

Barrak taken to hospital for heart checkup



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RUSSIANS MOURN CRASH VICTIMS AS PROBE BEGINS

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WOMAN MURDERS HUSBAND'S LOVE

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: In a gruesome murder, a female citizen allegedly stabbed her husband's girlfriend to death yesterday in Sabah Al-Salem area, security sources said. The young assailant visited the victim's apartment in Sabah Al-Salem with a knife she bought on her way to settle some old scores, case papers suggest. The two women reportedly argued over certain issues which developed into a fight during which the killer woman allegedly stabbed the other in the chest. The victim, also a Kuwaiti, reportedly succumbed to her wounds on arrival at the hospital.

600-PLUS LEFT FRANCE FOR SYRIA TO JOIN IS

PARIS: More than 600 people have now left France for Syria and Iraq, with about 800 more wanting to leave to join Islamic State (IS), Prime Minister Manuel Valls said yesterday. The figures show little respite in the number of people joining the jihadist group despite multiple bombing campaigns against IS strongholds and a crackdown by French authorities to prevent people from leaving the country after two major attacks in France during last year.

Continued on Page 13



ROSTOV-ON-DON: People mourn for the victims of the crashed flydubai plane at the Rostov-on-Don airport, about 950 kilometers (600 miles) south of Moscow, yesterday. — AFP

ROSTOV-ON-DON, Russia: Relatives gathered to mourn the 62 victims of a passenger jet crash in southern Russia yesterday and officials warned an investigation could take weeks to determine the cause of the downing. At Rostov-on-Don airport about 400 people paid their respects to the 55 passengers and seven crew who died when the Boeing 737-800, operated by Dubai-based budget carrier Flydubai, crashed in the early hours of Saturday.

Bereaved relatives laid red and white carnations on a growing pile of flowers, candles and children's toys, framed by photos of the dead. "We mourn," read an inscription listing the victims' names. "What happened cannot be expressed with any words. I can't comprehend how the relatives of the victims will go on living," Rostov resident Marina Bondar told Reuters.

"The whole world is expressing its condolences to us. But it is impossible to forget this." At the crash site, Russian workers finished their search of the snow-covered wreckage, having sifted more than 200 pieces of the victims' bodies scattered across the airfield, Russian TV reported. Meanwhile, Flydubai said yesterday it had not cancelled or delayed any flights following the crash of an airliner at Rostov-on-Don and would resume flights to the Russian destination once it reopened to traffic. Chief Executive Ghaith Al-Ghaith added at a news conference that the Dubai-based budget carrier was working closely with Russian authorities to identify the cause of Saturday's crash, and appealed for an end to speculation about the disaster.

Continued on Page 13

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His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets with Mauritania's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation Isselkou Ould Ahmed Izid Bih.

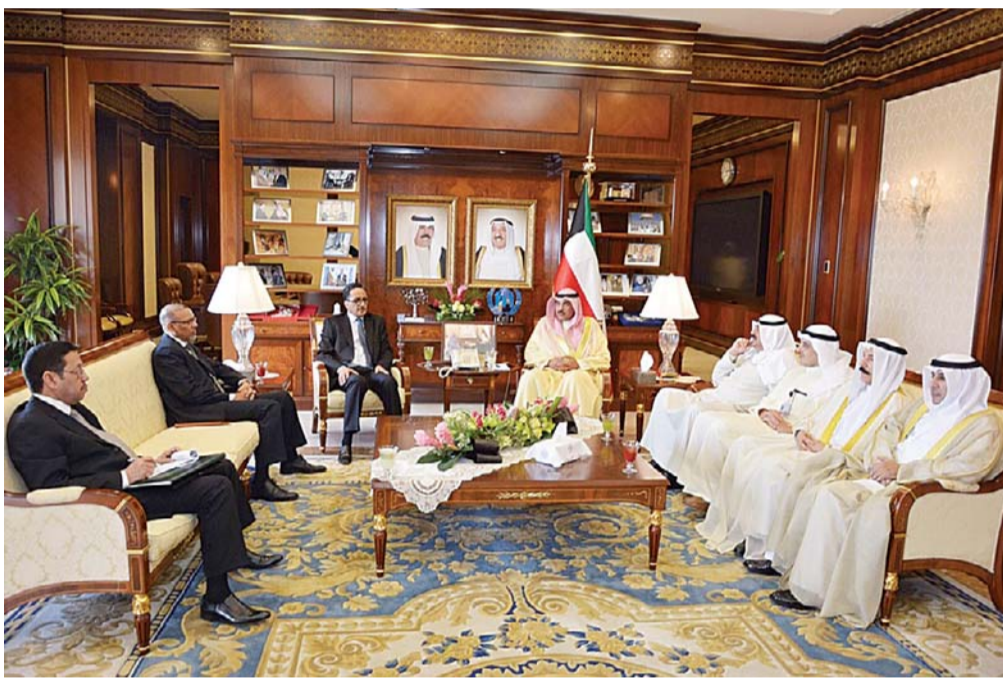


KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives a letter from Mauritania's President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, delivered by Mauritania's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation Isselkou Ould Ahmed Izid Bih.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Acting National Assembly Speaker Mubarak Al-Khurainej. —Amiri Diwan and KUNA photos

AMIR RECEIVES MAURITANIAN FM



First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meet with Mauritania's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation Isselkou Ould Ahmed Izid Bih.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Seif Palace yesterday Mauritania's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation Isselkou Ould Ahmed Izid Bih. During the meeting, the Mauritanian minister handed a letter from Mauritania's President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz to the Amir, tackling bilateral relations between the two countries as well as issues of common interests.

First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah attended the meeting. His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah later received the visiting Mauritanian minister, in the presence of Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled as well as Jaber Al-Sabah, premier diwan's undersecretary, and Khaled Al-Shibani, Kuwait's Ambassador to Mauritania.

Also, Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled held talks with the visiting minister, which discussed bilateral ties and means of promoting them at all levels. It also shed light on the latest regional and international developments. Deputy Foreign Minister Ambassador Khaled Suleiman Al-Jarallah, Assistant Foreign Minister Ambassador Dr Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah and Ambassador Shihani attended the meeting. —KUNA



LUSAKA: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem meets with President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Saber Hossain Chowdhury. —KUNA

SPEAKER GHANEM MEETS IPU CHIEF

LUSAKA: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem met with President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Saber Hossain Chowdhury yesterday. The meeting took place on the fringes of Ghanem's participation in meetings of the Inter-Parliamentary Union's (IPU) 134th conference. The meeting was attended by undersecretary of parliamentary committee MP Faisal Al-Shaya and charge d'affaires at Kuwaiti embassy in Zambia Mohammad Al-Nuaimi.

Ghanem and his accompanying delegation arrived in the Zambian capital city of Lusaka yesterday to participate in the

conference, which is due on March 19-23. He was received by Nuaimi and embassy officials. Ghanem will give Kuwait's speech before the conference, held under the theme "Democracy Renewal - Granting Vote for Youth." He is leading a delegation from the caucus, which would participate in meetings of the standing committees of International Peace and Security, Sustainable Development, Finance and Trade, Democracy and Human Rights and UN Affairs. The delegation consists of MPs Shaya, Awda Al-Rowaie, Hamdan Al-Azmi, Khalil Abdullah, and National Assembly Secretary General Allam Al-Kandari. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Minister of Education Dr Bader Al-Essa (third from left), Minister of Public Works Dr Ali Al-Omair (center) and senior officials attend the fourth Kuwait Conference of Chemistry yesterday. —KUNA

CONFERENCE REFLECTS PERSISTENT SUPPORT OF EDUCATION: MINISTER

KUWAIT: The fourth Kuwait Conference of Chemistry (KCC), which kicked yesterday, represents efforts to solidify the country's position as a beacon of education, Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education Dr Bader Al-Essa said.

The conference is a testament to the significance of education, Essa said in his speech during the start of the conference. The minister represented His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah at the event.

The conference, which runs until tomorrow, will address a total of 80 research papers from 21 nations,

all of which delve into the world of chemistry and its effects on everyday life, Essa noted. "Education and research are instrumental to bringing development plans to fruition," he said, adding that "there is no progress without education."

Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs Dr Ali Al-Omair underscored the importance of the conference, saying that "chemistry has a say in everything that is relevant to the country."

Moreover, representative of Kuwait Chemical Society (KCS) Dr Hassan Al-Rubaie highlighted chem-

istry's role in human development, saying that it adds simplicity to human life. "Chemistry is one of the cornerstones of educational development," Rubaie said. A total of 34 educational lectures will discuss chemistry and its use, in addition to the latest chemical products, he noted.

Meanwhile, head of the conference's organizing committee Haider Behbehani said that the conference will tackle a number of pressing issues that are of utmost importance. The conference, Behbehani noted, will present the latest technological and educational developments pertinent to chemistry. —KUNA



MORONI: Interior Minister of the Comoros Muhammad Al-Hadi meets with the Kuwaiti parliamentary delegation, headed by MP Saud Al-Hurajji. —KUNA

COMOROS LAUDS KUWAIT'S SUPPORT

MORONI: The Comoros lauded Kuwait's "unwavering and continuing support" for the country since pre-independence times till now. Such Kuwaiti backing for the country is highly appreciated, said the Interior Minister Muhammad Al-Hadi during a meeting with a visiting Kuwaiti parliamentary delegation, headed by MP Saud Al-Hurajji. He noted that a large number of Comorian citizens, who currently occupy senior posts in their homeland, have studied in Kuwait.

The Kuwaiti delegation's visit is an opportunity for lawmakers to examine parliamentary and presidential elections, currently held following recent troubles when some Comorian islands expressed a desire to secede. "Conditions now have become stable and the government has introduced reforms and built

many institutions to tackle shortcomings in public services," said the minister who doubles as the acting foreign minister. Moreover, the Comorian government has recently established a higher body grouping scholars to tackle misconceptions about Islam.

In response to a question by the delegation about investment hurdles, the interior minister said the country suffers from lack of energy resources, and this situation discourages external investments. He explained that studies intended to find energy resources had remained in the shelves. MP Hurajji meanwhile affirmed that the visit aims at boosting cooperation and relations with the Comoros. The Kuwaiti delegation includes MPs Dr Ahmad Matie Al-Azmi, Hamdan Salem Al-Azmi, and Mohammad Marwi Al-Hadiya. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Suleiman Al-Jarallah yesterday received credential of newly-appointed ambassadors to Kuwait from Guinea, Finland, Slovenia and Montenegro. —KUNA



Legalese

CHANGES AND WHAT THEY MEAN LEGALLY

By Attorney Fajer Ahmed

The world is changing expeditiously; I can feel it, I am sure you can feel and see it too. The rise of terrorist groups, the fall of oil prices, cold wars, civil wars, Trump might be trumped, telescreens on your wrists, Palestine is still and no longer is Palestine, but most importantly and more importantly than we think, people are looking closely at the changes happening within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

As Kuwait has its vital part in the success of one of the world's richest organizations, the GCC, Kuwait is changing rapidly too. It is changing in so many ways. Change can happen socially, politically, culturally and the fastest way to change all of the above, is through legal reform. The Kuwaiti government and parliament, hand in hand and separately, have and had brought about many legal changes in the past few weeks and months. Therefore, I think it is essential to describe these changes as they have the potential to solve many underlying issues.

I know most of the emails I get (and I thank you kindly for them, and I also apologize sincerely for not responding quickly), are negative. Negative legal situations, issues, troubles, mistakes that NEED legal reform to be solved. Therefore, I am extremely glad to be sharing these changes with you because they affect each and every one of us. I will be stating your most common concerns in hopes that change shall continue to come. I have chosen your questions carefully to highlight those changes more so than to answer questions.

Labor Law

Question: My boss does not treat me right, I know this. He does not give me my passport. My work permit has my salary written as an amount way less than my actual salary, and my sponsor's company is not my real company. I want to know what my rights are and what I can do?

Fajer: I have written many times about what your rights are and I invite you to go to <http://news.kuwaittimes.net/website/category/legal-clinic/> and read about these topics. Also, please do read Kuwait Labor Law for your reference, it is available on www.kuwaitlaborlaw.com.

Fortunately, new reforms are in place by the parliamentary legislative and legal affairs committee (a committee in the Kuwaiti Parliament that approves a law before the parliament members vote on it, essentially making it a law). One of the most important reforms to my readers would be the increase of a fine that is imposed on employers that have employees working for them and are NOT registered under their sponsorship at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor.

This is all great, but stricter punishments should be there for those employers that do not clearly state salaries, that keep passports, that do not pay overtime and that do not register their employees!

Rent Law

Question: I have been living in a building for two years and I have recently received a notice from my landlord stating that I have to leave the building within a month. It seems like this is done because the property was transferred to another owner and also the notice has been sent to every one living in the building, and therefore I do not think there is anything I can do! Please help.

Fajer: Even though I have written multiple times about rent issues, I can assure you I receive a lot more emails than I can mention and believe me you are not the only one.

Kuwait's rent law clearly states that rent should only be increased once every 5 years, yet some landlords do not respect the law. It has been reported that the ministry has formed a panel to reform the already existing rent prices stating that they do not represent the market. I hope the panel looks into the other issues and concerns of tenants, especially expat tenants, and bring about reform regarding such issues.

