

Minister hints driver who killed policeman may be a militant



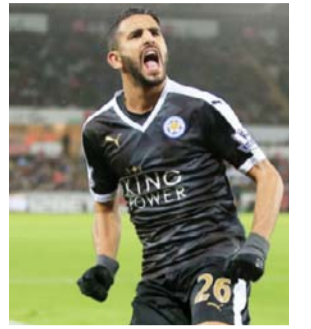
Pakistan executes governor's assassin



Asia's tuk-tuks providing a wheel boost to Africa



Leicester and Mahrez gaining fans in Algeria



150 FILS
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KUWAIT, NATO SIGN GULF'S FIRST 'TRANSIT AGREEMENT'

STOLTENBERG URGES JOINT SOLUTIONS TO REGIONAL CHALLENGES



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KUWAIT: (Left) HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg yesterday. (Right) Stoltenberg and Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah exchange documents after signing a NATO-Kuwait transit agreement at the foreign ministry yesterday. — Photos by AP and Yasser Al-Zayyat



KUWAIT: Kuwait and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) signed yesterday a "transit agreement" to promote partnership and cooperation between the two parties. The agreement was signed by First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and NATO's Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg.

In a joint press conference, Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled stressed that the agreement is considered "another cornerstone that builds on an existing partnership between the two sides". He added that the agreement will strengthen Kuwait's capabilities on facing security challenges in the region. On his part, Stoltenberg pointed out that the agreement will make NATO work more active and effective in the region. The agreement, NATO's first in the Gulf region, will facilitate the transit of personnel, supplies and equipment to the Resolute Support mission in Afghanistan. It will also make any future NATO activity in the region much more effective.

Stoltenberg said it is essential to work together to find common solutions to joint challenges the NATO's Istanbul Cooperation Initiative members are facing, adding the security of Kuwait and other members is of strategic significance to NATO. He added that Middle East countries are facing a set of issues like terrorism, extremism and proliferation of technologies of ballistic weapons and weapons of mass destruction.

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HOLLYWOOD: (From left) Best Supporting Actor Mark Rylance, Best Actress Brie Larson, Best Actor Leonardo DiCaprio and Best Supporting Actress Alicia Vikander pose with their Oscars in the press room during the 88th Oscars on Sunday. — AP

EX-ELECTRICITY MINISTER REAPPOINTED

By B Izzak

DOZENS OF SYRIAN RESIDENTS BARRED FROM RE-ENTERING

KUWAIT: Several Syrian residents of Kuwait said yesterday that airport officials there have kept them waiting for more than 48 hours, barring their re-entry on suspicion of having forged passports. Ayman Nashewati, a 42-year-old sound engineer who works in Kuwait, told AP he returned on Saturday after a weekend visit to nearby Dubai and was placed in a waiting room with other Syrians suspected of having forged documents.

He said more than 50 Syrians, including children, were transferred yesterday to a nearby airport hotel until further notice. He said they are being asked to pay for their hotel accommodations, and have been told they can cancel their residency and depart the country if they want to leave. Kuwaiti officials could not be immediately reached for comment. Al-Qabas newspaper yesterday quoted an unnamed official as saying that Kuwaiti authorities have been instructed not to accept Syrian passport holders due to alleged incidents of fraud with passports issued in the Syrian capital, Damascus.

Kuwait is home to more than 130,000 Syrian nationals, according to Kuwaiti government statistics released in 2014. Kuwait was one of the first Gulf Arab countries to sever ties with Syria and pledge support to the rebels seeking to topple Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad. Many Syrians who need to renew their passports and apply for other government documents must either travel to Damascus or to the United Arab Emirates, where a Syrian Embassy is still open.

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tract in 2007 that was suspected of involving corruption.

The appeals court however acquitted him and the officials of any wrongdoing. Jassar had maintained his innocence in the case. At the time of the contract, Jassar was a senior official at the ministry. MP Faisal Al-Shaye welcomed the return of the minister to the Cabinet and described him as highly qualified and a reformist. Shaye praised the minister for taking responsibility and resigning after the court convicted him, adding that he was reappointed after the court acquitted him.

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DICAPRIO FINALLY WINS OSCAR, 'SPOTLIGHT' GRABS BEST FILM

LOS ANGELES: Catholic Church abuse movie "Spotlight" was named best picture, the top award at Sunday's Oscars ceremony, after a night peppered with pointed punchlines from host Chris Rock about the #OscarsSoWhite controversy that has dominated the industry. In a ceremony where no single movie commanded attention, Mexico's Alejandro Inarritu nabbed the best directing Oscar for "The Revenant", becoming the first filmmaker in more than 60 years to win back-to-back Academy Awards. Inarritu won in 2015 for "Birdman".

"The Revenant" went into Sunday's ceremony with a leading 12 nominations, and was among four movies believed to have the best chances for best picture after it won Golden Globe and BAFTA trophies. The ambitious 20th Century Fox Pioneer-era tale, shot in subzero temperatures, also brought a first Oscar win for its star Leonardo DiCaprio, who got a standing ovation from the A-

list Hollywood audience. "I do not take tonight for granted," DiCaprio said, taking the opportunity in his acceptance speech to urge action on climate change. Rising star Brie Larson, 26, took home the statuette for best actress for her role as an abducted young woman in indie movie "Room," adding to her armful of trophies from other award shows.

Among surprises, Britain's Mark Rylance beat presumed favorite and "Creed" actor Sylvester Stallone to win the Academy Award for best supporting actor for "Bridge of Spies," Swedish actress Alicia Vikander won the supporting actress Oscar for transgender movie "The Danish Girl" while documentary "Amy," about the late and troubled British pop star Amy Winehouse was also a winner. Warner Bros' "Mad Max: Fury Road" was the biggest winner, clinching six Oscars, but all were in technical categories such as costume, makeup and editing. — Reuters

See Pages 38-40



HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah greets reappointed Electricity and Water Minister Ahmad Al-Jassar after he was sworn in yesterday, in the presence of HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah. — KUNA

SAUDI IRANIAN RESTAURANTS THRIVING

RIYADH: Iran and Saudi Arabia's rivalry has played out in proxy wars across the region, and escalated further after the two severed diplomatic and trade ties last month. Yet in the Saudi capital, Riyadh, popular Iranian restaurants are outselling feverish calls for a boycott and stand as a reminder of when ties between the two countries held promise. In the 1990s, inside steaming kitchens in Riyadh, Iranian chefs taught their counterparts how to season and cook Persian dishes for a Saudi-owned Iranian restaurant called Shayah. The food proved so popular that nearly 20 years later, Shayah is a chain with 13 outlets in the kingdom, 11 of them in Riyadh.

The bold signs on their storefronts proclaiming the restaurants as the "House of Iranian Cuisine" are daring in a country where Iran is now viewed as an existential threat. Despite Saudi-Iranian tensions, the two countries have deep historic links. For centuries, traders carrying spices and rugs have traveled the Arabian Gulf, landing on the shores of the Arabian Peninsula and weaving Iranian culture into Arab life.

Continued on Page 13



RIYADH: In this Jan 27, 2016 photo, women order Iranian food from Shayah restaurant at the Kingdom Center Mall. — AP

FIGHTING INFECTIONS WITH VIRUSES AS ANTIBIOTICS FAIL

PARIS: When doctors told Christophe Novou that his leg would have to be amputated at the hip due to a raging bacterial infection, the 47-year-old Frenchman thought about killing himself. After surviving a crippling traffic accident and dozens of operations to repair the damage, to him life in a wheelchair just did not seem worth living. That's when an article about a clinic in Georgia offering an obscure treatment for hard-to-treat infections using live virus - something called phage therapy - caught his eye.

Within hours, he was on a plane to Tblisi. "Without it, I wouldn't be here," Novou told AFP on the sidelines of a conference in Paris about the mostly forgotten therapy, which remains marginal outside a few former Soviet bloc countries. The treatment harnesses viruses called phages to attack and kill dangerous bacteria, including "superbugs" which have become progressively resistant to antibiotics.

In Novou's case, it was Staphylococcus, a common bacteria which can cause anything from a simple boil to horrible flesh-eating infections. Mostly ignored up to now by mainstream medicine, the alternative treatment has started to gain adherents over the last 15 years, especially in France, Belgium and the United States. The renewed interest is partly driven by a problem which the World Health Organization (WHO) recently described as a "global health crisis": The dramatic rise of antibiotic-resistant strains of deadly pathogens. WHO chief Margaret Chan warned last November of a "post-antibiotic era" in which common infections will become killers once more.

"Phage therapy is especially effective for infections that affect bones and articulation, but can also be used for urinary, pulmonary and eye infections," said Alain Dublanquet, a doctor at the forefront of the movement to resurrect the treatment in France.

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KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives commemorative coins from Governor of the Central Bank of Kuwait Dr Mohammad Al-Hashel. — Amiri Diwan photos



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with the outgoing Algerian Ambassador to Kuwait Khamis Araif.

AMIR RECEIVES CENTRAL BANK GOVERNOR, ENVOYS

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Governor of the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) Dr Mohammad Yousef Al-Hashel, at Seif Palace yesterday. Hashel during the meeting

presented His Highness the Amir with commemorative coins, marking the 55th anniversary of the National Day and the 25th anniversary of the Liberation Day of Kuwait. Hashel later met with His Highness the Crown

Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir received a letter from Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, which focused on bilateral ties and discussed boosting cooperation on

domains of mutual interest. The letter was handed over to His Highness the Amir by Deputy Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah and Egyptian Ambassador to Kuwait Yaser Atif. Also yesterday, His

Highness the Amir, received the outgoing Algerian Ambassador to Kuwait Khamis Araif. The meeting was attended by Deputy Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah. —KUNA

FM, NATO CHIEF DISCUSS REGIONAL, INT'L ISSUES

KUWAIT: First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah met with Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Jens Stoltenberg, where they shed light on regional and international issues of common interest. National Security Bureau Chief Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah was present at the meeting, that was held at the Foreign Ministry's Headquarters yesterday.

Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled reiterated Kuwait's unwavering support to the NATO since it joined NATO's Istanbul Cooperation Initiative in 2004; an initiative that aims to contribute to long-term global and regional security by offering countries of the broader Middle East region practical bilateral security cooperation with NATO.

Meanwhile, the NATO chief lauded Kuwait's "essential and constructive" regional and inter-

national role in promoting peace and stability in the region. Stoltenberg also praised Kuwait's humanitarian aid that reached the unfortunate everywhere. The meeting was attended by Assistant Foreign Minister for the First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister's Office Affairs Ambassador Sheikh Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, Acting chairman of the information and security projects department at the National Security Bureau Sheikh Fawaz Mishal Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah and a number of officials.

Joint efforts

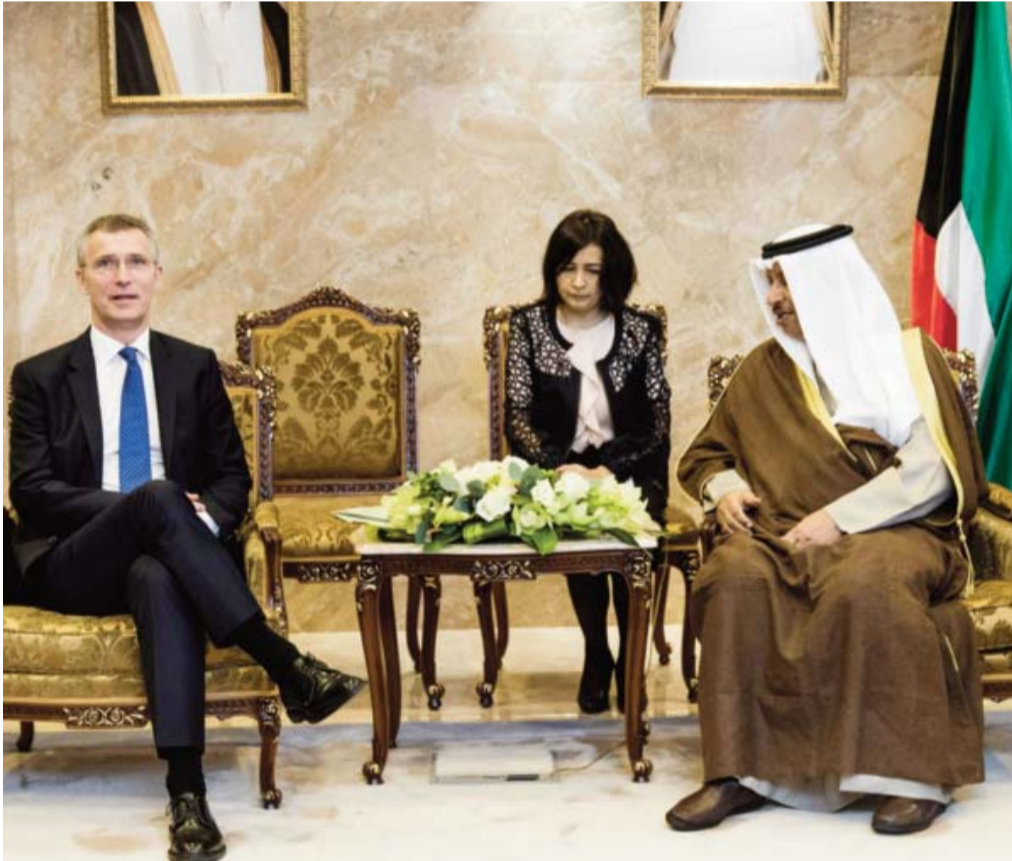
Sheikh Thamer Al-Ali said meanwhile that cooperation and joint efforts are needed to solve humanitarian crises and exterminate terrorism. In comments to the press during Stoltenberg's visit, Sheikh Thamer Al-Ali said that the center represents a step towards greater regional cooperation.

Kuwait has always been firm on its cooperation with the international community, Sheikh Thamer Al-Ali said, noting that the NATO-ICI center is expected to be opened during the latter part of the year. The center will come to encapsulate the unity of NATO members, from where current happenings will be analyzed meticulously, Sheikh Thamer Al-Ali added.

The NATO-ICI center is expected to host a slew of events, conferences and seminars "that are significant to peace and stability in the region," Stoltenberg said. On December 16-17, Kuwait hosted a meeting of political advisory groups of the ICI, with participation of NATO members, Saudi Arabia, Oman and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) General Secretariat.

Premier meets NATO Chief

Also yesterday, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received at Seif Palace yesterday Sheikh Thamer Al-Ali, accompanied by Stoltenberg. Sheikh Sabah Khaled and Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah were present at the meeting. — KUNA



KUWAIT: In this photo made available by NATO, Prime Minister of Kuwait, His Highness Sheikh Jaber Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah (right), meets with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg yesterday. — AP

KUWAIT REGRETS TRUCE BREACHES IN SYRIA

OFFICIAL CALLS FOR SUPPORTING IRAQ AGAINST TERRORISM

KUWAIT: Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Khaled Al-Jarallah yesterday voiced regret at breaches of Syria's recently announced ceasefire over the last couple of days, but believed that the ceasefire would hold.

If violations continued, then there would be an alternative plan agreed by involved parties, mainly the US and its allies, Jarallah told reporters following the opening of the fourth meeting of the international working group on stability, affiliated to the international coalition against the so-called Islamic State (IS).

Kuwait could play part in this context within the framework of the international coalition, he added. The UN Security Council late on Friday adopted unanimously Resolution 2268 endorsing US-Russian joint statement on Cessation of Hostilities in Syria. The resolution was drafted by both International Syrian Support Group (ISSG) co-chairs Russia and the US.

Violations

Earlier on Sunday, Saudi Foreign Minister Adel Jubeir said there were violations of the ceasefire from Russian and Syrian regime aircraft by targeting civilians and moderate opposition groups. Speaking at a joint news conference with Danish Foreign Minister Kristian Jensen, Jubeir called on Syrian regime and Russian to commit to the truce which became effective last Saturday.

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent on Saturday two cables to US President Barack Obama and Russian President Vladimir Putin. In his cables, His

Highness the Amir welcomed the UN Security Council's Resolution 2268 endorsing the US-Russian joint statement on Cessation of Hostilities in Syria.

His Highness the Amir appreciated both leaders' efforts to adopt this joint statement, hailing it as a genuine step and a glimpse of hope for ceas-



Khaled Al-Jarallah

ing several years of hostilities in Syria which have so far claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of Syrian people. His Highness the Amir wished that this could lead to a political solution to the Syrian crisis in order to put an end to the tragic situation and humanitarian sufferings of the brotherly Syrian people inside and outside Syria, to fulfill their legitimate demands and to bring security and stability back to Syria. His Highness the Amir also hoped that all involved parties would stick to the resolution so that the interna-

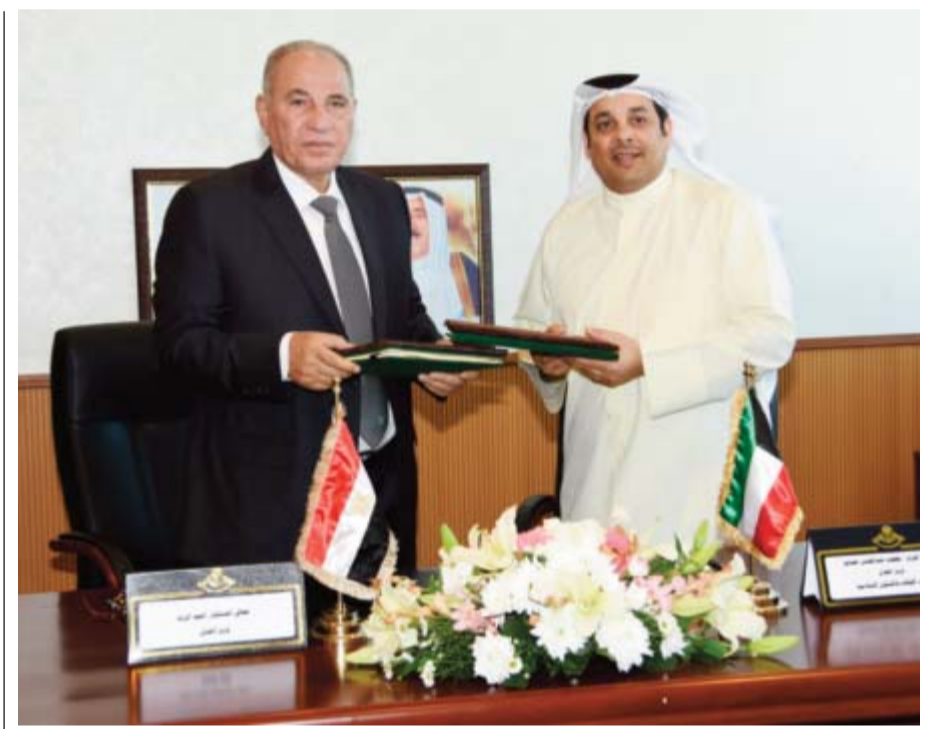
tional community can focus on fighting and eradicating terrorism.

Supporting Iraq

Meanwhile, Jarallah called on the international community to support Iraq's fight against terrorism in order to protect security and stability in the country. Kuwait and Iraq share strong ties on all levels and are cooperating to fight terrorism by all means, said the deputy FM. He added that the group has set a number of strategic plans to end the threat of terrorism against the international community. In the meantime, he noted that the group aims to allow citizens displaced by IS in different cities and towns to return to their homes, adding that Kuwait is exerting huge efforts to support the group's work.

It is the international community's duty to provide financial and political support to the Iraqi government to face the unstable conditions in the country, Jarallah said. He noted that Kuwait has donated \$200 million and has also agreed to delay the Iraqi compensations owed to Kuwait, to allow the country to recover from the worsening security conditions.

Head of the office of Iraq's Prime Minister Mahdi Al-Allag meanwhile stressed the importance of bringing stability to the recently-liberated cities. The official noted the prominent role played by different countries and the Iraqi government to allow displaced citizens to return to their homes at Salahuddin Governorate. He added that over 90 percent of people have returned to Tikrit and other cities. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Minister of Justice, Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Yaqoub Al-Sane and Egyptian Minister of Justice Ahmad Al-Zend are pictured after signing of a cooperation agreement yesterday. — KUNA

KUWAIT-EGYPT LEGAL DEAL REFLECTS FIRM BONDS: MINISTER

KUWAIT: The signing of a legal and judicial cooperation agreement with Egypt reflects firm bonds, pointing to mutual willingness to promote bilateral cooperation in all fields, Minister of Justice, Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Yaqoub Al-Sane said yesterday.

The minister made the remark at a joint news conference with visiting Egyptian Minister of Justice Ahmad Al-Zend following the signing of a bilateral legal and judicial cooperation agreement in presence of several senior Kuwaiti and Egyptian officials.

This cooperation marks a main pillar for more effective measures to fight all types of crimes, including terrorism, transnational crimes and corruption, with a view to alleviating their serious reflections on societies, he said. Both countries' political leaderships are willing to bolster and strengthen distinguished relations and to take everything that could lead to ideal cooperation between both brotherly nations, he added.

International divergent views on key

issues like international terrorism affect the destiny, security and stability of Arab countries in general and Kuwait and Egypt in particular, thus necessitating uniform efforts to fight terror and cut off the sources of financing, he further indicated.

This agreement is the fruit of relentless efforts between both countries to reinforce bilateral cooperation in the legal and judicial domains, Sane pointed out. The Kuwaiti minister expressed hope that such efforts would see effective and tangible procedures in the near future.

Meanwhile, Egyptian Minister of Justice Ahmad Al-Zend hailed his meeting with the Kuwaiti minister as a good opportunity to coordinate efforts and promote Arab cooperation and coordination in the legal and judicial realms. He said the bilateral agreement signed today comes within the framework of close bonds between both brotherly nations. Zend said he was impressed by the Kuwaiti justice ministry's experience in electronic litigation. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Suleiman Al-Jarallah meets with Saudi Ambassador to Kuwait Dr Abdulaziz bin Ibrahim Al-Fayez. — KUNA

JARALLAH MEETS ENVOYS

KUWAIT: Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Suleiman Al-Jarallah discussed with Saudi Ambassador to Kuwait Dr Abdulaziz bin Ibrahim Al-Fayez bilateral ties and the latest regional and international issues.

Meanwhile, Jarrah discuss with the Netherlands' Foreign Minister's special envoy Michelle Dean bilateral ties. The

meeting also shed light on the recent developments on regional and international arenas. The meeting was attended by Assistant Foreign Minister at the Foreign Minister's Deputy's Office Ambassador Ayham Abdulatif Al-Omar and the Netherlands' Ambassador to Kuwait. —KUNA



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah receives Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) members, led by Chairman Ali Al-Ghanem. — KUNA

PREMIER, KCCI OFFICIALS DISCUSS MEMO ON REFORMS

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received at Seif Palace yesterday Chairman of Kuwait Chamber of Commerce Industry (KCCI) Ali Al-Ghanem and its members, said Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah.

They presented to His Highness the Prime Minister a memorandum on address-

ing the country's economic situations and their different repercussions amid continued low prices. The memorandum included scientific proposals aiming to achieve financial and economic reforms with different axes, and promote the private sector's role in increasing national economy and pushing ahead with development process and economic reforms.

The memo also contained some trade

facilitation strategies seeking to materialize the vision of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah through turning the State of Kuwait into an international commercial and financial hub.

During the meeting, they discussed scientific means to address economic situations. His Highness the Premier expressed his gratitude to KCCI's officials for their

positive initiative which reflects the spirit of responsibility and national role in dealing with national issues. His Highness the Premier assigned the economic affairs committee to study the memo's proposals to enhance constructive cooperation with the chamber with the aim of reaching best results.

The meeting was attended by Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh

Mohammad Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister, Finance Minister and Acting Oil Minister Anas Al-Saleh, Minister of Commerce and Industry Dr Yousef Al-Ali, Minister of Communication and Minister of State for Municipal Affairs Essa Al-Kanderi, Minister of State for Planning Affairs and Development Hind Al-Subaih and Cabinet's Secretary-General Abdullatif Al-Rawdan. — KUNA

CABINET ASSIGNS NATIONAL CELEBRATIONS COMMITTEE TO STUDY NEGATIVE ASPECTS

KUWAIT: The Cabinet has assigned the permanent committee of national days' celebrations to study negative aspects associated with the festivals, with the aim of submitting proposals and solutions to avoid these aspects, and refer them within three months. This came during the Cabinet's weekly meeting held yesterday at Seif Palace under the chairmanship of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Mohammad Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah briefed ministers on the incident of a police patrol which led to the martyrdom of policeman Turki Mohammad Al-Enezi and an injury of five others. The minister told them about initial investigations conducted against the defendant to uncover the circumstances of this "heinous" criminal act which happened during celebration of national days.

Sheikh Mohammad Al-Khaled briefed the Cabinet on an arrest of a resident and his wife when they ran over policemen and injured some, said Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-

Sabah. The Cabinet expressed its heartfelt condolences to the martyr's family and wished those injured a speedy recovery. The Cabinet expressed its appreciation to the role of security men in organizing celebrations and maintaining safety of citizens and residents, and to their sacrifices offered for homeland's sake.

North Thunder

Ministers were apprised of a message received by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah from Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, welcoming the Amir to attend the final festival of Exercise "Ra'ad al-Shamal" (North Thunder) and associated air and military parades on the occasion of Kuwaiti armed forces' participation in the event.

The Cabinet was briefed on two letters sent by His Highness the Amir to US President Barack Obama and Russian President Vladimir Putin, welcoming the UN Security Council Resolution 2268 pertaining to halt hostilities in Syria.

His Highness the Amir expressed in the letters that the resolution is a serious step to stop infighting among Syrians, voicing his hope that

this would contribute to finding an urgent solution for the Syrian crisis and ending deterioration of humanitarian situations facing Syrians.

Conferees were apprised of a letter received by His Highness the Amir from President Obama, on Kuwait's national days, the depth of bonds of the two countries, the US' support for Kuwait's security and stability and an expansion of bilateral partnership to achieve interests of the two sides.

Also in the letter, Obama lauded His Highness the Amir's big humanitarian role, and called for coordinating efforts of GCC member states to combat terrorism.

New minister

His Highness the Prime Minister welcomed Ahmad Khaled Al-Jassar on the occasion of being named as Minister of Electricity and Water, wishing him success in achieving the country's interest and meeting citizens' demands in coordination with other ministers. Finally, the cabinet discussed several reports bearing on the overall political developments in both Arab and international arenas. — KUNA



KUWAIT: This photo released by the Interior Ministry shows Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Mohammad Al-Khaled Al-Sabah speaks during a ceremony to honor the family of Corporal Turki Mohammad Al-Enezi, who was killed in the line of duty last Thursday.

POLICE ATTACKER MEMBER OF AN ORGANIZATION: MINISTER

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: The suspect who deliberately ran over policemen last Thursday is a 'member of an organization,' Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Mohammad Al-Khaled Al-Sabah said yesterday, without naming the group. The ministry will check into information to reach facts, then take legal procedures to preserve the rights of its personnel he added.

Sheikh Mohammad Al-Khaled was speaking during a ceremony to honor the family of Corporal Turki Mohammad Al-Enezi, who was killed following the run over accident, as well as the injured officers. The ministry's security information department quoted Sheikh Mohammad as saying that a psychiatric hospital's certificate does not mean that its holder is not responsible for his behavior.

He said that martyr Enezi will always be a symbol of commitment and loyalty for the sake of the country and public security, and an example to be followed. He said the honoring of his family is a recognition of what the late officer gave in sincere efforts to safeguard Kuwait's security and its citizens' safety. Sheikh Mohammad Al-Khaled lauded the effort of security men in protecting the country, and expressed his pride in what the martyr and the injured officers have presented to the country.

Sheikh Mohammad Al-Khaled also expressed appreciation to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah's 'fatherly gesture' towards policemen following the accident, and said "we will remain loyal soldiers in defending the security of the country and safety of its citizens."



Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Mohammad Al-Khaled Al-Sabah is pictured with the martyr's son.

5 SAWABER FLAT OWNERS TO BE EXPROPRIATED

COMPLEX TO BE EVACUATED BY MARCH 31

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: The finance ministry's assistant undersecretary for expropriation affairs Fahd Al-Sho'lah announced that five flats in Sawaber residential complex would be expropriated because their owners had not applied for authentic ownership deeds, unless they do so by the end of March. Sho'lah added that the concerned owners have not so far checked with departments responsible for issuing the deeds at the Public Authority for Housing Welfare. He added that upon Cabinet instructions, the complex is to be entirely evacuated by March 31.

Auditor's assault

The Kuwait Society for Auditors strongly condemned assaulting the manager and auditors at the auditors' office at the ports authority while on duty. Society Chairman Sager Al-Haiss stressed that the assault violated all social and professional norms and that the society was willing to defend the assaulted auditors by all legal and professional means.

501 e-crimes

A recent report by the Ministry of Interior (MoI) showed that 501 e-crimes and cases were filed since the beginning of this year, including those committed using social media networks, such as slander,

misuse of mobile phones, threats, blackmail and instigating vice. Mol stressed that e-crime detectives are working hard to prevent such crimes in view of the constant increase of social media networks. The ministry added that statistics showed that 143 slander cases, 131 misuse of mobile phones, 75 threats and blackmail and 40 vice instigating cases were filed. Statistics also showed that 32 cases of forging bank drafts, 29 defamation and 18 impersonation cases were filed. In addition, statistics showed that 269 crimes were committed using Twitter, 109 crimes were committed using Instagram, 78 crimes were committed using WhatsApp, 20 crimes were committed using Snapchat and 25 crimes were committed using Facebook.

SYNDICATE SAYS MINISTER WANTS TO DEPRIVE OIL WORKERS OF PRIVILEGES

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: Chairman of Kuwait Engineers Syndicate (KES) Abdul Wahab Al-Kandari stressed that KES would strongly respond to Finance Minister and Acting Oil Minister Anas Al-Saleh's intentions to 'sell' the oil sector through amending the privatization law, which would deprive the sector employees of all their privileges. "Although the head of the parliamentary human resources committee Dr Khalil Abdullah and the committee rapporteur Ahmed Lari reassured everybody that amendments to the payroll strategic alternative law would not affect current employees or their allowances, Saleh has blown all assurances away and limited the assurances to salaries and indemnities," he said, noting that accordingly, salaries would be frozen until retirement.

Kandari added that such moves would mean ungratefulness to the efforts exerted by oil sector engineers and employees. "We will never accept being used as scapegoats to sell the state's sole resource," he added, warning that salaries would not exceed KD 700 with a maximum 3.5 percent annual increase.

"The cost of keeping Saleh in office will be very high for everybody. We are all in the same boat, so either we all safely sail to the shore or we all sink together," he warned, undermining the assurances made by Saleh because he had broken earlier promises he made not to suspend overseas training courses. "Decision-making within the oil sector is kidnapped by another Cabinet member whose family owns huge shares of commercial interests in the oil sector

and many senior officials have been sacrificed to maintain those interests," he said.

Finally, Kandari addressed Kuwait Petroleum Corporation's (KPC) CEO Nizar Al-Adani, urging him to support his staff and not to be isolated from them by the minister's instructions. Commenting on the same issue, Chairman of Kuwait Gulf Oil Company's (KGOC) employees syndicate Faleh Al-Ajmi urged all employees to unite to "protect the oil sector" from what he described as abusive decisions undermining employees' rights. Ajmi added that oil employees' rights were being unlawfully and surprisingly violated.

Lawsuit

Chairman of the labor union at the Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW) Abdul Rahman Al-Ghanem filed a lawsuit against his predecessor and the members of the previous board of directors, demanding investigating the volume and sources of their finances.

Jamal Abdul Nasser road

Assistant Undersecretary for Roadworks at the Ministry of Public Works (MPW) Ahmed Al-Hessan said that 36 percent of the west intersections along Jamal Abdul Nasser road were completed and that renovation and connection of the current sewage lines would be finished within 15 days.

Municipality campaign

Hawally municipality inspection teams launched several inspection campaigns during the recent national celebrations which resulted

in nabbing scores of peddlers, confiscating five truckloads of toys and foodstuff as well as removing 78 illegal ads. The raids were made along the Gulf Road, in Salmiya, Hawally and marine Shaab.

Hessan added that the KD 34.9 million project aims at boosting the road's capacity, reduce traffic congestions, reduce traffic accidents and achieve high security levels.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY HOLDS ORDINARY SESSION TODAY

KUWAIT: The National Assembly is set to hold its ordinary session today, where recently elected MP Ali Al-Khamis will take the constitutional oath. The assembly is also set to elect new members to replace the deceased MP Nabil Al-Fadhel in different committees including the legislative and legal affairs committee, as well as others concerned with public utilities, youth and sport. On February 20, Justice Hamad Al-Hadhram announced MP Khamis as the winner of the third constituency's by-elections for 2016, gaining 7311 votes. Meanwhile, the session will discuss pocket money provided for patients sent for treatment abroad and their companions, and fixing conditions of illegal residents in the country. — KUNA



KUWAIT: State Minister for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Al-Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah patronized a ceremony to hand over new ranks to two brigadiers at the Kuwait Fire Services Directorate (KFSD). The two are Major General Saleh Al-Ansari and Major General Jamal Al-Bulaihees. KFSD Director General Lieutenant General Yousef Al-Ansari and his deputies attended the ceremony.

—By Hanan Al-Saadoun

In Brief

FRANCE STEADFAST TO ITS TIES WITH KUWAIT

PARIS: France is steadfast to its "strategic" relations with the State of Kuwait and is working with the Gulf country to secure stability in the region, French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault stressed yesterday. These remarks were relayed in a letter to Kuwaiti Ambassador in France Samie Al-Suleiman, on the occasion of the Gulf country's national celebrations. Ayrault said that Kuwait and France enjoy a "strong" friendship of 50 years. —KUNA



SPEAKER RECEIVES KRCS CHAIRMAN

KUWAIT: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem received yesterday Chairman of the Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) Dr Hilal Al-Sayer. Sayer presented Ghanem with a copy of a KRCS book entitled, 'Do and Give,' which commemorates the 50th anniversary of the humanitarian society's inception. Also yesterday, the Parliament Speaker received local actor Abdulhussein Abdulredha, Deputy Chairman of the Kuwait Artists Syndicate Tareq Al-Ali and technical and cultural director Khaled Amin Mataqi. — KUNA



MEETING DISCUSSES ARAB CONCERNS

GENEVA: Kuwait is determined to defend the issues and concerns of the Arab states before the UN, said Kuwait's permanent delegate to the UN and international organizations at the meeting of the UN Human Rights Council. The current session will discuss main Arab issues including the Israeli violations of human rights in Palestine, the worsening humanitarian conditions in Syria and the situation in Yemen, the delegate, Ambassador Jamal Al-Ghunaim said yesterday. —KUNA



KUWAIT

Photo

of the day



KUWAIT: A panoramic view of a fishing area on a beach in Kuwait City. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

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NO SIGN OF ZIKA TRANSMISSION DURING BREASTFEEDING: OFFICIAL

KUWAIT: The World Health Organization (WHO) has so far found no evidence that Zika virus can be transmitted from mothers to infants during breastfeeding, a Health Ministry official has said. Head of the media the office at the Ministry of Health Dr Ghalia Al-Mutairi said yesterday that in case a mother is infected by Zika during the breastfeeding period, no harm happens to the baby. If a mother suspects, or even confirms she has been infected with Zika, she can breastfeed her baby, she said.

Mutairi referred to a report by the WHO that current evidence suggests the benefits of breastfeeding outweigh the theoretical risks of Zika virus infection transmission through breast milk. It encourages mothers with Zika virus infection and mothers living in areas with ongoing Zika virus transmission to breastfeed their infants.

WHO suggestions

The Ministry of Health (MoH) has implemented WHO suggestions of preventing the spread of Zika virus, the Assistant Undersecretary of Public Health said, adding that there have not been any Zika virus cases registered in the GCC.

Chief of the Epidemic unit at the MoH Dr Masab Al-Salah made those remarks during meetings of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) health officials. He said that the meetings are expected to produce concerted efforts to combat Zika virus, urging GCC citizens not to travel to

nations with active Zika virus transmission. Immunization against various waterborne diseases and Rotavirus could be available in the year 2017, Salah noted.

Joint programs

Meanwhile, Assistant Undersecretary of Public Health Dr Majda Al-Qattan said that results yielded by meetings of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) health officials are pivotal to joint programs aiming to stifle the spread of contagious diseases.

Speaking at the meetings, Qattan underscored the importance of these meetings, saying that they are supported by GCC health ministries. The spread of contagious diseases behooves GCC health bodies to coordinate their efforts through the exchange of information, Qattan noted. It is also imperative to keep abreast of the latest facts provided by the World Health Organization (WHO), she added.

The fourth planned Gulf seminar on vaccination is in the works, a move designed to facilitate the implementation of a unified GCC vaccination program, Qattan said. Moreover, amongst the issues to be discussed during the meeting are a planned study aimed at eradicating the diseases of measles and tuberculosis. The latest developments on Corona virus and plans to finalize a unified GCC vaccination program will also be discussed, Qattan said.



KUWAIT: Assistant Undersecretary of Public Health Dr Majda Al-Qattan speaks at a GCC meeting of health officials over the issue of contagious diseases yesterday. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Ambassador to the United Kingdom Khaled Al-Duwaisan speaks at The National Memorial Arboretum honoring UK servicemen who lost their lives during the liberation of Kuwait. — KUNA photos



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Ambassador to the United Kingdom Khaled Al-Duwaisan, along with army officers and relatives of servicemen who died or fought in the war to liberate Kuwait pay tribute in the National Memorial Arboretum.

SACRIFICES OF 47 UK SERVICEMEN DURING KUWAIT'S LIBERATION PRAISED

STAFFORDSHIRE: Kuwaiti Ambassador to the United Kingdom Khaled Al-Duwaisan has pledged that his country will never forget the sacrifices of the 47 UK servicemen who lost their lives during the liberation of Kuwait. The envoy, who is also the Dean of the Foreign Diplomatic Corps in London, hailed these sacrifices, while paying warm tribute to the long-lasting friendship and historic bonds that link the two countries together.

He made those remarks yesterday at an event in Alrewas, Staffordshire, central England, organized at the armed forces memorial dedicated to those who gave their lives and those who fought in the liberation of Kuwait in 1991. "Today is a historic day, as it

coincides with the 25th anniversary of the liberation of Kuwait and while we are here paying homage to the memory of those UK servicemen who lost their lives for this noble cause," Duwaisan said.

The commemoration was attended by a large number of high-ranking armed forces men, the families of those servicemen who lost their lives in the war to liberate Kuwait and the Kuwaiti armed forces attaché, as well as embassy staff here.

The Ambassador said that he conveyed to the senior officers present the greetings of His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and the Kuwaiti people to the UK government and people on

this important occasion. "Our friendship is ever-lasting and goes back for two centuries, and we will never forget that you always stood by us in our darkest days," he reiterated.

"This is a proof beyond doubt of your genuine friendship and support", Duwaisan emphasized. He underscored that Kuwait will always highly appreciate Britain's leading role in the liberation of Kuwait, an issue which reflects the sublime principles and values of the UK people.

In addition, he showered praise on the relatives of the soldiers and officers who died to liberate Kuwait. The Ambassador noted that "there is a deep-seated bond of friendship that links us with those relatives and they

have become like part of our families".

Meanwhile, representatives of the British armed forces personnel responded by warmly thanking His Highness the Amir for his kind message and the Ambassador for attending this event.

Later, the Ambassador and the embassy staff accompanying him, as well as British forces personnel, laid wreaths in front of the memorial to commemorate those who gave their lives and all those who fought the war to liberate Kuwait.

