiring that all

charges such as harming the honor of another person; insulting HH the Amir or other public figures or the judiciary; insulting religion; planning or participating in illegal gatherings; and misusing telephone communications. Other charges include harming state security, inciting the government's overthrow, and harming Kuwait's relations with other states. From January to October, courts convicted at least five of those charged, imposing prison sentences of up to six years and fines.

In June 2015, Kuwait passed a new cybercrime law that includes far-reaching restrictions on Internet-based speech. Article 6 of the law imposes prison sentences and fines for insulting religion and

destroying the basic statutes of Kuwait through illegal means." The law empowers authorities to close for one year all outlets or locations in which these crimes are committed and confiscate devices used in committing them.

Treatment of Minorities

At least 105,702 bedoon residents of Kuwait remain stateless.

After an initial registration period for citizenship ended in 1960, authorities shifted bedoon citizenship claims to administrative committees that for decades have avoided resolving the claims. Authorities claim that many bedoon are "illegal residents" who deliberately destroyed evidence of another nationality in order to receive benefits that Kuwait gives its citizens.

Members of the bedoon community frequently take to the streets to protest the government's failure to address their citizenship claims, despite government warnings that bedoon should not gather in public. Article 12 of the 1979 Public Gatherings Law bars non-Kuwaitis from participating in public gatherings.

In media interviews during the year, government officials suggested that Kuwait may "solve" the bedoon community's nationality claims by paying the Comoros Islands to grant the bedoon a form of economic citizenship, thus regularizing them as foreign nationals in Kuwait and rendering them liable to legal deportation from Kuwait—possibly violating their right to family life.

Migrant Workers

About 2 million of Kuwait's 2.9 million population are migrant workers. Abuse and exploitation of migrant domestic workers—who comprise a large proportion of the migrant worker population—continued to be reported, including withholding of salaries, and physical and sexual abuse.

In June 2015, Kuwait passed a new law giving domestic workers enforceable labor rights for the first time. The law grants domestic workers the right to a weekly day off, 30 days of annual paid leave, a 12-hour working day with rest, and an end-of-service benefit of one month a year at the end of the contract, among other rights.

However, it has only unspecified "hours of rest" and lacks other key protections found in the general labor law, such as an 8-hour day; one hour of rest after every 5 hours of work; and detailed provisions for sick leave, including 15 days at full pay.

The domestic worker law also falls short by failing to set out enforcement mechanisms, such as labor inspections. It prohibits employers from confiscating workers' passports, a common abuse, but fails to specify penalties. The new law does not guarantee the right to form a union. It came into force on July 26, 2015, when it was published in the Official Gazette. The Interior Ministry is required to issue regulations to implement the law by January 2016.

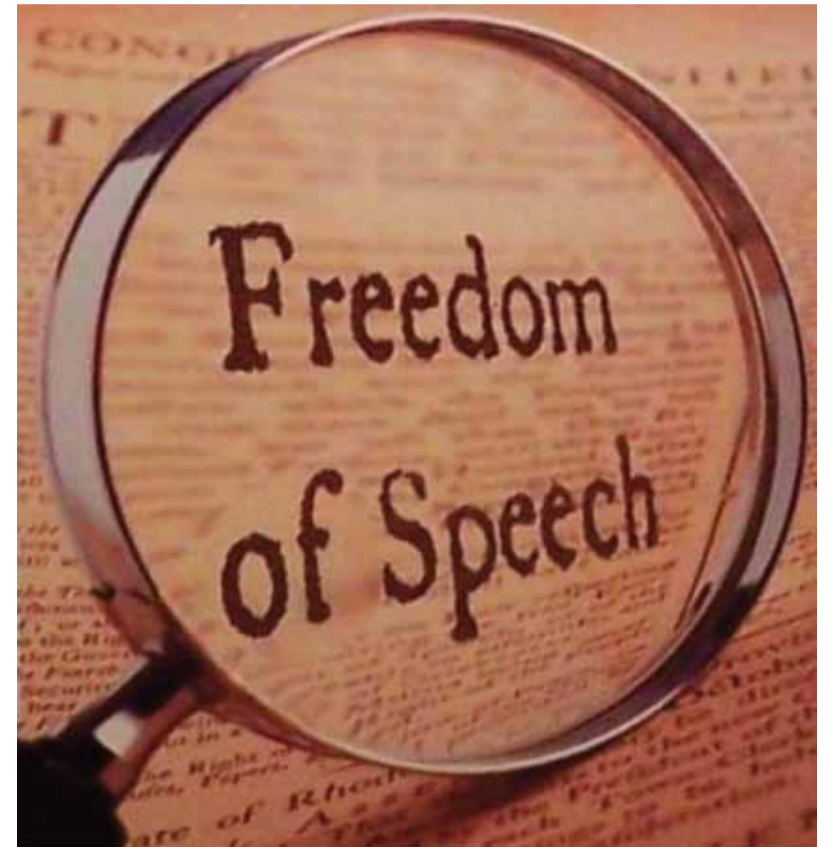
Women's Rights, Sexual Orientation, and Gender Identity

Women continue to face discrimination in many aspects of their lives, and large legal gaps remain in protections for them. Kuwait has no laws prohibiting domestic violence, sexual harassment, or marital rape. Legislation proposed in April 2014 to penalize sexual harassment was not passed in 2015. Kuwaiti women married to non-Kuwaitis, unlike Kuwaiti men, cannot pass on their citizenship to their children or spouses. Kuwaiti law also prevents a woman from marrying a partner of her choice without her father's permission.

Same-sex relations between men are punishable by up to seven years in prison. Transgender people can be arrested under a penal code provision that prohibits "imitating the opposite sex in any way."

Counterterrorism

In July 2015, in response to a suicide bomb attack on the Shiite Imam Sadiq Mosque that killed 27 people, Kuwait became the first



country to pass a law requiring that all Kuwaiti citizens and residents provide DNA samples to the authorities as part of a new counterterrorism law.

Death Penalty

Kuwaiti authorities are currently seeking the death penalty for 11 suspects in the Imam Al-Sadeq Mosque bombing. In 2013, they carried out five executions, the first time the country had applied the death penalty since 2007.

Key International Actors

In the 2015 US State

Department annual Trafficking in Persons report, the United States classified Kuwait as Tier 3—among the most problematic countries—for the ninth consecutive year. The report cited Kuwait's failure to prosecute, convict, or sentence a single trafficking offender during the reporting period.

It found that the government failed to develop procedures to identify trafficking victims among vulnerable populations or a referral mechanism to provide adequate protection services to victims.

KUWAIT LAST AMONG 'PARTIALLY FREE' STATES IN FREEDOM HOUSE REPORT

KUWAIT: Journalists and civil society activists in Kuwait found themselves under fresh assault in 2015, Freedom House said in its most recent report. Authorities in Kuwait are quashing dissent with increasing aggression and frequency, galvanizing concerns about citizenship revocation and use of the death penalty, says the 'Freedom in the World 2016' report, which ranks Kuwait among a short list of 'Countries to Watch in 2016' with states like Iran, Myanmar and Venezuela.

Kuwait retained its position as a 'partially free' country in the report with a score of 36; yet ranks last among states listed in this specific category. It is one of three Arab nations to be classified as 'partially free,' along with Morocco and Lebanon. Meanwhile, Tunisia was the only Arab state to be classified as 'Free,' and one of two nations in the Middle East and North Africa region to earn that calcification, along with Israel.

On a scale from one to seven, with one being most free and seven being least free, Kuwait scored 5 in political rights, civil liberties and freedom ratings, retaining the same scores in Freedom in the World 2015 report.

Freedom House's newest report indicates that "the world was battered by crises that fueled xenophobic sentiment in democratic countries, undermined the economies of states dependent on the sale of natural resources, and led authoritarian regimes to crack down harder on dissent. These developments contributed to the 10th consecutive year of decline in global freedom."

"Ratings for the Middle East and North Africa region were the worst in the world in 2015," says the report, noting that "the number of countries showing a decline in freedom for the year-72-was the largest since the 10-year slide began. Just 43 countries made gains."

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

Kuwaiti citizens and residents provide DNA samples, in violation of the right to privacy. The following is a transcript for the full report:

Freedom of Expression

Kuwaiti authorities have invoked several provisions in the constitution, penal code, Printing and Publication Law, Misuse of Telephone Communications and Bugging Devices Law, Public Gatherings Law, and National Unity Law to prosecute over a dozen people over the last few years for criticizing in blogs or on Twitter, Facebook, or other social media HH the Amir, the government, religion, and the rulers of neighboring countries.

Those prosecuted have faced

religious figures, and for criticizing HH the Amir on the Internet. Article 6 also prohibits Internet-based statements deemed to criticize the judicial system or harm Kuwait's relations with other states, or that publicize classified information, without exceptions for disclosures in the public interest.

Article 7 imposes a punishment of up to 10 years in prison for using the Internet to "overthrow the ruling regime in the country when this instigation included an enticement to change the system by force or through illegal means, or by urging to use force to change the social and economic system that exists in the country, or to adopt creeds that aim at

SMALL ENTERPRISES FUND GRADUATES FIRST BATCH OF ENTREPRENEURS

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: The National Fund for Small and Medium Enterprise Development (NFSMED) held a graduation ceremony for the first batch of Kuwaiti entrepreneurs of the 'Kauffman Fast Track New Venture' training program on Thursday at the Kuwait Chamber for Commerce and Industry. The program included 60 entrepreneurs who successfully passed the course, who

presented feasibility studies and planning for their projects in addition to other training tasks. They are now in the beginning of a new stage of their projects. Some of them had already launched their projects and they took the program either to expand or to develop them. "More than 40 of these projects have been financed by the fund, and we have a plan to finance more projects," said the Minister of Commerce and Industry Dr Yousef Al-Ali during

the ceremony. The next phase is to help build the state economy and diversify income sources, and the fund plays a key role in future programs. "NFSMED will serve a wide category of the Kuwaiti society to make their dreams come true through establishing their small and medium enterprises. NFSMED has a great role due to the present situation, as it's responsible for increasing work opportunities for Kuwaitis through their projects and for those who aim to work in these projects. Supporting these enterprises will have different forms. It may be through training courses such as this program, or through providing financial support and consolation," Ali said.

Dr Mohammed Al-Zuheir, Chairman of NFSMED, noted that this is the first batch of entrepreneurs and the fund is looking forward to graduate more entrepreneurs in the future. He then presented certificates to the 60 entrepreneurs in addition to awarding the instructors of the 21-day training program.

"This program represented one of NFSMED's goals that aims to qualify entrepreneurs and help them improve their skills in preparing feasibility studies and project ideas in addition to teaching them the proper way of establishing and directing successful companies. This program is special as it provides training, consultation and technical support in addition to financial support for small and medium enterprises," added Zuheir.

During the ceremony, seven of the participating entrepreneurs displayed presentations providing information about their projects. Some were existing projects that will be developed, while others were plans for upcoming projects.



KUWAIT: Minister of Commerce and Industry Dr Yousef Al-Ali (right) is honored during the ceremony. — Photo by Joseph Shagra

A leading bridal haute couture company established since 1980, is seeking candidates for the following positions:

Senior Pattern Master / Cutter

- Fabric selection
- Marking & cutting patterns
- Quality control
- Coordinating with designers
- Assigning work to tailors

Senior Creative Fashion Designer

- Developing new concepts of bridal dresses
- Creating mini mannequins for clients
- Creating samples
- Supervising the embroidery team
- Quality control
- Scheduling and timing the delivery of dresses
- Responsible for bridal dresses from design to finish

Senior Tailor

- Tailoring, measurements and fittings
- Provas for customers
- Coordinating with the customers and master cutter
- Supervising the alteration team

Minimum 10 years experience in bridal dresses haute couture. Attractive salary package + transportation + accommodation + health insurance.

Please send your resume to: hr.fashiondesigns@gmail.com

النهار Al-Anbaa

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?

By Dr Nermin Al-Houti

Words we want to present to those we do not know! As when we ask and search to know which area we want to focus on today, to thank and laud its performance in preserving and developing Kuwait, but we found that the decision is in the hands of more than one area. Out of this cooperation in the love of Kuwait, our words today includes much thanks and recognition for those who keep security in Kuwait, so our lines today will be "flashes" for stands we saw and heard about and hats off to them and those who took the decision for that.

* We heard lately about individuals who carry out inspections, not only on residential homes, but all over Kuwait, whose mission is to register material violations for those who waste water, and here we "thank you" for appointing an eye that guards, watches and punishes those who waste water.

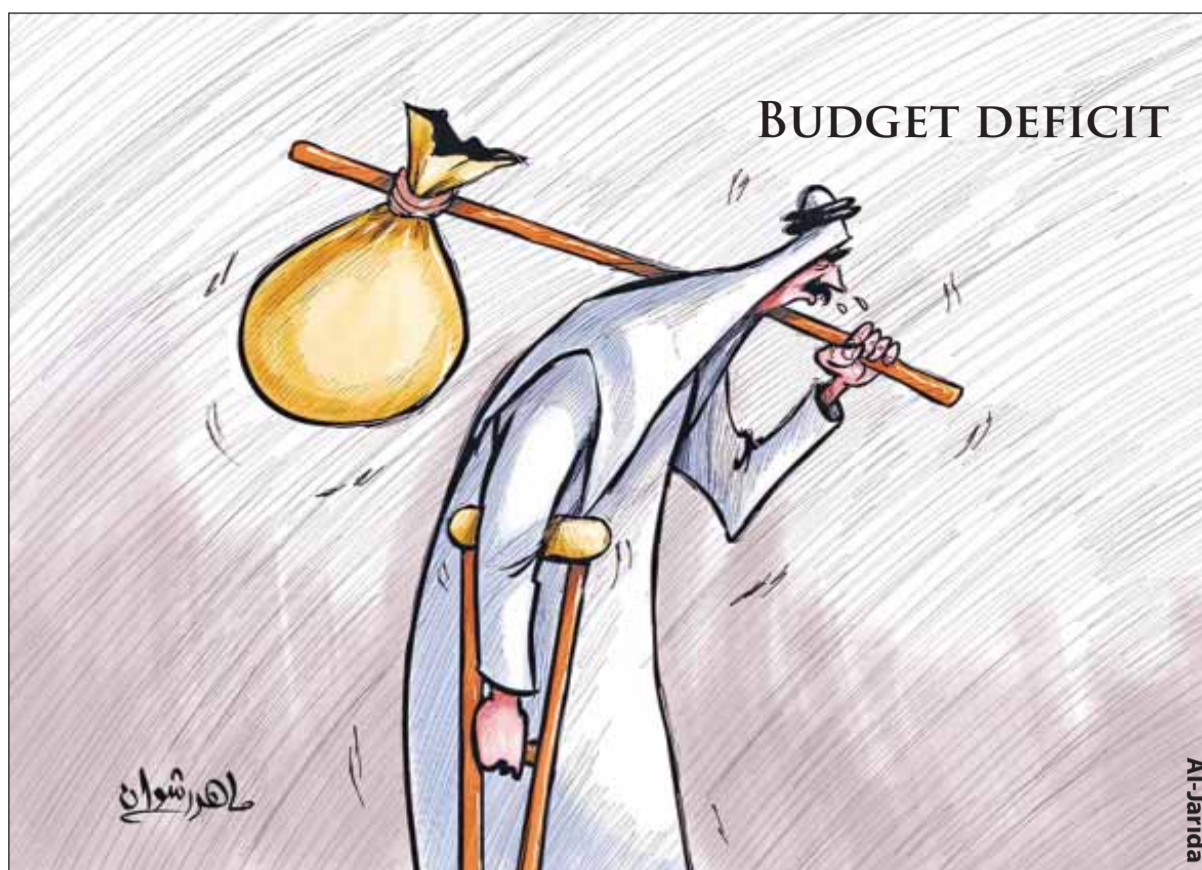
Since the start of the new year 2016, we are living in a revitalized era of culture and arts

* We are going through a legal awakening, and we mean Deputy Premier and Interior minister Sheikh Mohammad Al-Khaled Al-Sabah, when he ordered Interior Ministry commanders to follow legal procedures during raids. That is the law, and that is the spirit of cooperation between government bodies to preserve Kuwait's security and stability, and we tell the interior minister "may you be strong."

* Since the start of the new year 2016, we are living in a revitalized era of culture and arts through the cooperation between Information Ministry, Amiri Diwan, and the Cabinet. We thank all workers at Dar Al-Athar Al-Islamiya, Martyr's Park and the National Council for Culture Arts and Letters for all their cultural cooperation that resulted in enriching, supporting and developing the cultural and art movement, so Kuwait remains the cradle of Gulf culture.

A final word: Kuwait remains a shining beacon for the entire world with the solidarity of its people and government under the banner of the Al-Sabah ruling family.

— Translated by Kuwait Times



النهار

Al-Anbaa

INTEGRATING STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN EDUCATION - PART V

By Dr Zainab Al-Hasawi

The aim of the strategy of vocational development for integration school directors in Kuwait is to achieve comprehensive quality in achieving vocational development for those directors as well as public education through creating a solid infrastructure of experts with public education in general and for students with special needs in particular.

This has to be done in a way that suits the Kuwaiti society's goals and through seeking excellence by supporting integration staffs with all needed means and capabilities to motivate leaders to excel, handle international developments in caring for students with special needs and achieve equality and equal opportunities amongst public education learners by making the integration of students with special needs the basic rule of setting public education policies with the aim of ultimately providing education for all.

In addition, several strategic alternatives have been drawn to develop the management of integration school directors' training and vocational development centers in Kuwait that include training national staff in

those centers and qualifying them to run integration schools, linking integration requirements for the local labor market with higher education, exchanging expertise, using effective electronic means of communication amongst universities and training centers and providing job opportunities for majors that benefit integration.

In order to achieve such alternatives, strict measures should be applied to grant masters and PhD degrees at education faculties in order to develop specialized integration staffs. A special comprehensive and updated database of all related applications should be made through coordination between specialized faculties and vocational development centers. Awareness campaigns should be launched to boost public awareness of the significance of vocational development programs throughout public education facilities and training centers and protocols of cooperation should be made with leading foreign schools over applying school directors' vocational development programs. (To be continued).

— Translated by Kuwait Times

Crime

Report

Man says beaten for driving by camp

KUWAIT: A citizen filed a case against six others accusing them of assaulting and beating him because he drove by their camp in Kabd desert, said security sources, noting that the man provided a medical report of his injuries. The citizen said he passed by the suspects' camp looking for his friends' camp, which the suspects did not believe. A case was filed and the suspects are being summoned.

Search for harasser

A female citizen filed a case accusing an unidentified man of insulting her through phone messages when she turned his flirting attempts down. A case was filed and the suspect is being summoned.

Fake pills

Hawally detectives arrested two citizens and an Iraqi with illicit pills and fake sexual stimulants, said security sources, noting that on being stopped at a checkpoint, the suspects seemed nervous, and on searching them, detectives found 40 illicit pills and 60 aphrodisiacal pills. A case was filed.

Shooting report

Jahra detectives were alerted on receiving reports of hearing some gunshots in Naseem, said security sources, noting that the area was accordingly combed without any results. The sources added that state security was informed and that further investigations were still in progress.

Drunk driving

A citizen was arrested in Jahra for drinking, dangerous driving and resisting arrest, said security sources. Case papers indicate that reports were made about a vehicle being driven in an unsteady course in Waha. A police patrol was dispatched to the scene where the suspect resisted arrest and assaulted policemen before they brought him under control.

Student's shooters arrested

Jordanian security sources recently arrested a man suspected of shooting a Kuwaiti student inside a university campus in Jordan last week, said security sources. In this regard, the student's father, Adel Al-Nabhan said that his son's shooters were arrested thanks to the combined efforts exerted by the Jordanian security, the Jordanian Royal Court and the Kuwaiti embassy in Jordan. He added that the university's administration also decided to expel four of the security guards who had helped the suspects escape the scene and for allowing them into campus carrying guns in the first place. — Al-Ral & Al-Abaa

Photo

of the day



KUWAIT: This picture taken from Kuwait City on Friday shows a seagull flying over the Arabian Gulf waters. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat



'Miracle' rescue of four China miners

US WARSHIP SAILS IN WATERS OFF ISLAND CLAIMED BY CHINA

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IOWA: Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump poses with a ring given to him by a group of veterans during a campaign event on the campus of Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa. — AP

TRUMP: CELEBRITY BILLIONAIRE RE-WRITING US POLITICS

69-YEAR-OLD NEW YORKER RAINS INSULTS ON WOMEN, MEXICANS, MUSLIMS

NEW YORK: Republican frontrunner Donald Trump, the swaggering billionaire who revels in money and celebrity, has upended the 2016 presidential election by casting a spell over grassroots conservatives to the horror of the political establishment. To his critics, he is a racist demagogue or at best, a buffoon with an orange perm and an odd helmet of hair who would either hand Hillary Clinton the White House or lead the world into unmitigated catastrophe.

To his fans, he is the definition of American success, the cut-throat tycoon who can magically fix all that's wrong with a country no longer sure of its place in the world and home to an increasingly frustrated white working and middle class. What is clear is that the 69-year-old New Yorker defies the rules. He insults women, Mexicans, Muslims—virtually everyone who crosses his path and yet his say-it-how-it-is honesty, defiance of political correctness and disdain for the political class has struck a chord matched by almost no other candidate. "I could stand in the middle of 5th Avenue and shoot somebody and I wouldn't lose voters," he boasted in Iowa last week. "It's, like, incredible."

Billions

He promises to build a wall on the Mexican border, deport millions of illegal immigrants and stand up to China to "Make America Great Again." He also plays fast and loose with statistics, and has never unveiled detailed policies. He jets from rally to rally in his Boeing 757 like a

rock star and sucks up roughly as much TV coverage as the other candidates combined, saving him tens of millions of dollars in paid advertising. The big question is: Can he translate his poll numbers into votes? Can he win the Iowa caucus or will his campaign start to unravel when registered Republicans cast their first votes in the long road to the November election?

The Donald, as he is nicknamed, was born on June 14, 1946 in Queens, New York, the fourth of five children. His father Fred was a wealthy real estate developer and the son of German immigrants. His mother Mary was from Scotland. Boisterous and unruly, he was packed off to New York Military Academy, a private boarding school near West Point, and graduated from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania in 1968 with an economics degree. He then set to work for his father, who made money building and operating middle-income apartments in New York's outer boroughs. But Queens and Brooklyn were never going to be enough for the young Donald. He shot off to Manhattan and the big league, snapping up some of the flashiest real estate in the country, riding the wave of Reaganomics and coming to embody the swanky extravagance of the 1980s.

Insults

His true wealth is up for dispute. Trump told the Federal Election Commission he has more than \$10 billion. Forbes insists it is no more than \$4.5 billion. But there is barely a corner of

Manhattan that the Trump Organization hasn't conquered with luxury buildings. Its portfolio of hotels, golf courses, casinos and luxury estates straddles the world, from California to Mumbai. He has written a string of best-selling business books and cemented his fame by starring in NBC reality series "The Apprentice," which spawned "The Celebrity Apprentice"—until the network dumped him for offending Mexicans.

There were other business flops along the way. Four times between 1991 and 2009, his casino and hotel projects on the East Coast fell into bankruptcy. Best known until then for his three marriages, media stunts and for whipping up a frenzy over Barack Obama's birth certificate, Trump's bid for the White House was initially met by mirth last June. But within weeks, he catapulted to the top of the polls in a crowded field of Republican candidates and there he has remained. No matter who he insults, his admirers only love him all the more. He called Mexicans rapists, questioned whether America's most distinguished ex-POW, John McCain, was a war hero and seemed to imply that a Fox News anchor asked him difficult questions because she was menstruating.

He sparked international condemnation when he called for a ban on Muslims entering the United States. In London, MPs debated whether he should be banned from Britain. And still thousands, particularly lower income and less-educated white Americans, flock to his rallies, mesmerized by a man who promises that he can translate personal success into success



NEW HAMPSHIRE: Bob Holmes, owner of the Clay Dragon Tattoo shop tattoos a portrait of Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump on the arm of Seth Bailey at his shop in Seabrook, New Hampshire. — AFP

for the country at large. Previously a Democrat and an independent, he has ditched once liberal views on gun control and abortion, lurching to the right on the campaign trail, alarming and alienating moderate Republicans. Trump has

five children—three with his first wife, former Czech model Ivana whom he divorced in acrimony in 1992, a daughter with second wife Marla Maples and a son with current wife Melania. — AFP

IOWA KICKS OFF PRESIDENTIAL RACE WITH CAUCUS TRADITION

DES MOINES: The long and sometimes arcane ritual of electing the next US president begins on Monday in more than 1,100 schools, churches and libraries across Iowa, a state that wields political influence far greater than its small size. After more than a year of up-close and personal evaluation of the candidates, Iowans will gather with their neighbors on what promises to be a cold wintry night to kick off the state-by-state process of picking the Republican and Democratic nominees for the Nov 8 presidential election. The starring opening-night role of the largely rural Midwestern state in the presidential drama, now four decades old, is a source of pride for Iowa voters, who spend months evaluating the candidates, looking them in the eye and asking questions.

"Iowans see it as a great privilege and a great gift. They take their role very seriously," said Tom Henderson, chairman of the Democratic Party in Polk County, home to Iowa's biggest city, Des Moines. The caucuses will begin on Monday at 7 pm CST, and results are expected within two or three hours. Most gatherings will be in schools, communi-

ty centers or other public locations, although at least two Republican caucuses will be in private homes and one Democratic caucus will be held at an equestrian center. Turnout varies by community, with up to 1,000 people typically gathering in cities like Des Moines, while a few dozen or less may gather in more sparsely populated areas.

The state Republican and Democratic parties run their caucuses separately, although in some areas they hold them in different parts of the same building. Republicans will have more than 800 caucus sites, and Democrats will have about 1,100. The two parties also have different rules. Iowa Democrats gather in groups by candidate preference in a public display of support, a tradition that can allow for shifts back and forth. If a candidate does not reach the threshold of support of 15 percent of voters in a caucus needed to be considered viable, that candidate's supporters are released to back another contender, leading to another round of persuasion.

Republicans are more straightforward. They write their vote privately on a sheet of paper that is collected and counted at the site by caucus officials. A

surrogate or volunteer from each campaign may speak to their neighbors in a last-ditch plea for support, adding to the uncertainty going into the process. Neither party is offering voter turnout estimates this year, although many Iowans predict the Republicans will surpass the 121,503 who turned out in 2012. In the last contested Democratic caucus, in 2008, excitement over Barack Obama's candidacy spurred a record turnout of 239,872.

Iowa, the 30th most populated state, and tiny New Hampshire, which holds the second nominating contest on Feb 9, have traditionally served as early filters to winnow out the losers and elevate the top contenders for later contests. But Iowa Republicans recently have had a spotty record at backing the ultimate presidential nominees. Neither the Republican winner in 2008, former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee, nor the winner in 2012, former US Senator Rick Santorum, managed to win the party nomination. Iowa Democrats did back the party's last two nominees: John Kerry in 2004 and Obama in 2008, which ultimately launched Obama's drive to the White House. — Reuters



IOWA: Democratic presidential candidate, former Maryland Gov Martin O'Malley speaks during a campaign stop at his field office in Sioux City, Iowa on Friday, Jan 29, 2016. — AP

OBAMA LOOKS TO TAKE FIGHT TO IS IN LIBYA

WASHINGTON: US President Barack Obama has asked key advisors to draw up options for ratcheting up the fight against the Islamic State group, including opening a new front in Libya. Eighteen months after a US-led coalition began airstrikes against IS in Iraq and Syria, multiple administration sources said that the White House wants to speed up and broaden the effort. Efforts will deepen to retake Raqa in Syria, Mosul in Iraq and to check the jihadists' growth in Afghanistan, but there is an increasing focus on Libya.

Potential options are said to range from intensified air strikes to participation in a UN-backed ground force that would help take on Libya's estimated 3,000 Islamic State fighters. The Defense Department "stands ready to perform the full spectrum of military operations as required," spokeswoman Lieutenant Colonel Michelle Balanza said. "We also continue to work with the international community to mitigate conflict in Libya, promote stability, and strengthen governance."

Officials caution that Obama has not yet been presented with concrete military plans, though the security situation is acute. "Action in Libya is needed before Libya becomes a sanctuary for ISIL, before they become extremely hard to dislodge," said one US defense official. "We don't want a situation like in Iraq or Syria." Since rebels and Western airpower toppled Muammar Gaddafi's regime in 2011, the country has effectively lacked a government. In the chaos a disparate group of foreign fighters, homegrown militiamen, tribes and remnants of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group have co-

alesced around the IS banner and gained a foothold. Jihadists have recently taken control of Gaddafi's home town of Sirte, a strategic port near oilfields that could provide a lucrative source of income.

Next steps

Until now, US involvement in Libya has been limited to isolated airstrikes and the deployment of US special forces, who are building ties with local armed groups and providing intelligence. In November, an American F-16 fighter jet struck the eastern town of Dema, killing Abu Nabil-also known as Wissam Najm Abd Zayd Al-Zubaydi-the local IS leader. On Thursday, Obama convened his National Security Council to discuss current operations and the next steps. "The president directed his national security team to continue efforts to strengthen governance and support ongoing counterterrorism efforts in Libya and other countries where ISIL has sought to establish a presence," according to a White House account of the meeting.

Republicans, with one eye on November's US presidential election, have pilloried Obama and one-time secretary of state Hillary Clinton for not doing more to prevent the Islamic State's rise. "Congress has been calling for a real strategy from the president to defeat ISIS," said a spokesman for House Speaker Paul Ryan. "We'll see whether this is just more talk or if it will be backed up with the will and the resources necessary for victory."

Further steps-including ground opera-



AKAKAS: A Tuareg tribesman walks in the Meggedat valley, north west of Libya's Akakas mountain region, in the desert of the western Ghat District. — AFP

tions-are likely to depend on Libyans' ability to form a Government of National Accord, which the United Nations is still trying to bring together. "There needs to be a political solution to get a military solution," said another defense official, echoing comments from diplomats. "We hope that there is the beginning of a political solution so that there is a legitimate government that can invite us

to go after ISIL." Washington is also looking to European nations-facing a more acute threat from the collapse of a country a short distance across the Mediterranean to play a leading role, including former Libyan colonial power Italy. Obama will host the Italian head of state, President Sergio Mattarella, at the White House on February 8. France and Britain are also slated as possible contribu-

tors. Secretary of State John Kerry is expected to meet his European counterparts in Rome on February 2. "The idea is to have a coalition of nations," a defense official said. Some security experts say the deteriorating situation on the ground may leave the administration few options but to launch a ground campaign, even if the long-term path is unclear. — AFP

TURKEY ACCUSES RUSSIA OF A NEW AIRSPACE VIOLATION

ERDOGAN EYES EXPANDING TURKEY INFLUENCE ON LATIN AMERICA TOUR

ANKARA: Turkey yesterday accused Russia of a new violation of its airspace, warning Moscow against "irresponsible behavior." A Su-34 plane belonging to the Russian Federation air force violated Turkish airspace at 11:46 (0946 GMT) local time yesterday (Friday), the foreign ministry said in a statement. The allegation comes just over two months after Turkey shot down a Russian warplane on the Syrian border on November 24, saying it had violated Turkish airspace. Ankara on Friday summoned the Russian ambassador to the foreign ministry to "strongly protest and condemn" the latest alleged violation, the ministry added, without specifying where it took place. Ankara called on Russia to "act responsibly" and warned: "We stress once again that all the responsibility for any unwanted grave consequences as a result of any such irresponsible behaviour will belong entirely to the Russian Federation." Moscow and Ankara are currently experiencing their worst relations since the end of the Cold War. In addition to the November 24 incident which sparked a bitter diplomatic row, the two countries back opposing sides in Syria's almost five-year civil war, with Russia the key supporter of the Damascus regime while Turkey argues that the ouster of Assad is essential to solving the Syrian crisis.

Expanding Turkey influence

Meanwhile, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan yesterday embarks on a major tour of Latin American countries in a bid to expand Ankara's ties outside its traditional sphere of influence. His visits to Peru and Ecuador are the first-ever by a Turkish president and the stop in



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan

Chile is the first since late president Suleyman Demirel travelled there back in 1995. Regional and international issues will be on the agenda during talks with the leaders of South America, where Erdogan is also expected to attend business forums to intensify economic links. Erdogan had already in February 2015 visited Cuba, Colombia and Mexico. The Turkish president's itinerary will take him to Chile and then Peru before wrapping up his visit in Ecuador, the presidency said, adding that the trip "shows the importance we attach to the countries of Latin America."

'Long-term ambition'

Turkey is seeking to diversify its partners beyond its traditional sphere of

influence within the bounds of the former Ottoman Empire in the Middle East and the Balkans, analysts say. "The visit is part of Turkey's longer term ambition to expand its presence in Latin America, both to increase Turkish influence globally and also to reach out to new potential trade partners," said Aaron Stein, a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council, a US think tank. With its opening to Latin America, Turkey appears to want to forge new alliances in new regions at a time of tricky ties with the United States, the European Union and Russia. One of Turkey's major trade partners, Russia has imposed sanctions against Ankara after one of its war jets was shot down in November on the border with Syria. Stein said the trip to Latin America

aimed at diversifying Turkey's ties. "It is part of Turkey's overarching ambition to deepen its relations with a range of actors, independent of its alliance with the United States and individual EU member countries," he said. "It is a continuation of a foreign policy trend put in place in the mid-2000s."

'Euro-centric system finished'

Turkey's "multi-vector" foreign policy also covers Africa, which has been the subject of significantly greater interest from Turkey and visits by Erdogan in recent years. Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, a former foreign minister, is seen as the architect of this policy, pushing for a pivotal role for Turkey in global and not just regional affairs. This newly-assertive foreign policy by a key NATO member was slammed in some quarters for being "neo-Ottoman" and for drifting away from its Western axis. — Agencies

Erdogan's advisor Ibrahim Kalin has attacked such criticism for seeing the world through the "lenses of a Eurocentric world system." "Some even go so far as to see African and Latin American openings as diversions or 'moving away' from the West," he wrote in the pro-government Sabah Daily last year. "One wonders what meaning such analyses have in a world of growing interdependencies and new geo-political opportunities." In a sign of its growing soft power, Turkey's soap operas are taking Latin American countries by storm, prompting TV executives across the continent to start importing Turkish series to a region more used to exporting its own "telenovelas." This reverses the long-held trend of Turkey banking on Latin American prime time soap operas. — Agencies

ISRAEL'S LIBERAL ARTISTS DECRY ATTEMPTS TO LIMIT EXPRESSION

JERUSALEM: Israel's cultural class is increasingly alarmed by what many see as a tightening noose on freedom of expression, as a hard-line government minister seeks to cut off funding for artists who are critical of the state and activists accuse them of outright treason. The clash highlights a broader battle amid Israel's rightward lurch after nearly 50 years of occupation of lands the Palestinians want for a future state. As Israel's dovish camp erodes, a nationalist-religious right is rising that lends more emphasis to Israel's character as a Jewish state, rather than one that is equally Jewish and democratic.

Getting thinner

For Israeli artists, who like their counterparts worldwide tend to lean liberal, the chasm between their viewpoints and those of a growing number of Israelis is only deepening. Israel's liberal cadre of musicians, authors and actors have long been some of the country's most vocal critics, headlining peace rallies and staging provocative performances that challenge the prevailing orthodoxy. "The first signs of dictatorship are the elimination of the other," Ronit Matalon, a fiction writer, told the daily Haaretz. "The oxygen in the air we breathe is getting thinner."

For months, with Israel mired in a wave of near-daily violence with the Palestinians, hard-line lawmakers and activist groups have been stepping up pressure on dovish opponents, primarily rights groups who are critical of government policies in the West Bank. Leading that charge has been Im Tirtzu, a nationalist activist group that in December launched a fierce video campaign accusing human rights groups of being spies and foreign agents. The video questioned their loyalty because of their international advocacy and because such nonprofits tend to rely heavily on donations from European countries.

Hidden agenda

Im Tirtzu has now set its sights on artists. On Wednesday, it launched a new campaign on Facebook branding dozens of singers, actors and authors - including famed writer Amos Oz,

perennially touted as a potential favorite for the Nobel Prize - as foreign agents because of their support for rights groups. "We're fed up with funding 'artists' who support organizations of foreign agents," the group wrote. "If you are active in a certain organization, you are not just a cultural figure. You are a political activist," said Matan Peleg, the head of Im Tirtzu. "It's important for me that (the Israeli public) know there is a hidden agenda here."

The artists and their supporters have said the campaign incites violence and have demanded Im Tirtzu be restrained. "Have they lost their minds?" asked Yair Lapid, head of the centrist Yesh Atid party. "This campaign of hate and incitement to violence by Im Tirtzu crosses a red line." Politicians across the political spectrum, including hardliners in the government, rejected Im Tirtzu's latest campaign. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he "opposes using the term traitor for those who disagree with me."

Still, critics say the campaign is the result of an atmosphere stifling dissent nurtured by members of Netanyahu's hawkish government. Culture Minister Miri Regev caused an uproar this week in parliament by vowing to press ahead with legislation that would allow her as minister to determine what cultural institutions and projects could be denied funding based on criteria that could include denigrating the national flag or state symbols, denying Israel's existence as a Jewish and democratic state, or promoting Israel's independence day as a day of mourning. Much of those criteria would affect left-leaning or Arab institutions.

The brash and polarizing Regev has had a fraught relationship with the cultural community since her appointment last year and has been accused of attempting to bring Israeli artists' output in line with her political ideology. Last year, Regev, a former military spokeswoman, froze funding for an Arab theater in the mixed Arab-Jewish city of Haifa over a play it staged that was inspired by the prison experience of Walid Daka, an Arab citizen of Israel who was abducted, tortured and killed an Israeli soldier in 1984. Critics said the play humanized a killer and disrespected the family of the victim. — AP

US, CANADA SEEK NEW WAYS TO FIGHT IS AFTER JETS WITHDRAWN

QUEBEC CITY: The United States and Canada vowed Friday to work together in the fight against the Islamic State, even if Ottawa plans to withdraw its jets from the campaign. Secretary of State John Kerry and foreign ministers Stephane Dion of Canada and Claudia Ruiz Massieu of Mexico struck an upbeat tone at their annual get-together. But Dion made it clear that when Canada's new Liberal prime minister, Justin Trudeau, announces his war plan, his country's six CF-18 jets will leave Syrian skies.

Dion will now travel to Rome next week to join Kerry and two dozen more leaders from the US-led coalition to discuss new ways to work together against the threat. "Air strikes will continue even if Canada invests its efforts in other areas that are also necessary, and soon we will announce what these efforts will be," Dion said. "We will continue our discussion on this in Rome soon."

Kerry appeared satisfied by Canada's promise, acknowledging its effort in the fight so far and predicting a strong future coalition effort. "And Canada has played an outsized role really already in many different ways in both the military and the humanitarian component of the counter-Daesh struggle," Kerry said. "And I am absolutely confident from my conversation with Stephane that the prime minister and his security team are working on ways to continue the contribution and to continue to make a significant contribution to our efforts."

The talks also formed part of preparations for Trudeau's state visit to Washington on March 10 as US President Barack Obama's guest. "I know President Obama is very excited about welcoming Prime Minister Trudeau to Washington," Kerry said. "This is the first official visit of a Canadian head of government in nearly two

decades, long overdue and much anticipated." The young Canadian leader's government is expected to have more in common with the Democratic administration south of the border than did its Conservative predecessor, but there are points of concern.

Ottawa's plans to withdraw its warplanes from the US-led coalition targeting IS fighters in Syria is a symbolic blow against allied unity in the fight. And the Liberal government also expects to review the terms of the Trans-Pacific Partnership-a 12-country deal that Kerry and Obama see as key to the US trade agenda in their final year in office-before ratifying it. On the TPP treaty, the American side hopes it will have more success, despite concerns raised by some of the Liberal lawmakers who now form a majority in the Canadian parliament. Canada's government said Monday that it would sign the free trade deal next week at a meeting of the 12 partner countries from around the Pacific basin.

'Still have questions'

But, before the treaty is ratified, the Canadian parliament will want to debate it, and Trade Minister Chrystia Freeland has acknowledged that some have concerns. "Many Canadians still have not made up their minds and many more still have questions," she said on Monday. A US official traveling with Kerry said Washington was aware of the concerns, but still confident the deal would be approved in Ottawa. "That was pretty clear, even in the campaign, and so we're looking forward to being able to move ahead," she said. And, with Ruiz Massieu, the US delegation is keen to discuss the case of recaptured drug cartel boss Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman, whom Washington is keen to see extradited as soon as possible to face charges in the US. — AFP

UN BACKS BURUNDI FORCE AS AU LEADERS DEBATE TROOPS

ADDIS ABABA: UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon warned African leaders yesterday of the need for action in troubled Burundi at a summit hoping to end armed crises across the continent. African Union leaders face an unprecedented vote on deploying a 5,000-strong peacekeeping force despite Burundi's vehement opposition, but Ban was clear troops were needed to stem violence.

"Leaders who stand by while civilians are slaughtered in their name must be held responsible," Ban

said, adding the crisis in Burundi required the "most serious and urgent commitment". He said the UN backed the AU's proposal "to deploy human rights observers and to establish a prevention and protection mission" in Burundi. Talks at the AU Peace and Security Council, attended by presidents and foreign ministers from across the 54-member bloc, stretched late into Friday night in an attempt to narrow positions before the formal summit began on Saturday.

AU commission chief Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma

opened the summit by commemorating AU peacekeepers killed in "efforts to silence the guns", amid fierce backroom debate on whether to send a new force to Burundi. Talks on the possible peacekeeping deployment are being held behind closed doors and it is unclear when a vote may be taken. While the official theme of the African Union (AU) meeting is human rights, leaders are again dealing with a string of crises across the continent during two days of talks at the organization's headquarters in the Ethiopian capital.

'Unimaginable suffering' in South Sudan

Ban also warned of the need for action amid stalled talks to end war in South Sudan. "Leaders in South Sudan have again failed to meet a deadline to form a transitional government," Ban said. "Instead of enjoying the fruits of independence, their people have endured more than two years of unimaginable suffering." Neither Burundi's President Pierre Nkurunziza nor South Sudan President Salva Kiir are believed to be attending the summit. "Leaders must protect their people, not themselves," Ban added. AU Peace and Security Council chief Smail Chergui warned "the stakes are indeed high", but Burundi remained defiant in its opposition to a mission it calls an "invasion force".

Burundian Foreign Minister Alain Nyamitwe on Friday insisted he had the backing of other nations. Asked whether he had support of others in opposing the proposed force, Nyamitwe said, "Yes, very strong, you will see." Street protests, a failed coup and now a simmering rebellion began when Nkurunziza announced his intention to run for a controversial third term, which he went on to win in July elections. Hundreds have died and at least 230,000 have fled the country in the months since. "We have said that the deployment of this force is not justified," Nyamitwe said. "We believe that the situation in the country is under control." — AFP



ADDIS ABABA: A general view taken in Addis Ababa shows the 26th presidential summit of the African Union. Chad's president Idriss Deby (not pictured) was appointed yesterday the new African Union Chairperson. — AFP

RUBIO URGES AGAINST MASS DEPORTATION AS FIX TO IMMIGRATION

MUSCATINE: Republican presidential hopeful Sen Marco Rubio said Friday that if he is elected president, he will not look to deport 12 million people in the US illegally, and will instead propose solutions to accommodate those who have no criminal record. In an interview with The Associated Press, Rubio, campaigning in Iowa ahead of the state's leadoff presidential caucuses, said that the realistic approach to America's problems with illegal immigration is to round up only criminals, while finding ways to accommodate the rest.

"We're not going to round up and deport 12 million people," Rubio said, speaking on his campaign bus from eastern Iowa. "Criminals can't stay. Felons, people who are dangerous - they are not staying." "But we're going to deal with the people that are here," he added. Addressing reporters later Friday, Rubio noted that the approach he sees as feasible is to administer a background check for individuals who have lived in the US "for a defined period of time." If passed, provide authorization for anyone in the US illegally to get a 10-year work permit.

"We're not going to force it down their throat," he said in the interview, later remarking to journalists: "You have to learn English. You have to pay a huge fine. You have to start

paying taxes. You get a work permit. And that's what you'll have for at least 10 years. That's my idea." Immigration has become a critical issue for Florida's freshman senator, who co-wrote a lengthy 2013 immigration bill that detailed a path to citizenship for many of the 11 million immigrants in the country illegally. The legislation passed in the Senate on a bipartisan vote but ended up dying in the House.

Rubio has since distanced himself from the sweeping bill, saying he wants to secure the border before dealing with the millions of people living in the US illegally. At the Fox News GOP debate Thursday, Rubio and former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush squared off over immigration policy. Rubio said he never supported a pathway to citizenship for people in the country illegally. Former Gov. Jeb Bush asserted that Rubio did. Rubio was challenged to defend his past statements as a candidate for Senate where he opposed "blanket amnesty," but then went on to lead a bipartisan Senate group that would have allowed people to seek citizenship after a series of other requirements.

'Blanket amnesty'
Speaking to reporters Friday, Rubio explained that "blanket amnesty" means "any-

one here would be granted legalization or citizenship" and that the American people should decide what criteria should determine who can and cannot stay. Accusations of flip-flopping ensued throughout Thursday's debate and into Friday. In his closing argument to Iowa voters, Texas Sen Ted Cruz cast himself as the only true conservative who can be trusted to keep his word, especially on immigration. At a restaurant in Ringsted, Iowa, Cruz drew sharp contrasts between Rubio and national front-runner Donald Trump. Cruz, fighting to retake his December lead in Iowa, took a swipe at Rubio, saying he campaigned for the US Senate in 2010 by opposing amnesty for immigrants living in the country illegally, but then flipped his position after being elected. New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, whose presidential campaign rests largely on how well he does in the Feb 9 New Hampshire primary, charged both Rubio and Cruz with both changing their positions on immigration. "Neither of them will admit it," Christie said during an appearance on MSNBC's "Morning Joe." "America needs a Washington-to-English dictionary so they can understand what these people are talking about," Christie said. "Sen Rubio did not tell the truth on that stage." Scott Bauer contributed from Ringsted, Iowa. — AP



DUBUQUE: Republican presidential candidate Sen Marco Rubio (R-FL) arrives at a town hall style meeting in Dubuque, Iowa. Rubio is in Iowa trying to gain support ahead of the state's February 1 caucuses. — AFP



IOWA: Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton holds hands with her husband former President Bill Clinton as she takes the stage to speak at a rally at the Col Ballroom in Davenport, Iowa. — AP

HILLARY CLINTON'S LIFELONG AMBITION: THE PRESIDENCY

DES MOINES: Since her school days, Hillary Clinton has chased success, earning honors and accolades that could fill a bookcase. The ambitious Midwesterner has managed it all in her lengthy career—except the presidency, her decades-long obsession. Clinton might have been forgiven for expecting a glide path to her party's nomination in 2016, after losing out to Barack Obama eight years earlier. She and husband Bill Clinton have not just endured but thrived in symbiotic tandem under the political spotlight since 1977, the year before Bill's election as governor of Arkansas.

Now she is in the fight of her life against chief rival Bernie Sanders, who is seeking to imitate Obama and snatch victory from Clinton's grasp in Iowa, the state that votes first in the presidential nomination battle. Clinton has changed tack for this new campaign. She promotes her status as a new grandmother, but also as the torchbearer of America's women, a commitment that dates back to her early years as a lawyer and child advocate. Embracing her reputation as a "fighter," Clinton is keen to shed the has-been label and emerge as the nation's first female president.

From middle-class to Yale

Hillary Diane Rodham was born October 26, 1947 and raised in a middle-class household in Chicago suburb Park Ridge. She adored her mother Dorothy but described her father Hugh Rodham, born from Welsh immigrants, as a stubborn and rigid taskmaster. He imposed his work ethic on young Hillary, but also his frugality. She still puts uneaten olives back in the jar and is loath to waste anything, she wrote in her 2003 autobiography, "Living History." Clinton shared her father's Republican convictions in adolescence, as well as his thunderous laugh. The family is Methodist, and to this day Hillary

Clinton remains in the church. From age 13, she took odd jobs to help finance her studies. Smart and ambitious, Hillary was admitted in 1965 to Wellesley, an elite women's college near Harvard where she was eventually elected president of her class.

It was the social tumult of the sixties, and Clinton's eyes were opened to the struggle for civil rights, the explosive debate over Vietnam and the fight for gender equality. When she was accepted in 1969 at prestigious Yale Law School, she met Bill Clinton, the "Viking" from Arkansas who would change the course of her life. After working for the influential Children's Defense Fund, and a period in Washington in 1974 on the commission investigating the Watergate scandal, she gave in and joined Bill in Arkansas. He was soon elected Arkansas governor and Hillary Rodham joined a prestigious law firm, eventually becoming its first female partner. Chelsea, their only daughter, was born in 1980.

Political first lady

She soon dropped her maiden name and became Hillary Clinton, first lady of Arkansas and then the nation after her husband's White House election victory in 1992. Her assertive style contrasted with that of her predecessors. She played an active political role, symbolized by the location of her office in the West Wing. Her relations with lawmakers and journalists quickly soured, particularly over her efforts to reform the health care system, a role bestowed on her by her president husband. Republicans branded her a radical feminist. She suffered intense humiliation when news of Bill's affair with White House intern Monica Lewinsky surfaced in 1998. But her popularity has never been higher than the 67-percent approval rating she enjoyed in December 1998, according to a Gallup poll at the time. — AFP

US WON'T RELEASE 'TOP SECRET' CLINTON EMAILS

'HOMEBREW' SERVER AN EARLY EMBARRASSMENT FOR HILLARY

WASHINGTON: "Top secret" material was sent through Hillary Clinton's private email server during her tenure as secretary of state, it was revealed Friday, just days before voters cast their first ballots in the presidential campaign. State Department spokesman John Kirby said the emails, which he described as "22 documents covering 37 pages" from seven email chains during Clinton's tenure as secretary of state, would therefore not be released publicly. Another 18 emails, from eight email chains, sent between then secretary Clinton and President Barack Obama will also not be released. But Kirby said those exchanges did not contain classified information.

Although emails previously released by the State Department have been partially redacted due to the nature of the information they contained, this was the first time entire messages were withheld. The revelation about the top secret emails comes three days before Clinton the frontrunner for the Democratic presidential nomination—goes to battle in the Iowa caucus, the first time the public will cast ballots on the long road to Election Day in November.

"These documents were not marked classified at the time they were sent," Kirby told a news briefing, explaining that the emails had been reviewed prior to public release and found to contain top secret information. "The documents are being upgraded at the request" of US intelligence agencies. Senator Dianne Feinstein, the vice chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee, said that "none" of the email chains originated with Clinton or contained the mandatory markings that are required to accompany classified information when shared. She described the material as being contained in 22 separate emails. "The only reason to hold secretary Clinton responsible for emails that didn't originate with her is for political points, and that's what we've seen over the past several months," Feinstein added.

New attacks

Clinton's campaign reacted with fury to the announcement, demanding that the emails be released in full, to defuse a burgeoning scandal that could critically damage her 2016 presidential hopes.

Campaign spokesman Brian Fallon said the review process "appears to be over-classification run amok." "We understand that these emails were likely originated on the State Department's unclassified system before they were ever shared with Secretary Clinton, and they have remained on the department's unclassified system for years," he said.

Kirby said the State Department was separately investigating whether those emails should have been marked classified at the time. The FBI is also probing Clinton's use of a private email server. The disclosures triggered fresh Republican attacks on Clinton. "If someone on my staff did what she did, you know what would happen? They would be fired and they would be prosecuted," said Senator Marco Rubio. "She is disqualified just because of that."

Republican National Committee Chairman Reince Priebus said that with the latest revelations, "Hillary Clinton has removed all doubt that she cannot be trusted with the presidency." He said her use of a private server "put our national security and diplomatic efforts at risk." Rival Democrat Bernie Sanders, however, called for the legal process reviewing the emails to "not be politicized." In a memorable campaign line, he said during an October presidential debate as he turned to face Clinton: "The American people are sick and tired of hearing about your damn emails."

'Loudest and leakiest'

Clinton's successor as US Secretary of State, John Kerry, refused to be drawn on the widening scandal and whether the use of a private server to send the emails had threatened national security. "I can't speak to the specifics of anything with regard to the technicalities, the contents, what may or may not have taken place with respect to her personal server because that's not our job. We don't do that," he told reporters.

"We don't know about it. It's in other hands," Kerry said, explaining that the State Department's responsibility was to release the mails according to the court order and not to comment on their contents. In the buildup to the scheduled late Friday document dump, several leaks to US media had suggested that highly secret information had been found on Clinton's private server, which she used while in office instead of an official government account.

The revelation of the so-called "homebrew" server was an early embarrassment for her campaign, but she has long insisted that no information marked as classified had been put at risk by her unusual arrangement. Her campaign returned to this theme in her statement. "After a process that has been dominated by bureaucratic infighting that has too often played out in public view, the loudest and leakiest participants in this interagency dispute have now prevailed in blocking any release of these emails," it said. "This flies in the face of the fact that these emails were unmarked at the time they were sent, and have been called 'innocuous' by certain intelligence officials." — AFP

1 OF 3 US ESCAPEES TURNS HIMSELF IN

LOS ANGELES: One of three men who escaped a week ago from a California jail surrendered and was arrested Friday, while his two companions remained on the loose. Bac Duong, 43, was arrested in Santa Ana. The men who escaped with him, Hossein Nayeri, 37, and Jonathan Tieu, 20 - both considered dangerous and probably armed—are still being sought in a frantic pursuit by police in the area southeast of Los Angeles.