Economy

Question: Is it true that because of oil prices Kuwait has drafted many economic, commercial and financial reforms? If so, what are they and do they affect us?

Fajer: Yes, many reforms are happening. It is hard for me to say whether these changes are because of oil prices or because of other factors, but there definitely are a lot of changes. Of course they will affect each and every one of us, but maybe not as directly as the laws mentioned above.

It is becoming easier and easier to start a small or medium enterprise (SME); foreign investors are coming in, there no longer should be monopolies, agencies are changing and so on. We are jumping on the Arabian Gulf bandwagon, creating jobs and opportunities.

Although there are a lot of changes going on and this can feel overwhelming at times, and although I do not respond to your emails in a timely manner, and I did not answer many questions today, please do keep emailing me your concerns. I will keep sharing them with concerned officials (in confidentiality and without sharing your names) in hopes that solutions will be provided to our mistakes. In hopes that Kuwait will join its GCC neighbors when it comes to progress, making the region one of the most developed and fastest growing in the world.

Hope to hear from you soon.

For any legal questions or queries, email ask@fajertlawyer.com.



KUWAIT: Cell phone photos allegedly showing former MP Musallam Al-Barrak being escorted to the chest diseases hospital under tightened security.



BARRAK TAKEN TO CHEST HOSPITAL FOR HEART CHECKUP
MAN COMMITS SUICIDE BY BURNING

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: Former MP Musallam Al-Barrak was taken to the chest diseases hospital yesterday upon doctors' advice, Acting Secretary General of the Popular Action Bloc Awwad Al-Nasafi said. The leading oppositionist was scheduled for tests to examine the condition of his heart muscle and veins. Barrak was jailed last year to serve a two-year sentence after he was found guilty of offending His Highness the Amir.

Suicide

An unidentified person committed suicide by setting himself ablaze outside of a gas station in Sabah Al-Salem, said security sources. Police and firemen rushed to the scene to find that the man's body was totally burned. A case was filed and further investigations are in progress to identify the man and determine his motives.

Minister authorizes deputy

Minister of Social Affairs and Labor and Minister of State for Planning and Development Hind Al-Subaih recently authorized her undersecretary to handle some of her tasks concerning the referral of senior officials to the Civil Service Commission (CSC) for disciplinary measures, accepting their resignations and imposing penal measures on them. The

minister also authorized the undersecretary to suspend senior officials pending investigations, dissolve coop societies, NGOs and charities, dismiss any of those board members, appoint temporary boards or directors and appointing board members to replace dismissed ones. The decision also authorized the undersecretary to authorize any of his assistants to carry out some of his own duties.

Sawaber's eviction

The Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW) announced that tenants of 46 apartments in Al-Sawaber residential complex were evicted as of yesterday, leaving only one apartment which will be evicted tomorrow.

Jaber Bridge

Chairman of the capital committee in the Municipal Council Dr Hassan Kamal said that the committee approved a contract to design, build and maintain the Jaber Al-Ahmed Bridge. Kamal added that the committee's meeting also discussed a proposal to create a new exit from Surra to the Fifth Ring Road, a proposal to build a park in Da'eya, and a proposal to allocate a location for the Capital Markets Authority (CMA) building. Separately, Municipal Council member Ahmed Al-Bughaili demanded adding the 'General Contracting and Construction' activities to the list of activities currently allowed and practiced in industrial areas.

GOVERNANCE RULES TO BE APPLIED WITHOUT DELAY

KUWAIT: A senior Kuwait Capital Markets Authority (CMA) official reiterated that the governance rules will be applied as previously decided, on 30 June 2016, without delay. Chairman of CMA Board of Commissioners Dr Nayef Falah Al-Hajraf added that the authority would enforce the law against the licensed corporates that fail to apply these rules.

There is no room for hesitation regarding the full application of the rules, Hajraf said in a press statement on the sidelines of a discussion panel organized by the CMA on corporate governance that concluded discussions yesterday. He stressed that the CMA is so keen on sound implementation of the rules to realize the aspired benefits for all.

Commenting on reports that weak companies will have to go out as a result, Hajraf said it is up to shareholders. "We do not take decisions for the shareholders," he said. Meanwhile, Hajraf said he was certain of soundness of all arrangements and preparations for the Kuwait Bourse Company to take over the Kuwait Stock Exchange (KSE) as of April 25. On the CMA's share, he said that according to law, 6 percent (minimum) to 24 percent (maximum) are allowed for the government bodies in the company. —KUNA



NO INJURIES IN MAIDAN HAWALLY BUILDING FIRE

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: A fire was put out in a Maidan Hawally building yesterday, and no injuries were reported. Firemen from the Hawally, Salmiya and technical rescue stations rushed to the scene after the fire was reported. The firefighters were split into teams - one headed to the third floor apartment where the fire started and freed a number of people who were trapped inside, and the other tackled the flames. The fire was soon put out. An investigation was opened to determine the causes of the fire.

COURT HEARS TABTABAEI'S CASE

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: The criminal court yesterday heard a state security case filed against former MP Waleed Al-Tatabaei, accusing him of spreading false news. During the hearing, Tabtabaei told the judge that the Ministry of Interior was after him.

Blogger sentenced

The criminal court yesterday sentenced a Saudi blogger living in Kuwait to seven years in prison and a KD 20,000 fine for instigating sectarianism.

Safe site

Municipal Council chairman Muhalhel Al-Khaled said that he would suggest mandating the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) to examine the soil on any housing project's site prior to distributing housing units to citizens, in order to make sure it was safe.

Unified fare

A unified fare will be used for mobile phone calls in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries by the beginning of April, which would be 40 percent cheaper than current rates, a senior official said. GCC states agreed to gradually reduce the fare over the period of three years starting from April, said Adel Darweesh, Chairman of international relations at the telecom organization authority and head of the GCC mobile phones team.



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A Wonderful World

In Brief

JABER AL-AHMAD CENTER TO SIGN MOU WITH IAEA

KUWAIT: Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Center for Nuclear Medicine and Molecular Imaging is poised to sign a memo of understanding (MoU) with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), whereby the center will be a regional and global center for providing clinical and academic training to doctors, director-general Dr Nahil Al-Nafisi said. — KUNA



KFSD THANKS SOUQ SHARQ

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Major General Khalid Al-Mikrad, Acting General Director of the Kuwait Fire Services Directorate (KFSD), honored Fahad Al-Haraz, Marketing Director at Souq Sharq, and Mohammad Ghafel, Security Director at Souq Sharq for their efforts in facilitating the hosting of the 14th Fireman Day Festival.



KFSD TRAINS PERSONNEL

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: The Kuwait Fire Services Directorate (KFSD) launched a training program for heads of firefighting departments in cooperation with the Khalaf Consultation and Training Institute. Lecturers from the International Safety Training Council (ISTC) are participating in the program.



Photo

of the day



KUWAIT: Kids stand in front of the aquarium at the Kuwait Scientific Center. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

MEDICAL CONFERENCES KICK OFF

KUWAIT: The 7th Kuwait Medica Conference and Exhibition and the 5th Conference of the Kuwait Society of Nuclear Medicine and Molecular Imaging (KSNMMI) opened yesterday, sponsored by Minister of Health Dr Ali Al-Obaidi.

Kuwait Medica comes amid a boom in health services in Kuwait thanks to nine new hospitals and several medical centers, head of the organizer committee Nasser Al-Enezi said on the sidelines of the event.

The conference aims to introduce cutting-edge technologies, latest trends, products, services and ideas in healthcare. It presents a unique platform to bring together specialized contractors, suppliers, manufacturers, traders and investors involved in the planning, build, design, equipment supply, supply chains, operations and management services for all kinds of healthcare facilities.

The 5h KSNMMI was also opened yesterday as part of the 7th Kuwait Medica, in addition to a one-day conference today on the distinguished hospitals and medical treatment abroad, with participation of relevant bodies such as the Health Ministry, the Ministry of Defense and the Kuwait Oil Company (KOC).

Pioneer
KSNMMI chairman and president of the fifth conference Dr Fahd Abdulrahman Marafi said meanwhile that nuclear medicine in Kuwait started in the late 1990s, making it among the pioneer countries in the field, with several sections in the Ministry of Health-affiliated hospitals.

Nuclear medicine is a branch of medical imaging that uses small amounts of radioactive material to diagnose and determine the severity of or treat a variety of diseases, including many types of cancers, heart disease, gastrointestinal, endocrine, neurological disorders and other abnormalities within the body. Marafi added that the KSNMMI was founded in 2009 as a part of the Kuwait Medical Association (KMA).

Addressing the opening ceremony, head of the Council of Nuclear Medicine Departments at the Ministry of Health, Dr Iman Al-Shammari, said that the conference addresses the latest technologies and equipment in the field. Shammari added that up to 60 doctors and 200 specialists and technicians are working in the 10 nuclear medicine departments in the Ministry of Health hospitals. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Acting CEO and Director of Al-Salam International Hospital Dr Ayman Al-Mutawa speaks at the conference. — KUNA



Head of the Council of Nuclear Medicine Departments at the Ministry of Health Dr Iman Al-Shammari addresses the conference.

KUWAIT CELEBRATES EARTH HOUR

KUWAIT: Kuwait joined other countries of the world in celebrating the Earth Hour on Saturday, March 19, out of keenness on promoting the public awareness about effective use of power, Director General of the Environment Public Authority (EPA) Sheikh Abdullah Al-Humoud Al-Sabah said.

"We support the global efforts aiming to bring about far-reaching social impacts through boosting good-governance in, and sustainable use of, energy," he said on the sidelines of a function organized by Kuwait Environment Protection Society (KEPS).

"The Earth Hour is a community initiative involving government and non-government institutions in a collective effort that aims to promote and environment-friendly practices, curb excessive use of electricity and stem climate change.

"The manifestations of celebration in

Kuwait include turning off the lights at the EPA building as a token action which will spread to other state buildings and encourage the public to join this civilized campaign in the future," he pointed out.

Sheikh Abdullah reaffirmed the EPA support to any initiative that could contribute to curbing the carbon dioxide emissions out of the country's keenness on contribution to the UN effort to realize the Sustainable Development Goals.

Meanwhile, Sherif Al-Khayyat, head of EPA climate change division, said the KEPS function is a reminder of the risks of the climate change and the depletion of natural resources.

Abdulmir Al-Jazzaf, the KEPS Secretary General, said the annual event is organized in collaboration with the Ministry of Interior, environment police, Kuwait Fire Service Directorate (KFSD) and Kuwait Medical Association (KMA). — KUNA

KUWAIT AFFIRMS KEENNESS ON PRODUCTS' QUALITY

KUWAIT: Director General of the Quality Laboratories Management for the Public Authority for Industry Fayza Al-Mathkour said the department is keen on enhancing quality of Kuwaiti products in order to export them globally.

In an interview yesterday, Mathkour said that the most important achievement of the Laboratory Quality Management, recently, was winning international accreditation and global recognition for the laboratories of the department.

She added that the total revenue raised through the department amounted to KD

236,003 in 2015 to 2016, up six percent from 2014, noting that the administration has developed its own electronic system to facilitate and speed up activities of the labs.

She said the department is the first government laboratory that has received the international certificate (ISO) for chemical laboratories. The Quality Laboratories Management, which was established in 1984 under jurisdictions of the specifications sector and industrial services in the Public Authority for Industry, includes five laboratories specialized in tests and standardization. — KUNA

EXPERTS TAKE PART IN TOURISM, DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE

KUWAIT: The 'Kuwait Tourism and Development Conference: Facts and Future' takes place on March 29 and 30 under auspices of Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Sheikh Salman Sabah Al-Salem Al-Humoud Al-Sabah. The conference has already attracted considerable attention from various sectors concerned with sustainable development, the organizing committee said in a statement.

Officials from the aviation, hospitality, recreation, services, culture, arts and media sectors have already confirmed their participation in the conference, the committee said. It further stressed that the first session in the conference will be titled 'Tourism in Kuwait: facts and aspirations of hospitality and related services' sectors. It will be moderated by Kuwait University political sciences professor and former minister Dr Maassouma Al-Mubarak

Other speakers include Fawwaz Abdul Aziz Al-Farah, head of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation, Rasha Al-Roumi, Kuwait Airways' Chairperson and Managing Director, Ali Al-Youha,

Secretary General of the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL), Mohammed Nabil Jaafar, CEO of Talabat Company, columnist Eqbal Al-Ahmad and Abdul Elah Maarafi, Chairman of the Board of the Kuwait Hotel Owners Association.

The conference is organized by the Leaders Group Company for Consultancy and Development in collaboration with the information ministry's tourism sector, the World Tourism Organization (WTO), as well as local, regional and international partners.



Rasha Al-Roumi



Eqbal Al-Ahmad



Fawwaz Al-Farah



Ali Al-Youha



Abdul Elah Maarafi



KUWAIT: AUB's team is honored after securing the first position in the national competition for Global Management Challenge.

AHLI UNITED BANK SECURES FIRST POSITION IN GLOBAL MANAGEMENT CHALLENGE COMPETITION

KUWAIT: Once again, Ahli United Bank (AUB) has scored another prominent achievement. Ahli United Bank came first in the National finals of the Global Management Challenge among 27 participating teams representing various banks and companies in Kuwait and secured the honor of representing the State of Kuwait and raising Kuwait's flag in the global finals to be held in Macau, China in April.