The event was attended by a large number of people, including army officers and relatives of servicemen who died or fought in the war to liberate Kuwait. — KUNA

In my view

'NEW COLD WAR'

By Labeed Abdal



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Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev recently warned of catastrophic consequences if the conflict in Syria drags on, saying the world has slid into a "new Cold War." He also criticized the West's "unfriendly" policy against his country, which is not actually against it because antagonism and political paradoxes are widely prevailing worldwide.

The continuation of sanctions imposed by the West on the East and others imposed by East on the West have made the world retreat and made small and minor countries do the same with neighboring countries, and thus, new, unnecessary conflicts are being created, opening for more chaos, loss of control and side conflicts that consume all peace efforts here and there.

The Russian premier went as far as describing NATO's expansion towards eastern Europe as 'unfriendly' towards Russia while cooperation was needed more than intimidation to face many challenges such as terrorism and regional conflicts, which is a fact seen by the entire world and requires that the international community increase international standards of accountability.

Meanwhile, we have been witnessing the G20 countries and the 30+5 group discussing various important international issues but excluded blaming major powers for practicing threats and violating the rule of the game by striking 'below the belt', especially on testing a new arsenal of innovative lethal and destructive weapons.

The world needs a sort of balancing to serve the principles of international peace and security. Old principles used by a minority that has been manipulating international laws and boasting about it must be forgotten because they only contribute to creating more chaos, especially when major powers turn blind eyes!

We so often say that we have already started the 21st century and are supposed to get rid of some old and heavy 'luggage'. Many old stories are being told in a modern way. Some mistakes are being committed by new generations repeating what their ancestors did, while forgetting that international justice was a humanity demand regardless of introductions and fake definitions made in the past. Nothing is like using the right names and clear definitions in unsolved issues that have been antagonizing the human conscience with numerous victims.

EMBASSIES MARK NATIONAL DAYS

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Embassy in Bangladesh celebrated the 55th anniversary of the National Day, and the 26th anniversary of the Liberation Day in a reception held at the Westin Hotel. The event was attended by Minister of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Nurul Islam, besides International Affairs Adviser to the Prime Minister Tawfiq Elahi, besides officials in the cabinet and state ministries. It was also attended by Chief of Army Staff of Bangladesh Abu Belal Mohammad Shafiq Hujer, besides Inspector General of Police Mohammad Shahidul Haque, along with members of the diplomatic corps in Bangladesh.

Kuwait's Ambassador to Bangladesh Mohammad Hayat gave a speech before the audience, praising the firm position of Bangladesh in supporting Kuwait during the Iraqi invasion. The diplomat applauded Kuwait's pioneer role on boosting development in various country across the world. The ambassador stressed the importance of bolstering bilateral ties between both nations through exchanging visits between senior officials in both countries in various fields. Nurul Islam gave a speech in which he



ABUJA: Kuwait's Embassy in Nigeria held a ceremony to mark the 55th National Day and 25th Liberation Day. — KUNA

expressed his deepest thanks and gratitude to Kuwait's continuous support to his country in implementing developmental projects.

He also hailed the role of Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) in the development of Bangladesh. The Minister also endorsed the joint cooperation between both nations in various fields, offering his greetings to the Kuwaiti political leadership on the national celebrations.

Meanwhile, Kuwait's Embassy in Nigeria yesterday celebrated the 55th anniversary of the National Day, the

25th anniversary of the Liberation Day and the 10th anniversary of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's ascension to power. The ceremony was attended by the Director of Honorary Mission in Nigeria in the Foreign Ministry, Governor of Kano State, diplomats, and senior officials. Kuwait Ambassador to Nigeria Abdulaziz Al-Sharrah extended, in a speech marking the ceremony, his congratulations and blessing to the Kuwaiti leadership and people. In his speech, the ambassador also hailed bilateral relations between the two countries. — KUNA

DGCS SEEKS TO LINK KUWAIT AIRPORT TO INT'L AIRPORTS

KUWAIT: The Directorate-General of Civil Service (DGCS) said yesterday it is seeking to link Kuwait International Airport to the largest operating network of international airports. It said in a press release that it had participated in a recent meeting of a working group entrusted with reviewing the draft comprehensive aviation agreement between the European Union (EU) and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member states.

Kuwait's participation in the meeting held in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) between February 14-17 is part of the directorate's policy purposed to open skies with different world countries. During the meeting, the conferees exchanged information and views on the EU-GCC aviation agreement which would serve both sides in the aviation sector in general, it added. — KUNA

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PACI LAUNCHES ELECTRONIC STATISTICAL SERVICES SITE

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Civil Information (PACI) has launched its new website for statistics services that will facilitate missions of researchers, decision-makers, government bodies, and others. The new website - www.stat.paci.gov.kw - will be equal to the best statistics websites of other countries, PACI Director General MUSAED AL-ASOUSI, said during a press conference yesterday.

He stressed the importance of statistics data as it is used in all fields, researches and studies, indicating that the website aims to publish up-to-date data pertaining to housing, manpower, buildings, rates of birth and mortality, government bodies, the private sector and others.

It has daily statistics data on the country's population, and its gender in all governorates, and demography and charts of all fields, he added.

Meanwhile, Mohammad Al-Omar, head of statistics department, said that the website will provide statistics services of all segments in the society to all users. This will help researchers get information easily, and saves their efforts and time, he said. — KUNA

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Crime

Report

MAN DEPORTED FOR HARASSMENT

KUWAIT: An Egyptian man was arrested in a popular Farwaniya mall as he was harassing women. When police approached him, he ran on foot, but was caught. The suspect was taken to Andalus police station before being sent to criminal detectives, prior to his deportation from the country.

Neighbor charged with rape

A citizen accused a person of raping his 13-year-old daughter who was visiting her grandfather's house. The girl's father said while she was on her way to her grandfather's house, one of the neighbors raped her in a dark place, then fled. Mubarak Al-Kabeer detectives were asked to arrest the man as the girl was sent for legal medical examination.

Botched escape

A Filipina woman failed to escape by jumping from a third-floor domestic help office in Nugra. She fell to the ground during her botched escape attempt, and suffered several broken bones. She was admitted to Mubarak Hospital's intensive care unit. Police are waiting the woman's condition to stabilize before they launch investigations with her.

Forgery foiled

Doha customs officers foiled an Iranian man's attempt to smuggle five laboratory systems inside a food shipment, which were not registered in the shipment documents. The boat that arrived from Iran was inspected in Doha, and discovered that it had five lab systems in addition to bacteria resistant powder.

Reckless driving

A teenager was detained at Fahaheel police station after being caught recklessly driving his car without a license. He will be sent to juvenile detectives for further action. —Al-Rai



DOW OFFICE TO CLOSE IN JUNE

KUWAIT: Dow Chemical's office in Kuwait will be closed permanently in June following the completion of the company's final exit from its projects in Kuwait, sources said. Dow began executing its exit plan following an announcement on Nov 12, 2014, and began the first steps through its agreement to lower its share in MI Global and selling it to EQUATE. Sources said the Dow office in Kuwait is without a budget from the mother company since many months in preparation for the office's closure, moving or firing employees.

They said that following the Dow's sale of its share in MI Global for \$1.5 billion, the next stage is reducing its share and quitting EQUATE as well as other partnerships by June. Dow so far has not announced the percentage it will put up for underwriting in EQUATE, but informed sources expected it to be around 15 percent, because the American company will keep a minimum of 26 percent in EQUATE.

The website says that Dow is considered the largest foreign investor in Kuwait through its joint projects in which citizens have shares. Sources said the company has stopped all its social contributions in Kuwait, such as sponsoring Bayt Lothan and street cleaning. —Al-Anbaa



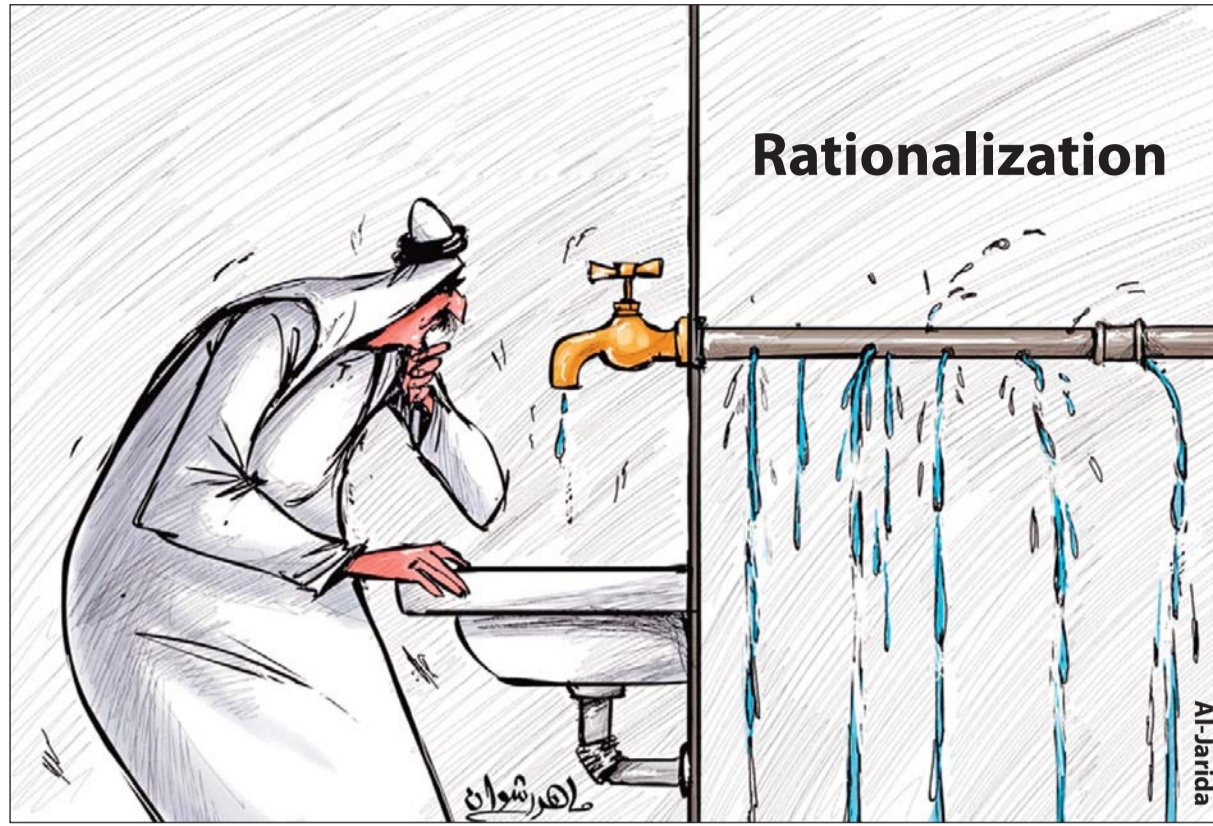
Hind Al-Subaih

MINISTER APPROVES NGO LAW AMENDMENTS

KUWAIT: Informed sources said Social Affairs and Labor Minister and State Minister for Planning and Development Affairs Hind Al-Subaih has approved amendments of some articles in the proposed NGO law, which was completed by the Social Affairs Ministry recently, particularly the article that angered NGOs due to its direct intervention in public charity work and imposing government guardianship over boards of directors.

The sources said the most notable item Subaih agreed to amend is article 13, which said "the minister can appoint, in addition to elected members, one or more members in the board, but not to exceed one third of the elected members", while the current law will be used in this regard which does not include any appointments by the ministry.

The sources said that Subaih also agreed to amend item one of article 10 which said that each society must have a board of directors of at least nine members, and their membership must be a maximum of three years, and it is not allowed to re-elect a member more than one time. The sources said the ministry sent the draft law to the fatwa and legislation department for review, to be later sent to the Cabinet for discussion and approval. —Al-Jarida



الانباء

Al-Anbaa

FRIEND FOR A 100 YEARS

By Sami Al-Khorafi

Listening to the following story from the girl's brother, I remembered the bestselling stories that used to be shown by Kuwait TV during its glorious days in the 1980s and 1990s. It is actually a strange story.

The brother says: "Two kids used to live in one of Kuwait's old neighborhoods and were almost like brothers. They were always together until the government bought their old houses for urban expansion purposes, marking the first time they ever parted. One of them became very rich because his father knew how to invest the money he got, while the other remained poor because his father misused the money he got for his house.

Years later, both kids grew up and had families. The poor man's son met the rich man's daughter in college and they fell in love. After graduation, the boy asked his mother to propose to the girl but she advised him to pick someone of their level. However, when he insisted, the mother told the father that their son wants to get married to so-and-

so's daughter. "That name rings a bell," the father said, but still rejected the idea. Eventually, he yielded to his son's threats never to get married unless to that particular girl.

The father went to the rich man's diwaniya and asked for his daughter's hand in marriage for his son and introduced himself, trying to remind him of their childhood days. "Did you not recognize me," he said, using a nickname he used to call him when they were children. Recognizing his childhood friend, the rich man burst into tears and they both hugged and talked long about their childhood and friendship. "Yes, I agree but let us ask the girl first," said the rich man, and the young couple got married." (End of story)

Childhood friends are unique and different. A saying says 'I do not want a hundred friends but I want a friend for a hundred years.' True friendship has nothing to do with richness or poverty because some friends are real gifts from Allah and they always remain loyal!

—Translated by Kuwait Times



KD 102 MILLION TO 'IMPROVE' KUWAIT'S IMAGE

KUWAIT: The proposed new development plan includes allocating KD 102 million over 119 months (about KD 10 million per year) for programs that improve Kuwait's image abroad, as well as support culture, art and information in a way that serves "Kuwait's image".

The plan said Kuwait's reputation image is below the accepted international level, which requires increasing the role of international diplomacy and activating participation in world arenas. It also aims at boosting the state's image in the fields of freedom, democracy and human rights. It encourages tourist investments, art and literary activity in addition to concentrating on Kuwait's role as a

center for humanitarian work.

Culturally, the diagnosis points to weakness in the theater, cinema and government media, and calls for developing media freedoms. The plan sees increases until 2020 in the number of book exhibitions both domestically and abroad, formative arts exhibitions and cultural and art festivals. The bodies that are concerned with the above mentioned programs are: Foreign Ministry, Information Ministry, Investment Encouraging Authority, National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters, Kuwait University and the Secretariat General of the Higher Council for Planning and Development. —Al-Qabas



القاسم

Al-Qabas

A TRUE PROBLEM

By Atyab Al-Shatti

Kuwait was shocked once again with yet another slaughter by an Ethiopian woman who worked as maid in the house of the victim. What made us feel more pain is that the victim was a young woman who had just started her life, and as much as we were hurting, I wonder until when the Kuwait society will continue to suffer from labor problems? Do we have a role in this incident, or maybe we had a role indirectly, and we were a cause without feeling it?

What is sure is that we have a true problem, that appears from the fact that the majority of women in Kuwait make the presence of expat labor in their homes to complete household chores a basic condition. And I do not mean the previous crime, but I look at the Gulf society as a whole and I feel pain towards our culture and our way of life. Maybe if we worked on changing it, we would get rid of the domestic help problems which have varied between murder, magic, sorcery, spoiling children's cultures and introducing beliefs that are contrary to our customs and traditions, and behaviors that do not agree with the Gulf society.

I sometimes wonder until when homemakers will keep domestic helpers with them? The culture of keeping a domestic helper at home is not right, because the original thing is to have the wife take care of household chores herself. And if there is a domestic helper, she is there to do simple things and not everything. But we are seeing today that the majority of homemakers in the Gulf society are the ones who carry out marginal jobs and leave the major and most important roles to expat laborers. The problem is that since the appearance of expat domestic workers, we realize the danger they carry, and despite this we accept to let them in our homes and private dormitories with their strange behaviors.

The thing that causes wonder in our Gulf societies is that dependence on domestic helpers in managing home affairs has become something normal and a foregone conclusion, as we are talking about something that there is nothing strange in it, rather there are those women who are about to marry who all agreed on "the maid must get into the home before me!" As if the maid is the real wife, mother and cook!

And as soon as the maid hits her with something drastic, she wakes up to find herself in front of the truth. If we start the change with small families with one child, to let go of expat laborers gradually, we will not have this huge need to bring them except when necessary, and the series of slaughters would disappear along with many other crimes. —Translated by Kuwait Times

WARBA BANK SPONSORS NATIONAL FESTIVAL

KUWAIT: Out of its commitment to efficiently participate in Kuwait national festivities and in line with its corporate social responsibility to share the Kuwaiti society its national occasions, Warba bank, the fast-growing bank in Kuwait providing a full spectrum of banking and investment services according to Islamic Shariah, provided its gold sponsorship to the national festival held under the slogan: "Kuwait between the Past and the Future," under the patronage and presence of Dr Bader Ahmed Al-Essa, Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education. The festival was organized by Kuwait university professors' committee and attended by ministries and banks. The event was held for the occasion of festivities launched to celebrate the selection of Kuwait as the Islamic Cultural Capital 2016, over two days on Wednesday and Thursday, 17 and 18 Feb on Abdullah Al-Jaber Theater at the university campus in Shuwaikh.

Warba's initiative stems from its leading position in the society as a pioneering Islamic banking institution. The bank is committed to playing a vital role in supporting Kuwait position as the Islamic Culture Capital 2016, therefore the bank didn't hesitate of sponsoring and participating in the festival which was attended by professors and students as well.

During the event, Warba bank has participated as gold sponsor where it showcased its latest products and services to professors and students by a dedicated teamwork who were keen to provide needed information about the bank's services

Since its inception in Kuwait market as an Islamic bank, Warba Bank took the commitment to spread the cultural awareness amongst all society audience, therefore the bank put its effort in pumping investments on both financial and human resources level, to support Kuwait from all aspects including culture, health education and much more. Warba bank is committed to Islamic rules which urge it to play a key role in boosting the society prosperity according to high-end cultural ethics.

SYRIAN PASSENGERS REJECTED AT AIRPORT FOLLOWING 'FORGED PASSPORTS' CONTROVERSY

KUWAIT: Scores of Syrian nationals were returned to where they came from as their passports were considered forged, while a Syrian embassy official said most of the passports are legitimate and hoped the interior and foreign ministries solve the problem. A security source said "tens of Syrian nationals arrived at Kuwait International and Saad Al-Abdullah airports, the majority from UAE and Syria, had their passports checked at the airport criminal evidence office and results indicated that they were forged, so they were arrested and their passports confiscated".

The source said that the Syrians told security authorities that those passports were issued by their embassies in Kuwait and other Gulf countries and, they do not know anything about them being forged or not. An official source at the Syrian embassy said charge-de-affairs Ghassan Anjareeni is following the issue, adding that most passports are authentic and issued by official authorities, but what happened is that a new barcode was approved at the airport and it considers old passports as forged. The source said the embassy is ready to deal with the issue and those affected who ask for a document proving the authenticity of their passports can get it, and passports can be replaced within one hour. —Al-Rai



Mahathir quits ruling party over PM scandals

FRANCE BEGINS BULLDOZING PART OF 'JUNGLE' REFUGEE CAMP



RAWALPINDI: Relatives and supporters stand around the body of Mumtaz Qadri, the convicted killer of a former governor, during funeral ceremonies at his home yesterday. — AP

PAKISTAN HANGS EX-GOVERNOR'S KILLER

TENSIONS HIGH AS PROTESTORS TAKE TO STREETS

RAWALPINDI: Pakistan yesterday hanged the man who killed a provincial governor for seeking reform of the blasphemy law, angering Islamist supporters who had feted Mumtaz Qadri as a hero and threatened violence if he was executed. Security was stepped up at flashpoints across the country including the garrison city of Rawalpindi where hundreds of supporters gathered at Qadri's family home, as officials braced for protests from hardliners.

Qadri, a police bodyguard to Salman Taseer, shot the liberal Punjab governor 28 times at an Islamabad market in 2011. He said he was angry at the politician's calls to reform the blasphemy law. Blasphemy is a hugely sensitive issue in the Islamic

republic of some 200 million, and Qadri was hailed as a hero by many conservatives eager to drown out calls to soften the legislation. Critics, including European governments, say the law - which carries the death penalty - is largely misused, with hundreds languishing in jails under false charges.

Analyst Hasan Askari said the next 24 hours would be "sensitive" for the government, adding that Islamabad had weighed the danger of mass violence against the need to "wash away the suspicion" of sympathy for militancy. "Qadri was hanged in Adiala jail early Monday morning" in Rawalpindi, senior local police official Sajjid Gondal told AFP. Mosques near Qadri's family home in Rawalpindi broadcast the news, with cries heard from inside

the house as hundreds of mourners arrived. Paramilitary Ranger forces and police in riot gear as well as ambulances and dozens of police vehicles were stationed at the house early yesterday. But they had melted away by mid-morning, an AFP reporter said, leaving mourners forming a queue roughly a kilometre long to view the body on display at a nearby compound.

"I have no regrets," Qadri's brother Malik Abid told AFP, tears rolling down his cheeks, while women chanted nearby. He said the family had been called to the prison Sunday evening by officials who said Qadri was unwell. But when they arrived, Qadri greeted them with the news that authorities had deceived them and that his execu-

tion was imminent. "We started crying, but he hugged us and chanted 'God is great,'" Abid said. "I am proud of the martyrdom of my son," Qadri's father Bashir Awan told AFP, adding he was ready to sacrifice all five of his other sons "for the honor of the Prophet".

'Justice Served'

Pakistan's second largest Islamist party Jamaat-e-Islami said it planned protests in Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi for yesterday afternoon. But the national media downplayed the news. Most channels led their bulletins with Pakistan's win for best foreign documentary at the Oscars. Earlier, authorities blocked roads in Rawalpindi and

Islamabad, bringing morning traffic to a standstill. Protesters in Islamabad burned tyres and briefly attacked a local news van.

In the port mega-city of Karachi, demonstrators blocked main intersections. Police said security had been tightened there and in the eastern city of Lahore, while hundreds also protested in Pakistani-held Kashmir. Taseer's son Shehryar said on Twitter the hanging was a victory for Pakistan, but not his family. "The safe return of my brother is the only victory my family wants," he wrote, referring to his sibling Shahbaz Taseer, who was kidnapped later in 2011 reportedly by the Taliban - despite being given a police escort after his father's killing. —AFP

SUICIDE BOMBING KILLS 27 AT FUNERAL IN EASTERN IRAQ

BAGHDAD: At least 27 people were killed when a bomber detonated his explosive vest at a funeral for the relative of a Shiite militia commander in the eastern Iraqi province of Diyala yesterday, security and medical sources said.

The attack in Muqdadaiya, 80 km northeast of Baghdad follows the deadliest bombing inside the capital so far this year, which left 78 people dead in a Shiite district on Sunday.

Security officials and police in Diyala said the target of the attack was two local commanders of the Hashid Shaabi umbrella group of Shiite militias who were attending the funeral ceremony for one of their relatives. "The suicide attacker approached the local Hashid commanders and then blew his vest up, killing both with many others," said one police major on condition of anonymity. A further 55 people were wounded, the sources said.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the bombing, but attacks on Shiite are often claimed by Islamic State militants who control large parts of north and western Iraq. Iraqi officials declared victory over the insurgents in Diyala a year ago, but Islamic State has remained active. The Badr Organisation has established itself as the ascendant militia in the region after rolling back the insurgents.

Security officials and witnesses say the situation inside Muqdadaiya is very tense, with dozens of Shiite militia members deployed in the streets with no presence of the security forces.

Militia elements have been accused of attacking Sunni mosques and residents in Diyala following similar bombings in January, but the groups have denied the allegations and blamed Islamic State. — Reuters

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MADISON, Alabama: Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump speaks at a campaign rally at the Madison City Schools Stadium on Sunday. —AFP

RUBIO TAKES THE OFFENSIVE IN EFFORT TO SLOW TRUMP

KENNESAW, Georgia: A flood of mainstream Republican officials and donors have lined up behind Marco Rubio in the week since former Florida Gov Jeb Bush suspended his campaign for president. And yet Rubio's team concedes that neither the influx of support, nor the conversion of many of Bush's wealthy donors, is enough to stop Donald Trump. Instead of riding the wave of new support alone, Rubio has been forced to speed up plans for an all-out assault on the billionaire businessman's character.

Rubio had hoped to wait until the chaotic Republican nominating campaign had shrunk to a two-man race. But with a growing sense of urgency among GOP stalwarts to settle on a Trump alternative, the young Florida senator is trying to simultaneously slow Trump and cast himself the savior of the party's future. "I will never quit. I will never stop until we keep a con man from taking over the party of Reagan and the conservative movement," Rubio thundered at a rally with 2,000 people in Oklahoma City on Friday.

It is a delicate balance. Rubio, a 44-year-old first-term US senator, is trying to project leadership in the party while also going after Trump using his own game, marked by mockery and uncanny aim for his opponent's vulnerabilities. But the hard-nosed strategy is necessary, says Tennessee Gov Bill Haslam, Rubio's latest big endorsement. "Rubio looked around and thought, 'Well, I might not like it, but that's what the media is covering and that's what people are responding to.'"

But Rubio is quickly getting a feel for what he began during Thursday's debate, launching a direct challenge to Trump's appeal to working class voters. In recent days, Rubio has dished about Trump's on-stage perspiration and alluded, jokingly, that Trump may have wet his pants. He's also taken to referring to the billionaire businessman as a "con artist" dozens of times a day while campaigning. "It's amazing to me. A guy with the worst spray tan in America is attacking me for putting on makeup," Rubio charged as he campaigned in Georgia on Saturday. "Donald Trump likes to sue people. He should sue whoever did that to his face."



SALEM, Virginia: Republican presidential candidate Sen Marco Rubio delights supporters as he enters a rally at Roanoke College's Bast Center on Sunday. — AP

Survival

But make no mistake: Rubio's new tack is a fight for survival. He trails Trump in virtually all of the 11 states holding nominating contests on March 1, known as Super Tuesday. The Florida senator has finished in no better than second place in the first four primary contests. Trump has won three out of four. And Texas Sen Ted Cruz remains a top-tier contender, even after finishing in third place in the last three contests.

Given Trump's momentum, Rubio's team says publicly the senator's best chance for the nomination might be a contested national convention in July. That could happen only if Rubio prevents Trump from accumulating the majority of delegates in the months-long primary season that extends through June. Some Florida-based donors, as well as top donors and fundraisers in Washington, DC, Chicago and elsewhere were ready to join Rubio's team immediately after Bush left the race.

"There are a number of us, now that Gov Bush is out of the race, who were very impressed with his debate Thursday, and see him as the one to take down Trump," said Chicago investor Craig Duchossois, who shifted from Bush to Rubio. "He showed he's not going to take any crap from him." In the past two weeks, Rubio has also won the backing of four governors and 20 members of Congress, more than all of his Republican rivals combined.

Rubio had hoped to forestall a one-on-one brawl with Trump until there were only two. Cruz, Ohio Gov John Kasich and retired neurosurgeon Ben Carson remain in the race, although none have the level of support from as many governors and members of Congress as Rubio. In a year of the outsider, however, it's unclear how much that will boost his momentum.

And in the meantime, Rubio's assault on Trump's character continues. Audiences in Super Tuesday states Oklahoma, Georgia and Alabama ate up the tough talk as he whipped through Southern states. "It's about time he take his gloves off and start fighting," said Gary Baker from Okmulgee, Oklahoma. "I think he should have started punching sooner." Better late than never, said Greg Strimple, a Republican pollster and former adviser to the National Republican Senatorial Committee. "The Rubio campaign needs to set-up a contrast on Trump, equate Trump to the culture of corruption Americans hate - where the rich get richer and middle class pays the price," Strimple said.

Rubio says there's time, but none to waste. "If you sense a sense of urgency, it's not just about winning," Rubio said. "It's about the idea that the party of Reagan and the conservative movement could fall into the hands of a con man, who's pulling the ultimate con job on the American people." —AP

RACIAL FEUD ERUPTS AS REPS FIGHT 'UNSTOPPABLE' TRUMP

WHITE SUPREMACIST LEADER AT CENTER OF NEW FUROR

LEESBURG, Virginia: The final-days sprint to Super Tuesday has erupted into a feud over a white supremacist as Donald Trump's Republican rivals scramble to stop the billionaire businessman from becoming an "unstoppable" force in the 2016 presidential contest. Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio continued to hammer the GOP frontrunner's character and lack of policy specifics in a series of attacks Sunday while courting voters across the South. But it was Trump's refusal to denounce an implicit endorsement from former Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke that dominated the narrative less than two days before Republican voters across 11 states head to the polls.

The new focus comes as Trump's rivals acknowledge that time is running out to prevent the former reality television host from becoming the Republican Party's presumptive nominee. He took a new step in that direction by earning the endorsement of Alabama Sen. Jeff Sessions, a would-be Cruz ally who backed Trump instead. "There is no doubt that if Donald steam rolls through Super Tuesday, wins everywhere with big margins, that he may well be unstoppable," Cruz said Sunday on CBS' "Face the Nation."

Trump was asked Sunday on CNN's "State of the Union" whether he rejected support from the former KKK Grand Dragon and other white supremacists after Duke told his radio followers this week that a vote against Trump was equivalent to "treason to your heritage." "Well, just so you understand, I don't know anything about David Duke. OK?" Trump told

host Jake Tapper. "I don't know anything about what you're even talking about with white supremacy or white supremacists." Cruz soon responded on Twitter, telling Trump: "You're better than this. We should all agree, racism is wrong, KKK is abhorrent."

Rubio went further in a message to thousands of supporters in Leesburg, Virginia: "We cannot be a party who refuses to condemn white supremacists and the Ku Klux Klan," Rubio said. "Not only is that wrong, it makes him unelectable. How are we going to grow the party if we nominate someone who doesn't repudiate the Ku Klux Klan?"

Trump was asked Friday by journalists how he felt about Duke's support. He said he didn't know anything about it and curtly said: "All right, I disavow, ok?" He hasn't always claimed ignorance on Duke's history. In 2000, he wrote a New York Times op-ed explaining why he abandoned the possibility of running for president on the Reform Party ticket. He wrote of an "underside" and "fringe element" of the party, concluding, "I leave the Reform Party to David Duke, Pat Buchanan and Lenora Fulani. That is not company I wish to keep."


Trump has won three of four early voting states, roiling a party divided over the prospect of the brash billionaire becoming its nominee. Late Sunday, Nebraska's Ben Sasse became the first sitting Republican senator to say explicitly that he would not back Trump if he does win the nomination. "If Trump becomes the Republican nominee my expectation is that I'll look for some 3rd candidate - a conservative option, a constitutionalist,"

Sasse wrote on Twitter.

The Duke debate seeped into the Democratic contest, as Vermont Sen Bernie Sanders also lashed out on Twitter: "America's first black president cannot and will not be succeeded by a hatemonger who refuses to condemn the KKK." Asked about the issue on Monday, Trump said he had disavowed Duke and asked, "How many times do I have to continue to disavow people?" In a phone-in interview with NBC's "Today" show, the real estate mogul was asked about earlier remarks in interviews where he had seemed to stop short of disavowing Duke.

He said the questioner in the earlier interview had asked about Duke and various "other groups," saying he had difficulty with an earpiece he was wearing for the phone-in interview and didn't want to disavow groups whose identity he didn't know. Trump also said he had clearly made separation with Duke over the weekend in posts on Twitter and Facebook.

Hillary Clinton re-tweeted Sanders' message. She scored a lopsided victory in South Carolina the day before, fueled by a huge advantage among African-Americans, a key Democratic constituency that will also play a dominant role in several Super Tuesday states. Clinton turned her attention to the Republican field, all-but-ignoring rival Sanders from campaign events in Tennessee on Sunday. Starting her morning with stops at two Memphis churches, Clinton offered an implicit critique of Trump, issuing a call to unite the nation and asking worshippers to reject "the demagoguery, the prejudice, the paranoia." —AP



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CLASHES BREAK OUT AS FRANCE CLEARS CALAIS CAMP

CALAIS, France: Clashes with police broke out yesterday as work got underway to clear part of the shanty town outside Calais in northern France where migrants are trying to reach Britain.

Police fired tear gas around midday, about 150-200 migrants and activists threw stones, and three makeshift shelters were set ablaze, according to a Reuters photographer at the site.

Earlier, one person was arrested for trying to stop a group of about 20 workers under heavy police protection from clearing the site, where about 3,000 people are staying. "The migrants are just going to run and hide in the woods and the police are going to have to go after them," said activist Francois Guennoc of the Auberge des Migrants migrant support group.

Regional Prefect Fabienne Buccio had said the police presence was needed because "extremists" could try to intimidate migrants into turning down housing offers or buses to reception centres.

Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve said last week that authorities would

work with humanitarian organisations to relocate the migrants to a nearby park of converted shipping containers or other reception centres around France. On Thursday, a judge upheld a government order to evict migrants living in the southern part of the camp, although a few makeshift buildings of social importance such as a school and a theatre are to remain untouched.

Thousands of migrants fleeing war and poverty, from Afghanistan to Syria, have converged on the northern port over the past year. Many attempt to climb illegally onto trains using the Channel Tunnel or into lorries heading to Britain where they hope to settle. Their presence has led to tension with some of the local population and to a permanent police deployment.

A flashpoint on the edge of the Channel, the camp sprang up less than a year ago in the port city, which has both ferries and the Eurotunnel rail route to Britain. It has grown explosively in past

months amid Europe's migrant crisis, fueling far-right sentiment in both



CALAIS: A man stands on a shelter's roof in front of anti-riot policemen as agents dismantle shelters yesterday in the "jungle" migrants and refugees camp in Calais, northern France. — AFP

Britain and France. Some 4,000 people are estimated to live in the camp - down from 6,000 in December.

Calais has lived with migrants in its midst for years, but the current camp on the city's edge sprang up around a

day center opened last April by the state - and after small camps inside the city were bulldozed. The dismantling of the dense southern portion of the current camp would be the largest

such operation the city has known. Scores of riot police stood guard, keeping journalists and volunteers out as helmeted workers tackled the shelters one by one.

Prefect Fabienne Buccio, who had ordered the camp evacuated and dismantled earlier this month, showed up as the operation began. Her office decried "intimidation" tactics by some activists who she said were manipulating migrants into refusing to accept government offers of shelter.

"Really three houses out of four - I mean three huts out of four, or three tents out of four - were already totally abandoned with a lot of garbage inside," she said. Migrants, she said, "had the time necessary to gather their belongings. The rest was good enough to throw away." However, cameras zooming into huts captured scenes of daily life fully intact. — Agencies



COTONOU: Voters wait in lines to elect their new president in a run-off election in Cotonou on March 18 which former military leader Mathieu Kerekou was poised to win with support guaranteed by other opposition figures. Long peaceable lines formed around dawn in the capital Cotonou where General Kerekou and his rival, incumbent president Nicephore Soglo, were both due to cast their vote. — AFP

GREECE'S 'ERRATIC MARXIST' SAYS EU IS DISINTEGRATING

LONDON: Yanis Varoufakis, the self-described "erratic Marxist" who took Greece to the brink of a eurozone exit by battling creditors over the conditions for a bailout, has got a new role: advising Britain's opposition Labour Party.

The former Greek finance minister who shuns neckties and says the European Union is falling apart will advise Labour due to his negotiating experience during the euro zone debt crisis, said Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn. "I think the way Greece has been treated is terrible and we should reach out to them," Corbyn, who has taken the party of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown further to the left since he became leader in 2015, told the *Islington Tribune*.

"Varoufakis is interesting, because he has obviously been through all the negotiations [with the ECB, European Commission and the International Monetary Fund]," Corbyn was quoted as telling his local London newspaper. Varoufakis, 54, did not immediately respond to emailed requests for comment about the new role.

A spokesman for the Labour Party said Varoufakis would take part in a lecture series to discuss his experiences and offer advice on Labour Party policy "in an attempt to raise the level of public debate on economics and policy making."

In six months as Greece's finance minister, the British-educated economist infuriated euro zone colleagues by opposing the terms for a Greek bailout.

As Greece tumbled towards what some investors feared would be a disorderly exit from the euro, Varoufakis engaged some colleagues in political discussion on the

economic theory behind the bailout terms while publicly criticising the euro zone.

He resigned in July 2015 shortly before Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras eventually finally agreed terms to avoid being bounced out of the common currency.

"We both want to see an economic strategy around anti-austerity, and we're both very concerned about the activities and power of the European Central Bank," Corbyn, 66, said when asked about his ties to Tsipras.

"EU FALLING APART"

Greece's debt crisis and eventual bailout were cast by some euro-sceptics in the British Labour movement as evidence that Germany was imposing spending cuts on citizens in euro zone countries to serve corporate interests. Though it was not immediately clear what Varoufakis would advise Labour on, the former finance minister has said he opposes a British exit from the EU.

Corbyn, who voted against membership in 1975, has said he will campaign to keep Britain in the EU in a June 23 referendum, arguing that membership is the best way to improve social and employment laws. "Under the weight of its own hubris, the EU is falling apart," Varoufakis said in an article on his web site. "Brexit will make the EU's fragmentation faster and surer, begetting a post-modern 1930s from which the UK will not escape even if out of the EU."

Corbyn's opponents in Prime Minister David Cameron's Conservative Party said Labour's move to seek advice from Varoufakis was indicated a flawed economic policy. — Reuters

CAMERON'S EU DEAL MAY DISAPPOINT BRITISH VOTERS: STURGEON

LONDON: Prime Minister David Cameron's renegotiation of Britain's relationship with the European Union might not have done enough to persuade undecided voters to back staying in the bloc, the nationalist leader of Scotland said yesterday. Cameron, who is campaigning for an 'in' vote at a June 23 referendum, has said a deal reached with the EU earlier this month addresses voters' key concerns with the bloc through measures such as curbing EU migrants' access to some welfare payments in Britain.

But pro-EU Scottish National Party (SNP) leader Nicola Sturgeon, who heads Scotland's devolved government, said renegotiation was "too grand a word" for what Cameron had achieved.

"Nothing in that was going to change my view as someone who wants to stay in, nothing in it was going to change the view of an arch Eurosceptic who wants out of Europe come what may," she said during a question session after a speech in London. "The danger is for those perhaps in the middle ground who were looking to that to try and make up their mind, it is an inevitable disappointment, because it didn't live up to what was promised."

Sturgeon said she hoped the vote would result in an "overwhelming" victory for the 'in' camp, but while she would be campaigning on the same side as Cameron, she did not plan to share a platform with him.

"We want the same outcome from slightly different perspectives ... if he appeals to people who agree with him and I appeal to people who agree with me then we will maximize the vote for staying in," she said. Scots rejected independence by 55-45 percent in 2014 vote but since then the SNP has gained further strength, taking 56 of the 59 seats representing Scotland in the national parliament in London in last May's election.

Polls show a majority of the 5 million Scots back staying in the EU, and Sturgeon repeated her claim that if Scotland were taken out of the bloc against its will there would be a rising "clamour" for a second independence referendum.

If that were to happen, Sturgeon said she was confident Scotland could remain a member of the EU. "I would expect that many people in the European Union and across Europe would want to see Scotland seek to stay in," she said. — Reuters

AS EUROPE BICKERS, POLICE GAS MIGRANTS ON BORDER

ABOUT 22,000 TRAPPED IN GREECE BY BALKAN ROUTE CLOSURES

IDOMENI/ATHENS: Macedonian police fired tear gas to disperse hundreds of migrants who stormed the border from Greece yesterday as a deeply divided Europe traded barbs over the biggest humanitarian crisis in decades.