Duong approached a civilian in Santa Ana around midday and "stated he wanted to turn himself in," Orange County Sheriff Sandra Hutchens told reporters. He had been jailed since December on charges including assault with a deadly weapon. A stolen white utility van that authorities say the escapees have been living in has not been located. "I think the longer they're out of custody, the more desperate they become, and that makes them more danger-

ous" said Lieutenant Jeff Hallock of the Orange County Sheriff's Department.

He said the two remaining men may have fled to Fresno or San Jose, which lie between the cities of Los Angeles and San Francisco. On Thursday, a 44-year-old English teacher, Nooshafarian Ravaghi, was arrested after authorities called her a "key" accomplice of the three men. She had given classes at the Santa Ana jail to Nayeri. Police have said the trio must have had "outside help." But Ravaghi has denied furnishing the escapees with the tools they used to cut through a ventilation grill and to fashion a makeshift rope from knotted bedsheets that allowed them to rappel down from the roof of the jail. Ten people have been arrested so far in connection with the spectacular escape. The authorities have been focusing their investigation on the local Vietnamese community. — AFP

FBI USING BILLBOARDS IN FIGHT AGAINST ALBANY CORRUPTION

ALBANY: Each workday, thousands of state workers commute from their suburban neighborhoods to the many state buildings scattered throughout New York's capital city. Based on Albany's remarkable penchant for corruption, odds are that a few of them have a story the feds would like to hear. That's where the big signs on the highway come in. Authorities have turned to using digital billboards along the interstate to urge citizens to report crooked politicians, dirty bureaucrats and other bad actors, the latest indication of just how big a problem political corruption has become in Albany.

The signs, which went up earlier this year, are emblazoned with the words "REPORT CORRUPTION," all in capital letters, above the number for a telephone tip line and FBI website. They went up only weeks after the Legislature's two top leaders were convicted of trying to cash in on their positions. The idea came from the New York Public Corruption Task Force, which includes the FBI, the IRS, the state comptroller and the state attorney general.

"The public plays an integral role in helping law enforcement root out corruption," said Andrew Vale, the FBI's special agent in charge at the Albany division. "Which is why we try to make it easier to come forward and report suspected abuse." Billboards have long been used to locate fugitives and missing children, or warn about the risks of domestic violence, drunken driving and child abuse. Their use in the fight against corruption, however, is a relatively new idea. "We got a call from the local field office,

and we worked with them to design it," said Matt Duddy, vice president and general manager in the region for Lamar Advertising, which operates the billboards and offered the space for free.

The FBI tried out anti-corruption billboards last year in Kentucky and Connecticut. Albany, where more than 30 lawmakers have faced criminal charges or left office because of allegations of ethical misconduct, would seem an obvious choice. Last year, former Assembly Speaker Sheldon and ex-Senate Leader Dean Skelos, R-Long Island, were convicted of corruption. Silver, a Manhattan Democrat, was found guilty of taking more than \$4 million in bribes. Skelos, a Long Island Republican, was convicted of extorting payments and jobs for his son. Authorities involved in the effort say the billboards are just one example of an increasingly creative, collaborative effort to address a problem long seen as intractable. "By cooperating and sharing our diverse expertise and resources, we've created a strong collaboration to fight public corruption," said state Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli. Authorities won't say whether they've seen an uptick in tips since the signs went up, or whether they've led to new investigations. Evidence from other states, however, suggests the signs could yield results: The Police department in Janesville, Wisconsin, reported that calls tripled after the department started putting information about wanted suspects and anti-crime messages on billboards. In New York, the tip line is 518-431-7200 and the website is tips.fbi.gov. — AP

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MASS RALLY AGAINST GAY CIVIL UNIONS IN ROME

ROME: Hundreds of thousands of people are due to protest in Rome's Circus Maximus arena yesterday against a civil unions bill for same-sex couples, a hot-potato issue for Prime Minister Matteo Renzi's government. "As many people as possible must take part, remember this is the only weapon we have!" organizer Massimo Gandolfini said ahead of the "Family Day" rally, which begins in the capital's ancient Roman chariot racing stadium at 1100 GMT.

Gandolfini said he expected to fill the arena, which can take 350,000 people without counting the surrounding streets. Authorities said they were preparing for up to 500,000 people as coaches began to arrive from across the country. Italy is the last major Western country not to allow same-sex couples legal status. The Senate began examining the bill on Thursday, which would enable gay people to commit to one another before a state official and, in certain circumstances, adopt each other's children and

inherit residual pension rights.

In 2007, another vast "Family Day" forced the centre-left government of Romano Prodi to drop a much less ambitious civil union project and the failure of the bill was cited as one of the reasons behind the fall of his government early the following year. Supporters say Italy has no choice this time but to change, pointing to repeated complaints from the European Court of Human Rights. But opponents hope their protest, backed by the Catholic Church, will slam the brakes on the bill. The Italian Bishops Conference (CEI) on Friday said it was "concerned" about the "process underway of putting marriage and civil unions on the same level-with the introduction of an alternative to the family".

'Beacon for Europe'

Centre-left Renzi has said he is confident the bill will pass, though there are several sticking points, in particular the ability to adopt the biological children of

one's partner. "Italy tomorrow will become a beacon for Europe. Each child needs a father and a mother, the complete deal," Jacopo Coghe, head of the Family Generation association, told journalists at a pre-rally on Friday.

As the hours ticked down to the demo, rights associations pleaded with would-be participants to change their mind. "It is statistically certain that among your children there are many boys and girls who, even if they've never confided in you, are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender," the Agedo association of parents and friends of LGBT people said. Beppe Severgnini, popular columnist for the Corriere della Sera, Italy's best-selling daily, said: "Italy, as we all know, has already decided". The arguments against gay civil unions recall those here against divorce 42 years ago, he said. "The answer should be the same: no one is obliged to get divorced, no one is obliged to get a civil union. But if they want to, why should we stop them?" — AFP



ROME: Franciscan friars holding a placard reading "no to the civil unions" take part in the Family Day rally at the Circo Massimo in central Rome yesterday. The Family day was organized to protest against a bill to recognize civil unions, including same-sex ones currently under examination at the Italian Parliament. — AFP



BETUNIA: Palestinian protesters hurl stones towards Israeli security forces during clashes following a demonstration in solidarity with Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails, outside the compound of the Israeli-run Ofer Prison, near the West Bank town of Betunia. — AFP

FRANCE WILL RECOGNIZE PALESTINE 'IF PLAN FAILS'

PARIS WANTS TO PUSH ISRAELIS, PALESTINIANS TO COMPROMISE

PARIS: France will recognize a Palestinian state if a final push that Paris plans to lead for a two-state solution between Israel and the Palestinians fails, its foreign minister said. US-led efforts to broker peace for a two-state solution collapsed in April 2014 and since then there have been no serious efforts to resume talks. Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius has repeatedly warned that letting the status quo continue risks killing off a two-state solution and playing into the hands of Islamic State militants.

Last year he failed in efforts to get the United States on board to push for a UN Security Council resolution to set parameters for talks between the two sides and set a final deadline for a deal. The expansions of settlements by Israel since have been described by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon as

"provocative acts" that raise questions about its commitment to a two-state solution. "We cannot let the two-state solution disintegrate. It is our responsibility as a UN Security Council member and a power seeking peace," Fabius told an annual gathering of foreign diplomats.

Fabius has previously called for an international support group comprising Arab states, the European Union and UN Security Council members that would essentially force the two sides to compromise. He said Paris would begin preparing in the "coming weeks" an international conference bringing together the parties and their main partners, American, European and Arab. If this last attempt at finding a solution hits a wall, "well... in this case, we need to face our responsibilities by recog-

nizing the Palestinian state", he said. A French diplomatic source said the aim was to launch the conference before the summer and that it would not be accompanied by a UN Security Council resolution, which would inevitably fail.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has previously criticized recent French initiatives, calling them "counter-productive". Despite anger in the US administration over Israeli settlements, there is little prospect of US President Barack Obama supporting any initiative that could upset the US Jewish lobby just 10 months before an election. Nabil Abu Rdainah, spokesman for Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, said he welcomed the move. "There is no doubt that a French recognition of the Palestinian state will contribute to building peace and stability in

the region," he said.

An Israeli official, who declined to be identified, said: "The foreign minister of France says up front that if his initiative reaches a dead end, France will recognize a Palestinian state. This statement constitutes an incentive for the Palestinians to bring about a dead end. Negotiations cannot be held nor peace achieved in this manner." Palestine has non-member observer status at the United Nations and its flag flies with those of member states at UN headquarters in New York. Sweden became the first EU member nation to recognize the Palestinian state in 2014 and has since been followed by several others. Palestinians seek a state in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem, parts of which have been occupied by Israel since a 1967 war. — Reuters

ITALY VOWS TO DEFY THOSE OUT TO DESTROY SCHENGEN, EUROPE

ROME: Prime Minister Matteo Renzi yesterday accused those who would "destroy" the passport-free Schengen zone of wanting to destroy Europe, and vowed that Italy would not let it happen. "We say with force, decisiveness and courage that those who want to destroy Schengen want to destroy Europe. And we will not allow them to," Renzi said a day after meeting with Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel on a migrant crisis which has threatened to see freedom of movement in the European Union revoked. Renzi was speaking during a visit to the Italian island of Ventotene, where during the Second World War two prisoners wrote a manifesto considered by many to be a key driver behind the movement for European unification.

The PM laid flowers on the grave of Altiero Spinelli, referred to as one of the founding fathers of the European Union for his co-authorship of the "Ventotene Manifesto", which he wrote with fellow prisoner Ernesto Rossi. "Today, in a moment of great difficulty for Europe, we decided to return here, where it all began... to pay homage to what happened during what was perhaps the most difficult moment in the history of European identity", Imprisoned from 1927 to 1943 by the

fascist government for dissident activities, Spinelli began the manifesto in 1941 on a federation of European states which would create a bond between the countries of Europe and prevent war.

'Strength to break down walls'

"The war seemed the natural outcome of centuries of conflict between European peoples. Yet here a few visionaries... had the courage, passion and strength to imagine a

united states of Europe, a Europe as a place of peace," he said. European nations have adopted a raft of restrictive measures on their borders since the beginning of the year as they seek to stem an influx of asylum seekers and the migrant crisis has sparked repeated warnings over the EU's fate. In the last few months of 2015, six out of the 26 members of Europe's Schengen passport-free zone reestablished provisional border controls, without closing the frontiers altogether.

It is not the only issue threatening the union: Britain is preparing to vote on whether or not to stay in the EU and experts have warned its exit could trigger the disintegration of the European project in the crisis-hit continent. Italy's Foreign Minister Paolo Gentiloni this week called for an urgent meeting of the six founding countries of the union: Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. "Italy will make its voice heard so that Europe does not become a grey, abstract debate on details and limits but becomes once more what it was for Spinelli and Rossi—a great dream, with the strength to move borders and break down prison walls," Renzi said. — AFP



CANAKKALE: A mother and her child wait after being caught by Turkish gendarme at kucukkuyu district in Canakkale. The European Commission said Greece could face border controls with the rest of the EU's passport-free Schengen zone if it fails to secure its exterior borders, with thousands of migrants still landing on Greek beaches from Turkey day after day. — AFP

HOW EU OFFER TO UK'S CAMERON IS SHAPING UP

LONDON: A draft EU reform package to help keep Britain in the European Union could be circulated tomorrow following meetings between Prime Minister David Cameron and top EU officials. The following are key points of what Reuters has been told by sources close to the negotiations could be the proposal European Council President Donald Tusk will send to EU governments after talks over dinner with Cameron in London on Sunday:

The form

Negotiators will work through the weekend to craft a single document laying out legislative and other measures responding to Cameron's November demands for reforms so he campaigns to keep Britain in the EU in a referendum by the end of next year. Depending on how Friday's talks in Brussels with European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker have gone, and on the Cameron-Tusk meeting, the document could set out in more or less detail a classic EU negotiating text, including blank spaces and alternative wordings in brackets, to be haggled over up to and during a summit chaired by Tusk in Brussels on Feb 19.

Nothing is done until everything is. A deal, needing all 28 national leaders' assent, could pave the way for a referendum as early as June. Imasse would probably mean more talks. The EU sees its proposals as legally watertight, safe from challenges in court and not requiring amendments to treaties now - something hard to pull off quickly across all 28 EU states. On some issues, it will offer binding guarantees that treaties will be amended later if that is required to enact proposals.

Migration

Cameron wants to discourage other Europeans coming to Britain by excluding them from the tax credits, child allowances and other non-contributory social benefits attached to low paid British jobs for at least four years. Without changing EU treaties guaranteeing free movement of labor and barring

national discrimination, EU lawyers propose an "emergency brake", limiting those fundamental rights where vital national interests or economic stability are at risk. Legislation would give any state to curb in-work benefits for up to four years - if agreed to the European Council of fellow governments. Normally, Council decisions are by consensus - in effect, unanimity - but easier terms might be negotiated. Allowances for children could also be reduced long term. EU negotiators speak of "indexing" so that workers whose children live in cheaper states than the parent would receive less.

Euro-zone

Cameron wants more legal safeguards for Britain's sterling-based economy and big financial industry from a risk of the euro zone countries writing EU rules to suit them. The EU proposes another "emergency brake" where Britain could object in the Council of all EU ministers. How far Britain may block measures and how far it would need allies is unclear yet. London and euro zone leaders all say Britain should not have a blanket veto.

National sovereignty

Cameron wants assurances Britain need not hand more power to Brussels and to enhance the say of nations in the EU. The EU will be proposing a "red card", letting national parliaments acting in concert block EU legislation. How few legislatures could obstruct how much is still being negotiated. Britain wants it made clear that an EU treaty phrase calling for "ever closer union" among peoples does not mean more political integration. The EU will offer a binding decision by the European Council, echoing a reassurance it gave in 2014.

Competitiveness

The least contentious area of Cameron's four reform "baskets", calling for less red tape and more economic dynamism has broad backing so a set of declarations will echo EU policy, but with elements to show Britain Brussels is listening. — Reuters



BRUSSELS: British Prime Minister David Cameron arrives for a meeting with the European Commission president at the European Commission in Brussels. — AFP

MASKED GANGS ATTACK MIGRANTS IN SWEDEN

STOCKHOLM: Dozens of masked men believed to belong to neo-Nazi gangs carried out a number of assaults on migrants in Stockholm overnight amid rising tension over immigration, Swedish police said yesterday. Police had beefed up their presence in the city centre, deploying anti-riot and helicopter units after learning that extremists were planning "aggression on unaccompanied migrant minors" in the city late on Friday.

"I was passing by and saw a masked group dressed in black... start hitting foreigners. I saw three people molested," the Aftonbladet daily quoted one witness as saying. Police spokesman Towe Hagg said by midday police had not received any complaints of assault but one 46-year-old man was arrested after striking a plain clothed officer. Three further people were briefly detained for public order offences and one more faces charges for carrying a knife.

As many as 100 people, their faces covered, had descended in the early evening on the Sergels Torg pedestrian square, a popular meeting point for young people, including unaccompanied migrants. Aftonbladet quoted witnesses as saying the

masked group targeted "people of foreign appearance" and handed out leaflets urging the infliction of "deserved punishment on children of the North African street." Internet site Nordfront, an online forum for the neo-Nazi SMR movement, said its "sources" had revealed that around "100 hooligans" from the AIK and Djurgarden football clubs had gathered Friday in order to "sort out the criminals coming in from North Africa."

After initially taking a generous stance on migration-the country of 9.8 million is among the European Union states with the highest proportion of refugees per capita-Sweden has in recent days said it expects to expel tens of thousands of people over several years as it struggles to cope with the influx. The number of new migrants entering the country has plunged since Stockholm introduced systematic photo ID checks on travelers on January 4. The toughening of policy comes against a backdrop of rising concern over conditions in the country's overcrowded asylum facilities, and officials called for greater security after an employee at a refugee centre for unaccompanied youths was fatally stabbed. — AFP

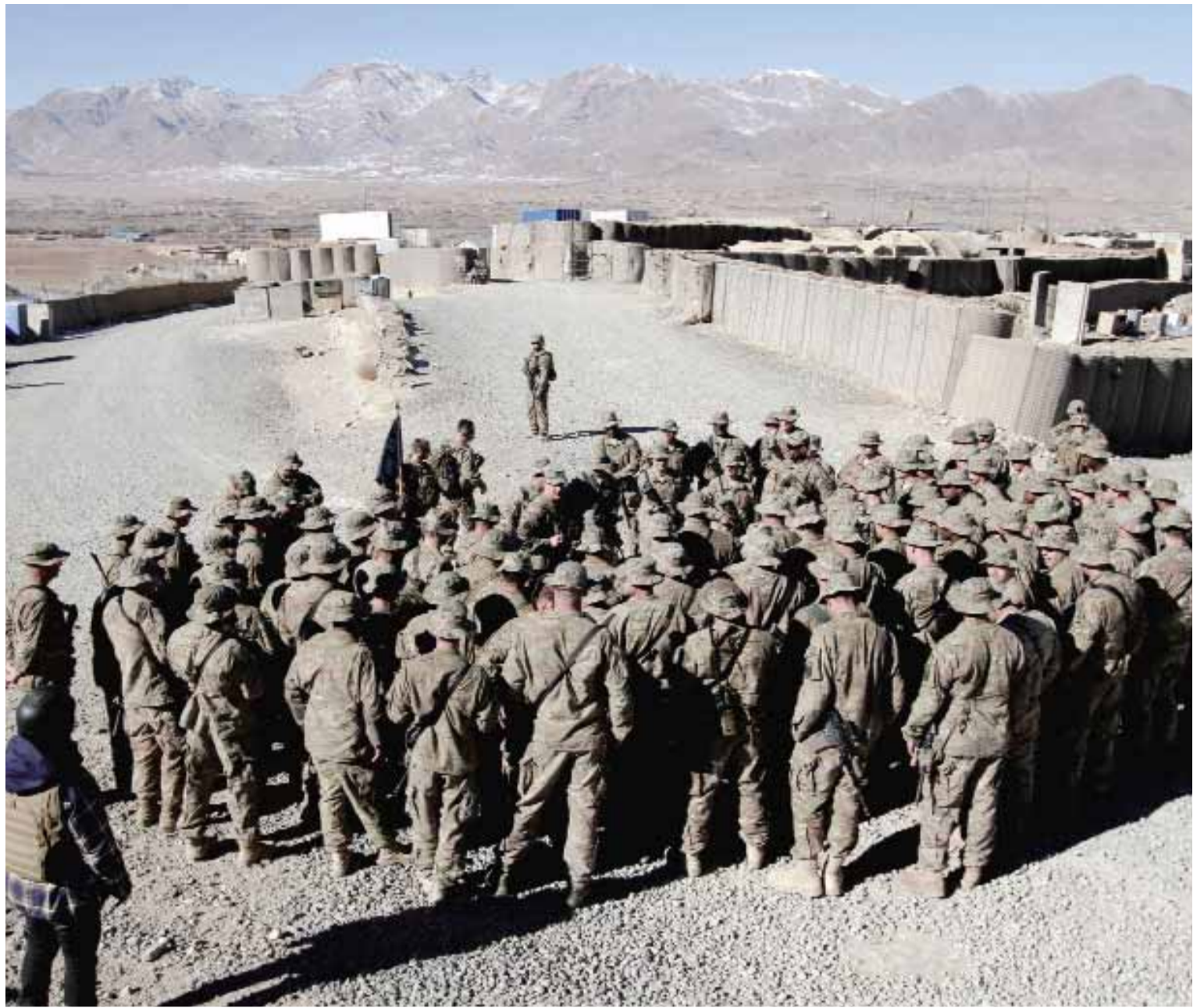
PAKISTAN ARRESTS ELUSIVE GANG LORD IN CRIME-RIDDEN KARACHI

KARACHI: One of Pakistan's most notorious gangsters, the alleged mastermind of a string of murders of local politicians and policemen, was arrested yesterday in the country's crime-ridden commercial capital of Karachi. "Lyari gang war leader Uzair Baluch has been arrested at outskirts of Karachi while entering the city," the Rangers paramilitary force said in a statement, with a photo showing him sitting handcuffed in a vehicle.

Baluch's criminal network controls much of Karachi's teeming Lyari slum. Local media have linked him to more than 20 cases of murder, extortion and terrorism and members of his gang have reportedly played football with the severed heads of his rivals. The early morning arrest of Baluch, believed to be about 40 years old, surprised many who had thought he was already in custody after Interpol detained him in Dubai in 2014. Karachi is Pakistan's

largest and richest city, home to the central bank and stock exchange, a major port and some of the most violent areas of the country.

Many of its sprawling slums are split along ethnic lines, and political parties have been accused of backing armed groups that have carved the city into spheres of influence, a charge they deny. Baluch's gang is believed to have been involved in killings of politicians from the influential MQM party, which critics accuse of racketeering, murder of opponents and holding the city to ransom by calling frequent mass strikes. A major military operation, launched in 2013, is credited with slashing Karachi's murder and kidnapping rates. But the clampdown has drawn protests from opposition politicians who say their party members have been targeted, and activists who accuse security forces of widespread human rights abuses. — Reuters



WARDAK: US troops gather in to Wardak province, eastern Afghanistan. Conditions in Afghanistan are getting worse, 15 years into a war that few Americans talk about any more. — AP

AFGHAN VERSION OF 'BE LIKE BILL' MAKES ONLINE SPLASH

KABUL: An Afghan iteration of the popular "Be Like Bill" Internet meme has gone viral online, with its Facebook posts extolling good Samaritan deeds resonating widely with the war-torn country's youth. "Be Like Qodos" has attracted more than 66,000 likes on its Dari Facebook page in over two weeks, a sizeable number in a country where few have access to the Internet. Qodos, a fictional name for a model Afghan citizen, takes a self-righteous stand on a variety of social ills—from corruption to street harassment of women.

"Qodos sees a woman driving. Qodos does his own work and does not stare at the woman," reads one post. "Qodos is a nice person, be like Qodos," it adds, highlighting the endemic sexual harassment of women. In another post, it takes a swipe at rampant graft, arguably the single biggest challenge confronting the troubled country rebuilding itself after decades of war. "Qodos does not pay or receive bribe. He respects the law. Qodos is smart. Be like Qodos," it says.

Corruption permeates nearly every public institution in Afghanistan, hobbling development despite billions of dollars of foreign aid, and fuelling insecurity as alienated Afghans veer towards the Taliban. "Be like Qodos" touches on other controversial issues such as the growing wave of Afghan migrants undertaking dangerous voyages to Europe in the face of worsening security

and unemployment. Afghans were the second largest group of migrants arriving in Europe last year and official pleas have so far failed to stop the exodus.

"Qodos is not considering going to Europe. Qodos is happy living in his country. Qodos is smart. Be like Qodos," said a post that received thousands of likes. The messages, though simple, are drawing widespread praise. "If we had 10 people like Qodos in the government, Afghanistan would be a prosperous country," wrote one Facebook user. Another urged President Ashraf Ghani and other officials in his widely unpopular government to emulate Qodos.

The administrator of the Facebook page, who identified himself as a "young male student," said he was overwhelmed by the response. "I have seen this society suffer immensely because of corruption and other social ills," he said. "This society needs role models like Qodos." But he said he feared making his identity public in case his posts draw any negative repercussions. Afghanistan's spy agency last year rounded up journalists suspected of running "Kabul Taxi", a satirical Facebook page that lampooned high-profile politicians, warlords and bureaucrats. The crackdown raised concerns over free speech in Afghanistan, which ranks as low as 122 out of 180 in the World Press Freedom Index compiled by Reporters Without Borders. — AFP



KABUL: An Afghan university student looks at a 'Be Like Bill' Internet meme on a Facebook account at Kardan university in Kabul yesterday. The text reads "This is Qodos and Qodos does not pay or receive bribe, he respects the law. Qodos is smart. Be like Qodos." —AFP

OBAMA FORCED AGAIN TO RETHINK TROOP NUMBERS IN AFGHANISTAN

CONDITIONS IN AFGHANISTAN GETTING WORSE

WASHINGTON: Fifteen years into the war that few Americans talk about any more, conditions in Afghanistan are getting worse, preventing the clean ending that President Barack Obama hoped to impose before leaving office. Violence is on the rise, the Taliban are staging new offensives, the Islamic State group is angling for a foothold and peace prospects are dim. Afghanistan remains a danger zone.

It's hobbled by a weak economy that's sapping public confidence in the new government. Afghan police and soldiers are struggling to hold together the country 13 months after the US-led military coalition culled its numbers by 90 percent. The bottom line: For a second time, Obama is rethinking his plan to drop US troop levels from 9,800 to 5,500 before he leaves office in January 2017. "I don't see any drawdowns" in the near future, said James Dobbins, Obama's former special envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan. He predicted Obama would leave the decision to the next president.

"They are just hoping that things hold together and they won't have to face a decision on whether to actually implement the force reduction they're talking about until late summer, early fall, by which time the administration will be on its last legs," Dobbins said. Top military officials, as well as Republicans and Democrats in Congress, think that trimming the force any more during Obama's presidency is a bad idea. Republican Sen John McCain of Arizona, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said Thursday that Afghanistan was in a "crisis

situation."

Initially, Obama announced plans to reduce the force to 5,500 troops by the end of last year, and to 1,000 by the end of 2016. Last fall, Obama changed his mind, saying the situation remained too fragile for the American military to leave. He announced plans to keep the current force of about 9,800 in place through most of 2016 to perform not in an offensive combat role but to continue counterterrorism missions and advise Afghans battling a resurgent Taliban. It's been a tough year on the Afghan battlefield.

Afghan soldiers and policemen - bankrolled by \$4.1 billion in US taxpayer money - fought virtually on their own last year for the first time since the US invasion in 2001. NATO officials have told The Associated Press that Afghan troops are displaying prowess yet suffering sustained heavy casualties - 28 percent higher in 2015 than before the international combat mission ended in December 2014. Lt Gen John "Mick" Nicholson, Obama's pick to be the next top US commander in Afghanistan, said at his Senate confirmation hearing Thursday that the Afghan security forces have "more than held their own against the insurgency," but are not yet "self-sustainable."

Asked whether the US effort in 2015 had resulted in gains or losses, Nicholson replied: "The Taliban came at the Afghan security forces more intensely than perhaps we anticipated. Because of that, we did not make the advances we ... thought we would make." When US and other foreign troops left on an announced

schedule, the Taliban pounced. Last fall, they briefly seized Kunduz, a city of 300,000 in northern Afghanistan. It marked the militants' first capture of a major city since before the US-led invasion and was marred by the mistaken US strike on a charity hospital run by Doctors Without Borders, killing 42 people.

Hamdullah Mohib, Afghanistan's ambassador to the United States, acknowledged that Kunduz was a setback. But he said it also reminded Afghans what life was like under the Taliban. "They don't want to return to that," he said. In the south, Afghan army units have been engaged in fierce fights with the Taliban for months in Helmand province, where militants sow more than \$3 billion a year in opium revenue. The Afghan army in Helmand has been plagued by incompetence and corruption. The Afghan military recently fired and replaced top Afghan army leaders there.

Also in the south, US and Afghan forces last year killed 150 to 200 Al-Qaeda members in a large training camp, complete with tunnels, that was discovered in neighboring Kandahar province, another militant stronghold. A current Afghan official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the media, acknowledged the army's many setbacks this year, but said the Taliban had sought to achieve major victories after the US-led coalition announced it would end its combat mission on Dec 31, 2015. Instead, they failed to retake huge swaths of land, the official said. — AP

THREE SENTENCED TO DEATH FOR GANG-RAPE AND MURDER IN INDIA

KOLKATA: Three men were sentenced to death yesterday by an Indian court for the gang-rape and murder of a student, in a case that sparked outrage over women's safety. A further three defendants were given life sentences for the gang-rape of the victim. The court in Kolkata handed down the sentences following their conviction on Thursday. The 21-year-old woman was targeted as she walked home after an exam in 2013 in eastern West Bengal state.

Senior public prosecutor Anindya Raut said: "It was a gruesome crime, a rarest of the rarest case." Judge Sanchita Sarkar handed down the verdicts in a packed court which included the victim's family. "I award the death sentence to three convicts on charges of gang-rape and murder of the student and life imprisonment to three others for gang rape, criminal conspiracy and causing disappearance of evidence," Sarkar said.

Scores of activists and people from the victim's home village were at court chanting slogans against the convicts and demanding death for all of them. Extra police officers were deployed outside the court following a scuffle Thursday between police and protesters who tried to enter the court complex. "Justice has failed us as two of the accused were acquitted and three were awarded life sentences," the victim's brother said. The woman, who cannot be named for legal reasons, was grabbed after getting off the bus before being dragged to a nearby abandoned farm.

The gang attacked her as she returned from the university to her home in a village, 50 kilometers northeast of Kolkata, on June 2013. She was found gagged and laying in a pool of blood in a field the next morning.

Evidence showed she had been repeatedly raped. Two of the eight accused were acquitted for lack of evidence by the court. The attack triggered anger in West Bengal

state and came just months after the fatal gang-rape of a student in Delhi in December 2012 that shone a global spotlight on violence against women in India.

The 2012 incident led to an overhaul of India's rape laws including speeding up of trials and tougher penalties for offenders, but high numbers of assaults persist. — AFP



KOLKATA: Women activists shout slogans as they participate in a demonstration demanding highest punishment for convicted persons in the Kamduni rape case and the re-arrest of two acquitted persons near the city court in Kolkata, India. — AP

US WARSHIP SAILED IN WATERS OFF ISLAND CLAIMED BY CHINA

WASHINGTON: A US warship sailed within 12 nautical miles of an island claimed by Beijing in the South China Sea, in an operation intended to underscore America's right to access the disputed waters, the Pentagon said. "We conducted a freedom of navigation operation in the South China Sea earlier tonight," Pentagon spokesman Jeff Davis said in statement issued late Friday US time. He said the operation was carried out near Triton Island in the Paracel Islands, "to challenge excessive maritime claims of parties that claim the Paracel Islands."

Davis said that the USS Wilbur was the guided missile destroyer used in the operation, and that no Chinese ships were in the vicinity at the time. The waters of the South China Sea have been the subject of tense territorial disputes in the region, the Pentagon spokesman noted. He added that Washington did not notify any of the countries laying claim to the islands that it intended to enter the territorial waters before embarking on the mission. "This operation challenged attempts by the three claimants-China, Taiwan and Vietnam-to restrict navigation rights and freedoms around the features they claim by policies that require prior permission or notification of transit within territorial seas," Davis said.

"The excessive claims regarding Triton Island are inconsistent with international law as reflected in the Law of the Sea Convention. This operation was about challenging excessive maritime claims that restrict the rights and freedoms of the United States and others, not about territorial claims to land features," he said. Davis added: "The United States takes no position on competing sovereignty claims between the parties to naturally-formed land features in the South China Sea. We do take a strong position on protecting the rights, freedoms, and lawful uses of the sea and airspace guaranteed to all countries. All maritime claims must comply with international law." — AFP

HONG KONG PRESS FREEDOMS DECLINE IN 2015

HONG KONG: Press freedom further declined in Hong Kong in 2015, driven by growing self-censorship and government interference as Beijing expands its influence over the city's boisterous media, a new report said yesterday. The southern Chinese city prides itself on having relative freedom of expression compared with severely restricted reporting in mainland China, a legacy of Britain's handover of power in 1997.

"Press freedom in China, Hong Kong and Macau deteriorated further in 2015, as the Communist Party of China used every means at its disposal to control the media," the International Federation of Journalists' China Press Freedom Report said. The report comes at a time when the fate of five booksellers, feared to have been detained in mainland China after disappearing late last year have put residents on edge with concerns the semi-autonomous city's freedoms are being eroded.

The five are from Hong Kong's Mighty Current publishing house, known for salacious titles critical of Beijing leaders. "There has been strong outcry from the Hong Kong people, with many concerned about their personal safety and freedom of speech," the report said of sentiment after the disappearances. The report also predicted China's ruling Communist Party will use resources to strengthen its influence in the city, which will hold elections for its legislature later in the year and for a new leader in 2017. "As Hong Kong goes to elections next year the party is also using its considerable wealth to consolidate its influence over the region," it said.

Last year's report warned of "intervention behind the scenes" at a time when tensions remained high after more than two months of mass protests for fully free leadership elections in late 2014. Ken Tsang, a pro-democracy activist who was allegedly beaten by police during the

protests in an attack captured by television cameras and beamed around the world said the situation in Hong Kong was "terrible". "Maybe we can say we have lots of freedoms but somebody is threatening you at your back, I think all Hong Kong citizens can feel that," Tsang told AFP after a court hearing on Thursday. "The situation is not that good, we are terrified," he said.

A British colony until 1997, Hong Kong is ruled under a "one country, two systems" deal that allows it far greater civil liberties than those enjoyed on the Chinese mainland, including freedom of speech and the right to protest. The report, presented at Hong Kong's Foreign Correspondents' Club, also called the outlook in 2016 for the rest of mainland China "even worse". Chinese authorities have detained and harassed reporters, used forced television confessions and other methods in limiting and influencing reporting, the report said. — AFP



HONG KONG: Anti-Beijing protesters, holding yellow umbrellas and a picture of human rights activist Wang Qingying, protest to demand Wang's release, in Hong Kong. — AP



SHANDONG: The first miner (centre on hoist) is lifted from a collapsed mine in Pingyi, east China's Shandong Province. — AP

'MIRACLE' RESCUE OF FOUR CHINA MINERS

MEN TRAPPED UNDERGROUND FOR 36 DAYS

SHANGHAI: Four miners trapped underground for 36 days in a collapsed Chinese gypsum mine were pulled out late Friday, a "miracle" rescue in a country with a poor track record on industrial accidents. The final operation to save the men trapped more than 200 meters underground took two hours as they were hauled up to the surface one by one in a rescue "capsule", according to state broadcaster CCTV.

The four were among 29 trapped when the mine collapsed on December 25. But the rescue was marred as a local government official said there had been no contact with 13 other missing miners. The incident drew comparisons to a 2010 mining accident in Chile, which saw 33 miners trapped underground for 69 days before their rescue. "It is a miracle," said Zeng Kunyuan on microblog Weibo, China's equivalent of Twitter. "I hope they can sit at the dinner table on the eve of Spring Festival!" the posting said, referring to the upcoming Chinese New Year when people return home to have a traditional meal with their families.

Dramatic footage released by CCTV showed rescue crews applauding as the men were brought above ground in China's eastern province of Shandong. Of the 29 that were trapped, one has been found dead and 11 were rescued the day after the accident. There has been no contact with the remaining 13, however. "We used life detection equipment to search for them.

Unfortunately, we haven't heard from those 13 missing miners," Zhang Shuping, mayor of Linyi city which governs the area was quoted by CCTV as saying.

The four rescued men were shown being wrapped in military blankets, blindfolded to protect their eyes, and put into ambulances. They were named by state media as Zhao Zhicheng, aged 50, Li Qisheng, 39, Guan Qingji, 58, and Hua Mingxi, 36. "Thanks," Guan was reported to have said as he was hoisted out clinging to a cable which held him with a series of harnesses strapped to his body. The four had suffered no major injuries and would soon be able to return home, the official Xinhua news agency quoted Cao Qingde, deputy head of the local hospital where they were being treated, as saying.

'New page'

Rescuers first detected signs of life on December 30. The rescue team managed to contact the miners, the broadcaster reported, and send down food, clothes and lamps through a tunnel. However, complicated geological conditions made the rescue difficult with crews having to account for the structural instability of the tunnel and falling rocks. Government officials said this marked China's first rescue of its kind, accomplished by drilling through rock with a large drill head. "In the rescue history of the People's Republic of China,

this has turned a new page," Gao Guangwei of the State Administration of Work Safety told CCTV.

The incident was the latest deadly accident in a country where safety rules are often flouted to cut costs. Despite the jubilation over the rescue, some online postings called for accountability over the accident. "Feel so proud of this? Shouldn't it be the time to hold someone accountable?" said one posting. The mine owner committed suicide by drowning himself at the scene soon after the collapse, Xinhua reported previously. The cause of the collapse is under investigation, but industrial safety regulations are often evaded in China and corruption enables bosses to pursue profits at the cost of worker safety.

Four officials in Pingyi county, where the mine is located, including the county's party chief and head of government, were removed from their posts in the wake of the incident. The gypsum pit and other mines in its vicinity were ordered to stop production in October by local authorities because of a risk of sinkholes, but it kept operating secretly, the Beijing Times reported earlier. Accidents linked to lax industrial safety enforcement saw hundreds of people killed in China last year, including a landslide caused by improper disposal of waste in the southern commercial hub of Shenzhen in December and chemical blasts in the industrial city of Tianjin in August. — AFP

CUBA'S RAUL CASTRO ON GRAND BRIDGE-BUILDING FRANCE TRIP

HAVANA: Cuba's Communist President Raul Castro will be welcomed under the Arc de Triomphe in Paris during a rare state visit tomorrow to showcase his island's warming ties with big world powers. Having restored relations last year with the United States, the 84-year-old leader now pays court to France, one of his most powerful European allies, in a new era of economic and diplomatic ties. "This visit is important for Cuba's image," said Eduardo Perera, an expert in international relations specializing in Europe at Havana University. "It will undeniably make Cuba shine on the international stage." Although Washington has yet to lift its half-century trade embargo against Cuba, US and European businesses are jockeying for a place in the market as the island's economy gradually opens up.

Trade delegations have been flocking to Cuba, hoping to cash in on its highly trained workforce and native assets such as its sunny Caribbean tourist beaches. Cuba, meanwhile, needs to tap new sources of income as its main ally among its neighbors, Venezuela, is in an economic and political crisis. During Castro's visit, France and Cuba are expected to sign an "economic roadmap" to develop ties, French officials said. They will also sign deals on transport, tourism and fair trade. Bilateral trade between France and Cuba is currently worth about \$195 million. That level is "not in line with our ambitions," France's foreign trade minister Matthias Fekl was quoted as saying in French newspaper L'Humanite.

Castros in the Elysee

It is Castro's first state visit to Europe since he took over from his elder brother Fidel as leader in 2006. The latter visited France in 1995 and met with its then president Francois Mitterrand. Raul Castro will

be officially received on Monday by French President Francois Hollande under the Arc de Triomphe in central Paris, according to French officials. The Champs Elysees avenue will be decked with Cuban flags. He will hold talks with Hollande in the Elysee presidential palace and attend a state dinner. He will meet various French officials on Tuesday.

Hollande in May became the first Western leader to visit Cuba following the announcement of the historic rapprochement with the United States. He called for the lifting of the trade embargo, in place since 1962. France recently engineered an agreement among the Paris Club of international creditors to write off \$8.5 billion of Cuba's debt. It could now agree to further, bilateral debt relief, potentially widening Cuba's access to international financial markets. Paris is also taking a leading role in strengthening Cuba's political ties with Europe overall. It hopes for a new cooperation deal after years of tension over the sensitive issue of human rights in Cuba.

International authorities have accused the Castros of repressing and harassing their political opponents. The government is sensitive about being lectured on the topic. A diplomatic source in Paris said human rights "will be discussed" during the bilateral talks. Hollande is expected to take a discreet stance on the issue, however. Hollande this week hosted Iran's President Hassan Rouhani, another head of state from a country whose leaders are accused of human rights abuses. Hailing a "new relationship," Hollande and Rouhani sealed a sheaf of big trade deals drawn up since nuclear sanctions on Iran were lifted. In Cuba, Hollande himself drew criticism on human rights grounds for meeting with Fidel Castro during his visit last year. — AFP



Cuba's President Raul Castro

HAITI'S RADICAL OPPOSITION PROTESTS OAS VOTE MISSION

PORT-AU-PRINCE: Several hundred radical opposition protesters demonstrated Friday in Port-au-Prince, angry over an international election mission that they say will interfere in Haiti's presidential vote. The protesters, who back the election's opposition candidate, are upset by the Organization of American States' deployment of a special mission meant to ease the country's political crisis. The OAS is acting at the request of outgoing President Michel Martelly, and opposition activists claim that he and his foreign backers are bent on rigging the poll in favor of his chosen candidate.

Demonstrators marched down the streets of the capital with red cardboard signs in hand which read "Down with the OAS." "The time has come that we take the destiny of our country in hand after 212 years of destruction, and the OAS is always in the middle of these conflicts," student Joenson Versailles said. Martelly is constitutionally prohibited from standing for re-election and his legal term in office

ends on February 7, when he had hoped to hand over power. His favored candidate, the previously little-known Jovenel Moise, won October's first round with around a third of the vote and remains the favorite.

But opposition flag-bearer Jude Celestin was close behind and refused to campaign ahead of the second vote, alleging the government was working against him. The second-round presidential runoff, which was originally scheduled for December 27, was postponed indefinitely last Friday, less than 48 hours before voting was to begin. Members of the UN Security Council expressed concern Friday "that the delay in elections may undermine Haiti's ability to address the security, economic and social challenges it faces." Since 1986, when president-for-life Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier fled a revolt, the Caribbean island nation, which is wracked by poverty and the after effects of a devastating 2010 earthquake, has struggled repeatedly to hold credible elections. — AFP

WHAT'S GOING ON WITH THE OREGON ARMED STANDOFF

BURNS: Leaders of the armed group that took over a national wildlife refuge in Oregon to oppose federal land policy have been arrested and are behind bars until another court hearing Friday. Authorities and jailed group leader Ammon Bundy now are working to persuade the handful of holdouts at the remote preserve to stand down.

The refuge

Four members of the armed group are still at Malheur



OREGON: Police monitor a checkpoint near the Malheur Wildlife Refuge near Burns, Oregon. — AFP

National Wildlife Refuge. The holdouts posted a video Friday to the YouTube channel "DefendYourBase," which the group has been using to give live updates during the nearly month-old standoff, saying they demand pardons for everyone involved. A speaker believed to be David Fry said he asked the FBI whether it was possible to "get out of here without charges," but "they keep saying that's not possible." He asks, "Why can't they pardon all of us?" It comes after federal and state law enforcement arrested Bundy and others Tuesday in a traffic stop that left one man dead and then blocked the roads leading to the property. Others were apprehended later.

What is Ammon Bundy saying?

Bundy has urged those still at the refuge to leave and asked the federal government to allow the holdouts to go home without being prosecuted, according to statements released through his attorney. He told the holdouts Thursday: "Turn yourselves in, and do not use physical force." Bundy said the armed activists never pointed their weapons at anyone and "never wanted bloodshed."

What's next for those arrested?

So far, eleven people have been taken into custody, including Bundy and his brother Ryan Bundy. They all face the same charge - conspiracy to impede officers of the United States from discharging their official duties through the use of force. Charges could be added or dropped depending on the FBI investigation, which is still underway. A federal judge said Thursday that she will not release any of those arrested while the occupation continues, the Oregonian reported. The judge has ordered seven of the

defendants, including the Bundys, held in jail pending a Friday afternoon hearing, saying they are a danger to the community.

How did this begin?

The group took over the refuge on Jan. 2 to demand the federal government turn public lands over to local control and object to the prison sentences of two local ranchers convicted of setting fires. The case led Bundy's group to demand an inquiry into whether the government is forcing ranchers off their land, though the father-and-son ranchers distanced themselves from the occupiers. It's a clash over public lands that dates back decades in the West.

What about the man killed?

Robert "LaVoy" Finicum, a 55-year-old rancher from Arizona, died after being shot by police who stopped his truck and another vehicle carrying occupiers. The FBI released video showing a white truck driven by Finicum taking off and officers chasing it. It shows Finicum's vehicle plowing into a snowbank, and a man identified as the rancher getting out of the truck. At first, he has his hands up, but then he appears to reach into his pocket at least twice. The FBI said Finicum had a loaded gun, and his truck nearly hit an agent before it got stuck in the snow. The bureau said authorities gave Finicum medical assistance about 10 minutes after the shooting, when they were sure there were no other threats. Finicum vowed this month that he would die before spending his life behind bars. He was a prominent voice of the group, and his affable but passionate demeanor made him a popular subject for on-camera interviews. — AP



A thoroughbred Arabian horse runs in a paddock at the Al-Dhafra Equestrian Club in the desert, near the city of Madinat Zayed, 150 km west of Abu Dhabi, before competing yesterday. — AFP

16 MORE STARVE TO DEATH IN SYRIA'S BESIEGED...

Continued from Page 1

The Observatory also reported regime shelling on the Aubin camp for displaced people in Latakia in northwest Syria, in the second such case in as many days.

A source close to the HNC said that the group was sending 17 negotiators and 25 others to the Swiss city. A 16-member delegation representing Assad's government arrived on Friday. Backed by external powers embroiled in Syria's war, the talks are seeking to end a conflict that has killed more than 260,000 people and fuelled the meteoric rise of the extremist Islamic State group. Millions of those fleeing the conflict have sought refuge in neighboring countries and hundreds of thousands have risked their lives to reach Europe, causing political tensions there.

Yesterday, dozens of migrant men, women and children, including Syrians, drowned when their boat sank off of Turkey - joining the almost 4,000 who died trying to reach Europe by sea in 2015. But the complexities of the Syrian conflict, involving a tangled web of moderate rebels, Islamist fighters, Kurds, jihadists and regime forces backed by Moscow and Iran, pose a huge challenge to the talks, experts say. "There is every reason to be pessimistic, and there is no realistic scenario in which a breakthrough would be reached," said Karim Bitar, an analyst at the Paris-based Institute of International and Strategic Relations.

The future of Assad, emboldened by recent territorial gains against rebels thanks to Russian support, in any peace deal remains uncertain. Attacks claimed by IS in Paris, Lebanon, Indonesia and the downing of a Russian airliner over Egypt last year have led Western powers to moderate their demands for him to go, seeing him as the lesser evil, experts say.

For now, no face-to-face talks between the opposition and the regime are expected. Instead "proximity talks" are envisioned whereby UN envoy Staffan de Mistura will shuttle between the participants. The UN envoy was to meet with HNC delegates "perhaps tomorrow (Sunday)", HNC spokesman Makhous said. In a controversial move, the alliance has named Mohammed Alloush, member of the Army of Islam rebel group, as its chief negotiator, but sources hinted he was not among those travelling to Geneva.

Excluded meanwhile, in the initial stages of the talks at least, are Kurdish representatives, with Saudi Arabia and in particular Turkey vehemently opposed to their participation. Kurdish figures - including Saleh Muslim, head of the powerful Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) - hoping to be included have left the Swiss city after not receiving invitations to negotiations, sources told AFP yesterday. The PYD has been one of the

most successful fighting forces against the extremist Islamic State group, clearing jihadists out of swathes of territory in northern Syria. "Without us, this process will have the same fate as the last round of Geneva talks" in 2014, a PYD source told AFP.

Several dozen more residents of Madaya are in "danger of death" because of severe malnutrition, MSF has warned, adding the real toll could be even higher. "MSF has clear medical reporting for 46 starvation deaths since December 1," the group said in a statement to AFP. "The real number is almost certainly higher, as MSF is aware of reports of people dying of starvation in their homes."

Located in Damascus province, Madaya is under government siege, and is one of four towns included in a rare deal last year that was intended to halt fighting and allow the entry of humanitarian aid. But despite the deal, the UN and other aid groups have had only limited access to Madaya, along with rebel-held Zabadani, and the government-held towns of Fuaa and Kafraya, which are under opposition siege. Conditions in Madaya have reportedly been among the worst, with about 42,000 civilians there surrounded by government troops who have laid mines around the town to prevent people leaving.

While the government has some ability to airdrop supplies to Fuaa and Kafraya, the opposition has no similar capacity, and aid groups have regularly urged continuous aid access to all four towns. They have also called for the evacuation of those suffering malnutrition or sick with other illnesses. Citing medical reports in the town, MSF said there were at least 320 cases of malnutrition in the town, including 33 that were so severe that the individuals could die without prompt treatment.

"It is totally unacceptable that people continue to die from starvation, and that critical medical cases remain in the town when they should have been evacuated weeks ago," said MSF's director of operations Brice de le Vingne. "The warring parties responsible for these siege strategies need to allow unhindered medical and humanitarian access immediately," he added. After the September deal for the four towns, an initial aid delivery was made, but no subsequent assistance was allowed in until Jan 11, after reports of deaths in Madaya.

Additional convoys of food and medicine entered Madaya, Fuaa and Kafraya on Jan 14, and then all four towns on Jan 19, but aid groups have said the piecemeal deliveries are insufficient. The UN estimates around 486,700 Syrians are living under sieges imposed by the regime, rebels or the Islamic State group. The UN's aid chief said this week that 75 percent of its requests for aid deliveries in Syria went unanswered by the government. — Agencies

IRAN CANCELS LONDON OIL CONFERENCE OVER VISAS

ANKARA: Iran has cancelled a London conference where it was set to introduce new oil and gas contracts to investors, the Seda weekly reported yesterday citing a senior Iranian official who blamed a delay in getting visas. Postponed five times amid uncertainty over international sanctions against Iran which were lifted this month, the conference had been set for Feb 22-24. Foreign companies will now be invited in May to bid for the new Iran Petroleum Contracts (IPCs), Ali Kardor, deputy head of the National Iranian Oil Co. (NIOC), told the weekly.

"The London conference has been canceled because the British embassy in Tehran could not issue visas for representatives of Iranian companies as its visa section has yet to become active," Kardor said. "There will be bids in May for new contracts ... There will be no need to hold a conference abroad after the bids," he said. To bolster its economy, Iran is sweetening the terms of its oil development contracts to lure back international companies. Some 135 firms, including BP, France's Total, Italy's Eni and Spain's Repsol attended a conference in Tehran in November to hear about the IPC.

Hardline rivals of pragmatist President Hassan Rouhani have criticized the new contracts, however. The Tasnim news agency said police dispersed a group

of 50 protesters, who gathered in front of the Oil Ministry building in Tehran yesterday to protest against "Rouhani's adopted oil policies and the new oil contracts". The protesters chanted "Cancel the IPC contracts," Tasnim reported. Kardor told Seda: "We are in talks with critics to hear their points and to resolve problems when needed."

Some analysts say Rouhani's government is determined to resolve the dispute through diplomacy. "The oil ministry and the government want a political consensus over this issue ... in a public statement, the government has asked all the experts to express their views," said Tehran-based senior energy analyst Reza Zandi. International sanctions on Iran were lifted this month as part of a nuclear deal reached with six major powers in 2015 in exchange for curbing Tehran's disputed nuclear work. OPEC producer Iran has said it now plans to increase its output by 500,000 barrels per day (bpd) and soon by another 500,000 bpd.

A draft of the IPC was approved by the government in September, but the official said the new contract still required approval by the NIOC board of governors. The IPC would end a more-than-two-decade-old buy-back system that banned foreign companies from booking reserves or taking equity stakes in Iranian companies. — Reuters

NEARLY 40 MIGRANTS DROWN OFF TURKEY

Continued from Page 1

The capsized boat was visible around 50 m from the shore, where divers from the coastguard were still searching for the missing. Military police in green berets placed bodies in bags to be taken to a morgue. Life jackets and other refugees' belongings were seen dotted across the beach. The drownings continue a grim trend that accelerated last year when nearly 4,000 people died trying to reach Europe by sea, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The influx, which has been fuelled by Syria's civil war, has continued throughout the winter.

During the first 28 days of 2016, a further 244 migrants died at sea, with at least a dozen more dying on land, the IOM said Friday. Turkey, which is hosting at least 2.5 million refugees from Syria's civil war, has

become the main launchpad for migrants fleeing war, persecution and poverty to Europe. The Turkish government struck a deal with the EU in November to halt the outflow of refugees, in return for A3 billion (\$3.2 billion) in financial assistance, but the agreement has failed to check the migrant tide.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel said Friday that with 2,000 new asylum seekers entering the Balkans on their journey to northern Europe every day the EU "urgently" needed to implement its side of the agreement. Italy has however questioned how much of the money should come from the EU budget, and how much control the bloc will have over how Ankara spends the funds. Turkey's minister for EU affairs Volkan Bozkir Saturday dismissed any problems with Italy about the release of the EU money and said the funds would be released in February. — AFP



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Focus

SYRIA TALKS FACE MAJOR CHALLENGE

By Maya Gebeily with Rana Moussaoui

Divisions among Syria's opposition and anger over regime blockades almost sank new peace talks in Geneva before they began, and analysts say prospects of a breakthrough at the negotiations remain slim. On Friday, after four days of suspense, Syria's main opposition umbrella group finally announced it would send representatives to Geneva. But formidable obstacles remain, including differences over the fate of President Bashar Al-Assad, emboldened by recent territorial gains with support from Russian air strikes.

In a sign of the challenges ahead, the Saudi-backed High Negotiations Committee (HNC) said it was sending a delegation "to participate in discussions with the UN, not for negotiations". The complexities of the conflict, involving a tangled web of moderate rebels, Islamist fighters, Kurds, jihadists and regime forces backed by Moscow and Iran, pose a huge challenge, experts say. "There is every reason to be pessimistic, and there is no realistic scenario in which a breakthrough would be reached," said Karim Bitar, an analyst at the Paris-based Institute of International and Strategic Relations. "For the time being, the disconnect between the Geneva process and the realities on the ground has never been bigger."

The conflict began in March 2011 with anti-government protests and has evolved into a multi-sided war that has killed over 260,000 people and displaced more than half the population. In recent months, world powers have redoubled diplomatic efforts to solve the crisis, fuelled by fear of the Islamic State group's growing power, as well as the pressure of a wave of refugees fleeing to Europe. They have pinned their hopes on an ambitious UN-backed plan for negotiations in Geneva, followed by the creation of a transitional government, a new constitution, and elections within 18 months.