AUB's team succeeded in 2015 in securing the first position in the semi-final stage and thus was qualified to participate in the finals to win the National Team Title for the Global Management Challenge.

AUB's team which secured the first position in the national competition for Global Management Challenge comprised: Abdullah Mahmoud Al-Langawy, Ahmed Abdul Rasheed Ibrahim and Mustafa Mohamad Khokhawala.

It is worth mentioning that the aims of the Global Management Challenge Competition conform to a great extent to the Ahli United Bank's strategic goals which aim at building promising generations of future leaders who are

capable of leading their societies' thorough and comprehensive developments.

Most important

The Global Management Challenge competition is the most important of its kind at a global level in Strategic Management. It focuses on the management capabilities of teams that join challenges pertinent to managing a company, following up its financial matters, analyzing its performance and operations through a hypothetical process of the company data. This future oriented program is the most recent in training tools and administrative talents development. In addition, the Competition also attempts to develop a set of main skills in the business sector such as leadership, team work, communication, time management and developing ability to predict in addition to other skills necessary for senior administrative positions. Furthermore, participating teams should deal with numerous challenges through entering data in a specially prepared program to achieve the highest investment performance of the hypothetical (virtual)

company they manage. So far, more than 500,000 participants from more than 40 countries have taken part.

First position

On this occasion, Moataz El Rafie, Senior Deputy CEO Banking Business Group at AUB, offered congratulations and appreciation to the AUB team reaffirming that AUB will continue support to its team to secure the first position in the Global final competition to be held in Macau, China. He also emphasized that the Bank is keen to provide every kind of support to staff through refining their skills and developing their potential to prepare them for assuming the top management positions and achieve greater success thereby benefiting the Bank's leading position. Likewise, Naqeeb Amin, Human Resources Head at AUB, expressed the Bank's management's pride and gratitude to the excellence and competence of the team which provides an example to others, bringing honor to their institution and also the honor of representing the State of Kuwait in international forums.

OOREDOO VISITS JAHRA BRANCHES, PARTNERS

KUWAIT: Ooredoo Kuwait, a member of international Ooredoo Group, recently visited the company's branches and strategic partners in Al-Jahra Governorate. The visit was led by executive management and the company's CEO and General Manager, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdullah Al Thani.

The main purpose of the visit was to connect with the customers' and the dealers in such a vital area that has more than 150 points of sales. The visit included the new Jahra branch which offers its customers a unique drive through service, allowing them to complete any payments and purchases at the comfort of their car.

The new branch in Jahra boasts a unique location with ample parking space, in addition to a designated section for business owners and entrepreneur services. The new branch also has an on-site repair shop, and self-service kiosks for cus-

tomers to use services without the need to queue for a representative to help them.

The management's visit to the branches and strategic partners aims to identify methods to strengthen the company's relationship with customers and provide them with the best services.

The delegation also visited Al-Jahra Copthorne Hotel and Resort, where the executive management held a meeting to discuss updates.

Ooredoo Kuwait has recently organized a special ceremony to honor its official distributors, who have achieved the highest sales in 2015. The ceremony comes as a gesture of gratitude for their outstanding performance and achieving the desired results. Distinguished performers were awarded with trophies and certificates, in addition to cash prizes.



KUWAIT TAKES PART IN UAE COMM FORUM

SHARJAH: UAE Supreme Council Member and Ruler of Sharjah Sheikh Dr Sultan bin Muhammad Al-Qasimi yesterday stressed the importance of governmental communication with various segments of the society, regarding its vital role in setting the strategic policies and plans for sustainable development.

Qasimi in his opening speech of the 5th International Government Communication Forum (IGCF), held in the UAE under the title "towards developed communities," said that communication between governments and societies is the core of progress and development in all segments of the society. The two-day event was attended by international senior figures, ministries, officials and

experts from various parts of the world.

Technological progress nowadays includes negative impact on the society and thus results in social and moral problems, Qasimi said. Improving efficiency of governmental communication with the society is the best way to benefit from positive aspects of technology progress and eliminate its negativities, he added.

The first sessions of IGCF was titled "governmental communication and building knowledge societies" with the participation of Swedish Prime minister Stefan Lofven, along with UN Special Advisor on Global Education Jordan Casey, besides other figures. The forum includes a number of activities including "community platform innovation" during

which eight innovating students from UAE presented their remarkable projects and initiatives.

The forum also includes a number of workshops organized in cooperation with the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), Thomson Foundation, and Sky News Arabia TV channel, including topics of "fighting radicalism, hatred, and violence through social media" besides "promoting for tolerance and cultural diversity" and as well as "governmental communication and strategies of partnership with the public". The participating Kuwaiti delegation headed by Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Al-Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, including General Consulate in Dubai Theyab Al-Rashidi. — KUNA



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Crime

Report

PURSE SNATCHING GANG IN FARWANIYA BUSTED

KUWAIT: Investigators arrested three persons who formed a purse snatching gang in Farwaniya. The men, all three from Syria, would use a motorcycle without license plates and target women walking along the street. The three, when interrogated, admitted to more than 60 such robberies. They told detectives that they would snatch the purses from unsuspecting women while riding on their motorcycle and if the woman held on to the purse, they would drag her along the ground until she let go.

Investigators uncovered the gang when detectives spotted a man riding a motorbike without a tag and followed him. They saw the man commit a robbery in the described manner and arrested him. He confessed and led authorities to the other two culprits.

It seems several victims did not report the incidents to police because in many cases the amount of money was small or they did not want to spend long hours waiting at the police station. In some cases, the victims were also illegal residents in Kuwait. The three thieves said they spent the money they steal on smoking, tablets and food.

Two men arrested for dumping body

A security source said criminal detectives arrested two men who dumped a dead body behind a Farwaniya mosque. Interior Ministry operations received a call about the body of an unknown person, so police went to the area and found that it was a citizen, and investigations led to the arrest of the two.

Jewelry stolen

A citizen lost her jewelry worth KD 4,500 when a thief broke into her apartment in Abu Halaifa. The woman accused her ex-husband of the theft. The victim told police that she was out with her sisters, then when she returned she discovered the break in and the jewelry was taken from the bedroom. She said her ex-husband is the only person who knows where the jewelry was hidden. Police are investigating.

Fugitive arrested

An ex-convict citizen was arrested. He is wanted for 11 separate cases including felonies and misdemeanors. A security source said the man was stopped in Mahboula and when his details were checked he was found to be wanted by authorities. He was taken to criminal detectives department.

Expat robbed

An Egyptian man sought the help of police after four people isolated him in a Hawally area yard, beat him and robbed him of KD 1,700. The four trapped the man behind the building where he lives when he was parking his car. Detectives are investigating.

Death threat

A citizen threatened to kill his brother if the man refused to borrow KD 17,000 to pay back the brother's debts and remove his name from the wanted list. The citizen called Sulabiya police and told them what happened. A complaint was lodged, and detectives are working on it. —Al-Anbaa

SAADOUN SLAMS GOVT, RENEWS BOYCOTT PLEDGE

KUWAIT: Opposition leader and former National Assembly speaker Ahmad Al-Saadoun warned of deterioration in several fields and stressed that Kuwait had never been through worse circumstances throughout its history. "We have never gone through any deficits even during the Iraqi invasion," he underlined.



Ahmad Al-Saadoun

Speaking in an interview with Al-Qabas daily, Saadoun said that many senior officials had come to office by Wasta (connections), holding them responsible for the failure of the state's development plan. "It is very normal that corruption prevails when a state is so lenient and law is not equally enforced on everybody," he stressed.

Further, Saadoun reconfirmed his intention to boycott the next parliamentary elections. However, he added that boycotting the elections does not mean sitting by doing nothing. "We have to keep fighting corruption," he underlined, expressing total rejection of detaining and pursuing politicians and withdrawing citizenships.

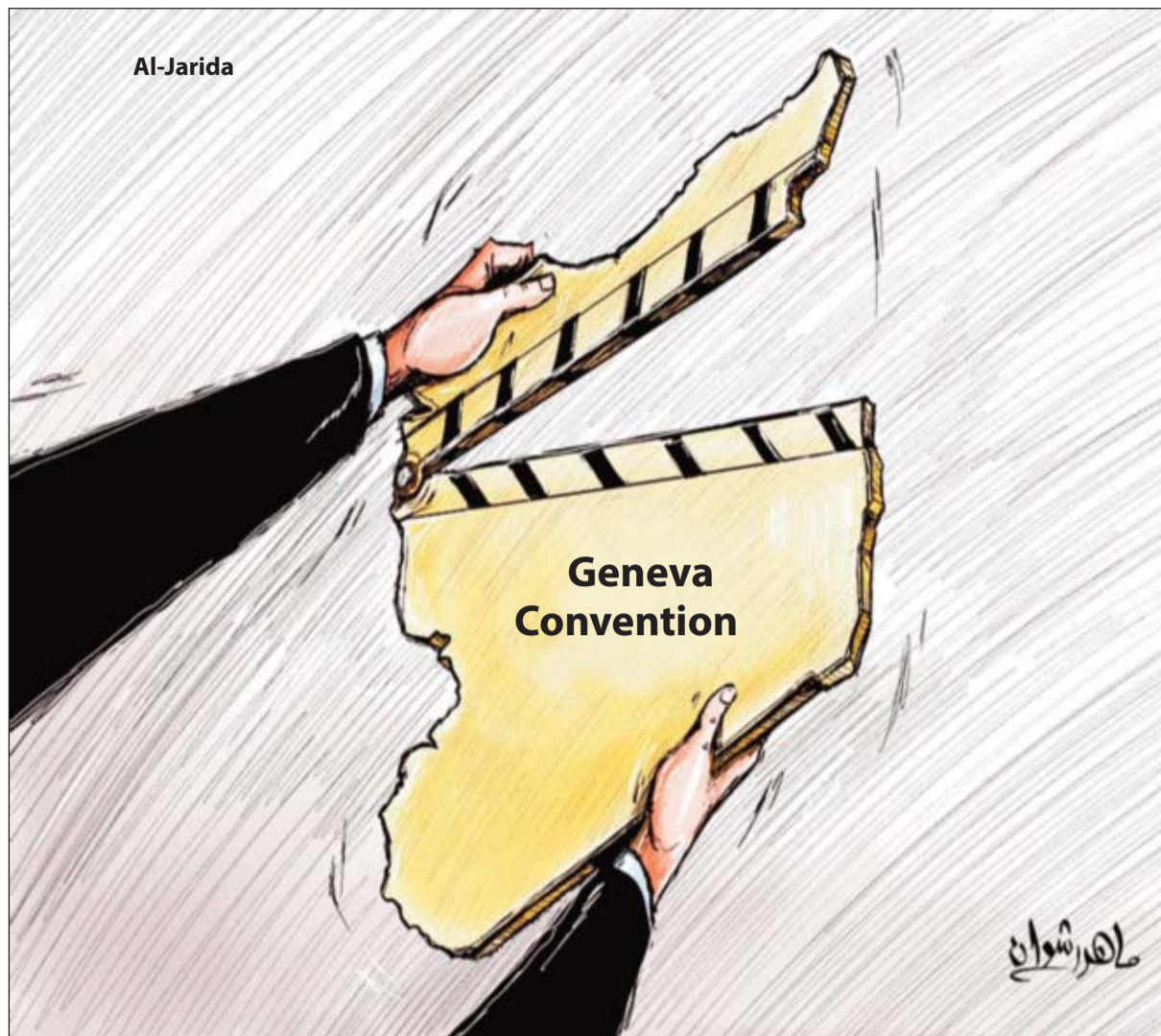
Responding to a question about his relation with former MP, Musallam Al-Barrak, Saadoun strongly denied having any disagreements with him. "He does have a loud voice, but no one can question his intentions," he underscored. "If we have fought attempts to manipulate the constitution, things would not have gone so far in terms of deterioration," he added, pointing out that he totally rejects passing any exceptional laws with the excuse of regional circumstances.

Saadoun also slammed the current law enforcement process, noting that current laws had not deterred the suicide bomber who blew off Al-Sadeq mosque nor the Abdaly cell. Further, Saadoun stressed that saboteurs were the ones who hold secret meetings, not the ones who work in public and in the open. — Al-Qabas

MAIL, LANDLINES TO BE PRIVATIZED

KUWAIT: Ministry of Communications (MOC) prepares to undergo the largest privatization process in its history after a proposal has been already made to privatize the mail sector, long distance calls and landlines and their infrastructure, Undersecretary Hameed Al-Qattan said.

Qattan added that the once established, the Telecom and Information Technology Authority would be responsible for offering those services for privatization. Once those projects see the light, the MOC would only be responsible for marine transportations, he said. —Al-Rai



NOW FOR ME: ZAIN IRAQ LAUNCHES #HASSAELIYA

MULTI-FACETED PROGRAM TO INSPIRE AND EMPOWER IRAQI YOUTH

BAGHDAD: Zain Group, a leading mobile telecom innovator in eight markets across the Middle East and Africa, announces that Zain Iraq, the country's leading operator, has launched a multi-faceted program dubbed "Hassa Eliya", (Now for Me). This initiative is focused on inspiring and empowering young Iraqi talents by encouraging them to explore their potential and skills, and equipping them with the necessary tools to help achieve their goals. The program aims to recognize and showcase Iraqi youth achievements to the world.