As frustrations boiled over at restrictions imposed on people moving through the Balkans, migrants trapped on the Greece-Macedonia border tore down a metal gate in the barbed wire fence. A Reuters witness said Macedonian police fired several rounds of tear gas into the crowd and onto a railway line where other migrants sat refusing to move, demanding to cross into the country.

Greece raced to set up temporary accommodation for a build-up of thousands of migrants stranded in the country after Austria and countries along the Balkans migration route imposed restrictions on their borders, limiting the number of migrants able to cross. Many of the migrants, fleeing war and poverty in the Middle East and North Africa, hope to reach Germany, which last year took in 1.1 million asylum seekers. There were an estimated 22,000 migrants and refugees trapped in Greece on Monday, some sleeping rough in central Athens, some in an abandoned airport and at the 2004 Olympic Games venues. Greece's migration minister said without any outlet, that figure could rise as high as 70,000 in coming days.

More than one million migrants passed through Greece last year, prompting criticism from other European nations that Athens simply waved people through. "These people do not want to stay here," said Thodoris Dritsas, Greece's shipping minister. "Even if we had a system in place for them to stay here permanently it wouldn't work."

German Chancellor Angela Merkel, facing the biggest test of her decade in power, on Sunday defended her open-door policy for migrants, rejecting any limit on the number of refugees allowed into her country despite divisions within her government over the issue.

"There are many conflicting interests in Europe," she told state broadcaster ARD. "But it is my damn duty to do everything I can so that Europe finds a collective way."

That was lacking yesterday, a week before European Union leaders were due to meet with Turkey on how it could help quell the flow of



Refugees and migrants gather for the opening of the border to cross into Macedonia, at the Greek-Macedonian border near the village of Idomeni yesterday. — AFP

migrants from its shores. In an increasingly shrill debate, Austria's defence minister suggested Merkel take in all those who were stranded in Greece. "The German chancellor ... said that formally there is no upper limit in Germany. Then, I would invite her to take the people, who arrive in Greece now and whom she wants to take care of, directly to Germany," Hans Peter Doskozil told Austria's Oe1 radio.

TENT COMMUNITY

Thousands of people have been gathering at Idomeni, the small frontier community on Greece's border with Macedonia, for days. Hundreds of tents were pitched in soggy fields yesterday and there were reports that fights had broken out among families over tents, which were in short supply.

Macedonian Foreign Minister Nicola Poposki, speaking in Geneva, said "encouraging" cooperation had been established with Greece on the issue, but that it may not be enough. "Shifting

responsibility from one border to the next is clearly not the solution," Poposki told the UN Human Rights Council.

Yesterday, a crush developed along the frontier after rumours spread that Macedonian authorities had opened the border. Crowds who gathered at the razor wire fence proceeded to use a heavy metal pole to bring down a gate. At least two people collapsed in the crush and ensuing use of tear gas, Reuters television images showed.

Aid agencies said the border was opening with Macedonia intermittently, with about 7,000 gathered in the area. People were also being sent back for apparent discrepancies between registration documents they received from Greek authorities and their own travel documents, witnesses said.

"There are people who have been here for as long as 10 days," said Gemma Gillie of aid agency Medecins Sans Frontieres. "Things are really stretched to the limit." — Reuters

NIGERIA CUTS 24,000 GHOST WORKERS FROM STATE PAYROLL

LAGOS: Nigeria's Finance Ministry says it is cutting 24,000 ghost workers from the national payroll, saving \$11.5 million a month. A new bank verification system helped uncover frauds with federal government salaries being paid to people who do not exist and some civil servants receiving salaries from multiple agencies, according to a statement received Monday from Festus Akanbi, the spokesman for the minister of finance.

The 24,000 make up 7.5 percent of the 312,000 names so far checked in an ongoing exercise to root out corruption, he said, but was reluctant to give a figure for the total workforce until the verification exercise is complete. In addition, the Military Pension Board has stopped payments to more than 19,200 personnel found to have died since the last audit in 2012, Akanbi said. Shortly before Nigeria's government

changed last year, an independent commission against corrupt practices reported discovering 45,000 ghost workers just in the federal ministry of finance. Federal workers' salaries, the biggest item on the budget, account for more than 40 percent of Nigerian government expenditure, Akanbi said. Any money saved will mean less borrowing abroad and at home to fund Nigeria's expanded budget for 2016, he explained. — AP

EMERGENCY CREWS TAKE PART IN LARGE-SCALE DISASTER DRILL

LONDON: Emergency crews are taking part in a large-scale disaster drill in southeastern England, complete with blood-covered "victims," trapped in rubble and mangled subway carriages in an Underground station.

The training exercise yesterday re-creates Waterloo Station in the aftermath of a building collapse.

The set for the four-day drill was created at a disused power plant and took a year to plan. Dozens of photographers lined balconies above the wreckage to watch as some 250 police, firefighters and ambulance workers practiced dealing with an emergency of 1,000 or more casualties. The scene also included a specially constructed temporary mortuary to test victim identification.

London Fire commissioner Ron Dobson says the response will be "rigorously observed" by independent evaluators so lessons can be learned. — AP



ANTRIM: Mayor of London Boris Johnson inspects a chassis at the Wrightbus factory in Antrim, Northern Ireland, yesterday. The Mayor visited the factory that produces the famous London red buses and announced a further 200 orders, he is also spending time in the province campaigning for Britain to leave the EU for the referendum on June 23. — AP

N KOREA PUTS TEARFUL DETAINED AMERICAN BEFORE CAMERAS

PYONGYANG: North Korea presented a detained American student before the media yesterday in Pyongyang, where he tearfully apologized for attempting to steal a political banner - at the behest, he said, of a member of a church back home who wanted it as a "trophy" - from a staff-only section of the hotel where he had been staying.

North Korea announced in late January it had arrested Otto Warmbier, a 21-year-old University of Virginia undergraduate student. It said that after entering the country as a tourist he committed an anti-state crime with "the tacit connivance of the US government and under its manipulation."

No details of what kind of charges or punishment Warmbier faces were immediately released.

According to Warmbier's statement yesterday, he wanted the banner with a political slogan on it as a trophy for the church member, who was the mother of a friend. In previous cases, people who have been detained in North Korea and made a public confession often recant those statements after their release.

He was arrested while visiting the country with Young Pioneer Tours, an agency specializing in travel to North Korea, which is strongly discouraged by

the US State Department. He had been staying at the Yanggakdo International Hotel, which is located on an island in a river that runs through Pyongyang, the capital. It is common for sections of tourist hotels to be reserved for North Korean staff and off-limits to foreigners.

Warmbier is a native of Ohio and Ohio Gov. John Kasich, while campaigning in New Hampshire as a Republican presidential candidate, called the arrest "inexcusable." Kasich has urged President Barack Obama to "make every effort to secure Mr. Warmbier's immediate release and keep (his) family constantly apprised."

Kasich said North Korea should either provide evidence of the alleged anti-state activities or release Warmbier. In his comments, Warmbier said he was offered a used car worth \$10,000 by a member of the church. He said the church member told him the slogan would be hung on its wall as a trophy. He also said he was told that if he was detained and didn't return, \$200,000 would be paid to his mother in the form of a charitable donation.

Warmbier identified the church as the Friendship United Methodist Church, which is in his hometown, Wyoming, Ohio. Meshach Kanyion, pastor of the

church, would not confirm whether he knows Warmbier or if he is a member of the church.

"I don't have any comment at this time," he told The Associated Press. Warmbier said he was also encouraged in his act by the "Z Society" at the University of Virginia, which he said he was trying to join. The magazine of the university's alumni association describes the Z Society as a "semi-secret ring society" that was founded in 1892 and conducts philanthropy, puts on honorary dinners and grants academic awards.

Warmbier said he accepted the offer of money because his family is "suffering from very severe financial difficulties." "I started to consider this as my only golden opportunity to earn money," he said, adding that if he ever mentioned the involvement of the church, "no payments would come."

North Korea regularly accuses Washington and Seoul of sending spies to overthrow its government to enable the US-backed South Korean government to control the Korean Peninsula.

US tourism to North Korea is legal and virtually all Americans who make the journey return home without incident. Even so, the State Department has repeatedly warned against travel to the



PYONGYANG: American student Otto Warmbier (right) is presented to the reporters yesterday in Pyongyang. North Korea announced late last month that it had arrested the 21-year-old University of Virginia undergraduate student.—AP

North. Visitors, especially those from America, who break the country's sometimes murky rules risk detention, arrest and possible jail sentences.

Young Pioneer describes itself on its website as providing "budget tours to destinations your mother would rather you stayed away from." The agency,

based in China, also has tours to Iran, Cuba, Turkmenistan, Iraq and other former Soviet countries.

After Warmbier's detention, it stressed in a news release that he was the first of the 7,000 people it has taken to North Korea over the past eight years to face arrest.—AP



YANGON: In this photograph taken on February 13, 2016, traffic on Mahabandoola road leads to Sule pagoda, seen in the background, Yangon's ancient Buddhist religious landmark.—AFP

MYANMAR PARLIAMENT TO CHANGE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS DATE

NAYPYITAW: Myanmar's democracy champion Aung San Suu Kyi is likely to speed up elections of the country's president, in a last-minute change following weeks of talks with the military that has stood by the constitution that bars her from assuming the highest office. Myanmar's parliament dominated by the National League for Democracy (NLD), which swept historic elections in November, will change the date of presidential elections, previously set for March 17, according to the agenda for today's parliamentary session.

NLD members and analysts say the party was likely to speed up the vote to end weeks of bickering between the army and the NLD over whether junta-drafted constitution, which bars Suu Kyi from becoming president, should be amended. The original date, set only two weeks before the term of the new government was set to start on April 1, gave Suu Kyi plenty of time to negotiate the terms of the transition. But in the face of the unrelenting military, Suu Kyi decided to speed up the vote to gain time to prepare for government, analysts say.

"It's become clear that amendment of article 59 (f) (barring Suu Kyi from becoming president) is impossible. So they want the presidential nomination to happen earlier so that they can take more time in handling cabinet formation," said political analyst Yan Myo Thein.

The NLD swept the historic Nov 8 election, securing some 80 percent of elected seats in parliament, or enough to push

through its president. Suu Kyi is barred from the presidency because she has foreign children. Another factor that may have forced the NLD's surprise change of tactics was lack of cooperation from the outgoing administration of President Thein Sein.

Last week, the NLD criticized the military and the army-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) over a controversial copper mine project run as a joint venture between a Chinese weapons manufacturer and the Myanmar military. It also zeroed in on other lucrative public works projects awarded by the outgoing government at the last minute.

In a rare show of outrage, the military MPs stood up, while one of the members of the army caucus rejected the NLD's allegations in parliament.

"Present government is responsible only to the previous parliament that formed it," said Thein Sein's spokesman, Ye Htut, backing ministers who refused to come to parliament to face questioning by the NLD. The rare heated debate showed the challenges facing Suu Kyi as she tries to overcome years of corrosive distrust between the junta that had ruled the country for nearly half a century and pro-democracy activists.

Now both sides are forced to share power. The military controls a large chunk of the country's administration through three security ministries, has guaranteed a quarter of the seats in the parliament and a constitutional veto.—Reuters

INDIA, US CLOSER TO PACT TO SHARE MILITARY LOGISTICS PARTNERSHIP SEEN AS COUNTERBALANCE TO CHINA

NEW DELHI/WASHINGTON: India and the United States are closing in on an agreement to share military logistics after 12 years of talks, officials said, a sign of strengthening defence ties between the countries as China becomes increasingly assertive.

The United States has emerged as India's top arms source after years of dominance by Russia, and holds more joint exercises with it than any other country. It is in talks with New Delhi to help build its largest aircraft carrier in the biggest military collaboration to date, a move that will bolster the Indian navy's strength as China expands its reach in the Indian Ocean.

After years of foot-dragging by previous governments over fears that the logistics agreement would draw India into a binding commitment to support the United States in war, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's administration has signalled a desire to move ahead with the Logistics Support Agreement (LSA). That would allow the two militaries to use each other's land, air and naval bases for resupplies, repair and rest, officials said.

Admiral Harry Harris, head of the US Navy's Pacific Command, said the two sides were working on the LSA, another agreement called the CISMOA for secure communications when the militaries operate together, and a third on

exchange of topographical, nautical, and aeronautical data.

"We have not gotten to the point of signing them with India, but I think we're close," Harris, due in India this week, told the US House Armed Services Committee on Wednesday.

The progress comes as the countries consider joint maritime patrols that a US official said could include the South China Sea, where China is locked in a territorial dispute with Vietnam, the Philippines and Taiwan among others.

Both sides, though, said there were no immediate plans for such patrols, which drew strong condemnation from Beijing. An Indian government official said the main impediment to signing the LSA had been cleared, after Washington gave an assurance that New Delhi was not bound by it if the US went to war with a friendly country or undertook any other unilateral action that New Delhi did not support.

"It has been clarified that it will be done on a case-to-case basis; it's not automatic that either side will get access to facilities in the case of war," the official familiar with the negotiations said.

India's previous centre-left government was worried the agreements would undermine India's strategic autonomy and that it would draw it into an undeclared military alliance with the United

States. Concerns linger over the proposed communications agreement, with some branches of the military including the air force fearing it would allow the United States to access their communications network.

US officials said they hoped that once the logistics agreement was signed, the others would follow. A US defense industry source engaged in business in India said there were expectations the LSA could be sealed by the time US Defense Secretary Ash Carter visited New Delhi in April. The source said Modi's office was directly involved in the matter and actively considering the agreements as a key for enhanced cooperation. India has been alarmed by Chinese naval forays into the Indian Ocean and its involvement in maritime infrastructure on island nations that it traditionally considered its back yard.

It has moved to shore up naval forces and build defence ties with Japan and Vietnam, besides the United States. "There is growing convergence between Obama's Asia pivot and Modi's Act East policy," said Saroj Bishoyi, an expert on the proposed India-US collaboration at the government-funded Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses in New Delhi. "The LSA currently appears to be a doable agreement."—Reuters



NEW DELHI: An Indian Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG) vendor loads empty gas cylinders onto a truck outside a depot in New Delhi yesterday. In his budget statement India's Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said that the Government has "decided to embark on a massive mission to provide LPG connection in the name of women members of poor households".—AFP

MYANMAR COURT JAILS INTERFAITH ACTIVISTS

YANGON: A Myanmar court has sentenced three Muslim and Hindu interfaith activists to two years with hard labor, their lawyer said yesterday, after activists raised fears over a campaign against them by Buddhist nationalists.

The two men and one woman from the central city of Mandalay were arrested in July 2015 and accused of crossing Myanmar's frontier with India after they posted pictures of themselves at the border on social media, according to Thein Than Oo, a lawyer representing two of the defendants.

"Zaw Zaw Latt, Pwint Phyu Latt and Zaw Win Bo were sentenced two years with hard labour" under the immigration act at Mandalay's Chan Aye Tharzan court on Friday, he told AFP.

"I think it's too harsh," he added. He said Zaw Zaw Latt and Pwint Phyu Latt, both Muslims, will face a further trial on March 3, accused under the unlawful associations act for a separate visit into the territory of ethnic minority rebels in northern Kachin state.

Fortify Rights has slammed the trial as "politically motivated" and called for the

release of the three, who are all members of a Mandalay-based interfaith peace network.

In a statement earlier this month the watchdog said the arrests came after a campaign against Zaw Zaw Latt on social media and in a journal linked to the Buddhist nationalist monk movement Ma Ba Tha, whose anti-Muslim rhetoric has gained in influence in recent years.

Myanmar has earned plaudits internationally for sweeping reforms since the end of junta rule in 2011, including a political opening that enabled Aung San Suu Kyi to lead her National League for Democracy to victory in November elections. Her party is due to form a government in April.

But campaigners have warned that some freedoms have been rolled back, with several activists detained for Facebook posts satirising the army in recent months. Myanmar has suffered sporadic bouts of religious bloodshed since 2012, mainly aimed at Muslims who were also marginalised in last year's election campaign, with even Suu Kyi's party failing to put forward a single candidate from the minority group.—AFP

CHINESE PASTOR, WIFE WHO OPPOSED CROSS REMOVALS SENT TO JAIL

BEIJING: A Chinese husband and wife who led a Christian congregation that opposed a government campaign to remove crosses atop churches have been given long prison sentences for illegal activities, including corruption and disturbing social order, state media said.

A court in eastern Zhejiang province on Friday sentenced pastor Bao Guohua to 14 years in prison and his wife, Xing Wenxiang, to 12 years after concluding that they had illegally organized churchgoers to petition the government and disturb social order, according to the state-run Zhejiang Daily newspaper.

The couple also was accused of "tricking" members of its congregation into donating \$336,000 that was spent on cars and other personal purchases while pretending to lead an ascetic lifestyle, the newspaper said. The court sentenced 10 other church members to prison, the report said, without giving details.

For the past two years, Zhejiang's Christians, particularly in the coastal city of

Wenzhou, home to a large Christian population, have been locked in a bitter dispute with local authorities who have removed hundreds of crosses from churches in the province, saying they violate building codes, or demolished churches altogether.

Zhejiang's religious leaders, many of whom lead churches sanctioned by the government, say the attitudes of local authorities have turned sharply negative in recent years as the Christian population grew in number and influence. Several well-known figures who have resisted the government campaign to remove crosses through legal challenges or public denunciations have been targeted with criminal prosecutions.

The clash over the Zhejiang Christians' religious rights has been complicated by the fact that they have received help from overseas supporters at a time when the Chinese government is particularly sensitive to what it considers foreign meddling in domestic issues. In the past year, China's government

has relentlessly pursued and jailed human rights lawyers that have received training and funding from foreign sources.

Zhang Kai, a Beijing-based Christian lawyer who was detained one day before he was due to meet a US envoy in August, was shown on television late Thursday night confessing to organizing illegal religious gatherings and undermining China's political system with backing from China Aid, a Texas-based group that has funded the churches' efforts to resist the cross removals.

China Aid said in a blog post Friday that the government action against Bao's church and other Christian leaders amounted to "religious persecution." Last month, provincial authorities opened a separate corruption probe into the prominent pastor Gu Yue, who openly spoke out against the government's clampdown on Christian activity. With 10,000 members, Gu's Chongyi church is the largest Protestant congregation in the Chinese-speaking world.—AP

MALAYSIA'S MAHATHIR QUILTS RULING PARTY IN PROTEST



PUTRAJAYA: Former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad speaks at a special press conference in Putrajaya yesterday. —AP

KUALA LUMPUR: Former Malaysian leader Mahathir Mohamad has quit the ruling Malay party, saying yesterday it has been hijacked by embattled Prime Minister Najib Razak to protect his own interests.

Najib has come under pressure to resign after documents leaked last July showed more than \$700 million was channeled into his private bank accounts. The attorney general decided last month not to prosecute Najib, saying most of the money was a personal donation from Saudi Arabia's royal family.

Mahathir said he decided to quit the United Malays National Organization, or UMNO, because it was now "a party dedicated to supporting Najib, protecting Najib and upholding whatever he does, including some of the wrong things he has done."

"I feel embarrassed that I am associated with a party that is seen as supporting corruption," he told a news conference. "I am very much ashamed of all that is happening, I decided that I cannot be a party to all these things, so the least I can do

is leave the party."

Mahathir was prime minister for 22 years before stepping down in 2003. He remains an influential political figure and has led calls for Najib to resign.

However, his departure from the ruling party is unlikely to have a major impact on Najib, who continues to enjoy the support of senior UMNO leaders. Najib has retained their backing because of the patronage he has been handing out, something which Mahathir also did to ensure his longevity in politics.

This is the second time Mahathir has left UMNO, the linchpin of the ruling coalition that has been in power since independence from Britain in 1957. He quit in 2008 to protest his successor, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, and rejoined the party in 2009 after Najib came into power. Mahathir said a prime minister should never have so much money, no matter where it came from. He said the announcement that it came from the Saudi royal family was "illogical" as there were no documents or banking evidence to show the trail.

He said Najib has been unable to quash accusations that the money came from state investment fund 1MDB, which Najib started and has accumulated more than 42 billion ringgit (\$10 billion) in debts in six years. Both Najib and 1MDB have denied the allegation.

Mahathir said Najib replaced the former attorney-general who had been investigating him with a loyalist, who last month ordered the anti-corruption agency to close its investigation of Najib. The agency is appealing the decision.

"The focus of UMNO is on how to keep Najib as prime minister, how to keep him in power," Mahathir said. "UMNO as a political party no longer exists. The party has been hijacked by Najib and turned into Najib's party."

Communications Minister Salleh Said Keruak, a senior UMNO leader, said the party has been through many crises.

"But UMNO survived and life went on. And UMNO will survive this one as well. In the long run it is better for everyone concerned that Dr. Mahathir leaves the party," he wrote on his blog. —AP

CHINA BRACING FOR N KOREAN RESPONSE TO NEW SANCTIONS

WASHINGTON, BEIJING AGREE ON HARSH SANCTIONS AGAINST NORTH

BEIJING: Beijing is on alert for any angry responses from North Korea to proposed new United Nations sanctions over the North's recent nuclear test and rocket launch, a Chinese diplomat said yesterday.

The diplomat, who accompanied Foreign Minister Wang Yi during talks in Washington last week, said the two countries had agreed on the need for harsh sanctions against North Korea for defying UN resolutions. However, the

diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue, said the US should also provide incentives to North Korea to return to negotiations, such as offering progress on a permanent peace agreement between the sides. The two countries are still technically at war because the 1950-53 Korean War ended with a cease-fire, not a peace treaty.

"We are fully aware that in the next couple of months the situation in this

area could be very sensitive. On the one hand, you have to be prepared, keep alert on what kind of reaction might be from Pyongyang," the diplomat said. The US and South Korea also bear responsibility to avoid actions that North Korea might view as provocative, such as scheduled military drills, he said. "We hope that after the adoption of the resolution all sides should refrain from taking any measures that could escalate." China is North Korea's most

important ally, biggest trading partner and key source of food and fuel. However, Beijing says its influence with Kim Jong Un's government is limited and has argued against measures from the international community that could spark its collapse, potentially leading to a wave of refugees crossing the border into China and the stationing of US and South Korean troops in the North. Despite its reservations, Beijing signed on to a draft resolution that for the first time would subject cargo ships leaving and entering North Korea to mandatory inspections, prohibit the sale of small arms and other conventional weapons to the North, and impose financial sanctions targeting North Korean banks and assets and ban all dual-use nuclear and missile-related items.

The proposed sanctions would also limit and in some cases ban exports of coal, iron, gold, titanium and rare earth minerals from North Korea and would prohibit countries from supplying aviation fuel, including rocket fuel, to the country. Items such as luxury watches, snowmobiles, recreational water vehicles and lead crystal were also added to a long list of luxury goods that North Korea is not allowed to import.

North Korea started off the new year with what it says was its first hydrogen bomb test on Jan. 6. It followed with the launch of a satellite on a rocket on Feb. 7 that was condemned by China and much of the world as a test of banned missile technology. —AP



MANILA: Philippine President Benigno Aquino III, center, salutes in front of the casket containing the urn of former President Elpidio Quirino during the transfer of his remains at the Heroes' Cemetery in suburban Taguig city, east of Manila, yesterday. —AP

PHILIPPINES ASKS CHINA TO RESPECT SEA DISPUTE ARBITRATION

MANILA: The Philippines yesterday urged China to respect a forthcoming ruling by an arbitration court in The Hague on a territorial dispute in the South China Sea after Beijing accused Manila of "political provocation." China claims almost the entire South China Sea, believed to have huge deposits of oil and gas. Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam also have claims on the waters, through which about \$5 trillion in trade is shipped every year.

China refuses to recognize the case lodged by the Philippines with the tribunal and says all disputes should be resolved through bilateral talks.

"The Philippines, as well as the international community, is asking China to respect the forthcoming ruling of the arbitral tribunal and together advance an international rules-based regime," Philippine Foreign Secretary Albert del Rosario said in a statement in Manila.

"If China does not heed our collective call, does it mean that China considers itself above the law?" The tribunal's ruling was expected before May, said del Rosario. Manila and Beijing had met several times to discuss maritime disputes but nothing had been resolved, he added.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman

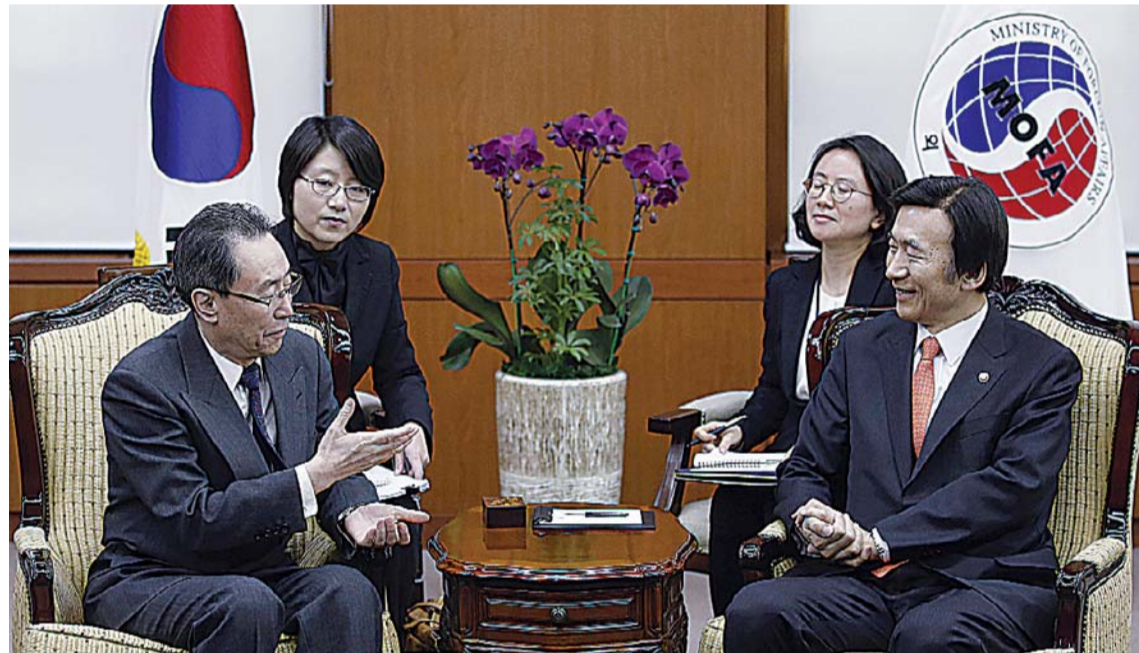
Hong Lei repeated yesterday that China would not participate in the case. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, on a visit to the United States last week, accused the Philippines of "political provocation" in seeking arbitration to resolve the dispute.

Wang held talks last week with his counterpart, US Secretary of State John Kerry, who said China was rapidly militarizing the waterway after building artificial islands and deploying fighters and missiles.

Wang defended China's actions as self-defence but said it would remain open for two-way talks with countries claiming the South China Sea. The Philippines and Japan, which has its own territorial dispute with China in the East China Sea, on Monday signed a military agreement allowing the transfer of aircraft and equipment to the Philippines.

Japan is ready to lease at least five TC-90 King Air planes to the Philippines as a training aircraft for surveillance and reconnaissance, a military official said.

The Philippines has expressed interest in getting old P3C-Orion planes from Japan after it started using the sophisticated P1 surveillance aircraft, the equivalent of the US Navy's P8 Poseidon. —Reuters



SEOUL: Chinese chief nuclear envoy Wu Dawei (L) speaks with South Korea's Foreign Minister Yoon Byung-se (R) during their meeting at the Foreign Ministry in Seoul yesterday. —AFP

DEMOCRACY CAMP WINS KEY HONG KONG VOTE

HONG KONG: Hong Kong's pro-democracy camp won a key by-election yesterday, with one young activist who advocates independence from China also taking tens of thousands of votes in closely-watched polls at a time of rising political tension.

While it was a candidate from one of the established pro-democracy parties who won the election, the results showed growing support for the more radical "localist" movement, which advocates far greater autonomy from Beijing amid rising concerns over Chinese interference. The movement grew out of the failure of pro-democracy rallies in 2014 to win concessions on political reform and advocates more radical tactics to force change.

Student Edward Leung, 24, one of the leaders of localist group Hong Kong Indigenous, took more than 66,000 votes in the election held Sunday in New Territories East—far more than observers expected.

That secured him third place behind pro-Beijing candidate Holden Chow in second and Alvin Yeung of the established pro-democracy Civic Party who won the seat. Yeung took 160,880 votes to Chow's 150,329 in the by-election, triggered when a prominent pro-democracy politician stood down.

The seat in the mainly middle-class constituency in the north of Hong Kong is traditionally a democratic stronghold.

Leung's slice of the vote was an indication of widening sympathy for localists, some of whom were involved in clashes with police earlier this month which left more than 100 injured.

Leung is currently facing a rioting charge for his involvement. He said his group must be taken more seriously after the election result. "In the past, the government, political parties, mainstream media have billed us as rioters. Now we have a mandate from 66,000 voters," Leung said.

Winning candidate Yeung has distanced himself from Leung's radicalism, but said the result should make the government sit up and listen.

"The number of votes obtained by myself and Edward Leung is not trivial. It is reflecting a serious governance issue," he said.

Hong Kong was handed back to China by former colonial power Britain in 1997 and its freedoms are protected by a 50-year agreement. But there is growing concern those freedoms are

Indigenous garnered a lot more votes than people expected," said Lam.

"The fact they did so well shows these nativist 'Hong Kong first' sentiments have grown amongst young people," he added. Lam said it could pave the way for more localist wins at legislative



HONG KONG: Student protesters (L to R) Nathan Law, Joshua Wong and Alex Chow talks to the media outside a court of justice in Hong Kong yesterday. —AFP

under threat as China seeks to stamp its authority on the semi-autonomous territory.

Political analyst Willy Lam said the pro-democracy camp must have been "very reassured" by the Civic Party's win in the face of the failure of the pro-democracy rallies.

But he added it was the localist movement that was gathering momentum. "Hong Kong

elections in September, in which student leader Joshua Wong's pro-democracy campaign group Scholarism will also stand for office.

The pro-Beijing camp stands democracy campaigners as a threat to stability and prosperity in Hong Kong. Beijing has dismissed localists as "separatists"—a label they do not shy away from. —AFP

JAPAN SIGNS PACT TO SUPPLY DEFENSE EQUIPMENT TO MANILA

MANILA, Philippines: Japan signed an agreement yesterday to supply defense equipment to the Philippines, the first such Japanese defense pact in a region where the US allies have been alarmed by China's aggressive advances in disputed territories. Defense Secretary Voltaire Gazmin said the agreement he signed with Japanese ambassador to Manila, Kazuhide Ishikawa, provides a frame-

work for the supply of defense equipment and technology and would allow the Asian countries to carry out joint research and development projects.

Future talks will determine what defense equipment could be supplied, although Gazmin told reporters without elaborating that Japan has initially offered a surveillance aircraft.

"This agreement would really substantiate

the Philippines and Japan being strategic partners," Gazmin said in remarks during the signing ceremony at the Department of Defense in metropolitan Manila which was not opened to the press. "Let me stress that what underpins this agreement is not only our desire to enhance our respective defense capabilities but also to contribute to regional peace and stability." —AP

VATICAN OFFICIAL: CHURCH 'MUCKED UP' WITH PAEDOPHILE PRIESTS

SYDNEY: Vatican finance chief Cardinal George Pell admitted yesterday the Catholic Church "mucked up" in dealing with paedophile priests and vowed he would not "defend the indefensible" before an Australian inquiry. Pell gave evidence from a hotel in Rome via video-link to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Sydney rather than appear in person as he has a heart condition. The inquiry is currently focused on the Victorian state town of Ballarat, where Pell grew up and worked, and how the church dealt with complaints, many dating back to the 1970s, against the Catholic clergy. Pell, who rose to be the top Catholic official in Australia, said the church historically made grave errors in not properly addressing the issue and was now working to remedy them.

"Let me just say this, as an initial clarification, and that is I'm not here to defend the indefensible," he said after swearing on the Bible to tell the truth. "The church has made enormous mistakes and is working to remedy those. The church in many places, certainly in Australia, has mucked things up, has let people down."

He acknowledged that in the past the church's general attitude to abuse was that it was "much, much more difficult for the child to be believed" and complaints were often dismissed. "I don't have the statistics on that but too many of them certainly were dismissed and sometimes they were dismissed in absolutely scandalous circumstances," he said, adding that the instinct was to protect the church from shame.

"They were very, very, very plausible allegations made by responsible people that were not followed up sufficiently." But he denied the church's structure was to blame for the way it handled paedophile priests, despite counsel assisting the commission Gail Furness saying many inquiries around the world had found those in senior positions did not take proper action.

"I think the faults overwhelmingly have been more personal faults, personal failures rather than structures," he said.

Catastrophe for the Church

Pell has always denied knowing of systemic child abuse occurring in Ballarat, including by Gerald Ridsdale, seen as Australia's worst paedophile priest who preyed on dozens of children over two decades. The pair shared a home but Pell has dismissed claims he helped move him to another parish or that he tried to buy anyone's silence. He told the commission the way Ridsdale was dealt with by church officials was "catastrophic".

"I have just re-read the file of Ridsdale. The priest-ex-priest-and the way he was dealt with was a catastrophe. A catastrophe for the victims and a catastrophe for the church," he said.

"If effective action had been taken earlier, an enormous amount of suffering would've been avoided." Pell also denied being aware of paedophile priests being sent for treatment for their sexual offending by then bishop of Ballarat Ronald Mulkearns while he was based in the diocese. —AFP

SAUDI IRANIAN RESTAURANTS THRIVING

Continued from Page 1

A prominent Saudi prince, speaking to reporters this week in Abu Dhabi, said political tensions do not change that Arabs and Iranians "believe in the same God, and the same prophet and the same holy book." "I don't think there is any family in the Arabian Peninsula in general, and Saudi Arabia in particular, that has not had, in one form or another, some kind of link to Iran in the past and visa-versa," said Prince Turki Al-Faisal, a former director of Saudi intelligence.

In Bahrain, where Shiites are the majority, many villages have Persian names and many speak Farsi at home. In Kuwait, some of the wealthiest families and businessmen are originally Iranian. The United Arab Emirates has long been a haven for Iranian businessmen, who have established an Iranian hospital, business council and club for Iranian families living in Dubai.

Even Saudi and Iran's longstanding rivalry appeared to be cooling in the 1990s, as joint opposition to Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait helped Riyadh and Tehran restore ties in 1991. The two governments exchanged high-level visits in the late '90s and ties improved further until a political crisis in Yemen saw them backing opposite sides of the conflict in 2000, with Saudi Arabia intervening militarily nine years later and again in 2015.

A handful of Iranian chefs were able to live and work in Saudi Arabia during the 1990s and early 2000s. Today, that would be unthinkable, said the General Manager of Shayah restaurants, Mohammed Farhat - for a start, they wouldn't be granted work visas. He said the last of Shayah's Iranian employees left Saudi Arabia five years ago. Saudi Arabia and Iran are now locked in proxy wars for regional supremacy, backing opposite sides of the wars in Syria and Yemen and supporting political rivals in Lebanon, Bahrain and Iraq. The conflicts have deepened Sunni-Shiite enmity between hard-liners on both sides. Relations hit a new low in January when Saudi Arabia executed a prominent Saudi Shiite cleric. Iranians protested and ransacked the Saudi Embassy in Tehran and its consulate in another part of the country. Diplomatic and trade ties between the two were severed and Saudi Arabia halted all commercial flights to

and from Iran. According to Iran's Ministry of Industry and Trade, Iranian exports to Riyadh for the first half of 2015 stood at \$132 million, and Saudi imports accounted for \$40 million.

Well before ties were officially cut, an Arabic Twitter account, named "Boycotting Iranian Goods," was telling its more than 23,000 followers that it is a religious and national duty to do so. Dozens of tweets were sent outing Iranian products in Saudi grocery stores, including photos of ice cream, rose water, golden apples, saffron, honey and a fizzy pomegranate drink. Shayah also became the target of zealous tweets, with some demanding that it remove the word "Iranian" from its signs and menu. "We don't want anything opened in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia with the name of the devil 'Iran'," said one tweet. "Their kebab is good, but I suggest they remove the word 'Iranian' and continue on," said another.

Even so, it appears a Saudi boycott of Iranian lamb skewers and saffron-infused rice is off the table for now. At a bustling food court in Riyadh's Kingdom Center mall, American fast food dominates. Nestled among Sbarro's pizzeria, a Krispy Kreme doughnut stand and a KFC is one of Shayah's branches, where a steady stream of customers, among them 26 year-old Hajjar Mohammed and her friend Rawan Fahd, ordered sandwiches. "If the government isn't barring it, why should we?" said Fahd, who thinks the restaurant should keep its "House of Iranian Cuisine" strapline. Mohammed jumped in to add that many items on the menu are Middle Eastern dishes anyway, and not just Iranian. Several fans of the restaurant have come to its defense on Twitter, with one simply writing "Please, keep food out of this!" For customers who might have doubts, a framed letter was put up in all of Shayah's branches several months ago stating the chain's Saudi ownership and financing.

Like many Saudis, customer Mohammed Al-Tamimi, 30, vehemently disagrees with Iran's policies in the region, but says he has no problem with the people of Iran. "It's not a problem of culture, but a problem of politics," he said, as he stepped out of Shayah carrying warm Iranian food to go. — AP



Malaysian children play in front of Putrajaya's iconic building Putra Mosque in the new administrative capital of Malaysia yesterday. Over 60 percent of Malaysia's population is Muslim with the rest following other religions as Buddhism, Christianity and Hinduism. — AP

DOZENS OF SYRIAN RESIDENTS BARRED...

Continued from Page 1

Abu Tarek, another Syrian national who spoke to the AP but requested anonymity for fear of repercussions, said his wife was granted re-entry, but that he and their

three children were kept waiting at the airport. "We had to sleep on the floor or on the benches in the waiting area in the airport," he said. "My nine-year-old son keeps asking me when he can see his mother. My kids missed two days of school because of this. I don't know what to do." — AP

KUWAIT, NATO SIGN GULF'S FIRST 'TRANSIT...

Continued from Page 1

Stoltenberg appreciated Kuwait's leading role in the promotion of security and stability in the region through its cooperation with the NATO in the fight against terrorism, as well as its humanitarian role in the alleviation of refugees' sufferings. The NATO chief hailed Kuwait as a "strong partner of NATO", pointing to its leading and basic role in the promotion of regional security and stability, and in the fight against the so-called Islamic State (IS).

He added that Kuwait has a long history of distinguished partnerships with NATO, hailing its strategic position in the Gulf region. Stoltenberg said Kuwait is an "ideal partner" of NATO in fighting common security challenges, including IS. He said he was so happy to visit Kuwait for the first time as NATO Secretary-General, noting that he will also visit the first regional center of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative. He pointed out that once completed, the center would be a central point for cooperation between Kuwait and NATO and other members.

On Syria's truce, he said NATO was aware of some encouraging developments towards commitment to the ceasefire in spite of violation reports. The NATO chief voiced concern over the impacts of Russian airstrikes in Syria, which he said do not only target IS but opposition forces as well.

Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled voiced pleasure for Kuwait to host the regional center of NATO's Istanbul Cooperation Initiative. He said the center would play a key role in the fulfillment of the initiative's goals through the promotion of cooperation between the

members of NATO and the initiative in the fields of strategic analysis, military cooperation, civil emergency, public diplomacy and people's awareness.