But analysts say the atmosphere for these talks is even worse than a last round of failed negotiations in Geneva in 2014. After a series of setbacks last year, Assad's government has gone on the offensive and scored several victories since its key ally Russia began an aerial campaign on its behalf in late September. "Assad is feeling stronger and stronger so is being inflexible," said Agnes Levallois, a France-based Middle East analyst. "If anything, Russia and the regime will feel that they are slowly grinding down the opposition, that the trend from now on will not be unfavourable to them," added Yezid Sayigh of the Carnegie Middle East Centre.

Assad's Future in Question

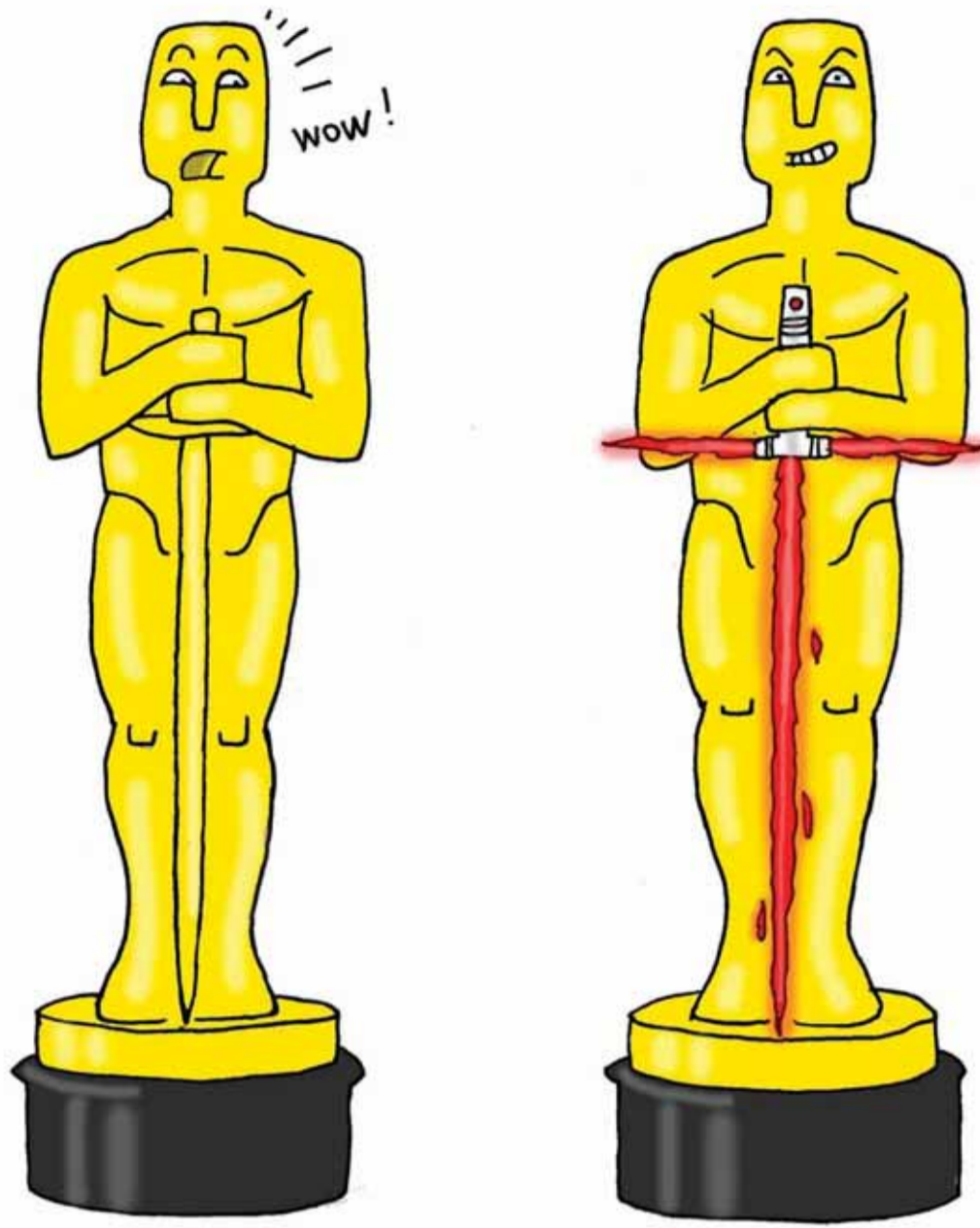
At the same time, Western powers have moderated their previous insistence that Assad must step aside immediately amid fears of a power vacuum that could benefit IS and push more refugees towards Europe. "Authoritarian nationalism is back in fashion," Bitar said. Syria's opposition has long insisted that Assad can have no role in any political transition and must resign at the beginning of any such process.

But even staunch supporters of the opposition, including Washington and Saudi Arabia, appear to be stepping back from that position, which could prove a major stumbling block for talks. It is "clear to the US and even to the Saudis" that Assad's departure cannot be guaranteed as a precondition, said Sayigh. "The real question is whether meaningful powers will go from Assad to a transitional council, including some mechanism that ensures that Assad is unable to run in future presidential elections," he said.

With the opposition HNC saying it will not participate in actual negotiations, it remains unclear what the talks can achieve. The umbrella group said it would participate in the "political process" in a bid to force the government to implement "international obligations and humanitarian demands". It had hesitated to attend the talks in part over the UN's failure to enforce a 2015 Security Council resolution that demanded humanitarian access throughout Syria, an end to sieges, and protection of civilians.

Sayigh, however, said any success at Geneva would be contingent on a "back-room process" that would see the US and Russia reach an understanding on a way forward. Perhaps in an effort to reach such an agreement, US Secretary of State John Kerry engaged in shuttle diplomacy ahead of the talks in an effort to narrow the gap between backers and opponents of Syria's regime. But Emile Hokayem, a senior fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, said the "dynamics on the ground are even less conducive to good-faith negotiations" than during the last round of peace talks in 2014. "Notwithstanding the energy, the positive outlook, the conditions aren't there." —AFP

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Washington Watch

WE NEED MORE FROM OUR CANDIDATES

By Dr James J Zogby

I have long argued that how candidates for high office speak about the Middle East should be a critical test of their capacity to lead our nation. Since the end of the Vietnam war, we have spent more money, sold or given more weapons, sent more troops, fought more wars, lost and taken more lives, expended more political capital, and have more vital interests at stake in that region than anywhere else in the world. And yet our candidates have not faced this reality by providing us with a substantial discussion about the challenges we face in that critical region.

I have listened attentively to all of the Republican and Democratic Party debates and have been deeply disturbed. I am most troubled by what I hear on the Republican side. From what I have learned so far, Republicans largely agree on a few points: ISIS must be defeated; Israel must be defended and never criticized; the Iran deal is bad and should be rescinded; President Obama has weakened America and betrayed our allies; and Syrian refugees, especially those who are Muslims, should not be allowed into the United States.

There are, to be sure, some differences in how the candidates propose addressing this litany of concerns. And there are other Middle East issues where the candidates differ, for example, on whether the Iraq war was a disastrous failure and whether the region is better off or worse off following the overthrow of dictators like Muammar Gaddafi. But, for the most part, I have found that the Middle East policies the candidates have advocated have ranged from the absurd to the banal - demonstrating a disturbing lack of both seriousness and understanding of the issues facing the United States in the Middle East.

Absurd

Donald Trump, for example, suggests that dealing with

America's Arab allies will be easy for him because "I know these people and do business with them" - ignoring the fact that many of "these people" have denounced him and cancelled their business connections with him following his repeated displays of anti-Muslim bigotry. For his part, Jeb Bush offered a quick and easy three point agenda to fix the Middle East that included: getting tough with Iran; immediately moving the US Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem; and then rebuilding frayed ties with our Arab allies in the Gulf region - ignoring the fact that once he moved the US Embassy to Jerusalem, he could pretty much forget about rebuilding ties with Arab allies and count, instead, on a crisis with every Arab and Muslim country.

Then there's Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio, both of whom reject admitting Syrian refugees who are Muslim, calling it "lunacy" or "irresponsible" - forgetting, of course, that their parents were refugees and that locking out innocent civilians fleeing war and persecution on the basis of their religion would not only be an unconscionable act of discrimination, but would compromise whatever relationships we have with the Muslim world.

And then there's Ted Cruz's nerdy tough guy talk about bombing ISIS until the desert sand glows or Chris Christie's consulting with Jordan's long deceased King Hussein - making both candidates sound like silly amateurs. The fact is that most of the candidates' pronouncements about key Middle East issues appear to come from ignorance (they just don't know), willful ignorance (they just don't want to know because it has never been politically important to them), or ideology (a problem for the neo-conservatives like Rubio or the evangelicals like Huckabee and Carson - whose convictions are based on blind faith, not on fact).

Democrats, too, must be criticized. While they have not made preposterous statements or been threatening or demagogic, they, all too often, have come up short, failing to propose new ideas that can help unwind conflicts raging across the Middle East. Pledging,

for example, to support a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict without suggesting any way to restrain Israeli behavior or end the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land, makes that pledge hollow. On this and other issues, simply embracing the failed policies of the past is nothing more than a recipe for more failure.

High Stakes

If all this were a mere academic exercise, it would be sad and disturbing. But it is so much more, because the stakes are so high. At risk are: the lives and futures of millions; the values and honor of the United States; and our strategic interests in a critical region of the world. For all these reasons and more, we should demand more than either mindless bluster or vacuous pronouncements. It is simply too important. And to excuse this behavior as necessary because of political pressures is not an excuse at all. It is just one more indictment of our broken politics.

The media personalities who conduct the debates or the commentators who evaluate the post-debate performances are also at fault. Because they also know or care too little about the Middle East or have, themselves, bought into the failed policies of the past or the ideologies that have created blinders to knowing more, they fail to challenge the candidates' silly statements. The result is tragic, because what it means is that we may have another election in which the candidates engage in a substantive debate about healthcare, entitlements, immigration reform, and the state of our military - but we will not discuss new ideas that might help us decide which candidate is best suited to lead our nation in addressing the region of the world that has helped to define the tenure of every president for the past four decades. The American people deserve better and the world needs more from us.

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

SUCCESSFUL VIETNAM LEADER NEEDS TO BE FACELESS

By Vijay Joshi

Vietnam's latest political turnover made one thing abundantly clear: Being a strong, charismatic leader with a high domestic and international profile will only lead to your downfall. To be successful in Vietnamese politics, you have to work with consensus - and be, for the most part, faceless. Vietnam's Communist Party ended a weeklong congress on Wednesday sticking with the status quo by re-electing Nguyen Phu Trong as party general secretary, the country's No. 1 leader, for a second five-year term. A contender, reform-minded Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung, was cut to size and ousted from the collective leadership because he was seen by party bosses to have become too big for his boots.

Collective leadership is key to understanding how Vietnam's one-party Communist system works. After Ho Chi Minh, the founding father of modern Vietnam, the party has studiously avoided cultivating a personality cult. Even Vo Nguyen Giap, a celebrated war hero, was never allowed the pedestal after he became a politician. All he got was a state funeral. Not even a statue or a bust or a portrait.

So no surprises that unlike China - its ideological ally where top leaders have been larger-than-life figures such as Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping and Xi Jinping - Vietnam prefers leaders who do not hog the limelight, and rule by consensus through a Politburo, the elite cream of the party. Dung was anything but that. "Dung was more charismatic, becoming a popular figure and generally seen to be becoming larger than the party, which did not go down well with the others who still have the old-fashioned notion that the country should be run by a faceless collective leadership," said Murray Hiebert, a Southeast Asian expert at a Washington, DC, think tank.

cease? Will Vietnam move away from the US? The answers are no.

Dung and Trong clashed over style, not ideology. Trong obliquely referred to Dung's style in post-congress comments to the media, saying that even though Vietnam's Communist Party is one-party rule, "we also have principles of democracy and accountability of the leaders. Otherwise, good deeds would be credited to individuals while failure would be blamed on the group and no one would be disciplined."

Under Dung, Vietnam's annual per capita GDP tripled to \$2,100. The economy grew 6.7 percent

most, according to Fitch Ratings. All this was seen as Dung's work. For sure, the economic reforms will slow down under the more conservative Trong, especially over the next six months until Dung is replaced by Nguyen Xuan Phuc.

Reforms

Phuc may not "be a strong personality", but in Vietnam "individuals do not have a very big role, because most of the policies are a collective decision," said Le Hong Hiep, a visiting Vietnamese fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asia Studies in Singapore. Trong and his allies in

Some say that Dung's departure may not be such a bad thing. Despite projecting the image of a pro-Western reformist, he also "sat at the apex of a vast network of rent-seeking interests that involve the government bureaucracy and many large companies in both the state and private sectors," said Alexander L. Vuving, an international relations and Vietnam expert based in Hawaii. "Dung's exit means that a major obstacle to institutional reform and the reform of state-owned companies has been removed," he said.

It is also wrong to assume that Dung was anti-China as Beijing expands its territorial ambitions in the South China Sea. In fact, Dung may well have been China's choice for the next party leader, Vuving said. Dung's approach to China was a mixture of nationalist rhetoric, dramatic action, and economic engagement. Vuving said he was instrumental in tightening Vietnam's structural dependence on China, and in fact China showed more aggression in Vietnamese waters on two occasions when Dung suffered humiliating rebukes by the Politburo at the hands of Trong's camp in 2014 and earlier this year. Apparently it was a subtle warning to Trong to leave Dung alone.

But Dung's exit this week shows the limits of China's ability to influence Vietnam's political decisions, and most observers agree Trong will not allow Beijing to ride roughshod over Vietnam. "Vietnam will continue to veer farther - but not too far - from China, and closer - but not too close - to the United States," said Vuving. A larger question is about the pervasive corruption, which Dung is accused of promoting through patronage politics. Trong will go after that, and it's possible that corruption will be reduced at the top leadership.

But don't have too many expectations. "Corruption is pretty hard-wired in the system, although some obviously have their hands deeper in the trough than others," said Hiebert. For the vast majority of Vietnam's 93 million people, one more thing is clear: No matter who is at the helm, they, the people, will not have a direct say in electing their leaders as long as the Communist Party maintains its 40-year-old grip on power. —AP



Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung walks back to his seat after casting his ballot as Vietnam Communist Party Secretary General Nguyen Phu Trong sits at the podium during the election of the new VCP Central Committee members of Vietnam on the sixth day of the VCP's National Congress in Hanoi on Jan 26, 2016. —AFP

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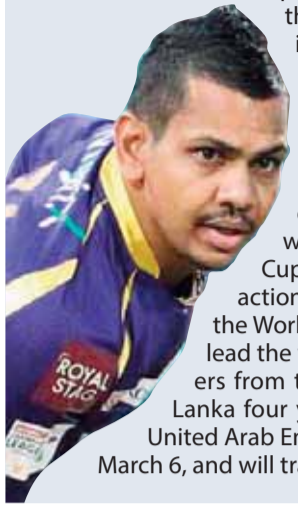
Change
 So what does that partial change in leadership mean for Vietnam? Will the economic reforms that Dung was carrying out stop? Will Vietnam start kowtowing to China, with whom Dung had apparently crossed swords? Will corruption and nepotism, which Dung was accused of fostering,

last year, and foreign investment reached a record \$14.5 billion. Vietnam has become an attractive destination for foreign manufacturers looking for cheap labor as an alternative to China. As the least developed member of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a 12-nation agreement led by the US to lower trade barriers, Vietnam will benefit the

Politburo are aware of the need to push for economic reforms, because the party's existence depends on it. It relies heavily on foreign investment and international trade to maintain growth, while domestic enterprises - both state-owned and private - are weak and beset with problems.

NARINE INCLUDED IN WINDIES SQUAD

COLOMBO: West Indies have taken a gamble by naming Sunil Narine in their squad for the World Twenty20 tournament in March as the off-spinner is currently suspended from bowling in international cricket due to an illegal action. The 27-year-old was reported to the International Cricket Council (ICC) during a one-day series in Sri Lanka last November and was later sanctioned after an independent assessment found his elbow extended beyond the maximum limit of 15 degrees. Considered an asset to the side, Narine was also initially selected for last year's 50-over World Cup but later withdrawn, and has been working on his action in a desperate attempt to get it cleared in time for the World Twenty20 in India. All-rounder Darren Sammy will lead the world's top-ranked T20 side, which includes 11 players from the contingent that won the last World Cup in Sri Lanka four years ago. The 15-man squad will assemble in the United Arab Emirates for a preparatory camp between Feb. 22 and March 6, and will travel to India on March 7 for the tournament.



IRAQ EDGE HOSTS QATAR FOR OLYMPIC BERTH

DOHA: Iraq booked a spot at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics after edging hosts Qatar for third place at the Asian Football Confederation's under-23 championships with a 2-1 extra time win. The Qatar side, featuring many players expected to represent the tiny gulf state at their home 2022 World Cup, looked set to secure the Olympic berth when they led 1-0 but Muhanad Abdulraheem equalised for the Iraqis in the 86th minute. Substitute Aymen Hussein then sealed victory with a header four minutes into the second period of extra time to send Iraq back to the Olympics for the first time since losing the bronze medal match to Italy at the Athens Games in 2004. "This victory really is the fruit of the great work of the Olympic committee in Iraq since we started our preparation," said Iraq assistant coach Hayder Najem. The final of the under-23 tournament takes place later yesterday between Japan, who beat Iraq 2-1 after a 93rd minute winner in the semi-finals, and South Korea. Both East Asian sides will also represent the continent at the Aug. 5-21 Games in Brazil. — Reuters

CHELSEA COMPLETE LOAN SIGNING OF STRIKER PATO

LONDON: Chelsea completed the loan signing of Brazilian striker Alexandre Pato until the end of the season. The 26-year-old Pato joins from Corinthians following previous spells with Sao Paulo and AC Milan. "I am so happy to sign for Chelsea. It is a dream for me. I am looking forward to meeting and getting to know my new team-mates and cannot wait to play," Pato said Friday after completing his move. "I thank Chelsea for their support and hope I can repay this faith to the club and its fans," Pato added. Defending Premier League champion Chelsea has struggled for form this season and is currently 13th in the standings with Jose Mourinho having been sacked in December, seven months after he led them to the title. Interim manager Guus Hiddink does not think Pato's arrival is a risk, with the Brazilian international joining a forward line alongside Diego Costa, Loic Remy and Radamel Falcao. "It's not a gamble. Coming on loan makes it possible to view if he can adapt to the league," Hiddink said. — AP



CAVENDISH SAYS NOT IN AUSTRALIA TO 'ROLL AROUND'

SYDNEY: Britain's Mark Cavendish yesterday said he was not in the Cadel Evans Great Ocean Road Race just to "roll around" as he prepared to compete in his first road race of 2016. Cavendish, the winner of 26 Tour de France stages, will race in the second annual edition of the Australian road event today for Team Dimension Data. The field includes fellow Briton Peter Kennaugh (Team Sky), Canadian Ryder Hesjedal (Trek-Segafredo) and Australian Simon Gerrans (Orica-GreenEdge), who earlier this month won the Tour Down Under around Adelaide. "It's great to be here in Australia, starting my season with the Dimension Data for Qhubeka boys," Cavendish said.

"I saw how the boys were going at the Tour Down Under and they all look to be in some pretty good shape," Cavendish said the race, named in hon-

our of the first Australian to win the Tour de France, Cadel Evans, promised to be exciting right up to the end. "I can't say how my form will be exactly as I haven't raced on the road yet this year, but I didn't come here to just roll around," he said. "If I make it to the final, then I have as good a shot as any to challenge for the win." The event features nine UCI WorldTour teams, five UCI Pro Continental teams, seven UCI Continental teams and the Australian national team. Hesjedal said racing in the Tour Down Under in Adelaide had prepared him for the race which begins in Geelong and takes in some of Victoria's coastal scenery.

"I raced in Australia in 2012, the year I won the Giro (d'Italia), and I want to do that again," he said. Belgian Gianni Meersman (Etixx-QuickStep) won the inaugural Evans title last year. — AFP

NORWAY'S KILDE WINS MEN'S W CUP DOWNHILL

GARMISCH-PARTENKIRCHEN: Aleksander Aamodt Kilde of Norway won a men's World Cup downhill yesterday as a late starter for his first career victory. Bostjan Kline of Slovenia appeared headed for his first triumph until Kilde, wearing bib No. 30, blazed down the Kandahar course to win by .22 seconds.

Kilde's previous career best was a third place in a Super-G in Val Gardena, Italy, in December. Kline's previous top finish was 13th in Santa Caterina, Italy, in December of 2014. Starting with the No. 3 bib, Kilde had a long wait as leader before Kilde completed his winning run, making up time at the bottom of the course. Beat Feuz of Switzerland was third and Christof Innerhofer of Italy finished fourth. Kilde's win gave Norway its fifth downhill victory this season. The first four were by Aksel Lund Svindal, but the overall World Cup leader sustained a season-ending knee injury in a crash last week in Kitzbuehel, Austria. Norwegian men have won 16 races in all disciplines this season. The last season a country had at least 16 race wins was in 2005-06 when Austrian men had 18.

"It's unbelievable for team Norway," Kilde said. Kilde covered the 3,300-meter Kandahar course in one minute, 55.28 seconds. "It was dark, fast and bumpy and fun to ski," Kilde said. Although it was

a mild and sunny day, the course is in the shadows and Kilde said his late starting number was not a handicap. "When I got my number yesterday (at the draw), I thought it would be difficult to get into the top 10," the Norwegian said.

"I thought it was pretty even for everyone. They did a good job in this weather and it was holding up pretty well." Kilde's late heroics robbed Kline of a sensational career first on one of the most difficult downhill courses.

"I knew it was going to be a long race," Kline said. "But the adrenaline was pumping up." Kline saw some of the pre-race favorites go out. Erik Guay of Canada, world champion in this German resort in 2011 and twice winner on the Kandahar hill, veered off course and missed a gate. So did Hannes Reichelt of Austria, last year's winner here and the fastest in practice, who went out at the very same spot.

"When I saw the favorites going out, I thought I had a chance," Kline said. Feuz, who came third in Kitzbuehel, was .24 back in third, with Innerhofer only .01 behind him in fourth. Adrien Theaux was fifth, .29 seconds behind the winner.

Another late starter, Matteo Marsaglia, with bib No. 52, shared sixth place with Travis Ganong of the United States. They were .65 seconds off the pace. — AP



MARIBOR: Germany's Viktoria Rebensburg, center, winner of an alpine ski, women's World Cup giant slalom, celebrates on the podium with second placed Slovenia's Ana Drev, left, and third placed Liechtenstein's Tina Weirather, in Maribor, Slovenia, yesterday. — AP

REBENSBURG VICTORIOUS IN MARIBOR AFTER VONN FALL

MARIBOR: Viktoria Rebensburg pipped Ana Drev to World Cup giant slalom victory in Maribor yesterday as Lindsey Vonn crashed out but held onto the overall lead.

It was a second giant slalom win in a row for German Rebensburg after also pushing Drev into second place in Flachau. The final difference between the two was just 0.03 seconds, with Liechtenstein's Tina Weirather completing the podium. Vonn's dramatic fall did not prove too costly in the end as her closest overall World Cup rival Lara Gut also made a mess of her second run and failed to finish.

American Vonn, who specialises in the speed events, went into the second run on Saturday in 12th place. The 31-year-old still looked set to pick up enough points to easily

maintain her position at the top of the overall standings, but she made a costly mistake halfway down the mountain and flew off the course. Austrian Gut, however, was unable to capitalise and she remains 55 points adrift in the race for the World Cup title.

Michaela Kirchgasser spent a long time at the top of the time-sheets thanks to a fast second run, but the 30-year-old knew that the leaders from the opening run were always likely to surpass her at the top. This weekend is the first visit to Slovenia for the women's World Cup this season. In the absence of Tina Maze, who is taking a year off, Drev gave the home supporters plenty to cheer with a storming second run to take the lead. Weirather narrowly missed out on overtaking

Drev as she crossed the line just 0.02 off the Slovenian's time.

Penultimate skier Rebensburg though flew down the piste to take the 12th World Cup win of her career and her second this month, as first run leader Eva-Maria Brem finished fourth. "Everything is going well at the moment but this race was rather chaotic," Rebensburg said. "I just decided to risk everything and it worked." The 26-year-old is now only 32 points behind Brem in the giant slalom discipline standings and has moved up to third overall. The women's World Cup continues in Maribor on Sunday with a slalom race that gives the technical specialists the perfect opportunity to get back into overall contention. — AFP



GARMISCH-PARTENKIRCHEN: Norway's Aleksander Aamodt Kilde celebrates after winning an alpine ski, men's World Cup downhill, in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany, yesterday. — AP

DIAMOND LEAGUE SHOULD BAN DOPERS: NICK BITEL

LONDON: Any athlete convicted of a serious doping offence should be banned from the Diamond League, following the "zero tolerance" approach of the London Marathon, the race's chief executive told Reuters on Friday.

City marathons have, like the rest of athletics, been hit hard by doping in recent years. Russian Liliya Shobukhova, who won the London race in 2010 and was runner-up in 2011, has since been banned for doping and turned whistle-blower to help expose the extent of the problem in her country.

Kenyan Rita Jeptoo, a three times Boston marathon winner who was in line to scoop \$500,000 as the world marathon majors' overall champion in 2014, has also been banned after testing positive.

The London Marathon does not allow any athlete convicted of a serious doping offence to take part in the race and, although life bans are not applicable across the sport, the race's organisers said others should follow their lead.

"You can't ban them (drug cheats) for life under WADA rules but where you have a choice, then make a positive choice to support clean athletes," London Marathon chief executive Nick Bitel said in an interview at the race launch on Friday.

"I think that where you have an invitational event, like the London Marathon, other big city marathons, or the Diamond League, then you can make a stand.

"Organisers should be asking themselves, 'Why do I want to have a drugs cheat, sometimes repeatedly, in my event?' 'We've taken the view that we don't want

them and it's difficult to understand why people would have multiple drugs cheats at their events."

PRIZE MONEY

The Diamond League, the main circuit for athletics outside the major championships, is made up of a series of invitational events and organisers are free to exclude anyone they like.

Former Olympic 100 metres world champion Justin Gatlin, who has twice been banned for doping, has routinely raced in Diamond League meetings, along with many other time-served doping offenders.

That does not happen in big-city marathons and Bitel said his organisation was also determined to get back the \$500,000 prize money and appearance fees paid to Shobukhova.

"We will spend whatever money it takes to pursue her and get the money back, even if it makes no commercial sense," Bitel said. "We want to ensure that that person is not benefiting and, in terms of the future, we want to send a very clear message that doped athletes will be pursued."

Race director Hugh Brasher, son of race founder Chris, said the London Marathon had taken steps to keep a tighter control on prize money.

"Any payment over \$50,000 is put in an escrow account and paid over a five year period," he said. "We brought that in 12 months ago - biological passports take time to catch someone."

London Marathon organisers have not always seen eye-to-eye with the sport's

governing body and were frustrated that the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) seemed to lag behind in testing for blood doping, especially as the race has the biggest "private" testing operation in any sport.

RIGHT MAN

However, despite the succession of scandals that have dogged the IAAF over the last year, Bitel and Brasher said they had faith that its president Sebastian Coe was the right man to put the sport back on the road to redemption.

"They are still the governing body of our sport and in Seb they have the best chance of coming to a resolution that we want," said Bitel.

"They are not there yet but we are trying to improve the situation with them and the work we are doing together is already having an effect and transforming the testing landscape in endurance running.

"The scandal is absolutely appalling but there is a wider story to tell." Brasher highlighted the fact the race, which started in 1981 with about 7,000 runners, will celebrate its millionth finisher in April when some 37,000 will complete the 26.2 mile course.

"The doping scandal involves a tiny proportion even of the elite field but for most of the runners it's a day of personal achievement and celebration," he said.

"We've spent a long time putting together that database of every finisher since 1981, each with a story to tell, and we think that's something to celebrate." — Reuters

WARD, STEWART VOW TO RETURN FROM INJURIES FOR SUPER BOWL

ENGLEWOOD: T.J. Ward's Super Bowl guarantee doesn't exactly possess the same sort of sizzle as Joe Namath once promising - and delivering - a win. For the Denver Broncos, though, the strong safety's guarantee just might make the difference in one.

Ward vowed he would play a week from today despite a tender ankle. Even more, free safety Darian Stewart pledged to be back, too, after spraining the MCL in his right knee during a win over New England in the AFC title game. Their health is the biggest question mark for Denver heading into Super Bowl 50 against Carolina.

Ask them, and there's really no uncertainty at all. "Without a doubt in my mind, I'm playing," Stewart said. Ward

was just as adamant: "Anytime you get an opportunity to play in this game, and you can run a little bit, I'm guaranteeing you're going to be out there."

Especially since this is basically a homecoming for Ward. He went to high school in Concord, California, which is about 60 miles away from Levi's Stadium.

"There's something about where you come from - the air, the grass, the sounds - that brings up memories," Ward said. "Sometimes, I'll be somewhere away from home and smell that grass and it reminds me of playing Pop Warner. This is going to take me back of when I was dreaming of this moment."

Only, now it's a reality. But trying to bring down Panthers quarterback Cam

Newton may prove to be a nightmare. These two safeties could prove instrumental in containing Newton, who's 6-foot-5, 245 pounds and does just about everything well. "He's probably at all times one of the top-10 biggest players on the field," Ward said. "He's a talented dude. He's got a big arm. He can run. Did he win MVP yet? Well, he's probably going to win the MVP. He won the Heisman. He's a rare breed of athlete."

That's why Ward needs to be at 100 percent - or close to it anyway - for this top-ranked defense. He could also see some time covering Greg Olsen, a tight end who "works well within that offense," Ward explained. "He has great hands. He runs good routes. He seems to be a smart player."

TUMULTUOUS SEASON

Stewart banged up his knee midway through the third quarter, while Ward left early in the fourth. That left backup safeties Shiloh Keo and Josh Bush to patrol the field against Tom Brady & Co.

Ward and Stewart have yet to practice this week and are listed as questionable on the injury report. "Extra days are always needed for healing, so I definitely think it helps," Stewart said. "It's just getting healthy and getting ready to play."

This has been a tumultuous season for Ward, who missed the first game of the season because of a league suspension and three more later in the year with an ankle ailment. But he's been a playmaker when he's been on the field. He finished the regular season with 61

tackles, two sacks and two forced fumbles. Stewart almost instantly fit in since joining the team this season. He intercepted Brady last weekend before hurting his knee, an injury that doesn't have him all that concerned. "Just getting as much treatment as I can and that's really the plan right now," Stewart said. "I mean, get better along the way." Same plan for Ward, because home is waiting. "I can't wait to get back in the Bay Area so I can taste that Bay Area air," Ward said. "Get that home feeling. Get the butterflies in your stomach. "It doesn't really get too much more special than the 50th Super Bowl anniversary at home, in your hometown. I don't think you can write a better story than that. Unless we win. "When we win." — AP

AMAZING GRACE WINS QATAR MASTERS AGAIN

DOHA: South African Branden Grace shot a composed final-round 69 yesterday to become the first player to retain the Qatar Masters title. The 27-year-old conjured up four birdies to finish on 14 under par, two strokes ahead of Spaniard Rafael Cabrera-Bello and Dane Thorbjorn Olesen. "It's a dream. This is a tournament that kicked my season off last year and hopefully it can take me to even better things this time round," Grace,

who has now won seven European Tour titles, told the Tour website.

"The key was my grinding and staying patient. It was tough out there, but fair. I knew if I stuck to my guns and tried to give myself some opportunities, I could do it." Briton Paul Lawrie, the former British Open champion who led the tournament after three rounds, slumped to a fourth-round 78 to finish well down the field. — Reuters

CHOI SEIZES SHARE OF LEAD IN SAN DIEGO

LOS ANGELES: KJ Choi, who is chasing his first win on the USPGA Tour in five years, fired a five-under 67 Friday to grab a share of the halfway lead at the Farmers Insurance Open at Torrey Pines. The 45-year-old South Korean was tied with American Gary Woodland, who also shot a 67, at nine-under 135 after 36 holes.

Choi has 20 international wins, including eight victories on the USPGA Tour making him the most successful Asian golfer in history. His last PGA win came at the Players Championship in 2011 when he beat David Toms in a play-off. "I hit it very well," said Choi who had seven birdies and two bogeys in the second round on the Torrey Pines North Course. "This week my iron play and putting is much better than it was the last week of the season. I had very good control with my putter."

Woodland birdied five of his first nine holes to become the co-leader at nine-under. American Dustin Johnson was alone in third after a bogey free six-under 66. Scotland's Martin Laird, Scott Brown and Billy Horschel are tied for fourth at seven-under 137, two shots adrift of the co-leaders. Woodland played the more difficult South Course at Torrey Pines, located 24 km (15 miles)

northwest of San Diego, California. Several notable players missed the 36-hole cut including defending champion and world number two Jason Day of Australia. Day, who withdrew from Wednesday pro-am with flu-like symptoms, followed a first round 72 on the North Course with a two-over 74 on the South Course.

World number four Ricky Fowler, coming off a win last week in Abu Dhabi, and San Diego native Phil Mickelson also missed the cut. Fowler carded a 71 and was at par after two rounds, failing to make the cut by a stroke. The final two rounds will be played on the South Course and Choi said it will be even tougher because of stormy weather expected for part of the weekend. He said it is going to be like a British Open. "I have had many experiences overseas in the British Open with it being windy and rain. And my house in Dallas is so windy so I will need some imagination in my shots to win," he said.

Choi has finished in the top 10 in the tournament two of the past three years. Johnson's bogey-free 66 tied the low score in the tournament's first two days. He started with six consecutive pars before getting birdies on four of the next five holes. —AFP



SINGAPORE: This handout photo taken and released by Lagardere Sports yesterday shows Jordan Spieth of the US hitting a shot during round two of the Singapore Open at the Sentosa Golf Club in Singapore. Round two of the tournament resumed following the previous day's suspension. —AFP

SPLUTTERING SPIETH THREE OFF THE PACE IN SINGAPORE

SINGAPORE: World number one Jordan Spieth struggled again with his putting as he ended a long 28-hole yesterday three shots off the pace at the Singapore Open.

The American was on the course at 07:30 (2330 GMT) to finish 12 holes of his weather-delayed second round, signing for a one-under-par 71 before returning in the afternoon to shoot one-under for 16 holes of his third round before dusk fell.

The six-under-total left him tied fifth, three shots behind overnight leader Song Young-han of South Korea who was level through 13 holes of his third round before play was called off.

Spieth, the headline act of the Asian and Japan Golf Tour's season opening event, had begun Saturday five adrift of Song but felt the gap should have been closed further.

"I made all my putts inside six feet yesterday but missed five or six today. I've just got to get comfortable on the shorter length putts," the American said after his second round.

He was again short of his major-winning form in the afternoon, with two birdie fours on the fourth and seventh punctured by a bogey on the fifth when he smacked the lip of a fairway bunker after finding sand from the tee.

He did finally find his touch on the large and undulating greens with a 10-footer nailed for a birdie three at 12 but another short par putt on 15 lipped out to add to the frustrations.

A makeable birdie putt narrowly slid by on 16 and despite his best efforts to speed up play and complete his round in time he was beaten by the fading light. The 22-year-old Texan has a six foot par putt when he returns to the 17th green

at 07:30 a.m. (23:30 GMT) today to finish his round along with 12 others. The fourth round was brought forward to 08:20 a.m. China's Liang Wencong managed to squeeze in his third round, tapping in to complete his second consecutive four-under 67 after the horn had sounded for the clubhouse lead on eight-under.

"I played 31 holes today and to be honest, I was feeling tired towards the end of the round," the Chinese said.

Liang was one behind Song, who had a long wait to start his third round after finishing his second before the storms on Friday.

"It did not help me that much not having played this morning as I had to wait about a long time for my tee off," said the Korean, who mixed two birdies with two bogeys for a nine-under overall. —Reuters



SAN DIEGO: K.J. Choi of South Korea tees off on the 9th hole during Round 2 of the Farmers Insurance Open at Torrey Pines North on Friday in San Diego, California. — AFP

FIJI, ENGLAND, NZ, AUSTRALIA TOP POOLS AT WELLINGTON SEVENS

WELLINGTON: Fiji, England, Australia and defending champion New Zealand topped their pools after the first day of the Wellington rugby sevens tournament yesterday, further establishing the powers of the sport ahead of its Olympics debut in Rio de Janeiro.

New Zealand faced the hardest task to finish atop Pool A, having to beat South Africa which was runner up in the Sevens World Series in the last three years. Fiji, South Africa, New Zealand and England have qualified for the Olympics tournament after filling the top-four placings in last year's World Series.

Joe Weber scored a try after the final hooter to give New Zealand a 19-14 win over South Africa in the final match of the day which left it unbeaten.

New Zealand plays Kenya, South Africa meets Australia, England faces Argentina and Fiji plays the United States in Sunday's quarterfinals.

South Africa seemed to have clinched victory in a see-sawing match against New Zealand when Cheslin Kolbe scored just before fulltime off an error by All Blacks star Sonny Bill Williams. Williams attempted one of his trademark offloads but the ball fell to South Africa who put the agile Kolbe into space.

Seconds after conceding Kolbe's try and after South Africa conceded a series of penalties to keep the clock ticking after the final siren, Williams provided a more assured offload which cracked the defense and from which Joe Webber scored the winning try.

The selection of Williams was seen as a coup for the New Zealand team in the Olympics year but, while he scored a try in his opening match, he at times looked lost in sevens rugby which requires pace and spontaneity - neither his strong suit.

Defending world series champion Fiji dominated Pool B with wins over Japan, Wales and Argentina and heads into the quarterfinals

the tournament favorite. Fiji beat Japan 45-7, Wales 33-7 and made sure it topped the pool when it beat Argentina 31-10.

England faced a tight struggle to top Pool C after a shock late loss to Samoa. Samoa had lost its first two matches in the pool to the United States and France while England beat France 17-14 in

the opening match of the day and the United States 19-5.

The Samoans opened a 17-0 lead by half-time then held out a stout England rally to win the match, though they failed to progress to the Cup quarterfinals.

A young Australian team won Pool D to emerge as a strong threat in the quarterfinals. But it had a scare in its opening match of the day when it found itself trailing Portugal 12-0 before rallying to win 19-12. It went on to beat Canada 26-22 and Fiji 17-12. —AP



WELLINGTON: New Zealand's Sam Dickson (L) is tackled by South Africa's Rosko Specman on the first day of the Wellington Sevens rugby Union tournament at Westpac Stadium in Wellington yesterday. — AFP

DELHI VENUE AT RISK OF LOSING WORLD T20 MATCHES

MUMBAI: New Delhi's Feroz Shah Kotla ground is in danger of losing its World Twenty20 fixtures after the Indian cricket board (BCCI) moved a match against Sri Lanka away from the venue due to administrative lapses. The Delhi and District Cricket Association (DDCA) failed to get the requisite clearances from various civic authorities in order to host the Feb. 12 T20 match between India and Sri Lanka, forcing the BCCI to transfer the contest to Ranchi. BCCI secretary Anurag Thakur said the DDCA needed to procure all the necessary clearances by Sunday if they were to continue as the hosts of the March 8-

April 3 tournament. "As far as the World Cup is concerned, the World Cup management committee has met today and has also discussed the issue of DDCA," Thakur said.

"They have given a deadline of January 31, five o'clock, to come out with the required NOCs (no-objection certificates) so that they can continue as a host of the World Cup matches. "If they are unable to do so by 31st evening, then the BCCI will shift those matches to the seven other remaining venues." Delhi is scheduled to host four matches in the tournament, including a semi-final on March 30. — Reuters

MCCULLUM TO PLAY FINAL ODI SERIES PENDING FITNESS

WELLINGTON: New Zealand captain Brendon McCullum has been named to lead his country in his final one-day series against Australia next month, providing he can prove his fitness.

The 34-year-old is expected to play New Zealand's third and final one-day international against Pakistan in Auckland today, as he makes his way back from a back injury he sustained last month against Sri Lanka.

"I've had a good couple of hits (in the nets)," McCullum told reporters in Auckland on Saturday. "It's probably not 100 per cent but there's a bit of stiffness so hopefully I'll be fine for tomorrow."

Tom Latham was named as cover for McCullum, who will retire after the second test against Australia in Christchurch next month.

Top order batsman Ross Taylor (side) and bowlers Tim Southee (foot) and Mitchell McClenaghan (eye) were not considered for the three-match one day series against Australia that starts next Wednesday due to injury.

"This is a pinnacle event for us and we will look to get our best side out on the park each time we play," New

Zealand coach Mike Hesson said yesterday.

"We've been lucky enough to use a big squad over the summer and although we were missing a few key players, we have guys who can step in and we know are up to the task."

Australia, who flew to New Zealand on Saturday, would be without coach Darren Lehmann for the one-day series as he recovers from deep vein thrombosis that has restricted his travel.

"We are still awaiting medical advice on when Darren is able to return to work," Cricket Australia high performance manager Pat Howard said. "As he is not available for the ODI component of the New Zealand tour we have decided to remain with the current management team that will see Michael Di Venuto serve as acting head coach."

New Zealand squad for Australia one-day series: Brendon McCullum (captain), Corey Anderson, Trent Boult, Doug Bracewell, Grant Elliott, Martin Guptill, Matt Henry, Tom Latham*, Adam Milne, Colin Munro, Henry Nicholls, Luke Ronchi, Mitchell Santner, Kane Williamson. — Reuters



NEW YORK: New York Knicks forward Kristaps Porzingis, center, shoots in front of Phoenix Suns forward Markieff Morris, right, during the fourth quarter of an NBA basketball game, Friday, in New York. The Knicks won 102-84. —AP

KNICKS HAND SUNS 13TH STRAIGHT ROAD LOSS

NEW YORK: Carmelo Anthony had 19 points, 10 rebounds and eight assists in his return from a two-game absence, and the New York Knicks snapped a four-game losing streak with a 102-84 victory over the Phoenix Suns on Friday night. Kristaps Porzingis also rejoined the lineup with seven points and seven rebounds, and the Knicks sent the Suns to their 13th straight road loss. Anthony had sat out with soreness in his surgically repaired left knee, and Porzingis missed his first game of the season Thursday with an upper respiratory illness. Having them back helped Arron Affalo, who scored 12 of his 17 points in helping the Knicks open a big first-quarter lead that was never really threatened. Rookie Devin Booker scored 21 points for the Suns, who fell to 4-21 on the road. Their last road victory was Dec. 7 in Chicago.

CELTICS 113, MAGIC 94

Kelly Olynyk and Marcus Smart scored 16 points apiece as the Boston Celtics won a season-high fifth straight game, beating the slumping Orlando Magic. Jae Crowder and Evan Turner each added 15 points, and Isaiah Thomas had 14 points and eight assists in just 27 minutes. Led by Olynyk, who scored nine points in the fourth quarter, the Celtics seized control by starting the period on a 22-4 run and pushing their lead as high as 27. Nik Vucevic led Orlando with 14 points and eight rebounds. Shabazz Napier added 13 points. Orlando has lost 10 consecutive regular-season games in Boston.

CAVALIERS 114, PISTONS 106

Kevin Love scored 19 of his 29 points in the first half, Kyrie Irving had 28 points and the Cleveland Cavaliers rolled to another high-scoring win, 114-106 over the Detroit Pistons. The Cavaliers have won three straight since losing to Chicago in Tyronn Lue's first game as Cleveland's coach. Cleveland has scored at least 114 points in each of the past three games. LeBron James had 20 points, nine rebounds and eight assists, shrugging off a rare missed dunk in the third quarter. He surpassed the 26,000-point mark during that period, becoming the youngest player to do so at 31 years, 30 days. Andre Drummond had 20 points and eight rebounds for Detroit.

HEAT 107, BUCKS 103

Dwyane Wade scored 24 points and hit a long jumper with 44.5 seconds left, and the Miami Heat won their third straight road game by beating the Milwaukee Bucks. Wade led a balanced scoring effort with all five Miami starters scoring in double figures. Chris Bosh added 20. Wade's step-back jumper from just inside the arc gave Miami a 103-101 lead. The Heat could have had a smoother finish if Wade hadn't gone 2 of 4 from the foul line after his jumper. But Wade finished off the Bucks by hitting two foul shots with 3.9 seconds left to give the Heat a four-point edge. Miami is headed home after wrapping up a five-game, 10-day road trip. Giannis Antetokounmpo led the Bucks with 28 points.

MAVERICKS 91, NETS 79

Chandler Parsons had 19 points and a season-high 10 rebounds while Deron Williams struggled in his first game against his former team and the Dallas Mavericks beat the Brooklyn Nets. Parsons led the Mavericks in scoring for the fifth time in six games and is averaging 24 points during that span. Williams, who sat out a visit to Brooklyn in December with a left hamstring strain, scored eight points on 3-of-14 shooting. Brook Lopez scored 28 points to lead the Nets, who had a four-game winning streak in Dallas snapped. Brooklyn is 3-12 in January with one game remaining in the month, which included the firing of coach Lionel Hollins.

THUNDER 116, ROCKETS 108

Russell Westbrook's sixth triple-double of the season helped the Thunder defeat the Houston Rockets. Westbrook finished with 26 points, 14 assists and 10 rebounds. It was the 25th triple-double of his career. Kevin Durant had 33 points and 12 rebounds and Enes Kanter scored 20 of his 22 points in the second half for the Thunder, who have won 10 of 11 overall and six straight at home. James Harden had 33 points, seven rebounds and seven assists for the Rockets. Houston's Dwight Howard was ejected in the third quarter after picking up his second technical foul, and Kanter scored all 20 of his second-half points after that.

JAZZ 103, TIMBERWOLVES 90

Rodney Hood scored 22 points, Derrick Favors had 20 in his return to the starting lineup and the Utah Jazz beat the Minnesota Timberwolves to win consecutive games for the first time in nearly three

weeks. The Timberwolves kept it close until late in the third quarter, when the Jazz closed on a 14-0 run that started with Favors' put-back dunk and ended with Trey Burke's 3-pointer. This was Favors' third game back and first as a starter since missing 16 games with a back/hip injury. Hood reached 20 points for the fourth time in five games. Karl-Anthony Towns led Minnesota with 32 points and 12 rebounds, and Gorgui Dieng added 20 points and 15 rebounds.

CLIPPERS 105, LAKERS 93

Chris Paul scored 27 points and the Los Angeles Clippers beat the Lakers for their franchise-record ninth straight victory over their Staples Center coterminant. Austin Rivers added 17 points off the bench for the Clippers, who improved to 14-3 without Blake Griffin. Their star forward is out for at least a month with a broken right hand after punching a team staff member on the road last weekend. He had already been out since Dec. 26 with another

injury. Julius Randle had 23 points and 14 rebounds for the Lakers, who dropped their ninth in a row and 13th in 14 games. Kobe Bryant sat out with various ailments.

TRAIL BLAZERS 109, HORNETS 91

Damian Lillard scored 22 points and Allen Crabbe added 20 off the bench to help the Portland Trail Blazers top the Charlotte Hornets. C.J. McCollum and Al-Farouq Aminu each had 17 points for the Blazers, who have won three straight and seven of their last nine games overall. They've won eight straight over Charlotte at home. Marvin Williams had 20 points and nine rebounds as the Hornets fell to 6-17 on the road this season. The game marked the return of Charlotte's Michael Kidd-Gilchrist, who played his first game of the season after suffering a shoulder injury in the preseason. The Hornets' top defender started and played 33 minutes, getting 13 points and seven rebounds. —AP

NBA results/standings

LA Clippers 105, LA Lakers 93; Dallas 91, Brooklyn 79; Boston 113, Orlando 94; Detroit 106, Cleveland 114; New York 102, Phoenix 84; Portland 109, Charlotte 91; Utah 103, Minnesota 90; Oklahoma City 116, Houston 108; Milwaukee 103, Miami 107.

Eastern Conference				Western Conference					
Atlantic Division		Central Division		Northwest Division		Pacific Division			
W	L	PCT	GB	W	L	PCT	GB		
Toronto	31	15	.674	—	Oklahoma City	36	13	.735	—
Boston	27	21	.563	5	Portland	22	26	.458	13.5
New York	23	26	.469	9.5	Utah	21	25	.457	13.5
Brooklyn	12	35	.255	19.5	Denver	18	29	.383	17
Philadelphia	7	40	.149	24.5	Minnesota	14	34	.292	21.5
Cleveland	33	12	.733	—	Golden State	42	4	.913	—
Chicago	26	19	.578	7	LA Clippers	31	16	.660	11.5
Detroit	25	22	.532	9	Sacramento	20	26	.435	22
Indiana	24	22	.522	9.5	Phoenix	14	34	.292	29
Milwaukee	20	29	.408	15	LA Lakers	9	40	.184	34.5
Atlanta	27	21	.563	—	San Antonio	39	7	.848	—
Miami	26	21	.553	0.5	Memphis	27	20	.574	12.5
Charlotte	22	25	.468	4.5	Dallas	27	22	.551	13.5
Washington	20	24	.455	5	Houston	25	24	.510	15.5
Orlando	20	25	.444	5.5	New Orleans	17	28	.378	21.5



MELBOURNE: Serbia's Novak Djokovic (L) gestures as he speaks with his coach Boris Becker during a training session on day thirteen of the 2016 Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne yesterday. — AFP

DOMINANT DJOKOVIC LOOKS TO JOIN LAVER, BORG

MELBOURNE: Novak Djokovic is poised to enter Rod Laver and Bjorn Borg territory as he chases a record-equalling sixth Australian Open title in today's final against Andy Murray. The peerless world number one is strongly favoured to deny Murray for a fourth time in the Melbourne final and secure a victory which would push him further up the list of the sport's greats.

Should he again vanquish the world number two, Djokovic will join Borg and Laver with 11 Grand Slam titles, and equal Roy Emerson's record of six Australian crowns—and all at the age of just 28. Djokovic destroyed the all-time Grand Slam champion Roger Federer in Thursday's semi-final to yet again underline his dominance in the men's game, and enter his fifth straight major final.

"Fighting for a Grand Slam trophy is a pinnacle of our sport. This is exactly where you want to be," Djokovic told reporters on Saturday. "You work hard to put yourself in this position. Of course, adding to that the fact that I am able to make history is just an additional encouragement and incentive for me to do well."

"If you want to win Grand Slam titles and be the best in the world, you have to win against the best players in the world. Going to be ready for that." This will be the 31st meeting between the pair in a rivalry that goes back to their junior days.

Murray is just seven days older than the Serb and while he enjoyed some success earlier on the professional tour, Djokovic has won 10 of their last 11 encounters.

ATTACK THE SECOND SERVE

Djokovic holds a 6-2 win-loss record against the Scot in Slams and a 3-2 advantage in major finals. There is not much each other does not know about the other's game.

"It's two games that are very much alike, so it's basically who's going to outplay who from the baseline," Djokovic said.

"I think serve is an important factor in

tomorrow's match. I think both of us will try to serve high percentage of first serves and not allow the other player to attack the second serve too many times. "Yeah, a lot about tactics and a lot about how you handle your emotions of the greatness of that occasion of playing for the Grand Slam title." Djokovic wore down Murray in last year's attritional final, in which the first two sets lasted two-and-a-half hours, and is renowned for his powers of endurance.

Djokovic mastered Rafael Nadal in the longest ever Grand Slam final in five hours, 53 minutes at the 2012 Australian Open, and last year he won the physical battle as he put away Murray in four sets. As well as his three losses to Djokovic in the Melbourne Park final in 2011, 2013 and 2015, the Scot also went down to Federer in the title match in 2010.

"I don't think many people are expecting me to win on Sunday," Murray said. "I have to just believe in myself, have a solid game plan, and hopefully execute it and play well."

"But the previous disappointments, it's one tennis match. Doesn't matter what's happened in the past really. It's about what happens on Sunday." Djokovic, while confident of another victory, knows what lies ahead in today's decider between two patient, defensive players. "I'm expecting a battle with Andy, as it always is. Very physically demanding match. Lots of rallies, exchanges. It's no secret we know how we play against each other," he said.

Murray's second serve, once considered a weakness, has more power and the extra oomph gives him more weapons to complement his already formidable return and defensive game.

"There has been a lot of talks about his second serve, and I'm sure he and his team are very much aware of that," Djokovic said.

"But on the other hand, I'm also working on things to improve, and I'm sure that we will try to explore each other's weaknesses tomorrow and see what happens." —AFP

MURRAY GETS DOUBLES BOOST FROM BROTHER

MELBOURNE: Andy Murray got a boost yesterday ahead of his Australian Open final against Novak Djokovic after his brother Jamie teamed up with Brazil's Bruno Soares to win the doubles title. The seventh seeds bounced back from a set down to beat Czech veteran Radek Stepanek and Canadian Daniel Nestor 2-6, 6-4, 7-5 on Rod Laver Arena. Andy Murray turned up at Rod Laver Arena to watch the trophy presentation and film it on his phone—despite the fact it was 1:00 am and he is playing the singles final today evening.

"Andy you should be in bed, I don't know why you're here taking photos. We'll be there to sup-

port you tomorrow," Jamie Murray said in his acceptance speech.

It was the newly formed partnership's first doubles title, in their first Grand Slam together—a feat last achieved by Vasek Pospisil and Jack Sock at Wimbledon in 2014.

If Jamie's sibling Andy beats world number one Djokovic in today's men's final, they will become the first brothers to both the men's singles and doubles titles at a Grand Slam in the Open era. Melbourne Park has now had different doubles champions for five straight years, with America's Bryan brothers the last team to successfully defend the title in 2011. — AFP



MELBOURNE: Britain's Jamie Murray (L) and Brazil's Bruno Soares pose with the trophy as they celebrate after victory in their men's doubles final match against Canada's Daniel Nestor and Czech Republic's Radek Stepanek on day thirteen of the 2016 Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne. — AFP

CHELSEA'S HIDDINK HOPES FOR FA CUP BOUNCE

MILTON KEYNES: Chelsea's dismal Premier League title defence means the FA Cup now carries even greater significance as interim manager Guus Hiddink attempts to avoid a trophy-free end to the season.