The program is based on the use of many innovative methods to stimulate and develop the relationship between Zain Iraq and the youth in Iraq, and among many initiatives, a Facebook page that serves as a platform for young Iraqis to voice their ambitions was just launched (five million views in just 72 hours). The Facebook page provides the youth with the opportunity to submit their ideas, projects and dreams and Zain Iraq will select a number of those suggestions and support their future development.

Zain Iraq's "Hassa Eliya" program will also incorporate a number of

youth-focused activities including a motivating media campaign highlighted by the launch of a compelling television commercial with future plans to launch a career program on YouTube, as well as a community focused health, sports and innovation program.

The program's television commercial is dedicated to the Iraqi youth, in a bid to motivate and inspire them to achieve their dreams, with Zain Iraq keen to send a message to the country's youth that their skills and contributions to society are recognized and appreciated. It was developed with three underground bands made up of 17 young Iraq talents who never produced an official song or video before. Zain Iraq offered them the opportunity to work with professionals and produce a song that symbolizes the values of Zain as a company while at the same time speaking the youth's language. It also showed that by offering the needed support, hidden talents could be brought to the world.

Ali Zahid, Chief Commercial Officer at Zain Iraq emphasized the role Iraqi youth play in shaping the future. "It is time the youth took the lead. Zain

Iraq, through "Hassa Eliya", aims to spread hope among younger generations, and make them feel that they have the necessary support and means to develop their abilities and talents. After all, this program is an incubator for young people's potential, creativity and dreams. It provides them with the opportunity to communicate with the world and to present their ideas and projects to a much wider audience."

It is envisaged that "Hassa Eliya" will touch upon multiple youth-oriented activities and disciplines including music, literature, scientific research, innovation and technology. Ultimately, Zain Iraq would like to have "Hassa Eliya" serve as an invitation and call to action to all young people across the country to treat the program as a channel through which they can share their aspirations and ideas.

The program also falls in line with Iraq's vision for the year 2020 as well as with Zain Group's own drive to inspire and empower the communities in which it operates. If you have a dream or ambition, share your thoughts with Zain Iraq on: www.Facebook.com/Hassa.Eliya



KUWAIT: The Commercial Bank of Kuwait (CBK) visited the Hussein Al-Asousi Elementary School for boys in Mubarak Al-Kabeer, as part of its fifth annual 'Ya Zain Turathna' (our beautiful heritage) cultural campaign.

UNLICENSED WEAPON OWNERS' HOMES TO BE RAIDED

KUWAIT: Director General of Weapons Detectives at the Interior Ministry Brigadier Abdulrahman Al-Suhail said legal preparations are being made to raid homes of citizens whose weapons' licenses expired and failed to renew

them or hand over the firearms. "We are compelled to take this measure and will be implemented in few days as a large number ignored our calls to hand over their weapons, or renew the license," Brig Suhail said. He said the law does

not give advantages to any person who has a weapon and his license expired, and those whose houses are raided will be sent to the public prosecution to face charges of possession of unlicensed weapons. —Al-Anbaa

التياب

Al-Anbaa

WISDOM TOOTH

By Sami Al-Khorafi

Many of us have always cried in pain because of wisdom teeth but very few of us have actually gone to a dentist to remove that terrible tooth. And once they do so, they usually feel very relieved, as if they lit their vehicles' headlights on a very dark night and started to see the world more clearly after feeling pain day and night. Unfortunately, many tend to buy loads of painkillers instead of removing that pain by all means simply because they are afraid of going to a dentist, but they eventually yield to visiting a dentist to remove it once the pains get too wild.

This metaphor really applies to the pain we experience in our daily lives because of our hesitation and tendency to use more painkillers. But someday, we will have to 'remove' those wisdom teeth because we will have ignored them so long that they started decaying and creating more damage.

For example, when one person works hard on dividing our national solidarity without any measures taken against him, the 'pain' he cause might go as far as dismantling the whole society and decay will have spread, calling for immediate removal only when it is too late because more decay had been created in the society.

In addition, political extremists act like wisdom teeth that bring nothing but problems and pain. Removing them would be a great relief to everybody because they have been causing pain by whatever they say or do in various government bodies through corruption and profiteering. They must be immediately removed instead of keeping silent about their practices or even settling for transferring them to other positions.

The daily problems everybody is currently talking about such as health services, education, housing and sports have been as painful as wisdom teeth without any solution, but using more painkillers and promises only worsen the pain. So unless we come up with immediate solutions to those problems, the situation in the very near future will be very difficult. We have many wisdom teeth that need immediate removal here in Kuwait because only then will we be able to view things more clearly, but unfortunately, some people want such teeth to remain in 'office' so that we go on using more painkillers!

—Translated by Kuwait Times

NO ACTIONS AGAINST LEBANESE MANPOWER

KUWAIT: While an official source at the Foreign Ministry confirmed that there are no plans to ban recruitment of Lebanese labor forces in Kuwait, Deputy Director General for Labor Protection at the Manpower Public Authority Abdullah Al-Mutoutah said that a decision was never made to stop issuance of work permits for Lebanese laborers or workers of any other nationality. "Kuwait was clear in supporting the Gulf Cooperation Council's (GCC) decision to brand Hezbollah as a terrorist group," said the Foreign Ministry source who spoke on the condition of anonymity. He referred to earlier reports which indicated that any person found to have relations or shown support to Hezbollah would be held legally responsible for his or her actions. —Al-Rai

HEAVY FINE FOR SPREADING RUMORS ABOUT CHARITY

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor recently finished studying the new charities' law and referred it to the Fatwa and Legislation Department for further study. The new law includes 81 articles, including an article that could prevent criticizing the works of charity organizations in Kuwait. Article 72 states that: "He who publishes false news, information or statistics or intentionally spreads rumors or publicity that would negatively affect charity work and trust in a certain charity would be penalized by the minimum of KD 10,000 and the maximum of KD 20,000." In addition, article 68 states that: "He who represents a non-claimed charity or continues to do so after it is suspended, or those who collect donations without ministry permission will be punished by a maximum of three years prison and/or a KD 1000-5000 fine plus confiscating the collected sums. Meanwhile, article 69 punishes whoever practices activities other than those a charity had been founded for. They would be punished by a maximum of two years in prison and/or a KD 1,000-3,000 fine. — Al-Jarida

45,000 WORK VISAS FOR CLEAN FUEL PROJECT

KUWAIT: Deputy CEO for Projects at Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) Abdullah Al-Ajmi pointed out the importance of reducing costs and increasing work efficiency. He expressed intentions to help realize that after assuming his new post by achieving more integration between the three projects under him: the clean fuel project, the project circuit 1 and the project circuit 2.

He said the current structure at the projects' sector is enough to run projects today and during the next three years, adding that 50 percent of the clean fuel project will be completed by the end of March.

Ajmi said that by April 13, 24 months would have elapsed on the strategic project's signing. "This reflects our success in going on with the plan as we prepare to go ahead with the construction stages after completing the engineering works this month," he said.

Ajmi said purchase operations of material and equipment are going on as planned, adding that by the end of the month, two units of Italian boilers will arrive at Mina Abdullah refinery as part of a project to acquire six boilers for the refinery. He said the next major challenge is logistic. "We suffered during the period from September to December 2015 because of the lack of contractors' ability to bring in workers for various reasons." He added that "concerned government departments have shown good cooperation, including the Manpower Public Authority (MPA) and the health ministry, as well as services companies in India which contributed to the facilitation of bringing laborers into Kuwait. —Al-Rai



Bus carrying foreign students crashes in Spain, killing 13

EXILED TIBETANS ELECT LEADER AS DALAI LAMA STEPS BACK

OBAMA ARRIVES IN CUBA TO BURY THE HATCHET

EYEING NEW FUTURE WITH US, CUBAN'S AWAIT PRESIDENT'S VISIT



MARYLAND: (From left) Barack Obama with first lady Michelle Obama and their daughters Sasha Obama and Malia Obama and mother-in-law Marian Robinson walk on the tarmac at Andrews Air Force Base. — AP

HAVANA: US President Barack Obama was due in Cuba late yesterday to bury the hatchet in a more than half-century-long Cold War conflict that turned the communist island and its giant neighbor into bitter enemies. Reversing generations of US attempts to cut Cuba from the outside world, Obama, First Lady Michelle Obama and their two daughters were arriving late afternoon in Havana for a three-day trip.

It won't just be the first visit by a sitting US president since Fidel Castro's guerrillas overthrew the US-backed government of Fulgencio Batista in 1959, but the first since President Calvin Coolidge came 88 years ago. Obama, seeking to leave a historic foreign policy mark in his final year in office, was due to see old town Havana late yesterday, hold talks with Cuban President Raul Castro today, and attend a baseball game before leaving tomorrow. For Cubans dreaming of escaping isolation and reinvigorating their threadbare economy, the visit has created huge excitement. Havana's old town was crawling with painters sprucing up the picturesque neighborhood. The Stars and Stripes—so long the enemy flag—fluttered from numerous buildings. Early yesterday cleaners swept the narrow, cobbled streets where Obama was due to stroll later and police, both uniformed and plainclothes, were out in large numbers.

"A president of the United States in Cuba arriving in Havana on his Air Force One," wrote popular

Cuban writer Leonardo Padura on the Cafefuente blog. "Never in my dreams or nightmares could we have imagined that we'd see such a thing."

No laughing matter

On the eve of his visit, Obama cracked jokes with one of the communist country's most loved comedians, Panfilo, in a three and a half minute video sketch released online and later broadcast on Cuban television—fortunately, since most Cubans do not have Internet. But less light-hearted matters will overshadow the visit. Although Obama has already loosened restrictions on US citizens visiting Cuba, the lifting of the decades-old US economic embargo can only be decided by a Republican-dominated Congress that is far less keen on detente with Raul Castro's Cuba. Republicans and some human rights activists have also criticized Obama for dealing with Castro when so many freedoms in Cuba, ranging from the media to politics and economic entrepreneurship, remain highly curtailed. Dissidents called on the eve of the visit for Obama to promote "radical change," notably a "stop to repression and use of physical violence against all political and human rights activists." One banned group, the Ladies in White, said they would attempt to demonstrate after attending Catholic Mass, just hours before Obama was to touch down.

The Castro government has warned Obama that lectures on democracy will be "absolutely off the

table." But White House deputy national security adviser Ben Rhodes insists that the subject will be brought up. Obama will also meet members of Cuba's beleaguered opposition and tomorrow, will give a speech at the National Theater carried live on Cuban television.

Soft power

The United States spent decades trying to topple Cuba's communist government. Washington tried economic strangulation, the failed 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion, and CIA assassination plots against Fidel Castro—including the legendary, but unproven story of sending him an exploding cigar.

Now, after so many failures, Obama has bet that soft power will achieve what muscle could not. The aim, Rhodes said, is to make "the process of normalization irreversible." And Cuba's regime, which for decades defined itself as the people's bulwark against the Yankee enemy, has bowed to the fact that Cubans would rather do business than make war. In the latest sign of the new dynamics, US group Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide said Saturday it had signed three hotel deals in Cuba, a first for any hospitality company since the revolution of 1959.

And as if Obama's arrival were not enough to illustrate the sea change in Cuba, the Rolling Stones—a symbol of the cultural imperialism that communist leaders raged against—are playing a free concert in Havana on Friday. — AFP

KURDISH NEW YEAR MARRED BY CLASHES WITH POLICE

ISTANBUL: Turkish police yesterday fired tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse hundreds of people attending Kurdish New Year celebrations in Istanbul in defiance of a ban on gatherings following a string of terror attacks. Dozens of people were arrested during the clashes in the Istanbul neighborhood of Bakirkoy on the eve of Kurdish Nevruz, or New Year, an AFP journalist witnessed. Nevruz is a key marker of the Kurdish social and cultural calendar.

Several Turkish cities, including Istanbul, had banned gatherings over the weekend,

citing security concerns following a raft of bombings around the country in recent months. In the latest attack, an alleged Islamic State bomber killed four people in a suicide attack Saturday on a busy shopping street in Istanbul.

Yesterday's Nevruz celebrations were called by the pro-Kurdish Democratic Peoples' Party (HDP) party. Police barred an HDP lawmaker from making a statement and then used tear gas, rubber bullets and water cannon to repel a crowd of demonstrators trying to gather in a square. —AFP

LEBANON TRASH CLEAN-UP BEGINS AS CRITICS CRY FOUL

BEIRUT: Workers began at the weekend removing tons of rubbish that have piled up around Lebanon's capital under a government plan to end an eight-month crisis that has sparked repeated protests. Civil society activists and environmental experts once again lashed out at the plan, warning that it does nothing to allay the ecological concerns that took them to the streets in the first place.

Beirut's suburbs have been awash in trash for months following the closure in July of the country's largest landfill at Naameh, just south of the Lebanese capital. Rubbish has piled up on beaches and in forests and riverbeds elsewhere in the country. The government last week said it would temporarily reopen the Naameh landfill to ease the crisis, but civil society activists have opposed

the plan, demanding a more environmentally sound solution. Workers could be seen yesterday at Jdeideh, a suburb north of Beirut, using front loaders to pack piles of trash into dozens of trucks.