He pointed to the center's role in following up the individual cooperation program and the transit agreement between Kuwait and the NATO, hoping that it would be opened in the last quarter of this year. Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled added that he and the NATO chief had met HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and listened to his views about the significance of fruitful cooperation between Kuwait and NATO. He quoted the Amir as appreciating efforts being exerted to strengthen existing cooperation between Kuwait and NATO.

On talks between HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and Stoltenberg, he said they discussed the steady growth of close cooperation between Kuwait and NATO and stressed the necessity of doubling efforts to address regional and global challenges. Kuwait joined the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative in 2004, which aims to promote and deepen partnership between the NATO and Middle East countries, mainly GCC ones, Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled noted.

Over the last 12 years, Kuwait and the NATO have worked together within the framework of fruitful cooperation in all aspects, including the exchange of expertise and personnel training, as well as security, military, civil and academic cooperation, he added. Since the initiative was launched, Kuwait has participated in over 90 training courses, workshops and conferences organized by NATO, he said, noting that Kuwait hosted the region's first NATO conference in Dec 2006. — Agencies

FIGHTING INFECTIONS WITH VIRUSES...

Continued from Page 1

Discovered during World War I and developed during the 1920s and 1930s, it has few undesirable side-effects. Dublanquet, now retired, claims to have cured at least 15 patients of infections they contracted mainly after road accidents, and for whom antibiotics did not work.

Treatment usually lasts a few weeks, and is generally far less expensive than last-resort antibiotics which can cost tens of thousands of dollars or euros. Pharmaceutical companies have shown little interest in phage therapy, in large part because viruses cannot be patented, according to participants at the Paris conference. "The laboratories have turned their back on this because the return on investment is just too small," said Jean Carlet, an expert on infectious diseases and a consultant for the WHO.

A few startups have invested in phage therapy, which the European Union classified as a medicine in 2011. But the cycle of drug trials can easily take a decade, so these are long-term - and perhaps long-shot - investments. To date no virus used in phage therapy has been approved as a treatment. "It will take years and a lot of money," said Jean-Paul Pirnay, a doctor at the Reine Astrid military hospital in Brussels, one of few actively researching the technique outside the ex-

Soviet bloc. Because phage therapy is not recognized in France, Dublanquet and other practitioners - working in a grey zone - often wind up going to eastern Europe to procure the viruses. In the United States, the only phages on the market are used in the anti-bacterial treatment of food products. The EU has launched a clinical trial called "Phagoburn" to test the effectiveness of virus-based treatments on victims of severe burns. Half of a group of 220 participants are to be treated with established techniques, and the other half with phage therapy. Temporary authorization for phage therapy may be granted in France "if the products are of sufficient quality and there is a presumption of efficacy," said Caroline Semaille, a spokeswoman for ANSM, the French government agency that monitors drug approval and use. Novou spent Å8,000 (\$8,700) on going to Tbilisi in 2013 for his treatment, but has no regrets.

Dozens, perhaps hundreds, of other French people with similar problems have done the same, said Dublanquet, and most come back in better shape. "It's not a matter of replacing antibiotics with phage therapy," he said. "They should be complimentary." Dublanquet also warned of the possible spread of therapeutic viruses into the environment, saying medical use should be strictly monitored. — AFP

EX-ELECTRICITY MINISTER REAPPOINTED

Continued from Page 1

The lawmaker meanwhile wondered about the delay in awarding the airport expansion project, saying that the estimated cost can be cut by changing the roof from concrete to other materials, which will save between KD 350 million and KD 400 million. He urged authorities not to delay the vital project any more.

Meanwhile, MP Abdullah Al-Turajji yesterday warned the government that he would file to grill concerned ministers responsible for not referring two projects to the public prosecution over suspected graft. Turajji said that the public funds protection committee recommended that the two cases, Dow Chemical and Advantage company, should be referred to the public prosecution for a probe. Although several months have elapsed, no government action has been taken with the government violating its pledge that it would send the two cases to the

prosecution immediately. Turajji said that ministers who are responsible for the referral will be grilled if they fail to do so shortly.

Separately, MP Abdulhameed Dashti strongly lashed out at those who criticized him for allegedly insulting Saudi Arabia a few days ago. Dashti acknowledged he received a court order regarding the statements he made on a Syrian TV channel a few days ago in which he said that Wahhabism, a form of Sunni Islam widespread in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, should be attacked to eradicate its extremist ideology. A large number of activists strongly lashed out at Dashti, accusing him of being "traitor for Iran". Dashti replied back by accusing his critics of being "agents". Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah said the government will take all necessary measures against those who undermine the strong Kuwaiti-Saudi ties amid reports the government has in fact sued Dashti for his remarks.

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Focus

OLD FOES' DILEMMA OVER TEAMING UP AFTER IRISH ELECTION

By Naomi O'Leary

Ireland's two biggest political parties, bitter rivals for almost a century, were facing a tough choice yesterday in the wake of inconclusive elections - team up, or risk months of instability. Fianna Fail and Fine Gael, which between them have ruled Ireland since 1932, differ little in ideology but are instead divided by history dating back to a 1920s civil war following the Irish struggle for independence from Britain. The question now is whether they can put their old rivalry behind them to provide a stable government for the eurozone's fastest growing economy and avoid the instability which has rocked other austerity-hit countries like Spain.

Ultimately, the biggest obstacle to a grand alliance may be pride. "Fianna Fail has still got the psyche of being the natural party of government, of being this dominant party," said Gail McElroy, political science professor at Trinity College Dublin. "If you go into government with Fine Gael, you're essentially giving up on that dream."

Fianna Fail, whose name means "Warriors of Ireland", was founded by Eamon de Valera, a towering figure in Irish history who was later president from 1959 to 1973. The party has its roots in opposition to the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty which granted Ireland limited independence from Britain and provided for the partition of Northern Ireland, still part of the United Kingdom. Fine Gael, meaning "Tribe of the Irish", grew out of the group that supported that treaty. Under de Valera's leadership, Fianna Fail became Ireland's dominant political force and remained so until 2011, when it suffered a defeat of historic proportions in response to a brutal economic crisis and housing crash on its watch.

The party rebounded in Friday's election but is far from reclaiming its lost dominance. Before the election, analysts noted that Fine Gael and Fianna Fail's combined support was at historic lows - a trend for established parties reflected in many other European countries - and asked whether this could be the vote that finally ended "civil war politics". For some, the shift to the left, insurgents and small parties in Friday's election did just that. "The Irish people are tired of 100 years of civil war politics and they are saying: 'Look, let's do something new,'" said Stephen Donnelly after being elected for the newly-formed party the Social Democrats.

'Will of the People?'

Any coalition between Fine Gael and Fianna Fail has the potential to transform both parties and also Irish politics. "The really interesting thing in this election is that ideology may be actually emerging, we may be waking up to 20th century European style politics," McElroy said. "There is kind of a left, although it's quite fragmented, and now there is a centre-right," she added. But an alliance between the two would risk angering their old guard and activist base.

Eamon O Cuiv, deputy Fianna Fail leader and de Valera's grandson, said a deal with Fine Gael would break pre-election promises not to unite and alienate the party's core supporters and canvassers. "The people who were doing all of the hard work for the party... they would see us being totally incompatible with Fine Gael policies," O Cuiv said.

It would also hand a strategic advantage to the leftwing Sinn Fein, which would become Ireland's main opposition party after gaining support on an anti-austerity platform, a new chapter for the party once seen as the political voice of the Irish Republican Army. Sinn Fein leaders like to dismiss the two parties as "tweedledum and tweedledee" and its president Gerry Adams urged them to unite following the vote. "They are natural partners, they are Siamese twins, they should get into bed together," he said.

An editorial in the Sunday Independent newspaper urged the parties to listen to the "will of the people". "It is time for these two parties born of a civil war to live up to the greatness of their past and to prove themselves renewed and worthy of a future of the common good," it added. —AFP

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EU'S TOWER OF BABEL MAY FALL

By Paul Taylor

It's little wonder the European Union can't find common solutions to Europe's urgent problems when its main members are having such different national conversations. Like the biblical Tower of Babel, Europe's ambitious construction is in danger of toppling because its peoples are not speaking the same political language. Tune in to Germany and the fierce debate is all about how to cope with an influx of a million migrants, whether to limit the numbers and, in some quarters, how to stop them coming.

Switch to France and you're listening to a nation that thinks it is at war, still living under a state of emergency and in shock after last November's attacks by Islamist militants that killed 130 people in Paris. Flip to Britain and the talk is all of national sovereignty and a possible Brexit in the build-up to a June referendum that might end the country's schizophrenic membership of the EU. Look east to Poland and people are arguing over the new government's moves to curb the media and the constitutional court, over who may have been a Communist informer 40 years ago, and over the perceived Russian threat to eastern Europe today.

Around central Europe the discussion is about how to resist German pressure to take in a share of refugees. Turn south and the Italians and Portuguese are engrossed in domestically focused debates about how to revive economic growth despite the EU's budgetary corset while cleaning

up legacy bank problems. Spain meanwhile is pre-occupied by Catalan separatism, political paralysis and the risk of a breakup of the country.

When those countries' leaders come to Brussels, they often cannot even agree what they should be discussing. For the last two EU summits, Britain wanted the focus to be on its demands for a renegotiation of its membership terms to give Prime Minister David Cameron a "new settlement" he can sell in a June 23 referendum on whether to stay in the bloc. He secured a deal on Feb 19, but many fellow leaders were frustrated at having to spend time on what they see as side issues and rhetorical formulations when their house is on fire.

"Everyone in the room and corridors was rather irritated that here we are dealing with some rather obscure issues of child benefits indexation, while we have real problems in Syria, member states closing borders, major issues we should really be on instead of this," a diplomat involved in the talks said. German Chancellor Angela Merkel, fighting for her political life against domestic critics of her open door for refugees, wanted the EU to concentrate on urgent measures to secure Europe's external borders, register migrants, send home rejected asylum seekers and share out refugees among EU states.

Desperate to find a common "European solution" to the migration crisis, she has forced yet another European summit on March 7 with Turkey, days before three German regional elections in which anti-immigration rightists could

make big gains. French President Francois Hollande, for his part, goes to Brussels seeking more cooperation against terrorism and support for military action against Islamic State in Syria and Libya. His prime minister, Manuel Valls, irked German officials by using a trip to the Munich Security Conference to criticize Merkel's welcome for refugees and declare that Europe could not take any more migrants.

Waning Authority

Unlike many past European crises, where disagreements could be postponed or salami-sliced into gradual steps that turned a political dispute into a technocratic process, there is no obvious way to delay or defuse the migration issue. Events on the ground are moving faster than the EU's ability to manage them. Governments along the main Western Balkans migration route, under pressure from populist forces, are resorting to beggar-thy-neighbour solutions.

Austria, a key transit country, unilaterally imposed daily caps on migrant entries and asylum applications in mid-February. In a sign of the waning authority of Brussels and Berlin, Austria brought together 10 central European and Balkan states last week - meeting without Germany, the EU authorities or Greece, the main arrival point for migrants - to coordinate national measures to choke off the northward flow of migrants.

As boatloads of migrants defy winter seas daily to cross from Turkey, that lockdown is rapidly turning Greece, the EU's most economically

enfeebled state, into a giant refugee camp. Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras has warned his country will not become "a warehouse of souls" and said he will hold up other European business if Athens' partners do not share the burden. EU countries have largely ignored the quotas of refugees they agreed last year to take in, and Hungary is now planning a referendum on whether it should have to accept any.

Britain and France are keeping their heads down rather than helping Merkel, Europe's most experienced and respected leader. Cameron won't take any refugees already in Europe for fear that public hostility to migration could cost him the referendum. Hollande too fears fuelling support for far-right populist Marine Le Pen if he offers Berlin more assistance. Barring an improbable halt to arrivals from Turkey in the coming weeks, the most likely next step is that Europe's 26-nation Schengen zone of passport-free travel will be officially suspended for two years to prevent a disorderly collapse.

A major achievement of EU cooperation on a continent scarred for centuries by wars will be put into an induced coma to prevent it dying immediately. The result will likely be long lines at borders that had all but disappeared two decades ago. At that point, Germany, with or without Merkel, will probably have to impose its own curbs on new migrants. While Europe's weak and divided leaders remain distracted by internal debates, the union that provided the framework for post-World War Two prosperity will start to unravel. —Reuters

RUSSIAN WORKERS SQUEEZED BUT SCARED TO SPEAK

By James Ellingworth

Once intended as a Soviet rival to the capitalist symbol of Detroit, Russia's auto-making hub of Togliatti is sliding into economic depression. And blue collar workers are taking the brunt of the pain as employers use the threat of joblessness to slash or withhold wages at will. Far from its 1960s roots as a socialist vision of the future, central Togliatti is lined with discount retailers, payday lenders and pawnshops as the recession has cratered the car market.

Workers from the vast Lada car factory say they're increasingly desperate but too scared to speak out due to what they claim is the threat of retaliation by managers. "People are frightened to say even a single word," production worker and union activist Nataliya Yemshanova said at a union meeting in a member's apartment. "I can't remember that happening before. They can pay less money. People will agree to any wage."

Yemshanova provided AP with pay slips showing monthly earnings of just 10,300 rubles (\$135) in January. She said her pay was slashed by half after she refused a demand to switch to cleaning floors, and claimed some managers at AvtoVAZ, the company which owns the Lada factory, were using the threat of unemployment to force workers - especially those critical of the management - to accept lower pay. A pay slip in the name of Yemshanova's brother, who works for the same company, shows earnings of 7,800 rubles (\$100) for January.

Sitting near Yemshanova at the meeting, union leader Anna Perova, who has worked for AvtoVAZ since the Soviet era, held up her right hand to show how she lost parts of four fingers in 2011 - crushed, she says, by a faulty metal press. She warns of a rise in industrial accidents as budgets for maintenance and training come under strain. "People are sent to different production areas where they don't understand what's going on. That happened recently. A woman pressed a button for an examination and her hand was utterly crushed," she said. Perova's account could not be independently confirmed by the AP.

Malaise

AvtoVAZ and Renault-Nissan, a French-Japanese alliance that controls AvtoVAZ through a holding company, did not respond to requests for comment on the allegations of wage cuts and industrial accidents. Many of Togliatti's major employers supply the factory, meaning the car market's malaise infects the city as a whole. AvtoVAZ lost almost \$1 billion in 2015 and its liabilities exceed its assets, leading auditors Ernst & Young to warn of "a material uncertainty which may cast significant doubt on (AvtoVAZ's) ability to continue as a going concern."

The company is the highest-profile casualty of a plunging car market, where sales dropped by more than a third last year and

some foreign firms, including General Motors, have pulled out entirely. Lada's factory is now implementing a cost-saving plan that includes a reduction in head count. Moving to a four-day week this month has essentially meant a 20 percent pay cut across the board, on top of the arbitrary wage cuts workers claim to have suffered.

President Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev have shown support for the industry with a string of factory visits and promised some state support, though the numbers are unclear. Under Renault and Nissan's ownership of AvtoVAZ, there has been a drive to modernize the Lada range with new models based on Renault designs, but this has meant importing parts and exposing the Soviet-era network of parts suppliers in the city to extra competition. AvtoVAZagregat, a company which made interiors for AvtoVAZ cars but is under separate ownership, ceased production last year and is now in bankruptcy proceedings, leaving more than 2,000 people out of work. CEO Viktor Kozlov has been arrested on suspicion of tax fraud.

Elena Seliverstova, who worked for AvtoVAZagregat in purchasing for 25 years, showed the AP documents detailing an ever-

increasing portion of unpaid monthly wages since July, culminating in January, when she received none of her monthly earnings of almost 23,000 rubles (\$300), money she needs to support her elderly mother. "You know, it's a complete catastrophe," she said through tears. Only financial help from her son has prevented her electricity from being cut off in the middle of winter, Seliverstova said.

Mechanic Andrei Dobrokhov said he had not received any money from AvtoVAZagregat since June, forcing his family to depend on cheap foods like barley. Both he and Seliverstova said they had looked for new work but found none, and that AvtoVAZagregat had retained documents of theirs that are required by law when registering at a new workplace. More than 1,000 people protested the AvtoVAZagregat collapse on a Togliatti square in November, demanding unpaid wages, in a demonstration organized by local communists. Seliverstova, who was there, doubts political action by workers can force the payment of wage arrears or get support from the city government, which is itself under pressure due to lower tax receipts from the car industry.—AP



Workers build cars on the assembly line at the UAZ car plant in the city of Ulyanovsk on the Volga River in Russia on Feb 16, 2016. —AP

SCOTT RELEVANT ONCE MORE BECAUSE OF WIN, NOT PUTTER

PALM BEACH GARDENS: Adam Scott seemed like the only person who wasn't worried about the 35-inch length of his putter. Scott was far more concerned that he had gone 36 tournaments over 21 months without winning anywhere in the world, the longest drought of his career. Nearly two years removed from No. 1 in the world, he was on the verge of falling out of the top 20 when he began his first big stretch of golf leading into the Masters. Sunday in the Honda Classic turned out to be quite a statement. Coming off a runner-up finish at Riviera last week, Scott closed with an even-par 70 in tough conditions at PGA National to hold off Sergio Garcia for a one-shot victory.

"I want to feel somewhat relevant out here when it comes to being one of the best players in the world," Scott said. "That's just down to my results. There's no other way. You can talk it in your head and try and build yourself up as much as you want, but at some point, you're going to have to have the results to actually prove it and achieve. I like where things are at," he said. "And hopefully, it's a move in the right direction to be in that top 10 player in the world."

Right direction

His 26th victory worldwide took care of that. Scott finished at 9-under 271 and moved up to No. 9, and there's little to suggest he's about to stop there. This was his 18th consecutive round at par or better. Dating to the Japan Open last fall, he has finished out of the top 10 only twice in his last nine tournaments.

That's about the time Scott switched back to the short putter for good. "I've kind

of said it the whole time. I don't think it's going to be that big a deal for me," Scott said. "It's some hard work, and I'm not afraid of that. I'm glad it's going in the right direction, and I've putted pretty solid the last couple weeks, and I want to make sure that keeps going."

Overlooked in the chatter about long putters is that Scott had won 18 times worldwide with a conventional putter, including The Players Championship and the Tour Championship. He went to a long putter that he anchored against his chest at the Match Play Championship in 2011, and he contended in the Masters two months later. When he won the Masters in 2013, he was the fourth winner in six majors to use an anchored putting stroke.

Perhaps because he reached No. 1 in the world, Scott became the face of the long putters when a new rule that outlawed the anchored stroke kicked in this year. For those who wondered if his career was in jeopardy, check out that trophy he was holding Sunday.

Scott won in only his third start since the rule took effect, and his 10th event since he switched back to the conventional putter for good. Asked if it was good to get that out of the way, the 35-year-old Aussie couldn't resist. "Probably good for everybody who likes talking about it, absolutely," Scott said. "And therefore, good for me. Good for me because maybe we don't have to go over it too much anymore. Again, it just reassures me I'm on the right track with the things I'm doing on the greens, and I'm just going to try and get better every week. And I think it's in a great spot at the moment. If I can get better and better, then I like what's to come." — AP



PALM BEACH GARDENS: Adam Scott, of Australia, tees off on the 13th hole during the fourth round of the Honda Classic golf tournament. — AP

SCOTT OUTLASTS GARCIA TO WIN THE HONDA CLASSIC

PALM BEACH GARDENS: Adam Scott won the Honda Classic and put to rest any notion that his career would suffer with a short putter.

In a tight duel with Sergio Garcia for the entire round Sunday at PGA National, Scott stayed out of the water and closed with an even-par 70 for a one-shot victory. It was his first title since Colonial in May 2014, and his first time winning with a conventional putter since the 2010 Singapore Open.

The timing of his victory also was a big statement for the 35-year-old Australian. Scott won in just his third start since a new rule took effect that bans the anchored stroke typically used for the long putter that he had the past five years. Scott switched back for good at the Presidents Cup. This was his 10th start since then, and only twice has he finished out of the top 10.

Two-man race

Scott opened with a 10-foot birdie that settled him and led by no more than two shots until back-to-back bogeys around the turn. But it was a two-man race all day, and Scott seized control when Garcia missed a short par putt on No. 11 and Scott hit a fairway bunker shot to 2 feet for birdie on the next hole.

Unlike Saturday, when Scott took a quadruple-bogey on the par-3 15th with two shots

into the water, he stayed dry around the treacherous finish at PGA National. The only nervous moment was on the 16th hole when Scott had a one-shot lead. Garcia hit a poor pitch and was headed for a bogey. Scott left his 40-foot birdie attempt 10 feet short, and the par putt stopped short of the hole to keep the margin at one heading to the raucous 17th, a par 3 over the water.

Scott's 7-iron covered the flag, and it was no small relief for him when he saw it hit the green. Garcia made another bogey, and Scott had a two-shot lead going to the 18th, where a par was enough for him to win for the 12th official time on the PGA Tour. "I hit a lot of good putts that didn't go in. Fortunately, it was enough at the end," he said. Scott finished at 9-under 271 and moved back into the world top 10 (No. 9) for the first time in a year.

Justin Thomas closed with a 69 and tied for third with Blayne Barber (70), four shots behind. Graeme McDowell had a 69 to finish another shot behind, while Rickie Fowler lost momentum on the back nine for a 71 and joined Vijay Singh at 3-under 277.

And in the final round, he appeared to be in control until failing to save par from a bunker on No. 9 and a wild tee shot on the 10th. But on one of the more daunting shots over water on the course, he fired at the right pin at the 11th. Scott narrowly missed the

birdie putt, though it seemed to steady him.

Puff of wind

He got through the late par 3s over water - Nos. 15 and 17 - without trouble, even if there were a few moments that made him pause. He was set up over his shot on the 15th when a small puff of wind in his face was all it took to make him back off. The day before, Scott was leading by three shots when he made a 7 on the hole and lost the lead. This time, he settled himself and hit a safe shot to 30 feet, and Garcia looked back at him and said, "Good shot." Scott became the first player since Phil Mickelson in 2009 at the Tour Championship to win on the PGA Tour with a quadruple bogey. That turned out to be the only big blemish on what otherwise had been a flawless display from one of the prettiest swings in golf. The victory proved to be validation that he can still get around with a short putter. Scott won 18 times around the world with a short putter, including The Players Championship and the Tour Championship.

He switched to a long putter that he anchored to his chest at the 2011 Match Play Championship, and contended at the Masters two months later. Scott won seven times with the long putter, including the Masters in 2013 when he was the fourth winner in the six majors to use an anchored putting stroke. — AP



PALM BEACH GARDENS: Adam Scott of Australia proudly is presented with the trophy after his one shot victory over Sergio Garcia during the final round of the 2016 Honda Classic held on the PGA National Course at the PGA National Resort and Spa. — AFP

MLB SENDS REMINDER: NO DIPPING AT FENWAY, DODGER STADIUM, SF

BOSTON: Dusty Baker was a big dipper. He's cut back his chaw over the years, but still might pop in a pinch when games get tight. The Washington Nationals manager won't get that choice at some ballparks this season. Big leaguers are now getting a reminder that smokeless tobacco is banned at stadiums in San Francisco, Los Angeles and Boston.

One-page letters are being put in clubhouse lockers throughout spring training. The notices come jointly from Major League Baseball and the players' union. "It's a bad influence for the kids. Big time. I'll say that. But also they're adults, too, at the same time," Baker said.



PITTSBURG: Cincinnati Reds manager Dusty Baker sits in the dugout before a baseball game against the Pittsburgh Pirates. — AP

"We'll see," he said. "My daughter used to put water in my can and put it back in my truck. Or my son, he has lip check - 'Get it out, Dad!'"

Local laws will prohibit the use of all tobacco products at Fenway Park, Dodger Stadium and AT&T Park this year, meaning players, team personnel, umpires and fans. The letter advises the same ban will take effect at every California ballpark in December.

"I support it," new Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said. "I think that the intentions are there, and there's obviously going to be some resistance with players." "Like it or not, players are role models, and we have a platform as coaches and players. So if that's the law, then we definitely support it," he said.

Similar legislation has been proposed in New York City, and both the Mets and Yankees say they back such a ban at their parks. "Preventing children from being exposed to smokeless tobacco is an important initiative and we are glad to play our part," the Mets said in a statement. "Major League Baseball has long

supported a ban of smokeless tobacco at the major league level and the New York Yankees fully support the proposed local law," they said.

The letter being distributed to players on 40-man rosters and teams this spring says: "Please note that these are city ordinances and not rules established by Major League Baseball. However, the commissioner's office will be monitoring players and club personnel for compliance with the regulations."

Smokeless tobacco isn't permitted throughout the minor leagues. There is no ban on dipping in the majors, and the issue is certain to be discussed in upcoming labor talks between MLB and the union on the contract that expires Dec. 1.

Lower profile

Going back more than a century, even before Bull Durham tobacco signs were plastered all over outfield walls, baseball was filled with pictures of players with a chaw in their cheek. Over the years, in collective bargaining, MLB and the union have tried to lower that profile.

Players, managers and coaches now can't stick tobacco tins, cans or pouches in their pockets when they're on the field or in plain sight of fans. No wads stuck in the mouth during TV interviews, either. In their letter, MLB and the union said it would provide "nicotine replacement therapy products to those players who wish to use them as substitutes. A shipment of various products including lozenges, gum, and patches will be sent to each club free of charge in spring training, and throughout the 2016 season."

The letter included a reminder that Dr. Michael Steinberg, director of the Rutgers University tobacco dependence program, had previously been hired as a consultant to help players develop a treatment plan, if they wanted. Toronto Blue Jays manager John Gibbons applauded the effort to cut down on chaw. He quit a couple years ago after Hall of Famer Tony Gwynn - a career-long dipper - died at 54 of salivary gland cancer.

"I was a tobacco user for a lot of years. I'm not proud of that. I finally was able to quit. It's a dirty, filthy habit," he said. "I wouldn't want my kids doing it. You hope in some way, they can eliminate it and wipe it out. I'm sure there will be some fights over that, especially in this election year. I'm sure that'll be brought up. But, hey, if you can get rid of it, I'm all for that," he said. — AP

JOHNSON PULLS ALONGSIDE THE INTIMIDATOR WITH 76TH WIN

HAMPTON: Jimmie Johnson reached another milestone in his brilliant NASCAR career. This one was really special. Win No. 76. Right up there with the Intimidator. Johnson's victory at Atlanta Motor Speedway on Sunday pushed him into a tie for seventh place on the career list with the late Dale Earnhardt, who was killed in a last-lap crash at the 2001 Daytona 500 just a few months before Johnson joined the Cup series.

"I didn't have a chance to race against him," Johnson said. "There's been a big void in my mind ... so to tie him, for me personally, it gives me a little bit of attachment to the great Dale Earnhardt." After a chaotic finish, the significance of the triumph didn't occur to Johnson at first. Then it hit him, so he took another spin in front of the grandstand, sticking his hand out of the car to hold up three fingers.

No. 3 was Earnhardt's number, of course. And, in an appropriate twist, Johnson teammate Dale Earnhardt Jr. crossed the line next, edging out Kyle Busch for the runner-up spot by mere inches. "I think dad would've liked Jimmie as a person," Junior said, "but he certainly wouldn't have enjoyed competing against him."

Bucket list

Next on Johnson's bucket list: another series championship. By winning the second race of the season, he essentially wrapped up his spot in the season-ending Chase, where he'll be attempting to join Earnhardt and Richard Petty as the only drivers to capture seven Cup titles.

"The six that I have, I know how special and meaningful they are," Johnson said. "If I have a chance to win a seventh and tie Petty and Earnhardt, that would be just monumental." Polished and well-liked throughout the garage, Johnson would appear to have little in common with the Intimidator, a rough-and-tumble driver who didn't mind making others mad and doing whatever it took to win the race - even if it meant knocking someone out of the way.

"He didn't get that Intimidator title by being nice to everybody," quipped Rick Hendrick, the owner of Johnson's No. 48 car. But Earnhardt Jr. thinks his father, if he had lived, would have become fast friends with Johnson. Certainly, he would've respected Johnson's skills behind the wheel, which were on full display Sunday as he struggled to maintain control of his car on fading tires, having made his final green-flag pit stop ahead of everyone else in a strategic bid to snatch the lead away from Kevin Harvick.

"Knowing dad and knowing Jimmie's character, they would've gotten along tremendously and dad would've thought the world of him," Earnhardt Jr. said. "How can you not like Jimmie? He's just a good guy who never stepped over the line with anything he's ever said or anything he's ever done."

All I do is win, win, win

All he does is win, with staggering consistency. The 40-year-old has now earned a victory in every full-time Cup season, extending the streak to 15 years in a row. As fit as any driver in the series, he could likely remain at the top of the game for another decade or more. While Petty's record of 200 career victories is unlikely to ever be duplicated - he competed largely in a different era with far more races each year - Johnson certainly has the potential to reach the second spot on the list. David Pearson won 105 times. Johnson has averaged a bit more than five victories a year, a pace that would push him past the Silver Fox in another six seasons. Shorter term, Johnson can set his sights on Cale Yarborough (83 victories), Bobby Allison and Darrell Waltrip (84 apiece), and longtime teammate Jeff

Gordon, who retired after last season with 93 wins. "You've got to say that he's one of the best that's ever been in the sport," Hendrick said of Johnson. "It's going to be interesting to see how many races and championships Jimmie and Chad (Knaus, his crew chief) can win."

It was Knaus who made the call that essentially gave Johnson a shot at his latest victory. Knowing it would be tough to get around Harvick, who led more laps than anyone, the crew chief brought in the No. 48 for its last scheduled pit stop nine laps before Harvick, gambling that Johnson could make his tires last longer on the bruising Atlanta track.

The move worked, giving Johnson a big lead, though a late yellow flag forced overtime. Everyone came back into the pits for new tires, Johnson returned to the track still out front, and a four-car crash on the backstretch shortly after the restart sealed the win.

Johnson gave much of the credit to his crew chief. Knaus gave it right back. "Jimmie is pretty amazing, isn't he?" the crew chief said, breaking into a big smile. "Let's be honest, he's just a heck of a race-car driver." Even the Intimidator would agree with that. — AP



HAMPTON: Jimmie Johnson, driver of the #48 Lowe's Chevrolet, leads Kevin Harvick, driver of the #4 Jimmy John's Chevrolet, during the NASCAR Sprint Cup Series Folds of Honor QuikTrip 500 at Atlanta Motor Speedway. — AFP

DORTMUND TRAVELS TO DARMSTADT AS BAYERN MUNICH HOSTS MAINZ

FRANKFURT: As Robert Lewandowski and Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang battle for top scoring honors, the midweek Bundesliga round is only a prelude to their showdown at the weekend. Lewandowski's Bayern Munich hosts Mainz tomorrow and Aubameyang's Borussia Dortmund visits Darmstadt. But the attention is already shifting to Saturday, when Dortmund hosts Bayern in the match of the season.

The two strikers have marked the season so far, with Lewandowski scoring 23 goals and Aubameyang notching 22. Bayern holds an eight-point lead with 11 matches remaining and no team has squandered such an advantage at this stage of the season to lose the title race. Dortmund's priority is to keep a safe distance to third-place Hertha Berlin, but if it can beat Bayern and reduce the gap it will inject some interest back into the championship.

Before, however, Dortmund has the tricky trip to promoted Darmstadt, while Bayern should have an easier job at home against Mainz. Here are some things to know ahead of the 24th Bundesliga round:

No threat at home

Darmstadt, a team with limited means, is playing a solid season and is hovering above the relegation zone. But that's more due to its success on the road than to strength at home. Darmstadt has won only one of 11 matches at home, while winning five on the road. It has earned 18 of its 25 points away from home - including a 2-2 draw at Borussia Dortmund. Darmstadt's rugged style could trouble Dortmund, which struggled before overcoming 10-men Hoffenheim with three late goals on Sunday - its eighth win in nine matches across all competitions in 2016.

Decisive days

Bayern's outgoing coach Pep Guardiola has described the current busy period as the decisive stage of the season. Bayern began with a 2-2 draw at Juventus - after blowing a 2-0 lead - in the champions

League, then beat Wolfsburg 2-0 with relative ease.

"Big points! These are big points," forward Thomas Mueller said in Wolfsburg. Now comes Mainz, which dispatched Bayer Leverkusen 3-1 on Sunday, and then Dortmund. Should Bayern win both, an unprecedented fourth straight Bundesliga title should be a formality. "The victory was very, very important for us today. We absolutely wanted the three points," David Alaba said after Saturday's win in Wolfsburg. "There are easier away matches, and it's a decisive week for us with games against Wolfsburg, Mainz and away to Dortmund. So it was crucial to start with three points in Wolfsburg," captain Philipp Lahm said.

Hoffenheim hopes

Hoffenheim, which was at a numerical disadvantage for more than half an hour after goalscorer Sebastian Rudy was sent off, played well until Dortmund's late three-goal flurry. Hoffenheim's problem remains protecting a lead - it has won only three of 12 matches it has gone ahead in.

It was Hoffenheim's first defeat in three matches under the new, 28-year-old coach Julian Nagelsmann, but the team appears to be playing with more confidence and a win tomorrow against Augsburg could lift Hoffenheim from the relegation zone. One of Hoffenheim's three wins this season was a 3-1 triumph over Augsburg.

No coach, no win

The first match without suspended coach Roger Schmidt went badly for Leverkusen, which lost 3-1 in Mainz. Schmidt is serving a three-match ban because he refused to leave the touchline when shown a red card in the loss to Dortmund the previous week. The defeat also meant that Mainz leapfrogged Leverkusen into fifth place. Leverkusen next hosts Werder Bremen, which needs points to escape from the danger zone. Another setback could see Leverkusen fall out of the Europa League berths. —AP



MADRID: Real Madrid's defender Sergio Ramos (L) and Real Madrid's French defender Raphael Varane (R) vies with Atletico Madrid's forward Fernando Torres during the Spanish league football match Real Madrid CF vs Club Atletico de Madrid at the Santiago Bernabeu. —AFP

ATLETICO LOOKING TO KEEP THE PRESSURE ON BARCA

MADRID: Atletico Madrid hosts Real Sociedad today looking to keep pressure on Barcelona atop the standings. Atletico can provisionally cut Barcelona's lead to five points with another win following Saturday's impressive 1-0 victory over Real Madrid at the Santiago Bernabeu.

"We have to keep fighting game after game," Atletico midfielder Saul Niguez said. "Then at the end we will see whether we still have any chance. We are not giving up just yet." Atletico's defense hasn't conceded a goal in four straight matches, including a scoreless draw at PSV Eindhoven in the Champions League. The offense has scored only two goals in the last four games, though. "We have to keep working to improve in that area," Coach Diego Simeone said.

Playing for pride?

Real Madrid has already given up on the league title after losing at home to Atletico Madrid and dropping 12 points behind leader Barcelona with 12 games to play. Players and Coach Zinedine Zidane admit that the focus now will be on the Champions League, with the club on the verge of as spot in the quarterfinals after a 2-0 win at Roma.

However, Madrid is in danger of losing third place in the league, which would secure an automatic spot in next year's European tournament. It is only two points ahead of fourth-place Villarreal going into its game at last-place Levante tomorrow. "Before the Champions

League we have a game tomorrow and we have to prepare for that game in order to play at our top level and win," Zidane said. "Our duties and aims are for the next game."

Moving up

Villarreal's impressive unbeaten run in the Spanish league has reached 13 games and left the team in position to fight for third place. Finishing third would give Villarreal an automatic spot in the Champions League, avoiding an extra qualifying round. "To finish third we would need to maintain this extraordinary level and hope that Atletico and Real Madrid play below expectations," Villarreal coach Marcelino Garcia said. "Each step we take is to secure this fourth place, which would be a great achievement." Villarreal has a comfortable 11-point lead over fifth-place Celta, the team it plays tomorrow in Vigo.

Relegation fight

The title fight is virtually over but there is still plenty of action near the bottom of the table. Five teams are within four points of relegation zone, and several matchups between threatened clubs take place this week. Second-to-last-place Granada hosts 18th-place Sporting Gijon on Thursday; 15th-place Getafe plays at 17th-place Las Palmas today; and 13th-place Real Betis faces 14th-place Espanyol in Barcelona on Thursday. The bottom three at the end of the season are relegated. — AP

Live Matches on TV (Local Timings)

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE	
Aston Villa v Everton	22:45
beIN SPORTS 7 HD	
Bournemouth v Southampton	22:45
beIN SPORTS 6 HD	
Sunderland v Crystal Palace	22:45
beIN SPORTS 4 HD	
Norwich City v Chelsea	22:45
beIN SPORTS 8 HD	
Leicester v West Bromwich	22:45
beIN SPORTS 2 HD	
SPANISH LEAGUE	
Atletico v Real Sociedad	23:00
beIN SPORTS 3 HD	
Wednesday	
Las Palmas v Getafe CF	00:00
beIN SPORTS 9 HD	
GERMAN BUNDESLIGA	
Hannover 96 v VfL Wolfsburg	22:00
beIN SPORTS 5 HD	
FC Ingolstadt 04 v FC Koln	22:00
beIN SPORTS 10	
ITALIAN CUP	
AC Milan v Alessandria	23:00
beIN SPORTS	

PSG'S RECORD UNBEATEN RUN ENDS COURTESY LYON

PARIS: Lyon stunned Paris Saint-Germain 2-1 on Sunday to end the defending champions' hopes of becoming the first French team to avoid defeat for a whole league season. Young forward Maxwell Cornet stroked Bruno Genesio's men into a surprise early lead and Lyon deservedly made it two through Sergi Darder's wonderfully-taken goal on the stroke of half-time.

Lucas Moura pulled one back for the runaway league leaders, but Lyon held on for a famous victory that moves them into the top three. For PSG this was a first league loss since a 3-2 defeat at Bordeaux in March 2015, although they remain 23 points clear of Monaco at the top of the table.

Manager Laurent Blanc admitted that his side were off the pace and did not deserve to take anything from the game. "We were too average, myself included," he told Canal+. "Lyon were in a better state of mind. Were we not at our best? I don't know, we must regroup." "We expected a difficult game, but not as hard. I took off a player at half-time (Benjamin Stambouli), I could have made more changes," he admitted.

Lyon manager Genesio wants his team's display to help them kick on for the rest of the campaign. "The game counts for three points, but of course beating PSG makes it more satisfying," he said. "What pleased me? The way we implemented the plan, with the will to press them high. Certainly, we were up against one of the best teams in Europe, but we need to repeat this performance until the end of the season."

PSG were looking to extend their record unbeaten league streak to 37 matches, but Lyon started the stronger at Parc OL and they forged ahead in the 13th minute. Alexandre Lacazette picked out 19-year-old Cornet, who displayed good footwork to cut inside Gregory van der Wiel, before curling confidently into the far corner to grab his third Ligue 1 goal. The visitors are not used to being behind and their frustra-

tion boiled over when Thiago Motta appeared to strike Jordan Ferri in the face, with the Italian fortunate to escape with just a yellow card.

On the day that Silva spoke of suffering a bout of depression in the aftermath of Brazil's World Cup thrashing at the hands of Germany two years ago, he was embarrassed by Darder in first half injury-time. Despite Rafael's cross being slightly behind Darder, the Spanish midfielder flicked the ball over the head of centre-back Silva with his first touch, and coolly steered home past Kevin Trapp with his second.

Lucas goal not enough

With the unbeaten run close to coming to an end Blanc responded by sending on Javier Pastore for Benjamin Stambouli at the interval. The substitute was instrumental in creating space in the Lyon penalty area as the away side pulled one back less than six minutes into the second period.