Hiddink's side travel to struggling second-tier side Milton Keynes Dons in the competition's fourth round on Sunday and having finally struck a decent vein of form, they will be expected to progress comfortably.

With next month's Champions League last 16 game against Paris Saint-Germain looming, the FA does not represent the Stamford Bridge club's last chance of silverware.

But it is probably their most realistic chance of salvaging a trophy from a calamitous campaign and Hiddink is keen to repeat his success of 2009,

when he led the club to FA Cup success against Everton.

"It's not just for me," he said. "I think a club like Chelsea must always go for a title. The targets in the past were the Premier League, the Champions League and the FA Cup. We aim the group for targets. The FA Cup is a target."

Hiddink has overseen a marked improvement in form since being asked to take charge until the end of the season following Jose Mourinho's dismissal in December. Chelsea remain in the bottom half of the league table, but a run of seven games without defeat under the Dutchman culminating in last weekend's 1-0 victory at Arsenal has transformed the mood at the club.

Hiddink believes a cup run can only help his team's efforts to improve their standing in the league. "Every win

helps, even in training, where we play to win," he said. "The attitude now is there to give everything in every duel, as a team and as individuals. It will help, of course."

"I don't want to say that (the cup is more important) because we'd be neglecting the beauty of the Premier League, but the next step is about today."

"I don't want to disrespect the Premier League, but that's after Sunday."

'ENJOY THE EXPERIENCE'

Eden Hazard is in line to make his first appearance for four weeks after recovering from a groin problem, but Loic Remy is expected to be missing from the squad with a groin injury.

Alexandre Pato has only just com-

pleted his loan move from Corinthians, while Radamel Falcao remains injured, leaving Diego Costa as Chelsea's only available senior striker.

Chelsea were humiliated in the FA Cup last season by third-tier Bradford City, who turned on the style to win 4-2 at Stamford Bridge.

MK Dons, then in the same division as Bradford, also produced a cup shock against a giant of the Premier League, beating Manchester United 4-0 in the League Cup. Manager Karl Robinson is hopeful his players can replicate that performance and keep believing that Chelsea can be beaten.

"On the day the players have to perform," he said. "All the prep and hard work that goes into every game doesn't mean anything if we go and freeze. I know they won't. I know we'll try to do

our best. The last words I'll say will be, 'Go and enjoy the experience.'

"It's going to be a wonderful experience, playing against some of the best players in the world."

The game is worth around 500,000 (\$711,000, 657,000 euros) to the Championship strugglers, who expect a sell-out crowd of more than 30,000. Almost 150,000 of that will come from television fees.

Striker Nicky Maynard is a doubt because of a hamstring injury, but defender Kyle McFadzean is back from a ban and on-loan forward Rob Hall is in contention after being ineligible for last weekend's 3-1 defeat at parent club Bolton Wanderers.

Former England defender Matthew Upson is out injured, however, along with Ben Reeves and Carl Baker. — AFP

Soccer table

MADRID: Spanish La Liga table after yesterday's early match (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Barcelona	21	16	3	2	54	17	51
Atletico	22	15	3	4	31	10	48
Real Madrid	21	13	5	3	58	20	44
Villarreal	21	12	5	4	28	18	41
Celta Vigo	21	10	4	7	32	33	34
Eibar	21	9	6	6	34	26	33
Sevilla	21	9	6	6	28	22	33
Bilbao	21	9	4	8	32	30	31
Deportivo	21	6	11	4	28	25	29
Getafe	21	7	5	9	26	31	26
Valencia	21	5	10	6	26	22	25
Malaga	21	6	6	9	16	19	24
Espanyol	21	6	4	11	20	35	22
Real Betis	21	5	7	9	14	29	22
Real Sociedad	21	5	6	10	24	33	21
Granada	21	5	5	11	24	43	20
Rayo Vallecano	21	5	4	12	26	45	19
Las Palmas	21	4	6	11	21	33	18
Sporting Gijon	20	5	3	12	22	35	18
Levante	21	4	5	12	20	38	17

French Ligue 1 table

Paris SG	22	19	3	0	56	10	0	60
Monaco	22	10	9	3	33	25	0	39
Nice	22	10	6	6	37	26	0	36
Rennes	22	8	10	4	32	25	0	34
Angers	22	9	7	6	21	18	0	34
Saint-Etienne	22	10	3	9	25	25	0	33
Caen	22	10	3	9	24	28	0	33
Marseille	23	7	10	6	33	24	0	31
Lyon	22	8	6	8	28	26	0	30
Bordeaux	22	7	9	6	27	30	0	30
Nantes	22	7	8	7	20	22	0	29
Lorient	22	6	9	7	30	32	0	27
Lille	23	5	11	7	18	19	0	26
Gazlec-Ajaccio	22	6	8	8	24	27	0	26
Bastia	22	7	4	11	21	27	0	25
Guingamp	22	6	6	10	20	29	0	24
Reims	22	5	8	9	23	30	0	23
Montpellier	22	6	4	12	23	29	0	22
Toulouse	22	4	8	10	24	39	0	20
Troyes	22	1	8	13	16	44	0	11

Italian Serie A table

Napoli	21	14	5	2	45	18	47
Juventus	21	14	3	4	38	15	45
Florentina	21	13	2	6	39	21	41
Inter Milan	21	12	5	4	26	14	41
Roma	21	9	8	4	37	24	35
AC Milan	21	9	6	6	29	25	33
Sassuolo	21	8	8	5	25	23	32
Empoli	21	9	5	7	27	26	32
Lazio	21	9	4	8	29	30	31
Chievo	21	7	6	8	27	26	27
Torino	21	7	5	9	27	28	26
Bologna	21	8	2	11	24	27	26
Atalanta	21	7	5	9	21	24	26
Palermo	22	7	4	11	24	35	25
Udinese	21	7	3	11	19	35	24
Genoa	21	6	5	10	24	27	23
Sampdoria	21	6	5	10	31	36	23
Carpi	22	4	7	11	21	37	19
Frosinone	21	4	4	13	22	45	16
Verona	21	0	10	11	14	33	10

German Bundesliga table

Bayern Munich	18	16	1	1	48	9	49
Dortmund	18	13	2	3	50	24	41
Hertha Berlin	18	10	3	5	26	18	33
M'gladbach	19	9	2	8	35	34	29
Leverkusen	18	8	4	6	26	21	28
Mainz 05	19	8	3	8	24	24	27
Schalke 04	18	8	3	7	24	26	27
VfL Wolfsburg	18	7	5	6	28	24	26
Cologne	18	6	6	6	19	24	24
Ingolstadt	18	6	5	7	12	18	23
Hamburg	18	6	4	8	20	25	22
Darmstadt	18	5	6	7	19	27	21
Augsburg	18	5	5	8	21	26	20
E Frankfurt	18	5	5	8	24	30	20
VfB Stuttgart	18	5	3	10	25	38	18
Werder Bremen	18	5	3	10	20	33	18
Hoffenheim	18	2	8	8	18	26	14
Hanover 96	18	4	2	12	19	31	14



LONDON: Burnley's Welsh striker Sam Vokes (3L) heads the ball to score his team's first goal during the English FA Cup fourth round football match between Arsenal and Burnley at the Emirates stadium in London, yesterday. — AFP

SANCHEZ KEEPS HOLDERS ARSENAL ON COURSE FOR FA CUP HISTORY

LONDON: Arsenal's bid to become the first team to win the FA Cup three times in succession since 1886 remains on course after Alexis Sanchez sealed yesterday's 2-1 win over Burnley in the fourth round.

The holders had a first half scare when Burnley's Sam Vokes cancelled out Calum Chambers' 20th minute opener, but Sanchez's second half goal ensured the Premier League side avoided an upset against Championship opposition.

Victory provided Arsene Wenger's side with a timely lift following their Premier League defeat against Chelsea six days previously. With Chile forward Sanchez and French midfielder Francis Coquelin emerging unscathed after their first starts since picking up injuries in November and Mohamed Elneny making his Gunners debut, Wenger had every reason to be satisfied.

Arsenal return to league action against Southampton on Tuesday when Wenger will no doubt overhaul his line-up. But after making nine changes to the team that started against Chelsea, the Arsenal manager could be pleased a number of fringe players got valuable match time, while Alex Iwobi produced a promising display on only his third start for the club.

Iwobi, the 19-year-old Nigeria international, occupied the position behind the striker normally filled by Mesut Ozil, while Elneny 23, slotted in alongside Coquelin in front of the back four.

And both players did enough to suggest they will add to the options available to Wenger during the testing final weeks of the campaign.

The visit of a Burnley side currently lying third in the Championship and bidding to make an immediate return to the Premier League following last season's relegation was never likely to provide Arsenal with an easy passage into the fifth round.

But Wenger's side started positively, making light of the wholesale changes with Sanchez in particular featuring prominently.

DOMINATING

Further back, however, they were less impressive with Laurent Koscielny in particular troubled by the strength and pace of Burnley forward Andre Gray.

And Gray should have put the visitors ahead in the 11th minute when he dispossessed Koscielny and advanced into the penalty area before electing to shoot straight at goalkeeper David Ospina when Vokes was positioned unmarked by the penalty spot.

That was a let off for Arsenal and they quickly punished Burnley for their wastefulness when Chambers put the holders ahead in the 20th minute. The England defender's only other Arsenal goal also came against Burnley in 2014, but his finish, a well-placed shot struck with the outside of his right boot after being set up by a clever pass by Sanchez, was worthy of a more regular goalscorer.

With Arsenal dominating possession, that should have been the signal for Wenger's side to put the game out of reach.

But Burnley responded positively, levelling 10 minutes later when Vokes headed home from Tendayi Darikwa's cross after the home side twice failed to clear the danger following a corner.

Sean Dyche's team maintained their momentum at the start of the second half, with only a late intervention from Iwobi preventing Scott Arfield from giving the visitors a shock lead.

That appeared to jolt Arsenal into life with the home side reasserting control in the 54th minute

when they produced a second goal from a superbly executed breakaway.

Iwobi was again at the heart of the move, moving the ball on quickly deep inside his own half before eventually picking out Alex Oxlade-

Chamberlain, who pulled the ball back into the path of Sanchez. The former Barcelona star made no mistake as he slotted in a first time finish for his first domestic goal since November, effectively ending Burnley's hopes of springing an upset. —AGP

UNITED CUP WIN OVER DERBY EASES PRESSURE ON VAN GAAL

MANCHESTER: Under-pressure Manchester United manager Louis van Gaal enjoyed a rare highlight after weeks of gloom when his side comfortably beat Derby County 3-1 on Friday to reach the FA Cup fifth round.

Goals from Wayne Rooney, Daley Blind and Juan Mata put the 11-times Cup winners through, with second-tier Derby only briefly threatening a shock when George Thorne equalised shortly before the break at a noisy Pride Park.

Dutchman Van Gaal has been under mounting pressure after a recent poor run of form and shortage of entertainment, but United were good value for their fourth-round win. He had lambasted the media on Thursday, accusing them of "sacking him three times" this season and told the BBC before kickoff it was hard to enjoy his job in the current climate. United were booed off after losing 1-0 to Southampton in the Premier League at Old Trafford last weekend, which left them fifth and struggling to qualify for the Champions League, but backed by 5,000 fans they produced a more vibrant performance. Not that it was all plain sailing.

When Thorne equalised against the run of play after 37 minutes United's insecurities briefly returned and, but for a superb last-ditch tackle by Chris Smalling to deny Chris Martin, they could have been trailing at half-

time. Van Gaal told the BBC: "We gave their goal away but at halftime I said that it was a good performance, keep it up and we will win. And we did."

QUALITY GOAL

Rooney had put the visitors ahead after 16 minutes with a goal of real quality. Receiving the ball on the left edge of the penalty area when he looked marginally offside, the England captain cut back on to his right foot and curled the ball past helpless keeper Scott Carson.

Impressive United striker Anthony Martial should have doubled their lead but his touch let him down in front of goal and the visitors were stunned when Martin's clever pass was brought down by Thorne who stabbed a shot past David de Gea. Derby had the first chance of the second half when right back Cyrus Christie's low cross just evaded Tom Ince, while at the other end Mata was inches away from restoring United's lead. They deservedly went back in front after 65 minutes when Blind met Mata's centre with a first-time shot and Mata wrapped it up when he converted Martial's cross. The rest of the fourth round matches are scheduled for the weekend with holders Arsenal, who are aiming for a third straight triumph, hosting second-tier Burnley. — Reuters



WEST BROMWICH: Peterborough United player Jon Taylor, right, scores the second goal for his side during the English FA Cup fourth round soccer match at The Hawthorns, West Bromwich, England, yesterday. — AP

AUBAMEYANG DOUBLE LEADS DORTMUND PAST INGOLSTADT

BERLIN: Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang struck twice in the final 13 minutes to earn Borussia Dortmund a nerve-wracking 2-0 victory over promoted Ingolstadt yesterday and cut the gap on Bundesliga leaders Bayern Munich to five points.

The 2015 African player of the year rose high to connect with a Lukasz Piszczek cross and beautifully time his header after Dortmund were frustrated by a tight Ingolstadt defence for much of the game.

The league's leading scorer added a late second with a diagonal shot to take his league goal tally to 20 and lift Dortmund to 44 points. Bayern, on 49, play Hoffenheim on Sunday.

"On days like this you can be happy with a such a scrappy win," Dortmund coach Thomas Tuchel, who brought on 17-year-old American Christian Pulisic for his Bundesliga debut in the second half, told reporters.

"We were the luckier team in some situations today," Tuchel said after his side's 14th league win in 19 games. The hosts had possession and chances galore but struggled against the second-best defence in the Bundesliga.

Despite missing playmaker Ilkay Guendogan and winger Marco Reus who were both out with a virus infection, Dortmund laid siege in the second half but had to wait until the 77th for Gabon international Aubameyang to come to the rescue. Minutes earlier captain Mats Hummels almost scored a spectacular own goal when he sent a high ball into his own net from about 30 metres out only to have it ruled out for a foul by an Ingolstadt player.

Javier Hernandez also struck twice as Bayer Leverkusen climbed back to fourth after beating bottom-placed Hanover 96 3-0. Stefan Kiessling gave them the lead on the stroke of halftime before Mexican Hernandez converted a 62nd-minute penalty and he struck again in the 87th with his 12th goal of the season.

Leverkusen are on 31 points, three behind third-placed Hertha Berlin, who squandered a two-goal lead to draw 3-3 with Werder Bremen. Schalke 04 bounced back from last week's loss to Werder to ease past Darmstadt 98 2-0 with goals from Max Meyer and talented Leroy Sane. The Ruhr valley club are in fifth place on 30 points. —Reuters



DORTMUND: Ingolstadt's defender Robert Bauer (C-L) and Dortmund's Columbian striker Adrian Ramos (C-R) vie for the ball during the German first division Bundesliga football match of Borussia Dortmund vs FC Ingolstadt 04 in Dortmund, western Germany, yesterday. — AFP

ANGERS SEE OFF PITIFUL MONACO TO RETAKE THIRD

PARIS: Angers inflicted a heavy 3-0 defeat on second-placed Monaco yesterday to end a three-match losing streak and reignite their unlikely challenge for a Champions League spot in France.

Home team Angers took an early lead when Cheikh N'Doye deflected in Romain Saiss's effort after Monaco failed to clear a corner. N'Doye doubled the advantage before half-time as Angers took utter control, before gloss was added to the scoreline in the second period by Mohamed Yattara.

Monaco stay 21 points behind champions elect Paris Saint Germain, who play

at Saint Etienne on Sunday night. Angers move, temporarily at least, above Nice and into the third and final Champions League place. In a lively start to proceedings at the Stade Ange Casanova, Bernardo Silva wastefully chipped the ball straight at Angers goalkeeper Alexandre Letellier, while at the other end Billy Ketkeophomphone had a long-range effort pushed wide by Danijel Subasic. Stephane Moulin's side have been a menace from set-pieces all season and they took a 19th minute lead from a corner. Visiting stopper Subasic kept out a free header from Romain Thomas, but

midfielder Saiss got to the rebound first and his shot flew in via the shin of Angers top-scorer N'Doye.

The Senegalese midfielder has had a fantastic debut season in the top flight and the fortuitous effort was his sixth league goal this term.

Monaco were wearing their training shirts as all three of their kits clashed with Angers', but this was a very competitive encounter and Subasic had to be alert to tip away powerful strikes from Pierrick Capelle and N'Doye.

But it was another scrappy goal that gave N'Doye a brace and Angers a two

goal cushion that they thoroughly deserved. N'Doye's initial shot was turned onto the crossbar by a stunning Subasic save. Yattara hit the loose ball towards the far corner with the aid of a big deflection, and although Subasic got across to save, the Monaco defence watched on as N'Doye prodded in from on the goalline.

Leonardo Jardim's principality outfit started the second half with far more intensity and attacking verve, and Tiemoué Bakayoko drew a low save from Letellier. But the hosts made the points safe ten minutes into the second period. N'Doye had a great chance to complete

the first hat-trick of his career but mis-kicked straight to Yattara, who did the rest with aplomb.

Letellier got down quickly to his right to deny Fabio Coentrao as Monaco searched for a consolation goal that would not prove forthcoming.

Angers are showing no sign of letting up in the race for Europe as their rivals also keep dropping points.

A very disappointing Monaco lost this match just when threatening to pull away from the chasing pack, while Marseille were held by struggling Lille at the Velodrome on Friday. — AFP

CHADLI DOUBLE SENDS SPURS INTO LAST 16

LONDON: Nacer Chadli crowned his 100th Tottenham Hotspur appearance with a brace as his side won 4-1 at third-tier strugglers Colchester United in the FA Cup fourth round yesterday.

The Belgian winger netted with a thumping drive in the 27th minute and a 78th-minute glancing header at the Colchester Community Stadium, either side of a deflected long-range shot from Eric Dier.

Colchester, rock bottom of League One, replied in the 80th minute when Ben Davies put through his own goal after Gavin Massey had hit the post, but Chadli immediately teed up Tom Carroll to restore Spurs' three-goal cushion.

"I think that this competition is magic. The opponents always believe that maybe it's their day, that they can win," Spurs manager Mauricio Pochettino told BT Sport. "At times we invited them a little bit to believe in the possibility, but I think it was

always under control. We conceded some chances, but it was a fair result."

Later, Arsenal's pursuit of a third successive FA Cup trophy—a feat last achieved by Blackburn Rovers between 1884 and 1886 — sees them entertain second-tier Burnley. League Cup finalists Manchester City and Liverpool are both in action, City visiting the Premier League's bottom club, Aston Villa, and Liverpool hosting West Ham United, who have beaten them twice in the league this season.

Chelsea interim manager Guus Hiddink's quest to repeat his 2009 FA Cup triumph with the west London club continues on Sunday when his team visit second-tier Milton Keynes Dons.

Manchester United were the first team to book a place in the last 16 after winning 3-1 at Championship promotion-chasers Derby County on Friday, with Wayne Rooney, Daley Blind and Juan Mata scoring. — AFP



LIVERPOOL: Liverpool's English midfielder Cameron Brannagan (C) is challenged by West Ham United's Croatian striker Nikica Jelavic (R) during the English FA Cup fourth round football match between Liverpool and West Ham United at Anfield in Liverpool, north west England, yesterday. — AFP

IHEANACHO TREBLE SPURS CITY IN FA CUP STROLL

BIRMINGHAM: Manchester City starlet Kelechi Iheanacho hit a hat-trick as his side crushed Aston Villa 4-0 yesterday in the FA Cup fourth round, with Raheem Sterling also on target.

It was only Iheanacho's fifth start of the season, but the 19-year-old Nigerian has now found the back of the net eight times, vindicating manager Manuel Pellegrini's decision to leave Sergio Agüero on the bench.

City's win kept them in contention for glory on four fronts, with Pellegrini's side three points below leaders Leicester City in the Premier League and through to the Champions League last 16 and League Cup final.

Pellegrini also put David Silva on the bench, while Yaya Toure was left out of the match-day squad altogether, as both managers rested players with vital Premier League matches coming up.

But Villa manager Remi Garde quickly came to regret the wholesale changes he made in the heart of his defence, where Micah Richards and Ciaran Clark replaced Jores Okore and Joleon Lescott.

It was a decision that may have led to the first goal after just four minutes as Villa's marking was found wanting at a corner.

Inevitably Fabian Delph, who was booed on his return to Villa Park, was involved in the goal, winning the corner and then taking the set-piece himself.

His kick was flicked on by Bacary Sagna and met with a powerful Fernando header at the far post.

Villa goalkeeper Brad Guzan could not hold the ball and Iheanacho was on hand to hook in for the opening goal.

Three minutes later the goalscorer almost turned provider after he was released down the left flank.

He whipped a perfect ball across for Jesus Navas, who could only fire the ball straight at Guzan.

Iheanacho then doubled the visitors' lead from the penalty spot after Leandro Bacuna was penalised for nudging Sterling in the back.

TEMPERS FLARE

The challenge looked innocuous

enough, but Sterling went sprawling to the floor and referee Michael Jones pointed to the spot despite Villa's protests.

The young striker showed tremendous confidence as he coolly sent Guzan the wrong way and passed the ball into the net with his left foot.

Tempers flared in the wake of the penalty decision, with Sterling winding up a frustrated Bacuna. The Villa full-back unwisely put his finger in the City forward's face and both men received yellow cards.

At the other end, Villa were finding chances hard to come by despite dominating possession for long periods. It took until the 43rd minute for the home side to find the target, but Clark's header lacked power.

A minute later Idrissa Gueye tried his luck from range and City goalkeeper Willy Caballero was forced to make a smothering save.

Garde brought Okore on at half-time, sacrificing Ashley Westwood and pushing Bacuna into midfield as the Villa manager searched for some cutting edge in attack.

However, it was City who remained the more threatening side. Guzan had to get down smartly and make a good save after Sterling arrived at full speed to meet Fernandinho's right-wing cross.

Villa came close to pulling one back after Nicolas Otamendi clipped Jordan Ayew just outside the box. Spanish forward Carles Gil curled the free-kick in and Caballero was at full stretch to keep it out.

With Villa, last season's beaten finalists, pushing for a goal that would give them some hope, they left themselves exposed at the back and the tie was soon over. Gueye hit a terrible back-pass that found Iheanacho in acres of space and he made no mistake as he calmly slotted the ball past Guzan for his third of the match.

Two minutes later Sterling made it four, completing Villa's misery, as he stabbed home from close range after Guzan had saved Fernandinho's initial effort. — AFP



BIRMINGHAM: Manchester City's Kelechi Iheanacho, second left no. 72, scores from a penalty against Aston Villa during the English FA Cup fourth round soccer match between Aston Villa and Manchester City at Villa Park in Birmingham, England, yesterday. — AP

LIVERPOOL FACE FIXTURE PILE-UP AFTER HAMMERS STALEMATE

LIVERPOOL: Jurgen Klopp faces an unwanted fixture pile-up after Liverpool were held to a dull 0-0 draw by West Ham in the FA Cup fourth round at Anfield yesterday. Reds boss Klopp picked a fairly inexperienced team in order to give several senior players a rest, but the stand-ins were unable to find a winner against opponents who lost James Tomkins and Cheikhou Kouyate to first-half injuries.

Young midfielders Cameron Brannagan and Joao Teixeira had shots beaten away by Hammers goalkeeper Darren Randolph, who was only playing because first choice Adrian had returned home to Seville to attend the birth of his first child.

Christian Benteke also failed to convert three second-half chances, meaning Klopp's side must travel to Upton Park for a replay next month.

Liverpool, who are still competing in four competitions, have played nine matches during January, and now face at least seven in February.

The last thing Klopp would have wanted was a replay, but that was exactly what he got after making 10 changes to the team who secured a League Cup final showdown against Manchester City by overcoming Stoke on Tuesday.

Only goalkeeper Simon Mignolet retained his place and West Ham carried the greater early threat as Dimitri Payet's inswinging free-kick from the

right brushed the outside of the near post on its way wide. Then Aaron Cresswell got down the left to deliver a cross that eluded both Dejan Lovren and Steven Caulker, but an unmarked Enner Valencia made a mess of his header, and sent the ball back from whence it came.

Brannagan, making only his fourth start for Liverpool, showed some neat touches, particularly with his set-piece deliveries.

One near-post corner was met with a Benteke flick that Cresswell cleared just in front of the line, while a superb inswinging free-kick was crying out for a glancing header from the former Aston Villa forward, who failed to provide one.

COLLISION

There was a painful early end to the evening for West Ham full-back Tomkins, who had to be taken off after receiving a cut to the head in an aerial collision with Joe Allen. As the visitors tried to make a substitution, Brannagan almost scored with a terrific 30-yard shot that Randolph did well to turn aside - moments before Hammers midfielder Kouyate limped off to be replaced by former Everton striker Nikica Jelavic.

Despite the enforced double substitution, West Ham finished the first half strongly, with Pedro

Obiang's 25-yard volley flying just wide.

Payet caused Liverpool's defence all sorts of problems with another of his inswinging free-kicks early in the second half, with the ball striking Caulker on the arm before Winston Reid's effort was scrambled clear.

At the other end, Reid faced a penalty appeal against him, escaping punishment when tugging Kevin Stewart's shirt as the young midfielder attempted to fashion space for a cross down the left. Liverpool began to create more chances, with Nathaniel Clyne bending a shot into the Kop, and Allen blazing over after good approach play from Jordan Ibe, before Teixeira's snapshot was beaten away at the near post by Randolph.

Benteke was guilty of the worst miss, miscontrolling the ball in the direction of the corner flag when Stewart's mis-hit bobbed towards him six yards from goal. By now, West Ham were looking stretched, with Randolph pushing out another Teixeira shot, then saving twice from Benteke after the striker had been played clear by Ibe.

Hammers substitute Michail Antonio had a penalty appeal rejected amid a goalmouth scramble after Mignolet had flapped at a free-kick, then headed against the post - although he had already been penalised for a push. — AFP

JAPAN COMEBACK SECURES ASIAN UNDER-23 TITLE

DOHA: Japan won the AFC Under 23 championship with a thrilling victory in Doha yesterday overturning a two goal deficit to stun South Korea 3-2.

The winner came in the 81st minute from substitute Takuma Asano, with a smart finish when through on the Korean goal. Asano had started the comeback, scoring Japan's first in the 67th minute, after they trailed 2-0 early on in the second half.

Within a minute of Asano's first, Japan were level after Yajima struck. It was heartbreaking for the Koreans who had taken the lead in the 23rd minute thanks to a deflected shot from Kwon Chang-hoon.

Then a brilliant turn and finish by Jin Seong-uk in the 47th minute doubled their advantage, but the match proved far from over.

Both teams qualified for the Rio Olympics later this year after getting through to the final of the two-week long championship held in Qatar.

Iraq finished third and were the other team to qualify for Rio. Hosts Qatar agonisingly finished in fourth position, just outside the Olympics qualification places. — AFP



DOHA: AFC president Sheikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa (R) presents Japan's captain Wataru Endo (L) with the trophy following the AFC U23 Championship final football match between Japan and South Korea at Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium in Doha yesterday. — AFP

Live		Matches on TV
		(Local Timings)
ENGLAND FA CUP		
Carlisle v Everton FC	beIN SPORTS	16:30
Keynes Dons v Chelsea	beIN SPORTS	19:00
SPANISH LEAGUE		
Real Sociedad v Real Betis	beIN SPORTS 7 HD beIN SPORTS 14 HD beIN SPORTS 1 HD	0:05
Sevilla v Levante	beIN SPORTS	14:00
Valencia v Sporting Gijon	beIN SPORTS	18:00
Las Palmas v Celta de Vigo	beIN SPORTS	20:15
Real Madrid v Espanyol	beIN SPORTS	22:30
ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE		
Chievo Verona v Juventus	beIN SPORTS	14:30
Bologna v UC Sampdoria	beIN SPORTS	17:00
SSC Napoli v Empoli	beIN SPORTS	17:00
Udinese Calcio v Lazio	beIN SPORTS	17:00
Torino v Hellas Verona	beIN SPORTS	17:00
Genoa CFC v Fiorentina	beIN SPORTS	17:00
AC Milan v Inter	beIN SPORTS	22:45
GERMAN BUNDESLIGA		
Wolfsburg v FC Koln	beIN SPORTS	17:30
Bayern Munich v Hoffenheim	beIN SPORTS	19:30
FRENCH LEAGUE		
Caen v OGC Nice	beIN SPORTS	16:00
Girondins v Stade Rennes	beIN SPORTS	19:00
Saint Etienne v PSG	beIN SPORTS	23:00

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13th straight
road loss

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Arsenal on
course for
FA Cup history

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REBENSBURG VICTORIOUS IN MARIBOR AFTER VONN FALL Page 15



BARCELONA: FC Barcelona's Neymar, right, duels for the ball against Atletico Madrid's Diego Godin, second left, during a Spanish La Liga soccer match at the Camp Nou stadium in Barcelona, Spain, yesterday. — AP

MESSI, SUAREZ EDGE BARCA PAST NINE-MAN ATLETICO

BARCELONA: Barcelona took control of the La Liga title race as goals from Lionel Messi and Luis Suarez inspired a come from behind 2-1 win against nine-man Atletico Madrid yesterday.

Koke handed the visitors a deserved early lead, but Barca turned the game thanks to two goals in eight minutes before the break through Messi and Suarez.

Atletico's hopes of salvaging a point were then ruined as Filipe Luis and Diego Godin were sent-off for rash challenges either side of half-time. Victory takes Barca three points clear of Atletico at the top of the table having also played a game less - and seven points clear of third-placed Real Madrid, who host Espanyol today.

"It is clear it is an important day for us to pick up three points against our closest rivals, but there is a long way to go," said Barca boss Luis Enrique.

"Every game presents its difficulties and you don't always overcome them in the most effective or spectacular way."

Meanwhile, Atletico coach Diego Simeone refused to chastise Luis and Godin for leaving his side short-handed against the European champions.

"I have nothing to reproach them for," said the Argentine. "Even with nine men we maintained our way of playing. In a game you can win or lose, but I always prefer to lose in this way."

The clash between La Liga's top two pitted Europe's most feared attack against its strongest defence, but it was Atletico who started on the front foot.

CLICK INTO GEAR

Saul Niguez's dipping effort was brilliantly turned over by Claudio Bravo after just two minutes. However, another Niguez burst provided the opening goal eight minutes later when his cross from the right just evaded Antoine Griezmann and was slotted home at the far post by Koke.

Atletico could even have had a more commanding lead as Augusto Fernandez flashed a shot inches wide

with Barca struggling to get a foothold in the game.

The European champions had been outplayed by Malaga and Athletic Bilbao in the first-half of their previous two games before reacting after the break, but they clicked into gear in the final 15 minutes of the first-half to turn the game on its head.

Suarez fired a warning shot that Jan Oblak got down well to save at his near post. However, the Slovenian's 483-minute run without conceding was ended when Jordi Alba showed great composure to pull a low cross into Messi's path to smash home.

Atletico were then caught uncharacteristically flat-footed as Dani Alves's long ball over the top picked out Suarez, who showed great strength to hold off compatriot Jose Maria Gimenez, before slotting between Oblak's legs.

The game looked over as a contest a minute before the break when Luis was sent-off for high, studs-up, challenge on Messi inside the Barcelona half.

Yet, despite their numerical disadvantage, Atletico

still started the second period the better. Yannick Carrasco's lung-bursting run was snuffed out at the last hurdle by Gerard Pique. The Belgian then produced a fine cross for Griezmann, but his acrobatic effort from point-blank range was brilliantly saved by Bravo.

Atletico's resistance was undone by their own stupidity again 25 minutes from time, though, as Godin lunged in on Suarez and was rightly shown a second yellow card.

Barca then rubbed salt into the visitors' wounds by introducing former Atletico midfielder Arda Turan for Ivan Rakitic and the Turkish international was inches away from his first goal since swapping the Spanish capital for the Camp Nou when his shot flew just wide of the far post.

And a horrible day for Diego Simeone's men was rounded off when Fernandez had to be stretchered from the field with what looked like a serious knee injury 15 minutes from time. — AFP

KERBER STUNS WILLIAMS TO WIN FIRST MAJOR TITLE

MELBOURNE: A tearful Angelique Kerber stunned an errant Serena Williams to win the Australian Open yesterday and thwart the American top seed's bid to equal Steffi Graf's Open-era record of 22 Grand Slam titles.

In a huge upset, the seventh seed toppled the 34-year-old 6-4, 3-6, 6-4 to win her maiden major title and become the first German Grand Slam champion since Graf at the 1999 French Open.

Williams, the world number one and defending champion, had won all six previous Melbourne Park finals she had played and had also triumphed in her last eight Grand Slam deciders.

But Kerber, inspired by a good luck message from Graf, knew all the pressure was on her opponent and she mercilessly exploited her weaknesses in a thriller at Rod Laver Arena.

"My whole life I was working really hard and now I'm here and I can say I'm a Grand Slam champion, so it sounds really crazy," she said, choking back tears.

"The best two weeks of my life and career. I had goose bumps here on the centre court when I was playing." Her win sparked celebrations in Germany, with a host of stars offering congratulations including Manchester United's Bastian Schweinsteiger and Formula One driver Nico Rosberg.

"Many congratulations! It was time. Steffi Graf's era was a good few years ago," said International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach, who is also German.

The left-hander, whose win will see her move up from world number six to two, has had an emphasis on consistency in Melbourne, patiently building control of the point as rallies develop.

It worked well with the 28-year-old, who had never beaten a world number one before, dropping just one set en route to the final, in the opening round to Miskai Doi when she saved a match point.

Williams had been in imperious form all tournament, but too

many errors cost her dearly against an opponent she had beaten five times before and lost only once.

"I was actually really happy for her. She's been around a really long time," said Williams. "I think I did the best I could today. You know, would I give myself an A? No. But today this is what I could produce today."

"Maybe tomorrow I could produce something different. But that's all I can go off." The imposing American was the overwhelming favourite, having won three of the four Grand Slam titles last year, but said she was only human.

"I mean, every time I walk in this (press conference) room, everyone expects me to win every single match, every single day of my life," she told her post-match press conference.

"As much as I would like to be a robot, I'm not."

ERROR-STREWN

The German faced the powerful Williams serve first up, and failed to win a point against it, reinforcing expectations that the top seed would take control.

But Kerber began finding her range and against the odds broke to go 2-1 in front.

An out-of-sorts Williams was hitting too many errors, but holding for 2-3 seemed to temporarily flip a switch in the American who broke back.

But the mistakes piled up and Kerber broke again as she dictated the baseline points.

Twenty-three unforced errors from Williams to the German's three told the story of the first set, which Kerber wrapped up in 39 minutes.

Rattled, Williams cleaned up her act in the second set and it went with serve until the fourth game when two Kerber double faults helped Williams to a 3-1 lead. She took it into a deciding third set having made only five errors, in stark contrast to her wayward first set. — AFP



MELBOURNE: Germany's Angelique Kerber (R) holds The Daphne Akhurst Memorial Cup as she celebrates after her victory in the women's singles final match against Serena Williams of the US (L) on day thirteen of the 2016 Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne yesterday. — AFP

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Saudi reforms may not avert
looming economic slump

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UK announces funding
for North Sea oil industry

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Infiniti reveals daring
Q60 sports coupe
at NAIAS 2016

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AS RUSSIAN FOOD PRICES SPIKE HIGHER, SOME WINNERS EMERGE

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YANGON: Construction workers stand to cross a main road to reach a building site in Yangon yesterday. Unskilled construction workers make more than Myanmar's set a minimum wage of 3,600 kyat (\$2.75) for an eight-hour workday, as the country's construction industry has boomed in recent years. — AP

TIJARI DECLARES NET PROFIT OF KD 46.2M FOR 2015

BOARD RECOMMENDS 13% CASH DIVIDEND AND 6% BONUS SHARES

KUWAIT: Commercial Bank of Kuwait announced an operating profit of KD 99 million (before provisions and taxes) for the year 2015. The net profit of the bank was KD 46.2 million with earnings per share of 32.7 fils.

The Board of Directors recommended to the General Assembly cash dividend distribution of 13 fils per share and a bonus issue of 6 shares for each hundred shares. This recommendation is subject to the approval of the regulatory authorities and the General Assembly of the Bank.

Ali Al-Mousa, the bank's Chairman, explained that the bank's financial results are a reflection of its strong financial position and asset quality. The non-performing loans ratio was less than one percent, (0.9%) with a provisioning coverage of 572 percent.

Al-Mousa further said that the bank's total assets exceeded KD 4 billion. The bank's capital adequacy ratio as at the end of December 2015 was 18.39 percent, the leverage ratio 11.51 percent and liquidity coverage ratio 138.5 percent, comfortably exceeding the minimum requirement of 12.5 percent, 3 percent and 100 percent respectively, as set by the Central Bank of Kuwait.

He pointed that the bank's strong performance indicators are a result of two factors. First is its conservative policy to build up additional and judgmental provision base that in turn will help the bank to withstand



Commercial Bank of Kuwait Chairman
Ali Al-Mousa

any shocks or pressures, and second is its prudent policy to diversify income resources.

Al-Mousa further commented that the bank's balance sheet was restructured in order to raise operating efficiency amidst the present volatile conditions witnessed by the global and local economies, particularly the decline in oil prices and its implications on the Kuwaiti economy.

Ali Al-Mousa concluded his statement by referring to the importance of perusing the bank's condensed financial statements on Kuwait Stock Exchange website and complete statements when issued by the bank.

BAHRAIN SAYS AUSTERITY PLANS IN LINE WITH IMF

DUBAI: Bahrain plans austerity steps to cut its budget deficit in line with IMF recommendations, its finance minister said yesterday in comments that could help the island kingdom sell its bonds when it returns to international markets later this year.

Bahrain is one of several Gulf Arab oil states using the IMF's assistance to plan economic reforms as low crude prices put heavy pressure on state finances. The IMF is also providing valuable political cover for the painful reforms. The kingdom is expected to return to bond markets this year to help finance its budget deficit, which is estimated by the International Monetary Fund at about 15 percent of gross domestic product this year.

Finance Minister Sheikh Ahmed bin Mohammed al-Khalifa said the IMF's latest country recommendations "echo Bahrain's

current fiscal action plan."

"Bahrain's Government Action Plan, currently underway, includes wide-ranging measures that will ensure the sustainability of Bahrain's financial resources and development, benefiting the entire country," he said in a statement quoted by the official BNA news agency.

On Friday, the IMF urged Bahrain to take "sizeable" steps to reduce its budget deficit, saying it could introduce a value-added tax being planned by Gulf states, cut spending on social transfers and freeze public-sector wages. Sheikh Ahmed said Bahrain aimed to balance its budget "within three budgetary cycles". Bahrain drafts its budget plans in two-year periods, implying the kingdom would eliminate its deficit within six years. — Reuters

US ECONOMY IS EXPECTED TO STRENGTHEN AFTER WEAK Q4

WASHINGTON: The US economy struggled to grow in the October-December quarter as consumer spending, business investment and exports slowed. Yet despite global weakness and shrunken oil and stock prices, many economists expect growth to accelerate on the strength of healthy job gains.

The economy grew at an annual rate of just 0.7 percent last quarter, less than half the 2 percent growth rate in the July-September period, the government said Friday. It was the worst showing since a severe winter slowed the economy, as measured by the gross domestic product, to a 0.6 percent annual growth rate in last year's first quarter. Though the slowdown late last year could renew doubts about the durability of the 61/2-year-old economic expansion, most analysts said they expected the slump to be short-lived.

"The weak growth is temporary," said Nariman Behravesh, chief economist at IHS Global Insight. "This is not an early warning of something worse."

Behravesh said two of the key negative factors last quarter - an effort by companies to pare an overhang of unsold goods and investment cutbacks by oil companies facing much lower energy prices - would likely diminish early this year. That would pave the way for decent annual growth of around 2.5 percent in the first half of 2016, Behravesh said.

Paul Ashworth, chief economist at Capital Economics, said he thinks GDP growth will rebound to an annual rate between 2.5 percent and 3 percent in the first six months of 2016 as further solid job growth fuels additional consumer spending. Consumer spending accounts for about 70 percent of economic activity.

Much of last quarter's weakness reflected a slowdown in consumer spending, which grew at a 2.2 percent annual rate, compared with a 3 percent rate the previous quarter. Analysts said part of that weakness likely reflected a warmer-than-normal December, which reduced spending on winter clothing and utility bills. Friday's estimate of fourth-quarter

growth was the first of three that the government will issue. Besides consumer spending, exports were a source of weakness last quarter. That reflected in part a stronger dollar, which has made US goods pricier and therefore less competitive overseas. Persistent sluggishness in such key export markets as China and Europe hurt, too. A wider US trade deficit cut annual growth last quarter by 0.5 percentage point. An additional drag came from cutbacks in business investment spending, which fell at a 1.8 percent annual rate, with spending on structures down 5.3 percent. That reflected a 38.7 percent plunge in spending in the oil and gas industry, which has slashed drilling and exploration in response to the plunge in oil prices.

Stockpiles slashed

Besides pulling back on investment, businesses cut spending on stockpiles to try to pare unwanted inventories. That effort reduced growth by 0.5 percentage point in the fourth quarter. But some economists said they

thought the broad effort by businesses to trim stockpiles was nearing an end.

Home construction was one of the bright spots in the fourth quarter; it grew at a solid 8.1 percent annual rate. The US housing market has remained solid.

Government spending slowed to growth of just 0.7 percent. Spending by the federal government grew at a 2.7 percent annual rate, while state and local governments cut back on spending at a rate of 0.6 percent.

For all of 2015, the economy grew 2.4 percent, matching the growth in 2014. Both years improved on 2013. Still, last year's growth rate extended the economy's pattern of subpar expansion since the Great Recession officially ended in June 2009. For 2016, economists have forecast another year of modest growth of around 2 percent to 2.5 percent. At the same time, they have nudged up the likelihood of another recession, given the stock market plunge that began the year, sharply diminished energy prices and China's struggling economy, the world's second-largest. — AP



NEW YORK: Traders work on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange on January 29, 2016 in New York City. The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose more than 390 points today. — AFP

LOW-COST TRAINING FOR YOUR EMPLOYEES IS POSSIBLE

KUWAIT: In an ever-changing job market, it is essential to your company's growth and success to not only hire top talent, but also retain your best employees and cultivate their skills. According to a recent survey by Bayt.com on career development in the Middle East, career development is important to 85 percent of professionals in the Middle East region, and the great majority (82 percent) would leave their current company for better training opportunities.

Fortunately, there are many ways you can ensure that you are providing your employees with a satisfying and effective training while keeping costs to a minimum. Here are 5 ideas from the career experts at Bayt.com, the Middle East's leading job site:

1. Mentorship programs

The most basic and most used training method is the mentorship method. Mentorship includes pairing up employees who can learn from each other and can help

one another accountable for success. Junior employees can gain knowledge by shadowing more senior employees in the company, while senior employees can get unbiased feedback and new perspectives from fresh graduates and other junior-level employees. By allowing employees to train each other, not only are you nurturing learning within the company, but are also promoting teamwork and camaraderie among employees, which will eventually reflect positively on your company.

2. Job rotation

Job rotation is one of the most effective training methods. It widens employee exposure and allows them to gain a more complete understanding of the company and how it is run. Give your employees new roles and responsibilities, have them shadow someone else for a few days, then put them up to the challenge to perform the job themselves. Job rotation helps your employees

BAYT.COM WEEKLY REPORT

overcome boredom; it keeps them motivated and encourages learning and interaction among different departments and individuals. In the Middle East, 29 percent of respondents believe that company rotations are the most effective training method.

3. Online courses

It's 2016, and the Internet has successfully integrated itself into every aspect of our lives, connecting us to the entire world with the simple click of a button. So why not use this to our advantage? There are entire databases of paid, as well as free, online courses that employees can take online. With so many options to choose from, employees can pick the method which best suits them. Bayt.com Courses, for example, are tailored to a wide cross section of professionals within an organization. These courses aim to provide professionals with the tools and techniques

to improve their efficiency and that of their organization.

4. Trainers from within the company

Every company has star employees. That person who not only can do their job well, but also has great communication skills and is knowledgeable, patient, and liked by everyone. So why not utilize the talent you already have to everyone's benefits? Send your top employees to conferences, seminars and courses, and then allow them to use that newly-acquired knowledge to train their colleagues in form of lectures, presentations or group discussions. 40 percent of respondents believe that company training by internal teams is the most effective training method.

5. Games

Are you looking for ways to enrich your employee's soft skills, such as their teamwork skills, creative thinking and innovation, communication or even leadership skills? Try

introducing these skills in the form of office games and challenges. Split employees into groups, and then give them challenges to complete, with the promise of a reward to the winning team. The challenges can be anything from presenting business case studies, to playing games that require critical thinking. The increased popularity and usage of gaming techniques can be attributed to the spirit of competition; it not only makes learning more enjoyable, but also increases retention.

About Bayt.com:

Bayt.com is the #1 job site in the Middle East with more than 40,000 employers and over 23,500,000 registered job seekers from across the Middle East, North Africa and the globe, representing all industries, nationalities and career levels. Post a job or find jobs on www.bayt.com today and access the leading resource for job seekers and employers in the region.

SAUDI REFORMS MAY NOT AVERT LOOMING ECONOMIC SLUMP

KINGDOM PLANS PRIVATIZATIONS, NEW INDUSTRIES

RIYADH: At a three-day conference in Riyadh this week, hundreds of Saudi Arabian officials and businessmen discussed ways to rescue the economy from low oil prices, by developing new industries and giving opportunities to the private sector. Outside the luxury hotel where they met, worsening business sentiment and flagging consumer spending suggested the reforms may not come in time to prevent a deep economic slump.

As cheap oil pressures its currency and opens up a record state budget deficit of around \$100 billion, Saudi Arabia - assisted by a small army of Western consultants who are believed to number in the hundreds - is plotting its biggest shake-up of economic policy in well over a decade.

Stakes in the operations of big state companies, including national oil giant Saudi Aramco, would be sold off; underused assets owned by the government, such as vast land holdings and mineral deposits, would be made available for development.

Parts of the government itself, including some areas of the national health care system, would be converted into independent commercial companies to improve efficiency and reduce the financial burden on the state. The number of privately run schools would rise to around 25 per-

cent from 14 percent.

Meanwhile, the government would use its massive financial resources to help diversify the economy beyond oil into sectors such as shipbuilding, information technology and tourism, by awarding contracts to new firms and providing finance.

Proposals for some of these policies have been kicked around the government for years with no result. But the political momentum behind them is clearly stronger than it has ever been, as they are backed by a powerful new economic policy council chaired by the king's son, Prince Mohammed bin Salman. "This is a quantum leap in all aspects," Abdullah Al-Othman, governor of the Saudi Arabian General Investment Authority, told the conference.

The problem for Saudi Arabia is that the difficult, complex reforms are expected to take years to implement. In the meantime, the kingdom will continue to depend heavily on oil, leaving it at the mercy of fluctuations in the price of crude. To ease the drain on its reserves, the government has been forced into austerity steps that are slowing the economy from last year's 3.3 percent expansion. In December, growth in the non-oil private sector hit its lowest since at least 2009; retailers say consumers' discretionary

spending is falling.

The government's austerity budget for this year assumed a Brent crude oil price of about \$40 a barrel, analysts estimate. If oil stays at its current levels of around \$30, more austerity could be on the way.

Fadl Al-Boainain, a prominent Saudi private-sector economist who attended the conference, said he welcomed officials' emphasis on developing parts of the economy that had long been neglected because of the focus on oil.

But he added: "The overall economic situation does not support the great optimism that ministers expressed, and it does not support the indicators they referred to..."

"There is a real concern in the private sector about spending cuts and the liquidity drain, which will increase borrowing costs. The sector is also worried about job cuts related to the economic changes."

WINDOW FOR REFORMS

Three big areas of concern emerged at the conference. One is how finance will be provided to projects, such as a shipbuilding and repair complex that Aramco announced it would establish on the eastern coast, eventually creating as many as 500,000 jobs. Market interest rates are rising

sharply as commercial banks face a liquidity squeeze caused by smaller flows of new oil revenues. So the government may end up footing most of the bill, which would be costly and involve its inefficient bureaucracy. Another challenge is creating the skilled Saudi workforce needed for new projects, in a country where some two-thirds of local workers are employed by the state, which offers cushy conditions and higher salaries. Aramco said it would leverage its own extensive training and education programs to help develop a skilled national workforce.

In some cases, Saudi Arabia's conservative culture may slow reforms. An all-woman panel at the conference discussed boosting the role of Saudi women in business, but women are not allowed to drive in the kingdom.

As many as a million foreign chauffeurs are estimated to be in the kingdom to drive women around. Eliminating the need for them could save household budgets hundreds of millions of US dollars which the workers remit home annually but so far authorities have not said they are studying the politically sensitive issue. The size of the central bank's net foreign assets, \$628 billion in November, suggests Saudi Arabia may have a window of several years to make its economy less vulnerable to oil prices before reserves fall to levels which would panic financial markets, making further spending on reforms much more difficult.

Meanwhile, the economy may struggle. An executive at a major Saudi company told Reuters that one million of the country's roughly 10 million foreign workers might be sent home in the next year as businesses slowed and construction companies, hit by cutbacks in state contracts, laid off staff.

Saudi employees will not be laid off in the initial stages but that could conceivably happen next year, he said. A foreign banker who has worked in Saudi Arabia for a decade said the direction of oil prices would ultimately decide whether it faced a slump as severe as the one suffered in the 1980s, when the economy shrank for several years. If oil rebounds to around \$60, pressure will ease, he said. If prices near \$30 become entrenched for seven or eight years, "Saudi Arabia will have a very difficult time." — Reuters

AZERBAIJAN ON BRINK OF RECESSION AS S&P 'JUNKS' ITS DEBT

PARIS: Standard and Poor's on Friday cut the rating of oil-dependent Azerbaijan into speculative or "junk" territory as plunging crude prices and a weak currency are expected to push it into recession.

"Azerbaijan depends heavily on the hydrocarbons sector" said the ratings agency as it cut the rating of the Caspian nation by one notch to BB+, out of the investment grade that is crucial for many funds to buy debt. Standard and Poor's said "we now expect the Azerbaijani economy will contract in 2016 as exports decline while consumption falls in the wake of sizable manat devaluation."

Azerbaijan gave up trying to prop up its currency in December, which came under pressure as the latest plunge in oil prices began to pick up pace, with the manat plunging by around a third against the dollar. Discontent over price hikes and the collapse of the national currency sparked rare anti-government rallies in the ex-Soviet nation last month, with police using tear gas to disperse protesters.

Oil prices have tumbled from over \$100 a barrel in June 2014 to under \$30 last month, delivering a body-blow to the economies of oil-exporting nations around the world. A barrel of oil was trading for around \$33 on Friday.

With oil exports accounting for around

40 percent of Azerbaijan's economic output and 95 percent of merchandise exports in 2013-2014, according to Standard and Poor's, the drop in crude prices will have a major impact on the economy. "We now expect the economy will contract by 1 percent in 2016 as exports decline and consumption falls..." said the ratings agency.

It warned that "external risks are increasing, with the central bank's foreign currency reserves declining by two-thirds from their mid-2014 peak." While the devaluation of the manat should help Azerbaijan's central bank conserve its foreign currency reserves and boost the government's fiscal position, Standard and Poor's warned it will lead to a significant decline in income levels.

"In particular, we expect (gross domestic product) per capita to fall from nearly \$8,000 in 2014 to about \$4,100 in 2016 while inflation will spike at 15 percent this year compared to an average of 2 percent over 2012-2015," said the ratings agency.

The Financial Times reported this week that officials from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank are heading to Azerbaijan to discuss a possible \$4 billion emergency loan package in what could be the first bailout due to plunging oil prices. — AFP

DUBAI'S AL-KHALEEJ SUGAR OPERATING AT 70% CAPACITY

DUBAI: Dubai's Al-Khaleej Sugar Refinery, the world's biggest port-based refinery, said yesterday it was operating at only 70 percent of its capacity due to slow physical demand for white sugar despite high white premiums.

"There is no real physical off-take, the physical off-take is very slow," Jamal al-Ghurair, managing director of the refinery told Reuters in an interview ahead of the Dubai Sugar Conference.

The whites-over-raws premium is a measure of refining profitability with levels over \$100 per ton seen as very attractive margins.

The whites-over-raws premium traded above \$110 per ton in the global market on Monday for the first time since August, driven by strong import demand by China, the world's top sugar buyer. However, Ghurair said high premiums were a reflection of a "paper squeeze" not physical demand.

"There's no real buyer, it's just a paper squeeze... it is a paper manipulation," he said. He expects white premiums have reached their peak and will probably go down in the summer.

"We will probably see them at \$80 to \$100 a ton in 2016," he said. The Al-Khaleej refinery has a capacity of 7,000 tons a day but is being

underutilised as export prospects are weak. "We are entering 2016 with more uncertainty than certainty," he said. A number of refineries came onstream in the Middle East in recent years in Yemen, Bahrian and Iraq with more capacity in Oman and Saudi Arabia due to come onstream in the next few years.

Iraq, once a top export destination for the refinery, is now producing most of its white sugar locally after the Babylon-based Etihad sugar refinery came onstream in 2015. Ghurair said Al Khaleej was only exporting 20 percent of what it used to export in the past to Iraq.

"We are exporting very little to Iraq," he said. Al Khaleej exported 500,000 tonnes of white sugar to Iraq in 2014.