"The stench is awful but the roads are open, everything is going well on the road, the security forces are facilitating the flow of traffic," said Kamil Haddad, one of the workers, who wore a protective mask over his nose and mouth.

The waste, which has laid for months in the open as authorities scrambled to find a solution, will now be transported to a dump operated by Sukleen—the same private waste collection company that threw in the towel after its contract with the government expired last July. "Things are going alright," Haddad said, as his colleagues

piled trash into trucks. Naameh was set up in the early 1990s as a temporary measure. Activists and nearby residents have long opposed the use of the site but when it was shut in July no alternative was proposed. Two other landfills are also planned for Burj Hammoud, a mainly Armenian suburb of northern Beirut, and Costa Brava to the south of the capital, likely for four years.

'Back to square one'

"The idea of taking the rubbish and dumping it in landfills—this is how the crisis started in the first place. So they (authorities) are basically ignoring the crisis of the past eight months, pretending like nothing happened, and taking us back to square one," environmental and industrial engineer Ziad Abi Chaker said.

He explained that Lebanon could in fact recycle up to 90 percent of its waste. But "there's a corruption dimension ... There is no huge money to be made out of recycling. The only way to make crazy money is with another corrupt contract," Abi Chaker said. "The cherry on the cake is that after the four years, we will have incineration—I don't know if you can call this a plan, because it certainly has nothing to do with planning." Activists from the "You Stink" movement and other groups have also demanded long-term solutions, including investment in recycling and the transfer of waste management duties to municipalities. The movement has in recent months led a string of protests that has seen thousands of people taking to the streets, accusing the government of mismanagement and corruption, and even calling for its downfall.

"Now the ball is in the court of residents of the areas where the landfills are located," one leading "You Stink" member told AFP on condition of anonymity, for fear of retribution. "We do hear some people have started to mobilize in a couple of areas, but when you see the army, security and intelligence forces deployed in the Naameh area—how do you think residents will dare take action?" — AFP



BEIRUT: Trucks began moving stacked rubbish outside the Lebanese capital under a plan adopted by the Lebanese government to put an end to the waste crisis that has been going on for eight months. — AFP

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KOBANI: Smoke rises following an airstrike by the US led coalition, seen from a hilltop outside Suruc, on the Turkey-Syria border. —AP

IS SUFFERS BLOW IN IRAQ, SYRIA BUT STILL LAUNCHES ATTACKS

‘DAESH ARE NOT AS DETERMINED AS THEY USED TO BE’

BAGHDAD: After months of losing ground in Iraq and Syria, the Islamic State group is showing signs of wear and tear, and its opponents say they have seen an increase in desertions among the extremists. But the jihadis appear to be lashing back with more terrorist and chemical attacks.

Under a stepped-up campaign of US-led and Russian airstrikes, as well as ground assaults by multiple forces in each country, the jihadis are estimated to have lost about 40 percent of their territory in Iraq and more than 20 percent in Syria. At their highest point in the summer of 2014, the group had overrun nearly a third of each country, declaring a “caliphate” spanning

but so far, the reports of desertions are mostly anecdotal. Brett McGurk, President Barack Obama’s envoy to the US-led coalition fighting IS, said this week at a conference in northern Iraq that IS desertions have increased recently and more are expected, but he did not provide figures.

The setbacks

Clint Watts, a fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute, said IS is experiencing a phenomenon he’s witnessed in other extremist groups that begin to lose territory. “You’ve seen more and more reports of defectors just broadly, and you’ve also seen more reports of internal killings of

the erosion is accelerating. The IHS figure roughly matches an estimate of a 20 percent loss given this week by US Secretary of State John Kerry.

In February alone, the SDF said it captured 2,400 square kilometers consisting of 315 villages including the IS stronghold of Shaddadeh, on the main road linking the Iraqi city of Mosul and the Syrian city of Raqqa, the de facto capital of the “caliphate.” SDF spokesman Col. Talal Sillo said the command will meet soon to plan for another offensive in northern Syria.

Loss of Grounds

In Iraq, IS territorial losses have

Syria. In an effort to squeeze the group’s finances, coalition and Russian warplanes in Syria began increasingly targeting IS oil assets in November. IS has since had to cut salaries and benefits for fighters.

Last week, Iraqi, Syrian and US officials confirmed that prominent IS military leader Omar al-Shihani died of his wounds from a US airstrike in northeastern Syria earlier this month. US special forces also recently captured the head of the IS unit researching chemical weapons in Iraq, and airstrikes have targeted the group’s chemical weapons infrastructure.

“As bad things start to happen, the less motivated, less disciplined, less radical elements of the force break and run,” US Army Col. Steve Warren said. “We’re going to keep seeing this.”

The United States estimates that as of last month, IS fields 19,000 to 25,000 fighters in Iraq and Syria - down from an estimated 20,000 to 31,500 - a number that was based on intelligence reports from May to August 2014. A US official said the decrease reflects the combined effects of battlefield deaths, desertions, internal disciplinary actions, recruiting shortfalls and difficulties that foreign fighters face traveling to Syria. Still, these developments do not necessarily make IS less of a threat.

In both Syria and Iraq, IS has launched some of its deadliest suicide attacks in recent weeks as well as a number of chemical weapons attacks. On Feb. 22, a triple suicide bombing in a Shiite suburb of the Syrian capital killed at least 83 people and wounded more than a hundred. In neighboring Iraq, a suicide truck bombing south of Baghdad killed 61 and wounded 95. In the northern Iraqi town of Taza, an IS chemical weapons attack last week killed one person and wounded more than 600.

IS also launched a coordinated assault on the northern Syrian border town of Tal Abyad and nearby villages. In days of fighting, 47 SDF fighters and 140 militants were killed, according to the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition activist group that tracks all sides of the conflict.

Watts said that if IS can’t use battlefield victories to rally its supporters, it will turn to terrorist attacks. “In terms of being a conventional army that can take territory, they are less dangerous,” Watts said. “But if your worry is regional and international terrorism they’re going to be more dangerous.” —AP



RAMADI: Iraqi security forces and allied Sunni tribal fighters help trapped civilians to cross from neighborhoods under control of the Islamic State group to neighborhoods under control of Iraqi security forces. —AP

from northwestern Syria to the outskirts of Baghdad.

At that time, the extremists were riding high, known for their courage, experience, readiness to die and brutality. Now, those battling them on the ground say they appear to be flagging.

“What we are witnessing is that Daesh are not as determined as they used to be,” Lt. Col. Fares al-Bayoush, commander of a Syrian rebel faction, said, using an Arabic acronym to refer to IS. His 1,300-strong Fursan al-Haq Brigade has been fighting against IS and Syrian government forces for more than a year. “Now there are members who surrender, there are some who defect. In the past they used to come blow themselves up,” he said.

A Palestinian-American member of IS recently gave himself up to Kurdish forces in northern Iraq,

so-called spies,” Watts said. “As they lose ground and retract you start to see these fractures emerge in the organization.”

The IS setbacks began over a year ago, when the fighters were forced out of the northern Syrian Kurdish town of Kobani by local Kurdish forces backed by US-led airstrikes.

In December, the predominantly Kurdish US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces, or SDF, under cover of intense coalition airstrikes seized the Tishrin Dam, which supplies much of northern Syria with electricity. In the weeks that followed the forces gained control of more areas.

In all of 2015, the jihadis lost 14 percent of their territory in Syria, according to IHS, an analysis group that monitors the conflict. In the past three months, they lost another eight percent, a sign that

been more gradual. Coalition airstrikes have cleared the way for ground forces to reclaim towns and cities from Sinjar in the country’s north to Ramadi in the west. The coalition estimates that between the launch of the air campaign in August 2014 and January 2016, IS has lost between 21,000-24,000 square kilometers (8,100-9,200 square miles), about 40% of the Iraqi territory it once held.

Calls for a stepped-up campaign intensified after IS claimed responsibility for the Nov. 13 Paris attacks that left 130 dead and the Oct. 31 downing of a Russian jetliner from the Egyptian beach resort of Sharm el-Sheikh, which killed all 224 on board.

Deadly attacks in Turkey by IS that killed scores of people also spurred Ankara to tighten its closure of the border, making it difficult for the extremists to cross into

from his family and with no papers. “I am not a young man,” he said. “This does not make sense.”

In December, a Bahraini court ruled that the authorities need not provide “specific means of proof” when revoking the citizenship of nationals who “cause harm to the state” or fail in their “duty of loyalty,” HRW said.

The tiny but strategic Gulf country, which is home to the US Fifth Fleet, has been wracked by unrest since security forces crushed Shiite-led protests demanding political reform in 2011. In 2015, Bahraini authorities stripped 208 Bahrainis of their citizenship, HRW said. —AP

BAHRAIN URGED TO STOP DEPORTING CITIZENS STRIPPED OF NATIONALITY

DUBAI: Human Rights Watch called on Bahrain yesterday to stop deporting citizens after stripping them of their nationality, two days before a hearing that could lead to the expulsion of another nine.

Since February 21, the Sunni-ruled but Shiite-majority kingdom has deported five people after revoking their citizenship and leaving them stateless, the New York-based watchdog said.

Another nine risk the same fate if an appeals court on Tuesday upholds a 2012 ruling to rescind their nationality for allegedly causing “damage to security of the state.”

“These unlawful deportations are ripping families apart and causing untold suffering,” HRW’s deputy Middle East director, Joe Stork, said.

“Bahrain should stop the deportations immediately and restore citizenship to those who have been left stateless, especially when this was done without justification or because they criticized their government.”

One of the nine who risk deportation after Tuesday’s appeals hearing, father of four Taimoor Karimi, told HRW he was concerned about being forced to another country away

NINE MIGRANTS DROWN OFF LIBYA, HUNDREDS RESCUED

TRIPOLI: Nine migrants trying to reach Europe have drowned off Libya and hundreds more been rescued, the Red Crescent said yesterday amid fears of an increase in crossing attempts as the route from Turkey closes.

Leaders from six EU nations led by Britain held talks in Brussels on Friday on how to tackle the flow of migrants across the Mediterranean from Libya after a European naval task force plucked more than 3,100 from the water in just three days.

The nine who died were among several hundred migrants who were discovered aboard dilapidated boats off the port of Zawiya, west of Tripoli, on Saturday, Libyan Red Crescent spokesman Malek Mersit told AFP. A total of 586 migrants were rescued, said Colonel Ayoub Qassem, spokesman for

the navy of a Tripoli administration that has disputed power with Libya’s internationally recognized government since 2014.

They included 11 children and 60 women, and were mainly Bangladeshi and Sudanese, he told AFP. The drowning came just days after four migrants were killed in a boat fire off Libya and another 187 rescued.

European leaders fear that a deal with Turkey to tackle the EU’s worst ever migrant crisis will spark an acceleration in the already large number of crossing attempts from Libya. Around 330,000 have landed in Italy from Libya since the start of 2014.

The lawlessness that has reigned in the North African nation since the NATO-backed overthrow of veteran dictator Moamer Kadhafi in 2011 has made it a favored jumping-off point. —AFP

MILITANTS KILL 13 POLICEMEN IN EGYPT’S NORTHERN SINAI

EL-ARISH: Militants killed 13 Egyptian policemen in an attack Saturday on a checkpoint south of northern Sinai’s provincial capital of el-Arish, the Egyptian Interior Ministry said.

A Sinai-based Islamic State affiliate has claimed responsibility for the attack, according to a statement circulated on social media. The Associated Press could not independently verify the claim.

The local IS affiliate has been targeting Egyptian security forces in Sinai and

claimed the downing of a Russian airliner last October that killed 224 people.

Egypt has been hit with a wave of suicide bombings and militant attacks that intensified after the military’s ouster of Islamist President Mohammed Morsi in 2013. The local Islamic State affiliate has claimed responsibility for most of the attacks.

While the attacks have largely been carried out in northern Sinai, explosions have also hit areas on the mainland including Cairo, the capital. —AP



AL-ARISH: In this photo provided by the Ismailia Governor’s office, citizens and dignitaries attend the funeral of Mohammed Taha Hassan Bakht and Bassam Hindawi, two victims of a Saturday mortar attack on a checkpoint south of northern Sinai’s provincial capital of El-Arish, at a mosque in Ismailiya, yesterday. —AP

IS-LINKED TURKISH JIHADIST BLAMED FOR ISTANBUL ATTACK ‘WAS NOT ON OUR WANTED LIST’

ISTANBUL: A Turkish jihadist with links to the Islamic State carried out the suicide bombing that killed four foreigners on a major shopping street in Istanbul, Interior Minister Efken Ala said yesterday.

“The attacker has been formally identified. He is linked to the terrorist organization Daesh,” Ala told a press conference, using another name for IS.

Ala named the bomber as Mehmet Ozturk from Gaziantep, a southeastern city on Turkey’s border with Syria.

Three Israelis and one Iranian were killed, and 39 people injured, when the bomber blew himself up Saturday on Istiklal Caddesi, a bustling pedestrian street and popular meeting spot in the heart of the city. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Most of those injured in the blast on the pavement, outside a local government building, were also foreigners. By Sunday morning, 19 people were still being treated in hospital, eight of them in critical condition, the health ministry said.