Pastore was crowded out by a group of home defenders, but the ball broke kindly for Brazilian Lucas, who bent his shot just inside the far post. Lyon went straight up the other end and could have restored their two-goal cushion, only for Ferri to side-foot wide. It was by far the busiest outing for Trapp since his move to Paris last summer and the German made an excellent point-blank save with his legs to keep out Rachid Ghezzal. But last season's runners-up closed out a fourth win in five games with ease to move into the third and final Champions League place and become the first team to beat PSG domestically in almost a year. Monaco were held to a goalless draw by in-form Nantes as Caen reignited their unlikely Champions League push with a 2-1 win at Saint-Etienne. Monaco are eight points clear in second but the six teams directly below are separated by just two points in the race for third place. Meanwhile, Marseille's match away to Gazelec Ajaccio was postponed due to the inclement weather in Corsica. — AFP



KUWAIT: To commemorate late Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah, the knight of challenges, and under the auspices of Sheikhha Fadiya Sa'ad Al-Abdullah, the athletic expert Ali Al-Eidan climbed the Liberation Tower, which is the 15 tallest communication tower in the world, on Friday February 26, 2016. This event was done on the occasion of celebrating Kuwait's liberation.



ZAIN AWARDS GULFRUN KARTING ENDURANCE RACE WINNERS

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading telecommunications company in Kuwait, awarded the winners of the three first-place winners of GulfRun's Karting Endurance Race. The honoring came as part of the company's main sponsorship of the region's most popular motorsport activity.

Zain's sponsorship of the latest edition of this unique motorsport event is in line with the company's strategy and belief in supporting the youth and sports sectors, and encouraging the various sporting initiatives that

cater to young people in Kuwait. Zain awarded the first, second and third place winners of the 12 and 24 hours Karting Endurance Races, which were held at Kuwait's SIRBB Circuit and witnessed immense participation of thrill-seeking crowds and motorsport enthusiasts, both amateur and professional.

GulfRun activities will continue to include the final race in the Kingdom of Bahrain, which is considered as a true test of participants' motorsport skills, in addition to the sport cars show that will take place at Murooj

next week, where participants will showcase their sport cars and thrill visitors. GulfRun is considered an ideal and safe alternative to street racing, which threatens the lives of many people, many of them young drivers, every year. Through GulfRun, motorsport enthusiasts were able to showcase their talents within professional and certified grounds. By sponsoring this event, Zain also looks to highlight its dedication to applying safety measures while driving on the roads of Kuwait, especially for the country's youth.

LEICESTER, MAHREZ GAINING FAN BASE IN NATIVE ALGERIA

ALGIERS: Riyad Mahrez shirts are flying off the shelves of sports shops in Algiers as the Algerian winger continues to impress for Premier League leaders Leicester City. The form of the 25-year-old, who has 14 league goals and 10 assists this season, has led to calls for him to win the PFA Player of the Year award and elevated him to god-like status in his home country, where many have become Leicester fans.

The 2015 Algerian Player of the Year has scored four goals in 22 international appearances, and is held in higher regard by fans than World Cup stars Yacine Brahimi and Sofiane Feghouli. "Before Mahrez, Leicester were unknown in Algeria where Liverpool was the most popular club," said Samir Lamari, of sports daily Liberte.

"Now it is the most popular club in the country, supported by more than five million people, with the Premier League watched more than the local Ligue 1. "A



Riyad Mahrez

Leicester match is an event which permits people to meet", even at work or on a Sunday, while children skip school to watch him play. In a country where football is revered, Mahrez is considered a deity.

"We ordered shirts four days ago, but they have still not arrived," said an impatient seller who sells Mahrez jerseys for

7,000 dinars (60 Euros, \$65.35), which is 40% of the national monthly minimum wage. There are counterfeit shirts available at seven times cheaper though, sold illegally in the heart of the Casbah citadel.

"Thank god, Mahrez, it's just crazy," rejoiced a young salesman about the rise of the child born in the suburbs of Paris, but who was snubbed by both France and Marseille. Annis, a 23-year-old student, spoke of a "resentment towards binational French-Algerians from the older generation." "He confuses with his dribbles, has an excellent pass, and understands the game," added Annis, who has not missed a single one of his matches, and can recall all of his tricks and goals.

From zero to hero

Things have not always been easy in Algeria for former Le Havre player Mahrez, who had caught the eye of Bosnian coach Vahid Halihodzic before the Brazil World Cup. Dropped after the opening defeat to Belgium, Mahrez did not play again in the 2014 tournament as Algeria bowed out to eventual winners Germany in the last 16.

"It was even alleged that Mahrez paid me to take him to the World Cup," claimed former national coach Halihodzic. But those days are in stark contrast to his current situation, as Mahrez's stunning form in England has helped him settle into the Algeria side under new manager Christian Gourcuff.

Algerians also appreciate the humility of their prodigy, who often visits his hometown of Beni Snous near the Moroccan border. "I love my country, I love the people of my country and I always say that when I come here," Mahrez said during his last trip home in June. It was here that his father was buried in 2006, a moment that the player regards as a turning point for both his life and career at the age of 15. "The death of my father may have been when it all started. I don't know if I started to get more serious then, but after his death, things began to turn," he told the Guardian earlier this season. If he can continue to replicate his Foxes form with the Desert Foxes, then Mahrez's stock in Algeria is only going to rise more. — AFP



LEICESTER: Leicester City's English striker Jamie Vardy (right) vies with Norwich City's German defender Timm Klose during the English Premier League football match between Leicester City and Norwich City at King Power Stadium. —AFP

RANIERI ROLLS DICE AGAIN AS LEICESTER FACE WEST BROM

LEICESTER: Leicester City face the next test in their extraordinary Premier League title challenge with manager Claudio Ranieri prepared to take more risks in search of victory over West Bromwich Albion. Ranieri's boldness was rewarded on Saturday as his substitutions paid off with a late 1-0 win against Norwich City.

And the Italian is ready to take the bull by the horns again today as Leicester look to claim a second home win in four days and extend their fairytale season. Leicester answered another major question about their title credentials on Saturday when they demonstrated their patience and nerve to score in the 89th minute through Leonardo Ulloa after being frustrated by Norwich.

Success came after Ranieri threw caution to the wind by sacrificing a defender to deploy a 3-5-2 system late on. "I take a lot of risks," said Ranieri, whose side goes into the game two points clear of second-place Tottenham Hotspur at the summit. "One point is nothing we had to win. If you lose, it is just one point less. "We took the risk and the manager is hired for this reason, to take a risk.

I enjoy it when there is something to do

from my side and Saturday was good. "When you change and the change finds the solution, it is fantastic." Ranieri is likely to be forced into a change to his starting line-up against West Brom after N'Golo Kante, one of the stars of Leicester's season, suffered a hamstring injury against Norwich.

Andy King is the Frenchman's likely replacement after figuring as a substitute on Saturday, while right-back Danny Simpson is available again after serving a one-match suspension. The right-back could return at the expense of January signing Daniel Amartey, who made his debut against Norwich.

Berahino 'hungry'

"Kante felt something in his hamstring and we managed him during the training sessions," said Ranieri. "I think it is nothing serious and I hope he is not out for so long. I hope Kante is ready. I don't know about the next match, but maybe next Saturday. "I hope he is ready because he is an important player. But King replaced him very, very well."

The Italian added: "This win gives us confidence going into a tough derby. If you score at the end of the match, that means the fit-

ness and the stamina is OK." West Brom will also be forced into at least one change after Chris Brunt suffered a knee injury in their 3-2 home win against Crystal Palace.

The left-back, who is awaiting news from a scan amid fears of cruciate ligament damage, is expected to be replaced by James Chester. Saido Berahino is set to start again after demonstrating his return to form with a fine goal and an impressive performance against Palace just 24 hours after he apologized for his threat to go on strike last year.

Captain Darren Fletcher said: "He's never been a problem in the dressing room, or anything like that. "But he'll feel he could've been fitter at the start of the season. There's no doubt about that. "It's difficult to play Premier League games when you're not on top of your fitness levels. "But he's got them back and he's back in the team. He's got his head down and he's hungry to score goals and do well. "It's good to see him fit and showing what a good player he is. He's a talented player and you want to see people like that do well for West Brom, and go on and do well if that's the case. "He's hungry to do well now for us between now and the end of the season." — AFP

WENGER CHALLENGES ARSENAL TO REBOUND FROM UNITED SETBACK

MANCHESTER: Arsene Wenger challenged Arsenal to respond in this week's crucial fixtures after watching his team waste a glorious opportunity to close the gap at the top of the Premier League in Sunday's 3-2 loss at Manchester United.

Arsenal, seeking their first league title in 12 years, were bidding to stay within two points of surprise leaders Leicester City ahead of a home fixture against Swansea tomorrow and a crucial visit to Tottenham looming on Saturday. But the loss at Old Trafford, against an under-strength United side that enjoyed another stunning two-goal display from teenage forward Marcus Rashford, has left serious question marks over Arsenal's ability to capture the title.

"We have lost three points," said Wenger. "You have to show you are up for the fight and give absolutely everything in our next game. Things can change quickly, but only if you keep going, keep believing. "We are in a fight where we can show we have great character, great mentality and respond tomorrow (against Swansea). That's what we have to do.

"Let's not go overboard. They had still a few millions on the pitch from (David) de Gea to the midfield. They spent a lot on (Memphis) Depay, he is not a player from the academy. "The player who was surprising for me talent-wise was Rashford, the timing and intelligence of his movement was great. He could be a very positive surprise for Man United. "We struggled to be dangerous because they defended very well and I will analyze the game again to see why. But of course there is time to pull the points back. It is still possible but the answer will have to come quick and strong."

Rashford rocks Gunners

Rashford scored twice, within the space of three first-half minutes, for Louis van Gaal's side following his two-goal display in the midweek Europa League victory over Denmark's FC Midtjylland. Former United forward Danny Welbeck, starting a league game for the first time in 11 months, pulled

a goal back before the interval but Ander Herrera's 64th-minute shot was deflected in by Laurent Koscielny and Mesut Ozil's goal, five minutes later, was not enough to rescue a point.

"No of course not," said van Gaal when asked if he expected such an impact from the 18-year-old Rashford. "I could imagine the first game he did that because he is a striker coming in to score goals and the first match is always good. The second match he has to do what the manager is willing him to do and he did it fantastically. His performance was better than the first match.

"He did everything I asked of him. He scored two again, four goals in two matches, and that's an average that is unusual! When you have the chance, you have to perform and do the things we're asking and I've always said, it's not a matter of age, it's a matter of quality and he showed it." Rashford was just one of five United players to make their debuts in a week which saw United beat Shrewsbury in the FA Cup, Midtjylland and then Arsenal. "It is the culture of Manchester United, that is why they take me as a manager and now it is of course crazy all the injuries we have, today 12 injured players," said van Gaal. "So now it is a little bit overdone, I think, but you see youngsters always give spirit to the team. I have a lot of experience with that and that is also a very important aspect of my philosophy."

Impressive as the other debutants - defenders Joe Riley and Tim Fosu-Mensah and midfielders Regan Poole and James Weir - may have been, Rashford is the player who has guaranteed a place in United folklore. "It's just crazy," said Rashford. "It was a shock playing in midweek because (Anthony) Martial was meant to be starting and that benefitted me because I wasn't thinking about the game too much. "But this is crazy, I can't explain it, when you're out there - the rush of blood, everything. Having players like Michael Carrick helping us with their experience, we can only go forward." — AFP



MANCHESTER: Arsenal's French manager Arsene Wenger (2R) leads off his team at the end of the English Premier League football match between Manchester United and Arsenal at Old Trafford. — AFP

POCHETTINO SERENE WITH TITLE REALITIES DAWNING

LONDON: Tottenham Hotspur manager Mauricio Pochettino said that the balm of victory would help his hobbling players prepare for tomorrow's Premier League clash with London rivals West Ham United.

Harry Kane wore a face mask to protect a broken nose against Swansea City on Sunday and Dele Alli injured his foot in the warm-up, but both players finished the match with smiles on their faces as Spurs came from behind to win 2-1. Coupled with Arsenal's 3-2 defeat at Manchester United, it enabled Pochettino's men to reclaim second place and close to within two points of leaders Leicester City.

After visiting sixth-place West Ham, Spurs face a showdown with north London rivals Arsenal, but despite their walking wounded, Pochettino said: "It's easier to prepare for the West Ham game after this victory. "They (the players) are happy, they smile, it is always a better mood to recover. "It is an exciting moment for us, but some players we need to manage because some players feel a little bit tired. We came from a very tough period."

While Spurs look to establish themselves as Leicester's main challengers, third-place Arsenal find themselves five points behind the leaders ahead of their home game with Swansea. Arsenal could not take advantage of an injury-ravaged United team at Old Trafford, where 18-year-old striker Marcus Rashford scored twice for the hosts and set up Ander Herrera for what proved to be the decisive goal, and manager Arsene Wenger conceded it had been a weighty blow. "We dropped three important points, but we have to show we are up for the fight and bounce back tomorrow night," said the Frenchman. "We have to not feel sorry for ourselves. Mathematically, what it means, we will only know at the end of the season."

Manchester City's title hopes looked to have been fatally undermined by consecutive losses to Leicester and Spurs, but although they lie nine points off the pace-albeit with a game in hand-confidence has been bolstered by Sunday's League Cup triumph over Liverpool. League Cup success proved the catalyst for a late surge to title glory in 2014 and ahead of tomorrow's speedy reunion with Liverpool at Anfield, manager Manuel Pellegrini is hoping that lightning will strike twice.

Ivanovic warning

"It's important to continue trusting what we are doing," said the Chilean, whose side prevailed 3-1 on penalties at Wembley after the game finished 1-1 at the end of extra time. "We continue (being) involved in the Premier League.

We have to play (for) another 36 points, so we are not going to give up.

"We made a huge step the other day in the Champions League (winning 3-1 at Dynamo Kiev), but winning this title will continue giving us a lot of trust to work." United, now three points below the Champions League berths, having played a game more than fourth-place City, host Watford tomorrow.

Leicester continue to make a mockery of predictions that their title challenge is bound to collapse and can reassert their five-point advantage on Tuesday when they host West Bromwich Albion. They almost squandered a chance to put pressure on their rivals on Saturday, when it took an 89th-minute goal from substitute Leonardo Ulloa to see off Norwich City, but manager Claudio Ranieri took the manner of victory as a

sign of the depth in his squad.

"When one man scores a goal, all of Leicester City Football Club are happy," said the Italian. "Everyone would like to play, but it's not possible. They believe in the project and they believe their team-mates are playing well.

"For me it's important to believe in them because, when I need some changes, they are ready." Champions Chelsea, meanwhile, will look to continue their recent upsurge in form when they visit relegation-threatened Norwich. "Every time when we relax, even for a few seconds, we lose points, so we have to go step by step," warned Branislav Ivanovic, who scored Chelsea's late winner at Southampton on Saturday. "We have in three days another game and we have to be very careful because it is another away game against a difficult opponent." — AFP



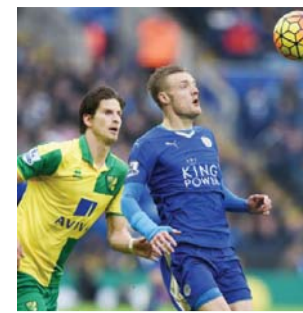
LONDON: Tottenham Hotspur's Belgian midfielder Nacer Chadli (left) celebrates with Tottenham Hotspur's English striker Harry Kane after scoring their first goal during the English Premier League football match between Tottenham Hotspur and Swansea City at White Hart Lane. —AFP

Sports

Curry turning
3-pointers into
longest drive
competition



Ranieri rolls
dice again as
Leicester face
West Brom



TUESDAY, MARCH 1, 2016

SCOTT OUTLASTS GARCIA TO WIN THE HONDA CLASSIC Page 17



BARCELONA: Barcelona's Argentinian forward Lionel Messi (left) shoots a free kick to score a goal next to Barcelona's Brazilian forward Neymar during the Spanish league football match FC Barcelona vs Sevilla FC at the Camp Nou stadium. — AFP

BARCA EQUAL UNBEATEN RECORD IN SEVILLA WIN

BARCELONA: Lionel Messi scored with an unstoppable free kick to help Barcelona come from behind to beat Sevilla 2-1 on Sunday, a record-equaling 34th game without loss that kept the champions on track to retain their Spanish league title.

Sevilla's Victor "Vitolo" Machin struck first for the visitors in the 20th minute, but Messi curled home his free kick 11 minutes later before Gerard Pique put Barcelona ahead just after halftime. Barcelona equaled Madrid's record unbeaten streak in all competitions from 1988-89. Barcelona's last loss in any competition was at Sevilla on Oct. 3.

"The record means nothing to me," said Barcelona coach Luis Enrique. "If we win the title, fine, but if not, then it means nothing to me." Luis Enrique's team is certainly on course to win the league. In fact, it has a chance to repeat its rare treble of league, cup and Champions League trophies from last year.

Barcelona's 10th consecutive Liga win maintained its eight-point lead over second-place Atletico Madrid.

Third-place Real Madrid, which lost 1-0 to Atletico on Saturday, fell 12 points behind the pacesetters with 12 rounds to go. Sevilla, which remained dangerous until the final whistle, slipped down to sixth place.

Emery's team will have the opportunity to avenge the defeat when they meet Barcelona in the Copa del Rey final on May 22. "It's tough for a defeat to strengthen you," Emery said. "To beat Barca you have to find that extra something because we are probably talking about the best team in the world." Elsewhere Sunday, Villarreal eased to a 3-0 win over 10-man Levante to cement its hold on fourth place, while Athletic Bilbao won 3-0 at Valencia in a preview of their Europa League round-of-16 clash.

Granada eked out a 1-0 win at Deportivo La Coruna in the debut of coach Jose Gonzalez to escape last place and push Levante to the bottom. While Sevilla made no attempt to hide its intent to defend and counterattack, Barcelona mustered the first scoring chances with two strikes that hit the woodwork in the 13th

minute. Messi was first, sending a corner kick toward the near post that defender Coke Andujar was lucky to head onto the upright and not into his own net. The rebound then fell to Luis Suarez near the edge of the box, where he blasted it off the bar. Having dodged Barcelona first shots, Sevilla stunned the Camp Nou crowd with a finely executed move that started from an apparently harmless throw-in.

Benoit Tremoulinas put the ball in play, weaved together two passes with teammates, and found himself unmarked on the left flank. His cross was then volleyed beyond goalkeeper Claudio Bravo by Vitolo. Sevilla held firm at the back, until all its discipline in defense was undone by Messi after Suarez earned a dangerous free kick on the edge of the area.

The Ballon d'Or holder did the rest, bending a left-foot shot over the wall and into the net, giving goalie Sergio Rico no hope of making a save. Messi, who scored both goals in Barcelona's 2-0 win at Arsenal in the Champions League on Tuesday, recorded his 30th

goal of the season in all competitions.

"It's not for nothing that Messi is the best in the world," Vitolo said. "It seems like he scores every free kick he gets against us." After his goal, Messi was the motor in Barcelona's attack, which hemmed Sevilla into its area. Sevilla got a reprieve at halftime, but Barcelona didn't have to wait long for Suarez to exchange passes with Messi before slipping the ball over for Pique to score from close range in the 48th.

Both sides then needed their 'keepers to shine. Bravo was first to deny Kevin Gameiro before Barcelona went straight down the other end and Messi drew a great save from Rico. Sensing that his team needed control more than another goal, Messi shifted gears and focused on keeping possession of the ball to disarm Sevilla's rally. "Messi does it all," Pique said. "He is incredibly talented and has a special vision of the game. There are teams that cope with him better than others, but it is impossible to stop him." — AP

MORATA STRIKE SEES JUVE CLEAR WITH WIN OVER HAPLESS INTER

TURIN: Alvaro Morata came off the bench to earn then score a late penalty as champions Juventus went four points clear at the top of Serie A on Sunday with a 2-0 win over hapless Inter Milan. Days after rescuing their Champions League hopes with a 2-2 home draw with Bayern Munich, Juventus welcomed Roberto Mancini's visitors looking to steal a march on title challengers Napoli.

After a dominant first half, the hosts broke the deadlock two minutes after the restart when Leonardo Bonucci fired Inter midfielder Danilo D'Ambrosio's header past Samir Handanovic on the volley. Morata replaced Juve striker Paulo Dybala with eight minutes remaining, and two minutes later stepped up to send Handanovic the wrong way after winning a penalty when he was chopped down in the box by Joao Miranda.

Juve's 19th win of the season leaves Massimiliano Allegri's men four points clear of Napoli, who will be hoping striker Gonzalo Higuain finds his scoring boots again for a difficult trip to fourth-placed Fiorentina on Monday.

Inter remain in fifth place at 13 points behind Juve, but their seventh loss of the campaign has all but ended their titles hopes and given hope to their direct rivals for the third and last Champions League qualifying spot. While a reportedly ailing Mancini decided not to speak to media, Allegri was only too happy

to have removed a direct rival for the league trophy.

"It wasn't easy tonight with a wet pitch and the players sliding around, but the boys did great to take control of the game and secure a precious win," said Allegri. "We've taken one of our direct rivals for the title out of the race. "Now, we're in a position where we can win a fifth consecutive title and that hasn't happened since 1935."

Inter sporting director Pierre Ausilio took over media duties, and seized the occasion to hit out at the team. "The players really need to have a good look at themselves," slammed Ausilio. "We shouldn't be letting goals in like we did the first one, but looking at our league position explains everything."

'Smaller teams'

"No disrespect to Verona or Carpi, but more than losing to Juventus, we should be angry at the fact we've let smaller teams take points off us at home." Former Inter midfielder Hernanes, handed a rare start by Allegri after a sterling performance as a second-half substitute against Bayern in midweek, announced the hostilities after just five minutes.

Taking a pass from fellow Brazilian Alex Sandro, Hernanes sidestepped his marker to hit a sweet left-foot drive that sailed over Handanovic and cannoned off the crossbar. It took until 25 minutes for Inter to get a sniff of

goal, but Sandro produced a great saving header at the back post as D'Ambrosio waited to pounce and then Giorgio Chiellini made a timely interception on Mauro Icardi to thwart the Argentine striker.

Juve spurned two chances to break the deadlock on the stroke of half-time, Paul Pogba's delivery across goal finding no takers and then Mandzukic narrowly missing the Frenchman's inviting through ball that forced Handanovic out to parry. The first half fizzled out, but the second started with a bang when, after just two minutes, Bonucci broke the deadlock. Dybala floated in a free-kick from the right that was met by D'Ambrosio, whose header towards the back post provided the perfect assist for Bonucci to smash into the roof of the net. "Bonucci scored a great goal, it wasn't easy," added Allegri. Juve almost doubled their lead minutes later, Dybala's first-timer from

Sandro's cross on the left trickling past the right post. Juve's fans were up in arms when Juan Jesus chopped Dybala down from behind, and it was similar indiscipline that led to Juve's second six minutes from time. Morata appeared to irk Miranda as they tussled for possession on the edge of the box, the Brazilian retaliating with a challenge that saw the referee point to the spot. Morata made no mistake, sending Handanovic the wrong way to send a virtually packed stadium delirious. — AFP



TURIN: Juventus' Spanish forward Alvaro Morata (left) celebrates after scoring during the Italian Serie A football match Juventus Vs Inter Milan. — AFP



Ithmaar Bank reports continued retail growth

CHINA ASSURES US NO CURRENCY DEVALUATION, PUSHING REFORMS



GUWAHATI: Indian fishermen prepare their fishing net on the Brahmaputra River in Guwahati yesterday. India pledged to spend \$5.2 billion to double the income of struggling farmers. — AFP

INDIA UNVEILS 'POPULIST' BUDGET TO WOO VOTERS

FISCAL DEFICIT AT 3.5% OF GDP • \$16BN IN RURAL AID, \$130BN IN FARM CREDIT

NEW DELHI: India unveiled a fire-fighting budget yesterday that seeks to win back support among rural voters for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government and sustain growth against a grim global backdrop - all without borrowing more.

Finance Minister Arun Jaitley's third budget marked a strategic shift by addressing rural distress in a country of 1.3 billion, where two-fifths of families rely on farming and are reeling from two years of drought. At the same time it hiked public investment in India's woeful infrastructure by 22.5 percent, while taking further steps to revive corporate investment that Modi needs to create new jobs for India's burgeoning workforce. "We have a shared responsibility to spend prudently and wisely for the people, especially for the poor and downtrodden," the 63-year-old finance minister told lawmakers in his 100-minute address.

India holds several state elections this year, including in the farming state of West Bengal, with the country's most populous state, Uttar Pradesh, going to the polls in 2017. A strong showing will be vital to Modi's chances of a second term. Despite commanding a large majority in parliament's lower house, Modi's government has failed to pass several key

measures since sweeping to power almost two years ago, raising doubts over the impact of its reform agenda. Jaitley called Asia's third-largest economy a bright spot in a gloomy global landscape, and reiterated a forecast that it would grow by 7.6 percent in the fiscal year that is drawing to a close. But, despite hefty commitments on rural welfare and health, Jaitley managed to stick to his fiscal deficit target of 3.5 percent of gross domestic product for the 2016/17 fiscal year that starts on April 1 - a pledge that may open the way for an early interest rate cut by the Reserve Bank of India.

"At first sight, it's a good budget, a fire-fighting budget," said Amitabh Dubey, director of India research at Trusted Sources. "Rural demand is weak, private investment is dead in the water and, of course, we have a banking crisis," he added. "They've announced some ease-of-doing-business-measures that are positive. But, in other ways, it's a classic tax-and-spend budget."

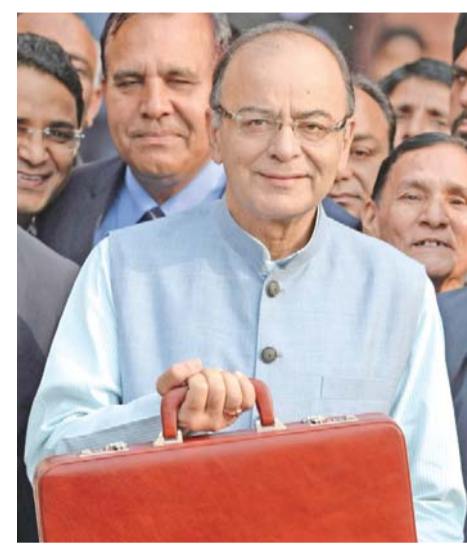
INDIA SHINING?

Modi's change of course seeks to prevent a repeat of the fate of the last government led by his nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP),

whose relentless optimism - summed up by its "India Shining" slogan - grated with voters who dispatched it after one term in 2004. Jaitley reeled off a list of \$16 billion in measures targeted at the countryside, including spending on a job creation scheme, farmers' welfare and building of rural roads.

He also targeted a total of \$130 billion in credit to farmers. "These steps will help our millions of farmers recover from the rough patch they have been going through," said Yoginder K. Alagh, a farm expert and former planning official. The government will also allocate \$32 billion for infrastructure development in 2016/17, an increase of 22.5 percent from last year, building 10,000 km of new national highways and upgrading another 50,000 km. Those spending pledges leave scant cash over to recapitalize a state banking sector weighed down with bad loans to a corporate sector that itself is struggling under a heavy debt burden.

Jaitley announced a capital injection of just \$3.6 billion into public sector banks in the coming fiscal year - a fraction of total needs that his economic adviser, Arvind Subramanian, estimated at \$26 billion in his pre-budget report. "The banking sector has a



NEW DELHI: Indian Finance Minister Arun Jaitley poses for media representatives prior to presenting The Union Budget at Parliament House in New Delhi yesterday. — AFP

major role to play in spurring private investment, which is lacking and without which an all-round economic revival is not a possibility,"

said Milind Kothari, head of direct tax at BDO India in Mumbai.

Jaitley promised a one-time disputes resolution process for back-tax claims that have hit foreign investors like Vodafone. But he also hiked taxes on new cars and tobacco products, and imposed a new tax on large dividend payments - all measures that will hit India's growing middle class.

"Despite our disappointment on the tax on cars, I see no reason for the mayhem in the market," Anand Mahindra, chairman of Mahindra Group said on Twitter. "The call for a shift to investment in general infrastructure such as highways has also been answered. And fiscal targets have been maintained."

Financial investors gave Jaitley's budget a cautious thumbs up, with the rupee, bonds and stocks buoyant. Ratings agencies also gave their cautious backing to a spending package that produced no nasty surprises on the borrowing side.

"What we've heard is largely in line with the current rating and the current outlook," said Atsi Sheth, Associate Managing Director, Sovereign Risk Group, Moody's Investors Service, which rates India at "Baa3", its lowest investment grade rating. — Reuters

ONLINE RETAILER SOUQ.COM RAISES \$275M FROM INVESTORS

DUBAI: Middle Eastern online retailer Souq.com has raised \$275 million from a funding round with investors to support its future growth, it said yesterday, in the largest-ever fundraising in the region's e-commerce space.

The Middle East's technology sector, including e-commerce, is growing rapidly due to the region's young and tech-savvy population. Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are in the top seven worldwide for mobile phone penetration. Souq.com, which sells consumer electronics, fashion and household goods among others, said investors participating in the funding round included Tiger Global Management, Naspers, Standard Chartered Private Equity, International Finance Corporation and Baillie Gifford. Chief Executive Ronaldo Mouchawar would not be drawn on the make-up of the current shareholder base. However, he said no shareholder had a majority in the company and Naspers and Tiger Global Management had also invested in previous funding rounds.

In a separate statement, Standard Chartered Private Equity said it had invested \$50 million in Souq.com for a minority stake. It did not specify the stake size. Having used cash from previous

fundraisings to build up its infrastructure, Mouchawar told Reuters the new money would support the growth of its product offering, development on mobiles, as well as logistics, including its last-mile delivery and payment services.

The slow development of online payment services in the region has a major drag on the region's e-commerce sector, with the majority of online purchases still cash on delivery.

Souq.com mostly serves customers in Saudi Arabia, UAE and Egypt but last year began delivering to customers in Oman, Qatar and Bahrain. Looking at ways to service Kuwait from its Dubai hub would be part of its future plans, according to Mouchawar. "The region has many countries, one language, one culture, but you need to get your logistics in order to make sure you serve the whole region and not just one area."

The Middle East e-commerce market was expected to be worth \$20 billion in 2016, the company said. The company had made small acquisitions and would continue to seek out further opportunities, Mouchawar said, adding a stock market listing was not an immediate plan as it focuses on growing the business. — Reuters

UAE UP ON MOMENTUM TRADES; SAUDI STALLS

MIDEAST STOCK MARKETS

DUBAI: Stock markets in the Middle East ended mixed yesterday as local traders chased after small and mid-cap stocks in the United Arab Emirates, while Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Qatar gave up early gains as investors booked profits. Riyadh's index initially rose as much as 1.0 percent as the banking sector gained, but then pulled back as traders cashed out of speculative stocks and the petrochemical sector. The index ended almost flat at 6,093 points, failing to break technical resistance on the early February and end-January peaks of 6,056-6,099 points.

Saudi Basic Industries, the petrochemical giant, retreated 1.0 percent. But banking stocks remained resilient with Samba Financial jumping 5.1 percent and Saudi British Bank adding 2.2 percent. On Sunday, the central bank announced a housing mortgage scheme under which the government would guarantee 15 percent of payments; if it proves successful, the program could boost business for banks.

Although day traders chasing quick profits weakened the Saudi market yesterday, Gulf bourses are starting to see more long-term investors returning to buy back beaten-down stocks amid signs that oil prices may have bottomed out, with Brent crude futures trading over \$35 a barrel yesterday.

The latest monthly Reuters survey of Middle East fund managers, published yesterday, showed 43 percent said they expected to boost their alloca-

tions to Saudi stocks - the highest figure since February 2015. Only 7 percent anticipated reducing allocations. In Qatar, the main index fell 0.4 percent after trading up as much as 0.5 percent. A sell-off in blue chips was the main drag with Islamic lender Masraf Al Rayan dropping 3.0 percent.

Similarly, Egypt's main index did not hold onto early gains and closed 0.2 percent lower. Orascom Telecom, the most heavily traded stock, fell 1.7 percent after initially rising the same percentage. OTMT's subsidiary Beltone Financial signed a share purchase agreement on Sunday with Commercial International Bank to buy CIB's investment banking arm CI Capital. Beltone jumped 9.9 percent yesterday while CIB closed down 0.3 percent.

Yields on Egypt's three-month and nine-month treasury bills rose sharply at an auction on Sunday, signalling expectations for an interest rate rise next month. Global Telecom, one of foreign investors' favoured Egyptian stocks, fell 1.0 percent to 2.06 Egyptian pounds after hitting a session high of 2.10 pounds.

DUBAI, ABU DHABI

After trading down in the first hour, Dubai's index jumped 2.0 percent to 3,240 points, breaking technical resistance on the late December peak of 3,189 points. This confirmed a reverse head & shoulders pattern formed by the highs and lows since December, and pointing up to around 3,600 points. Builder Arabtec surged its daily limit and

jumped 14.3 percent to 1.44 dirhams in its volume since June 2009. The stock is now up 38.0 percent from its January low and its next chart resistance is on the 200-day average, at 1.78 dirhams.

Buying was triggered by exchange data showing former chief executive Hasan Ismaik's stake had risen to 11.91 percent from 11.81 percent. It was not clear whether this was due to buying by Ismaik or simply a technical adjustment to the data, perhaps due to the consolidation of shares previously listed under another name, as sometimes occurs in United Arab Emirates markets. Ismaik could not be reached for comment. Amlak Finance also saw its heaviest turnover since 2009; shares in the mid-sized finance firm rocketed 12.8 percent after it reported that net profit attributable to equity holders jumped 130 percent.

"Now it is about momentum trading in select stocks," said Muhammed Shabbir, head of equities funds at Dubai-based Rasmala. The momentum trade was also seen in Dubai Financial Market, the only listed exchange in the Middle East. Volume reached a level last seen in June 2015; the stock jumped 7.8 percent, and is now up 36.0 percent from its mid-January low. Abu Dhabi's stock index rose 1.8 percent after initially trading down. Volume was concentrated in small and mid-tier shares such as Eshraq Properties, up 5.5 percent. Blue-chip banks, which were dormant in the first hour of trade, also helped lift the bourse with First Gulf Bank surging 3.2 percent. — Reuters

MOODY'S AFFIRMS NBK'S RATINGS, OUTLOOK STABLE
NBK IN PREFERENTIAL POSITION TO EXPLOIT LARGER CREDIT OPPORTUNITIES

KUWAIT: Moody's Investors Service has affirmed National Bank of Kuwait's (NBK) long-term global local currency (GLC) deposit rating at Aa3, the highest in the Middle East and North Africa, with a stable outlook.

opportunities compared to its domestic peers. The agency expects that as the government's development plan begins to gain traction, with more infrastructure projects being tendered than in previous years, NBK will be able to take advantage of new business opportunities.



Moody's added that NBK's core profitability will remain robust despite tighter margins. NBK has a stable deposit base and would benefit from 'flight to quality' in the event of non-intrinsic systemic problems.

Moody's noted that NBK has consistently performed better than local peers. NBK's non-performing loans (NPLs)-to-gross loans ratio fell to 1.3 percent at year-end 2015 and remained below the average for the conventional Kuwaiti banks.

capital adequacy ratio (CAR) is well above the regulatory requirements. During 2015, NBK boosted its capital base through issuing \$700 million Additional Tier-1 (AT-1) securities and KD 125 million of Tier 2 subordinated bonds.

GOLD UP 1%, SET FOR BEST MONTH IN FOUR YEARS

LONDON: Gold rose 1 percent yesterday, boosted by lower European shares and a softer dollar, leaving the metal well placed to log its best monthly performance in four years as turmoil in wider markets increased its safe-haven appeal.

ently low inflation. Markets are now pricing in at least two rate cuts. European shares fell after a weekend meeting of the G20 group of leading economies failed to strike new measures to boost growth.



BHUBANESWAR: An Indian farmer works on his farm on the outskirts of the eastern Indian city of Bhubaneswar yesterday. — AP

GENEL HALVES ESTIMATE FOR IRAQI KURDISTAN FIELD

FIRM TO WRITE DOWN VALUE OF ITS HOLDING IN TAQ TAQ FIELD

BAGHDAD: Genel Energy Plc, one of a handful of foreign oil producers in Iraqi Kurdistan, lost more than a third of its market value yesterday after the company halved the reserves estimate for its largest operational field.

year. Since 2011, Taq Taq had produced 184 million barrels on a gross basis. Genel kept its full-year production forecast of 60,000-70,000 barrels of oil per day (bopd), but said that Taq Taq production would fall to 50,000-70,000 bopd by 2018.

company's two main producing assets. Genel has a 44 percent interest in Taq Taq, which is located 85 kilometres southeast of the city of Erbil.

EMIRATES GLOBAL ALUMINIUM PROFIT HALVES ON WEAK PRICES

ABU DHABI: Emirates Global Aluminium (EGA), one of the top five global producers, said its net profit fell by nearly half in 2015, weighed down by weak prices and a slowdown in China.

China's production of aluminium is expected to be 2-2.5 million tons higher than the country's consumption in 2016, resulting in a global oversupply of up to 1 million tons.

EGYPT LAUNCHES INVESTMENT SCHEME TO LURE EXPAT DOLLARS

CAIRO: Egypt launched a new scheme yesterday to encourage millions of Egyptians living abroad to pour their dollar savings into special certificates, as it tries to ease an acute shortage of foreign currency that has hit the economy.

try's economy," said Makram Ebeid. Import-dependent Egypt has been suffering from a shortage of foreign currency since the 2011 uprising scared off foreign investors and tourists-major sources of foreign exchange.

EXCHANGE RATES

AL-MUZAINI EXCHANGE CO.

Table with columns for ASIAN COUNTRIES, GCC COUNTRIES, ARAB COUNTRIES, and EUROPEAN & AMERICAN COUNTRIES, listing various currencies and their exchange rates.

GOLD

Table listing gold prices for 20 Gram, 10 Gram, and 5 Gram.

UAE EXCHANGE CENTRE WLL

Table with columns for CURRENCIES and TELEX TRANSFER PER 1000, listing various currencies and their rates.

DOLLARCO EXCHANGE CO. LTD

Table with columns for Rate for Transfer and Selling Rate, listing various currencies and their rates.

Table listing exchange rates for Saudi Riyals, Jordanian Dinar, Egyptian Pound, Sri Lankan Rupees, Indian Rupees, Pakistani Rupees, Bangladesh Taka, Philippines Peso, Cyprus pound, Japanese Yen, Syrian Pound, Nepalese Rupees, Malaysian Ringgit, Chinese Yuan Renminbi, Thai Bhat, and Turkish Lira.

BAHRAIN EXCHANGE COMPANY

Table with columns for COUNTRY, SELL CASH, and SELLDRAFT, listing exchange rates for European and Australasia currencies.

Table listing exchange rates for Bangladesh Taka, Chinese Yuan, Hong Kong Dollar, Indian Rupee, Indonesian Rupiah, Japanese Yen, Kenyan Shilling, Korean Won, Malaysian Ringgit, Nepalese Rupee, Pakistan Rupee, Philippine Peso, Sierra Leone, Singapore Dollar, South African Rand, Sri Lankan Rupee, and Thai Bhat.

Arab

Table listing exchange rates for Bahraini Dinar, Egyptian Pound, Iranian Riyal, Iraqi Dinar, Jordanian Dinar, Kuwaiti Dinar, Lebanese Pound, Moroccan Dirhams, Nigerian Naira, Omani Riyal, Qatar Riyal, Saudi Riyal, Syrian Pound, Tunisian Dinar, Turkish Lira, UAE Dirhams, and Yemeni Riyal.