Iraq said in December it would stop imports of refined sugar for a government food distribution program, as the country's own production rises. Ghurair also said Al Khaleej was well-stocked with Brazilian raw sugar and had enough to last until the third quarter of 2016, but declined to give an exact figure.

"When the market picks up I will be ready but we need some signs or orders to do more," he said. — Reuters



YANGON: Construction workers cross a main road to reach a building site in Yangon yesterday. Unskilled construction workers make more than Myanmar's set a minimum wage of 3,600 kyat (\$2.75) for an eight-hour workday, as the country's construction industry has boomed in recent years. — AP

EXCHANGE RATES

AL-MUZAINI EXCHANGE CO.

ASIAN COUNTRIES

Japanese Yen	2.573
Indian Rupees	4.494
Pakistani Rupees	2.896
Sri Lankan Rupees	2.115
Nepali Rupees	2.815
Singapore Dollar	213.530
Hongkong Dollar	38.973
Bangladesh Taka	3.871
Philippine Peso	6.334
Thai Baht	8.469

GCC COUNTRIES

Saudi Riyal	81.070
Qatari Riyal	83.510
Omani Riyal	789.631
Bahraini Dinar	807.360
UAE Dirham	82.770

ARAB COUNTRIES

Egyptian Pound - Cash	38.300
Egyptian Pound - Transfer	38.872
Yemen Riyal/for 1000	1.419
Tunisian Dinar	149.170
Jordanian Dinar	428.230
Lebanese Lira/for 1000	2.026
Syrian Lira	2.167
Morocco Dirham	31.005

EUROPEAN & AMERICAN COUNTRIES

US Dollar Transfer	303.850
Euro	331.500
Sterling Pound	434.050
Canadian dollar	213.080
Turkish lira	100.550
Swiss Franc	301.140
Australian Dollar	213.000
US Dollar Buying	302.650

GOLD

20 Gram	224.370
10 Gram	115.110
5 Gram	58.400

UAE EXCHANGE CENTRE WLL

CURRENCIES

Australian Dollar	202.30
Canadian Dollar	218.22
Swiss Franc	304.94
Euro	332.67
US Dollar	304.45
Sterling Pound	437.40
Japanese Yen	2.61
Bangladesh Taka	3.881
Indian Rupee	4.504
Sri Lankan Rupee	2.118
Nepali Rupee	2.813
Pakistani Rupee	2.898
UAE Dirhams	0.08285
Bahraini Dinar	0.8091
Egyptian Pound	0.03878
Jordanian Dinar	0.4330
Omani Riyal	0.7906
Qatari Riyal	0.08394
Saudi Riyal	0.08115

DOLLARCO EXCHANGE CO. LTD

Rate for Transfer	Selling Rate
US Dollar	304.350
Canadian Dollar	217.315
Sterling Pound	436.095
Euro	330.075
Swiss Franc	310.175
Bahrain Dinar	805.175
UAE Dirhams	83.105
Qatari Riyals	84.320

Saudi Riyals	81.840
Jordanian Dinar	428.735
Egyptian Pound	38.757
Sri Lankan Rupees	2.119
Indian Rupees	4.495
Pakistani Rupees	2.897
Bangladesh Taka	3.871
Philippines Peso	6.361
Cyprus pound	579.695
Kenyan Shilling	3.555
Syrian Pound	2.380
Nepalese Rupees	3.805
Malaysian Ringgit	72.045
Chinese Yuan Renminbi	46.605
Thai Bhat	9.425
Turkish Lira	101.620

BAHRAIN EXCHANGE COMPANY

CURRENCY	BUY	SELL
Europe		
British Pound	0.425443	0.434443
Czech Korune	0.004168	0.016168
Danish Krone	0.040063	0.045063
Euro	0.323887	0.331887
Norwegian Krone	0.030599	0.035799
Romanian Leu	0.072597	0.072597
Slovakia	0.009074	0.019074
Swedish Krona	0.031361	0.036361
Swiss Franc	0.293082	0.303282
Turkish Lira	0.095588	0.105888
Australasia		
Australian Dollar	0.202780	0.214280
New Zealand Dollar	0.189744	0.199244
America		
Canadian Dollar	0.207171	0.215671
US Dollars	0.299750	0.304250

US Dollars Mint	0.300250	0.304250
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Asia

Bangladesh Taka	0.003517	0.004117
Chinese Yuan	0.044712	0.048212
Hong Kong Dollar	0.036896	0.039646
Indian Rupee	0.004217	0.004607
Indonesian Rupiah	0.000017	0.000023
Japanese Yen	0.002487	0.002667
Kenyan Shilling	0.002963	0.002963
Korean Won	0.000242	0.000257
Malaysian Ringgit	0.067162	0.073162
Nepalese Rupee	0.002881	0.003051
Pakistan Rupee	0.002589	0.002869
Philippine Peso	0.006265	0.006545
Sierra Leone	0.000070	0.000076
Singapore Dollar	0.208993	0.214993
South African Rand	0.012275	0.020775
Sri Lankan Rupee	0.001762	0.002342
Taiwan	0.008916	0.009096
Thai Baht	0.008134	0.008684

Arab

Bahraini Dinar	0.799079	0.807079
Egyptian Pound	0.035399	0.039735
Iranian Riyal	0.000084	0.000085
Iraqi Dinar	0.000200	0.000260
Jordanian Dinar	0.424564	0.432064
Kuwaiti Dinar	1.000000	1.000000
Lebanese Pound	0.000150	0.000250
Moroccan Dirhams	0.021497	0.045497
Nigerian Naira	0.001255	0.001890
Omani Riyal	0.782890	0.788480
Qatar Riyal	0.082749	0.083962
Saudi Riyal	0.080140	0.081090
Syrian Pound	0.001288	0.001508
Tunisian Dinar	0.146009	0.154009
Turkish Lira	0.095588	0.105888
UAE Dirhams	0.081746	0.082895
Yemeni Riyal	0.001373	0.001453

US LAWSUIT PAYMENTS HIT ARAB BANK 2015 PROFITS

AMMAN: Jordan's largest lender, Arab Bank Group, said yesterday its 2015 net profits fell to \$442 million, from \$577 million a year earlier, after putting aside hundreds of millions to cover a legal settlement in the United States.

Arab Bank agreed last August to settle lawsuits filed a decade ago by about 500 US citizens who sued the lender under the US Anti-Terrorism Act. The act permits U.S. citizens to pursue claims arising from international terrorism. Chairman Sabih Al-Masri said the bank had set aside \$349 million in legal provisions in 2015 that were part of \$1 billion in provisions the bank had accumulated over the last few years to cover the "expected obligations" under the settlement.

The bank said its total profits before tax and provisions topped \$1.1 billion in 2015.

The bank, one of the biggest financial institutions in the Middle East with a balance sheet of \$46.4 billion, has not given a figure for how much it had agreed to pay.

The verdict marked the first time a bank was held liable in a US court for violating the US Anti-Terrorism Act. Based in Amman, but with only a fifth of its assets and a quarter of its deposits in Jordan, the bank has built a reputation for stability amid regional political upheaval.

Masri said the bank's loans book and customer deposits had continued to grow despite exchange-rate fluctuations. "The underlying performance of the bank was strong in 2015. We have succeeded in increasing our operating profits by taking advantage of the broad diversification of our business in Jordan and in the region," Masri said in the statement.

Bankers said while the credit provisions weighed on profit, Arab Bank was cushioned by a healthy capital base and \$9 billion of shareholders equity. Total capital adequacy ratio reached 14.2 percent at end of Dec., well above regulatory standards. Total loans rose 3 percent to \$23.8 billion as of the end of December, while deposits also had grown by a similar 3 percent to \$35.2 billion compared with the same period last year.

CEO Neme Sabbagh said the ratio of non-performing loans to net loans stood at 4.8 percent at the end of December. Its provisions coverage ratio for non-performing loans stood in excess of 100 percent. Arab Bank is one of the Arab world's largest privately owned banks and operates in 30 countries. It owns 40 percent of Saudi Arabia's Arab National Bank ANB. —Reuters



ADNAN JEHAD ASHOUR WINS KD 125,000 IN NBK'S AL-JAWHARA DRAW FOR JANUARY

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) announces the winner for January's KD 125,000 Al Jawhara monthly prize, Adnan Jehad Ashour. The draw was held under the supervision of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. NBK has doubled customers' chances to win in the weekly, monthly and quarterly draws when they do not withdraw or transfer from their accounts.

NBK customers have chances to win KD 5,000 weekly,

KD 125,000 monthly and a grand prize of KD 250,000 quarterly. Each KD 50 in a customer's account entitles them one entry into the draw, thus more money in an account means more chances into each draw. This new added feature enables Al Jawhara Account holders to double their chances through maintaining their balance.

Al-Jawhara is the most popular prize-giving account

in Kuwait. Al-Jawhara account entitles account holders to enter the weekly, monthly and quarterly Al-Jawhara draws. All prizes are automatically credited to the winners' accounts the day after the draw.

Al-Jawhara account is available for both Kuwaitis and expats and can be opened at any of NBK's numerous branches around Kuwait, or safely and easily through NBK's website for existing customers.



CARACAS: Customers walk around as they wait in a line to buy car batteries in Caracas. There is a current shortage of car batteries in the country and some people even queue up sleeping in their cars overnight to buy them. —AP

VENEZUELA'S FORTUNES RISE AND FALL WITH OIL PRICE

CARACAS: You can fill up your car with gasoline for less than a dollar in Venezuela, but that's where the good news ends for the country's economy. Though it practically gives away petrol at the pump, the country with the biggest known crude reserves in the world is in an oil-fueled mess which risks bankrupting it, analysts warn. At an official price of \$0.015 per liter, citizens can get a full tank of petrol for next to nothing. But many would trade that for a bag of rice, a bottle of cooking oil or a roll of toilet paper-basic goods that are in short supply in shops.

Socialist President Nicolas Maduro and his late predecessor Hugo Chavez for years used Venezuela's big oil revenues to fund social spending programs. But over the past year and a half, oil prices have tumbled by two-thirds. The fall has devastated this Latin American nation of 30 million people, which gets 96 percent of its foreign revenues from oil.

"The economic crisis in Venezuela will deepen," analysts from research group Capital Economics wrote in a note. "In the absence of a renewed rebound in oil prices a government debt default looks increasingly likely."

'Cash flow catastrophe'

The oil supply is high and demand low as the world economy slows, but major crude producers' alliance OPEC is refusing to cut its output.

Analysts say that strategy is led by Saudi Arabia to try to squeeze US producers of shale oil out of the market. Oil prices dipped under \$30 a barrel this month. In mid-2014 they were over \$100. Economist Asdrubal Oliveros at Venezuelan consultancy Ecoanalitica estimated that at that price level, the country would suffer a cash shortfall of \$27 billion this year.

The government does not publish figures for its sovereign debt, but the Venezuelan Industry Confederation esti-

mates the country's commercial debts to suppliers at \$12 billion.

"The crisis is severe. Revenues are plunging and the country risk rating is soaring," said Luis Vicente Leon, an economist and head of pollster DataAnalisis. "The fall of the oil price is a cash flow catastrophe, but defaulting would be suicide and the government knows it."

Oil 'war'

Voters last month punished Maduro for the economic crisis by handing the opposition a majority in the legislative assembly for the first time since Chavez came to power 17 years ago. Maduro's center-right rivals now want to force a change in what they call his and Chavez's "failed" economic policies.

Maduro faces pressure to scrap petrol subsidies, which Oliveros estimates have cost the state \$29 billion in the past three years. "Given the international context and the internal imbalances, there is a golden opportunity to do so," Oliveros said.

One man filling his car's tank at a petrol station in eastern Caracas told AFP it costs him the equivalent of just \$0.60 — four of Venezuela's Bolivar currency at the official exchange rate.

"I pay for it with a 20-Bolivar note: four for the gasoline and the rest as a tip," he said.

Venezuela produces some 2.65 million barrels of crude a day, according to OPEC. But to balance its books the country needs to sell them for about \$80 a barrel.

Maduro is lobbying other major oil-producing states to cut production to shore up prices-so far without success. He regularly blames Venezuela's woes on an economic "war" by capitalists.

He said recently he also sees the oil crisis as a strategic conflict. "There is a geopolitical war against oil, which will seriously affect the whole world economy this year and next." —AFP

IRAQ WILL COOPERATE WITH ANY PRODUCTION-CUT DECISION

VENEZUELA CALLS FOR MEETING OF OPEC, NON-OPEC MEMBERS

BAGHDAD: Iraq's oil minister said yesterday his country was ready to accept a decision by OPEC and non-OPEC members to cut crude production and was preparing to revive its national oil company, moves aimed at boosting profits amid dropping prices.

Cash-trapped Venezuela has called for a meeting in February to discuss steps to prop up global oil prices, which have plunged to 12-year lows around \$30 a barrel.

"Iraq will agree and cooperate if producers really want to cooperate to cut," Adel Abdul Mahdi told reporters in Baghdad. He said the ministry was also preparing a draft law to revive the National Oil Company, which was established in the 1960s but merged into the ministry in 1987. He said it would be "vital for the devel-

opment of the energy sector" and operate independently of the ministry.

Legislation to reestablish the company has languished for years amid political turmoil and changes of government in the war-battered nation. Baghdad, which relies on oil exports for nearly all its revenues, is struggling to improve its finances as it wages a costly battle against Islamist insurgents in the north and west. Southern oil exports through Jan. 24 averaged 3.324 million barrels per day (bpd), with production at about 3.7 million bpd, according to Abdul Mahdi.

Separately, the minister said a Chinese company and other foreign firms had signed a deal this week in Beijing to form a consortium to invest in building an oil pipeline connecting the

southern city of Basra with Aqaba port on Jordan's Red Sea coast.

Ministry spokesman Asim Jihad said the main firms were China Petroleum Pipeline (CPP) and private company Mass Global.

"The two companies will submit their investment offer to the oil ministry in March," he told Reuters. The plan is to export one million barrels per day (bpd) of Iraqi crude to Jordan, 150,000 bpd of which will supply Jordan's Zarqa refinery. Iraq pre-qualified 12 companies and joint ventures in 2013 to build an \$18-billion export pipeline to Jordan, but security concerns forced it to delay the plans. The pipeline runs through the western Iraqi province of Anbar, most of which fell under the control of Islamic State militants in 2014. —Reuters

SWISS SAY \$4 BILLION MISAPPROPRIATED FROM MALAYSIAN STATE FIRMS

WASHINGTON/KUALA LUMPUR: Switzerland's chief prosecutor said on Friday a criminal investigation into state fund 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) had revealed that about \$4 billion appeared to have been misappropriated from Malaysian state companies.

The office of Swiss Attorney General Michael Lauber said it had formally asked Malaysia to help with its probes into possible violations of Swiss laws related to bribery of foreign officials, misconduct in public office, money laundering and criminal mismanagement at the fund.

It said it had identified four cases of alleged criminal conduct. 1MDB, whose advisory board is chaired by Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak, has been probed by Malaysian authorities following accusations of financial mismanagement and graft.

Earlier this week, Malaysia's attorney general cleared Najib himself of any criminal offences or corruption, declaring that \$681 million deposited into his personal bank account was a gift from Saudi Arabia's Royal family. The Malaysian attorney general's office said in a statement yesterday it would take all possible steps to follow up and collaborate with its Swiss counterpart, but noted that the investigations into donations made to Najib were entirely separate from those into 1MDB. —Reuters



LAGOS: Naira banknotes, Nigeria's currency, being counted at a money exchange outlet in Lagos. Nigeria's central bank governor, Godwin Emefiele, dismissed calls to devalue the naira in his monetary policy committee statement. —AFP

UK ANNOUNCES FUNDING FOR NORTH SEA OIL INDUSTRY

LONDON: Britain announced a £250 million (325 million euro, \$350 million) package of funding to boost the oil industry in northeast Scotland, which has been hit hard by slumping prices.

Prime Minister David Cameron visited the oil city of Aberdeen and met industry bosses for talks on the current situation. "Obviously it's a difficult time for the oil industry because of the oil price decline, but what this shows is that the British government is 100 percent behind this industry, behind Aberdeen, behind Scotland," Cameron said.

"We want to see this port expand, we want to see an energy innovation centre, we want to

help Aberdeen to diversify its industrial base," he said. Scotland's First Minister Nicola Sturgeon welcomed the announcement and said that the Scottish government would add £254 million in funding to improve infrastructure in the region over the next five to ten years.

Global oil prices fell by more than 30 percent in 2015 and have dropped by another 20 percent this year amid increasing production and weaker demand. In London, Brent North Sea crude for March, the European benchmark for crude oil, is currently at \$34.24 a barrel, down from highs of over \$100 in 2014.

"We very much welcome Prime

Minister David Cameron's visit to Aberdeen and his recognition of the seriousness of our situation," said Deirdre Michie, head of Oil and Gas UK, an industry body.

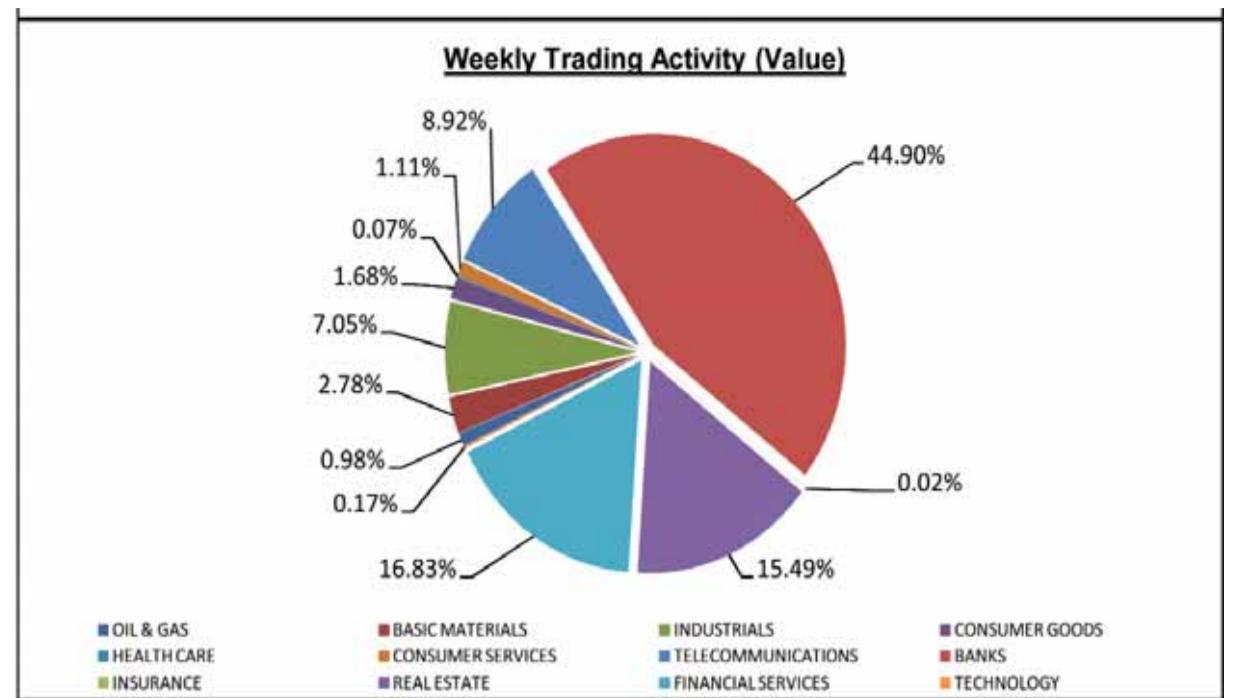
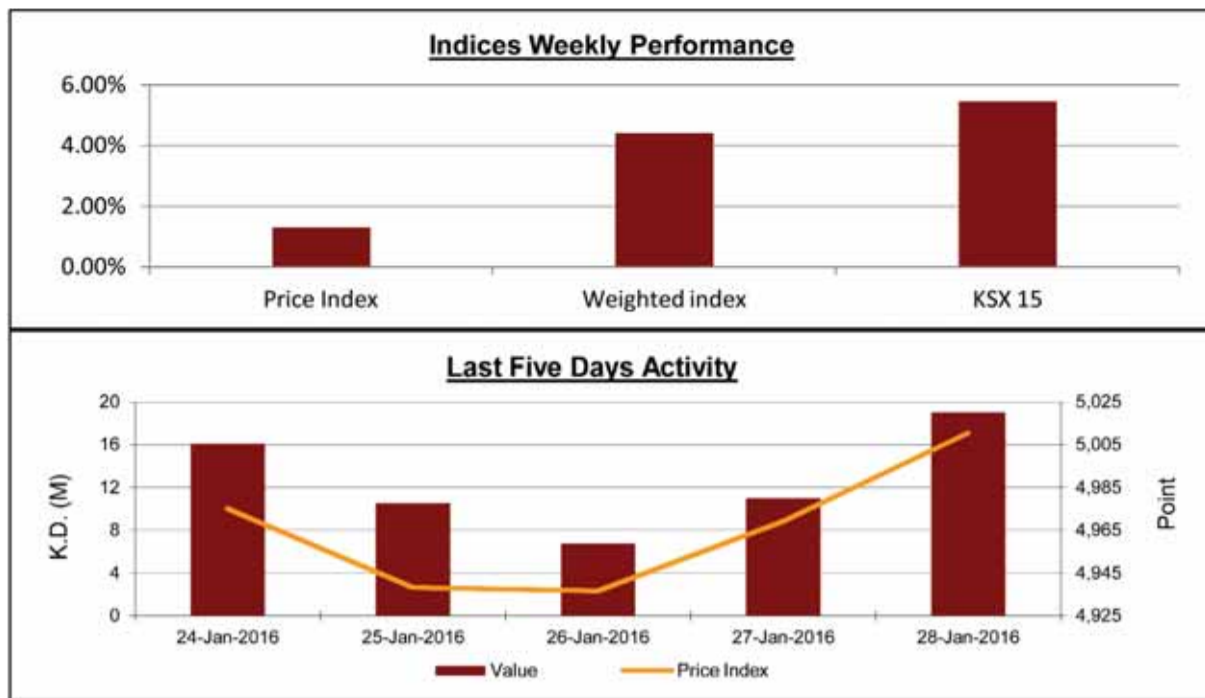
"While the oil and gas sector is under severe pressure globally, due to the current oil glut and price collapse, it is being felt particularly forcefully on the UK Continental Shelf (UKCS), which is a mature basin with its own particular difficulties and cost challenges," she said.

"Companies are doing all they can to bring down costs and be more efficient, but many are still having to make difficult decisions," she added.

The funding is expected to be

used to help the oil and gas industry export its expertise globally as well as encouraging economic diversification in northeast Scotland.

It has been committed equally by the government in London and the devolved Scottish administration based in Edinburgh and led by the pro-independence Scottish National Party (SNP). Oil and gas production in Britain rose by over seven percent last year, the first increase in over 15 years, Oil & Gas UK said this month. The Oil and Gas Authority (OGA) earlier estimated that the sector has lost 65,000 jobs — 15 percent of its workforce-since the start of 2014. —AFP



KUWAIT EQUITIES END LOSING STREAK

BAYAN WEEKLY MARKET REPORT

KUWAIT: Kuwait Stock Exchange (KSE) ended last week in the green zone. The Price Index closed at 5,010.39 points, up by 1.30 percent from the week before closing, the Weighted Index increased by 4.43 percent after closing at 344.87 points, whereas the KSX-15 Index closed at 809.68 points up by 5.46 percent. Furthermore, last week's average daily turnover decreased by 20.41 percent, compared to the preceding week, reaching KD 12.65 million, whereas trading volume average was 166.58 million shares, recording an increase of 15.94 percent.

The stock market was able to compensate a part of its previous weeks' losses as a result to the relative increase recorded by the oil prices, which positively affected the traders' morale and pushed them to purchase, especially after the price decline of many stocks to very low tempting purchasing levels during the past period. The market witnessed such performance in light of the purchasing power that included most of the traded stocks during the week, especially the leading and operational stocks, which affected all the market indices headed

MARKET ACTIVITY			
	Last Week	Previous Week	Ch. %
Volume	832,894,673	718,389,317	15.94%
Value (K.D)	63,252,442	79,475,849	-20.41%
Deals	18,922	16,745	13.00%
MARKET CAPITALISATION (K.D.)			
	Last Week	Previous Week	Weekly Ch. %
	22,847,874,625	21,981,234,770	3.94%
TOP GAINERS OF THE WEEK			
Company	Last Week Closing	Previous Week Closing	Ch. (fils)
MTCC	68.00	48.50	19.5
MARAKEZ	23.00	17.50	5.5
SULTAN	60.00	49.00	11.0
SOKOUK	35.50	29.00	6.5
ADNC	24.00	20.50	3.5
TOP LOSERS OF THE WEEK			
Company	Last Week Closing	Previous Week Closing	Ch. (fils)
TAIBA	70.00	300.00	-230.0
OSOUL	30.00	37.50	-7.5
MASHAER	95.00	106.00	-11.0
AREEC	122.00	136.00	-14.0
KPAK	315.00	350.00	-35.0
SECTORS' ACTIVITY			
The Real Estate sector dominated a total trade volume of around 263.99 million shares changing hands during last week, representing 31.70% of the total market trading volume. On the other hand, the Banks sector's stocks were the highest traded in terms of value; with a turnover of around K.D 28.40 million or 44.90% of last week's total market trading value.			

SECTORS' WEEKLY TRADING ACTIVITY				SECTORS INDICES PERFORMANCE			
Sector	Volume	To Market %	Value	To Market %	Sector	Last Week Closing	Previous Week Closing
OIL & GAS	35,697,549	4.29%	621,574	0.98%	OIL & GAS	745.58	749.40
BASIC MATERIALS	4,923,578	0.59%	1,755,458	2.78%	BASIC MATERIALS	867.36	844.10
INDUSTRIALS	47,189,058	5.67%	4,459,859	7.05%	INDUSTRIALS	939.07	933.47
CONSUMER GOODS	1,503,546	0.18%	1,059,487	1.68%	CONSUMER GOODS	998.13	1,011.96
HEALTH CARE	256,523	0.03%	42,236	0.07%	HEALTH CARE	937.68	891.29
CONSUMER SERVICES	8,425,086	1.01%	701,119	1.11%	CONSUMER SERVICES	929.85	917.02
TELECOMMUNICATIONS	12,205,373	1.47%	5,641,551	8.92%	TELECOMMUNICATIONS	586.41	575.19
BANKS	197,225,032	23.68%	28,399,730	44.90%	BANKS	799.83	761.74
INSURANCE	70,456	0.01%	14,073	0.02%	INSURANCE	1,048.83	1,058.70
REAL ESTATE	263,993,759	31.70%	9,799,473	15.49%	REAL ESTATE	819.95	792.65
FINANCIAL SERVICES	258,777,522	31.07%	10,648,507	16.83%	FINANCIAL SERVICES	505.92	506.72
TECHNOLOGY	2,627,191	0.32%	109,373	0.17%	TECHNOLOGY	811.30	810.01

KSE INDICES				
		Price Index	Weighted index	KSX 15
Weekly	Last week	5,010.39	344.87	809.68
	Previous week	4,946.33	330.24	767.74
	Change (Point)	64.06	14.63	41.94
	Change (%)	1.30%	4.43%	5.46%
Annual	Last year	5,615.12	381.70	900.43
	Change (Point)	-604.73	-36.83	-90.75
	Change (%)	-10.77%	-9.65%	-10.08%

by KSX-15 to realize big weekly gains. The stock market initiated its first sessions of the week with a noticeable growth to the three indices, supported by the active purchasing operations witnessed by many stocks of most sectors, especially the leading stocks which affected the KSX-15 index in particular, and enabled it to reach its highest level in one day since a long time, as its gains exceeded in that session 2.3 percent, which positively reflected on the market capitalization to record good increase by the end of the session. Also, the market could not continue its upward direction in the next session, as all its indices dropped due to the profit collection operations that were present during the session, in addition to the return of the speculated operations to take a negative control over the trading activity.

On the mid-week session, the three market indicators closed mixed, as the Weighted and KSX-15 indices were able to realize some gain despite the profit collection operations that were present during the session, whilst the Price Index decreased slightly affected by the selling operations executed on some small-cap stocks. Moreover, the three stock market indicators returned to close in the green zone in the end of week two sessions, supported by the continued optimism state in controlling the traders' morale, among a purchasing operation concentration on the leading and operational stocks, especially in the Banks and Real Estate sectors. By the end of the last week, the KSE lost since the beginning of the year around KD 2.42 billion, as the market capitalization reached K.D. 22.85 billion, after being KD 25.27 billion by

end of 2015, losing about 9.57 percent. On the weekly level, the market cap for KSE increased by 3.94 percent compared to a week earlier, where it was KD 21.98 billion. On the other hand, the drop in prices of many stocks during last week's trading caused the market cap to lose around KD 10.77 billion, to reach KD 9.65 billion, compared to KD 10.08 billion at the end of a week earlier. Eight of KSE's sectors ended last week in the green zone, while the other four recorded declines. Last week's highest gainer was the Health Care sector, achieving 5.20 percent growth rate as its index closed at 937.68 points. Whereas, in the second place, the Banks sector's index closed at 799.83 points recording 5 percent increase. The Real Estate sector came

in third as its index achieved 3.44 percent growth, ending the week at 819.95 points. On the other hand, the Consumer Goods sector headed the losers list as its index declined by 1.37 percent to end the week's activity at 998.13 points. The Insurance sector was second on the losers' list, which index declined by 0.93 percent, closing at 1,048.83 points, followed by the Oil & Gas sector, as its index closed at 745.58 points at a loss of 0.51 percent. **Sectors' Activity** The Real Estate sector dominated a total trade volume of around 263.99 million shares changing hands during last week, representing 31.70 percent of the total market trading volume. The Financial Services sector was second in terms of trading volume as the sector's traded shares were 31.07 percent of last week's total trading volume, with a total of around 258.78 million shares. On the other hand, the Banks sector's stocks were the highest traded in terms of value; with a turnover of around KD 28.40 million or 44.90 percent of last week's total market trading value. The Financial Services sector took the second place as the sector's last week turnover was approx. KD 10.65 million representing 16.83 percent of the total market trading value. — Prepared by the Studies & Research Department, Bayan Investment Co.

US STOCKS SOAR TO FINISH TOUGH MONTH AS TECH STOCKS CLIMB

WALL STREET WEEKLY REPORT

NEW YORK: US stocks soared on the last trading day of January, with Microsoft, Visa and other tech stocks making the biggest gains in a broad market rally Friday. Indexes rose throughout the day and finished with their biggest gains in about five months. Asian stocks jumped after the Bank of Japan moved to stimulate the economy, and European markets also rose. In the US, tech stocks climbed following strong quarterly results from Microsoft and Visa. Materials companies and banks also made large gains, and the price of oil rose for the fourth day in a row. The US government said Friday that the economy slowed in the fourth quarter, a possibility that had worried investors. But its estimate of the country's gross domestic product was about equal to analysts' forecasts and didn't hurt stocks. The Dow Jones industrial average surged 396.66 points, or 2.5 percent, to 16,466.30. The Standard & Poor's 500 index rose 46.88 points, or 2.5 percent, to 1,940.24, as more than 480 of its component stocks rose. The Nasdaq composite index jumped 107.28 points, or 2.4 percent, to 4,613.95. Stocks made some big gains in the last two weeks, but still finished January with hefty losses. Microsoft added \$3.04, or 5.8 percent, to \$55.09 after its profit and revenue beat expectations. The tech giant posted strong results from its cloud computing business and the unit that sells PC software and Surface tablets and Xbox game consoles. Visa and MasterCard both rose after reporting solid results. Visa climbed \$5.16, or 7.4 percent, to \$74.49 and MasterCard picked up \$5.60, or 6.7 percent, to \$89.03. E-commerce company Amazon took its largest one-day slide in more than a year. Amazon's quarterly

profit more than doubled, but it still fell short of Wall Street's forecasts because of increased costs. Some of those related to its Fulfillment by Amazon service, which handles shipping for sellers and makes them eligible for Amazon Prime shipping. The stock lost \$48.35, or 7.6 percent, to \$587. Honeywell advanced \$5.23, or 5.3 percent, to \$103.20 following its fourth-quarter report, and General Electric added 89 cents, or 3.2 percent, to \$29.10. Xerox said it will split into two publicly traded companies after pressure from activist investor Carl Icahn. Its stock gained 52 cents, or 5.6 percent, to \$9.75. The Commerce Department said US gross domestic product grew only 0.7 percent over the last three months of 2015, while analyst expected 0.8 percent. The agency said consumers spent less, businesses invested less, and exports were down because of global instability. The US economy has been expanding for six and a half years, but on Wednesday the Federal Reserve cautioned that the US economy is slowing down. The Fed also expressed concerns about global growth. Stocks tumbled after the Fed released its assessment. Crude oil prices kept rising. Benchmark US oil added 40 cents, or 1.2 percent, to \$33.62 a barrel in New York. Brent crude, a benchmark for international oils, gained 85 cents, or 2.5 percent, to \$34.74. Oil prices have increased for four days in a row as investors hope for cuts in global production. US government bond prices rose. The yield on the 10-year Treasury note fell to 1.93 percent from 1.98 percent. European bond yields also sank. The euro weakened to \$1.0829 from \$1.0955. Consol Energy jumped \$1.19, or 18

percent, to \$7.94 following its fourth-quarter report and another increase in the price of natural gas. Electronic Arts traded lower. Its profit and revenue forecasts fell a bit short of Wall Street estimates. The video game maker said sales of its "Star Wars: Battlefront" game were strong, but analysts said investors were disappointed with the number of downloads, which are more profitable than sales of physical games. The stock gave up \$5.25, or 7.5 percent, to \$64.55. That was its largest daily loss in almost three years. January was a tough month for the market, and the beginning of the year was the worst in the history of the Dow average and the S&P 500 index. Both fell into a correction, or a drop of at

least 10 percent from a recent peak. The small-cap Russell 2000 index entered a bear market, which means a 20 percent slide. The Dow and S&P 500 both fell more

than 5 percent in January, while the Nasdaq lost almost 8 percent. For each index, that was the largest drop in a single month in years. The Russell finished January down almost 9 percent. Google's parent, Alphabet, might soon overtake Apple as the world's most valuable publicly traded company. Alphabet has surged over the last year while Apple has struggled. Both companies are valued at more than \$500 billion, and Apple is currently about \$16

billion above Alphabet. On Friday the Bank of Japan said it will charge money to banks that leave large amounts of cash parked at the central bank. The policy is intended to encourage commercial banks to lend more money. That could stimulate investment and growth in Japan's struggling economy. Japanese bonds and fell the dollar got stronger compared to the yen. Friday afternoon the dollar traded at 121.10 yen, a huge move for the currency, which traded at 118.78 yen late Thursday. Luke Bartholomew, investment manager at Aberdeen Capital Management, said the move by Japan's central bank is a change of course for the bank and for its governor, Haruhiko Kuroda. "The surprise is they're going to negative rates a little more than a week after Kuroda explicitly said they had no intention of doing so," Bartholomew said. He said the Bank of Japan will need to do more to strengthen Japan's economy. Japan's Nikkei 225 jumped 2.8 percent and Hong Kong's Hang Seng gained 2.5 percent. The Shanghai Composite in mainland China rose 3.1 percent. European indexes also rose. Germany's DAX climbed 1.6 percent. Britain's FTSE 100 added 2.6 percent and France's CAC 40 advanced 2.2 percent. Wholesale gasoline picked up 2.4 cents, or 2.2 percent, to \$1.103 a gallon. Heating oil added 2.4 cents, or 2.3 percent, to \$1.055 a gallon. Natural gas rose 11.6 cents, or 5.3 percent, to \$2.298 per 1,000 cubic feet. Metals prices didn't change much. Gold rose 80 cents to \$1,116.40 an ounce and silver gained 1.1 cents to \$14.243 an ounce. Copper added 1.6 cents to \$2.067 a pound. —AP



NEW YORK: An historic marker on Wall Street in New York. Japan led global stock markets higher on Friday after its central bank introduced a negative interest rate policy in the latest move to overcome malaise in the world's third-biggest economy. The yen dived against the dollar and the euro. —AP

PUERTO RICO CREDITORS ASKED TO TAKE 45% CUT ON DEBT

NEW YORK/SAN JUAN: Puerto Rico on Friday presented a plan to creditors that asks them to take a deep discount on their debt - an aggregate of around 45 percent, two sources familiar with the situation said, as the debt-ridden island tries to pull itself out of fiscal crisis.

With a 45 percent poverty rate and exodus of its population to the United States, Puerto Rico is trying to solve an economic crisis before substantial debt payments come due in May and July. The U.S. territory has defaulted on some of its debt and is trying to persuade creditors to take concessions.

Under the plan unveiled Friday, four tranches of bonds would be exchanged into two new bonds with different

structures. Haircuts on the debt would differ according to which bonds are being exchanged and would reflect the current trading of those bonds, the sources said, with general obligation bonds getting the best treatment, followed by COFINA bonds, subordinated COFINA bonds and then a slew of other bonds which are to be included in the offer.

The aggregate haircut across the structures would be around 45 percent, the sources said. Current trading of the bonds would indicate that general obligation debt would take a 30 percent haircut from the par value. General obligation bonds issued in 2014 are currently trading around 72 cents on the

dollar. The category of other bonds to be exchanged would include about a dozen issues which include those supported by tax and legislative appropriations - such as bonds of highway authority HTA and infrastructure authority PRIFA and even PFC, which defaulted on its payments in August. It would exclude a handful of bonds including PREPA and aqueduct and sewer agency PRASA.

The plan may be greeted with skepticism by creditors, with one of the sources saying it was "uninviting" and noting it was premised on the island's financial projections, which some creditors believe are overly optimistic.

The newly-structured bonds would

consist of a so-called 'base' bond and a 'hope' bond, the sources said, with the latter being a bet on the long-term health of the US territory. The base bond would start paying interest in 2018 at 2 percent, rising to 5 percent in 2021 when it would also pay principal, the sources said. It would have a general obligation guarantee and would receive pledged revenues to support the credit, one of the sources said.

There is a waterfall mechanism built into the offer which would give certain bonds a priority of payments depending on which tranche they are, the source said. The bonds which would be issued are expected to carry a roughly 5 percent yield, that source said.

The hope bond is a 30-year issue and would be based on a revenue formula with the aim of starting to pay out by 2026, the source said, with a cap on the payment for any given year. The territory could elect not to make a payment if unexpected budget costs come up. Some details of the bond exchanges were reported by The Wall Street Journal earlier.

If the territory fails to get a supermajority of creditors to agree to the exchange, it has the right to withdraw the offer, one of the sources said. That could spell a difficult scenario for creditors who may be left with illiquid bonds. The plan is expected to be made public tomorrow, the sources said. —Reuters



TOKYO: Governor of the Bank of Japan Haruhiko Kuroda arrives at his head office in Tokyo on Friday. The Bank of Japan has introduced a negative interest policy in a move to boost the stumbling recovery of the world's third-largest economy. —AP

BOJ'S KURODA BRINGS OUT HIS STUN GUN

TOKYO: Bank of Japan Governor Haruhiko Kuroda used classic shock tactics on Friday to push through his latest unconventional monetary policy of negative rates: deny, then strike.

Despite months of Kuroda saying the policy was not a timely option, BOJ officials had been quietly considering it as financial markets began to question just how far the central bank could go with its aggressive asset-buying program. "Never say never" is a mantra for BOJ officials, who see themselves as pioneers in battling deflation - through zero rates, quantitative easing and other unconventional policies.

But a razor-thin 5-4 vote underscores the difficulty Kuroda had in winning enough board backing for his shock tactic, and illustrates the doubts among board members about the governor's line that by sticking to a 2 percent inflation goal the BOJ can make people believe prices will rise.

Publicly, Kuroda was unwavering in saying Japan was on track to hit his ambitious inflation target and that quantitative and qualitative easing (QQE) was working down through the economy.

But talk of more monetary easing began to emerge last month as policymakers fretted over weak inflation expectations, enough to ponder expanding the stimulus, said people familiar with the BOJ's thinking. The bank's latest quarterly survey showed that corporate inflation expectations weakened in October-December, and other similar market gauges also sagged. Companies blamed the global economic uncertainty for not raising wages or capital expenditure.

Fine-tuning QE last month with elements of monetary easing signalled some alarm among central bankers over the heightened deflationary risks, the people said.

Top BOJ economists began looking into whether to further modify QE or go for a full

makeover of the monetary easing framework - all the time considering what policy tools were still available if the BOJ eased again.

Negative interest rates was one of those options, though it was down the list given the technical difficulties of expanding base money while charging banks for piling up funds in BOJ accounts.

At the start of the year, Kuroda switched to stronger language in public to warn he would do "whatever it takes, including more easing," to hit his price target - likely prompted by the impact of global market turbulence on Japanese share prices and local business sentiment, the people said.

"When stocks are falling this much, it's hard to justify not acting," said one of the individuals, who has occasional contact with Kuroda.

DAVOS TRIGGER?

On Jan. 21, a day before flying out for the annual World Economic Forum in Davos, Kuroda told Japan's parliament he was not considering negative interest rates. But he quietly told his staff to come up with several options in case the BOJ eased.

"Of course, our staff knew that several central banks have adopted negative interest rates, so they've been analysing the step for some time," Kuroda said at a news conference on Friday. "They raised it as one of the options, which we discussed at today's meeting."

By the time Kuroda returned from Davos, BOJ staff were ready to propose negative rates, taking a leaf from the European Central Bank's book. "The ECB showed that combining QE and negative interest rates can work," one BOJ official said. "It was just a question of overcoming some technical difficulties." —Reuters

AS RUSSIAN FOOD PRICES SPIKE HIGHER, SOME WINNERS EMERGE

MCDONALD'S OPENED 59 NEW RESTAURANTS IN RUSSIA LAST YEAR

PAVLISHCHEVO, Russia: For Olga Druganina, Russia's economic turmoil has been a great business opportunity. Four years ago, the former employee at an industrial machines company began to develop her modest farm near Moscow as a business. She started out simply wanting to feed family and friends, but Russian bans on foreign foods and the plunging value of the currency encouraged her to expand and tap the growing national demand for local produce.

First came President Vladimir Putin's sanctions on US and European Union food products in 2014, a response to international sanctions over Russia's role in the Ukraine crisis. Over the last year, the low oil price has brought down the value of the Russian ruble, making imported food more expensive.

"It was a little agriculture to supply our family's needs but when it happened that the sanctions appeared, all that gave a push to our farm's development," Druganina says. "We started developing and got a lot of interest from both small shops and chain stores, and in general from people who want to consume healthy food."

Now, as part of a farmers' cooperative selling high-end organic dairy products to moneyed Muscovites, Druganina employs 18 people and keeps more than 450 cows, sheep, goats and even buffaloes. Her products - cheese, milk, and traditional berry-flavored yoghurts - sell at a premium at the LavkaLavka chain of boutique shops across Moscow, a growing presence named after the Russian for "market stall." Its customers include many who would previously have bought now unaffordable or unavailable imported products.

Local food producers like Druganina are the most visible beneficiaries of the Russian government's policy of import substitution, aiming to replace costlier imported goods with home-grown alternatives. While Putin has called for Russia to head toward self-sufficiency in food, this will take years.

At the other end of the market from Druganina, McDonald's is another surprising winner from Russia's refocusing on domestic food. At a time when sharp food price rises have put Russian family budgets under pressure, the ability to compete on price is key for fast food retailers. Food prices rose 14 percent last year, accord-

economy shrank 3.7 percent last year and is forecast to remain in recession in 2016.

McDonald's is "definitely benefiting" from having a Russia-based production network for many of its products, says Moscow-based analyst Vladimir Pantyushin of Sberbank, who points out that the company's signature Big Mac is

sanctions over the Ukraine crisis.

Pantyushin said many Russian consumers are switching to cheaper food products - swapping out beef for chicken, for example - and avoiding imported fruit and vegetables.

"Right now it's maybe even historically the deepest effect on consumption levels since the



MOSCOW: Workers deliver food in a McDonald's restaurant in Moscow, Russia. A long-standing policy to source as many ingredients as possible locally has paid off for the US fast-food giant, which says it serves 1.1 million customers a day in Russia. McDonald's opened 59 new restaurants in Russia last year and picked out the country as a high growth market in its 2015 financial results. —AP

ing to the state statistics agency, at a time when real wages are falling and unemployment rising.

A long-standing policy to source as many ingredients as possible locally has paid off for the US fast-food giant, which says it serves 1.1 million customers a day in Russia. McDonald's opened 59 new restaurants in Russia last year and picked out the country as a high growth market in its 2015 financial results. That's particularly surprising considering the Russian

cheaper in Russia than almost anywhere else in the world when compared to local earnings. The Big Mac is also the centerpiece of the localization strategy, with all its ingredients produced in Russia.

It is a surprising turnaround for a company which less than two years ago was under apparent political pressure in Russia. Some of its flagship restaurants were temporarily shut down in Moscow by Russian health watchdogs at a time when Russia was hit with US

1990s," when Russia was in economic chaos following the collapse of the Soviet Union, he said. However, modern consumers are not faced with empty shelves and have more choice when looking to cut spending. "Back then, I remember people were really living on basic staples, like cereals," Pantyushin said. "Meat was expensive but even more importantly, meat was not available in the same quantity that it is now." —AP

STIMULUS SKEPTIC DOWNPLAYS CHINA, OIL RISKS FOR EUROZONE

FRANKFURT: A top European monetary official is downplaying the risks for the 19-country euro currency union from an economic slowdown in China and low oil prices.

But Jens Weidmann also cautioned that a long period of excessively low inflation could mean trouble by challenging the credibility of the European Central Bank's monetary policy.

The mixed remarks Thursday come as the European Central Bank prepares to weigh expanding its stimulus measures at its next meeting March 10. Weidmann, who heads Germany's central bank and therefore also sits on the ECB's policy council, is regarded as a stimulus skeptic and made several comments that could argue against more action.

He said in the text of a speech to be delivered in Bonn, Germany, that he saw "no indications of a steep economic collapse in China" that would threaten the eurozone economy but rather an adjustment of excessive share prices there.

And he called cheaper oil "an economic tail wind" for consumers that would help boost growth in the currency union, which is a major oil importer.

Weidmann, however, balanced his remarks with comments that could be seen as supporting more stimulus. For instance, he said that low oil prices could mean that this year's inflation forecast must be "substantially lowered" - a step that could push the ECB to act to achieve its goal of higher inflation.

He also said that any prolonged failure on the part of the ECB to boost inflation close to its goal "surely represents a stress test for the credibility of monetary policy."

ECB head Mario Draghi has awakened market expectations for action March 10, such as adding to the 60 billion euros a month in bond purchases with newly printed money. The goal would be to push up inflation from only 0.2 percent annually toward the bank's goal of just under 2 percent. Lower oil prices have hampered the bank's effort to reach that goal. The written summary of the Dec. 3 meeting indicated Draghi faces skepticism about the benefits of doing more from some members. The bank did increase stimulus at that meeting by extending its bond purchases by six months and by cutting the rate on deposits from commercial banks from minus 0.20 percent to minus 0.30 percent, a step aimed at pushing banks to lend money rather than hoard it.

But those steps were less than markets had expected, and the no-names written summary released later indicated there was some opposition to any added stimulus. —AP



BEIJING: A Chinese investor uses a computer terminal to check stock prices in a brokerage house in Beijing yesterday. Tokyo stocks finished nearly 3 percent higher on Friday while the yen dived as the country's central bank introduced a negative interest rate policy to boost the economy after previous stimulus efforts produced indifferent results. —AP

PAYING BANK INTEREST TO HOLD YOUR DEPOSITS? WHAT GIVES?

WASHINGTON: The idea sounds preposterous: Pay the bank to hold your money? But the Bank of Japan on Friday joined European central banks by introducing negative interest rates - that is, charging, not paying, for deposits.

What gives?

WHAT EXACTLY DID THE BANK OF JAPAN DO?

The Japanese central bank surprised financial markets by announcing a 0.1 percent fee on some deposits by commercial banks. The central bank vowed to cut the interest rate further into negative territory "if judged as necessary."

WHY?

By charging banks for parking their money, the Bank of Japan - like the European Central Bank and others before it - hopes to discourage them from doing so. It wants those banks instead to make loans and thereby provide some stimulus to a fragile economy. The central bank's negative rates are also designed to lower other rates. In addition, negative rates tend to lower the value of a nation's currency, giving its exporters a price advantage in foreign markets.

WON'T BANKS JUST STICK THEIR MONEY UNDER A MATTRESS?

That's harder than you'd think. Michael Pearce, a global economist at Capital Economics, notes that transporting and

storing bills and coins is costly - equal to a 2 percent fee, he calculates. So it might make more sense to keep the money where it is.

"Negative rates have not yet triggered a 'flight to cash,'" Pearce wrote in a report Friday.

DO NEGATIVE RATES WORK?

"The verdict is quite mixed," says Nariman Behravesh, chief economist at IHS.

The ECB rolled out negative rates in 2014. But European banks are still reluctant to lend, the economy of the 19-country eurozone is barely moving and inflation remains well below the central bank's 2 percent target. Behravesh says Europe's banks are still trying to recover from the financial crisis. Japan's banks are a bit further along in the recovery process, he says, and negative rates might prove more effective in getting them to lend more.

Switzerland's central bank had some success turning to negative rates in 2014 to rein in a rocketing currency that was hurting Swiss exporters, Pearce says.

Behravesh says Japan may be trying to drive the Japanese yen lower in advance of further declines in the currency of its trading rival China, which is trying to manage an economic slowdown.

"What they are hoping to do is buffer themselves from the troubles coming from China," Behravesh says. —AP



INFINITI REVEALS DARING Q60 SPORTS COUPE AT NAIAS 2016 BOLD EXTERIOR SHOWS CLEAR PERFORMANCE INTENT FAITHFUL TO 2015 CONCEPT

DUBAI: Infiniti has unveiled the new Q60 sports coupe at the 2016 North American International Auto Show (NAIAS) in Detroit. Designed and engineered to perform, the Q60 offers a compelling combination of daring design and exhilarating performance and dynamics.

The bold exterior of the Q60 expresses a powerful elegance through its expressive proportions and taut, muscular lines. The sports coupe maintains the distinctive lines and sharp angles of the original concept, first

revealed at the 2015 NAIAS twelve months ago.

Speaking in Detroit, Carlos Ghosn, CEO of Nissan Motor Corporation and the Renault-Nissan Alliance, commented: "As the third-generation version of Infiniti's iconic sports coupe, the new Q60 builds on Infiniti's brand heritage and history of technology leadership. It reinforces Infiniti's reputation for performance, elegance, and driver-focused design".

Innovative drivetrain technologies deliver

a powerful drive, bringing the Q60's dynamic promise to life. The high performance 3.0-liter V6 twin-turbo engine from the new and exclusive 'VR' powertrain family continues the brand's longstanding heritage of six-cylinder powertrains production. The new V6 engine comes in two power ratings: 300hp or 400hp, with the latter offering one of the best power-to-efficiency ratios in the sports coupe class.

The Q60 delivers a truly engaging experience, thanks to Infiniti's unique balance of ride comfort and agile handling. Maximizing

this balance is Infiniti's new optional Dynamic Digital Suspension, which has been engineered to provide crisp handling responses and superior ride comfort.

Infiniti's available second-generation Direct Adaptive Steering brings improved levels of steering feel and feedback to the Q60, and the Drive Mode Selector gives drivers the option to personalize the steering's precise responses to suit their preferences.

Roland Krueger, President of Infiniti Motor Company, added: "The Infiniti Q60 conveys a

powerful elegance through its daring design, next-generation ride and handling technologies, and powertrains offering up to 400hp. The Q60 will attract new customers to the Infiniti brand and affirm our position in the sports coupe segment."

The world premiere of the new Q60 sports coupe comes at a time of rapid growth for Infiniti, released in the midst of an intense global product offensive. Infiniti sold a record 215,250 new vehicles in 2015, a year-on-year rise of 16 percent.



Ray Gammell, Etihad Airways' Chief People and Performance Officer, and NYUAD Provost, Fabio Piano, with the senior executives selected for the Leadership in Action program at NYUAD.

ETIHAD AIRWAYS SIGNS MOU WITH NEW YORK UNIVERSITY ABU DHABI NEW EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM



(Left to right) Ray Gammell, Etihad Airways' Chief People and Performance Officer, and NYUAD Provost, Fabio Piano, celebrate the signing of the MoU between Etihad Airways and NYUAD.

ABU DHABI: Etihad Airways, the national airline of the United Arab Emirates, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with New York University Abu Dhabi (NYUAD), to develop and deliver an executive leadership development program.

The Leadership in Action program, exclusively designed for Etihad Airways, aims to strengthen and cultivate leadership skills across the airline, with a major focus on UAE national executives. The program will also benefit Etihad Airways' subsidiaries and its equity partner airlines.

After a rigorous assessment process, 30 senior executives were selected from across the organization, including 15 UAE national employees, as well as two executives from Alitalia.

The participants will undertake the comprehensive eight-month program combining invaluable executive training with on-the-job learning and executive coaching.

Ray Gammell, Etihad Airways' Chief People and Performance Officer, said: "This innovative program demonstrates our ongo-

ing commitment to the development of our international and UAE national leaders. It will evolve our executives into better leaders who can embrace change, build effective teams and leverage diversity in our multicultural environment. This will be instrumental in building a strong leadership culture throughout the organization and equipping our people with the right tools to manage the airline's future growth."

The formal training is a fully integrated classroom training program developed in partnership with NYUAD, which will draw expert faculty from its campuses in Abu Dhabi, New York, and Shanghai. Modules will include leadership presence, innovation, problem solving, team building, as well self-awareness tools and strategic projects.