Ozturk, who was born in 1992, was identified by DNA traces found at the scene, Dogan news agency reported. He was “not on our wanted list,” Ala said, defending the authorities against accusations of repeated security failings following six major attacks since July that have killed over 200 people.

Another alleged IS member, Savas Yildiz, had been initially named by Turkish media as the suspected bomber. The minister said five people had been arrested on suspicion of links to the attack. Dogan reported that Ozturk’s father and brother were among those held.

Israeli media said the three Israeli victims—Avraham Goldman, 69, Jonathan Shor, 40 and Simha Damari, 60 — were part of a group that was on a gastronomic tour of Turkey. Two of them also had US citizenship.

The bodies of the three Israelis were to be flown home Sunday for burial aboard an Israeli military jet, Israeli military sources said. Five injured Israelis were repatriated overnight, Israel’s emergency services said.

Government accused of ‘incompetence’

The Istanbul blast came just six days after 35 people were killed in a suicide car bombing in a busy square in the capital Ankara, in an attack claimed by Kurdish rebels.

“Terrorism will not win!” the defiant front page headline of pro-government

newspaper Sabah read on Sunday.

The main opposition newspaper Cumhuriyet said the latest strike was proof of the government’s “incompetence” in its handling of the security crisis. Ankara had borne the brunt of the attacks until now, being hit three times in five months.

IS was held responsible for Turkey’s worst ever attack, which killed 103 people at an October rally in Ankara in support of the Kurdish minority-arch-enemies of IS across the border in Syria. The only attack in Istanbul since the summer, also blamed on IS, targeted the tourist quarter of Sultanahmet. Twelve German tourists were killed in that blast.

‘Terrifying’ new reality

Yesterday morning, Istiklal Caddesi street and nearby Taksim Square, the nerve centre of the European side of Istanbul, were eerily quiet, reflecting Turks’ growing nervousness in the face of the seemingly indiscriminate nature of the terrorist threat.

“You never know here it can happen. It’s terrifying,” said Ismail, a chef from a nearby restaurant.

Flowers, candles and hand-made placards calling for people not to be cowed by terrorism were left at the spot where the bomber struck.

Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu promised a determined fight “until all forms of terrorism are eradicated.”

The US and Europe, NATO allies which have been critical recently of Turkey’s slide into authoritarianism under strongman President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, assured the country of their support.

Erdogan has been accused of neglecting the fight against IS to wage a relentless offensive against the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) since a two-year-old truce between the state and the Kurdish rebels fell apart in July.

A Kurdish rebel group, the Kurdistan Freedom Falcons (TAK), claimed responsibility for the March 13 suicide car bombing in Ankara, saying it was avenging the military’s actions in the battle-scarred towns of the mainly Kurdish southeast.

TAK, which also claimed a February attack targeting troops in Ankara that killed 29 people, has ties to the PKK, which took up arms against the state in pursuit of autonomy for the Kurdish minority in 1984. The conflict has claimed some 40,000 lives so far. —AFP

US TOURISTS SEEK PRESERVED CUBA, AND CUBANS SEEK CHANGE

HAVANA: American Sue Pemberton rushed to Havana to experience authentic Cuba before the communist island gets swamped by capitalism. The only problem: millions of other foreigners had exactly the same idea.

Already booming tourism is set to explode in the wake of President Barack Obama's visit to Havana on Sunday, when he'll bury an almost six decades-long conflict that left Cuba the last major undeveloped market in the Caribbean. So Pemberton, 63, joined a tour to "see it before it changes." "I assume in a few years there'll be a Starbucks and the McDonald's and Subway and all the chains," she said, while waiting for her group outside the cathedral, set in a stunning square in old Havana.

Visitors flock to see Havana's crumbling, picturesque streets, ride in pre-1960s American convertibles, and listen to street musicians playing romantic songs about Fidel Castro's 1959 revolution.

But the more they come to see a country seemingly stuck in time, the more the country changes. "For me the attraction was getting here before everyone," said Evan Ingardia, 30, a student at the University of Washington business school, standing with two friends near a dream-like line of pink and purple open-top Cadillacs and Oldsmobiles in the city center. Yet he was aware they were probably already too late. "It's starting to wander between what's authentic and what's bordering on fake."

Floodgates crack open

Tourism dominated by Canadians and Europeans is nothing new. But the game changer was last year's restoration of US-

Cuban diplomatic relations, raising the eventual prospect of unrestricted travel from a country of 323 million barely an hour's flight away. Last Tuesday, the Obama administration tore another hole in the already tattered US economic embargo by telling Americans they can now travel to Cuba as individuals, not just as part of approved organizations. They are still officially not tourists and have to come under one of 12 categories, such as educational activity, but the rules are now almost unenforceable.

Of the 3.5 million tourists to Cuba in 2015, only 161,000 were Americans. However, this was 77 percent up on the previous year and Americans are now expected to be a major component in a growth spurt taking overall numbers to 6.8 million in 2018.

"We are obliged to focus entirely on this market, because there are so many of them that we don't have time for other tourists," said Nelson Calderon, a tour guide specializing in US visitors. "It's not that we don't want others, but we don't have time."

Nostalgia? No thanks

The commercialization of old Havana and other Cuban attractions may disappoint tourists searching for retro-revolutionary chic.

But Cubans themselves are utterly unnostalgic, thinking only of a chance to escape their stifling existence in a broken-down communist economy. "It was an era that led to a dead end, so it's good that it's changing," said Fulgencio Verderas Dias, an 80-year-old guitarist busking in a touristy street.

Yaset Martin, 30, an artist selling paintings nearby, said that "developing, not standing still," is what matters. Perfectly illustrating



HAVANA: Foreign tourists use an ATM machine in downtown yesterday. —AFP

Cuba's drift from its revolutionary past, Martin's offerings included the inevitable portraits of revolutionary icon Che Guevara — but only because they are tourists bait, rather than for ideological reasons. "I don't know the past," the artist said. "I live in the present."

'Theme park' Cuba?

Cuba does not have the infrastructure to handle mass tourism. Some also fear unpreparedness for the darker kind of problems-ranging from overbearing corporations to

social ills like income inequality, crime and drugs—that Cubans have previously kept largely at bay.

"By the time you get big business concerns and the hotels, I think you're going to see a very different Cuba emerging," said Nancy Roberts, a professor specializing in strategic planning at the Naval Postgraduate School in California, who was working with university colleagues in Havana. "There's something special and unique about this place and is anyone thinking about that?"

Most Cubans are overwhelmingly bullish, noting their country's unusually high educational levels and strong sense of national identity. But filmmaker and blogger Eduardo del Llano is one of the rare voices calling on his countrymen to beware the lure of the tourist dollar. "Long term, we have to ask ourselves to what point we're going to be turned into a communist theme park where people come to see curiosities from the distant past," he said—"and where we, to attract tourists, will have to dress up." —AFP



NEW YORK: People clash with protesters while they take part in a march against Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump this past Saturday. —AFP

ANTI-TRUMP PROTESTERS RALLY IN NEW YORK, BLOCK ARIZONA ROAD

NEW YORK: Hundreds protested Donald Trump in New York and blocked a major road Saturday in the southwestern state of Arizona, where a demonstrator was punched and kicked at a rally. The latest attempts by opponents to disrupt the campaign of the top US Republican White House hopeful resulted in a handful of arrests, police and witnesses said.

In Tucson, Arizona a protester with a sign showing Trump's face and the words "Bad For America," was kicked and punched by a member of the audience while being escorted out of the venue by security, video posted online by NBC showed.

The network reported that the audience member was handcuffed and taken away before being charged with assault with injury, according to police.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the country, demonstrators who gathered at Manhattan's Columbus Circle, near one of the billionaire real estate mogul's luxury buildings overlooking Central Park, shouted the slogan "Donald Trump, go away, racist, sexist, anti-gay." Amid a considerable police presence, protesters held up signs that read "Deport Trump" and "Build a wall around Trump." Also spotted in the crowd were placards which read "Don't let bigotry Trump our constitution" and "Will trade 1 Donald Trump for 25,000 refugees."

At least one person was arrested on the city's

famous Fifth Avenue during a brief skirmish that was quickly brought under control by police. The demonstration was organized by a group called Cosmopolitan Antifascists, with others joining in. Ordinary New Yorkers turned out for the event, concerned by Trump's status as the clear frontrunner for the Republican party's nomination ahead of November's presidential elections.

Trump "is racist, he is sexist, he is homophobic, he is Islamophobic, xenophobic, he is a fascist. It has serious implication for the future of America," Patrick Waldo told AFP. "If we start closing our borders to some people based on their religious beliefs, that is completely unconstitutional... we start going to a World War II Germany kind of situation and I don't want that in my country," the 31-year-old historian added. Trump has called for a ban on all Muslims entering the United States, just one example of rhetoric by the candidate that has sparked controversy on the 2016 campaign trail.

"Everything he says is racist, is false. It hurts my feelings," said Nour Hapatsha, a 22-year-old Muslim born in the United States. Some pro-Trump supporters also showed up. "More and more, people who show their support to Donald Trump are intimidated," said one among them, Jim MacDonald. "As frightening as this is, we are going to show that we have the right

to show our support to Donald Trump whether it pleases the other side or not," he added.

Donald Trump

Ahead of Trump's Tucson event, Arizona protesters blocked a major thoroughfare on the outskirts of Phoenix, in an attempt to prevent his supporters from reaching an area rally.

Trump was in the state ahead of his primary next Tuesday. The estimated 50 protesters held a banner across the width of Shea Boulevard with the words "Dump Trump" as long lines of traffic backed up in the suburb of Fountain Hills. Controversial Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio, who openly endorsed and supports Trump, said he would do everything possible to ensure the event would go ahead and Trump subsequently took the stage.

Deputy Joaquin Enriquez told AFP that three people were arrested and that two vehicles were towed. "These arrests were made because they were blocking a public roadway, not for protesting," he said. Demonstrations and violence have broken out at several Trump events recently, with critics saying the businessman's inflammatory rhetoric and barely veiled threats directed at protesters have been fueling an increasingly toxic atmosphere surrounding his rallies. —AFP

NATIVE AMERICAN TRIBES GAINING RESERVATION LANDS

BOSTON: Native American tribes have been steadily gaining lands under President Barack Obama's administration. Nearly 400,000 acres have been placed into trust for tribes since Obama took office in 2009, according to data from the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Indian Affairs. And more lands set aside for tribes are likely on the way.

The president has pledged to place a total of 500,000 acres into trust for tribes before his tenure ends. That's more than double the roughly 233,000 acres placed into trust during the prior tenure of President George W. Bush.

John Dossett, general counsel to the D.C.-based National Congress of American Indians, said the administration has been more proactive than prior ones in speeding up an application process that can sometimes take decades.

But it remains to be seen whether the next administration will have the same commitment, he said. Roughly 525,000 acres of land that tribes are seeking to place into trust are still pending decisions, according to the interior department. "This administration has really heard from tribes that the process is much too slow," Dossett said. "It can certainly be better, though. It should happen much, much faster."

Native American lands collectively represent about 56 million acres - a territory roughly the size of Minnesota, Dossett said. Generally, getting land placed into trust requires tribes purchase or otherwise acquire rights to land and then petition the federal government for the special status. If placed into trust, the land is tax exempt, eligible for federal programs for business development, housing and other uses.

C. Matthew Snipp, director of the Native American studies program at Stanford University, said the process isn't without controversy. "It's always been controversial, gaming or not, because it removes land from the local tax rolls," he said. "One way of looking at this is that this is just a process of righting past wrongs, and for local governments, what goes around, comes around."

The Citizens Equal Rights Alliance, an opposition group fighting some of the recent decisions, said it's generally not opposed to the decisions, especially when they involve lands already under federal control, like national parks.

Its concern lies with the relatively small percentage that involve private lands under state jurisdiction, said Lana Marcussen, a legal consultant for the Wisconsin-based group whose stated mission is to "change federal Indian policies that threaten or restrict the individual rights of all citizens living on or near Indian reservations."

"This is the constitutional problem of trying to restore what should have happened with the Indians," Marcussen said. "If the federal government has the legal authority to rewrite what the process was supposed to be it has the legal authority to change all the rights to everyone else too." She said the group, which is involved in legal challenges against the Oneida in upstate New York, is closely watching developments in Massachusetts, where the Department of the Interior created a reservation of over 300 acres for the Mashpee Wampanoag tribe this year.

The tribe, which had acquired the land prior to the decision, had been anxiously awaiting the designation because it's aiming to build, along with its Malaysian partners the Genting Group, a \$500 million Las Vegas-style resort.

The newly designated reservation lands are split into two large tracts, one on its historical home on Cape Cod and another about 50 miles away in Taunton, where the tribe envisions the new casino.

Adam Bond, an attorney representing local residents challenging the decision in federal court, argues that the department can't legally take land into trust for the tribe because they weren't federally recognized in 1934 as he suggests the law requires.

Bond also questioned the tribe's historical ties to Taunton, arguing in his lawsuit that its land claim is based on speculation, not physical evidence like burial sites, artifacts or other archaeological findings. "The fight is about government getting too big," he said. "It's about government going rogue and ignoring its federal mandate."