INDIAN PROPERTY EXHIBITION IN KUWAIT ON MARCH 4-5

KUWAIT: The New Indian Express newspaper in association with Life Insurance Cooperation Housing Finance Limited (LIC HFL) will be holding an exclusive Indian property exhibition at the Holiday Inn Hotel in Salmiya, on 4 and 5 March, from 10 am to 8pm. More than a 100 real estate projects from cities across south Indian real estate spectrum will be exhibiting at the show, promising to make it one of the most encompassing property exhibitions in recent times.

The Indian Realty Exhibition will offer people seeking to invest in Indian properties first-hand information on a range of property options, including residential apartments, plots, bungalows and commercial properties from more than 25 leading reputed builders and developers of India.

Some of the builders presenting special offers to potential buyers during the exhibition include Confident Group, which is offering up to 50 percent interest (pre-EMI) paid by the builder; Casa Grande with ready-to-occupy flats at a starting price of Rs10 lakh; Hallmark Infrastructure, which is offering flats from Rs35 lakh on GST Road in Chennai; Fortune Infra offering plots for Rs1.6 lakhs or villas for Rs4.9 lakh, with the rest in easy EMIs, along with an offer to get one kg silver free. Meanwhile, VGN is offering apartments in Guindy at Rs7,599 per square feet and TVS is presenting buyers flats for Rs25 lakh, just 15 minutes from Tambaram in Chennai.

The Indian Realty Exhibition 2016 assumes added significance as it will come at a stage when property prices have been



relatively stable and housing loans are available at competitive rates with a special concession on interest rates being granted to women homebuyers. The exhibition is also being held immediately after the 2016 Union Budget, which is expected to have provisions in support of the realty sector.

The two-day mega show will also be holding exclusive seminars, including a presentation on Indian City Scenario, Union Budget 2016 highlights, Tax Planning for NRI investment in real estate, NRI investment in real estate, FDI investment in real estate and panel discussion on 'Is it the right time for NRIs to invest in India'.

The Indian Realty Exhibition 2016, which is offering so much under one-roof, is probably the best venue to explore the lucrative options available in the Indian real estate sector.



BEIJING: People at a street market on the outskirts of Beijing. — AFP

STRAINS SHOW IN CHINA'S FACTORY HEARTLAND

DONGGUAN, China: Millions of migrant workers streaming back to China's industrial heartland after the long lunar New Year break are facing an uncertain future, as smaller factories in particular struggle to cope with anaemic orders and rising inventories.

In the Pearl River Delta, the "world's workshop" in southern Guangdong province that accounts for around a quarter of China's exports, workers and business owners say production lines have been slower than usual to restart after the annual two-week holiday.

At the Xicheng industrial park in Hengli, several factories lay gutted with broken machines strewn outside, while plots of land earmarked for industrial use were being used by villagers to grow vegetables, a sign of the weak demand for Chinese goods that is forcing business closures and putting pressure on wages. "Finding a factory with a good salary, that's what we want," said Luo Xianrong, an 18-year-old laid off by a factory in January, who was one of scores of migrants knocking on factory gates in the hunt for new work. "We have to be careful. Many factories aren't providing food and accommodation, and they're delaying wage payments," she said, as her four friends nodded in unison. "I don't want to be cheated."

While global policymakers gathered in Shanghai for a G20 meeting at the weekend declared that "growth in key emerging markets remains strong", the slowdown in China - the motor of the world economy for the past decade - has unnerved investors and contributed to market turbulence at the start of 2016. The plight of Luo and her friends underlines the dilemma for China's leaders - they want to shift the economy away from the low-end manufacturing that fuelled its rise, but they also need jobs for the consumers they hope will support its next phase.

Labour activists also point to the risk of unrest, as industries consolidate and workers find their benefits squeezed.

MANUFACTURING CONTRACTION

China's manufacturing sector likely contracted for a seventh straight month in February, with the latest numbers due today. The official purchasing managers' index is expected to show the sector shrinking at its fastest pace since August 2012.

Exports from Guangdong province - which has a bigger economy than Indonesia - are predicted to grow just 1 percent this year, according to a January government work report. Analysts say many of the smaller factories hit hardest by the slowdown catered more for domestic demand than the export market, another signal that the Chinese consumer is not picking up the slack as is needed to rebalance the economy.

That is bad news for policymakers in Beijing, scrambling to stabilise swooning financial markets and with growth slowing to 6.9 percent last year, its weakest in a quarter of a century. Stanley Lau, who runs a watch factory, said uncertainty in Europe, including the refugee crisis and a possible exit of Britain from the European Union, could further sap consumer confidence there, and impact China's factories. "There will be certain numbers of factories that will have some changes, by narrowing down the scale of the factories or moving to other places," said Lau.

"We follow the market trend. If we won't receive sufficient orders by mid-year ... We'll have to reduce our workforce. But for now, we'd like to keep our workforce steady."

"LIFE AND DEATH"

While makeshift recruitment booths and signs advertising jobs remain a fairly common sight in the Pearl River Delta, the labour market is seen getting tighter in the coming months. "The life and death of enterprises ... is to be expected," said Xu Jianhua, the Communist Party Secretary of Dongguan, a major industrial city there, at a recent press conference.

He said 39,000 enterprises had shut down in Dongguan last year, including around 500 foreign invested firms, though he stressed the number of new businesses registered in the same period had outnumbered those closing down. "The economic challenges will be more complex" in the year ahead, he added. The outlook appeared better for some larger factories with steady revenue streams, including electronics makers such as Foxlink, a subsidiary of Hon Hai, Apple's main contract manufacturer in China.

"We've got these stalls in many factory towns now," said Wang Chunshun, a recruiter for Foxlink who'd pitched several plastic stools and a glossy recruitment poster on the pavement next to a highway and a large industrial estate. "Our company needs new workers, we've still got a lot of orders." Some workers interviewed in Dongguan factory towns suggested the chance of labour disputes or strikes was growing. "I heard from some friends, who didn't get paid by their boss, that the government did nothing to help them," said Zhou Huazhong, a worker at a motor factory in Dongguan, who was smoking a cigarette during a break. "The government is useless."

The real challenge for China's leaders is whether the economy can create enough new jobs in sectors they are trying to encourage, such as biotechnology or robotics, to replace those lost lower down the chain. "Basically the employment situation is in a state of flux, factories are closing down," said Geoffrey Crothall of China Labour Bulletin, a labour rights advocacy and monitoring group. —Reuters

OMAN PORT TARGETS BIGGER IRAN SHIPPING CONTRACTS

SOHAR PORT LOOKING AT EXPANDING ITS TIES WITH TEHRAN

LONDON: Oman aims to expand shipping and trade links with Iran and get ahead of rivals after the lifting of international sanctions on Tehran, leading port officials involved say.

Measures were lifted last month as part of a nuclear deal with world powers, ending years of isolation which saw the international shipping sector cut ties and disrupt supplies to import-dependent Iran. The United Arab Emirates previously enjoyed greater shipping activity with Iran but Oman's nearby Sohar port is looking at expanding ties.

Oman could also benefit from a spat between rivals Saudi Arabia and Iran which saw Riyadh cut ties last month and others like the UAE to downgrade relations. Annual UAE-Iran container trade pre-sanctions was estimated at 1.5 million TEUs (20-foot equivalent units). Reports cited by ship insurers pointed to a ban on all Iranian flagged ships calling at Saudi ports and neighbouring ally Bahrain. While Oman maintained warm ties with

Tehran it now faces competition from across the Arabian Sea in the form of India. Andre Toet, chief executive of Sohar's port and freezone, acknowledged they were smaller than nearby terminals.

"What we are trying to do is see if we can get a piece of the cake and divert or create new business opportunities for business between Oman and Iran using Sohar as the base for that," he told Reuters. "The first signs are there that it is happening. It is still in very small pockets."

Sohar, a 50-50 joint venture between the government of Oman and the Dutch port of Rotterdam, acts as the port authority and landlord and runs its 45 km freezone.

Toet said Sohar was targeting more trade with major Iranian dry bulk and container line IRISL and national tanker operator NITC. An IRISL ship made its first call to Sohar recently.

Separately, a direct service between Iran's major cargo port of Bandar Abbas and Sohar had opened up. Toet said the port was looking at

links with other Iranian terminals such as Chabahar. "We are talking to several Iranian companies looking for possible investment in the free zone - small metal manufacturing and warehousing distribution of agricultural products," he said.

Total vessel calls to Sohar reached 2,545 last year - a rise of 26 percent from the previous year. With global cargo and container shipping markets suffering a prolonged recession since 2008, Iran represents a potential area of growth for the Oman International Container Terminal (OICT), located in Sohar.

"I can see high potential for an increase of trade between our two countries," said Albert Pang, chief executive of OICT, which is operated by investors including Hutchison Port Holdings and Oman's government. Last year OICT reported cargo volumes of around 540,000 TEUs, versus 329,000 TEUs in 2014, and Pang said it was targeting double-digit growth this year, with Iran potentially adding to it. — Reuters



PARIS: Children salute French Prime Minister Manuel Valls (right) as he visits the 'Salon de l'Agriculture' (Agriculture Fair), in Paris yesterday. — AFP

CBS NEAR POLICY LIMITS BUT BACK IN FOCUS AFTER G20

FRANKFURT/TOKYO: The widely predicted failure of G20 leaders to agree on bold new steps to reinvigorate the world economy at a meeting in Shanghai this weekend puts the onus firmly back on central bankers. But after years of increasingly desperate attempts to kick-start growth there is fear among bankers and top finance officials that monetary policy is running out of effective ammunition and future stimulus efforts could even be harmful.

"Monetary policy is extremely accommodative to the point that it may even be counterproductive in terms of negative side effects on banks, policies and growth," German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble said at the G20 meeting. "Fiscal as well as monetary policies have reached their limits," he said. "If you want the real economy to grow, there are no shortcuts which avoid reforms."

The G20 acknowledged that monetary policy alone is not enough to combat rising global risks but leaders failed to outline concrete steps, making only vague and general pledges.

Facing a new paradigm of slow growth and the legacy of crises, top central banks have kept rates near or below zero for years, waiting in vain for governments to embrace reforms instead of pointing the finger at monetary policy.

Testing uncharted waters, smaller central banks in Switzerland, Sweden and Denmark even cut rates deep into negative territory, raising the prospect that monetary policy still had some room left. The BOJ and the ECB both followed suit but the results have been mixed, with side effects.

POSSIBLE BUT COSTLY

"Some things may be technically possible, but it's a different question when it comes to whether they are feasible," BOJ board members Takahide Kiuchi.

"The reality in Japan is that it's gradually becoming difficult to come up with policy steps for which the merits sufficiently outweigh the costs," Kiuchi said, suggesting that the BOJ may have exhausted its options when it cut its key rate to below zero last month. Although the rate cut pushed bond yields into negative territory, it failed to lift stock prices or stop an unwelcome rise in the yen, meaning that policy is not achieving its goals. In the world of such unconventional monetary policies, the law of diminishing returns apply, so each new measure yields less but carries a greater risk. "The options are not unlimited," Swiss National Bank chief Thomas Jordan said. "The effects of monetary policy measures can wane with duration and dosage." "Interest rates ... cannot continue to be lowered into negative territory without at some point precipitating a flight to cash," he added.

BUBBLES, ZOMBIES

Low rates and big central bank asset buys, a key part of unconventional policy, fuel asset price bubbles, particularly for housing, and keep poorly functioning "zombie" firms alive through access to cheap credit, slowly eroding competitiveness.

Low rates also depress bank profits, eventually reducing banks ability to lend, while quantitative easing disrupts markets, reducing liquidity and limiting market access. With China, Japan, the ECB and Switzerland all seeking a weaker exchange rate, banks are facing the risk of an open currency war, losing their ability to boost prices and competitiveness through devaluation. "Central banks should rethink their strategy," said Michael Heise, chief economist of Allianz, an insurer and one of the world's biggest investors. "The power of the central banks is limited. We have been over reliant on central banks to fix the problem but it is not under their control."

Indeed, this time many of the shocks are external, such as slowing emerging market growth and deflationary pressures from low oil prices. These shocks are difficult to counter and weak PMI and confidence indicators in Europe suggest that growth is already taking a hit, despite a 1.5 trillion euro stimulus program from the ECB.

Help could come from fiscal spending but the G20 meeting highlighted that few governments have room to manoeuvre and the those which could spend more, such as Germany, made it clear they are not going to. That leaves central banks stuck with a need to act and the ECB is almost certain to ease policy on March 10, delivering a small rate cut and a few changes to its assets buys, moves well short of a quantum leap. Still, if a global crisis flared up again, central banks still have a few powerful, though controversial and potentially illegal tools left.

Economists say that central banks could force commercial lenders to offer loans at a negative interest rate in return for guaranteed earnings, stimulating both growth and investment. That would force central banks to take big losses.

They say a last resort would be to offer "helicopter money", free cash provided to all euro zone citizens with the aim of stimulating spending and inflation.

This was suggested by former Fed chairman Ben Bernanke in 2002 as an effective way to fight deflation but European policymakers have not seriously discussed the idea. It would face fierce resistance from conservative countries like Germany, where even asset purchases have been challenged in court, likely leading to years of legal and political challenges.

It would also be questionable as domestic demand in the euro area is holding up well and cheap central bank money is already providing liquidity. — Reuters

BUFFETT SAYS US ECONOMY WEAKER THAN HE EXPECTED BUT GROWING

OMAHA: Billionaire Warren Buffett says the US economy appears weaker than he thought it would be as recently as last fall, but that doesn't change his optimistic long-term view of the country's prospects. Buffett appeared on CNBC yesterday after releasing his annual letter to Berkshire Hathaway shareholders over the weekend. Buffett says the collapse in oil prices will be good overall for the American economy because consumers will have more money to spend.

But he says the negative effects of falling crude prices hit the oil industry immediately in terms of lost jobs and reduced company values. Buffett says the benefit to Americans trickles in slowly every time they fill up their gas tanks. Buffett's letter, which reviews the operations of the conglomerate over the previous year, is one of the most widely read business reports. — AP



OMAHA: Berkshire Hathaway Chairman and CEO Warren Buffett smiles while touring the exhibit floor before presiding over the annual shareholders meeting in Omaha. — AP

WORLD STOCKS RETREAT ON LACK OF G20 ACTION

LONDON: European and Asian stock markets slid yesterday after a key weekend meeting of finance ministers failed to quash concerns about stalling global growth.

"European equities are trading lower on the back of... the G20 meeting concluding in Shanghai without any major breakthrough where stimulating global growth is concerned,"

said Markus Huber, a trader at City of London Markets.

"Souping the mood somewhat not only in Asia but also in Europe is the fact that China has once again fixed its currency lower... This does not only keep the spotlight on a slowing Chinese economy but also creates further uncertainty going forward."

Pressure has been mounting on central

bankers to do more to stimulate growth and reassure investors after financial markets posted one of the worst starts to the year in living memory.

Back in Europe, Irish Prime Minister Enda Kenny faced a struggle to form a new govern-

ment after apparently failing to win a majority, as counting continued after a weekend vote marked by anger against austerity.

"The Irish bond market reaction has been remarkably muted," said Brenda Kelly, head analyst at traders London Capital Group, noting however that this could be more down to expected stimulus by the ECB.

"It could be argued some of these (pre-weekend) gains were as a result of some optimism about this weekend's events in Shanghai as G20 finance ministers met to discuss the global economy," said Michael Hewson, chief market analyst at CMC Markets.

Asian shares fall

Asian stocks broadly fell yesterday, with Shanghai ending at a month-low and Tokyo diving into the red after a G20 meeting failed to ease concerns about stalling global growth.

The weakening yuan also hit sentiment after China's central bank set it at a four-week low even after its chief said there was "no basis" for the currency to keep falling.

Seoul lost 0.18 percent, Sydney closed flat and Hong Kong dropped 1.30 percent,

while European markets fell at the open. Ray Attrill, National Australia Bank's global co-head of foreign exchange strategy in Sydney, described the G20 as "underwhelming".

European and Asian equities rose on Friday, as hopes grew that the world's top 20 economies would agree to unleash their monetary firepower at a two-day meeting in Shanghai.

But G20 ministers disagreed over the best way to stem the turmoil, and the final text did not include the call for coordinated action for which many had hoped.

Dollar strength returns

Traders said the focus in China would now shift to the National People's Congress, the meeting of its rubber-stamp parliament, beginning on Saturday.

The economy expanded by one percent in the final quarter of the year, the Commerce Department said Friday, surprising analysts by revising up its previous estimate of 0.7 percent.

Daily Kuwait Stock Exchange Report

Monday 29 February 2016

Table with 6 columns: Index, Change, Closing, Last Closing, High, Low. Rows include Price index, Weighted Index, KXS 15.

Table with 2 columns: Volume, Value (KWD), Number of Trades. Values: 138,827,464; 11,151,246; 3,315.

Table with 7 columns: Security, High, Low, Volume, Value (KD), Trades, Last, Change. Rows include MARIN, IKARUS, IPG, NAPESCO, ENERGYH, GPI, ABAR.

Table with 7 columns: Security, High, Low, Volume, Value (KD), Trades, Last, Change. Rows include KFOUC, BPCC, ALKOUT, ALQURAIN.

Table with 7 columns: Security, High, Low, Volume, Value (KD), Trades, Last, Change. Rows include KCEM, REFRI, CABLE, SHIP, PCEM, PAPER, MRC, ACICO, GGMC, HCC, KPAK, KBMMC, NICBM, EQUIPMENT, NCCI, GYPSUM, SALBOOKH, AGLTY, EDU, CLEANING, CITYGROUP, KGL, KPCP, HUMANSOFT, NAFAS, SAFWAN, GFC, MAYADEEN, CGC, MTCC, UPAC, ALAFCO, MUBARRAD, LOGISTICS, SCEM, QCEM, QCEM, FCME, RKWC, SPEC, Industrials.

Table with 7 columns: Security, High, Low, Volume, Value (KD), Trades, Last, Change. Rows include KSH, NSH, PAPCO, CATT, DANAH, POULT, FOOD, Consumer Goods.

Table with 7 columns: Security, High, Low, Volume, Value (KD), Trades, Last, Change. Rows include MHC, ATC, YIACO, Health Care.

Table with 7 columns: Security, High, Low, Volume, Value (KD), Trades, Last, Change. Rows include KCIN, KHOT, SULTAN, CABLETV, EYAS, IFHR, OULAFUEL, MUNTAAZAHAT, JAZEERA, SOOR, FUTUREKID, ALNAWADI, ALRAI, ZIMAH, UFIF, KOUTFOOD, Mezzan, Consumer Services.

Table with 7 columns: Security, High, Low, Volume, Value (KD), Trades, Last, Change. Rows include ZAIN, OOREDOO, HITSTELEC, VIVA, Telecommunications.

Table with 7 columns: Security, High, Low, Volume, Value (KD), Trades, Last, Change. Rows include NBK, GBK, CBK, ABK, ALMUTAHED, KIB, BURJ, KFIN, BOUBYAN, AUB, ITHMR, WARABANK, Banks.

Table with 7 columns: Security, High, Low, Volume, Value (KD), Trades, Last, Change. Rows include KINS, GINS, AINS, WINS, KUWAITRE, FTI, WETHAQ, BKIKWT, Insurance.

Table with 7 columns: Security, High, Low, Volume, Value (KD), Trades, Last, Change. Rows include SOKOUK, KRE, URC, NRE, SRE, TAM, AREEC, MASSALEH, ARABREC, ERESCO, MBANEE, INJAZZAT, INVESTORS, IRC, ALTUARIA, SANAM, AAYANRE, AQAR, ALAQARIA, MAZAYA, ADNC, THEMAR, TIJARA, TAAMEER, ARKAN, ARGAN, ABYAR, MUNSHAAT, FIRSTDUBAI, KBT, REAM, MENA, ALMUDON, MARAKEZ, REMAL, MASHAER, Real Estate.

Table with 7 columns: Security, High, Low, Volume, Value (KD), Trades, Last, Change. Rows include KINV, FACIL, IFA, NINV, KPROJ, COAST, SECH, SGC, ARKAN, MARKAZ, KMEFIC, ALAMAN, ALOLA, ALMAL, GIH, AAYAN, BAYANINV, OSOUL, KFC, KAMCO, NIH, ISKAN, MADAR, ALDEERA, ALSALAM, EKTTITAB, ALMADINA, NOOR, TAMINV, EXCH, TAIBA, KSHC, STRATEGIA, ASIYA, GNAHC, AMWAL, ALMUTIAZ, MANAZEL, NIND, BIHC, SENERGY, AGHC, KPCP, TAHSILAT, JEERANH, EKHHOLDING, GFH, INOVEST, Financial Services.

Table with 7 columns: Security, High, Low, Volume, Value (KD), Trades, Last, Change. Rows include ASOS, OSOS, FUTURE, HAYATCOMM, Technology.

Table with 7 columns: Security, High, Low, Volume, Value (KD), Trades, Last, Change. Rows include BAREEQ, AFAQ, ALSHAMMEL, SAFRE, AJWAN, MASAKEN, DALGAN, ALEID, MIDAN, FLEX, THURAYA, KCLNIC, AMAR, Parallel Market.

Table with 7 columns: Security, High, Low, Volume, Value (KD), Trades, Last, Change. Rows include KINS, GINS, AINS, WINS, KUWAITRE, FTI, WETHAQ, BKIKWT, Insurance.

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For more information, call Global Investment House on 1 80 42 42, www.globalinv.net



Table with 6 columns: Index, Previous Close, Last Price, Change, Daily Performance %, Yearly Performance %. Rows include Dow Jones, NASDAQ, SBP 500, Financial Times, DAX, CAC 40, Swiss, Nikkei 225, Topix, Hang Seng, Straits Times.

Table with 6 columns: Index, Previous Close, Last Price, Change, Daily Performance %, Yearly Performance %. Rows include Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia.

Table with 8 columns: Currency, Kuwaiti Dinar, Saudi Riyal, US Dollar, Euro, Sterling Pound, Swiss Franc, Japanese Yen, Australian Dollar. Rows include Kuwait Dinar, Saudi Riyal, US Dollar, Euro, Sterling Pound, Swiss Franc, Japanese Yen, Australian Dollar.

Table with 8 columns: Currency, US Dollar, Kuwaiti Dollar, Saudi Riyal, Bahraini Dinar, Qatari Riyal, Omani Riyal, Emirates Dirham, Egyptian Pound. Rows include US Dollar, Kuwaiti Dinar, Saudi Riyal, Bahraini Dinar, Qatari Riyal, Omani Riyal, Emirates Dirham, Egyptian Pound.

Table with 6 columns: Currency, 1-Week, 1-Month, 3-Month, 6-Month, 1-Year. Rows include Kuwaiti Dinar, US Dollar, Euro, Sterling Pound, Swiss Franc, Australian Dollar, Canadian Dollar.

Table with 5 columns: Country, 2-Year, 5-Year, 10-Year, 30-Year. Rows include United States, Europe, United Kingdom.

Table with 6 columns: Index, Previous Close, Last Price, Change, Daily Performance %, Yearly Performance %. Rows include Kuwait Oil, Brent, West Texas, Gold, Silver.

Source: National Bank of Kuwait



VIVA CONCLUDES ITS PARTICIPATION IN MOBILE WORLD CONGRESS 2016

KUWAIT: Viva, Kuwait's fastest-growing and most developed telecom operator, concluded successfully its participation in Mobile World Congress 2016 organized by Group Special Mobile Association "GSMA", held in Barcelona between 22 and 25 February 2016.

VIVA is always anxious to participate in such events focusing on technology, to update its products and services to meet the customers' expectations, and foster its leader-

ship in the telecom arena.

VIVA's delegation from different divisions, Technology, Marketing, Sales and Services, was present at the congress through STC's Booth, where all VIVA's achievements since inception has been displayed, in addition to the latest offers, services and products.

VIVA reaped several awards for excellence in the Kuwaiti telecom sector in 2015, including "Best Industry Call Center" and "Best

Medium Help Desk" from Insights - Middle East Call Center Awards 2015, the only Call Centre dedicated, Professional Services Organization in the Middle East.

Up to 2200 companies from around the world will participate in this congress, specialized in telecommunications, internet and technology, in addition to more than 90 thousands visitors who will experience the latest in the mobile industry.

VIVA is the fastest-growing telecom operator in Kuwait. Launched in December 2008, VIVA makes things Possible for its customers by transforming communication, information and entertainment experiences. The company has rapidly established an unrivalled position in the market through its customer centric approach. VIVA's quest is to be the mobile brand of choice in Kuwait by being transparent, engaging, energetic and fulfilling. VIVA

continues to take a considerable share of the market by offering an innovative range of best value products, services and content propositions; a state of the art, nationwide network and world-class service. VIVA offers internet speeds of more than 100 Mbps, due to the implementation of the most advanced fourth generation (4G LTE) network in Kuwait resulting in superior coverage, performance and reliability.



TOKYO: Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, right, chats with lawmakers at the lower house of parliament in Tokyo yesterday. —AP

JAPAN FACTORY OUTPUT RISES FOR FIRST TIME IN 3 MONTHS

TOKYO: Japan yesterday posted its first factory output expansion in three months, official data showed, offering some rare good news after a string of weak figures threw cold water on recovery hopes. The upbeat figures—a 3.7 percent rise on-month in January—comes as investors look for clues about the state of the world's number three economy.

Disappointing inflation numbers last week stirred speculation the Bank of Japan will have to unleash more monetary easing to boost prices and growth. Japanese businesses have remained cautious over investing in their businesses and offering significant wage increases, citing the uncertain outlook.

The once-powerhouse economy shrank in the October-December period, Japan's second quarterly contraction in 2015. The bad news stretched into January when the country swung back into a trade deficit as exports to key market China plunged, dealing another blow to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's bid to kick-start the economy.

"It's sign that production is improving, albeit at a slow pace," Hidenobu Tokuda, senior economist of Mizuho Research Institute, said of the industrial production figures.

"But the export trend is still not very strong given the downside risks for the global economy... If the US economy picks up, that will help Japanese exports."

Slowing global growth, particularly in number two economy China, and a slump in oil prices have seen financial markets suffer one of their worst starts to the year in living memory.

Some predicted Japan's positive indus-

trial production figures will not last, as separate data Monday showed retail sales fell slightly more than expected last month. "The rebound in industrial production in January is unlikely to assuage concerns about the health of Japan's economy," Marcel Thieliant from research house Capital Economics said in a commentary.

"This jump in activity should be reversed soon." Last month, central bank policymakers shocked markets by resorting to an unprecedented negative interest rate policy, which aims to boost lending by penalising banks for storing excess reserves in the BoJ.

The move was widely panned as a desperate bid to counter Japan's slowdown after earlier monetary easing efforts failed to cement a sustained recovery in the economy.

With his growth program limping along and the BoJ struggling to hit an ambitious two-percent inflation target, Abe must decide whether to follow through with another sales tax hike next year. The rise is seen as crucial to containing Japan's massive national debt, but it could dent consumer spending and hurt an already fragile economy. A consumption tax hike in 2014 pushed Japan into a brief recession. Abe's program was also shaken by the bloodbath on equity markets at the start of this year and a resurgent yen, which threatened to dent companies' overseas profits.

A poll published yesterday by the leading Nikkei business daily found 50 percent of voters do not approve of Abe's growth plans, against 31 percent who are in favor. That is the largest percentage of naysayers since February last year. —AFP

CHINA ASSURES US NO CURRENCY DEVALUATION, PUSHING REFORMS CB FIXES YUAN AT 4-WEEK LOW DESPITE PLEDGE

BEIJING: China's premier told visiting US Treasury Secretary Jacob Lew yesterday his government is pressing ahead with painful reforms to shrink bloated coal and steel industries that are a drag on its slowing economy and ruled out devaluing its currency as a short-cut to boosting exports.

Premier Li Keqiang's comments to Lew yesterday were in line with a joint declaration by financial officials from the Group of 20 biggest rich and developing economies who met over the weekend in Shanghai. They pledged to avoid devaluations to boost sagging trade and urged governments to speed up reforms to boost slowing global growth.

Beijing is under pressure to reassure global financial markets it has its economy under control following stock and currency turmoil. The G20 finance officials' declaration that global growth was still on track despite signs it may be slowing again appeared to fall flat: share prices fell in most Asian markets yesterday, with the Shanghai benchmark dropping as much as 4.4 percent to close down 2.9 percent at 2,687.98.

Li told Lew that China is moving ahead with a long-range plan to squeeze excess production capacity out of industries where supply exceeds demand, according to a deputy Chinese finance minister, Zhu Guangyao. He said regulators would focus first on steel and coal, huge industries with millions of workers.

In a report in mid-February, the European Union Chamber of Commerce in China complained the ruling Communist Party's failure to eliminate unneeded production capacity in industries including steel, cement and glass has worsened China's economic slowdown.

Steel producers have responded to the glut by slashing export prices, hurting sales by foreign competitors. That prompted a protest Feb. 14 by thousands of steelworkers in Brussels, seat of the European Union.

"Premier Li Keqiang told Secretary Lew that as China moves forward in reducing overcapacity, we will focus on two areas, the steel and coal sectors," said Zhu. "And in the process of reducing overcapacity, we will properly handle the issue of unemployment."

The ruling party is in the midst of a marathon effort to replace a worn-out growth model based on trade, investment and heavy industry with a more self-sustaining expansion driven by con-

sumer spending. Growth in the world's second-largest economy slowed last year to a 25-year low of 7.3 percent and is expected to decline further this year.

In coal, regulators expect to eliminate some 1.8 million jobs, the minister of human resources, Yi Weimin, said at a separate event Monday. That would be equivalent to about 17 percent of the 10.3 million people the China National Coal Association said last year are employed by the industry.

pledges to avoid devaluing its yuan to boost exports, according to Zhu. A key concern of financial markets, despite repeated Chinese denials, is that Beijing plans to allow its yuan to weaken further following a surprise introduction of a new mechanism in August to set its state-controlled exchange rate.

Yuan rate

China's central bank yesterday fixed its rate for the yuan currency at a four-week low, data



BEIJING: People at a street market on the outskirts of Beijing yesterday. —AFP

In steel, regulators have eliminated some 90 million tons of production capacity over the past three years and plan to close another 150 million tons in the next three to five years, according to Zhu. China's steel production last year was about 800 million tons, or half the world total.

Beijing announced a 100 billion yuan (\$15 billion) fund last week to cushion the blow to workers who lose their jobs in the restructuring and help them find new jobs.

"We believe this fund will play a very important role in this process," Zhu said. Li affirmed Chinese

showed, despite comments by chief Zhou Xiaochuan that there was no basis for further depreciation.

The People's Bank of China (PBoC) set the yuan at 6.5452 to \$1.0, down 0.17 percent from Friday, according to the China Foreign Exchange Trade System. The fix was the weakest since February 3, previous figures showed. The weaker currency hurt sentiment on the stock market, with the benchmark Shanghai Composite Index closing down nearly three percent on Monday after dropping as much as 4.63 percent. —Agencies

EUROZONE INFLATION FALL HEIGHTENS PRESSURE ON ECB

BRUSSELS: Eurozone inflation in February plunged sharply back into negative territory, data showed yesterday, in the clearest sign yet that several rounds of stimulus measures by the European Central Bank are not working. The ECB is under huge pressure to revive prices and the economy in the single currency zone, with many of the 19 national governments that use the euro still not delivering a convincing recovery three years after the eurozone debt crisis.

The steep drop to negative 0.2 percent came in well below analysts' forecast of zero percent inflation, which is already much lower than the ECB's official two-percent target.

This was a big fall from a revised rise of 0.3 percent inflation just a month before. The sharp nosedive puts the eurozone into negative territory for the first time since

September and dashes hopes that unprecedented efforts to boost prices by the ECB were slowly having an effect in Europe.

"February's drop... back into negative territory intensifies the pressure on the ECB to announce a decisive increase in its policy support after it meets next week," said Jennifer McKeown, European economist at Capital Economics.

'Focus minds'

The eurozone has been drifting in and out of deflation since December 2014, unable to shake fears that Europe has entered a long-term period of falling prices and low growth that has plagued Japan for nearly two decades.

While cheaper prices may at first seem a good thing to households, in the long term they demonstrate weaker demand and a lack of confidence by consumers causing more deflation, lower wages and even

recession. Falling oil prices and slowing economic growth in China and other emerging economies are weighing on the headline rate of inflation in the 19-country area that uses the European single currency.

Eurostat said energy prices in February fell by 8.0 percent, after a far slower decline of 5.4 percent a month before. "Today's deflation surprise will focus minds again on the negatives of low inflation," said Teunis Brosens, an analyst at ING Bank in the Netherlands.

Low inflation "is especially bad for debt-laden households, businesses and governments in southern Europe, which will have little scope to inflate away" their debt burden, he said.

'Seals the deal'

The ECB holds its monthly policy meeting on March 10, and the return of deflation will increase speculation that bank chief Mario

Draghi will announce a further effort to reverse the fall in prices.

"The ECB will be most worried as eurozone core inflation narrows to 0.7 percent in February from 1.0 percent in January," said IHS Economist Howard Archer, referring to the closely watched inflation measure that strips out energy and other volatile prices.

"(This) ramps up pressure for major March stimulus," he said. The ECB has already rolled out a range of different policy measures to help get the eurozone economy back on its feet, most recently a controversial program of bond purchases known as quantitative easing or QE.

Draghi insisted earlier this month the policies were working and that the ECB "will not hesitate to act" if more effort is needed. "Today's weak core inflation... pretty much seals the deal on additional monetary easing," said ING's Brosens. —AFP

HEDGE FUNDS TURN BULLISH ON BRENT BUT NOT WTI

LONDON: Hedge funds are turning more positive about the outlook for crude oil prices, according to the latest positioning data from regulators and exchanges. Hedge funds and other money managers held a combined net long position in the three main crude oil futures and options contracts amounting to 383 million barrels on Feb. 23.

The combined net long position has increased in eight of the last 11 weeks from a recent low of 230 million barrels on Dec 8. But the increase in hedge fund and other money manager net long positions has been

concentrated in Brent rather than WTI.

The net long position in Brent futures and options traded on ICE Futures has jumped by more than 100 million barrels to 320 million barrels from 183 million barrels. The net long position in WTI futures and options traded on ICE and the New York Mercantile Exchange has risen less than 20 million barrels to 63 million barrels from 47 million barrels. Extreme pessimism about the near-term outlook for prices, which reached its height in December and early January, seems to have dissipated a little. —Reuters

EMC DECLARES 2016 THE 'YEAR OF ALL-FLASH' FOR PRIMARY STORAGE

DUBAI: EMC Corporation (NYSE:EMC) yesterday announced a quantum leap forward in its enterprise storage strategy with major additions to the industry's leading all-flash storage solutions to address mixed, consolidated and the world's most performance-intensive enterprise workloads. Complementing the industry-leading XtremIO all flash array, today's announcement of EMC's flagship VMAX(i) All Flash(i) enterprise data services platform and EMC(i) DSSD(tm) D5(tm) Rack-Scale Flash solution (see related news releases linked above) underscores EMC's commitment to all flash arrays for primary storage. EMC's flash portfolio is designed to address virtually any enterprise data center use case, enabling the Modern Data Center. By 2020, EMC estimates that all storage used for production applications will be flash-based; traditional disk will

primarily be used for archive and content depots only.

EMC's all-flash portfolio is purpose-built to address virtually any enterprise data center use case:

- XtremIO(i) all-flash arrays for accelerating and consolidating mixed block storage workloads such as databases, analytics, server virtual machines, and virtual desktop infrastructures that require consistent and predictable performance with sub-millisecond latencies. XtremIO is designed to address most high-end enterprise workloads with some of the industry's best inline data compression and de-duplication capabilities for improved capacity economics.
- VMAX All Flash for consolidating mixed block and file workloads that require up to "six-nines" of enterprise availability, rich data

services, IBM mainframe and iSeries support, and scalable storage growth. VMAX All Flash offers the gold standard of replication, recovery, data services and quality of service, re-engineered with all-flash to deliver up to four petabytes (PB) of storage capacity.

- DSSD D5 Rack-Scale Flash - a new flash storage category with breakthrough performance - for the most performance-intensive, traditional and next-generation use cases that require microsecond latencies such as real-time analytics for Hadoop and Oracle.
- VNX(i) Series arrays provide EMC's simplest and most economic all-flash offering. The all-flash VNXe starts at less than \$25K and offers support for file and block workloads for midrange enterprises and departmental workloads. EMC's Converged Platforms division, VCE will deliver new Converged

Infrastructure offerings based on these all-flash building blocks.

Solid State Drives Overtake Traditional Disk for Primary Storage

As the first vendor to offer Solid State Drives (SSDs) in enterprise storage arrays in 2008, EMC has continuously innovated and evolved its storage portfolio to deliver products that address customer needs for performance, reliability and rich data services at competitive price points. Both the technology and market evolution of SSDs has reached the point of making all-flash arrays cost-effective for general-purpose enterprise data storage. EMC will continue leveraging a variety of flash media in its all-flash products including 3D NAND and future cutting-edge flash technologies. According to IDC's most recent

Worldwide Quarterly Disk Storage Systems Tracker2, EMC is the market share leader in all-flash storage solutions at 39%, more than the next three competitors combined and is also the market share leader in enterprise storage solutions that include both all-flash and hybrid flash storage arrays. EMC storage solutions based on hybrid configurations will be offered primarily for bulk data storage capacity and archive requirements.

Modern Pricing and Packaging for the Modern Data Center

EMC is extending its Xpect More Program to offer customers the unique combination of a lifetime flat-price maintenance model and lifetime flash endurance protection to enable simplified planning, deployment and management for the new VMAX All Flash array.



Japan's Robot Taxi aims to forge partnerships with carmakers to develop a driverless taxi service in time for the 2020 Olympics.

JAPAN DRIVERLESS TAXI START-UP EYES ALLIANCE WITH AUTOMAKERS

FUJISAWA: Japan's Robot Taxi aims to forge partnerships with carmakers to develop a driverless taxi service in time for the 2020 Olympics, the technology company said, holding its first tests on public roads and joining a global race to develop self-driving cars. The joint venture between gaming software maker DeNA Co and robotics developer ZMP has set the 2020 Games in Tokyo as a target to develop software to operate driverless cars and an online service to ferry athletes and tourists between Olympic venues and the city's transport hubs. On Monday, it launched an initial 10-day field test in which selected residents of Fujisawa, around 45 km (28 miles) south of Tokyo, can summon a Robot Taxi online or from their smartphones, to take them to a local supermarket and back home. The test uses Toyota Motor Corp Estima minivans equipped with its "Robovision" stereo camera and data processing system, although the company has said that it is open to working with all carmakers to supply vehicles.

Robot Taxi plans to take on Japan's famously immaculate cabs in urban centres and remote, rural towns where public transport for elderly residents is limited. The company plans to focus on

systems development rather than building vehicles from scratch. "It's difficult to make a car from the ground up when you consider production cost and safety, and we have the world's best automakers already doing that here in Japan," Robot Taxi Chairman Hisashi Taniguchi told reporters. "Our strategy is to keep our costs low by partnering with automakers for the hardware, and to keep those production costs low while we create both the technology and the service," he added.

The world's largest automakers are competing with technology firms to create self-driving and driverless cars, with companies from Google to Toyota investing heavily in developing both hardware and software.