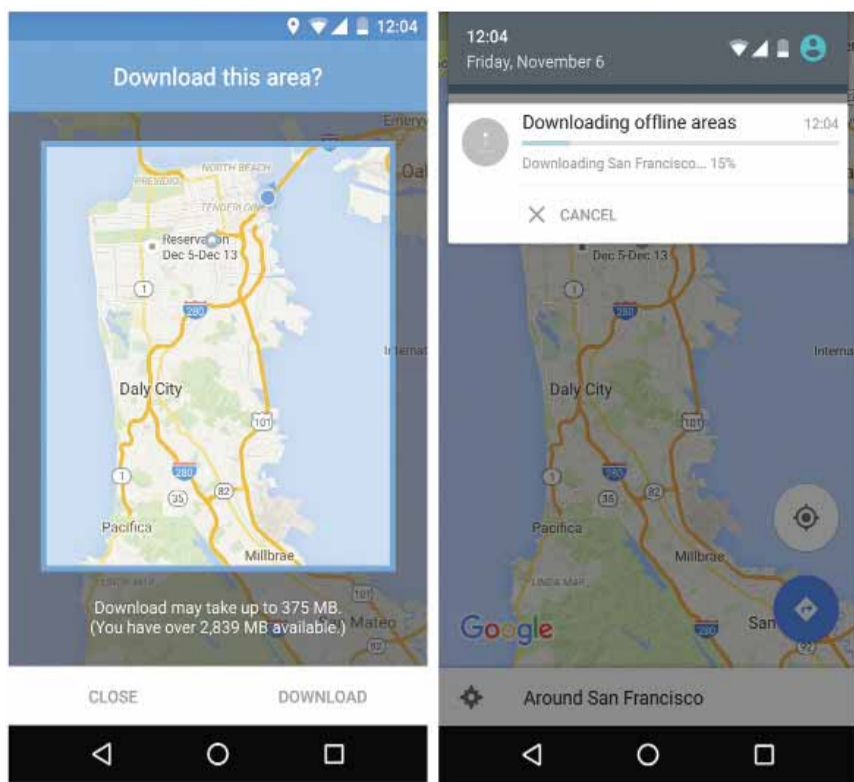
Participants will also undertake long-term on-the-job strategic projects where they develop innovative business ideas. Executive one-on-one coaching and mentoring sessions will help support each student's personal development by focusing on their individual areas of strengths and

opportunities.

NYUAD Provost, Fabio Piano, said: "This agreement between NYU Abu Dhabi and Etihad Airways illustrates our commitment to fulfilling NYUAD's vision of establishing Abu Dhabi as a leading international hub for attracting, developing and retaining top global talent through transformative executive and professional education programs. As a top-tier University and research institution, NYUAD is consistently seeking new ways to contribute to growth and innovation within the UAE and beyond. This partnership underscores that commitment, and we look forward to working closely with Etihad Airways on developing new opportunities for collaboration."

The MoU also provides a formal framework for cooperation that will benefit NYUAD students in the areas of student internships, lectures by distinguished international speakers, seminars by Etihad Airways' highly-skilled Learning and Development team, networking and other advanced opportunities.

REVIEW: GOING OFFLINE WITH GOOGLE MAPS



This smartphone screen grab provided by Google shows a map of the San Francisco Bay Area during a demonstration of Google Maps' new offline navigation option. — AP

By Anick Jesdanun

ORLANDO: I knew I wouldn't get real-time traffic information and other features when I opted to rely solely on Google's offline mapping capabilities for a week in and around Disney World near Orlando, Florida. In fact, Google Maps gave me trouble the moment I tried to leave the airport parking lot. But things got much smoother after that. It wasn't exactly painless; while I mostly got where I needed to go, it sometimes came at the cost of delays that had nothing to do with traffic. But being able to navigate with no cellular connection certainly beat getting lost because I had no signal.

How It Works

You might not realize this, but mobile mapping apps can typically still direct you even if you lose your cellular connection; their turn-by-turn voice prompts can tap GPS location information when cellular signals aren't available (though with less precision than having both). It's still a bit like wandering around in the dark: The apps can't display a map for you without downloading it first, and they need an Internet connection for that. They also can't reroute you if make a wrong turn. That's where Google Maps' offline features come in. You simply download mapping data for a given area ahead of time. That gives you local maps to enable GPS-based naviga-

tion. The downloaded data also includes enough information on nearby shops and other businesses so that you can simply give the app the name of your destination rather than a specific address. If you're old-school, you could even use these maps to find your way around as you would with traditional paper maps.

This is helpful if you're in a remote national park with poor cellular connectivity or if you're traveling internationally where cellular data gets expensive. Just download mapping data for the places you're going before leaving home or from a hotel room with Wi-Fi. For this test, I used a Samsung Android phone with its cellular service turned off. The Google Maps iPhone app also offers offline access.

Early Mishaps

In the Orlando airport's rental-car parking deck, Google Maps found my first destination easily. Trouble was, it didn't know where to start. Google Maps was designed for parking garages with spotty cellular connection. Here, though, the GPS signal was also terrible; the app thought I was still in New York. I had to walk over to an exit ramp to find a clear GPS signal. This might not be a problem if you're coming from somewhere nearby, like your office, but the app needs a location refresh after flights.

I also couldn't request a route without highways or tolls, as Google Maps allows in

normal use. I don't mind paying a few dollars in tolls, but many bridges and highways these days won't take cash. If you don't have an electronic-payment service such as Florida's SunPass, you're billed using a photograph of your license plate. Rental-car companies typically add fees when this happens. Fortunately, the toll plazas I encountered took cash.

Other Limitations

With no real-time traffic data, you don't get alternate directions if there's unusual congestion ahead. Information on businesses is also limited; you get contact information and hours of operations, but not customer reviews. You also can't use offline features for mass transit, walking or biking. It's for driving only, and if you try to use it as a pedestrian, it might send you down an interstate shoulder. (We don't recommend that.) I knew all that ahead of time. But there were still two big surprises:

- I wasn't able to search businesses by type, such as gas stations. I tried typing big gas-stations brands such as "Chevron" and "Exxon," but found only ones several towns away. I had to slide the map around until I found what looked like a gas station near the airport.

- When offline, you miss hints about which lane you need, such as the second lane from the right if you need to steer left just after taking an exit ramp. — AP

OBAMA WANTS \$4BN TO HELP STUDENTS LEARN IT

WASHINGTON: US President Barack Obama said yesterday he will ask Congress for billions of dollars to help students learn computer science skills and prepare for jobs in a changing economy. "In the new economy, computer science isn't an optional skill. It's a basic skill, right along with the three R's," Obama said in his weekly radio and Internet address. Obama said only about one-quarter of K-12 schools offer computer science instruction, but that most parents want their children to develop analytical and coding skills.

"Today's auto mechanics aren't just sliding under cars to change the oil. They're working on machines that run on as many as 100 million lines of code," Obama said. "That's 100 times more than the Space Shuttle. Nurses are analyzing data and managing electronic health records. Machinists are writing computer programs."

The federal budget proposal for 2017 that Obama plans to send Congress on Feb 9 will seek \$4 billion for grants to states and \$100 mil-

lion for competitive grants for school districts over the next three years to teach computer science in elementary, middle and high schools, administration officials said. Separately, the National Science Foundation and the Corporation for National and Community Service this year will start spending \$135 million to train teachers over five years.

Obama said also wants governors, mayors, business leaders and tech entrepreneurs to become advocates for more widespread computer science education. Brad Smith, president of Microsoft, said computer science education is an "economic and social imperative for the next generation of American students." Smith, who spoke on a media call arranged by the White House, said that up to a million US technology jobs could be left unfilled by the end of the decade. Meanwhile, countries as large as China and as small as Estonia are expanding computer science education, Smith said, but in the US "we're moving, frankly, just more slowly than we need." — AP



WASHINGTON: The "Hub" inside the Washington Post's news room brings editors into a common space and allows them to keep track of breaking news and digital media metrics in its new headquarters on Jan 28, 2016. (Inset) Amazon founder and Washington Post owner Jeff Bezos delivers remarks during the opening ceremony of the media company's new location. — AFP

FACEBOOK BLOCKS UNLICENSED GUN SALES

SAN FRANCISCO: Facebook has banned people using the social network for unlicensed gun sales after pressure from anti-gun violence groups alarmed over the ease with which firearms are sold online in the United States. Although Facebook and its Instagram photo-sharing service do not participate in outright gun sales, the sites have been a forum for negotiations. The California-based social network on Friday updated its policy for managing regulated goods to prohibit people who aren't gun dealers from using Facebook to offer guns for sale or negotiate private sales of firearms.

"Over the last two years, more and more people have been using Facebook to discover products and to buy and sell things to one another," Facebook head of product policy Monika Bickert said in an email response to AFP. The policy change, however, will not affect licensed gun dealers who tout their wares on the social network, which is used by 1.59 billion people monthly.

Facebook has similar restrictions on regulated goods such as prescription and illegal drugs. Facebook and Instagram in 2014 restricted posts about buying or selling guns to users 18 years of age or older. The social network has been under political pressure in the United States to prevent posts that could result in people sidestepping gun-buying laws or background checks. Gun control groups - some of which have been pressuring Facebook for years to tighten firearms sales on the site - were jubilant about the policy change.



'A Big Thumbs Up'

"A big thumbs up to Facebook for taking this important step!" said Dan Gross, president of The Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, in a statement issued after the announcement. "The Brady Campaign urged Facebook to bar unlicensed gun sales in 2014 and we are happy to see that Facebook has finally adopted our policy," he said, adding that the move "will help keep guns out of the hands of dangerous people."

An anti-gun group, Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America, said it was the fruition of two years of concerted pressure on Facebook by it and other groups. Those efforts, said "Moms" founder Shannon Watts, led to "new policies to curb children's exposure to guns and to clarify state laws around selling and buying guns online." "Our continued relationship with Facebook resulted in today's even stronger stance, which will prevent dangerous people from getting guns and save American lives," Watts said. — AFP

GEOMETRY HELPED ANCIENT BABYLONIANS TRACK PLANETS

MIAMI: People in ancient Babylon used geometry to calculate the position of Jupiter some 1,400 years earlier than previously thought, researchers said Friday. The findings in the US journal *Science* are based on an analysis of four ancient tablets that were written in Babylon between 350 and 50 BC. Previously, historians believed this kind of sophisticated geometry was born in 14th century Europe.

"These tablets are the earliest known examples of using geometry to calculate positions in time-space and suggest that ancient Babylonian astronomers may have influenced the emergence of such techniques in Western science," said the study led by Mathieu Ossendrijver of Humboldt University in Berlin, Germany. "These tablets redefine our history books, revealing that European scholars in Oxford and Paris in the 14th century, who were previously credited with developing such calcu-

lations, were in fact centuries behind their ancient Babylonian counterparts."

The tablets show Jupiter appearing along the horizon at two intervals, noting the planet's position at 60 and 120 days. They also contain geometrical calculations based on a trapezoid's area, and its "long" and "short" sides. The study noted that it was previously thought that Babylonian astronomers only used arithmetical concepts. But the ancient astronomers were in fact able to use geometry in an abstract sense to compute the time it took for Jupiter to travel, and its velocity.

Their methods "foreshadow the development of calculus," said the study. Historian John Steele of Brown University, who was not involved in the study, described it to *Science* magazine as "an extremely important contribution to the history of Babylonian astronomy, and more generally to the history of science." — AFP

BEZOS TAKES PAGE FROM AMAZON TO PUSH POST

PAPER HEADS INTO DIGITAL ERA

WASHINGTON: Under new owner Jeff Bezos, The Washington Post is no longer just a newspaper. It's reinventing itself as a "media and technology company" that hopes to blaze a trail for newsrooms struggling to transition to a digital era. The transformation may not be apparent on the surface, but the Internet billionaire has ripped up and revamped the technology underpinnings at the Post since buying the storied daily in 2013, while investing in the newsroom with more journalists, video offerings and tools for digital storytelling.

In a symbolic step, Bezos was present at Thursday's dedication of the new tech-rich Post headquarters, a few blocks from the musty 1970s building that is being razed. "I am a huge fan of leaning into the future," said Bezos, the founder of online giant Amazon who snapped up the struggling newspaper for \$250 million in personal funds. Some of his efforts appear to be paying off. The Post last year overtook The New York Times in digital visitors, claiming 76 million unique users in December, according to research firm comScore.

That appeared to put it on track toward Bezos's goal of becoming a new "newspaper of record," an open challenge to its New York rival. The growth comes from upgrading all facets of the Post's digital offerings with a revamped website and mobile apps, Post content on applications from Facebook and Google, and a Post app pre-loaded onto Amazon Fire and Kindle tablets and offered at a discounted price.

The Post is also offering its content for free through websites of smaller newspapers around the United States, in a step toward fulfilling its ambition as a national rival to The New York Times and Wall Street Journal. The Bezos experiment is being closely watched in the industry as newspapers struggle with declining print readership and advertising that pressures the business model of once-lucrative metropolitan dailies.

"The most important thing he has done is give the Post runway - giving the organization a chance to actually take some risks that may not immediately pay off financially," said Nikki Usher, a George Washington University professor specializing in new media and the future of journalism. "This has allowed them the freedom to experiment. You see them hiring some of the most talented people in product and business areas, and also doubling down on reporting."

Know thy Customer

Ken Doctor, a media consultant and analyst who writes a blog called *Newsnomics*, said Bezos is borrowing some of the techniques he used to build Amazon into an online powerhouse. "Amazon is world class in the customer experience," Doctor told AFP. "It has figured out what people want and made that as seamless as possible. And it is Jeff Bezos's quest to bring that same level of understanding to The

Washington Post." Doctor said a big part of that strategy is creating a technology "platform" - one that not only performs fast but delivers analytics on how readers are interacting with the website and apps, and also integrates with marketing to deliver targeted advertising and other messages. The Post platform dubbed "Arc" made its debut in August, and is also being offered to other newspapers to improve their performance and analytics - a move that could according to Doctor help the Washington daily collect useful reader data. "That's the roadmap - to learn rapidly about news readers in the same way that Amazon has learned about buyers of goods," Doctor said.

Bezos upgraded the Post technology team which he said rivals "any team in Silicon Valley." At the same time, he said he hopes to maintain the strong journalistic tradition at the Post. He has hired dozens of journalists to bring the newsroom staff up to 700, second only to The New York Times, with more than 1,200.

"We now have a real newspaper fight on," GWU's Usher said. "Bezos has decided he wants to make the Post a national paper and you are starting to see the results of that."

'22nd Century Newsroom'

Post publisher Frederick Ryan, hired by Bezos in 2014, told the dedication event that the Post is "a media and technology company" where "journalists work side by side with rock-star engineers" to produce compelling content. "Our teams are looking ahead to devices and platforms that have not yet been invented," Ryan said. "We are looking ahead to the newsroom for the 22nd century." While Bezos appears to be making strides at the Post, it remains to be seen whether the strategy can be duplicated at other news organizations, many of which lack the same brand recognition and may not have a billionaire owner willing to invest for the long term. — AFP

ISRAEL'S CYBER SECTOR BLOOMS IN THE DESERT

BEERSHEBA: A modern metropolis rising from Israel's Negev desert stands on the frontline of a global war against hacking and cybercrime, fulfilling an ambition of the country's founding father. David Ben Gurion famously said he wanted to make the Negev bloom. Today, in the streets of Beersheba, a city of 200,000, his dream is taking shape in a form he likely did not anticipate.

Long a poor relation of hyper-modern Tel Aviv, Beersheba has traditionally been a refuge for poor, working class and Sephardic Jews of Middle Eastern descent. But the city in the vast Negev desert of southern Israel has experienced a rapid gentrification since the start of the decade, during which middle class neighbourhoods have expanded. The real estate boom in Beersheba has been fuelled by the city's ambition to be Israel's cyber capital, especially since the creation of its industrial park CyberPark.

Two ultra-modern complexes house a dozen Israeli companies, start-ups, venture capital funds and foreign groups such as Lockheed Martin, Deutsche Telekom, Oracle and IBM. Already, 1,500 technicians, engineers and researchers are hard at work. Many have been trained in the computer sciences department of the local Ben Gurion University - part of a planned symbiosis between the university and the company, which are linked by pedestrian bridges. "We have established a perfect

ecosystem with the integration of Israeli companies and foreign multinationals, the university and the foundation of the Israeli army specialised in cybersecurity, which will move from the region of Tel Aviv to Beersheba," said Tom Ahi Dror, CyberSpark project leader at the Israeli National Cyber Bureau.

Starting from Scratch

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has spoken highly of the development, saying the close proximity allows "a physical interaction between security officials, academia and industry, in Israel and abroad." "They meet, they talk and they create together," he told a "CyberTech" conference in Tel Aviv, calling cybersecurity "vital" for a small country like Israel, which is faced with multiple threats and a favourite target of hackers. According to a study carried out in 2012, Israel "may be the most heavily targeted country in the world - by hostile hackers, nonstate actors, and states - with as many as a thousand web attacks per minute". Tal Elal, deputy mayor of the city, pinpoints the secret of CyberSpark's success: "We started from scratch four years ago and we designed a customised project to meet the exact needs of companies specialising in cybersecurity." Two more complexes comprising 27 buildings are to be added, and the municipality expects the population to grow by 100,000 in the next 10 years. — AFP

IN FACE OF ZIKA VIRUS, WOMEN PONDER ABORTION, CHILDLESSNESS

SAN SALVADOR: Maria Erlinda Guzman desperately wants a baby, and has been undergoing fertility treatments at El Salvador's largest women's hospital. But now, she fears her dream of motherhood may be dashed by Zika. After her country took the extraordinary step of advising women to avoid pregnancies for two years due to concerns about the rapidly spreading virus, the 34-year-old now plans to start using contraception. She worries that she may be too old to conceive by the time it is considered safe to do so. "I'm going to be left childless," Guzman said.

While Zika's exact link to the rare birth defect known as microcephaly is still unclear, warnings from El Salvador, at least six other countries and health officials across the Americas are raising anxiety for millions of would-be and could-be mothers in affected areas. For some it's a dilemma pitting religious beliefs about abortion against the risk that their babies could be born with abnormally small heads and a short life expectancy.

World Health Organization officials said Thursday the virus is "spreading explosively" and the Americas could see up to 4 million cases of Zika in the next year. And as it expands to countries where abortion is strictly limited or outlawed altogether, doctors and health advocates fear that many women could resort to back-alley procedures that imperil their health. "What happens in a country where abortion is completely illegal?" said Angelica Rivas of Acdatee, a Salvadoran nonprofit that advocates for decriminalization of the procedure. "What can be expected is an increase in the

rates of illegal abortions, unsafe abortions and a mental health issue for women."

At least 4.4 million pregnancies were aborted in 2008 in Latin America, about 95 percent of them clandestinely and in unsafe conditions, according to the Guttmacher Institute, a US-based nonprofit that promotes reproductive health rights. "When women are desperate ... they will seek out their own solutions," said Carmen Barroso, Western Hemisphere director for the International Planned Parenthood Federation. In El Salvador, she said, half of all pregnancies are unplanned. So far, only Brazil has seen a sharp rise in microcephaly cases suspected of a link to Zika.

Rape, danger

Abortion is illegal in Brazil except in cases of rape, danger to the mother's life or anencephaly, another birth defect involving the brain. Authorities have said they don't plan to add a microcephaly exception, though the Folha de S Paulo newspaper argued in an editorial that Zika raises a need to discuss decriminalization of abortion. Microcephaly usually occurs because of abnormal brain development that numerous conditions can trigger: genetic abnormalities, disorders such as Down syndrome, drug or alcohol use, other infections such as cytomegalovirus or even serious nutritional problems. WHO officials say it may be six to nine months before a link between Zika and microcephaly is established or dismissed.

Complicating the mystery is how to detect which pregnancies really may be at risk. Microcephaly typically has not been diagnosed in early pregnancy. One study

published in 2000 found it was diagnosed on average at 28 weeks, although Dr. Jeffrey Ecker, a maternal-fetal medicine specialist at Massachusetts General Hospital, said it sometimes may be detected in the second trimester. "We don't know as much as we would like," Ecker said. "That's the caveat that hangs over all of this." In the United States, if there's concern that a pregnant woman may have been infected by Zika while traveling abroad, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists is recommending ultrasound exams every three to four weeks to evaluate the fetus.

No symptoms

Moreover, about 80 percent of those infected with Zika present no symptoms, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Zika does not produce effects in all pregnant mothers. ... It is a rate that we don't understand yet," said Dr. Carlos Espinal of the American Health Foundation. The type of mosquito that transmits Zika, and also dengue and chikungunya, is present in much of the Americas. Even in countries where there have been no confirmed cases of microcephaly, such as El Salvador, nervous women are asking themselves tough questions.

"I can't say what I would do. It's illegal to abort - they would throw me in jail," said Dinora Martinez, a 26-year-old Salvadoran woman who is not pregnant but has a 5-year-old son. But she noted that there are clandestine clinics where her countrywomen can terminate a pregnancy: "If I did," she added, "I wouldn't tell anyone." So far no health agency has suggested abortion for



BAHIA: Antonio Bandeira, who was part of the team of researchers who identified the Zika virus in Brazil, talks by mobile in front of the Santa Helena hospital in Camacari, Bahia, Brazil. Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff has vowed to "win the war" against the Zika virus, but some experts criticized her government's response and warned the Olympics could fuel the disease's spread. — AFP

pregnant women who contract Zika. For many who are already pregnant, reports about Zika have injected fear into what would otherwise be a joyous time.

"I'm afraid that my baby could have some problem," said Kerly Rocio Ariza, a 17-year-old Colombian who is five months into her first pregnancy and was recently diagnosed with Zika. "It terrifies me because I've seen the symptoms I had on TV, and in truth they told me it was dangerous." In the

Ecuadorian capital of Quito, about 2,850 meters (9,350 feet) above sea level in the Andes, Maria de Jesus Rivera said she will put off trips to the beach for the five months remaining before she gives birth. The mosquito that transmits Zika is believed to be unable to reproduce above 1,800 meters (5,900 feet). "We're afraid," the 26-year-old woman said. "We want the child to be born healthy with no problems of any kind." — AP



RECIFE: Boys ride a scooter at a slum in Recife, Pernambuco state, Brazil. Brazilian officials still say they believe there's a sharp increase in cases of microcephaly and strongly suspect the Zika virus, which first appeared in the country last year, is to blame. — AP

RACE FOR ZIKA VACCINE GATHERS MOMENTUM AS VIRUS SPREADS

US CDC ACTIVATES ZIKA EMERGENCY RESPONSE CENTER

RIO DE JANEIRO: Companies and scientists are racing to create a Zika vaccine as concern grows over the mosquito-borne virus that has been linked to severe birth defects and is spreading quickly through the Americas. Zika is now present in 23 countries and territories in the Americas, Brazil, the hardest-hit country, has reported around 3,700 cases of the devastating birth defect called microcephaly that are strongly suspected to be related to Zika. The Geneva-based World Health Organization (WHO), stung by criticism that it reacted too slowly to West Africa's Ebola epidemic, convenes an emergency meeting on Monday to help determine its response to the spread of the virus.

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has activated an emergency operations center staffed around the clock to address Zika, agency officials said. On Thursday, the WHO said as many as 4 million people in the Americas may become infected by Zika, adding urgency to the research efforts. Vaccine developers made clear a vaccine for widespread public use is at least months, if not years, away. The closest prospect may be from a consortium including drugmaker Inovio Pharmaceuticals Inc that could have a vaccine ready for emergency use before year-end, according to one of its lead developers. Inovio's share price gained more than 15 percent in Friday trading.

Canadian scientist Gary Kobinger told Reuters on Thursday the first stage of testing on humans could begin as early as August. If successful, the vaccine might be used during a public health emergency by October or November, said Kobinger, who helped develop a trial vaccine for the Ebola virus. Privately

owned vaccine developer Hawaii Biotech Inc said it began a formal program to test a Zika vaccine last fall as the virus started to gain traction in Brazil, although it has no timetable yet for clinical trials. "Right now, we are in the pre-clinical stage, as I suspect everyone is," Chief Executive Officer Dr. Elliot Parks said.

Another private vaccine developer, Boston-based Replikin Ltd, said it was preparing to start animal studies on a Zika vaccine in the next 10 days. Data from the trials on mice and rabbits would likely be out in the next couple of months, Replikin's Chairman Samuel Bogoch said. "No one has the \$500 million on hand to take it (a vaccine) all the way to human trials. Somewhere along the course we hope to have big pockets join us," Bogoch said.

'Fight the mosquito'

Zika had been viewed as a relatively mild illness until Brazilian health officials identified it as a matter of concern for pregnant women. While a direct causal relationship has not been established, scientists strongly suspect a link between Zika and thousands of children born in Brazil with abnormally small heads, brain defects and impaired vision.

There is no treatment for Zika infection. Efforts to combat Zika are focused on protecting people from being bitten and on eradicating mosquitoes, a tough task in many parts of Latin America, where people live in poverty and there are plentiful breeding grounds for the insect. "We do not have a vaccine for Zika yet. The only thing we can do is fight the mosquito," Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff said on Friday, reiterating her call for a national eradication

effort. Rousseff said tests for the development of a vaccine would begin next week at the Butantan Institute, one of Brazil's leading biomedical research centers in Sao Paulo.

US President Barack Obama spoke on Friday with Rousseff about the spread of the virus, the White House said. "The leaders agreed on the importance of collaborative efforts to deepen our knowledge, advance research and accelerate work to develop better vaccines and other technologies to control the virus," the White House said in a statement. Zika has hit Brazil just as it prepares to host the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro on Aug 5-21, an event that draws hundreds of thousands of athletes, team officials and spectators. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) assured teams on Friday the Olympics would be safe from Zika, but urged visitors to carefully protect themselves.

US lawmakers have begun to press the Obama administration for details of its response to Zika. At least 31 people in the country have been infected, all of them after travel to affected countries. The US Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee is planning a hearing on Zika "very soon," said Republican Senator Lamar Alexander of Tennessee, who called the threat posed by the virus to the United States a "big concern." Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease, said he did not expect the United States to be hit hard like other some countries in South America and the Caribbean. "We prepare for the possibility of a major outbreak but we believe it is unlikely to happen," Fauci said. — Reuters

VENEZUELA WATER CRISIS INCREASES ZIKA THREAT

CARACAS: Yurman Torres is standing in line at the foot of Avila mountain, on the edge of Caracas, to fill a large jug with water, a rare commodity in crisis-hit Venezuela. The scarcity of water is just one of a long list of headaches for the struggling South American oil giant, but it comes with a particularly nasty risk. As Venezuelans stockpile water in their homes, health officials warn, they risk fueling an expansion of the mosquito population, and with it the transmission of Zika, the mosquito-borne virus blamed for causing brain damage in babies.

"What can we do? We have to come here every day," said Torres, 36, who fills two jugs every morning before going to work—just one of the daily hoops he jumps through to find the basic necessities in a country reeling from a deep recession and chronic shortages. Venezuela, which hardly needed another problem to add to its triple-digit inflation and plunging oil revenues, has registered 4,700 suspected cases of Zika since the virus, which originated in Africa, began sweeping through Latin America last year.

And the official estimate for the number of cases is probably far too low, according to Julio Castro, a doctor and professor at the tropical medicine institute at Central University of Venezuela. He estimates the real number of cases is at least 250,000. The virus is transmitted by the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, the same species that carries yellow fever, dengue and chikungunya. It is relatively mild compared to that trio, resembling a mild flu with a rash.

But since it arrived in Latin America there has been a surge in babies born with microcephaly, or abnormally small heads. Health officials suspect the birth defect is being caused by expecting mothers catching Zika during pregnancy. And the water crisis increases the risk, said Castro: mosquitoes breed in stagnant water, and the buckets and cisterns Venezuelans are using to ensure their water supply are ideal habitats within which

the insects multiply. "My daughter-in-law woke up this morning with what appear to be the symptoms," said Maryori Magallanes, a 50-year-old teacher, as sanitation workers fumigated her house for mosquitoes. "I have a niece who's pregnant. They say there's a substantial risk. They ought to fumigate constantly."

More than just drought

The Venezuelan legislature, which the opposition recently wrested from leftist President Nicolas Maduro's party after 17 years, has passed a motion calling for increased efforts to stem the crisis and warning that the country's 18 largest reservoirs are nearing minimum levels. In Caracas, cistern trucks line up to load water normally used for public parks and deliver it to parched households. The government has introduced rationing, blaming late rains.

"Since 2013, the rainfall volume has been 45 percent lower than in previous years," said Water Minister Ernesto Paiva. But the problem is more than just a drought, said the former president of Hidrocapital, the public water management firm for the north of the country, the area hardest hit by the shortages. Venezuela is home to one of the largest rivers in the Americas, the Orinoco, but has only built two new reservoirs in the past 18 years—not enough to keep up with population growth, he said.

Venezuela "has stopped making the necessary infrastructure investments that would guarantee water supplies," he said. Meanwhile, Venezuelans have little choice but to stockpile water at home—one of the biggest problems in the fight against Zika, according to one of the researchers who first identified the disease in Latin America, Brazilian virologist Gubio Soares. "There's no water so people keep containers full of it, which is a breeding ground," he said in Salvador, in northeast Brazil, at the epicenter of the outbreak. "Most mosquitoes today are reproducing inside the home." — AFP



LIMA: A health worker fumigates against the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, a vector of the Dengue, Chikungunya and Zika viruses, inside a house in Lima, Peru. The Zika virus causes only a mild illness in most people. But there's mounting evidence linking it to a birth defect, especially in Brazil. — AP

ASIA URGES SICK TRAVELERS TO REPORT ZIKA SYMPTOMS

BANGKOK: The Zika virus is spreading rapidly in Latin America, and Asian governments have issued advisories in a bid to contain the spread of the disease, which could be linked to birth defects and can cause temporary paralysis. So far, no Zika case has been confirmed anywhere in Asia. A look at some of the measures announced:

MALAYSIA

Health authorities have asked travelers from South and Central America who display symptoms such as fever and rashes to immediately report to health centers. Deputy Health Director Dr. Lokman Hakim Sulaiman said the move was imperative as it was not practical to conduct public health screenings at national gateways. "The virus is difficult to detect and there is no quick point-of-care test which can be used," he said.

JAPAN

Japan's Foreign Ministry has issued a safety advisory urging women to try to avoid traveling to Brazil and other affected countries during pregnancy, and advised all travelers to the area to use caution. It suggested wearing long sleeves and pants, using mosquito sprays and avoid leaving out buckets, empty gardening pots and other containers that can catch water, and report to medical institutions in case of developing suspected symptoms. The health authorities asked medical facilities to advise pregnant women not to visit the Zika areas, conduct test on suspected patients returning from the areas and send samples to the national lab.

AUSTRALIA

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is advising pregnant women to avoid travel in areas where Zika is active.

The federal government is also asking Australian doctors to look out for signs of Zika infection in travelers returning from affected areas. A spokeswoman said Australian laboratories could diagnose the virus if required.

INDIA

Health Minister Shri J P Naddahas stressed the control of the spread of *Aedes* mosquitoes that transmit dengue and the Zika virus and breed in clean water. "Community awareness plays an instrumental role in this regard. There is a need for greater awareness amongst community," he said. India is also stepping up surveillance and has set up a technical group to monitor the situation.

HONG KONG

Health officials are advising pregnant women and those planning pregnancy to adopt necessary anti-mosquito precau-

tions, and consider deferring trips to areas with Zika virus transmissions. Secretary for Food and Health Dr. Ko Wing-man also said that because only up to one quarter of the infected persons might develop relatively mild illness, "the attention was therefore not too big." *Aedes* mosquitoes are currently not found in Hong Kong, the Health Department said, but the secretary said that other species of mosquito present in the territory are also considered as possible carriers of the disease.

VIETNAM

The Vietnamese health authority has warned people coming from countries with the Zika virus to monitor their health for 14 days and if they develop fever to report to medical facilities. The health authority also warned people to empty water containers and use mosquito nets to prevent the possible spread of the virus. — AP



ASUNCION: Dengue fever patients are treated in a hospital in Asuncion. Health authorities have issued a national alert against the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, vector of the Dengue, Zika and Chikungunya. — AFP

30 YEARS SINCE CHALLENGER: TEACHER-IN-SPACE FINALISTS GATHER

CAPE CANAVERAL: Dozens of educators who competed alongside Christa McAuliffe to become the first teacher in space gathered Thursday to remember the seven astronauts who perished aboard Challenger 30 years ago. McAuliffe's son, Scott, now 39, also took part in the emotionally charged ceremony, held on a bleak, drizzly morning just six miles from where his mother's space shuttle blasted off for the final time on Jan 28, 1986. Many of the teacher-in-space semifinalists are retired now. They have gray hair. A few limp. But they still believe strongly in what McAuliffe hoped to accomplish aboard Challenger before disaster struck during liftoff.

"It's really hard" to be back, said William Dillon, 77, a retired teacher who represented California in the competition back in the mid-1980s. He was at Kennedy Space Center for Challenger's launch and had gotten to know not only McAuliffe, but a few of the other astronauts on the doomed flight. Linda Preston, 61, also retired as a teacher, choked up as the names of the Challenger dead were read during the memorial service. The former space shuttle pilot reciting the names of all 24 astronauts killed in the line of duty over the years, Jon McBride, had to fight back tears. "All of a sudden, I couldn't breathe," Preston later confided to a reporter. She represented Utah

in the teacher competition.

About 40 of the 113 remaining semifinalists for teacher-in-space traveled to Cape Canaveral for the anniversary commemoration, the biggest gathering ever for a NASA memorial like this. "We felt we all wanted to be part of it," said Connecticut semifinalist David Warner, 63, who still teaches science, robotics and rocketry. Like so many of his colleagues, Warner wanted to see Kennedy's "Forever Remembered" exhibit that opened last summer. It contains the only piece of Challenger wreckage on public display, a 12-foot section of the left-side body panel complete with the US flag, as well as personal belongings of the Challenger and Columbia crews. The ceremony was one of several NASA memorials that took place Thursday at Arlington National Cemetery and elsewhere around the country. At Kennedy, rain moved the ceremony indoors, directly in front of the "Forever Remembered" exhibit. The gathering took place beneath the suspended shuttle Atlantis, which in 2011 made the final shuttle flight. Afterward, McAuliffe and other children of the Challenger dead laid a wreath at the outdoor Space Mirror Memorial. Each guest received a rose or carnation to attach to the railing in front of the massive granite mirror.

McAuliffe, who works in education tech-

nology in Maine, said having his own two sons there with him - ages 6 and 8 - made it easier. It's time, he said, that his children see and learn firsthand all about astronauts and the space program. Indeed, in a nod to the second generation, June Scobee Rodgers - widow of Challenger commander Dick Scobee and longtime spokeswoman for the group - passed the torch to daughter Kathie Scobee Fulgham. Fulgham - not Scobee Rodgers - was on the stage for the ceremony and introduced guest speaker Barbara Morgan, an Idaho schoolteacher who served as Christa McAuliffe's backup so long ago.

Morgan recalled how Dick Scobee was "a deep and poetic thinker," and how pilot Michael Smith let her "push the stick" during a training jet flight. She said Christa McAuliffe taught her not to worry about what's unimportant but rather work harder at what truly counts. Up until the final day before launch, Morgan noted, Christa McAuliffe took time to write college recommendations for her students. The rest of the Challenger crew, remembered fondly by Morgan: Judith Resnik, Ronald McNair, Ellison Onizuka and Gregory Jarvis. The crowd of about 500 included family members of astronauts killed in all three of NASA's spacecraft tragedies: Challenger; Columbia's catastrophic descent on Feb. 1, 2003; and the Apollo 1 fire on Jan 27, 1967. For



FLORIDA: The crew members of space shuttle Challenger flight 51-L leave their quarters for the launch pad at Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Fla. —AP

the astronauts' loved ones, the disasters remain fresh in their minds. Steven McAuliffe, a federal judge in Concord, New Hampshire, still declines interviews about his late wife Christa. But he noted in a statement that although 30 years have passed, "Challenger

will always be an event that occurred just recently. Our thoughts and memories of Christa will always be fresh and comforting." McAuliffe was presiding over a trial this week in Concord, and so Scott represented his father as well as his younger sister. —AP

GABON'S ECO-GUARDS IN UNEQUAL BATTLE AGAINST ELEPHANT POACHERS

SMUGGLERS RESORT TO USING PYGMIES

MAKOKOU: At the entrance to the sprawling Ivindo national park in central Gabon, wildlife guards in paramilitary uniform scour a fisherman's dug-out canoe, going through his bags of worn clothes and bait. "We're looking for arms and ammunition," one says. Gabon, which along with Democratic Republic of Congo now has Africa's biggest elephant populations, is deploying scores of "eco-guards", as they are called, to ward off poachers honing in on a prime continental target.

The wild territory in the heart of central Africa's tropical forest basin on the border with Cameroon and the Congo has seen a massive jump in ivory smuggling in recent years. About 11,000 elephants have been slaughtered for their tusks in less than 10 years in the Minkebe national

park, the most threatened of three in the region, with Ivindo and Mwagna, according to the National Agency for National Parks (ANPN). Some 100 eco-guards patrol the three sprawling parks in an increasingly dangerous job. Minkibe is the size of Belgium, with towering trees - some 150 feet high making aerial surveillance impossible. Luc Machot of the non-governmental organization Conservation Justice branded the killings as "industrial poaching". Between "150 and 200 kilograms" (330 to 440 pounds) of ivory are smuggled out of the reserve every week, he says, accounting for about 15 to 20 slain elephants. A dense terrain of some 7,000 square kilometers with no roads or villages can only be crossed by boat and has become a lair for poachers, very hard to monitor. Foot patrols of up to 50 eco-

guards with a small military and police escort are outgunned by the poacher gangs often equipped with assault rifles. In early December, one of the guards was injured in a clash with poachers from Cameroon and had to be evacuated.

Taking pygmies for trackers

Getting to Minkibe is a four-day journey by boat to reach the Lele base inside the park, where Claude Angoue says that logistics are a nightmare. After 10 years on the job, Angoue bemoans battered canoes with "broken motors", a lack of food, radio communications that are sometimes cut and the time taken for reinforcements to arrive "when there's a problem". "Our job has become dangerous. The more arrests we make

on the ground, the better armed they come. Some have hunting rifles, but we're seeing more and more Kalashnikovs," an eco-guard said. Rostand Abaa, the chief warden of the Ivindo park, says civil warfare in the neighboring Republic of Congo partly accounts for the "widespread circulation of military weapons" in the region.

When faced with joint patrols of Gabonese and Congolese eco-guards, smugglers resort to using pygmies - the millennial people of the deep forests as trackers, with their special skills. "Our mission is no longer simply to look out for the people who come to kill the game, it's also a matter of national security," Abaa says. With a human population of 1.8 million, Gabon is home to more than half the forest elephants in Africa, estimated to number some 80,000. Poaching has largely depleted elephant stocks elsewhere in Africa. Gorillas, buffalo, panthers and other large mammals also shelter in one of the last Edens on the continent.

'Organised crime'

President Ali Bongo Ondimba is promoting a "Green Gabon" in a bid to draw tourists, while promising tough action against smugglers. The state prosecutor at the north eastern regional capital of Makokou, Alain-Georges Moukoko, denounces "organized crime" in the gold and ivory business and says "we need more severe punishment." At present, the maximum penalty for poaching is six months in prison. A short jail term will never dissuade poachers while ivory fetches 80,000 CFA francs (122 euros / \$133) a kilo, a notorious trader who claims to have repented said after two spells behind bars.

"The higher we go towards Cameroon, the more it's worth," says the Gabonese dealer, who wears two panther teeth on a gold chain. Cameroon is a key transit route for ivory, which can fetch 1,000 or even 2,000 euros per kilo in China, one of the countries where it is prized. "The margin is enormous," Machot notes. About 50 percent of the poached ivory goes to China, he says, but there are also major clients elsewhere in Asia, as well as in Europe and the United States. —AP



KONGO BOUMBA: Rangers stop pirogues to check they do not transport weapons or other forbidden goods, on a stretch of the Ivindo river in the Ivindo National Park in Gabon. At the sprawling Ivindo national park in central Gabon, wildlife guards in paramilitary uniform scour a fisherman's dug-out canoe for arms and ammunition in an unequal battle against elephant poachers in one of the continent's last Edens where ivory smuggling has jumped massively in recent years. —AFP

HERPES OUTBREAK PUTS PHOENIX RACETRACK UNDER QUARANTINE

PHOENIX: A Phoenix racetrack's horses remained under quarantine Friday as officials worked to get the upper hand on an equine herpes outbreak that has infected more than a dozen horses in New Mexico. One horse had to be euthanized this week at Turf Paradise in north Phoenix, manager Vincent Francia said. The horse was one of three that arrived Jan 20 from Sunland Park, New Mexico.

The other two are under isolation for 21 days. So far, they show no signs of the virus. When the facility first learned horses in Sunland Park were testing positive for the virus, the three horses were tested. Francia said a nasal swab came back negative for all three and the animals seemed fine. Then one, a mare, was suddenly unable to stand Wednesday. She eventually had to be put down. The horse's body was sent to a lab in Tucson for testing. Though the results won't be available for a week, Turf Paradise staff immediately enacted measures to disinfect anything that comes in contact with the horses.

"We got very aggressive," Francia said. "This virus is so easily transferable from human to horse." Workers have been sanitizing everything in stable stalls including the walls, tack supplies and even water buckets. Even the starting gates have had to be cleaned. Jockeys will have to use Chlorox wipes on their hands and disinfect their riding boots after each race. Only essential personnel such as veterinarians will be allowed in the stables, Francia said. Turf Paradise currently houses 1,700 horses and will continue to hold races as scheduled.

However, no horses will be allowed to leave or enter the facility for the duration of the quarantine. Even if nothing turns up under the quarantine, Turf Paradise will likely not accept horses from New Mexico for the foreseeable future. "It's not because we're trying to be tough with New Mexico," Francia said. "But the situation (in Sunland Park) on a daily basis keeps getting worse." Officials at Sunland Park Racetrack and Casino say they have temporarily suspended all races because of the outbreak. So far, 18 horses have tested positive for the equine virus. Of those animals, one was euthanized. —AP

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5TH GREEN GLOBE CERTIFICATION, 500KG OF DATES AT MOVENPICK HOTEL KUWAIT

While its existing green initiatives recently resulted in a fifth consecutive Green Globe certification for Movenpick Hotel Kuwait, the upscale hotel is especially proud of one particular green project. As part of a sustainable product supply program to become partially self-sufficient, the 100-room hotel in the Kuwait Free Trade Zone recently reaped the fruit of its first date harvest. It partnered with a specialist agricultural company to design strategic solutions for successfully harvesting and using the dates in its own hotel restaurants and operations.

The dates have been used in the hotel's breakfast buffet, in healthy, nutritional juices, as gifts to long-stay guests and during the Movenpick Chocolate Hour, a signature culinary service where complimentary choco-

late is featured for guests to enjoy. "This new project is part of Movenpick Hotels and Resorts' world-wide program of green initiatives and it's been a thoroughly enriching experience to see our latest plan come to fruition," said Hassan Hassanien, General Manager of Movenpick Hotel Kuwait.

"A key element of the plan is to involve our employees at a grassroots level to imbed our commitment to the company's sustainability approach. The first date harvest was entirely done by our own hotel employees and it has been wonderful to see their enthusiasm and dedication to this cause."

At 7,000 sqm and covering 60 percent of the premises, the hotel's surrounding green landscape is presently almost double its original size and contains a variety of local flora and

plants indigenous to the region. A variety of eco-friendly products and environmentally-sound methods are employed to maintain and irrigate the area, including sprinkler and drip-ping systems.

The 40 date palms that delivered the first harvest were planted around 12 years ago and provided a total of more than 500 kilograms of dates. To efficiently manage its energy and water use, the elegant low-rise hotel already features LED lighting, dual flushing toilets and low-flow, high-pressure rain showerheads.

Movenpick Hotel Kuwait is close to Kuwait Bay and the international airport. It features five restaurants, including a garden café close to the free-form lagoon pool with waterfalls. Other facilities include a boardroom, events venue, gymnasium and kids club.



Dr Mattar Al-Mutairi, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor, inaugurated the Balanced Life Conference this past Thursday at the Social Development Center in Zahra.

—Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat



NISSAN AL BABTAIN CONGRATULATES ULTIMATE SOCCER ACADEMY TEAM FOR WINNING GOLD

Abdulmohsen Abdulaziz Al Babtain Company, the exclusive agent of Nissan in the State of Kuwait, and the official sponsor of the "Ultimate Soccer Academy" congratulates the team for bringing home the gold medal.

A game took place, early this month against the Emirati team Al Nasr that ended with "Ultimate Soccer Academy" winning with the score of 3-

2. The audience enjoyed a beautiful game, which qualified the team to go straight to the championship finale, along with 3 UAE team, which ended with "Ultimate Soccer Academy" winning the gold medal.

Nissan Al Babtain has sponsored the "Ultimate Soccer Academy" the end of 2015. The team started their training preparation from the 12th to the 16th of January for the champi-

onship. The camp was beyond successful as the team showed a great motivation booster.

On the other hand, Nissan Al Babtain continues to help and support talents, sports and health. Al Babtain supports all talents of all ages and provides them with support, as part of its Corporate Social Responsibility to the community and its duty towards Kuwait and its people.



OASIS OXYGEN BAR OPENS IN KUWAIT

The first ever aromatized oxygen bar recently opened in Kuwait to provide people with superb taste a chance to relax in a most romantic and healthy atmosphere. The Oasis Oxygen Bar center is the first of its kind in Kuwait and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). It gives customers the chance to relax in an oxygen-enriched atmosphere that helps revive their brains, blood circulation, remove headaches and tension and boost their immune system. High levels of oxygen also improve memories, strengthen the heart and help prevent heart attacks. Recent studies proved that the human body gets 90 percent of energy its needs from oxygen, while it only gets 10 percent from food and beverages. Talal Al-Failakawi, the Oasis oxygen Bar owner, said that the idea came to him when he noticed the amount of daily stress, headaches, depression and fatigue in society, saying that people suffer from these issues due to lack of oxygen.



—Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

FAUCHON LE GOURMET CAFÉ SUPPORTS LOCAL ARTISTS

By Nawara Fattahova

The third design exhibition by "Select" held its launch event on Wednesday, showcasing works of art by the most daring and imaginative designers in the region today. Proudly sponsored by the latest exclusive Fauchon concept "Le Gourmet Café," at Salhiya Mall, the artistic flair of local artists embraced the Parisian theme of hidden charm and sophistication.

The exhibition displays works of art by Kuwait's most renowned designers and artists. The artistic flair of Fauchon was embraced as each artist unveiled one piece of work based on their personal interpretation of the luxury brand. The fusion of Arabesque and Parisian

themes created something of a surprising and hidden charm. The artists will also be showcasing personal pieces where further insight into the bold and upcoming design talents will be clearly evident.

In support of Kuwait's thriving community of designers, Fauchon Le Gourmet Café sponsored the event promoting contemporary designers based in Kuwait, who have become a force of change and expression both locally and regionally. The "must see" exhibition will transport you to the "City of Lights"-Paris. To complement your journey, treat yourself to a unique dining experience at Fauchon Le Gourmet Café.

The exhibition will be showcased until Tuesday, Feb 2, hosted by Salhiya Mall.



Dr Hind Al-Mazeedi from Abdallah Al-Mubarak Health Center gave a lecture to students about obesity recently. Dr Hind emphasized that good nutrition is part of preventing many diseases, most notably diabetes, blood pressure and other chronic ailments. She said that school-aged children of all stages must learn healthy eating habits and exercising to maintain a healthy lifestyle, which will be of good benefit and effect later in life. Dr Walaa Al-Kandari, head of the center was on hand during the event. School officials and students appreciated the efforts of the medical center, particularly Dr Walaa and Dr Hind for their keen interest to keep students up to date with their health concerns.



THIRUVALLA PRAVASI ASSOCIATION FAMILY GET-TOGETHER

Thiruvalla Pravasi Association New year celebration and family get-together was held in Hidine Auditorium, Abbassiya. Sri. Joseph M. Puthusserry Ex-M.L.A was the chief guest, who inaugurated the function. The public meeting was presided over by Vice-president Pradeep Joseph and Secretary Reji Koruthu offered the welcome speech. TIPAK Patron Sri. Abey Varicad, Advisory board chairman Rajeev Vanchipalam and Murali Krishnan gave the felicitation speech. Treasurer Abey Sam gave the vote of Thanks. Variety entertainment programmes were also performed. The function was attended by a large gathering.

Discovery Channel HD

00:20 Superhuman Science
 00:45 Engine Addict With Jimmy De Ville
 06:00 Siberian Cut
 06:50 Wheeler Dealers
 07:40 Misfit Garage
 08:30 Storage Hunters
 08:55 The Liquidator
 09:20 Storage Wars Canada
 09:45 What Happened Next?
 10:10 How Machines Work
 10:35 Alaskan Bush People
 11:25 Alaska: The Last Frontier
 12:15 Railroad Alaska
 13:05 Storage Hunters
 13:30 The Liquidator
 13:55 Storage Wars Canada
 14:20 Siberian Cut
 15:10 Cuban Chrome
 16:00 Misfit Garage
 16:50 What Happened Next?
 17:15 How Stuff Works
 17:40 Street Outlaws
 18:30 Street Outlaws
 19:20 Troy
 20:10 The Liquidator
 20:35 Storage Wars Canada
 21:00 X-Ray Mega Airport
 21:50 X-Ray Mega Airport
 22:40 Wheeler Dealers: Trading Up
 23:30 Cuban Chrome

19:30 Gravity Falls
 19:55 Dog With A Blog
 20:20 Mako Mermaids
 20:45 Good Luck Charlie
 21:10 Good Luck Charlie
 21:35 Wizards Of Waverly Place
 22:00 Binny And The Ghost
 22:25 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch



00:00 New Money
 00:30 Fashion Bloggers
 01:00 Stewarts And Hamiltons
 02:00 Live From The Red Carpet
 04:00 E! Entertainment Special
 05:00 E! Entertainment Special
 06:00 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
 06:55 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
 15:10 Cuban Chrome
 16:00 Misfit Garage
 16:50 What Happened Next?
 17:15 How Stuff Works
 17:40 Street Outlaws
 18:30 Street Outlaws
 19:20 Troy
 20:10 The Liquidator
 20:35 Storage Wars Canada
 21:00 X-Ray Mega Airport
 21:50 X-Ray Mega Airport
 22:40 Wheeler Dealers: Trading Up
 23:30 Cuban Chrome

Discovery Science

00:35 How The Universe Works
 01:20 How The Universe Works
 02:08 How The Universe Works
 02:55 How The Universe Works
 03:42 Mythbusters
 04:29 Mythbusters
 05:16 Mythbusters
 06:03 Mythbusters
 07:37 How Do They Do It?
 08:00 How Do They Do It?
 08:23 Food Factory
 08:45 Food Factory
 09:08 Food Factory
 09:30 Food Factory
 09:53 Food Factory
 10:15 Food Factory
 10:38 Food Factory
 11:00 Food Factory
 11:23 Food Factory
 11:45 Food Factory
 12:08 How It's Made
 12:30 How It's Made
 12:53 How It's Made
 13:15 How It's Made
 13:38 How It's Made: Dream Cars
 14:00 How It's Made: Dream Cars
 14:23 How It's Made
 14:46 How It's Made
 15:10 How It's Made
 15:33 How It's Made
 15:57 Strangest Weather On Earth
 16:44 Curiosity: Megastorm
 17:31 Storm Chasers
 18:18 Storm Chasers
 19:05 Storm Chasers
 19:50 How The Universe Works
 20:40 How The Universe Works
 21:25 How The Universe Works
 22:15 How The Universe Works
 23:00 How The Universe Works
 23:45 What Could Possibly Go Wrong?