The tribe, which became federally recognized in 2007 but traces its ancestors to the Native Americans who negotiated peace with the Pilgrims nearly four centuries ago, declined to comment for this story. It plans to break ground on the casino early April, despite the pending challenge. — AP

FOR SOME MONTANA OFFICE SEEKERS, IT'S NOT ABOUT WINNING

HELENA: Candidate Bill McChesney has been speaking out against big money in Montana politics, but he gave incumbent Gov. Steve Bullock a big financial favor just by entering the Democratic primary. Bullock can now keep hundreds of thousands of dollars in contributions that he would have had to return if he had run unopposed. Montana law allows campaign donors to give a gubernatorial candidate a maximum of \$1,320 - up to \$660 in the primary and another \$660 in November's general election. However, without a primary challenger, candidates would have to send back any amount exceeding \$660.

Most states have limits on campaign contributions, but Montana and South Carolina may be the only ones requiring candidates to return money when they run unopposed, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Some say Montana law should be changed to prevent "paper candidates." It's become a ritual among Montana election watchers to see who Democrats and Republicans can wrangle into key races to skirt campaign finance rules.

That explains the phone calls Mark Perea received from Republican officials days before the

March 14 filing deadline. "There were people who were trying to make sure that I filed. Different people involved in politics were contacting me," said Perea, an antiques dealer in Helena. The callers stressed the importance of giving voters a choice in the primary and prevailed on him to enter the governor's race against candidate Greg Gianforte. Some offered to pay the \$1,982.02 filing fee.

Perea refused

"I wouldn't run as a paper candidate. I would never do that," he said. Though Perea didn't jump in, Terry Nelson did. Nelson knows he stands little chance against Gianforte, a wealthy Bozeman businessman. But, he said, if Donald Trump can enthrall the masses despite throngs of early naysayers, why can't he?

Nelson's and McChesney's entries in the gubernatorial race - just days before the candidate-filing period ended March 14 - follows a common trend in Montana election cycles. Election watchers say both parties use token opponents to comply with state law. Robert Saldin, a professor of political science at the University of Montana, said the law needs to be changed to prevent such "farfetched situations."

"There is a pattern here in Montana of people jumping in like this. They jump into the race and they basically don't do anything. They don't even attempt to mount anything approaching a real campaign. They just file their paperwork then sit at home," Saldin said.

Former Montana Gov. Brian Schweitzer acknowledged the practice of recruiting dummy candidates, as they are called in political parlance, and said it might be time for the Legislature to revisit the issue. Few, if any, will fess up to being part of the charade, he said. And neither would he. "Sometimes people get into these races so their opponents can raise more money, and it looks like it's happening in some of these races now. But there's nothing illegal about it," Schweitzer said. Jonathan Mott, the state's Commissioner of Political Practices, defended the rule, saying it helps limit the role of money in campaigns and promotes robust debate. "Primary elections are set up to allow for the opportunity for debate to occur without impacting the winner's chance to then face the other candidate in the general election," he said. McChesney said he's in the race to make a statement, not to help Bullock. "My filing for election will give Gov. Bullock the opportu-



HELENA: Republican gubernatorial candidate Greg Gianforte addresses supporters. — AP

nity to carry his primary collections into the general election, although that was not my purpose," McChesney said. "And I hope that doesn't overshadow - in fact, I hope that it would emphasize - the necessity for campaign finance reform."

Nelson said no one forced him to run, though a few Republicans urged him to run. Nelson, who chairs the GOP's Ravalli County Central Committee, is

making his first run for statewide office. He said he's running to give voice to the concerns of western Montana and to raise his name recognition. "I believe that my running would be a big long shot," he said, "but you've seen what Trump's been able to do in the primary." While McChesney and Nelson say they're in it to win it, they both donated \$50 to the campaigns of their rivals before becoming candidates. — AP

'CIVIL WAR' GRIPS UK GOVT AFTER SHOCK RESIGNATION

LONDON: A top British eurosceptic minister who quit over welfare cuts launched a damaging attack on Prime Minister David Cameron on Sunday, exposing serious tensions in his government ahead of June's referendum on EU membership.

In his first interview since resigning as work and pensions secretary Friday, Iain Duncan Smith accused Cameron of trying to reduce Britain's budget deficit through benefit cuts which hurt poorer voters while protecting older, often richer ones.

Duncan Smith, who last month became one of the most senior Conservatives to say he would campaign against the premier for Britain to leave the EU on June 23, denied his shock resignation was about Europe.

But the former army officer known as IDS who led the ruling party from 2001 to 2003 admitted that Cameron and his finance minister and close ally George Osborne had stopped listening to him.

"This is not some secondary attempt to attack the prime minister or about

Europe," Duncan Smith said in a BBC television interview, adding he quit because he was "losing that ability to influence events from the inside".

Duncan Smith also said that Cameron's government was "in danger of drifting in a direction that divides society, not unites it".

The resignation of Duncan Smith is perhaps the biggest blow Cameron has suffered since being re-elected last year. It comes just three months ahead of the referendum on EU membership which Cameron admitted in an interview published Sunday would be close.

"My fear is turnout," the prime minister told the Independent on Sunday. "For heaven's sake, get out and vote in, because you might wake up and find you're out."

Inflicting 'maximum damage'?

Duncan Smith says he resigned over 1.3 billion (1.2 billion euros, \$1.4 billion) of cuts to disability welfare announced in a budget last week which "benefits higher earning taxpayers"—often

Conservative voters.

But a furious Cameron called Duncan Smith a four-letter word in a phone call to discuss the resignation, describing him as "dishonorable", media reported.

And ministers in Cameron's government were arguing publicly Sunday about whether Duncan Smith's resignation was a principled stand against benefit cuts or a eurosceptic plot to undermine the premier. Pensions Minister Ros Altmann, who served under Duncan Smith, said she was baffled by his decision to quit after Downing Street had already said it would rethink the cuts he was objecting to.

"He seems to want to do maximum damage to the party leadership in order to further his campaign to try to get Britain to leave the EU," she added. In response, three other ministers who worked closely with Duncan Smith issued statements supporting him.

Another Duncan Smith ally, senior eurosceptic Bernard Jenkin, complained of high-handed leadership by Cameron, telling Sky News that "the prime minis-

ter... is not meant to be a dictator". David Laws, who served as a Liberal Democrat minister in the last coalition government under Cameron, said on the BBC that the implications of the current row were "huge". "I hate to intrude into a civil war which is now dominating British politics," he added.

As the Duncan Smith row overshadowed the wider referendum debate, Conservative former prime minister John Major stepped forward to argue that a Britain outside the EU would be much less powerful than at present.

"Our nation can either decide to be true to our history and remain outward-looking internationalists on the world stage—or shrink to lower prominence," he wrote in the Sunday Telegraph.

Major—the last Conservative to lead Britain before Cameron, between 1990 and 1997 — endured a turbulent term in office due to party fighting over the creation of the European Union. He famously dubbed leading eurosceptics who plotted against him "bastards". — AFP



Iain Duncan Smith



AMPOSTA: The students, enrolled at Barcelona University as part of the European Erasmus exchange program, were returning from a traditional festival in the eastern city of Valencia when the driver "hit the railing on the right and swerved to the left so violently that the bus veered onto the other side of the highway," Jordi Jane, who heads interior matters for the Catalonia region, said. —AFP

BUS CARRYING FOREIGN STUDENTS CRASHES IN SPAIN, KILLING 13

TORTOSA: Yesterday thirteen foreign students were killed and dozens more injured in Spain when a bus carrying them back from a popular traditional festival crashed into an incoming car.

The students, who were on a European exchange program in the northeastern region of Catalonia, came from 16 different countries including Britain, the Netherlands, Ukraine, Switzerland, Finland, Norway and Sweden but also Japan and New Zealand.

All the dead were female, according to a regional government source who requested anonymity, but authorities have yet to announce their exact nationalities. The accident occurred just before 6 am (0500 GMT) near the small town of Freginals, about 150 kilometres (95 miles) south of Barcelona, as the students were returning from the Fallas festival in eastern Valencia known for the burning of giant statues.

The driver "hit the railing on the right and swerved to the left so violently that the bus veered onto the other side of the highway," said Jordi Jane who heads up interior matters for the Catalonia region.

The bus then hit a car coming in the opposite direction, injuring two people inside, he added.

Interior Minister Jorge Fernandez Diaz, who rushed to the scene, said it was still not clear why the driver hit the railing in the first place, adding however that the accident was likely due to a "human factor". An AFP photographer at the scene several hours after the crash said many fire engines were at the scene, as were three hearses and a heavy-lift crane. The car's front was smashed in, and the bus was lying on its side after the accident.

Negative for drugs, alcohol

The bus was carrying 57 people in all, including the driver.

Spain's national radio station RNE spoke to the son of the owner of the company that chartered the bus, who said his father was driving another bus in front of the one that crashed—one of a total of five vehicles ferrying students back from Valencia. "All of a sudden, he stopped seeing it in his rear-view mirror. He stopped at the next service area, called the driver but he didn't pick up," said the son, named only as Raul.

He added that his father then asked passengers in his own bus to call those in the other vehicle, and that is when he got news of the accident. "The driver is in a state of shock, but he's okay physically," he added.

Catalonia's high court said in a statement that an initial probe revealed that "the bus driver tested negative for drugs and alcohol". The accident is one of the deadliest in Spain in recent years. In November 2014, a bus carrying pilgrims fell into a ravine in the southeast of the country, leaving 14 dead and another 41 injured.

Spain's Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy tweeted his concern on Sunday. "My condolences to the families of the victims and I wish rapid recovery to the injured," he wrote. Catalonia's newly-elected regional president Carles Puigdemont, meanwhile, visited the area after cancelling a planned trip to Paris. Joining in mourning for the tragedy, players for Barcelona and Villarreal which is only around 100 kilometres from the crash site—observed a moment of silence before kick-off, as will those from the Real Madrid and Sevilla later Sunday. — AFP

SENEGAL VOTES ON REFERENDUM TO REDUCE PRESIDENTIAL TERM

DAKAR: Senegalese residents are voting on a referendum that would see some sweeping constitutional reforms including a reduction of the presidential term from seven to five years.

The election commission says more than 5 million people are expected to vote Sunday to determine if more than a dozen reforms will be adopted. The referendum proposed by President Macky Sall is in stark contrast to other heads of state in Africa trying to change

constitutions to remain in power.

Senegal's referendum also calls for a strengthened National Assembly, better representation for Senegalese abroad, greater rights for the opposition and participation of independent candidates in elections among the 15 changes.

In February, the Constitutional Council rejected Sall's suggestion he limit his own term to five years, in line with campaign promises in 2012. — AP

PUTIN: RUSSIA CAN REBUILD ITS SYRIA FORCES IN 'A FEW HOURS'

MOSCOW: Signaling Russia's intention to maintain a high-profile role in Syria despite its partial military withdrawal, President Vladimir Putin warned Thursday that Moscow could still build up its forces within "a few hours" if needed and will continue helping the Syrian army fight extremist groups.

Putin, who recalled some of Russia's warplanes from Syria earlier this week, said Moscow will keep enough forces there to continue the fight against the Islamic State group, the Nusra Front and other extremist organizations. It will also continue to boost the Syrian military with weapons, training and operational guidance.

In an apparent warning to Turkey, Saudi Arabia and others who had talked about the possibility of sending troops into Syria, Putin also emphasized that the Russian military will keep all its air defense missile systems, including the powerful S-400s, at its air base in Syria. It will stand ready to use them "against any targets that we would consider a threat to our servicemen," he said.

Putin's statements underlined his intention to maintain a strong military presence in Syria to consolidate the military and political gains achieved in Russia's 5 1/2-month air campaign. That campaign has helped turn the tide of war and allowed Syrian President Bashar Assad's forces to make significant advances ahead of peace talks, and established Russia as a major player in the diplomatic effort to determine Syria's future.

Speaking during a Kremlin ceremony honoring Russian military officers who have taken part in the Syrian campaign, Putin said that the action in Syria has demonstrated Russia's "leadership, will and responsibility" in fighting "enemies of civilization".

Russian warplanes have conducted more than 9,000 combat missions since the air campaign began on Sept. 30, allowing the Syrian army "to gain strategic initiative," Putin said. He said the action in Syria cost the military about 33 billion rubles (about \$480 million), adding that the Defense Ministry already had those funds earmarked for maneuvers and used them instead to finance the Syrian campaign.

"There is no more efficient way of training than real combat," he said, adding that the military action in Syria allowed the Russian armed forces to test their long-range cruise missiles and other new weapons in real action for the first time.

Alongside hundreds of officers at the Kremlin were the widows of four Russian servicemen killed in action in Syria: a pilot of a Russian plane downed by Turkey, a marine killed on a mission to rescue the pilot's crewmate, a military adviser killed

by shelling and a fourth man the circumstances of whose death haven't been revealed yet. In addition, officials said one soldier at the Russian base killed himself.

Putin said that a Russian- and U.S.-brokered cease-fire that began on Feb. 27 has now allowed Russia to reduce its military presence in Syria. The number of Russian air missions flown in Syria has dropped from 60-80 to 20-30 a day, meaning that some aircraft could be sent home, he said, without specifying how many warplanes will stay in Syria.