General Motors said in January it would invest \$500 million in Lyft Inc and laid out plans to develop an on-demand network of self-driving cars with the ride-sharing service. The Japanese government pledged late last year to ease regulations to allow for self-driving cars to be tested on more public roads. Still, from the standpoint of regulation and development, Japan is seen lagging behind other countries including Germany and the United States. —Reuters

IN SWEDEN'S FIRST UNMANNED FOOD STORE, ALL YOU NEED IS A PHONE

VIKEN: It was a chaotic, late-night scramble to buy baby food with a screaming toddler in the backseat that gave Robert Ilijason the idea to open Sweden's first unmanned convenience store.

Home alone with his hungry son, Ilijason had dropped the last baby food jar on the floor, and had to drive 20 minutes from the small town of Viken in southern Sweden to find a supermarket that was open.

Now the 39-year-old IT specialist runs a 24-hour shop with no cashier.

Customers simply use their cellphones to unlock the door with a swipe of the finger and scan their purchases. All they need to do is register for the service and download an app. They get charged for their purchases in a monthly invoice.

The shop has basics like milk, bread, sugar, canned food, diapers and other products that you expect to find in a small convenience store. It doesn't have tobacco or medical drugs because of the risk of theft. Alcohol cannot be sold in convenience stores in Sweden.

"My ambition is to spread this idea to other villages and small towns," said Ilijason. "It is incredible that no one has thought of his before."

He hopes the savings of having no staff will help bring back small stores to the countryside. In recent decades, such stores have been replaced by bigger supermarkets often many miles (kilometers) away.

Ilijason receives deliveries at the shop and stacks products on the shelves. Then he lets the customers do the rest.

He has installed six surveillance cameras to discourage shoplifting in the 480-square-foot (45 square-meter) store. Also, he is alerted by a text message if the front door stays open for longer than eight seconds or if someone tries to break it open.

"I live nearby and can always run down here with a crowbar," Ilijason said laughing, but added that hasn't been necessary since the store opened in January.

A bigger challenge has been getting some of the elderly residents in Viken, a town of 4,200 people, to get the hang of the technology involved.

Tuve Nilsson, 75, said there were many more shops in the town when he moved here with his family in 1976. He welcomed Ilijason's new store, saying it could be convenient for elderly people living alone.

"But if they can manage this (technology), I don't know," Nilsson said. "Sometimes I don't understand it."

Ilijason is considering other ways to unlock the door that wouldn't require using an app. He's ruled out face-recognition or fingerprint scanners, but is thinking of installing a credit card reader like some banks use. He's also considering having one person man the store for a few hours a day to help customers who aren't comfortable with modern technology.

Other customers loved the speed of the no-service store. Raymond Arvidsson, a friend of Ilijason's, did his shopping in less than a minute. "No queues," he said, smiling. "Quick in, quick out. I like." —AP



Customer Raymond Arvidsson takes sweets from the display at the no-staff, app shop in the southern Sweden village of Viken in this photo dated Jan. 27, 2016. Customers to the new general store need to register and download a cell phone app, then customers simply use their cellphones to unlock the door with a swipe of the finger and scan their purchases, then they get charged for their purchases in a monthly invoice. —AP



Swedish IT entrepreneur Robert Ilijason shows how to use a cell phone to scan a purchase at the no-staff, app shop in the southern Sweden village of Viken in this photo dated Jan. 27, 2016. Customers to the new general store need to register and download a cell phone app, then customers simply use their cellphones to unlock the door with a swipe of the finger and scan their purchases then they get charged for their purchases in a monthly invoice. —AP

'DROIDCON' - GCC'S BIGGEST ANDROID DEVELOPER CONFERENCE RETURNS TO UAE

DUBAI: Returning to the UAE for its second edition, droidcon Dubai 2016 is a global conference series that focuses on individual networking opportunities for Android developers, while highlighting the latest advances and new technologies of all things Android. The conference will be held at the Impact Hub, Downtown Dubai, from 25-26 March.

droidcon Dubai is part of the global droidcon community that has seen an increasing number of conferences held worldwide each year, since 2009. To date, droidcon has also been held in Amsterdam, Bangalore, Berlin, Brussels, Bucharest, London, Madrid, Moscow, Murcia, Paris, Stockholm, Tunis, and Turin; however, such has been its success that new locations continue to be added.

The stated intention of the organisers of droidcon Dubai is to gather the UAE's tech community together - under one roof - to learn about the latest Android advances, hear about innovative new technologies from expert speakers and to network with people from across the tech and Android industry. The event is also expected to further drive the development of the UAE's start-up landscape by giving talented developers access to industry leaders, thereby encouraging new ideas, and nurturing innovation.

Having grown into one of the world's biggest tech events, with thousands of attendees every year across five continents, droidcon Dubai is expected to follow the success it has achieved at similar conferences

held in locations around the world.

The conference agenda for droidcon Dubai 2016 includes a host of expert speakers who will present on a wide range of topics relating to the latest developments in the Android community. These include speakers from Google, Skyscanner, Groupon, HRS and Shazam.

Additional slots for speakers are still available, so if there are Android developers or companies who wish to present then submissions for proposed topics will be accepted up to 6th March.

Speaking ahead of next month's event, droidcon founder and director of strategic orientation for the brand, Boris Jebsen said:

"We are tremendously excited to be bringing the GCC's biggest, community-driven, Android developer conference series back to the United Arab Emirates for the second time. Having already secured some of the world's top names in Android development as guest speakers, we are confident that developers and companies from the UAE and across the Gulf region will see this as the must-go-to event of the year - for their industry and individual networking opportunities."

According to Jensen, the concept of droidcon was formed in 2009 as an idea for supporting the Android platform and to draw attention to different parts of the community driven eco-system, including core development, embedded solutions, augmented reality, business solutions and games.

IBM TO BUY CYBER SECURITY FIRM RESILIENT SYSTEMS

NEW YORK: IBM Security plans to acquire private cyber security firm Resilient Systems, the computing giant said yesterday, as part of a move to expand its role in the incident response market.

The sale comes amid a consolidation in the cyber sector and a decline in valuations of public and private cyber firms. Some investors believe

the companies were overvalued after a host of headline-grabbing hacks against the U.S. government and major corporations increased interest in the market.

Terms of the deal were not disclosed. The acquisition is being announced during the RSA security conference in San Francisco and expected to close later this year subject to

regulatory review. IBM (IBM.N) said it intends to retain the roughly 100 employees working at Resilient Systems, including Chief Executive Officer John Bruce, a former vice president at Symantec, and Chief Technology Officer Bruce Schriener, a prominent cryptographer, security blogger and author.

"Our intent is all these guys are going to come on board," said Marc van Zadelhoff, general manager of IBM Security, told Reuters. "You acquire technology, but you really want to acquire people."

Known as Co3 Systems when it was founded in 2010, Resilient Systems has become a leading player in the high-demand field of incident response by helping private and government customers prepare for, detect and mitigate cyber breaches, said Jon Oltzik, senior principal analyst at Enterprise Strategy Group.

Incident response is "hot in the market," Oltzik said. "Customers are spending a lot of money on cybersecurity to address their shortcomings."

The acquisition comes against the backdrop of a U.S. cyber security market slogging through a funding slump, forcing some startups to sell themselves or cut spending.

IBM also said on Monday it is creating X-Force Incident Response Services, which will leverage Resilient Systems' technology and talent to help clients identify and respond to cyber threats.

The X-Force service will also rely on a new partnership with cyber firm Carbon Black, which IBM said will help its analysts conduct security forensics on compromised endpoint devices and discover where a breach first occurred. —Reuters





FILLMORE: This undated photo from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service shows Condor No. 255 wearing a GPS transmitter while perched near her nest in the Hopper Mountain National Wildlife Refuge. — AP

WILDLIFE SECRETS REVEALED WITH ADVANCED TRACKING DEVICES

BOISE, Idaho: Solar-powered trackers on wings have recorded California condors soaring to 15,000 feet, while locators attached to humpback whales have revealed 1,000-foot dives to underwater mountains. And GPS collars on Yellowstone grizzly bears are giving new insights into one of the most studied large carnivore populations in the world.

Technological advances in recent years have allowed what could be the most inquisitive Earth dweller of them all, humans, to invent ever more ingenious tracking devices to find out what their fellow inhabitants are up to.

"It's a large field that's developing very fast," said Alex Zerbini, a research biologist with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Mammal Laboratory in Seattle. "There are many types of tags being developed for many species of marine animals."

Better habitat management

Scientists say the trove of information thanks to ever smaller, tougher and more powerful tracking devices is leading to discoveries that could be used to make better wildlife and habitat management decisions. The devices are also revealing the secret lives of hard-to-study animals.

For example, Zerbini said, scientists recently discovered humpback whales diving to underwater mountains on a regular basis, and also making the dives during migrations. In Yellowstone National Park and the surrounding area, more sophisticated tracking devices on grizzly bears are providing information, notably on their ability to find food, that could be a factor in whether Endangered Species Act protections are lifted.

Scientists say whitebark pine, a key grizzly bear food source, has been diminishing due to insect infestation, possibly due to global warming. A recent study aimed at finding out if grizzlies are finding a replacement food source used more advanced GPS collars that could tell if a grizzly spending a long time in a specific area was guarding a dead carcass or napping.

"We were actually able to determine differences in the patterns between those types of activities," said Frank van Manen, leader of the Interagency Grizzly Bear Study Team. The results, he said, suggest grizzlies are relying more on carcasses and less on

whitebark pine in the fall when the tree produces edible, high calorie seeds just as the bears are trying to pack on weight before hibernation.

New information is also revealing the nuances of how wildlife interact with the environment. California condors soar high and land to feed on dead animals. But why do they climb to nearly 3 miles above the Earth?

New data, information

Tracking data shows that once the condors attain a high altitude, they take a long downhill glide, sloping in a specific direction toward a dead animal they've already fed on or to an area they have found dead animals in the past. One condor made a 70-mile flight, traveling 210 miles in a single day.

Joseph Brandt, a wildlife biologist with the US Fish and Wildlife Service at the Hopper Mountain National Wildlife Refuge in California, said wing flapping is inefficient for the birds that can weigh 25 pounds and have wingspans of 10 feet. Instead, they use rising currents of heated air called thermals to gain altitude. Tracking the birds suggests that flying conditions might be the primary factor dictating where condors live.

"Maybe they're finding food where the flying conditions are best," Brandt said. He said the new tracking information, along with meteorological data, is being used to create maps of areas with weather conditions suitable for condors as part of Fish and Wildlife's plan to continue recovery efforts of the federally protected bird. "We really see how the birds are using the topography," Brandt said. "We compare wind conditions to see how the bird is reacting in that kind of 3-D world."

Similar analysis involves how the behavior of Steller sea lions off Alaska is linked to ocean cycles. Many species of birds around the world are also being tracked, including long-billed curlews, and sage grouse in Idaho. The findings have led to more questions. For example, after learning that humpbacks dive to underwater mountains, scientists wanted to know why, Zerbini said. Are they feeding? Are they socializing? "It's always like that in science," he said. "The more you know, the more questions you have. Which is good. Then you can develop the technology specifically to address your new questions." — AP

NEW TWIST IN ADDICTION CRISIS: DEADLY PAINKILLER IMPOSTORS

POTENT PAINKILLER DISGUISED AS OTHER MEDICATIONS

COLUMBUS: Authorities are sounding the alarm about a new and deadly twist in the country's drug-addiction crisis in the form of a potent painkiller disguised as other medications. Tennessee officials say they've seen two dozen cases in recent months of pills marked as the less potent opiates oxycodone or Percocet that turned out to contain fentanyl, a far more powerful drug. One official likened the danger to users playing Russian roulette each time they buy a pill on the street.

In San Francisco, the health department blamed several overdoses last summer on look-alike Xanax containing fentanyl, while Canada has issued warnings about multiple recent cases of look-alike oxycodone pills containing fentanyl. And in suburban Cleveland, federal agents arrested a man this month after seizing more than 900 fentanyl pills marked like oxycodone tablets.

"These pills are truly a fatal overdose waiting to happen," said Carole Rendon, acting U.S. attorney in Cleveland. Because fentanyl is cheap to manufacture illicitly, dealers see a chance to make more money by disguising it as oxycodone, which typically can sell for more, she said. Look-alike pills were likely to blame for some of the county's 19 fentanyl-related overdose deaths that came just in January alone, said Dr. Thomas Gilson, the Cuyahoga County medical examiner. "People might otherwise say, 'I know I can abuse this much of oxycodone,' and they may be in for a really, really bad surprise when they find out that's fentanyl and not oxycodone," Gilson said.

Illegal markets

The drug, typically used for treatment of chronic pain in end-stage cancer patients, is 25 to 40 times more powerful than heroin. Properly prescribed, it's often applied through a skin patch. Fentanyl produced for the illegal street market comes from Mexico, while chemically similar components have been traced to China, according to the US Drug Enforcement Administration.



This undated photo provided by the Cuyahoga County Medical Examiner's Office shows fentanyl pills. — AP

In a second Ohio indictment, federal authorities have charged a man with obtaining fentanyl from China that killed an addict to whom it was sold in Akron. The DEA says fentanyl-related overdoses killed more than 700 people nationwide between late 2013 and early 2015.

Mimicry of other drugs is one way fentanyl is now being illicitly marketed, the agency said. "The fact that fentanyl has been found in this form should hopefully make people nervous that do abuse these types of opiate pills, that they could be getting their hands on something even more lethal," said DEA spokesman Rich Isaacson.

China announced in October it would regulate the sale and distribution of 116 chemical compounds used in the production of synthetic drugs, including acetyl-fentanyl. The problem of look-alike fentanyl comes as the country struggles to contain a drug overdose epidemic that began with illegal use of prescription

painkillers and developed into a heroin crisis. Ohio experienced 502 fentanyl-related deaths in 2014, up from 84 the year before. In all, 2,482 people in Ohio died from accidental overdoses in 2014, an 18 percent increase over the previous year.

Nationally, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says drug overdoses rose again in 2014, driven by surges in deaths from heroin and prescription painkillers. Overdose deaths in the US surpassed 47,000 - up 7 percent from the previous year.

Heroin deaths also continued to climb, by 28 percent to about 10,500. Despite these statistics and the danger of look-alike pills, addicts aren't always deterred, said Rendon, the acting US attorney. "When there is an overdose death, users do tend to flock to that drug dealer, because they think that he or she must have incredibly potent - either heroin or fentanyl or a combination thereof," she said. — AP

OBAMA ENCOURAGING YOUNG PEOPLE TO LEARN SCIENCE

WASHINGTON: President Barack Obama is launching a version of "take your child to work day" that's focused on America's science laboratories instead of its corporate workspaces. It's part of Obama's effort to encourage young people, especially girls and minorities, to pursue careers in the fields of science, technology, engineering and math.

More than 50 national labs in 20 states are opening their doors this week to approximately 5,000 elementary, middle and high school students to help spark interest by exposing them to the scientists, engineers and lab employees who carry out important work and research at facilities in their communities.

The students, including from communities aligned with Obama's "My Brother's Keeper" initiative, will participate in mentoring sessions, hands-on experiments and other activities. My Brother's Keeper is a public-private initiative started by Obama to help boys and young men of color stay on the right path. The White House Council on Women and Girls is also involved.

"National Week at the Labs" coincides with February's end of Black History Month and the start of Women's History Month in March. "It's an exciting time to think about how we're pulling all the children of our country into technology and STEM and the jobs of the future," Megan Smith, chief technology officer in the Office of



WASHINGTON: In this Feb 17, 2016 file photo, President Barack Obama speaks in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington. Obama is launching a version of "take your child to work day" focused on America's science laboratories instead of its corporate workspaces. — AP

Science and Technology Policy at the White House, told The Associated Press in a telephone interview.

She said some 600,000 US technology jobs, which pay significantly higher than the average

salary, are currently unfilled. At the White House on Monday, elementary school students from Baltimore and the District of Columbia are expected to participate in a science fair-type event. — AP

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ACK CELEBRATES KUWAIT'S NATIONAL, LIBERATION DAY

The Australian College of Kuwait (ACK) recently held a 2-day event at its campus in celebration of Kuwait's 55th National Day and the nation's 25th Liberation Day. Organized by ACK's Student Affairs department, with many representatives from the College's student clubs, staff members and students were treated to a wonderful showcase of traditional dancing by the 'Al-Qurain Group', in addition to numerous activities and a variety of traditional foods. Concluding the event, over a hundred students joined together to sign a massive Kuwaiti flag to express their love for the country and to symbolize unity under the nation's colors. The Student Affairs department aims to create a vibrant campus life and safe environment that contributes to ACK's students in different ways to push them towards excellence and success.

TIES ORGANIZES CLASSES ON PROPHET MUHAMMAD'S LIFE

The TIES Center cordially invites all those interested in our Thursday classes about Prophet Muhammad's life (Peace Be Upon Him) that will resume on March 3, when we will discuss Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) dream alluding to his visit to Makkah for Umrah (lesser pilgrimage), the Treaty of Hudaibiya, its causes, and Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) implementation of military tactics.

We will also discover why Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) camel knelt on his way to Hudaibiya, lessons elicited from

that, and some miracles performed by the Prophet (PBUH) during and after his journey to Hudaibiya.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was heartbroken because his people - the Quraish - were hostile to his message of peace, security and co-existence, but at Hudaibiya, he was able to seal a treaty with the them that paved the way for the Muslims to spread Islam in Arabia within few years. Finally, the Quraish came to realize that they should not underestimate Muhammad (PBUH) and his companions.



ICE SKATING RINK REOPENS

The main hall at the Ice Skating Rink has reopened after the conclusion of comprehensive maintenance works, said Saqer Al-Bader, Public Relations and Media Director, the Touristic Enterprises Company (TEC). The Ice Skating Rink welcomes visitors everyday on usual working hours between 8:30 am and 10:00 pm, divided on seven intermissions. The entrance ticket to the facility is sold for KD 1.5 per person (skiing boots included).



Saqer Al-Bader



First Lieutenant Talal Al-Houtari from the Interior Ministry's Relations and Security Media Department gave a lecture on traffic safety at the Center for Child Evaluation and Teaching.



The Al-Farsi International Kite Festival took place recently as part of Kuwait's 55th National Day and the nation's 25th Liberation Day celebrations. —Photos by Joseph Shagra

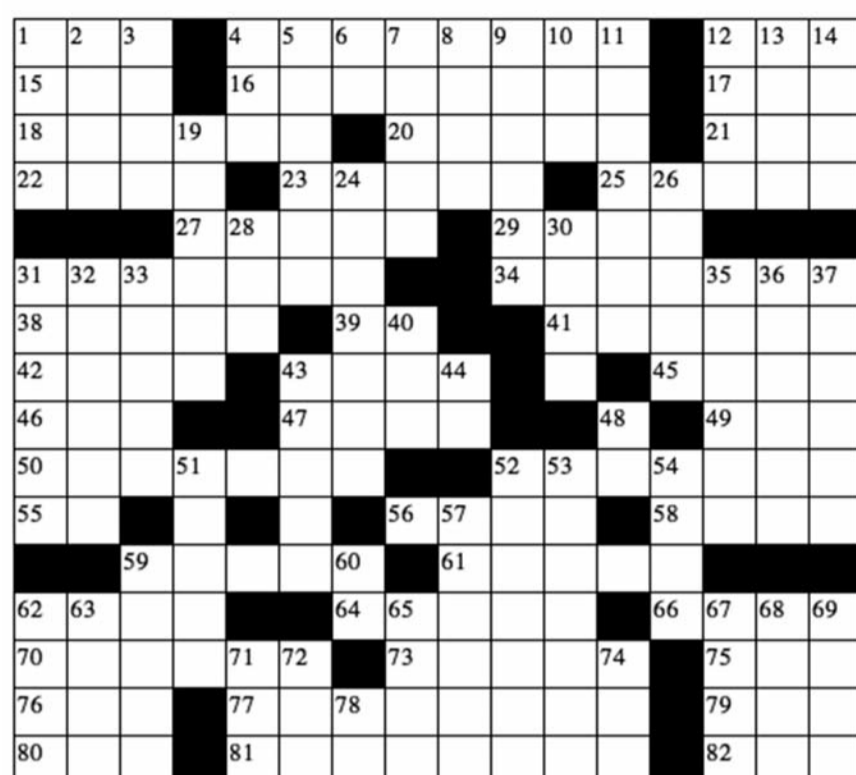


Farwaniya Governor Sheikh Faisal Al-Humoud Al-Malik Al-Sabah hosted a luncheon recently for representatives of state departments which participated in the governorate's National and Liberation Days celebrations.



German Ambassador to Kuwait Eugen Wollfarth inaugurated his country's section at the Kuwait House for National Works during Kuwait's celebrations of the National and Liberation Days. —Photos by Joseph Shagra

CROSSWORD 1182



ACROSS

- 1. The rate at which energy is drawn from a source that produces a flow of electricity in a circuit.
- 4. Any of various long-legged carrion-eating hawks of South and Central America.
- 12. A change in the electrical properties of the skin in response to stress or anxiety.
- 15. A river in north central Switzerland that runs northeast into the Rhine.
- 16. United States composer (born in Austria) and pianist noted for his interpretations of the works of Mozart and Beethoven and Schubert (1882-1951).
- 17. A flat wing-shaped process or winglike part of an organism.
- 18. A stiff chitinous seta or bristle especially of an annelid worm.
- 20. Brusque and surly and forbidding.
- 21. A rapid escape (as by criminals).
- 22. United States lawyer and politician who formulated a production code that prescribed the moral content of United States films from 1930 to 1966 (1879-1954).
- 23. Toward the inside of the cheek.
- 25. An anti-TNF compound (trade name Arava) that is given orally.
- 27. A small bottle that contains a drug (especially a sealed sterile container for injection by needle).
- 29. Not in action or at work.
- 31. (medicine) Pertaining to the surface of a body part.
- 34. An antibacterial drug (trade names Rifadin and Rimactane) used to treat tuberculosis.
- 38. A chock or bar wedged under a wheel or between the spokes to prevent a vehicle from rolling down an incline.
- 39. Being nine more than ninety.
- 41. A small overnight bag for short trips.
- 42. French philosopher (1909-1943).
- 45. A flat-bottomed volcanic crater that was formed by an explosion.
- 46. (Irish) Mother of the ancient Irish gods.
- 47. Made by polymerizing butadiene.
- 49. Being two more than fifty.
- 50. (Greek mythology) The goddess of divine retribution and vengeance.
- 55. A public promotion of some product or service.
- 56. One thousandth of a second.
- 58. Title for a civil or military leader (especially in Turkey).
- 61. Selected as the best.
- 62. God of fire.
- 64. Widely distributed lichens usually having a grayish or yellow pendulous freely branched thallus.
- 66. Type genus of the Alcidae comprising solely the razorbill.
- 70. A high-crowned black cap (usually made of felt or sheepskin) worn by men in Turkey and Iran and the Caucasus.
- 73. A city in southern Turkey on the Seyhan River.
- 75. An associate degree in applied science.
- 76. Being one more than two.
- 77. A cut of pork ribs with much of the meat trimmed off.
- 79. Government agency created in 1974 to license and regulate nuclear power plants.
- 80. A metric unit of volume or capacity equal to 10 liters.
- 81. A large estate in Spanish-speaking countries.
- 82. A doctor's degree in preventive medicine.

DOWN

- 1. (used of count nouns) Every one considered individually.

Yesterday's Solution



STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

There is a lot of passion behind what you say and think. You make quick decisions and you communicate with strength. Your lunch may be interesting today as you could have unexpected company you have choices to make. This is a productive time to be with others and it might be a wise idea to visit with co-worker friends but return to your work and work until you finish your day's work. You could come up with new ideas or styles to help make your home or professional life more agreeable. Visiting with friends this afternoon, you show an interest in exploring the realm of dreams and imagination. You can delve into most any secret or sensitive area and find the truth. Perhaps a new buy on a movie or on some fun music is available for this evening.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

You have an inner urge for order and organization and a great sense of responsibility. You are competent, ambitious and cool. There may be some reason to tend to some type of personal business and you may take a half day off at this time. This marks the coming of good times as far as career and social life are concerned. If you have not discovered this already, it seems your time of paying dues is over; real accomplishments and staying focused are important. You are a very hard worker and are driven to accomplish your goals. You may find yourself as a representative or possibly a politician when it comes to your community. It is easy for you to be an arbitrator, especially if you can remove your own emotional thinking. Try a new recipe.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

It may be your job is in a restaurant. You may work with the employees in the restaurant to help them understand special diets or problem children. You also probably have great compassion for the stray and lost animals in your city. You could easily become part of the help for feeding the animals in the city animal shelter. You may also want to be a part of the humane society in your area to create notices and pamphlets that will provide a public awareness in gaining help for the helpless animals. You seek to understand and improve relationships and you add positive, upbeat energy to whatever social gathering you attend this evening. Take advantage of this time because you may want to join in some group conversations. You may enjoy an evening walk.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Faith, optimism and a yearning to explore all kinds of new horizons are some of the focal points in your life. Travel, education and other ways to gain new knowledge and experience open new doors of opportunity. Religious, philosophical and cultural matters are likely to have a special appeal for you now; transmitting ideas on a broader scale brings gain. You, your friends, and possibly a few family members may volunteer at a soup kitchen to feed homeless people this afternoon. New groups are gathering later that will be able to take over and give you some rest. You and a couple of friends may be planning a shopping trip for tomorrow. Each of you has a list that requires different shops so an agreed time to meet at lunchtime or after work would be good.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

You may be alone most of this day-people just seem to drain your energies at this time. You may find yourself shopping, but not necessarily to purchase items-perhaps to investigate the new technical items on the market. Later this afternoon, you will feel more like being with others and perhaps, talking about all those new high-tech products you saw this morning. Ideas and technologies that change the way people live are a major new focus in your life. Uphold any obligations now-promises, errands, chores, etc. Someone is really depending on you to come through with your promises. Although your finances will look better later this year, it would be a good idea to tread lightly when it comes to any financial questions.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Your plans for today may have been clear-cut, but now an interruption has occurred. You might become a bit fuzzy in what you need to accomplish-you agree to help another department or another boss. Because you may not have firmed up plans for what you felt was now most important to accomplish, you may find yourself a little frustrated. However, one thing at a time and you will complete the tasks faster than you thought possible. The secret here is to listen and focus. At home this afternoon, you may find yourself knuckles deep in the dough for bread. You may have a new bread machine and are anxious to give bread to friends for sharing. Someone else may share by bringing a stew or soup and this evening there are smiles to share.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

Taking care of business is a major theme where your emotional orientation is concerned. You crave organization and practicality and you want to get things accomplished. This is the day you dive into those in-depth discussions and probing conversations that find you at your mental best. Your analytical abilities are at a high point. An early time of leaving work may help you cleaning up around your work station and leaving yourself notes for later. You aim to have a place for everything and everything in its place. Your home environment, friends and surroundings in general receive attention and encouragement. Your work or career is in real harmony with the rest of your life. There is a basic drive to appreciate life.



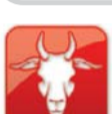
Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Business matters are your highest priority and today it is up to you to find a similar personality that will fit into your business and take your place for the time you will take on a vacation or business trip. You may or may not have the time to lead or teach this person what is needed so one idea would be to print the usual steps you take each day, as well as the usual ways to handle the common problems. You will more than likely appoint someone to be available to help. Now you can be secure. You draw emotional nourishment from ideals, friends and social involvement this afternoon and evening. There is a desire to break a few patterns from the past and there is a longing for the new, the different and perhaps, the unique. You enjoy fun times this evening.



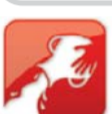
Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

You want to get many things accomplished today, but you may put aside work issues if you do not stay focused. Talking to a senior may help your understanding of an old work issue. There could be new projects waiting for your expertise. You might talk someone into finishing what you are involved with so you can begin something new. People seem more changeable than usual, including you. This feeling of change may even follow you around. Family announcements are thrilling. Negotiations may be in order before you can make much headway in many of your affairs, whether they are professional or personal; patience is needed during these short spurts. Trade chore responsibilities with members of your family this afternoon.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Learning what makes people tick is fun for you. Your instinctive orientation at this time is toward getting down to the basics and starting over from scratch. However, trying to figure things out when it comes to romance just now may be a bit premature. You may want answers, but the universe and perhaps the gal or guy in question, may not be ready to give up the answers. Keep your mind busy on those hobbies you wanted to organize. Of course, until the weather clears... This is certainly a good time to do the tax report. It is best to stay within your own little world today-tomorrow will be a better day to understand the people around you-including that special love relationship. Some kind of healing process is at work in your life now.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

If you are working and not in school this year or at home today, you will find you have a great deal of influence with other people. You make a positive difference in other people's lives. Preparing to apply for a loan or for credit in the next few days will help the results run smoothly. This may mean a request for real-estate sales, purchase of a car or some other large item. Take care not to become so involved in thinking about future events that you forget upcoming matters in the workplace. Health goals may take on importance. You may benefit from an older person's advice this afternoon. Neighbors or siblings have a big impact on your goals and make a big impression. This weekend is a good time to seal plans for a reunion or a trip with the family.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Exciting things happen now where marriage and close relationships are concerned. New members come into the family, new jobs, graduations, shower parties and of course, your very own important day. All are in good moods and feeling as if they have the world in their hands-even difficult situations seem to be open for quick and positive solutions. Business opportunities are in your future and you may certainly count on achieving quite a lot in your professional years ahead. After work you have an opportunity to enjoy a little get-together with friends. This evening is a very good time to communicate with some of the members in your family. Think about your accomplishments and enjoy celebrating!

WORD SEARCH

Hip-Hop Artists

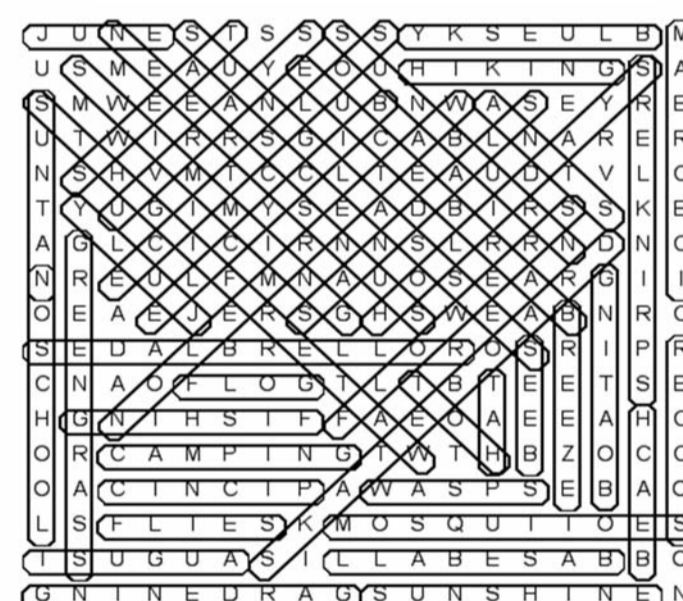
Find and circle all of the Hip-Hop Artists that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell the title of a Lauryn Hill song.



- AFRIKA BAMBATTA
- BRAND NUBIAN
- BUSTA RHYMES
- COOLIO
- CORMEGA
- CRAIG MACK
- DE LA SOUL
- DJ SHADOW
- ERICK SERMON
- FAT JOE
- FOXY BROWN
- GANG STARR
- GRANDMASTER FLASH
- HEAVY D
- KANYE WEST
- KILLARMY
- KURTIS BLOW
- LAURYN HILL
- LL COOL J
- MASTER P
- MISSY ELLIOTT
- MUGGS
- NATURE
- NOTORIOUS B.I.G.
- ONX
- QUEEN LATIFAH
- REDMAN
- SALT N PEPA
- SPOONIE GEE
- STETSASONIC
- THE ALCHEMIST
- THE FAT BOYS
- THE FUGEES
- THE PHARCYDE
- THE ROOTS
- TLC
- WILL SMITH
- WU-TANG CLAN
- WYCLEF JEAN

Yesterday Solution

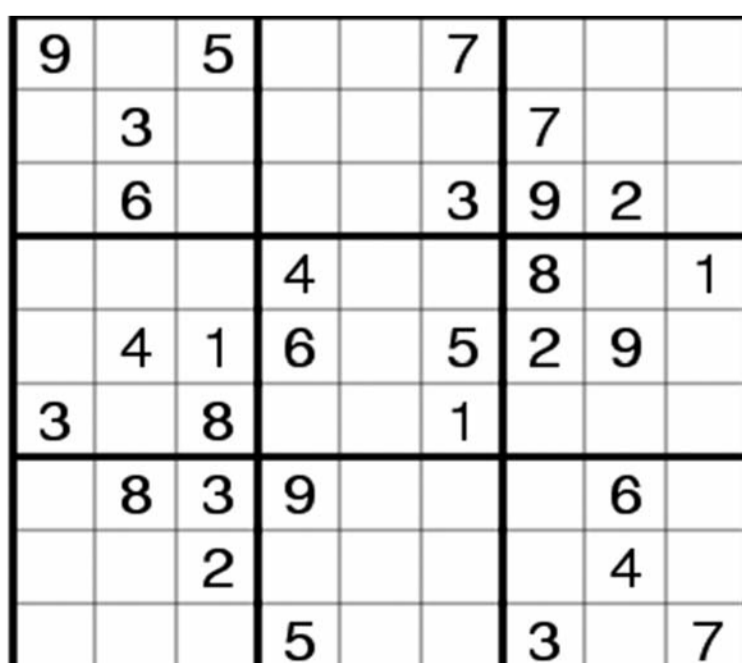
Summer



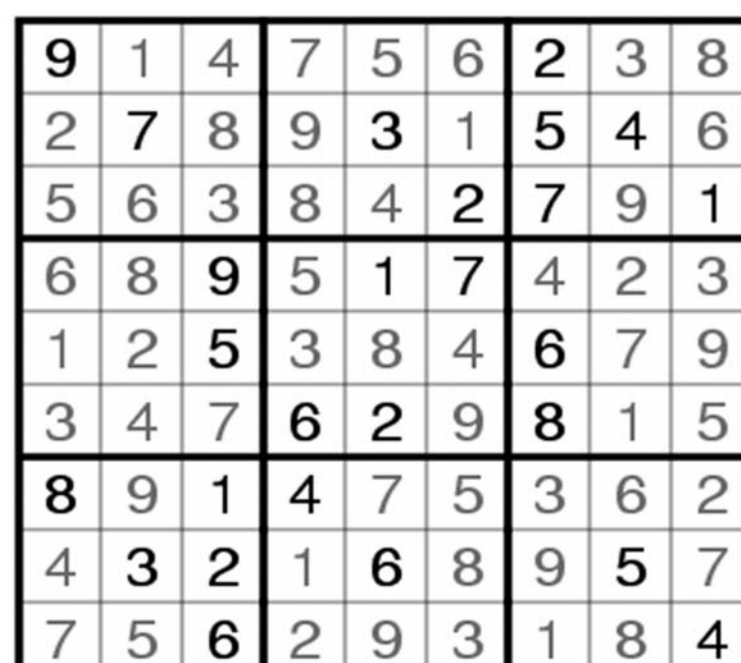
- ANTS
- AUGUST
- BARBECUE
- BASEBALL
- BEACH
- BEES
- BICYCLE
- BLUE SKY
- BOATING
- BREEZE
- CAMPING
- FISHING
- FLIES
- FLOWERS
- GARDENING
- GOLF
- GREEN GRASS
- HAT
- HIKING
- HOLIDAYS
- HOT
- ICE CREAM
- JULY
- JUNE
- MOSQUITOES
- NO SCHOOL
- PICNIC
- ROLLER BLADES
- SANDALS
- SKATEBOARD
- SOCCER
- SOLSTICE
- SPRINKLERS
- SUNBURN
- SUNGLASSES
- SUNSCREEN
- SUNSHINE
- SUNTAN
- SWEAT
- SWIMMING
- U V RAYS
- WASPS
- WATER FIGHTS
- WATERMELON

The hidden message is: SUMMER VACATION

Daily SuDoku



Yesterday's Solution





Cartier Salhia new boutique opening

The unveiling of Cartier's new boutique was celebrated with an opening ceremony officiated by Ali Morad Behbehani, President of Behbehani Group, Laurent Gaborit, Regional Managing Director of Cartier Middle East, India & Africa and Arnaud Carrez, International Marketing and Communication Director, Cartier International. The boutique is now Cartier's biggest boutique in Kuwait, and third in the Middle East; after Dubai Mall and Sowwah Square in Abu Dhabi.

After the full renovation the new Salhia boutique

has the most updated concept design proposed by Cartier's dedicated designers. Cartier is always evolving the concept design of the boutiques to improve the customer experience; the result is that today the boutique has a warmer, brighter and more shining aesthetic, where the history and the cultural heritage of Cartier are paramount.

While Cartier operates over 250 boutiques in 125 countries, the new boutique at Salhia ranks amongst the largest around the world, offering 583 square-meters of elegance on two levels. A new entire floor

has been added to the boutique, which can be reached with a designated lift inside the shop, which is fully dedicated to welcome the VIP clients and host special events.

Guests discovered the new space in all its splendor, as well as the latest creations of the Maison. The boutique faAade was beautifully illuminated with the iconic Cartier red. The new space provides a series of distinct, but interconnected, environments, with a real sense of privacy and intimacy. Designed to exude luxury through a quiet elegance.

"The new Salhia boutique demonstrates Cartier's continued commitment to offering the best service to its clients," added Laurent Gaborit, Regional Managing Director

Cartier Middle-East, India & Africa. Ali Morad Behbehani, President of Behbehani Group, added "We are delighted to open the largest Cartier boutique here in Kuwait, and I am confident that will enhance our clients experience."

flydubai inspires travellers to explore more for less

flydubai has announced reduced fares of up to 50% on select flights, inspiring passengers to further explore its network of up to 90 destinations.

The reduced fares are now available on flydubai's website flydubai.com and this offer will run until midnight on 14 March, for travel between 10 March 2016 and 25 March 2017. This is the first time that flydubai has gone on sale for an extended travel period. Passengers who plan their travels further in advance will enjoy greater discounts.

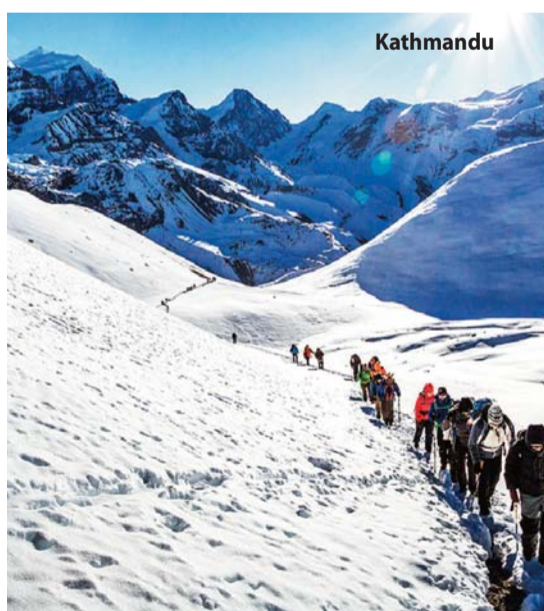
flydubai's Business Class offers passengers a more comfortable and personalised service from a member of crew dedicated to the Business Class cabin as well as priority services on the ground.

flydubai offers Economy Class across its fleet of 50 Next-Generation Boeing 737-800 aircraft. The onboard offering includes an interactive In-Flight Entertainment System for every seat with a choice of more than 1,200 hours of entertainment in Arabic, English, Hindi and Russian.

flydubai recently launched its new website, redesigned to offer customised content based on customers' location and previous interaction with the site. In addition, new destination guides and travel tips provide inspiration for planning the perfect trip, holiday or last-minute getaway to some of flydubai's hidden gems, such as Baku, Kathmandu, Sarajevo, Sofia or Zanzibar.



flydubai aircraft



Kathmandu



Zanzibar



Baku



A picture taken on October 10, 2015, shows auto-rickshaws in the streets of Monrovia. Omnipresent on the chaotic streets of Mumbai, Jakarta and Bangkok, Asia's three-wheeled "tuk-tuk" has now come to Africa — and with a two-fold bonus: providing much-needed jobs and slashing accidents. Cheap to run and safer than the traditional motorcycle taxi, the auto-rickshaw is an increasingly common sight trundling along the traffic-choked streets of the continent's sprawling capitals. — AFP

Asia's tuk-tuks providing a wheel boost to Africa

Omnipresent on the chaotic streets of Mumbai, Jakarta and Bangkok, Asia's three-wheeled "tuk-tuk" has now come to Africa — and with a two-fold bonus: providing much-needed jobs and slashing accidents. Cheap to run and safer than the traditional motorcycle taxi, the auto-rickshaw is an increasingly common sight trundling along the traffic-choked streets of the continent's sprawling capitals.