Food Network

00:00 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
 01:00 Chopped
 02:00 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
 03:00 Man V Food
 04:00 BBQ Crawl
 04:30 BBQ Crawl
 05:00 Chopped
 06:00 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
 07:00 Man Fire Food
 08:00 Chopped
 09:00 Amazing Wedding Cakes
 10:00 The Kitchen
 12:00 Chopped
 13:00 Guy's Big Bite
 14:00 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
 17:00 Chopped
 18:00 Siba's Table
 18:30 Siba's Table
 19:00 Dinner At Tiffani's
 19:30 Dinner At Tiffani's
 20:00 Rev Run's Sunday Suppers
 20:30 Rev Run's Sunday Suppers
 21:00 All Star Academy
 22:00 Ching's Amazing Asia
 22:30 Ching's Amazing Asia
 23:00 The Freshman Class



itv HD CHOICE

00:20 Coronation Street
 00:45 Coronation Street
 01:10 Pick Me!
 02:00 Coronation Street
 02:30 Coronation Street
 02:55 Coronation Street
 03:25 Coronation Street
 03:50 Coronation Street
 04:15 Murdoch Mysteries
 05:05 Murdoch Mysteries
 05:55 The Jonathan Ross Show
 06:50 Vera
 08:40 Safe House
 09:35 Endeavour
 11:20 The Chase: Celebrity Specials
 12:15 The Jonathan Ross Show
 13:10 Murdoch Mysteries
 14:05 Murdoch Mysteries
 15:00 Code Of A Killer
 15:55 Midsomer Murders
 17:40 The Jonathan Ross Show
 18:35 Coach Trip

ID. INVESTIGATION DISCOVERY

00:40 Serial Killers
 01:30 Deadly Sins
 02:20 Deadly Devotion
 03:10 Swamp Murders
 04:00 Deadly Women
 04:45 Serial Killers
 05:30 Deadly Sins
 06:20 The Will
 07:10 The Will
 08:00 Fatal Encounters
 08:50 Disappeared
 09:40 Disappeared
 10:30 True Crime With Aphrodite Jones
 11:20 True Crime With Aphrodite Jones
 12:10 The Will
 13:00 The Will
 13:50 California Investigator
 14:15 California Investigator
 14:40 Dr G: Medical Examiner
 15:30 True Crime With Aphrodite Jones
 16:20 True Crime With Aphrodite Jones
 17:10 Disappeared
 18:00 Disappeared
 18:50 California Investigator
 19:15 California Investigator
 19:40 I Almost Got Away With It
 20:30 I Almost Got Away With It
 21:20 I Almost Got Away With It
 22:10 I Almost Got Away With It
 23:00 House Of Horrors:
 Kidnapped
 23:25 House Of Horrors:
 Kidnapped
 23:50 Deadline: Crime With Tamron Hall

OSN MOVIES HD COMEDY

04:30 The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon
 07:00 Late Night With Seth Meyers
 11:00 The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon
 17:00 Late Night With Seth Meyers
 18:30 The Goldbergs
 19:00 Grandfathered
 19:30 Melissa & Joey
 20:00 Bad Judge
 22:00 Married
 23:30 Bad Judge



OSN FIRST HD COMEDY

00:00 Defiance
 02:00 The Blacklist

Disney Channel

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
 02:05 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
 04:35 Wolfblood
 05:00 Violetta
 05:45 The Hive
 05:50 Mouk
 06:00 Lolirock
 06:25 Sofia The First
 06:50 That's So Raven
 07:15 Gravity Falls
 07:40 Jessie
 08:05 Shake It Up
 08:30 Shake It Up
 08:55 That's So Raven
 09:20 That's So Raven
 09:45 Jessie
 10:10 Violetta Recipes
 10:25 Read It And Weep
 12:00 I Love Violetta
 12:20 Jessie
 12:45 Jessie
 13:10 Liv And Maddie
 13:35 Liv And Maddie
 14:00 Austin & Ally
 14:30 Austin & Ally
 14:55 Lolirock
 15:20 I Didn't Do It
 15:45 I Didn't Do It
 16:10 Best Friends Whenever
 16:35 Best Friends Whenever
 17:00 Girl Meets World
 17:25 Girl Meets World
 17:50 I Love Violetta
 18:00 Double Teamed

00:00 The Right Kind Of Wrong
 02:00 Fading Gigolo
 04:00 Simon Birch
 06:00 The Devil Wears Prada
 08:00 Happy Gilmore
 10:00 Simon Birch
 12:00 Tooth Fairy
 14:00 Down To Earth
 16:00 Happy Gilmore
 18:00 Grudge Match
 20:00 I Give It A Year
 22:00 No Way Jose

OSN MOVIES HD FESTIVAL

01:00 A Civil Action
 03:00 A Mighty Heart
 05:00 The Nightmare Before Christmas
 06:30 The Man Who Would Be King
 09:00 Grace Of Monaco
 11:00 The Nightmare Before Christmas
 13:00 Diana
 15:00 Lost Christmas
 17:00 Grace Of Monaco
 19:00 The Butler
 21:30 Blue Sky
 23:30 Killer Joe



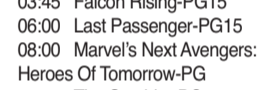
OSN MOVIES HD MORE

00:00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show
 01:00 Survivor: Cambodia
 02:00 Good Morning America
 03:00 Satisfaction
 04:00 Olive Kitteridge
 05:00 Survivor: Cambodia
 06:00 Good Morning America
 07:00 Coronation Street
 07:30 Coronation Street
 08:00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show
 09:00 Supernatural
 10:00 Coronation Street
 10:30 Coronation Street
 11:00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show
 12:00 Resurrection
 13:00 Shark Tank
 14:00 Survivor: Cambodia
 16:00 The Voice
 18:00 Shark Tank
 19:00 Supernatural
 20:00 Deadline Gallipoli
 21:00 Shark Tank
 22:00 Satisfaction
 23:00 Olive Kitteridge



OSN MOVIES HD ACTION

00:00 Four Brothers
 02:00 The Terminator
 04:15 Justice League vs. Bizarro League
 05:45 Falcon Rising
 08:00 Last Passenger
 10:00 Marvel's Next Avengers: Heroes Of Tomorrow
 12:00 The Outsider
 14:00 Northmen: A Viking Saga
 16:00 Falcon Rising
 18:00 Last Passenger
 20:00 The Outsider
 22:00 The Prince



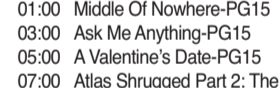
OSN MOVIES HD ACTION

00:00 The Terminator-18
 02:15 Justice League vs. Bizarro League-PG15
 03:45 Falcon Rising-PG15
 06:00 Last Passenger-PG15
 08:00 Marvel's Next Avengers: Heroes Of Tomorrow-PG
 10:00 The Outsider-PG15
 12:00 Northmen: A Viking Saga
 14:00 Falcon Rising-PG15
 16:00 Last Passenger-PG15
 18:00 The Outsider-PG15
 20:00 The Prince-PG15
 22:00 Breakdown-PG15



OSN MOVIES HD COMEDY

00:00 The Right Kind Of Wrong
 02:00 Fading Gigolo
 04:00 Simon Birch
 06:00 The Devil Wears Prada
 08:00 Happy Gilmore
 10:00 Simon Birch
 12:00 Tooth Fairy
 14:00 Down To Earth
 16:00 Happy Gilmore
 18:00 Grudge Match
 20:00 I Give It A Year
 22:00 No Way Jose



OSN MOVIES HD DRAMA

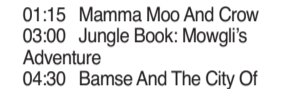
01:00 Middle Of Nowhere-PG15
 03:00 Ask Me Anything-PG15
 05:00 A Valentine's Date-PG15
 07:00 Atlas Shrugged Part 2: The Strike-PG15
 09:00 The Invisible Woman-PG15
 11:00 A Valentine's Date-PG15
 13:00 Shadow Witness-PG15
 14:45 Two Men In Town-PG15
 17:00 The Invisible Woman-PG15
 19:00 Short Term 12-PG15
 21:00 Deadfall-PG15
 23:00 Maps To The Stars-18

OSN MOVIES HD KIDS

01:15 Mamma Moo And Crow
 03:00 Jungle Book: Mowgli's Adventure
 04:30 Barmse And The City Of Thieves
 06:00 The Adventurer: The Curse Of The Midas Box
 08:00 Moomins And The Comet Chase
 09:45 Pim And Pom: The Big Adventure
 11:15 Columbus In The Last Journey
 12:45 Curious George: Back To The Jungle
 14:15 Ghatohkach - Master Of Magic
 16:00 Marco Macaco
 18:00 Pim And Pom: The Big Adventure
 20:00 Krazy Planet
 22:00 Ghatohkach - Master Of Magic
 23:45 Marco Macaco

OSN MOVIES HD KIDS

01:15 Mamma Moo And Crow
 03:00 Jungle Book: Mowgli's Adventure
 04:30 Barmse And The City Of Thieves
 06:00 The Adventurer: The Curse Of The Midas Box
 08:00 Moomins And The Comet Chase
 09:45 Pim And Pom: The Big Adventure
 11:15 Columbus In The Last Journey
 12:45 Curious George: Back To The Jungle
 14:15 Ghatohkach - Master Of Magic
 16:00 Marco Macaco
 18:00 Pim And Pom: The Big Adventure
 20:00 Krazy Planet
 22:00 Ghatohkach - Master Of Magic
 23:45 Marco Macaco



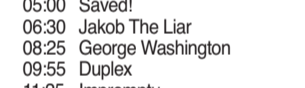
OSN MOVIES HD PREMIERE

00:15 Animal-PG15
 02:00 Penthouse North-PG15
 04:00 Forget And Forgive-PG15
 06:00 Quartet-PG15
 08:00 Selma-PG15
 10:15 Planes: Fire And Rescue-PG
 12:00 Penthouse North-PG15
 14:00 Maleficent-PG
 16:00 Selma-PG15
 18:15 Closed Circuit-PG15
 20:00 The Maze Runner-PG15
 22:00 Paranormal Activity: The Marked Ones-18



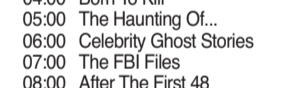
OSN MOVIES HD PREMIERE

00:15 Animal-PG15
 02:00 Penthouse North-PG15
 04:00 Forget And Forgive-PG15
 06:00 Quartet-PG15
 08:00 Selma-PG15
 10:15 Planes: Fire And Rescue-PG
 12:00 Penthouse North-PG15
 14:00 Maleficent-PG
 16:00 Selma-PG15
 18:15 Closed Circuit-PG15
 20:00 The Maze Runner-PG15
 22:00 Paranormal Activity: The Marked Ones-18



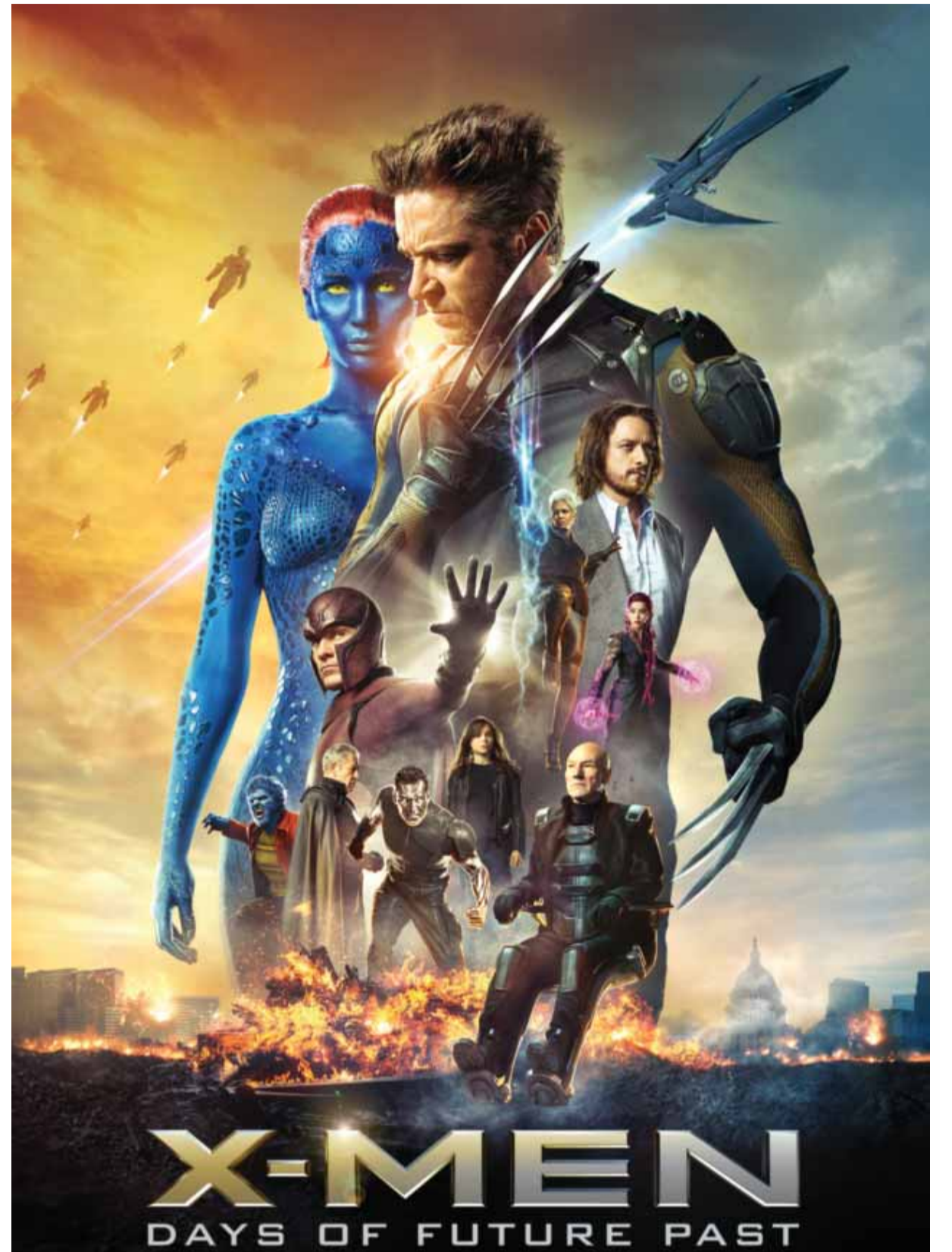
AMC

05:00 Saved!
 06:30 Jakob The Liar
 08:25 George Washington
 09:55 Duplex
 11:25 Impromptu
 13:10 Jakob The Liar
 15:05 Puckoon
 16:30 Saved!
 18:00 True Heart
 19:30 Teen Witch
 21:00 Great Balls Of Fire!
 22:45 Suspect Zero
 00:25 Great Balls Of Fire!
 02:10 The Big Man



AMC

03:00 Born To Kill
 04:00 Born To Kill
 05:00 The Haunting Of...
 06:00 Celebrity Ghost Stories
 07:00 Zou
 07:20 Loopidoo
 07:35 Art Attack
 08:00 Calimero
 08:10 Zou
 08:25 Loopidoo
 08:40 Jake And The Never Land Pirates
 09:05 Sofia The First
 09:30 Miles From Tomorrow
 09:55 The Hive
 10:05 Mickey Mouse Clubhouse



X-MEN: DAYS OF FUTURE PAST ON OSN MOVIES HD

Disney Junior

03:05 Calimero
 03:20 Zou
 03:30 Loopidoo
 03:45 Art Attack
 04:10 Henry Hugglemonster
 04:20 Calimero
 04:35 Zou
 04:45 Loopidoo
 05:00 Art Attack
 05:25 Henry Hugglemonster
 05:35 Calimero
 05:50 Zou
 06:00 Loopidoo
 06:15 Art Attack
 06:35 Henry Hugglemonster
 06:50 Calimero
 07:00 Zou
 07:20 Loopidoo
 07:35 Art Attack
 08:00 Calimero
 08:10 Zou
 08:25 Loopidoo
 08:40 Jake And The Never Land Pirates
 09:05 Sofia The First
 09:30 Miles From Tomorrow
 09:55 The Hive
 10:05 Mickey Mouse Clubhouse

10:35 Doc McStuffins
 11:00 Sofia The First
 11:30 Captain Jake And The Never Land Pirates
 12:00 Miles From Tomorrow
 12:25 Miles From Tomorrow
 12:50 Miles From Tomorrow
 13:15 Miles From Tomorrow
 13:35 Miles From Tomorrow
 14:00 Sofia The First
 14:25 Doc McStuffins
 14:50 Henry Hugglemonster
 15:15 Zou
 15:30 Mickey Mouse Clubhouse
 15:55 Loopidoo
 16:10 Miles From Tomorrow
 16:35 Jake And The Never Land Pirates
 17:00 Sofia The First
 17:25 Jungle Cubs
 17:50 Aladdin
 18:15 Gummi Bears
 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 Jungle Cubs
 22:25 Aladdin
 22:50 Gummi Bears
 23:20 Lilo And Stitch
 23:45 Cars Toons
 23:50 Zou
 00:05 Henry Hugglemonster
 00:20 Calimero
 00:35 Zou
 00:50 Loopidoo
 01:05 Art Attack

Disney XD

07:00 Star vs The Forces Of Evil
 07:25 K. C. Undercover
 07:50 Supa Strikas
 08:15 Lab Rats
 08:40 Annedroids
 09:10 Kirby Buckets
 09:35 Gamers Guide To Pretty Much Everything
 10:00 Star vs The Forces Of Evil
 10:25 K. C. Undercover
 10:50 Supa Strikas
 11:20 Lab Rats
 11:45 Annedroids
 12:10 Kirby Buckets
 12:35 Gamers Guide To Pretty Much Everything
 13:00 Lab Rats
 13:30 Lab Rats
 13:55 Lab Rats
 14:20 Lab Rats
 14:45 Lab Rats
 15:15 Lab Rats
 15:40 Lab Rats
 16:05 Lab Rats
 16:30 Lab Rats: Bionic Island
 16:55 Lab Rats: Bionic Island
 17:25 K. C. Undercover
 17:50 Supa Strikas
 18:15 Lab Rats
 18:40 Mighty Med
 19:10 Annedroids
 19:35 Star vs The Forces Of Evil
 20:00 Kirby Buckets
 20:25 Gamers Guide To Pretty Much Everything
 20:55 K. C. Undercover
 21:20 Supa Strikas
 21:45 Lab Rats
 22:10 Mighty Med

nickelodeon HD

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
 14:36 100 Things To Do Before High School
 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
 19:00 100 Things To Do Before High School
 19:24 Max & Shred
 19:48 SpongeBob SquarePants
 20:12 SpongeBob SquarePants
 20:36 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
 21:00 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
 21:24 Breadwinners
 21:48 Breadwinners
 22:12 Sanjay And Craig
 22:36 Sanjay And Craig

sundance CHANNEL

04:10 Watchtower
 05:50 54
 07:20 Bob And The Trees
 09:00 China Power Chinese Art From Mao To 2012
 10:00 Kumiko, The Treasure Hunter
 11:45 Battle For Britain
 12:00 All On The Line
 13:00 The Red Road
 14:00 Choking Man
 15:20 Edge Of Outside
 16:25 Sensation: The Story Of The Who's Tommy
 17:25 Christmas, Again
 18:45 Kumiko, The Treasure Hunter
 20:30 The Red Road
 21:30 All On The Line
 22:30 Theatreland

TLC HD

03:15 Long Island Medium
 04:05 World's Worst Mum
 06:00 Say Yes To The Dress: Ai Bridesmaids
 06:25 Super Soul Sunday
 07:15 Hoarding: Buried Alive
 08:05 My Giant Life
 08:55 Convy Brides
 09:20 Convy Brides
 09:45 Jon & Kate Plus 8
 10:10 Little People, Big World
 10:35 My Five Wives
 11:25 Cake Boss
 11:50 Oprah: Where Are They Now?



PARANORMAL ACTIVITY: THE MARKED ONES ON OSN MOVIES PREMIERE HD

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KNCC PROGRAMME FROM THURSDAY TO WEDNESDAY (28/01/2016 TO 03/02/2016)

Programme	Time	Programme	Time
SHARQIA-1 AMERICAN HERO ALVIN AND THE CHIPMUNKS:THE ROAD CHIP ALVIN AND THE CHIPMUNKS:THE ROAD CHIP ALVIN AND THE CHIPMUNKS:THE ROAD CHIP AMERICAN HERO AMERICAN HERO AMERICAN HERO AMERICAN HERO	12:15 PM 2:00 PM 4:00 PM 6:00 PM 8:00 PM 9:45 PM 11:30 PM 1:15 AM	FANAR-1 AMERICAN HERO AMERICAN HERO AMERICAN HERO THE REVENANT AMERICAN HERO AMERICAN HERO	12:00 PM 2:15 PM 4:15 PM 6:15 PM 8:00 PM 11:00 PM 12:45 AM
SHARQIA-2 CONCUSSION CONCUSSION CONCUSSION CONCUSSION CONCUSSION CONCUSSION	12:00 PM 2:30 PM 5:00 PM 7:30 PM 10:00 PM 12:30 AM	FANAR-2 STANDOFF ALVIN AND THE CHIPMUNKS:THE ROAD CHIP ALVIN AND THE CHIPMUNKS:THE ROAD CHIP ALVIN AND THE CHIPMUNKS:THE ROAD CHIP STANDOFF STANDOFF STANDOFF	12:45 PM 2:45 PM 4:45 PM 6:45 PM 8:45 PM 10:30 PM 12:15 AM
SHARQIA-3 STANDOFF STANDOFF STANDOFF STANDOFF THE BOY STANDOFF THE BOY STANDOFF	11:45 AM 1:30 PM 3:30 PM 5:15 PM 7:00 PM 9:00 PM 10:45 PM 12:45 AM	FANAR-3 RIDE ALONG 2 MIN DAHAR RAGEL - Arabic RIDE ALONG 2 MIN DAHAR RAGEL - Arabic MIN DAHAR RAGEL - Arabic RIDE ALONG 2	12:30 PM 2:15 PM 5:15 PM 7:00 PM 10:00 PM 1:00 AM
MUHALAB-1 EXPOSED EXPOSED NO FRI+SAT ALVIN AND THE CHIPMUNKS:THE ROAD CHIP FRI+SAT ALVIN AND THE CHIPMUNKS:THE ROAD CHIP ALVIN AND THE CHIPMUNKS:THE ROAD CHIP EXPOSED EXPOSED EXPOSED	11:45 AM 1:45 PM 1:45 PM 3:45 PM 5:45 PM 7:45 PM 9:45 PM 11:45 PM	FANAR-4 CONCUSSION CONCUSSION CONCUSSION CONCUSSION CONCUSSION FANAR-5 THE BOY THE BOY THE 5TH WAVE THE BOY THE 5TH WAVE THE BOY	12:15 PM 2:45 PM 5:15 PM 7:45 PM 10:15 PM 12:45 AM 1:00 PM 3:00 PM 5:00 PM 7:30 PM 9:30 PM 12:05 AM
MUHALAB-2 AMERICAN HERO AMERICAN HERO SAALA KHADOOS - Hindi AMERICAN HERO RIDE ALONG 2 AMERICAN HERO AMERICAN HERO	1:00 PM 2:45 PM 4:30 PM 6:45 PM 8:30 PM 10:30 PM 12:15 AM	MARINA-1 AMERICAN HERO THE 5TH WAVE AMERICAN HERO AMERICAN HERO THE 5TH WAVE AMERICAN HERO	12:45 PM 2:30 PM 4:45 PM 6:30 PM 8:15 PM 10:45 PM 12:30 AM
MUHALAB-3 CONCUSSION CONCUSSION CONCUSSION CONCUSSION CONCUSSION CONCUSSION	11:30 AM 2:00 PM 4:30 PM 7:00 PM 9:30 PM 12:05 AM	MARINA-2 CONCUSSION ALVIN AND THE CHIPMUNKS:THE ROAD CHIP CONCUSSION CONCUSSION CONCUSSION	11:45 AM 1:45 PM 4:15 PM 6:45 PM 9:15 PM

REQUIRED TYPIST

English & Arabic

- Only Indian or Pakistani
- Experience not less than 5 years
- Experience of computer (English & Arabic)
- Must read and write and speak English and Arabic well
- Must have Transferable visa No. 18
- Bring your C.V with photo

Kuwait city behind Municipality bldg.
Ground floor Samsung (Centro) - AQSA int'l Est. 1st floor
Sulaiman Al-luhaib bldg. No.2
Contact No. 65189946

I, SAFNA MOHAMMED KUTTY,
 hereby inviting to the notice of the public that my marklist of IXth Semester B.Arch Examination, December 2013 with Reg. No. MKAJEB026 of University of Calicut has been irrecoverably lost during travel and as such I intend to apply for the duplicate marklist. If anybody happens to get the original may kindly send the same or intimate the undersigned or the University.

Safna Mohammed Kutty, P.O.Box 28970,
 Safat - 13156, Kuwait. Mob: 99583693.

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 + maid room with bath, big living

99679188

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Balaveni Dadala daughter of Dadala Pullaiah and Dadala Nagarattamma bearing an Indian Passport No. G 0613666 and having an address H.No.31672, Rajalakshmi Nagar, Kakinada, East Godavari, Andhra Pradesh, India has embraced Islam and changed the name as AYSHA. (C 5120)
 31-1-2016

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Male or female to work in a copy center shop, with knowledge of Heat Printing and Poster Fixing with transferable visa.

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Job Requirements

- Similar experience.
- Fluent English (Reading & Writing).
- Transferable Visa.
- Valid driver license.

Applications to be send to
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 or by e-mail:
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K7C Dental
 المركز الطبي الكويتي - للاستشارات
 Kuwait Medical Center - Dental

Required

1. Receptionist
2. Female Staff Nurse
3. Medical Store Keeper

CONTACT: 22256555
Email: hr@kmcd.com.kw

Flight Schedule

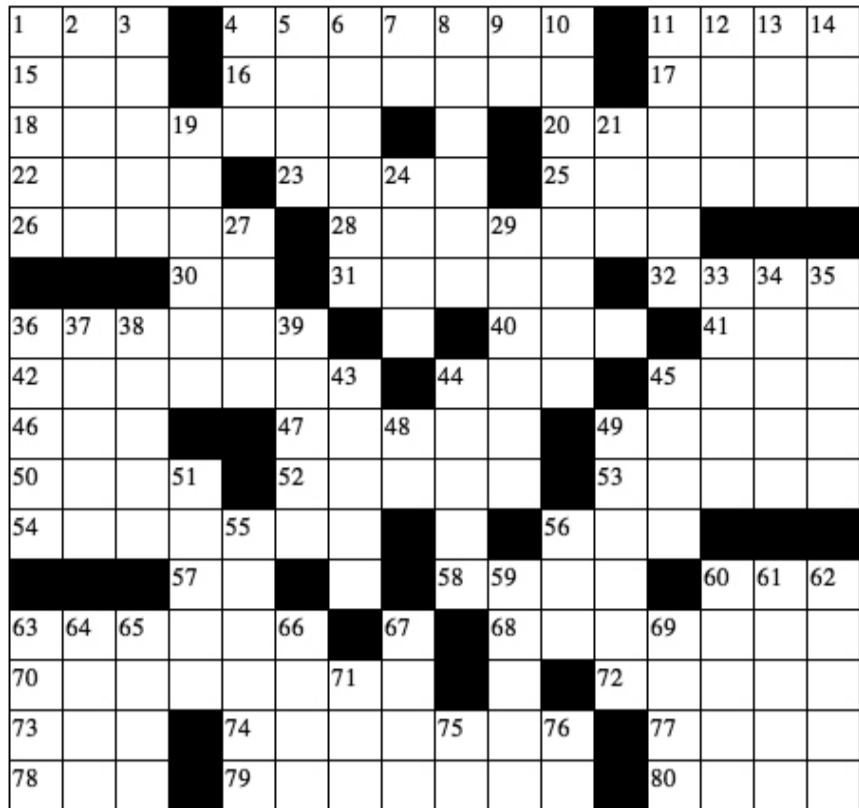
Directorate General of Civil Aviation Home Page (www.kuwait-airport.com.kw)

In case you are not travelling, your proper cancellation of bookings will help other passengers to use seats

Airlines	Fit	Route	Time	FDB	057	Dubai	14:10
MSC	415	Sohag	00:05	AXB	393	Kozhikode	14:20
JZR	239	Amman	00:25	SVA	500	Jeddah	14:30
JZR	267	Beirut	00:30	KAC	672	Dubai	14:45
JZR	539	Cairo	00:40	KAC	788	Jeddah	14:50
FDB	069	Dubai	00:55	GFA	221	Bahrain	15:00
RJA	642	Amman	01:05	KNE	472	Jeddah	15:05
THY	772	Istanbul	01:05	OMA	645	Muscat	15:30
ETH	3402	Addis Ababa/Riyadh	01:30	JZR	563	Sohag	15:35
DLH	635	Doha	01:35	KAC	562	Amman	15:40
ETH	620	Addis Ababa	01:45	ABY	127	Sharjah	15:45
PGT	858	Istanbul	02:00	UAE	857	Dubai	15:45
JZR	555	Alexandria	02:25	QTR	1072	Doha	16:10
UAE	853	Dubai	02:30	JZR	535	Cairo	16:10
GFA	211	Bahrain	02:30	JZR	787	Riyadh	16:25
OMA	643	Muscat	02:55	FDB	051	Dubai	16:30
FDB	067	Dubai	03:05	ETD	303	Abu Dhabi	16:40
MSR	612	Cairo	03:10	RJA	640	Amman	16:55
CEB	7694	Manila	03:15	KAC	542	Cairo	16:55
QTR	1076	Doha	03:15	SVA	510	Riyadh	17:15
KKK	6507	Istanbul	03:20	GFA	215	Bahrain	17:30
ETD	305	Abu Dhabi	03:25	KAC	678	Muscat/Abu Dhabi	17:50
KAC	544	Cairo	03:35	MSR	614	Cairo	17:50
LMU	510	Cairo	04:05	JZR	777	Jeddah	17:55
PGT	860	Istanbul	04:15	UAE	875	Dubai	18:00
DHX	170	Bahrain	05:40	KAC	502	Beirut	18:00
THY	770	Istanbul	05:55	FDB	063	Dubai	18:05
QTR	8511	Doha	06:10	KAC	792	Madinah	18:10
FDB	5061	Dubai	06:30	JZR	177	Dubai	18:20
BAW	157	London	06:40	KAC	786	Jeddah	18:30
KAC	412	Manila/Bangkok	07:20	ABY	123	Sharjah	18:45
FDB	053	Dubai	07:25	QTR	1080	Doha	18:55
QTR	1086	Doha	07:40	KAC	742	Dammam	19:05
SVA	512	Riyadh	07:50	KAC	774	Riyadh	19:25
KAC	302	Mumbai	07:50	KAC	166	Paris/Rome	19:30
OMA	641	Muscat	08:00	GFA	217	Bahrain	19:30
KAC	354	BLR	08:15	JZR	483	Istanbul	19:35
KAC	206	Islamabad	08:25	KAC	618	Doha	19:35
KAC	346	Ahmedabad	08:30	KAC	674	Dubai	19:45
KAC	352	Kochi	08:30	KAC	102	New York/London	19:55
UAE	855	Dubai	08:40	FDB	061	Dubai	20:20
KAC	362	Colombo	08:50	OMA	647	Muscat	20:20
KAC	332	Trivandrum	08:50	MSR	606	Luxor	20:45
ABY	125	Sharjah	09:00	FDB	5053	Dubai	20:50
KAC	284	Dhaka	09:10	JAI	572	Mumbai	20:55
ETD	301	Abu Dhabi	09:20	DLH	634	Frankfurt	20:55
QTR	1070	Doha	09:25	QTR	1088	Doha	21:00
FDB	055	Dubai	09:40	MEA	402	Beirut	21:20
IRA	665	Shiraz	09:40	ETD	307	Abu Dhabi	21:20
IRC	528	Ahwaz	10:00	ALK	229	Colombo	21:25
GFA	213	Bahrain	10:40	UAE	859	Dubai	21:40
UAE	873	Dubai	11:05	GFA	219	Bahrain	21:45
SYR	341	Damascus	11:25	JZR	125	Bahrain	22:00
JZR	165	Dubai	11:30	QTR	1082	Doha	22:00
AGY	682	Asyut	11:40	KLM	417	Amsterdam	22:05
MEA	404	Beirut	11:55	AIC	981	Chennai/Ahmedabad	22:25
SAW	701	Damascus	12:20	ETD	309	Abu Dhabi	22:25
FDB	075	Dubai	12:25	FDB	059	Dubai	22:30
JZR	561	Sohag	12:45	KAC	172	Frankfurt	22:35
UAE	871	Dubai	12:50	MSC	501	Alexandria	23:00
MSR	610	Cairo	13:00	JZR	239	Amman	23:05
JZR	175	Dubai	13:00	JZR	185	Dubai	23:15
KAC	382	Delhi	13:50	PIA	206	Lahore	23:40
QTR	1078	Doha	14:10	FDB	071	Dubai	23:45
				THY	764	Istanbul	23:50
				JAI	574	Mumbai	23:55

Airlines	Fit	Route	Time	KAC	785	Jeddah	13:00
AIC	988	Hyderabad/Chennai	00:05	FDB	076	Dubai	13:10
FDB	072	Dubai	00:40	JZR	786	Riyadh	13:10
MSC	404	Asyut	00:55	KAC	791	Madinah	13:25
JAI	573	Mumbai	00:55	SAW	702	Damascus	13:35
MSC	416	Sohag	01:00	JZR	176	Dubai	13:45
THY	773	Istanbul	02:30	MSR	611	Cairo	14:00
DLH	635	Frankfurt	02:35	UAE	872	Dubai	14:15
ETH	621	Addis Ababa	02:45	KAC	673	Dubai	15:00
ETH	3403	Addis Ababa	03:05	FDB	058	Dubai	15:10
KAC	381	Delhi	03:30	QTR	1079	Doha	15:10
UAE	854	Dubai	03:45	AXB	394	Kozhikode	15:20
PGT	859	Istanbul	03:55	SVA	503	Madinah/Jeddah	15:45
OMA	644	Muscat	03:55	GFA	222	Bahrain	15:45
FDB	068	Dubai	04:00	KAC	617	Doha	15:45
MSR	613	Cairo	04:10	KAC	773	Riyadh	15:50
ETD	306	Abu Dhabi	04:15	KAC	741	Dammam	15:55
KKK	6508	Istanbul	04:20	KNE	473	Jeddah	16:05
PGT	861	Istanbul	04:55	ABY	128	Sharjah	16:25
QTR	1077	Doha	05:00	OMA	646	Muscat	16:30
LMU	511	Cairo	05:05	JZR	266	Beirut	17:05
THY	765	Istanbul	05:15	ETD	304	Abu Dhabi	17:30
CEB	7695	Manila	05:20	JZR	238	Amman	17:30
JZR	560	Sohag	06:10	FDB	052	Dubai	17:35
FDB	070	Dubai	06:30	QTR	1073	Doha	17:40
JZR	164	Dubai	06:55	UAE	858	Dubai	17:45
RJA	643	Amman	07:05	JZR	538	Cairo	17:45
THY	771	Istanbul	07:05	RJA	641	Amman	17:55
FDB	5062	Dubai	07:10	SVA	511	Riyadh	18:15
GFA	212	Bahrain	07:15	GFA	216	Bahrain	18:20
QTR	8512	Doha	07:40	JZR	184	Dubai	18:40
FDB	054	Dubai	08:10	MSR	615	Cairo	18:50
JZR	174	Dubai	08:25	JZR	124	Bahrain	19:10
QTR	1087	Doha	08:40	FDB	064	Dubai	19:20
BAW	156	London	08:45	ABY	124	Sharjah	19:25
SVA	513	Riyadh	08:50	UAE	876	Dubai	19:30
OMA	642	Muscat	08:55	GFA	218	Bahrain	20:15
JZR	562	Sohag	09:00	KAC	283	Dhaka	20:35
KAC	171	Frankfurt	09:05	KAC	361	Colombo	20:45
JZR	534	Cairo	09:15	QTR	1081	Doha	20:50
KAC	787	Jeddah	09:25	KAC	351	Kochi	20:50
ABY	126	Sharjah	09:40	OMA	648	Muscat	21:20
UAE	856	Dubai	09:55	FDB	062	Dubai	21:20
KAC	541	Cairo	09:55	MSR	619	Alexandria	21:45
KAC	117	New York	09:55	DLH	634	Doha	21:45
KAC	561	Amman	10:00	DHX	171	Bahrain	21:50
KAC	671	Dubai	10:05	FDB	5054	Dubai	21:50
ETD	302	Abu Dhabi	10:25	JAI	571	Mumbai	21:55
KAC	501	Beirut	10:30	QTR	1089	Doha	22:00
FDB	056	Dubai	10:35	JZR	502	Luxor	22:00
JZR	482	Istanbul	10:35	ETD	308	Abu Dhabi	22:10
IRA	664	Shiraz	10:40	KAC	301	Mumbai	22:10
KAC	677	Abu Dhabi/Muscat	10:50	MEA	403	Beirut	22:20
QTR	1071	Doha	11:00	ALK	230	Colombo	22:25
IRC	529	Ahwaz	11:00	GFA	220	Bahrain	22:30
GFA	214	Bahrain	11:25	UAE	860	Dubai	22:55
JZR	776	Jeddah	12:20	QTR	1083	Doha	23:05
SYR	342	Damascus	12:25	KLM	417	Dammam/Amsterdam	23:05
KAC	103	London	12:25	KAC	205	Islamabad	23:10
UAE	874	Dubai	12:30	ETD	310	Abu Dhabi	23:15
AGY	683	Alexandria	12:40	FDB	060	Dubai	23:35
MEA	405	Beirut	12:55	KAC	411	Bangkok/Manila	23:35
				KAC	415	Kuala Lumpur/Jakarta	23:40

CROSSWORD 1154



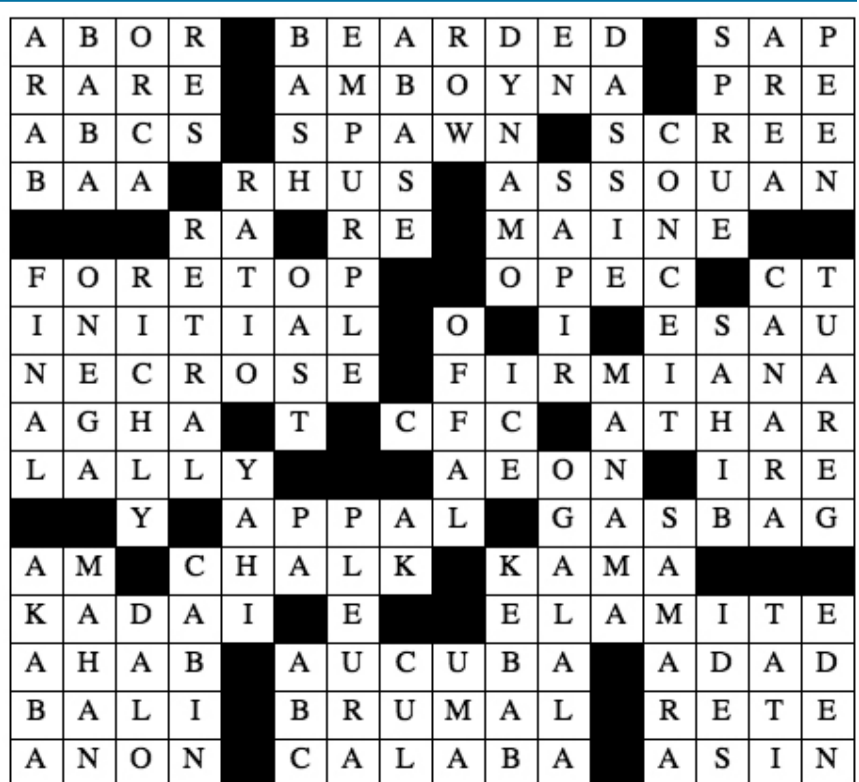
ACROSS

- The network in the reticular formation that serves an alerting or arousal function.
- Largest city in Washington.
- A river in central Italy rising in the Apennines and flowing through Florence and Pisa to the Ligurian Sea.
- An inflated feeling of pride in your superiority to others.
- Small round bread leavened with baking-powder or soda.
- An accidental hole that allows something (fluid or light etc.) to enter or escape.
- Butter creamed with parsley and tarragon and beef extract.
- Having the equatorial diameter greater than the polar diameter.
- A particular geographical region of indefinite boundary (usually serving some special purpose or distinguished by its people or culture or geography).
- According to the Old Testament he was a pagan king of Israel and husband of Jezebel (9th century BC).
- One of the evil spirits of traditional Jewish and Christian belief.
- A genus of Ploceidae.
- Ubiquitous strong-scented mat-forming Eurasian herb of wasteland, hedgerow or pasture having narrow serrate leaves and small usually white florets.
- A silvery ductile metallic element found primarily in bauxite.
- Of or relating to or involving an area.
- A collection of things (goods or works of art etc.) for public display.
- A hereditary military dictator of Japan.
- Someone who is morally reprehensible.
- Resinlike substance secreted by certain lac insects.
- A doughnut-shaped chamber used in fusion research.
- An agency of the United Nations affiliated with the World Bank.
- A holy war by Muslims against unbelievers.
- Type genus of the Nepidae.
- Lower in esteem.
- Relating to or having the characteristics of bees.
- Genus of herbs of southern United States.
- The blood group whose red cells carry both the A and B antigens.
- The (prehensile) extremity of the superior limb.
- (of reproduction) Not involving the fusion of male and female gametes reproduction".
- (Babylonian) The chief Babylonian god.
- A cordial disposition.
- A plant hormone promoting elongation of stems and roots.
- Marked by extreme anger.
- An independent ruler or chieftain (especially in Africa or Arabia).
- The part of the nervous system of vertebrates that controls involuntary actions of the smooth muscles and heart and glands.
- The basic unit of money in Mozambique.
- A quantity of no importance.

DOWN

- A summary that repeats the substance of a longer discussion.
- 100 agorot equal 1 shekel.
- Having a sole or soles especially as specified.
- The compass point that is one point east of due south.
- A genus of Mustelidae.
- Respiratory disorder characterized by wheezing.
- A crystalline metallic element not found in nature.
- An acrobatic feat of rolling or turning end over end.
- Being one more than fifty.
- A nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (trade name Lodine).
- One of two alternative forms of a genes that can have the same locus on homologous chromosomes and are responsible for alternative traits.
- A large quantity of written matter.
- An international organization created in 1949 by the North Atlantic Treaty for purposes of collective security.
- German naturalist whose speculations that plants and animals are made up of tiny living 'infusoria' led to the cell theory (1779-1851).
- A member of an agricultural people of southern India.
- The Tibeto-Burman language spoken in the Dal region of Yunnan.
- A river in northern England that flows south-east through West Yorkshire.
- A white crystalline double sulfate of aluminum.
- The face or front of a building.
- Being three more than forty.
- Large black-and-white herbivorous mammal of bamboo forests of China and Tibet.
- A large body of water constituting a principal part of the hydrosphere.
- A blind god.
- Similar to the giraffe but smaller with much shorter neck and stripe on the legs.
- Sole genus of the family Naiadaceae.
- Cubes of meat marinated and cooked on a skewer usually with vegetables.
- An archaic name for Easter or Passover.
- Plant with an elongated head of broad stalked leaves resembling celery.
- (astronomy) The angular distance of a celestial point measured westward along the celestial equator from the zenith crossing.
- Ground snakes.
- The mission in San Antonio where in 1836 Mexican forces under Santa Anna besieged and massacred American rebels who were fighting to make Texas independent of Mexico.
- In the same place (used when citing a reference).
- (Irish) Mother of the ancient Irish gods.
- Transient cessation of respiration.
- (Jungian psychology) The inner self (not the external persona) that is in touch with the unconscious.
- Bright with a steady but subdued shining.
- Long-tailed arboreal mustelid of Central and South America.
- Wild or seedling sweet cherry used as stock for grafting.
- A river that rises in northeastern Turkey (near the source of the Euphrates) and flows generally eastward through Armenia to the Caspian Sea.
- A stick that people can lean on to help them walk.
- Of or relating to or characteristic of Thailand of its people.
- A strategically located monarchy on the southern and eastern coasts of the Arabian Peninsula.
- A vacuum tube in which a hot cathode emits a beam of electrons that pass through a high voltage anode and are focused or deflected before hitting a phosphorescent screen.
- 1,000,000,000 periods per second.
- A metric unit of volume equal to one tenth of a liter.

Yesterday's Solution



STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Finances from the past have been a problem but this year promises to bring a new understanding. If you broadcast your stability and power, other people will automatically plug into an overflow valve. Be selective of the areas in which you will want to share your knowledge and expertise-as well as money. Keep your goals in mind so that other people's ideas do not sway you from your path. There is good news from family members today. You have a powerful drive for most anything you want to do-perhaps some out-of-door sports with friends. Exercise regularly by walking. Make it a habit of putting your feet up when you sit down for any length of time. Being more closely involved with another person may well become your highest priority this year.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

You plan to make more time for friends and family this year and may even look for opportunities to go into business for yourself and hire a few of those people to do business with you. You get along well with others and can move through problems rather quickly, so this is a good time for consolidating your assets. You may receive insights into your living situation or support system now. There are many choices for what you want to do and where you want to go this year. It will soon be time to pick and choose your destiny. One thing is for sure... This is a very positive time. It may not be as important to have a group meeting in order to figure out future events as much as it is important to have a plan; decide what you want and create a time limit.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

At this time, you may have to take care in love. It is a difficult time to try to heal or increase romantic feelings. Now that you know, you can move through this time without the usual problems. Young people are important to you and the relationship you have with young family members is progressive. You can make a positive difference in the lives of many by setting aside some time to be available with laughter, hugs, questions and answers. This may mean speaking, teaching and helping in certain issues, etc. It also may mean saying no to some increase of workflow that has been coming your way recently. Tonight you can join in a group gathering at a neighbor's house. Just get in and participate where you would enjoy.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Your plate is full and you may decide to stop trying to make a round object fit into a square place. Now your job is to verbalize the word "no," learn to delegate and then move forward. Come on... Take a deep breath, be brave-pick and choose where you place your energies, appreciate the ability to choose and that you have choices and then-stick to the path. This is the year of learning to cull through your opportunities, appreciate them and realize your limitations as well as your possibilities; stay focused. You may be involved in a self-employed business now. Your energies will adapt best to a consulting and advising business.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

A new beginning now will have plenty of time for research, insight, planning and scheduling. This tends to be more in your personal affairs and could include anything, such as better health, better budgeting, further education, creative inventions, etc. Plot your path and begin to make your changes. The world is finally catching up to your speed. You have the ability to change other people's lives. This could be through your example or by your advice. Your physical well being has an opportunity to renew and revitalize itself. Remember that tiny causes can lead to big effects. This is a time of recognition, perhaps on the personal level as well as on the professional level.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

You will soon gain recognition for your efforts in the workplace... And you thought nobody was interested. Later this afternoon you may want to consider some list making for your personal needs. Since you keep thinking of things you are supposed to be doing for some future social occasion, list making will allow you to keep those stray thoughts on a leash and your business attention where it is needed. Intellectualism, the exchange of ideas and the idea of being smart as a fox have special appeal and importance in all areas of your life. Later, at home, you might heat up a little spiced tea or cocoa and prop your feet up-you have worked hard and deserve a rest. Phone conversations this evening help you sum up your ideas and plans.

WORD SEARCH PUZZLE

Transportation

Find and circle all of the transportation words that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters will reveal an additional method of transportation.



- | | | | |
|----------|------------|---------------|------------|
| AIRPLANE | FERRY | RICKSHAW | SNOWMOBILE |
| BICYCLE | GONDOLA | ROCKET | SUBMARINE |
| BLIMP | HORSE | ROLLER BLADES | TRAIN |
| BOAT | JET | SCOOTER | TRAM |
| CAMEL | MOPED | SHIP | TRUCK |
| CANOE | MOTORCYCLE | SKATEBOARD | VAN |
| CARRIAGE | PARACHUTE | SKIS | WAGON |
| ELEVATOR | RAFT | SLED | YACHT |



Libra (September 23-October 22)

Work today may call for your flexibility... You are energetic and willing to help. You have an attitude of independence with grace. You create positive outcomes when you remain focused, flexible and positive. Write it down or memorize it-do whatever you have to do to be reminded of these three things as each day unfolds. It will diffuse your anger, smooth out your dependency and create in you the peace that comes with successfully creating your own works. Exciting changes are coming concerning your career this year. Practical vision, self-discovery and common sense are the three ingredients that are necessary to you in making this a successful year. You can improve your position with difficult people. Make it a point to add a bit of laughter.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Your creative side may be showing more often this year. Recently, there just has not been enough time to show the world your talents-changes are taking place. Priorities will be set and you will find the ability to be more focused this year. There is more room for the creative you. Make every moment count-even the restless ones. This may mean eliminating some activities-be brave-you can do it! Further education that can improve your working status should be considered in your plans. A domestic matter may not be your own but suggesting financial counseling will have good results. Your job is to encourage that search. It is a good time to sign papers, make announcements and generally be open to changes. A love relationship deepens.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

Your personal power can be very strong when you understand and come to know yourself. Give yourself time to develop and mature-not unlike a good wine. Enjoy the company of the opposite sex but do not be in such a hurry to take on those responsibilities. Creating and sustaining a positive attitude are the best ways to push that ambitious nature of yours in a forward mode. Faith, optimism and a yearning to explore all kinds of new horizons are some of the focal points in your life at this time. Travel, education and other ways to stretch your horizons open new doors of opportunity. Religious, philosophical and cultural matters are likely to have special appeal for you; transmitting ideas on a broader scale brings gain.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

You have a good head about you but can be rather set in your ways. This may be a time of blossoming, so to speak. You will be wise to allow some situations to evolve... Interesting lessons are learned when you resist entering into common psychological games. Start now by getting into the habit of keeping an open mind. This will increase your creativity and help you to win friends and influence people. Nobody says you have to be swayed in any particular direction-just be open-minded. This is the perfect time to sign up for a class or perhaps you could teach a class.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

There is an attitude of fun today. What a miracle you are and what a difference you can make when you take on that miraculous feeling that comes when you realize your own special power. The workday may be a bit slow but could end earlier than usual-perhaps because it is your special day. At home this afternoon, you may look around at your collection of things and decide that it is time to become more organized. There is an urge to set new routines in order to eliminate clutter. You can set up ways to organize and become encouraged. You may be reconsidering recycle habits-you will be glad you did. Friends and family want to express their love with some fun activity or perhaps a meal away from home tonight.

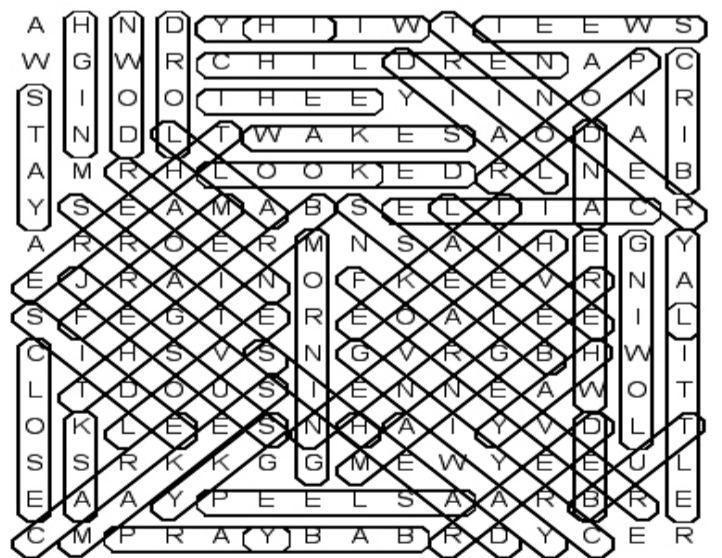


Pisces (February 19-March 20)

You have already done a great deal of growing-this may begin a year of fine-tuning. Don't you just feel it this is a period that emphasizes an enhanced sense of personal possibilities. It is a time of tremendous personal success. The success and failure of some people in your life may dictate where your attention is focused. Allow yourself the experience of leadership. Stand tall among others and speak your ideas. Join others in the art of solving situations. Become a member of the construction crew by not allowing gossip or negative words and thoughts to manipulate your mind-write that down. Romance this evening is flattering and uplifting. There are some wonderful bonding opportunities all during this year.

Yesterday's Solution

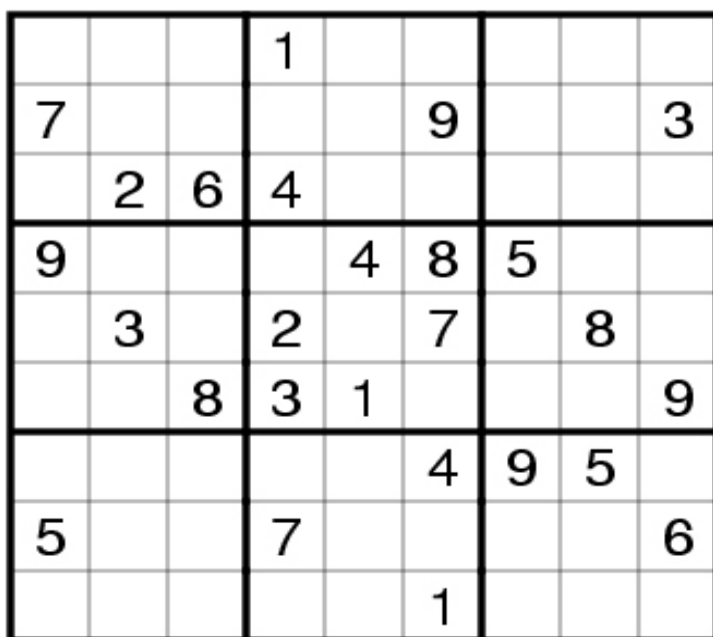
Mystery Christmas Carol #2



- | | | | | |
|--------|----------|--------|---------|--------|
| ALL | CATTLE | HEAVEN | LOWING | STAY |
| AND | CHILDREN | HIS | MAKES | SWEET |
| ASK | CLOSE | JESUS | MANGER | TAKE |
| ASLEEP | CRIB | LAD | MORNING | TENDER |
| AWAY | CRYING | LAY | NEAR | THEE |
| BABY | DEAR | LITTLE | NIGH | THERE |
| BED | DOWN | LIVE | POOR | THY |
| BLESS | FOREVER | LOOK | PRAY | WAKES |
| BRIGHT | FROM | LOOKED | SIDE | WHERE |
| BUT | HAY | LORD | SKY | WITH |
| CARE | HEAD | LOVE | STARS | |

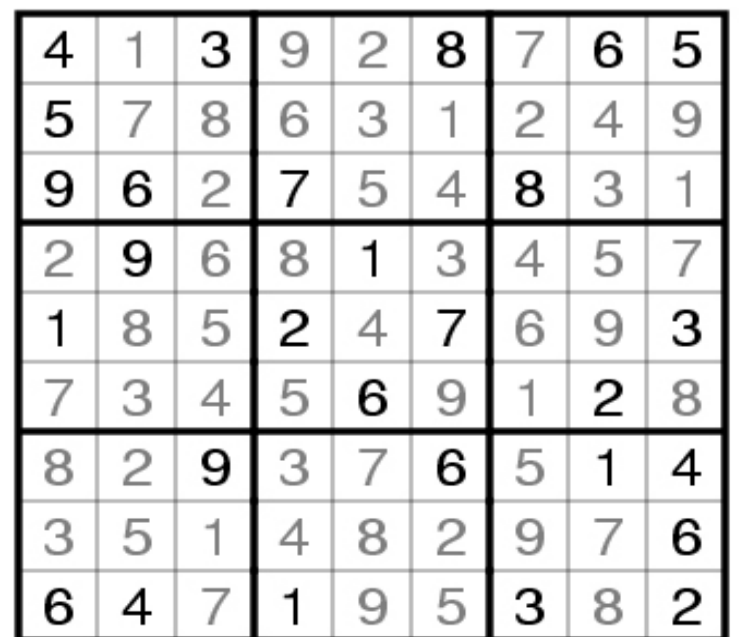
The Mystery Christmas Carol is: AWAY IN A MANGER

Daily SuDoku



very hard

Yesterday's Solution



medium



'Miracle' rescue of four China miners

US WARSHIP SAILS IN WATERS OFF ISLAND CLAIMED BY CHINA

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IOWA: Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump poses with a ring given to him by a group of veterans during a campaign event on the campus of Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa. — AP

TRUMP: CELEBRITY BILLIONAIRE RE-WRITING US POLITICS

69-YEAR-OLD NEW YORKER RAINS INSULTS ON WOMEN, MEXICANS, MUSLIMS

NEW YORK: Republican frontrunner Donald Trump, the swaggering billionaire who revels in money and celebrity, has upended the 2016 presidential election by casting a spell over grassroots conservatives to the horror of the political establishment. To his critics, he is a racist demagogue or at best, a buffoon with an orange permaman and an odd helmet of hair who would either hand Hillary Clinton the White House or lead the world into unmitigated catastrophe.