Known in Tanzania and Ethiopia as "bajaj", in Egypt as "toktok", in Nigeria as "keke-marwa" and in Sudan as "raksha", the tuk-tuk has now hit Liberia, where delighted locals have christened their own version the "kekeh".

Motorcycle taxis, known locally as "two-tires", were the go-to means of public transport in Liberia's capital Monrovia until lawmakers outlawed them in 2013 amid concerns over reckless riding and the high toll of accidents. The ban paved the way for the kekeh, imported from India and China by numerous operators, mostly Nigerian and Guinean, who employ young Liberians.

"What's making the kekeh very important... is (that) we are looking at a huge transport challenge in our country," said Jenkins Zayzay, secretary-general of the Liberian Motorcycle and Tricycle Association (LIMTCA).

"You had the two-tires that were running in the city centre before, but because of government regulations, we had to introduce another form or some level of job employment for the young people. So it was decided that we had to introduce the kekeh."

DROP IN ACCIDENTS

India produces around 800,000 motorised rickshaws a year, more than a third of which end up in foreign cities.

The country's TVS King—which has a presence in 30 African countries—has a four-stroke, single cylinder 200cc engine which runs on petrol, or the more environmentally friendly compressed natural gas. Huasha, based in the southern Chinese city of Jiangmen, is producing its own version which looks more like the front end of a motorbike towing a two-wheel passenger trailer. LIMTCA says kekeh have generated 5,000 jobs for Monrovia, many of whom were made unemployed by the motorcycle taxi ban.

"It's helping our economy immensely. Number one, it generates revenue for the government and it serves as

an opportunity for employment for the young people," says Zayzay.

A new kekeh will cost the aspiring driver \$3,500 (3,100 euros), or they can be hired at a daily rate of around \$25.

Operators say the three-wheelers are tightly regulated when it comes to following the highway code and the number of passengers they can carry, meaning accidents have been cut drastically. Not only do the tuk-tuks move at slower speeds than the motorbike taxis, their sheet-metal frames offer more protection. According to a statement by the Liberian National Police, motorbike accidents had dropped by 90 percent since the ban was introduced on using them as taxis, though there were no specific figures.

MORE ACCESSIBLE

At just 25 US cents a journey, the kekeh is also seen as a more accessible means of transport than the traditional taxi, which is out of reach for thousands of Monrovia who might otherwise have to walk long distances to work.

"I use the kekeh every day because I take a ride to go to my house and to come back to sell," says trader Akoi Jallah. A regulatory body called the Joint Implementation Committee also provides workshops in Monrovia where kekeh drivers can learn how to ply the streets safely.

Francis Mulbah, a 23-year-old driver circling Monrovia's Redlight market in search of customers, says around 1,000 kekeh are operating in Monrovia, each permitted to carry three passengers.

"In town, in town... Who is going to the city? Two more seats," he yells intermittently as he explains how the trade has improved his life. "When the government decided to move bikes from the streets, some of us lost our jobs," he says. "But I kept confidence in myself that though this decision has been passed, God can still help me to make an impact in our nation." — AFP

Armani's black velvet wraps Milan fashion

Giorgio Armani wrapped Milan Fashion Week yesterday with a fall collection for his main line dedicated to luxurious black velvet.

The 81-year-old Italian, whose designs were worn by Oscar winner Leonardo DiCaprio and nominee Cate Blanchett at Sunday's Academy Awards, made the material the protagonist of his autumn/winter 2016/2017 line, using it in trousers, tops, coats and glittering evening wear.

Models stepped onto the catwalk in round colored black velvet jackets paired with wide leg trousers.

Show notes said Armani has "always loved this material for its subdued, intense splendour".

Jacquard jackets with dabs of pale pink and blue added colour, as did a selection of floral designs-knit suits, silky trousers, tunic tops and chiffon dresses-later sequined with sparkles for the evening.

Armani also mixed other textures to all black outfits, including satin, fringes and ruffles on jackets worn with velvet trousers.

Black lacquer collars were added to velvet evening jackets while strapless gowns fit for the red carpet mixed black velvet with lace and sparkling black embroidery. Among footwear, there were nude fishnet ankle boots with black toe caps.

For the finale, Armani, who also used black as the basis colour for his Emporio Armani line unveiled on Friday, presented a black halter neck top, slit at the waist with black trousers under a black tulle cape.

At Missoni's show on Sunday night, designer Angela Missoni presented plenty of colourful knits that were layered together — jumpers, short dresses, floor-length scarves and hats in the brand's well-known bold stripes and zigzag patterns.

In a collection described as "lean, long and leggy", there were chunky cardigans in plaids and colourful stripes over similarly kaleidoscopic short dresses and leggings. There were also similar out-

fits in black and white.

For the evening, Missoni offered colourful plisse maxi dresses, at times worn over long-sleeved tops, as well as matching cardigan and long loose trouser combinations that glittered in silver and gold.

One black evening jacket had shimmering fringes. Models wore colourful heels and boots as well as sports shoes, adding a relaxed feel to the lines. Milan now passes the autumn/winter 2016/2017 catwalk baton to Paris, which starts its shows today. — Reuters



Fashion designer Giorgio Armani poses with models after presenting his women's Fall-Winter 2016-2017 collection, part of the Milan Fashion Week, unveiled in Milan, Italy, yesterday. —AP



Armani



Armani



Armani



A model wears a creation part of the Dsquared2 women's Fall-Winter 2016-2017 collection, part of the Milan Fashion Week, unveiled in Milan, Italy, yesterday. — AFP, AP photos



Armani



Armani

Dolce & Gabbana, Ferragamo, Missoni at Milan Fashion Week

A plethora of ribbons and ruffles signaled an air of romance in Milan this fashion season, but not all the references were strictly aesthetic.

There also was a nostalgic notion of connecting with the past, either stylistically or by challenging expectations of how that is done. Some highlights Sunday from previews for next fall and winter womenswear collections during the fifth day of Milan Fashion Week.

OVER THE RAINBOW

The Salvatore Ferragamo runway was alive with color, playfulness and ironic twists.

Creative director Massimiliano Giannetti drew inspiration from artists from the Dada and the Bauhaus art and design movements for the explosion of patterns and colors.

"I like the way in which everything was very geometric, very rigorous, very constructed. They were playful," Giannetti said backstage. The collection developed from dresses with horizontal bands of color in tiers of ribbed and pleated knitwear, to tunics and trouser combinations with thick vertical color blocking. And it continued with a series of outerwear in black-and-white checks and stripes.

Heartbeat pattern zigzags, oversized houndstooth and checkerboard patterns gave the looks a fantastical, almost Alice in Wonderland feel, from fuchsia, red, black and white chevron capes to a purple-and-red houndstooth double-breasted coat.

The silhouette was slim and sophisticated with playful touches like big buttons on cropped bodices, contrasting zigzag ribbons and rows of vertical zippers that, when closed, created a shiny pinstriped pattern, but when left open, revealed another layer of garment below.

"Especially in this moment, I think it is so important to send to the consumer a very positive message," Giannetti said. "But also to inspire the consumer, to inspire with the colors, with the combinations of different materials."

For this reason, Ferragamo CEO Michele Norsa precluded any move by the brand toward bringing the collection straight to stores, aside from a limited number of selected items as it has in the past.

DREAMS DO COME TRUE

Dolce&Gabbana have turned fairytale conventions on their head: their woman is both a princess and prince.

For a world where dreams do come true, designers Domenico Dolce and Stefano Gabbana created an updated version of Cinderella's blue dress, this one a simple cut covered with silvery and crystal beads, with princess short sleeves but without the scalloped layers of skirts from storybook illustrations. It wouldn't be giving the end away to say the slippers were transparent. The model was also accompanied by her wishful washerwoman self, wearing a short silken dress with her sewing machine.

Then the designers suggested the Dolce&Gabbana woman is her own prince, creating short bolero jackets with military details and pants that just cover the knees with stripes down the side. Those looks were finished with military boots.

There was also a plethora of black dresses, including one sexy ruched dress that epitomized the brand, though it may be reaching to say they were for the requisite evil queen. The designers also made oversized furry coats in big shimmering stripes of silver and gold or covered with floral appliques.

The fairytale is one of the fashion world's most obvious refer-

ences, and the designers turned it around by focusing on a new generation of princesses who they described as "individuals first and foremost."

But they couldn't resist a happy ending: The finale was a flourish of pretty fuchsia, pink and silver beaded and crystal dresses.

EMBELLISHMENTS AS SPORT

Marni creative director Consuelo Castiglioni's outerwear is nearly puritanical in its strictness while the house's short dresses are adorned with big embellishments like oversized translucent sequins and big buttons. The dichotomy suggests a public vs. private identity: solemn on the outside while a party rages within.

Archway hemline cutouts contributed to the solemnity of the capes and coats in neutral tones, while puffy sleeves added a romantic touch and demonstrated the collection's exaggerated proportions. The sleeves, which were detachable with button or ribbon closures, grew more audacious as they were enhanced by geometric patterns.

Ribbed shirts with athletic stripes gave a sporty touch and were tucked into high-wasted pants or skirts with a ruffle on top and big pockets. Decorative dresses, meanwhile, were short and decorated with big colorful sequins or cut out of Marni's trademark prints, including florals, crystalline color blocks and blurred Venetian harlequin patterns.

Castiglioni, who built her fashion house out of a family fur business, included no full furs in the runway show, just a mini-cape and a contrast fur collar. Pointy pumps and boots were built on sculpted, metallic heels, some formed like crystals, others like waves.

UNMASKING FASHION IDENTITY

Designer Stella Jean probed our notions of cultural identity in a new collection that examined Western portraiture and sub-Saharan African masks as ways to recall our ancestors. The looks mixed tribal motifs and prints with European tailoring and textiles as the Italian-Haitian designer continued to build fashion bridges between the developed and the developing worlds. She also deepened her study of cross-culturalism by taking Western references of masks interpreted by Modigliani, Giacometti and Picasso.

Graphic tribal images were applied like breastplates on silken tunics, worn over a straight skirt with alternating triangular patterns, while a sweater with the image of a mask opened onto a ruffled blouse, worn with a skirt of Peruvian prints. On the other side of the equation, an exaggerated Flemish-inspired collar graced a simple cinch-waist dress worn over a longer, flowing silken patterned skirt.

Handbags included doctor bags with portraits of old Europeans or made-in-Haiti plastic clutches embellished with masks and feathery tufts. Footwear included ankle booties and sandals, for which there were clear plastic galoshes.

The Milan Gospel group Soul Voices sang background music for the show, which also had an environmental footnote. Some of the textiles were made from recycled industrial cast-offs, employing for the first time a new technique for garments. — AP

Awards



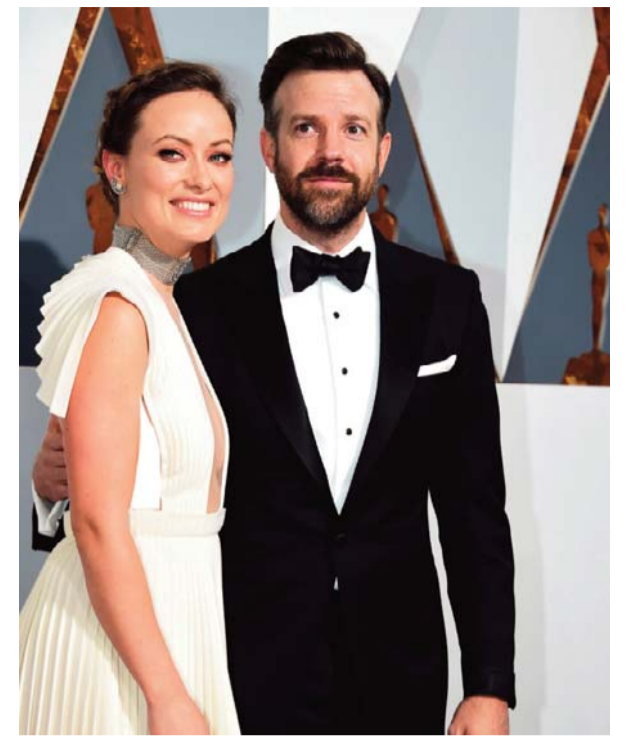
Actress Amy Poehler arrives on the red carpet



Actor Mark Ruffalo and his wife Sunrise Coigney arrive on the red carpet for the 88th Oscars.



Actor Matt Damon (L) and Luciana Barroso.



Olivia Wilde and Jason Sudeikis



Actress Margot Robbie



Olivia Munn



Rooney Mara



Kevin Hart (R) and Eniko Parrish



Christian Bale and his wife Sibi Blazic



Sylvester Stallone (L) and Jennifer Flavin—AP/AFP photos

Something for everybody on the Oscars red carpet

The year's biggest night for red carpet glamour included something for everybody in bold color and soft shades, frothy wonders and sleek, body hugging looks. And there was, of course, plenty of sparkle.

"I was really taken by the super fitted dresses, the very long and lean silhouettes," said Eric Wilson, the fashion news director for InStyle.

"The whole idea of the ball gown seems to have gone away with very few exceptions this year. We're seeing so many sleek and slim dresses," he said. Among them was Charlize Theron. She wowed in a red hot Dior Haute Couture in crimson silk crepe. It was ultra-low cut with a train and plunged in the back as well. She showed off a long jeweled necklace and joined the party Sunday night in the tight hair club, hers with a deep side part. In all, she wore \$3.7 million worth of Harry Winston diamonds.

"She was statuesque and thoroughly elegant," said Avril Graham, the executive fashion and beauty editor for Harper's Bazaar. "She's a designer's dream muse."

Later, as the attention moved from red carpet stunners to little gold statues, presenter Tina Fey classed up the stage in a deep purple custom silk Atelier Versace with pleating detail, her hair also tight and high. She, like so many others, kept jewelry to a minimum with a short sapphire necklace from Bulgari that went nicely with the dress.

"That dress fits her like it was shrunk wrapped right on her," Wilson said. "I loved how she matched the necklace."

But it was the whimsy of Cate Blanchett that truly caught his eye and quickly topped best-dressed lists. It was seafoam, from Armani Prive, and it included pops of silver in a large floral applique from the shoulders to her train.

"It was my favorite of the night," Wilson said. "There was so much individuality to the look. It looked like a crystal or ice sculpture. It was just so clean and cool looking."

Graham also loved Blanchett's pastel look. "It was really wonderful," she said.

The biggest surprise for Graham was fashion "it" girl Alicia Vikander, who won best supporting actress for "The Danish Girl." While some were not impressed with her bubble hem and pale yellow princess custom Louis Vuitton, comparing her to Belle of "Beauty and the Beast," others were on board. She wore her hair down her back but pulled it up in the front to add to the look.

"I loved it. It gave a girlish feel to the evening," Graham said. "Her low-key hairstyle accentuated the sweetness of her look. I think she took the most risks in terms of silhouette. Her look was the most surprising of all because of its silhouette and its unique point of view." Margot Robbie stunned in a "va-voom" gold gown with a snakeskin design from Diane Von Furstenberg, Graham said. "It's the fact that she's got that very natural, Aussie beauty. The natural hair and makeup was a perfect foil," she said.

Wilson said Robbie might have gone a bit too Las Vegas over more appropriate Los Angeles.

"It was very flashy. It didn't really feel like an Oscars dress," he said. "It feels like a fun disco dress. It didn't

read well on television."

Robbie was shiny, to be sure. Another really shiny moment - and really patriotic one - was Saoirse Ronan, the Irish actress who chose sparkly, liquid emerald from Calvin Klein. The gown hugged her body just right, her drop Chopard earrings mismatched - one in white pearls and the other emeralds. The back was barely there but intriguing with its ultra-low cut and a low horizontal strap.

"The jewel tone green was a big story on the catwalks that we've just seen," Graham said. "She said hers was a nod to her Irish heritage. It was lovely. It's a tremendously telegenic color." Graham also lauded another of the recent "it" carpet girls, Brie Larson in a belted blue Gucci that was ruffled at the skirt and radiated in a three-dimensional way at the chest, as if a TV watcher might want to get up and adjust the focus.

Regardless, Graham called it "ruffles and sweetness." While color ranged from the deep purples, greens and a dark black that told a Bette Davis story on Whoopi Goldberg, Wilson said the softer hues might reflect a "kind of easy, calming moment at a time of stress and conflict in the world."

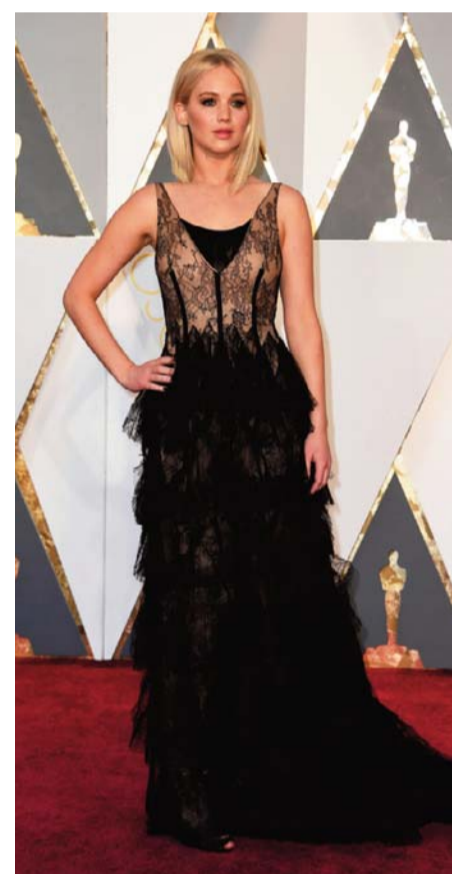
He added: "It feels like fashion is moving in that gentler direction right now with less harsh colors, less neon, less aggressive color." Graham called it a safe carpet that had a little something for everybody. "It gave us the flavor of lots of different elements in beauty and style," she said, "from knockout glamour and sequins and body conscious looks to romantic ruffles and pastels." — AP



Cate Blanchette



Jessica Alba



Jennifer Lawrence

Oscar dresses bring the bling

From sequins to Swarovski embellishments to crystal-embroidered belts, 2016 Oscar fashions are all about upping the bling factor.

Best supporting actress nominee Alicia Vikander looked like the belle of the ball (and Belle from "Beauty and the Beast") when she graced the carpet in a strapless ballooning Louis Vuitton dress in a pale yellow shade. "I love the color," the fashion "it girl," who is the face of Louis Vuitton, noted on the carpet. "It's a dusty yellow-spiced it up a bit."

After Calvin Klein dressed Lupita Nyong'o last year in an intricate construction of 6,000 white pearls, the house designed "Brooklyn" star Saoirse Ronan's sequined fitted dress with low V-neck. "It's an Emerald green," said Ronan-a most fitting choice for the Irish actress and film.

Lead actress frontrunner Brie Larson added something extra to her custom Gucci blue silk organza gown with cascading ruffle skirt: a navy velvet black crystal and pearl embroidered belt, with a deep violet silk and jeweled flower. Operating under a brand-new creative director, the new vision of Gucci also was showcased on this year's Oscar carpet by Jared Leto, Tom Hardy and Ryan Gosling.

Naomi Watts similarly brought some shimmer, in an Armani Prive sapphire blue and vibrant purple strapless gown, embroidered with stripes of Swarovski crystals, sequins and

lurex thread-which the house said created "a modernistic chevron pattern." (Liev Schreiber was supposedly the one who made the final dress call for Watts this morning.)

Armani also dressed nominee and presenter Cate Blanchett in a look featuring Swarovski: a seafoam green cap-sleeve mermaid gown with hand-sewn clusters of Swarovski crystals and white feathers.

Sofia Vergara stunned in navy blue Marchesa with some embellished glitz, which Jennifer Garner's dramatic Old Hollywood-esque gown also possessed. Margot Robbie sizzled in a gold snake-like fabric.

Olivia Wilde added some bling to her white ribbed Grecian-style ensemble with a Neil Lane Edwardian, pearl, diamond and platinum choker. And Chanel, which dressed best actress winner Julianne Moore last year, Jessica Biel in 2014 and no one in the two years prior, put "Star Wars" star Daisy Ridley in a standout sparkly silver creation.

As for the men, velvet was a popular choice for stars like Henry Cavill and Eddie Redmayne. "My tux was made by Alexander McQueen," said the ever-fashionable Redmayne, who most unusually doesn't work with a stylist. "It's amazing and very hot!" — Reuters

Academy Awards take on issues beyond #OscarsSoWhite

Hollywood's diversity crisis has loomed large over awards season and the big question going into the 88th annual Academy Awards was whether it would dominate the ceremony, too. It did, of course, but it wasn't alone.

The evening turned out to be a platform not just for racial representation in the movies, led by host Chris Rock's incisive insight and parody, but a wide array of causes, from global warming and bank reform to sexual abuse in church and on campus. It was a subtle plea from the film community that the movies and artists honored at Sunday night's ceremony did have purpose and meaning - even in this second year of #OscarsSoWhite.

The "Spotlight" team, which won the first and last prize of the night - best original screenplay and best picture - and nothing else, celebrated the Pulitzer Prize-winning work of The Boston Globe journalists who exposed sex abuses in the Roman Catholic Church and the conversation the film has renewed around the world.

Leonardo DiCaprio, the forgone best-actor winner for "The Revenant," used the platform to talk about his life's passion outside of acting - climate change, which got a "thank you" from the official White House Instagram account.

Adam McKay and Charlize Randolph, who won for best adapted screenplay for "The Big Short," spoke about the need for finance reform.

And Pakistani director Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy, whose "A Girl in the River: The Price of Forgiveness" won for the impact of her film.

"This week, the Pakistani prime minister said he would change the law on honor killing of women," said Obaid-Chinoy, who was also the only female director to win an award at Sunday's ceremony. "That is the power of film."

POINTED TARGET

In some ways, the Oscars have always been a place where winners use the podium and their 45 seconds to opine on causes directly or indirectly related to the movies, from Sachin Littlefeather's speech about Native American rights 43 years ago to Patricia Arquette's call last year for pay equality for women.

But perhaps no ceremony has had such a pointed target, and nothing this year could eclipse #OscarsSoWhite, which was woven into the fabric of the show, thanks to Rock. He launched immediately into the uproar over the lack of diversity in this year's nominees, and didn't let up, dubbing the show "The White People's Choice Awards" at the start.

Rock ensured that the topic remained at the forefront throughout the proceedings, usually finding

hearty laughs in the process.

In an award show traditionally known for song-and-dance routines and high doses of glamour, Rock gave the 88th Academy Awards a charged atmosphere, keeping with the outcry that followed a second straight year of all-white acting nominees.

Streaks, broken and extended, dominated much of the evening, with an expected best actress win for Brie Larson for her breakout performance in the mother-son captive drama "Room" and a best supporting actress win for Swedish actress Alicia Vikander for the transgender pioneer tale "The Danish Girl."

NIGHT'S MOST-AWARDED FILM

Gasps went around the Dolby when Mark Rylance won best supporting actor for Steven Spielberg's "Bridge of Spies" over Sylvester Stallone. Nominated a second time for the role of Rocky Balboa 39 years later, Stallone had been expected to win his first acting Oscar for the "Rocky" sequel "Creed."

The night's most-awarded film, however, went to neither "Spotlight" nor "The Revenant." George Miller's post-apocalyptic chase film, "Mad Max: Fury Road," sped away with six awards in technical categories for editing, makeup, production design, sound editing, sound mixing and costume design.

Alejandro Inarritu, whose win for "The Revenant" meant three straight years of Mexican filmmakers winning best director and his second consecutive win, was one of the few recipients to remark passionately on diversity in his acceptance speech.

Mexican cinematographer Emmanuel Lubezki ("The Revenant") also became the first cinematographer to win three times in a row.

Talk of election was largely absent from the ceremony, though Vice President Joe Biden was met by a standing ovation before talking about sexual assault on college campuses in an introduction to best-song nominee Lady Gaga.

Best animated feature film went to "Inside Out," Pixar's eighth win in the category. Asif Kapadia's Amy Winehouse portrait, "Amy," took best documentary. Hungary's concentration camp drama "Son of Saul" won best foreign language film.

Composer Ennio Morricone, at 87, landed his first competitive Oscar for "The Hateful Eight." But the wins at times felt secondary to the unflinching host. Rock said he deliberated over joining the Oscars boycott and bowing out as host, but concluded: "The last thing I need is to lose another job to Kevin Hart."

Down the street from the Dolby Theatre, Rev. Al Sharpton led several dozen demonstrators in protest against a second straight year of all-white acting nominees.



The acting nominees restored "OscarsSoWhite" to prominence and led Spike Lee (an honorary Oscar winner this year) and Jada Pinkett Smith to announce that they wouldn't attend the show. Several top African American filmmakers, Ryan Coogler ("Creed") and Ava DuVernay ("Selma") spent the evening not at the Oscars but in Flint, Michigan, raising money for the water-contaminated city.

GREATER OPPORTUNITY

Rock also sought to add perspective to the turmoil. Rock said this year didn't differ much from Oscar history, but that black people earlier were "too busy being raped and lynched to worry about who won best cinematographer."

In a quick response to the growing crisis, Cheryl Boone Isaacs, president of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, led reforms to diversify the

academy's overwhelming white and male membership.

In her remarks during the show, Boone Isaacs strongly defended the changes, quoting Martin Luther King Jr. and urging each Oscar attendee to bring greater opportunity to the industry.

Last year's telecast, hosted by Neil Patrick Harris, slid 16 percent to 36.6 million viewers, a six-year low. How the controversy, and Rock's head-on approach, will affect ratings for the ABC show is the new big questions, not to mention how well the causes of the movies and their artists will live in the conversation beyond Sunday's show. — AP

Actor Chris Rock presents the amount of money collected by the Girl Scouts during the show on stage at the 88th Oscars in Hollywood, California. —AFP



Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy

Pakistan's praises Oscar for film denouncing 'honour killings'

Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif hailed Sunday's Oscar win for a documentary about the practice of "honour killings," with activists calling for changes in laws to punish those who kill women deemed to have disgraced their families. Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy's film, "A Girl in the River: The Price of Forgiveness," follows the story of a young woman who survived being beaten, shot and thrown into a river by her father and uncle after marrying a man without their approval.

Sharif yesterday reiterated that his government was in the process of pushing a law to stop the killings.

"Women like Ms Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy are not only a pride for the Pakistani nation but are also a significant source of contribution towards the march of civilisation in the world," Sharif said in a statement lauding the Oscar win in the category of Best Documentary (Short Subject).

The Oscar win is the second for director Obaid-Chinoy, who in 2012 won Pakistan's first Oscar for a documentary on the horrors endured by women who suffer acid attacks.

Domestic abuse, economic discrimination, honour killings and acid attacks made Pakistan the world's third most dangerous country for women, a 2011 Thomson Reuters Foundation expert poll showed.

More than 500 men and women died in honour killings in 2015, according to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP). Most were never prosecuted.

But yesterday, after a six-year trial, a court in the eastern city of Lahore sentenced two brothers to death for killing their sister in 2009 for marrying a man of her choice.

"A Girl in the River: The Price of Forgiveness" tells the story of 19-year-old Saba from Punjab province who survived her attempted killing but was pressured to forgive her attackers.

The forgiveness option under the country's existing law can effectively waive a complainant's right to seek punishment against the accused, even in the case of attempted murder. Obaid-Chinoy told Reuters earlier that she hoped the film would further raise awareness about honour killings.

"It's not something that is part of our religion or culture. This is something that should be treated as pre-meditated murder and people should go to jail for it," she said.

Altering the law to remove the possibility of "forgiveness" could help reduce the number of honour killings in Pakistan.

Others in Pakistan hope the attention the film has received might help push changes through. "She has been able to motivate the prime minister of Pakistan who until her film has not taken any step on this issue," said Sughara Imam, who last year introduced a bill in the upper house of parliament to change the law on honour killings.

The bill did not pass, however, and it is not clear exactly how Sharif proposes to change the law. "He will have to take some bold steps... Words from the PM are really not enough," said Zohra Yusuf, chairman of the HRCP. — Reuters

Best quotes from the Oscars

The 88th Academy Awards were overshadowed by a row on the lack of black nominees, but Hollywood's biggest night also witnessed commentary on issues ranging from climate change to gay rights to... Girl Scout cookies. Here are some of the most memorable quotes from the Oscars on Sunday:

PROTECTING THE WORLD

"Let us not take this planet for granted. I do not take tonight for granted." Leonardo DiCaprio, finally winning a long-sought first Oscar, for his lead acting role in "The Revenant," on the need to take urgent action against climate change.

REAL CONCERNS ON RACE

"You know, when your grandmother's swinging from a tree, it's really hard to care about best documentary foreign short." Oscars host Chris Rock, explaining why fewer fellow African Americans raised concerns about diversity issues in film in the past.

AND ... REAL CONCERNS ON RACE

"This year, in the 'In Memoriam' package, it's just going to be black people that were shot on their way to the movies." Chris Rock again, alluding to major issues faced by African Americans in recent times.

AND REAL-LIFE CONCERNS

"I want you to reach into your millionaire pockets and I want you to buy some of my daughter's Girl Scout cookies." Chris Rock, on how his daughter has not sold enough this year.

DARTH VADER IS BLACK?

"I is here representin' all them who has been overlooked—Will Smith, Idris Elba and of course, the amazing black bloke from 'Star Wars,' Darth Vader."

Comedian Sacha Baron Cohen, unleashing some of his characteristically provocative humor as Ali G, his racially ambiguous hip-hop character.

TIME TO LOOK BEYOND COLOR

"What a great opportunity to our generation to really liberate ourselves from all prejudice ... and make sure for once and forever that the color of skin becomes as irrelevant as the length of our hair."

Mexico's Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu, winning his second straight best director Oscar for "The Revenant."

GAY AND PROUD

"I stand here tonight as a proud gay man and I hope we can all stand together as equals one day."

English singer Sam Smith, after winning the Oscar for best original song for the theme to the latest James Bond film, "Spectre."

MESSAGE TO THE POPE

"This film gave a voice to survivors. And this Oscar amplifies that voice, which we hope will become a choir that will resonate all the way to the Vatican."

Michael Sugar, co-producer of best picture "Spotlight," the sto-

ry of The Boston Globe's expose about the Catholic Church's silencing of victims of sexual abuse by priests.

LOVE FOR THE MEDIA

"We would not be here today without the heroic efforts of our reporters. Not only did they effect global change, but they absolutely show us the necessity for investigative journalism." Blye Pagon Faust, another co-producer of "Spotlight."

STANDING UP TO CAMPUS RAPE

"We must and we can change the culture, so that no abused woman or man like the survivors you will see tonight ever feel they have to ask themselves, 'What did I do?' They did nothing wrong!"

US Vice President Joe Biden, introducing Lady Gaga, who performed with survivors of campus sexual assault.

ELECTION YEAR LESSONS FROM FINANCIAL CRISIS

"If you don't want big money to control government, don't vote for candidates that take money from big banks, oil or weirdo billionaires." Adam McKay, director of financial crisis satire "The Big Short." — AFP



Jimmy Napes, left, and Sam Smith pose in the press room with the award for best original song for "Writing's On The Wall" from "Spectre" at the Oscars on Sunday at the Dolby Theatre in Los Angeles.



Actress Emily Blunt (L) and actress Charlize Theron present on stage at the 88th Oscars. —AP/ AFP photos



US singer Lady Gaga performs on stage at the 88th Oscars in Hollywood, California.



Oscar winners celebrate on stage at the 88th Oscars on Sunday in Hollywood, California.

DiCaprio, Brie Larson win Oscars

Leonardo DiCaprio won his long-awaited first Oscar for revenge epic "The Revenant" Sunday but journalism drama "Spotlight" took best picture in a surprising end to Hollywood's glittering awards season.

The night was overshadowed by a simmering race row, addressed head-on by black host Chris Rock, who delivered a series of caustic jokes targeting the Academy's overwhelmingly white male membership. As well as DiCaprio's best actor award, "The Revenant" picked up the statuettes for best director for Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu-his second in a row-as well as for best cinematography. But "Spotlight," a searing study of The Boston Globe's investigation into child sex abuse in the Catholic Church, grabbed best picture honors in one of the shocks of the 88th Academy Awards.

The film had only taken one other award-best original screenplay-and Hollywood's Dolby Theatre gasped as a stunned cast and crew headed onstage to accept the trophy.

"This film gave a voice to survivors. And this Oscar amplifies that voice, which we hope will become a choir that will resonate all the way to the Vatican," co-producer Michael Sugar told the audience. "Pope Francis, it's time to protect the children and restore the faith."

A defeat for "Creed" star and Tinseltown darling Sylvester Stallone was the other big surprise of the night, as he was snubbed for best supporting actor, with the trophy going against the odds to Britain's Mark Rylance for "Bridge of Spies."

George Miller's stark action epic "Mad Max: Fury Road" was the big winner in the technical categories, taking home Oscars for best costumes, production design, make-up, film editing, sound editing and sound mixing.

LEO'S NIGHT

DiCaprio's success for his grueling star turn as 19th century fur trapper Hugh Glass came 22 years after his first of four unsuccessful acting nominations. For the 41-year-old actor, the fifth time was a charm. He thanked a long list of figures who have helped him in his career, including filmmaker Martin Scorsese, before speaking on his passion-climate change.

"Climate change is real. It is happening right now. It is the most urgent threat facing our entire species and we need to work together and stop procrastinating," DiCaprio said to applause.

First-time nominee Brie Larson picked up a widely predicted best actress statuette, having dominated the awards season with her performance as a kidnapped mother in "Room."

But it was not all celebration, as a row over the lack of ethnic minority acting hopefuls overshadowed Hollywood's biggest night. "Well, I'm here at the Academy Awards-otherwise known as the white People's Choice awards. You realize if they nominated hosts, I wouldn't even get this job," joked Rock, 51, who continued with a series of jibes at the Academy throughout the night.

For the second year running, all 20 nominees in the main acting categories were white, and an angry social media backlash under the hashtag #OscarsSoWhite has grabbed the awards season headlines. Rock, who hosted despite calls for him to join a boycott, unleashed a fierce monologue-one he apparently rewrote in the wake of the scandal to hold the Academy's 6,000-plus voting members, overwhelmingly white men, to account.

Former radio DJ Inarritu, just the third filmmaker to win back-to-back Academy Awards for best director, picked up the theme as he hailed his latest Oscar as a tribute to diversity.

"There is a line in the film that says, 'They don't listen to you when they see the color of your skin,'" Inarritu said.

"So what a great opportunity to our generation to really liberate ourselves from all prejudice and, you know, this way of thinking and make sure for once and forever that the color of skin becomes as irrelevant as the length of our hair."

SOLIDARITY

The first acting award of the night went to Sweden's Alicia Vikander, who dazzled on the red carpet in a strapless pale yellow Louis Vuitton gown, for her supporting role in transgender love story "The Danish Girl."

"This is insane," a visibly moved Vikander said, hailing her co-star Eddie Redmayne: "Thank you for being the best acting partner. I could have never done it without you. You raised my

game." It was a huge night for "Spotlight" director Tom McCarthy, who also picked up the Oscar for best original screenplay. Adam McKay and Charles Randolph took the adapted screenplay Oscar for financial crisis satire "The Big Short"-which had also been a best picture contender. Mexico's Emmanuel Lubezki made history with his third consecutive Oscar for cinematography, for his dramatic work on "The Revenant."

One of the moments of the night came when Lady Gaga led the Oscars in a rally against campus sexual assault, bringing together survivors who joined arms in solidarity.

The pop star, who recently has spoken out about being raped as a teenager, was introduced by Vice President Joe Biden, who personally took part in Hollywood's biggest night to lend his voice to the cause.

Erik Davis, managing editor of film website Fandango described the evening as "one of the most consistently entertaining Oscar shows in memory."

"Whether or not it was intentional, the show had a unifying theme, and every Chris Rock joke was a perfect riff on that theme," he said. — AFP

Winners

Here is the complete list of winners at the 88th Academy Awards, which were handed out on Sunday in Hollywood:

- Best picture: "Spotlight"
- Best director: Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu, "The Revenant"
- Best actor: Leonardo DiCaprio, "The Revenant"
- Best actress: Brie Larson, "Room"
- Best supporting actor: Mark Rylance, "Bridge of Spies"
- Best supporting actress: Alicia Vikander, "The Danish Girl"
- Best original screenplay: "Spotlight" - Josh Singer and Tom McCarthy
- Best adapted screenplay: "The Big Short" - Charles Randolph and Adam McKay
- Best foreign language film: "Son of Saul" (Hungary)
- Best cinematography: Emmanuel Lubezki, "The Revenant"
- Best animated feature: "Inside Out"
- Best animated short film: "Bear Story"
- Best documentary feature: "Amy"
- Best documentary short: "A Girl in the River: The Price of Forgiveness"
- Best live action short: "Stutterer"
- Best original score: Ennio Morricone, "The Hateful Eight"
- Best original song: "Writing's On The Wall" from "Spectre", Jimmy Napes and Sam Smith
- Best visual effects: "Ex Machina"
- Best film editing: "Mad Max: Fury Road"
- Best production design: "Mad Max: Fury Road"
- Best costume design: "Mad Max: Fury Road"
- Best makeup and hairstyling: "Mad Max: Fury Road"
- Best sound mixing: "Mad Max: Fury Road"
- Best sound editing: "Mad Max: Fury Road"

Multiple award winners

- "Mad Max: Fury Road" - 6
- "The Revenant" - 3
- "Spotlight" - 2. — AFP



Best Actress Brie Larson and Best Actor Leonardo DiCaprio pose with their Oscar in the press room during the 88th Oscars in Hollywood on Sunday.



Director Laszlo Nemes poses with the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film, "Son of Saul," in the press room during the 88th Oscars.



Actress Alicia Vikander poses with her Oscar for Best Supporting Actress, "The Danish Girl," in the press room during the 88th Oscars in Hollywood.



(L-R) Steve Golin, Blye Pagon Faust, Nicole Rocklin, and Michael Sugar, pose with the Oscar for Best Picture, "Spotlight," in the press room during the 88th Oscars in Hollywood.



Andrew Whitehurst (R), Paul Norris (2nd R), Mark Ardington (2nd L) and Sara Bennett pose with their Oscar for Best Visual Effects, "Ex Machina," in the press room during the 88th Oscars in Hollywood. — AFP photos