To his fans, he is the definition of American success, the cut-throat tycoon who can magically fix all that's wrong with a country no longer sure of its place in the world and home to an increasingly frustrated white working and middle class. What is clear is that the 69-year-old New Yorker defies the rules. He insults women, Mexicans, Muslims—virtually everyone who crosses his path and yet his say-it-how-it-is honesty, defiance of political correctness and disdain for the political class has struck a chord matched by almost no other candidate. "I could stand in the middle of 5th Avenue and shoot somebody and I wouldn't lose voters," he boasted in Iowa last week. "It's, like, incredible."

Billions

He promises to build a wall on the Mexican border, deport millions of illegal immigrants and stand up to China to "Make America Great Again." He also plays fast and loose with statistics, and has never unveiled detailed policies. He jets from rally to rally in his Boeing 757 like a

rock star and sucks up roughly as much TV coverage as the other candidates combined, saving him tens of millions of dollars in paid advertising. The big question is: Can he translate his poll numbers into votes? Can he win the Iowa caucus or will his campaign start to unravel when registered Republicans cast their first votes in the long road to the November election?

The Donald, as he is nicknamed, was born on June 14, 1946 in Queens, New York, the fourth of five children. His father Fred was a wealthy real estate developer and the son of German immigrants. His mother Mary was from Scotland. Boisterous and unruly, he was packed off to New York Military Academy, a private boarding school near West Point, and graduated from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania in 1968 with an economics degree. He then set to work for his father, who made money building and operating middle-income apartments in New York's outer boroughs. But Queens and Brooklyn were never going to be enough for the young Donald. He shot off to Manhattan and the big league, snapping up some of the flashiest real estate in the country, riding the wave of Reaganomics and coming to embody the swanky extravagance of the 1980s.

Insults

His true wealth is up for dispute. Trump told the Federal Election Commission he has more than \$10 billion. Forbes insists it is no more than \$4.5 billion. But there is barely a corner of

Manhattan that the Trump Organization hasn't conquered with luxury buildings. Its portfolio of hotels, golf courses, casinos and luxury estates straddles the world, from California to Mumbai. He has written a string of best-selling business books and cemented his fame by starring in NBC reality series "The Apprentice," which spawned "The Celebrity Apprentice"—until the network dumped him for offending Mexicans.

There were other business flops along the way. Four times between 1991 and 2009, his casino and hotel projects on the East Coast fell into bankruptcy. Best known until then for his three marriages, media stunts and for whipping up a frenzy over Barack Obama's birth certificate, Trump's bid for the White House was initially met by mirth last June. But within weeks, he catapulted to the top of the polls in a crowded field of Republican candidates and there he has remained. No matter who he insults, his admirers only love him all the more. He called Mexicans rapists, questioned whether America's most distinguished ex-POW, John McCain, was a war hero and seemed to imply that a Fox News anchor asked him difficult questions because she was menstruating.

He sparked international condemnation when he called for a ban on Muslims entering the United States. In London, MPs debated whether he should be banned from Britain. And still thousands, particularly lower income and less-educated white Americans, flock to his rallies, mesmerized by a man who promises that he can translate personal success into success



NEW HAMPSHIRE: Bob Holmes, owner of the Clay Dragon Tattoo shop tattoos a portrait of Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump on the arm of Seth Bailey at his shop in Seabrook, New Hampshire. — AFP

for the country at large. Previously a Democrat and an independent, he has ditched once liberal views on gun control and abortion, lurching to the right on the campaign trail, alarming and alienating moderate Republicans. Trump has

five children—three with his first wife, former Czech model Ivana whom he divorced in acrimony in 1992, a daughter with second wife Marla Maples and a son with current wife Melania. — AFP

IOWA KICKS OFF PRESIDENTIAL RACE WITH CAUCUS TRADITION

DES MOINES: The long and sometimes arcane ritual of electing the next US president begins on Monday in more than 1,100 schools, churches and libraries across Iowa, a state that wields political influence far greater than its small size. After more than a year of up-close and personal evaluation of the candidates, Iowans will gather with their neighbors on what promises to be a cold wintry night to kick off the state-by-state process of picking the Republican and Democratic nominees for the Nov 8 presidential election. The starring opening-night role of the largely rural Midwestern state in the presidential drama, now four decades old, is a source of pride for Iowa voters, who spend months evaluating the candidates, looking them in the eye and asking questions.

"Iowans see it as a great privilege and a great gift. They take their role very seriously," said Tom Henderson, chairman of the Democratic Party in Polk County, home to Iowa's biggest city, Des Moines. The caucuses will begin on Monday at 7 pm CST, and results are expected within two or three hours. Most gatherings will be in schools, communi-

ty centers or other public locations, although at least two Republican caucuses will be in private homes and one Democratic caucus will be held at an equestrian center. Turnout varies by community, with up to 1,000 people typically gathering in cities like Des Moines, while a few dozen or less may gather in more sparsely populated areas.

The state Republican and Democratic parties run their caucuses separately, although in some areas they hold them in different parts of the same building. Republicans will have more than 800 caucus sites, and Democrats will have about 1,100. The two parties also have different rules. Iowa Democrats gather in groups by candidate preference in a public display of support, a tradition that can allow for shifts back and forth. If a candidate does not reach the threshold of support of 15 percent of voters in a caucus needed to be considered viable, that candidate's supporters are released to back another contender, leading to another round of persuasion.

Republicans are more straightforward. They write their vote privately on a sheet of paper that is collected and counted at the site by caucus officials. A

surrogate or volunteer from each campaign may speak to their neighbors in a last-ditch plea for support, adding to the uncertainty going into the process. Neither party is offering voter turnout estimates this year, although many Iowans predict the Republicans will surpass the 121,503 who turned out in 2012. In the last contested Democratic caucus, in 2008, excitement over Barack Obama's candidacy spurred a record turnout of 239,872.

Iowa, the 30th most populated state, and tiny New Hampshire, which holds the second nominating contest on Feb 9, have traditionally served as early filters to winnow out the losers and elevate the top contenders for later contests. But Iowa Republicans recently have had a spotty record at backing the ultimate presidential nominees. Neither the Republican winner in 2008, former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee, nor the winner in 2012, former US Senator Rick Santorum, managed to win the party nomination. Iowa Democrats did back the party's last two nominees: John Kerry in 2004 and Obama in 2008, which ultimately launched Obama's drive to the White House. — Reuters



IOWA: Democratic presidential candidate, former Maryland Gov Martin O'Malley speaks during a campaign stop at his field office in Sioux City, Iowa on Friday, Jan 29, 2016. — AP

Gossip



Brown slams Grammy Awards as meaningless

The 26-year-old singer - who won a Grammy for best R&B album in 2012 - was furious that his latest record 'Royalty' didn't receive any nominations for the ceremony next month and took to Twitter to vent his anger. He wrote: "#GRAMMY? This is probably the main reason I love being free to create any kind of music I want. Too many people kiss butt and work less. If u turn on ya radio right now I promise within the hour you will hear CHRIS BROWN on damn near half the songs or I've co-written. The awards used to mean something. Now it's about likes, and memes."

"I'm thankful to my fans, I am able to be the best artist I can without having to conform to the ways of my peers. I also need my commission." Although Chris - who has been nominated for a Grammy 15 times in the past - received a nod this year for 'Only', his collaboration with Lil' Wayne, Nicki Minaj and Drake, his solo work was not recognized by the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences. The Grammy Awards 2016 will take place in Los Angeles on February 15.

Carey wants 'beautiful but humble' wedding

The diva recently got engaged to billionaire James Packer after a whirlwind romance and as this will be the third marriage for both of them, Mariah has insisted they want to keep the ceremony and celebrations simple. She told E! News: "We are not doing a big wedding because he did two big weddings, and it's kind of like, 'I've done a big wedding [too]. We would rather make it beautiful but humble." Mariah was previously married to music executive Tommy Mottola and 'America's Got Talent' host Nick Cannon, the father of her four-year-old twins Moroccan and Monroe. And James has been wed twice before, to Jodhi Meares and Erica Baxter, the mother of his three children. Speaking about James' proposal, which came after only a few months of dating, Mariah said: "It was very romantic. He's an exceptional person and really... it gets more romantic by the day, so it's very sweet." She also revealed the wedding will be "somewhat soon" and joked that her 35-carat engagement ring is "so heavy I can't lift my arm up".



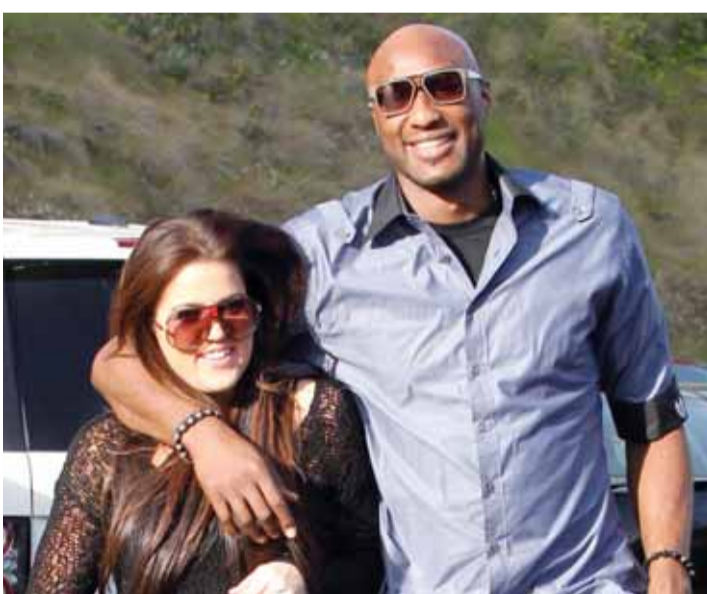
David Bowie's ashes are to be scattered in Bali

The 69-year-old singer died earlier this month after a secret cancer battle and left instructions for his ashes to be scattered on the island, according to his will which was filed in Manhattan on Friday. The New York Post's Page Six also reports that David left half his \$100 million fortune and his Manhattan home to his wife Iman while their daughter Lexi was left his property in upstate New York. David bequeathed \$2 million to his personal assistant, Corinne Coco Schwab, and \$1 million to his son Duncan's former nanny, Marion Skene while the remainder of his fortune will be split between his two children. Meanwhile, Ivo Van Hove, who worked with David on stage show 'Lazarus' recently said the star fought to live because he wanted more time with his wife Iman, their daughter Lexi, 15, and his son Duncan. Director Ivo said: "I deeply felt that he really didn't want to die. It was a fight not against death but a fight to live. "And living, for him, was being a real family man. He loved to go home, to be at home with his daughter, with his wife, his family."



Spelling edited reality TV show to make husband look better

The 'Beverly Hills 90210' actress admitted she hid Dean McDermott's temper from viewers by cutting damaging footage because she didn't want to ruin the idea of them as "America's sweetheart couple". Speaking about the show, 'Tori and Dean', she said: "I was controlling it as best I could. I was being real, but I knew not to let it go to a certain place. I knew Dean had a temper, and I didn't want that on camera, because that didn't serve us well. We were like America's sweetheart couple. Why would I do that? There were some things where I'd be like, 'You guys have to cut that out.'" And Tori admitted that she saw a different side of Dean when they filmed the show. She said: "I was the executive producer. I looked at every edit. I basically protected our relationship through that. At first, it was fine, but it was a new relationship for us. All of a sudden, we got pregnant, and then I saw a different side of him. Not that I didn't love him. But I thought, I didn't sign up for this. Wait, you didn't show me this. He said, 'If I had shown you that side, you wouldn't have been with me.' That's not fair." However, Tori later made the reality TV show 'True Tori' about their marriage in the aftermath of Dean's affair insisting she "didn't have a choice" because she always lived her life in the public eye. Explaining her decision, she told Lena Dunham in an interview for LennyLetter.com: "I didn't know what to do. This wasn't going away. Everyone said, 'This happens all the time. Look at all the A-list celebrities. They used to complain about it. Then they go on and do a big movie and it just goes away.' That's not my life. That's not my relationship with my fans. I'm not the type that can just go from talking about everything and then it's like, 'No personal questions,' the next time I do something."



Odom 'so grateful' to Khloe Kardashian

Khloe has been caring for her estranged husband ever since he collapsed at a brothel in Nevada in October and Lamar recently moved into a rented home in the same gated community as Khloe. A source told PEOPLE: "He can move around alone, and he can communicate much better. In the beginning, he couldn't talk at all. He knows how much Khloe has been there for him, and he is so grateful. The therapy can be incredibly frustrating and he has hard moments, but Lamar is a former athlete. He's strong. And he really wants to get better. "Khloe continues to look after him. Khloe visits him at his house and Lamar hangs out at hers." While Lamar, 36, is on the road to recovery, he still has a long way to go. The insider added: "He still needs help walking. Lamar is not driving himself and instead has a driver. Whenever he leaves the house, he looks happy. He looks alert and often smiles. He is definitely looking more like the old Lamar. "While he isn't 'back to normal' by any means, he's made so much progress."

Dion has thanked her fans for their 'love and support'

The singer's husband of 21 years René Angélil passed away earlier this month after a long battle with cancer and Celine posted a message on her website on behalf of their kids, René-Charles, 15, and five-year-old Eddy and Nelson, and René's children Patrick, Jean-Pierre and Anne-Marie, from previous relationships. Celine wrote: "My family and I are deeply touched by the outpouring of love and support from so many people who have touched our lives during these past few days. We have felt your love for René, and your prayers and compassion have helped us during this most difficult time... more than you'll ever know. I thank you from the bottom of my heart. "I would also like to sincerely thank the Quebec Government for honoring René with National Funerals as well as the many individuals and organizations who came together to hold such a beautiful tribute in his name. We will never forget all of the kindness that you have bestowed upon us. On behalf of our family, with all of our love, Céline, René-Charles, Nelson & Eddy, Patrick, Jean-Pierre & Anne-Marie (sic)." René was laid to rest at a public funeral at the Notre-Dame Basilica - where he and the singer were married in 1994.



Brian Green and Megan Fox sell their marital home

The former couple - who filed for divorce in August 2015 - bought the Toluca Lake property for \$3.35 million two years ago but sold it on for just \$2.6 million, according to the LA Times. Brian and Megan's 6,710-square-foot house once belonged to Bing Crosby. Meanwhile, it was previously revealed that Brian - who has sons Noah and Bodhi with Megan - was seeking spousal support from the 'Transformers' beauty. He has been unable to work because of vertigo, which affects his balance, sustained as a result of a car crash he and Megan were involved in. And a source previously claimed that 'Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles' actress Megan felt "overwhelmed" by her husband's expectations of her. They said: "Megan and Brian's split is a classic Hollywood story of two people in different stages of life and career. "Megan is young and hot and sought after for work, and she is eager to move ahead in her career. Brian wants more of her time than she can allow. "She was overwhelmed with the children and her husband's expectations, which got in the way of work responsibilities. They had many disagreements and arguments about her time at home, which led to problems."

Miller put dancing shoes on as she watched Craig David perform

The 33-year-old actress enjoyed a night off from caring for her three-year-old daughter Marlowe - her child with fiance Tom Sturridge - to join a host of stars from the worlds of fashion, film and music at the unveiling of the restaurant and live music venue in Soho. Sienna was seen chatting with Oasis legend Noel Gallagher - who attended the bash with his wife Sara McDonald - at one point and looked super-stylish in a faux leopard skin jacket. Other celebrities in attendance included Leah Weller and her brother Nat Weller - whose father is Paul Weller - sports manager Dave Gardener, Jack Guinness and Tallia Storm among many others. When garage star Craig took to the stage at 1am to sing his greatest hits such as 'Seven Days' and 'Rendezvous', Sienna, Mary Charteris and Immy Waterhouse went crazy and started jumping up and down and couldn't stop themselves from grooving. After Craig finished his performance, Lou Hayter and the Dixon Brothers played DJ sets until 3am. Through the evening guests were served Molt Champagne and Belvedere Vodka and special Wardour Fizz cocktails to mark the occasion. The site of 100 Wardour St was previously home to the iconic Marquee Club in London.



Lively forced her husband to smuggle apple pie over Canadian border

Ryan Reynolds, the 'Deadpool' actor has revealed his beloved wife, who has her own lifestyle website stashed full of her baking recipes, encouraged him to hide the sweet-tasting dessert as they went through security to board their flight to the US. Speaking on 'The Graham Norton Show', he explained: "My wife is a foodie and loves these apple pies they make in Vancouver where I grew up so we grabbed a bunch of them and we were heading back down to the States and across the border." The 28-year-old actress even made her handsome spouse, 39, with whom she has 13-month-old daughter James, practice

his "poker face" beforehand. Ryan said: "The guard knew something was going on as I've the worst poker face ever and he had me on a hook. "He said, 'You remember you did that movie 'Just Friends' and at the end you sang 'I Swear'? I said, "Yes," and he said, 'Go ahead.' He was saying dance monkey and I danced! I sang that thing in the best falsetto I had and I was on my way through the border eating pie by the next stop." Fruits and vegetables are prohibited on entry to the US, and travelers are expected to declare banned items or risk being slapped with fines of up to \$10,000.

Barker wants Pink Floyd to play at his funeral

The American rocker has already planned what he wants to happen when he is laid to rest and the psychedelic rockers' track must feature during the ceremony according to his instructions. He said: "The song I want played at my funeral is Pink Floyd 'Wish You Were Here'. I actually have this in my will. It's something from back in the day." Travis - who briefly romanced Rita Ora last year - is already lucky to still be alive after he was involved in a plane crash in South Carolina in 2008 which killed many of the people he was travelling with and left him with 67 per cent burns, an ordeal that took him months and 27 operations to recover from. Just as 'Wish You Were Here' is a special song to him, Travis has many songs that are special to him and he can remember vividly the first time he heard Van Halen's 'Hot For Teacher' and knew he wanted to be a professional drummer. However, it was watching Animal on 'The Muppet Show' drum with puppet band Dr. Teeth and The Electric Mayhem that made him want to pick up the sticks and hit the skins. In an interview with NME magazine, he recalled: "Hot For Teacher' was something I would mimic when I was younger. But it wasn't a song that got me into drumming though. It was Animal from 'The Muppets'. It wasn't even a human being I was inspired by - it was an animal!"



Gaga and Taylor Kinney want to tie the knot in Italy

The 'Til It Happens to You' hitmaker is reportedly keen to "celebrate her heritage" with a beautiful wedding in the European country but are in no rush to walk down the aisle. A source said: "She wants to celebrate her heritage, so they're looking at places in the Italian countryside. She wants a big Italian wedding. They're still enjoying their engagement, so they have to figure out the right time to do it. They're not fully planning yet." The 29-year-old singer and actress is also planning to settle on a venue before she decides on her dress as she wants the venue to "inspire" the gown. An insider added to the New York Post's Page Six column: "The venue is going to inspire the dress, so she has to lock that in first. It'll make her figure out what the dress will be and who will make it." Meanwhile, the 'Chicago Fire' star previously revealed Lady Gaga - real name Stefani Germanotta - wants a "nice big wedding". He said: "I could go to the Little White Chapel [in Las Vegas] but I think, well she's an Italian and that won't happen. She wants a nice big wedding so I'll let you know when we get a date."



Clooney has adopted a dog for his parents

The 'Monuments Men' star - who owns three rescue pooches himself with wife Amal - heard about the plight of Nate the terrier, who was born with birth defects that affect the way he walks, and had not found a home in the nine months he spent at LuvFurMutts, a shelter in Ohio, and decided to take him for Nick and Nina Clooney, whose own canine companion had recently passed away. A post on the organization's Facebook page read: "When we took Nate to adoption events, people would stare and kids would point. Several people applied to adopt him but then said no when they met him. He was with us 9 months. "The lowest point came when an adopter cried when she met him and said she would be depressed the rest of her life if she had to look at him every day." George arranged to have Nate delivered to his parents in Kentucky on Christmas Eve and they were thrilled with the new addition to their household. The post continued: "All details were handled by George's very efficient personal assistant, Angel. Angel said George picked Nate out, then showed him to his Mom, Nina, on YouTube. She watched his video over and over and she fell in love. He then asked his Father Nick how he felt about the way Nate walks and he replied 'I guess it sounds like he gets around just as good as we do anymore...' "Nina cried a little when she opened the door and Nate was put into her arms. She was very surprised. She cried a little again when she read the card from George, Amal and Angel saying they wanted her to have Nate to enjoy Christmas with." And the kindly actor and his lawyer wife also made a generous donation to the facility. The post read: "We want to thank George and Amal Clooney for adopting Nate and their donation to LuvFurMutts that covered more than Nate's previous surgery expenses. "They had no idea of those previous surgeries nor did we know Nate's heroes the Clooneys would be coming soon when Nate had the procedures. What a gift!" —Bangshowbiz

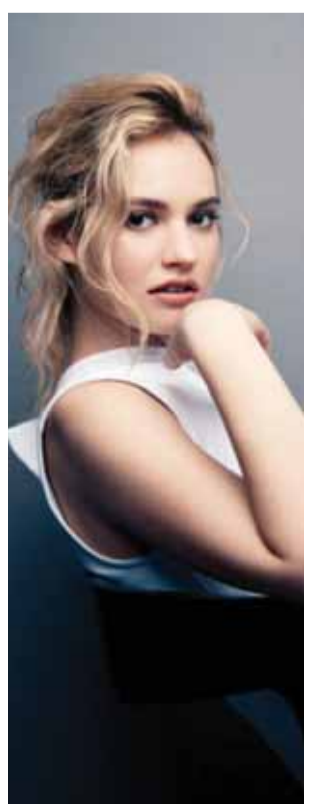


Chelsea Handler won't apologize for offending people

The outspoken talk show host insists she is careful to "push boundaries" without being "disrespectful" so never sees the need to say sorry. She said: "I think if you start apologizing, a) you have to apologize every time and b) be smart enough to say something that doesn't warrant an apology." You have to be thoughtful about what you're saying. You can push boundaries but you can't be completely disrespectful. "I just choose not to go down that road [of apologizing]. I just won't." "God forbid I ever say something terrible, maybe I'll change my mind. But in my opinion, as long as I'm OK with it, I'm not going to bow low to people that are expecting an apology from me. That goes against everything I stand for." Chelsea thinks her open stance is "enlightening" and she insists a lot of people relate to her. She told heat magazine: "I feel like it's enlightening to say things that people don't say. I can't tell you how many times girls say, 'Oh my God, we would be best friends. You say or do everything I feel!'"

James once decorated her bedroom with pictures of Ryan Phillippe

The 'Pride and Prejudice and Zombies' actress - who is in a relationship with Matt Smith - had a huge crush on the 'Cruel Intentions' star and "really loved" him. She said: "My first movie crush was Ryan Phillippe. He covered my bedroom walls. "I didn't have proper posters of him, I made collages using Microsoft Word - an A4 sheet that was 15 tiny pictures of Ryan Phillippe. I really loved him." The 26-year-old star was a presenter at the recent Golden Globe awards and shared a "surreal" moment backstage with Lady Gaga. Asked when she last got starstruck, she said: "I had a little moment with Lady Gaga [at the Globes]. "We were backstage because I was presenting and she held on to me at one point, which was amazing. "She held my shoulders. I just smiled. It was very surreal." Though she was invited to the prestigious awards ceremony, Lily doesn't feel particularly famous. Ranking her fame on a scale of one to 10, she told Empire magazine: "Four? I sometimes do ridiculously crazy things. "I went to the Golden Globes but I don't really feel I'm at Globes level!"





This image released by Thekla Inc shows a scene from "The Witness," a video game set in a mysterious island with hundreds of puzzles. — AP

Clever, infuriating puzzles lead 'The Witness'

Independent video-game designers have hit upon a fascinating way to create buzz: Don't give players all the answers. That opens up a game beyond the game, with players flocking at online message boards to debate the deeper meanings of what they've just experienced. I'd guess that many of the people who have bought recent indie hits like "Her Story," "Soma" and "Journey" have spent more time arguing about them than playing them.

One of the pioneers of this trend is Jonathan Blow, whose time-warping puzzle game "Braid" baffled millions in 2008. The story in "Braid" was unapologetically ambiguous, and interpretations ranged from a tale of love gone sour to a retelling of the creation of the atomic bomb.

Blow has taken his time crafting a follow-up, but has finally re-emerged with "The Witness" (Thekla, for the PlayStation 4, PC, \$39.99). It's even more bewildering than "Braid" - and while some Blow fans will adore it, many will find it infuriating.

"The Witness" is set on a lush tropical island dotted with the ruins of a vanished civilization. Scattered across the island are hundreds of electrified panels, each of which contains a small, two-dimensional puzzle. The vast majority are mazes, and the first few simply ask you to draw a line from start to finish. But they quickly grow more complex: You may need to separate colored boxes, or draw the line so it creates certain shapes in the grid.

The devilish gimmick here is that the designers never explain the rules, so when triangles and stars pop up in the mazes you have no idea what they mean. The only way to interpret them is by experimenting - and once you figure out one symbol, Blow has another in his pocket.

Rewards vary. Most of the time your prize for solving a puzzle is ... another puzzle. Some panels unlock doors or create bridges to new areas. If you solve enough mazes, you'll activate lasers that converge at a mountaintop, where you'll find - well, let's not spoil too much. Older gamers

will be reminded of the 1990s classic "Myst" (indeed, one of the designers is a "Myst" veteran), although the mythology here isn't quite as elaborate.

As a die-hard puzzle addict, I initially found "The Witness" disappointing. The puzzles are generally well-designed, but they're almost all mazes, and I would have liked a bit more variety. But it has grown on me, and I've found it's better appreciated in short sessions. Tinker with a few panels until you get stuck, and then play something less nerve-racking, like "Call of Duty."

Websites have already started posting solutions to some of the most vexing puzzles, so there's nothing to stop you from seeking help. And I'm looking forward to finding out what players think of the broader mystery embedded in the island. "The Witness" demands intense levels of patience and concentration - and I still don't know if the payoff is worth the effort. Three stars out of four. — AP



Film Review: 'Jane Got a Gun'

There are movies that can make you feel nostalgic for a more innocent time - ie, the pre-Internet era - when audiences (and critics) could approach each new release unburdened by detailed knowledge of its production history. "Jane Got a Gun," a solidly made and conventionally satisfying Western, is one of those movies. For those who have perused the countless accounts of last-minute cast changes, musical directors' chairs and repeatedly delayed release dates, it may be difficult to objectively judge what actually appears on screen here without being distracted by thoughts of what could have been, or should have been.

To be sure, a hefty percentage of the folks most likely to enjoy an old-fashioned oater such as this normally won't devote massive quantities of time to consuming showbiz blogs and trade papers. But those unplugged genre aficionados may not know "Jane Got a Gun" exists, since the Weinstein Company opted to open it with only slightly more advance notice than is normally afforded a traffic accident. By the time word reaches most interested parties, this luckless sagebrush saga will have vamoosed from the megaplexes.

When it reaches home-screen platforms, however, "Jane Got a Gun" almost certainly will find a receptive audience for its revisionist yet respectful spin on genre conventions. Indeed, the only thing about it that might rattle traditionalists is the sporadic use of four- and five-letter words. (Yes, there still are people who get upset by the sort of thing. And many of those people feel under-served because Hollywood seldom gives them this sort of movie.)

Natalie Portman is persuasive and compelling in the lead role of Jane Hammond, a slightly built but formidably resourceful pioneer woman who's greatly upset when John (Noah Emmerich), her husband, returns one day to their New Mexico Territory farm with several bullets in his innards. Mind you, John's ambush is not a complete surprise to Jane, since he is an outlaw with a price on his head, and both of them have long been hunted by John Bishop (Ewan McGregor), a grandiloquent villain with an old score to settle with the couple. But with her husband temporarily indisposed while he recovers from his wounds, Jane realizes she must even the odds as she prepares for the worst.

And so, after placing her young daughter out of harm's way, Jane rides over to the tumbledown home of Dan Frost (Joel Edgerton), a hard-drinking gunslinger with whom she shared a relationship - and more, it's gradually revealed - years earlier. At first, Dan rejects Jane's plea for help with a surly display of alcohol-fueled resentment. But when push comes to shove, well, a man's got to do what a man's got to do - especially when it looks like a woman will dang well try to do it alone if he doesn't.

Not surprisingly, considering the movie's title, there is a perceptible feminist undercurrent to the screenplay credited to Edgerton, Brian Duffield and Anthony Tambakis. Jane is not your grandfather's Western heroine: She can

fire bullets into bad guys just as efficiently as she can take them out of her husband. Granted, she may not be the world's surest shot when it comes to hitting a long-range target. But when she's facing a foe in close quarters - particularly during the applause-worthy finale - she shoots and she scores. Portman handles the rough stuff quite convincingly throughout "Jane Got a Gun." She's at her best, though, in scenes where Jane demonstrates that maternal rage can be every bit as lethal as a quick draw.

Gavin O'Connor, a filmmaker whose intriguing resume runs the gamut from the warmly femme-centric ("Tumbleweeds") to the aggressively macho ("Warrior"), maintains a deliberate pace, less a gallop than a canter, during what basically amounts to a readying-to-rumble narrative interspersed with backstory-abundant flashbacks. After the measured build-up, he effectively amps the excitement (with the invaluable assistance of editor Alan Cody) during the climactic shootout, then tops it off with a coda that slyly suggests what Clint Eastwood's Man With No Name might have done a few hours after the ending of "For a Few Dollars More."

There are more than a few tips of the Stetson to other classic Westerns, ranging from visual quotes (a gaze-through-the-doorway shot that recalls the beginning and end of "The Searchers") to plot developments (the "Magnificent Seven"-style approach to rigging booby-traps around the Hammond homestead). And there is a classical look and feel to the movie overall, with handsome widescreen lensing by Mandy Walker and aptly evocative music by Lisa Gerrard and Marcello De Francisci.

Edgerton hits the right balance of sullen gruffness and soulful sincerity as Dan, while McGregor artfully entwines amusement and menace as he serves generous slices of ham as John Bishop. Emmerich has little to do but lie in bed and indicate that being shot multiple times can really take a lot out of you. But what he does, he does well. —Reuters



For anonymity-loving Sia, new album 'acting' for other stars

NEW YORK: For her first album since her breakthrough hit "Chandelier," Sia is facing off on the charts against superstars Adele and Rihanna. And they are likely familiar with some of the songs - they were written for them.

"This Is Acting," the seventh album by the Australian singer known both for her distinctively soaring voice and her face-covering black-and-white wig, consists of tunes that she wrote, offered to other artists and, after deals fell through, salvaged.

For Sia, the album is a multidimensional paradox. She is interpreting her own songs, ones that are often highly personal. But they were intended to come from the hearts of others. The



This file photo taken on December 6, 2014 shows singer-songwriter Sia as she attends the "Annie" World Premiere at Ziegfeld Theater on December 7, 2014 in New York City. —AFP

album's first single, "Alive," was meant for Adele as part of her blockbuster album "25."

"Alive" matches the mood of "25," as Sia - playing the role of Adele - reminisces of her childhood and her survival into adulthood to a tune that opens with richly dark piano chords before a rapid climax. "I'm still breathing / I'm alive," sings Sia in one of her strongest performances, her voice gliding from soulful to roaring with a touch of rasp. Sia, speaking to Apple Music's Beats 1 radio, said she was surprised that Adele did not want "Alive."

"I thought this one was such a smash but she just wasn't feeling it," Sia told the station, whose host Zane Lowe described the album's concept as playing "fantasy football with the world's pop stars." Sia similarly appears to channel Beyonce on the more inspirational "Footprints," a string-backed, mid-tempo pop song that uses subtle spiritual imagery to describe salvation either by a partner or God. A more conventional pop ballad, "Reaper," was co-produced by rap star Kanye West. Sia wrote "Reaper" and the uptempo "Cheap Thrills" for Rihanna, who released her long-awaited "Anti" album on Wednesday. But the R&B superstar, whose new album focuses on inward-looking ballads, rejected them. Even giddier is "Move Your Body," a club-style dance track that Sia wrote for Shakira.

What the public wants

The 40-year-old singer, whose real name is Sia Furler, had her start in the jazz scene of Adelaide and remains more at least in the indie world than with pop celebrity. But she has become a major writer for pop stars, notably composing Rihanna's 2012 worldwide hit "Diamonds." Sia, who keeps her face hidden to preserve her anonymity, has struggled with addiction, a battle that figured prominently on her last album, "1000 Forms of Fear," which came out in 2014.

The album's hit "Chandelier," an electropop ballad of a party girl's alcohol-fueled self-destruction, was nominated for Grammys for Song of the Year and Record of the Year. Sia returns to dark territory on the latest album by exploring abusive relationships.

In "House on Fire," armed with one of the album's most powerful musical hooks despite a conventional synthesizer arrangement, Sia uses the title as a metaphor for personal chaos. The similarly bleak "Bird Set Free" was written for Adele, who did not find it suitable.

Speaking to Rolling Stone magazine, Sia said she thought most of her songs for pop stars were "terribly, terribly cheesy." But Sia acknowledged that she knew a successful tune when she wrote one. "It really seems like the general public responds well to songs about salvation or overcoming something, or that everything's going to be okay, or that things are fun," she said. "I think that my skill is more upbeat curating, as in choosing the right tracks and then sort of trying to understand the will or nature of popular culture." — AFP



Max celebrates Spring 2016 collection launch and fashion for real campaign #berea

MAX, the largest value fashion brand in the region showcased its well-received Spring 2016 collection at a spectacular fashion show that took place on January 25th, 2016 at the Westin Hotel. The event included a fashion show, and several activations, including an accessories booth, live LED screens capturing the audiences, live event footage to the Middle East region for Max customers, media, partners, a photo wall with customized polaroid and a caricaturist who drew attendees.

In attendance of the event was Mohammad Assaf, who has collaborated with Max for the Fashion for Real People campaign launched in November. The 360 campaign highlights human authenticity and encourages people to embrace their own unique style, by treating fashion as an extension of one's personality. It aims to inspire consumers to embrace their individuality and motivates them to dress for their comfort.

Since its launch in November last year, the campaign has received tremendous success. It began with a social experiment that was featured across all Max Social Media platforms followed by a TVC featuring Mohammed Assaf. The total investment in the brand campaign is AED 8.1 million.

Ramanathan Hariharan, CEO of MAX says, "The 'Fashion For Real People' campaign recognizes true comfortable fashion, not solely dictated by glamour pages or catwalks, but fashion that allows our customers unique individuality in the style choices they make. In essence, the campaign recognizes individuality in fashion that makes one feel comfortable."

In our latest campaign our consumers are families, young adults, boys and girls who shop at Max because it feels real to them. We thus wanted to let our shoppers know that we appreciate and respect their sense of individuality. At the heart of the Be Real campaign is a call for authenticity, an encouraging platform that will allow people to embrace their own unique style by treating fashion as an extension of their personality."

Mohammed Assaf added: "It is an absolute honor for me to collaborate on such a campaign with Max. The campaign's ethos resonates with my personal values and beliefs." The Spring Collection was carefully designed to reflect this sense of individuality. Trends woven into the collection blend understated elegance with a touch of modernized style. A minimalist 70's approach pervades this season, brushed with modernism for a neo-nostalgic look that is dreamy and pensive.

For the female collection, classic maritime with revamped classics, evolved spots and stripes combined with simplified styling

under a sports influenced umbrella directs a strong nautical message this spring season. Nautical colors with bright highlights in quirky conversational prints and oversized polka dots transforms a more modern take on this evergreen trend. Key shapes such as culottes, tubular maxi's, roll-up chinos & resort polo t-shirts play a big role in updating this classic look.

Black and white tailoring with proportion play, and typography stay a key trend from the past for Spring 2016. Stencil florals, linear markings, and simple horizontal stripes update the classic monochrome trend with key shapes like long lined cardigans, slim leg pants, wrap front jumpsuit boxy shift dress, kimono's & slim leg with kick flare trousers.

For the men's collection, preppy resort wear is the new nautical for Spring 2016. This trend focuses on resort styling with sailor stripes and color pop updating this classic trend. Simple typography, yacht referencing anchor motifs as well seaside conversational prints bring that fun modern edge. Core classic shapes such as; the single button blazer, tipped polo shirt, cricket sweater the 5-pocket chino & tailored shorts are updated with modern resort styling.

Monochrome sportswear continues to have the biggest influence on the season with proportion play, oversized fits, longer



hemlines and Bauhaus typography. Simplified graphics with easy slogans continue in monochromatic shades. These are found in shapes such as; slim fit joggers, active inspired t-shirts longer length shirts, cut and sew polo's slouchy crew neck tops to name but a few.

Max Fashion loyalists can support the new

campaign by using the hashtag #BeReal across social media platforms. Max Fashion is part of Landmark Group, one of the largest retail and hospitality conglomerates in the Middle East and India. It currently operates in 16 countries across MENA and India.



In this Friday, Jan 29, 2016 photo, an employee of a clothing store eats lunch next to a "child angel" doll in Bangkok, Thailand.



Supavadee Tapmalai uses her smartphone next to a "child angel" doll at a Japanese restaurant. —AP photos



A collection of "child angel" dolls are displayed at the clothing store of their owner Supavadee Tapmalai.



In this Thursday, Jan 28, 2016 photo, "child angel" dolls sit on a chair.

In latest fad, Thais treat 'child angel' dolls like progeny

Mix one part superstition, two parts fashion, a dab of celebrity idolatry and a heap of media frenzy, and what do you get? "Child angel" dolls, the latest craze in Thailand. The dolls occupy a niche somewhere between Buddhist amulets, beloved by gamblers, gangsters and policemen for their reputed magical protective powers, and Furby toys, adored by children for their cuteness.

The adults who own them affirm that "child angel" dolls will bring you good luck, especially if you treat them like your own living progeny, taking them on trips, treating them to meals and praying together at the temple.

While "luk thep" dolls, as they are known in Thai, previously drew only mild notice beyond the circle of their devoted collectors, attention skyrocketed this past week after a leaked memo from budget airline Thai Smile instructed staff to treat the dolls like human passengers - provided, of course, their seats were paid for.

The airline noted the creepiness factor, suggesting the dolls be seated out of sight as much as possible. In short order, several restaurants announced similar doll-friendly policies. Police, meanwhile, warned the dolls could be used to smuggle drugs and busted one with 200 hidden

methamphetamine tablets. The dolls have been specially blessed by some Buddhist monks, who apply sacral markings to them, as they might with a new car or house. It's not a strictly Buddhist practice, and at least one temple reportedly banned the doll blessings, but easygoing Thais aren't fussy about blending Hindu ritual and other elements into their religion.

Superstitious practices

The dolls, mostly imports, cost anything from a few dozen to a few hundred dollars, with the blessings available on a similar sliding scale. Some are customized by sellers, and owners invariably gussy them up, with jewelry and other accessories, in anticipation of, or thanks for, good fortune. The dolls have elements of a hobby, a cult and a business. Mental health authorities, while cautioning against superstitious practices, acknowledge their therapeutic utility as stress reducers.

Kanuengnit Chotichanachaphat, 31, adopted her first doll two years ago on the recommendation of a friend who said it would bring her luck, and named it "Pa Ruay" ("Being Wealthy"). Kanuengnit, with part-time jobs as an events hostess and golf caddy, believes Pa Ruay helped increase

her income just three months after she adopted him. Now she has five dolls, and enjoys doing their hair so much she does hair modifications on other people's dolls for 800-1,000 baht (\$22-28) apiece.

The dolls provide some of the same satisfactions as a pet - minus the messiness - but it is their supernatural aspect that draws more attention and debate. Aside from the awkwardness of carrying them around in one's arms, they have much in common with traditional Buddhist amulets - coin-sized talismans with supposed magical powers that are usually worn around the neck.

Amulet collecting is a popular but old-fashioned hobby. Dolls are more popular with a younger, urban crowd, including celebrities. It has been suggested that the dolls also have more macabre associations, or at least antecedents. An ancient black magic rite known as "kuman thong" in its purest form involves taking a stillborn human fetus, drying it over a fire, and coating it with gold leaf. More commonly, the rite is reputed to merely contain a body part, but like luk thep, they are believed to be imbued with a child's spirit. —AP



Actor Chris Pine attends the premiere of Disney's "The Finest Hours" at TCL Chinese Theatre on January 25, 2016 in Hollywood, California. — AFP

Chris Pine, rising star in Hollywood's 'The Finest Hours'

Pale blue eyes. Leading-man looks. Chris Pine is one of Hollywood's rising stars and for good reason. The "Star Trek" and "Horrible Bosses 2" actor sat down with AFP ahead of the US release of his latest film, "The Finest Hours," to talk about everything from his most recent role to being the son of Hollywood actors. The movie, which hits theaters Friday, recounts the true story of a 1952 rescue mission to save a ship caught in a hellish storm off the coast of Massachusetts. The 35-year-old Californian plays heroic Coast Guard captain Bernie Webber, who leads the rescue operation, and is cast alongside actor Casey Affleck in the film by Craig Gillespie.

AFP: So who was Bernie Webber?

"He's an atypical hero," Pine told AFP. The type you wouldn't expect to step up and do heroic things. "He was indeed a quiet man who spoke about the facts, God and his faith, which gave me an idea of who he was," Pine said after listening to Webber's interviews. "He's a complete 'beta' - not 'alpha male.' That's what attracted me to the character. I had a great empathy for Bernie and wanted him to succeed," he said.

Who are your personal heroes?

"My parents certainly, but I think that in today's age we need more people like Malala (Yousafzai, the Nobel Peace Prize winning Pakistani education campaigner). She's a warrior," Pine said. "To be able to experience what she did and not meet it with anger... and use that and expand it in people's lives to open new doors for women across the world, (and to be) that young and have that old of a soul, is just mind-blowing," he said.

What about growing up Hollywood?

Pine, who is the child of actors Robert Pine and Gwynne Gilford, said "I never got any specific advice from my parents," but added that he "always credits them for being supportive and having an open ear." "I wanted to play baseball growing up but was not good enough to do that," Pine said.

Thoughts about social media

Social media "can be a wonderful way to disseminate information," Pine told AFP, but he also called it "self-promoting." And he would rather have something of a barrier with the public than use it to connect with fans. "I might be too sensitive of a creature," he said. "I don't want to hear what people think of me, I don't want to hear if they don't like my hair cut, I just don't want to hear it."

On writing as therapy

The enthusiasm Pine lacks for social media he makes up for with his embrace of creative outlets. "I love music and I love singing... and I love writing about a lot of things that are happening and popping," Pine said. "I've been trying to have writing be a part of my life," he added, explaining that he doesn't keep a journal but does jot down song lyrics, ideas and daily events. Plus he likes to draw. "You break down some barriers of creativity when you access this part of you," he said. — AFP



This image provided by the Sundance Institute shows, Armie Hammer, left, and Nate Parker, in a scene from the film, "The Birth of a Nation," directed by Nate Parker. — AP

Diversity thrives in indies, while studios lag behind

A year ago, first-time director Nate Parker was still struggling to get together the \$10 million he needed to make his passion project, a film that tells the story of slave rebellion leader Nat Turner. On Tuesday, a day after the film debuted at the Sundance Film Festival, Parker sold "The Birth of a Nation" to Fox Searchlight for a record \$17.5 million. The buzz caused such frenzy that encore screenings reportedly commanded \$100 offers for tickets.

"The Birth of a Nation" is a bit of a Cinderella story of how independent films can become part of the mainstream. But Parker's success - and previous Sundance breakouts like "Dope" and "Fruitvale Station" - illustrate that there's a hunger out there for diverse stories, and that studios are willing to pay premiums for them, but not necessarily make them. As things stand, the fastest route to getting an audience and a distributor is by going independent.

Promising antidote

While the big studios cover to widespread outrage over the lack of meaningful diversity in film, the Sundance Film Festival is the promising antidote for one reason: In

Hollywood, the dollar is the bottom line. At Sundance, the story is. That philosophy tears down the hurdles that so many minority filmmakers have to face in the entertainment industry, where the big studios sometimes operate by antiquated standards (such as having slots for one or two "urban movies" on their slate) even though monster hits like "Creed" and "Straight Outta Compton" would seem to suggest that making more could be good for the bottom line. The films that make it to Sundance aren't filling pre-determined slots. They are borne out of the passion of the filmmakers and financiers who believe in them. They don't have to think about box office, foreign sales or shareholders. They don't have to abide by conventional storytelling techniques. And they don't have to worry about whether the stars or directors are names. Tika Sumpter, whose fictionalized tale of the Obamas first date, "Southside With You," also premiered at Sundance, said she just "wanted to see someone who looked like me falling in love up there." It's a sentiment that many of the filmmakers at the Park City, Utah festival share, and their only opportunity to get their projects made and seen are to do it themselves. —AP

Jacques Rivette, French New Wave film director, dies at 87

French director Jacques Rivette, a secretive pioneer of New Wave film acclaimed for expanding the boundaries of movie making and for creating rich roles for actresses such as Emmanuelle Beart, has died at 87.

Known for his often-tousled hair and slight build, he was among the last survivors from a generation of directors that included Francois Truffaut who startled filmgoers and revitalized filmmaking in the 1950s and '60s. French President Francois Hollande, in a statement Friday announcing Rivette's death, hailed him as "a cineaste of the woman." Serge Toubiana of the Cinematheque museum in Paris described Rivette's "sense of conspiracy, sense of secrecy" and the "magnificent place" he provided to women characters.

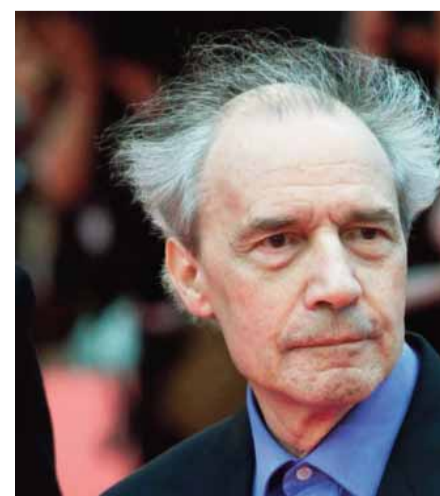
Among them were roles in an early film "La Religieuse" (The Nun), censored when it first came out in 1966; the award-winning, nearly-four-hour "La Belle Noiseuse" (The Beautiful Troublemaker) with Beart in 1991; and a 1994 version of the Joan of Arc tale called "Jeanne la Pucelle" starring Sandrine Bonnaire. He was known for working without scripts, for telling stories within stories and for disregarding rules of commercial cinema, notably with his 12 hour, 40 minute "Out 1," a film all the more legendary because few have seen it in its entirety.

In a critique more than half a century ago published in Cahiers du Cinema, he observed, "To make a film is to show certain things. At the same time, it is to, by the same act, show them from a certain angle; these two acts are rigorously intertwined." A native of Rouen, Rivette became fascinated by movies in the 1940s after reading a book by Jean Cocteau about his adaptation of "Beauty and the Beast." ("La Belle et La Bete").

He moved to Paris in his early 20s and regularly attended screenings at the Cinéma de la Sorbonne, becoming part of an impassioned and gifted circle of young movie lovers that included Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard and Claude Chabrol. Many went on to become critics, then filmmakers, influenced by everything from French

literature to American gangster movies, their work a dynamic hybrid of intellectualism, romanticism and raw energy. The New Wave ("La Nouvelle Vague") was at the center of a thriving film culture worldwide.

Rivette was a private man and not as famous as Truffaut or Godard, but his career as a director predates them with his 1956 short "Le Coup du Berger" ("Fool's Mate") and he was an important influence as a critic. Hired by the revered Andre Bazin to write for Cahiers du Cinema, he wrote tributes to such American filmmakers as Nicholas Ray and John Ford that nurtured an appreciation in France for Hollywood and in turn inspired Scorsese and other Americans to treat their country's movies with heightened respect. His last film was 2009's "36 vues du Pic Saint Loup" ("Around a Small Mountain"). "He was the most experimental of the French New Wave directors," Martin Scorsese said in a statement. "Rivette was a fascinating artist, and it's strange to think that he's gone. Because if you came of age when I did, the New Wave still seems new. I suppose it always will." — AP



French director Jacques Rivette arriving for the screening of his film "Who Knows", in competition at the Film Festival in Cannes, France. — AP



In this Jan 27, 2013 file photo, Alexis Bledel arrives at the 19th Annual Screen Actors Guild Awards in Los Angeles. — AFP

Netflix to bring back hit 'Gilmore Girls' TV series

Netflix announced Friday it is reviving the hit TV series "Gilmore Girls," which won legions of fans more than a decade ago depicting the exploits of a thirty-something mother and her teenage daughter. The show's stars-Lauren Graham as Lorelai Gilmore and Alexis Bledel, who played her daughter Rory-will also be back. Graham confirmed the show's revival-and her return as its star-on Twitter late Friday.

"I CAN NOW CONFIRM: it's time for me, and this jacket I stole in 2007, to return to work," she wrote under the handle @thelaurengraham, adding the @netflix and hashtag #GilmoreGirls. The Twitter post also showed a copy of Graham holding a lavender jacket with lettering that read "Property of Gilmore Girls Costume" department.

The popular show, which aired 150 episodes from 2000 to 2007, will see actors Scott Patterson, Kelly Bishop, Sean Gunn and Keiko Agena return as well. Creator Amy Sherman-Palladino will oversee the new program, although Netflix gave no details about the name of the new program, its filming schedule or when fans can expect it to go online. The latest episodes will be in miniseries format, with four 90-minute shows, Variety magazine said, citing sources, whereas the original episodes were in standard TV-series format. —AFP

Thais treat 'child angel' dolls like progeny

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Egyptian singer Tamer Hosni performs on stage at Kuwait's Ice Skating Rink.

Hala February

Festival kicks off with musical concerts

By Nawara Fattahova

The musical concerts of the Hala February Festival kicked off on Thursday night at the Ice Skating Rink, like every year. The weather was extremely cold, but fans still came to enjoy listening to their favorite stars.

The first concert started with the young Qatari singer Fahd Al-Kbeisi, who came onstage at 10:30 pm. Although he launched his career in 2001, he only became popular in Kuwait a few years ago, especially among the younger generation. Besides his own songs, he also sang some old folk Kuwaiti songs. He took a selfie from the stage with the audience for his Snapchat account. He concluded at 11:45 pm.

The second singer to come onstage was Syrian veteran Asala Nasri, at 12:15 am. Wearing a long white dress, she welcomed the large audience. She concluded at 1:45 am. The concert concluded with veteran Saudi singer Abadi Al-Jawhar, who came onstage at 2:15 am. He started his career about 40 years ago, and is very popular for playing the oud (lute), and is known as the 'King of Oud' and the 'Octopus of Oud'. His fans enjoyed his performance till 4:00 am.

The second concert took place on Friday night with three singers participating. It started at 10:15 pm with young Emirati singer Shama Hamdan. The 22-year-old became popular after participating in the TV show 'Arabs Got Talent',

and gained a huge number of fans. As of last year when she participated in the festival, she presented a new song that she sang for the first time, which the audience liked and sang with her. She concluded at 11:20 pm.

The second singer was veteran Algerian star Shab Khalid, who is internationally popular due to some of his popular songs in French. This is the first time for him to participate in a musical concert in Kuwait, and he expressed his happiness to perform in Kuwait when he came onstage at midnight. He is called the King of Rai, which is a style of Algerian music. The audience interacted with his Western fast rhythmic music that's different from the other performers in the festival. He concluded at 1:00 am.

The final part of this concert witnessed action, as a young girl ran from the audience towards popular Egyptian singer Tamer Hosni, trying to hug him. This happened after he came down from the stage, but he continued singing, while the security guards took the excited fan outside. Tamer started his career in 2002 with a joint album with Egyptian singer Shireen. He released his first solo album in 2004. He has become very popular, especially among the younger generation, and his fans sang with him all his songs. He also took a selfie from the stage with the audience.



Asala



Abadi Al-Jawhar



Shama Hamdan



Shab Khalid