Putin said that Assad had been informed in advance about the Russian pullout and supported the decision. Putin praised the Syrian president for what he described as his readiness to contribute to a peaceful settlement. "We have seen his restraint, a sincere striving for peace and readiness for compromise and dialogue," he said.

The Russian president voiced hope that the partial withdrawal of Russian forces from Syria would send an "important positive signal" and help Syria peace talks that began in Geneva on Monday. While praising cooperation with the U.S. in negotiating the truce, Putin warned that the Russian military remaining in Syria would be ready to act against any groups that violate the cease-fire.

"If it becomes necessary, Russia is capable of building up its groups of forces in the region to the level required by the situation in literally a few hours and use our entire arsenal," he said. "We wouldn't like to do it ... and we count on common sense of all sides, on the Syrian authorities' and the opposition's adherence to the peace process."

Without naming any specific country, Putin said that "all interested nations have been warned" about Russia's intention to destroy any target that would threaten the Russian military and the fact that Russia also has helped beef up Syrian army's air defenses. The warning appeared directed at Turkey, which downed a Russian warplane at the Syrian border in November, and other nations, like Saudi Arabia, which mulled sending troops into Syria.

"No one has the right to violate the airspace of a sovereign country, Syria," he said. He also said the Syrian army will press its offensive on Palmyra and drive out the IS forces controlling it, adding that Russia will continue offering all kinds of assistance to Assad's military. "It includes financial aid, the deliveries of weapons and military gear, help in training, organization and teaming of Syrian armed forces, intelligence support, help in planning combat missions," he said, adding that Russia would also continue to provide direct air cover for the Syrian military. — AP

CONGOLESE IS HIGHEST-RANKING POLITICIAN SET FOR HAGUE COURT VERDICT

AMSTERDAM: A former Congolese vice-president becomes the most senior political leader ever to face judgment before the International Criminal Court today, when judges rule on whether he committed war crimes in the Central African Republic (CAR).

Jean-Pierre Bemba, a wealthy businessman whose Movement for the Liberation of Congo (MLC) militia and political party vied for dominance in the Democratic Republic of Congo in the early 2000s, is charged with ordering rape and murder. If acquitted, Bemba, an old rival of Congolese president Joseph Kabila, could return to political life in the war-torn country which has for decades been ravaged by militias fighting over its mineral wealth.

The charges - two of crimes against humanity and three of war crimes - stem from his militia's intervention on the side of CAR's then-president Ange-Felix Patasse in the neighbouring country's civil war. Bemba denies the charges.

In the court's prison, in The Hague's seaside suburb of Scheveningen, he rubs shoulders with suspects including former Ivorian president Laurent Gbagbo and fellow Congolese Germain Katanga, who is appealing his war crimes conviction. The ICC's prosecutors say Bemba knew, or should have known that his MLC soldiers were committing crimes. During the five-year trial, 40 witnesses testified. One described being raped by two MLC soldiers. She was later diagnosed with HIV/AIDS.

Bemba's lawyers say he had no control over the MLC's campaign in CAR, during which they claim its soldiers were fully under Patasse's command. His arrest in 2008 came as a surprise both



THE HAGUE: ICC will decide its sentence against Jean-Pierre Bemba today. — AFP

to Bemba and his supporters and opponents at home. He had been living in semi-exile in Europe for several years when prosecutors sprung a trap by issuing an arrest warrant during a visit to Belgium, Congo's former colonial master.

Like most fellow inmates in the comfortable detention centre, he has devoted the years of his trial to hobbies, entertaining his lawyers with

impromptu piano renditions of Abba's hit "Waterloo", in a nod to the town near Brussels where he was arrested. The trial began in 2010 but was delayed when, three years in, prosecutors claimed to have uncovered evidence of a conspiracy by Bemba and his lawyer to fabricate exonerating evidence. Five people, including Bemba, were charged in the resulting witness tampering case, which continues. — Reuters

CONGO EXTRADITES KEY SUSPECT IN RWANDAN GENOCIDE

KINSHASA: Congo's justice minister says one of the most wanted suspects in the 1994 Rwandan genocide has now been extradited home to face charges.

Ladislav Ntaganzwa's arrest in eastern Congo late last year came more than two decades after the genocide in which more than 800,000 ethnic Tutsis and moderate Hutus were slaughtered by extremist Hutus.

Congolese Justice Minister Alexis Thambwe Mwamba made the

announcement today. Rwandan authorities have said they want to try him on charges of participating in the planning and execution of the massacre of more than 20,000 Tutsis over a four-day period.

In one case, authorities say Ntaganzwa personally gave the order for a massacre to begin in Cyahinda Parish on April 15, 1994, and then incited others to kill those who tried to escape. — AP

TWO SCHOOLCHILDREN KILLED, NINE MISSING IN PAKISTAN AVALANCHE

CHITRAL: Pakistani rescuers yesterday found the bodies of two schoolchildren hit by an avalanche in the mountainous northwest, while around nine more remain buried beneath the snow.

The disaster struck on Saturday afternoon near the village of Susom, some 40 kilometers north of the town of Chitral in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, local police station chief Sultan Baig told AFP.

Worried parents and authorities began searching for the ninth graders when they did not return from school. "The chances of finding any survivors are very low," said local deputy mayor Mohammad Ali. "But you never know, people have been found

alive buried under snow for nearly 20 hours."

The Provincial Disaster Management Authority said yesterday evening the rescue operation was still continuing.

Heavy rains have killed at least 86 people, injured 101 and damaged 240 houses since March 9 across Pakistan, according to the National Disaster Management Authority. It said landslides and collapsed roofs caused most of the fatalities.

Poorly-built homes, particularly in rural areas, are most prone to collapse. Severe weather hits the country every year, with hundreds killed and huge tracts of prime farmland destroyed in recent years.—AFP

PAKISTAN FREES 86 INDIAN FISHERMEN

KARACHI: Pakistan yesterday released 86 Indian fishermen held for trespassing into its territorial waters, officials said, the second batch freed this month.

"We released 86 more Indian fishermen today," Superintendent of Karachi's Malir prison Raja Mumtaz told AFP, adding that 363 still remain in Pakistani custody. On March 6, Pakistan released 86 fishermen and a civilian prisoner, he added.

Indian and Pakistani fishermen are frequently detained for illegal fishing since the Arabian Sea border is not clearly defined and many boats lack the technology to fix their precise location.

The fishermen often languish in jail, even after serving their terms, as poor diplomatic ties between the two arch-rivals slows up bureaucratic requirements for release.—AFP

INDONESIA TO SUMMON CHINA AMBASSADOR OVER FISHING BOAT INCIDENT

JAKARTA/BEIJING: Indonesia will summon China's ambassador over an incident involving a Chinese fishing vessel in the Natuna Sea, a minister said yesterday, as Beijing accused it of attacking the ship in traditional Chinese fishing grounds.

The move comes amid heightened tensions in the South China Sea over China's land reclamation there and over its claims on vast swathes of an important shipping corridor. Several Southeast Asian countries have overlapping claims in the area.

Indonesia was attempting to detain the Chinese vessel for fishing illegally in waters near the contested South China Sea when a Chinese coast guard vessel intervened, fisheries minister Susi Pudjiastuti told reporters in Jakarta.

"What we will ask the ambassador is that if they say their nine-dash line does not claim Natuna then why is there still illegal fishing happening there," Pudjiastuti said, adding the ambassador will be summoned by the foreign ministry on Monday. "Their government should not stand behind illegal and unregulated fish-

ing," she said.

China's foreign ministry, in a statement sent to Reuters, said the trawler was carrying out "normal activities" in "traditional Chinese fishing grounds". "On March 19, after the relevant trawler was attacked and harassed by an armed Indonesian ship, a Chinese Coast Guard ship went to assist," it said.

"The Chinese side immediately demanded the Indonesian side at once release the detained Chinese fishermen and ensure their personal safety," the ministry added. China hopes Indonesia can "appropriately handle" the issue, it said. Indonesian foreign ministry officials were not immediately available for comment.

China claims vast swathes of the South China Sea that are also claimed by several Southeast Asian countries. Indonesia is not a claimant in the disputed South China Sea, but has raised concerns over China's inclusion of the resource-rich Natuna Islands in its so-called "nine-dash line". China says that it does not dispute Indonesia's sovereignty over the Natuna Islands.—Reuters



CHENNAI: Indian Hindu devotees pull a chariot decorated with flowers and statues carrying a diety of Hindu god Shiva during an annual cart festival procession in Chennai.—AFP

PAKISTAN PROVINCE WILL CELEBRATE HINDU HOLIDAY

KARACHI: Southern Sindh province has announced a public holiday to celebrate Holi next week, the first time the Hindu "festival of colours" will be officially marked in the overwhelmingly Muslim country.

The move comes days after Pakistan's federal parliament passed a non-binding resolution that called for the country to observe Hindu and Christian holidays. "We have announced a public holiday across the province on March 24 for the festival of Holi," Maula Bakhs Chando, a senior aide to the province's chief minister Qaim Ali Shah told AFP.

A government circular that was tweeted by Bakhtawar Bhutto-Zardari, daughter of the ex-president Asif Ali Zardari, added that all government bodies except essential

services would be off for the day. Pakistan's Hindus make up around two percent of the country's 200 million people and mostly live in southern Sindh province. Christians account for roughly 1.6 percent of the population. Religious minorities have long faced economic and social discrimination though there are signs the government is now attempting to improve its track record.

The ancient Hindu festival of Holi, which heralds the end of winter and the victory of good over evil, is marked with a national public holiday in India and sees revelers pour onto the streets.

Celebrated mainly in India, Nepal and other countries with large Hindu populations, it falls on the last full moon of winter.—AFP



LAHORE: Pakistani Christians pray during Palm Sunday Mass in St Anthony Church. The Southern Sindh province has announced a public holiday to celebrate Holi next week, the first time the Hindu "festival of colors" will be officially marked in the overwhelmingly Muslim country.—AFP



MCLEOD GAN: Tibetans voting for a new leader tasked with sustaining their struggle for greater autonomy in their Chinese-ruled homeland as the Dalai Lama retreats from the political frontline.—AFP

EXILED TIBETANS ELECT LEADER AS DALAI LAMA STEPS BACK

DHARAMSALA: Tens of thousands of exiled Tibetans voted yesterday for a new leader tasked with sustaining their struggle for greater autonomy in the Chinese-ruled province as the Dalai Lama retreats from the political frontline. While Tibetans from across the world were geared up to vote, those in the picturesque Indian hill town of Dharamsala where the Dalai Lama lives started lining up at booths at 9:00 am (0330 GMT) to elect the next leader of the government-in-exile.

One by one, hundreds including monks and nuns scribbled the names of their favorite candidates on pieces of paper and slipped them into green ballot boxes as polls were set to close around 5:00 pm. The post of prime minister in exile was a low-profile role before the 80-year-old Tibetan spiritual leader devolved power in an attempt to lessen his own totemic status and foster a democratic setup to keep Tibet's freedom movement alive after his death.

While many felt voting could help their campaign against Chinese rule over their Himalayan homeland, several were skeptical given the government-in-exile's lack of effective power. "I am not sure whether the democratic system can help in Tibet's freedom struggle," said Rikten, a 28-year-old teacher who gave one name, after voting. "But its values and rights can definitely bring more awareness on the Tibetan cause."

A lifetime in exile

The Dalai Lama announced his decision in

March 2011, just days before the election of the incumbent prime minister—or Sikyong-Lobsang Sangay, who is standing again. The 48-year-old Harvard-educated former academic is regarded as the front-runner, having already beaten off three of the four other candidates in a first round of voting last October.

Both he and his one remaining opponent, Penpa Tsering, 49, favor the "middle way" approach of the Dalai Lama that advocates seeking greater autonomy for Tibet peacefully. In all, 88,000 Tibetans in 13 countries from Australia to the United States were registered to cast ballots for a prime minister and the 44-member parliament-in-exile.

Many voters, like Sangay, have lived all their lives in exile and never visited Tibet. One of the eliminated candidates, Lukar Jam Atsok, spent time as a political prisoner in China and had threatened to make waves with his more aggressive policy of advocating complete independence. On policy, there is relatively little to choose between Sangay and his remaining opponent, and opinions on the streets of Dharamsala were mixed in the run-up to yesterday's vote.

Many said they would stick with Sangay. But some who voted for him in 2011 said they had been disappointed by his performance in office. "I will vote for Penpa Tsering, who has decades of experience serving in the Tibetan government in exile and in the Tibetan community. He will have more substance," said Lhadon, a 55-year-

old woman who did not give her full name.

Both Sangay and Tsering voted yesterday, while Atsok cast an "empty vote" to express dissatisfaction over the election commission's move to bar his candidacy. The results from yesterday's voting are expected on April 27.

Shadow of Dalai Lama

Tsering was born in India and has served in the Tibetan parliament-in-exile based in Dharamsala for 10 years, where he is currently the speaker. Whoever prevails can expect to remain in the shadow of the Dalai Lama, a Nobel peace laureate who remains the most potent rallying point for Tibetans, both in exile and in their homeland. The Himalayan hill town has been home to him and thousands of Tibetan refugees since he fled Tibet in 1959 after a failed uprising against Chinese rule. Despite the Dalai Lama's status, many exiles said it was important to vote. "The election is really important. It is a basic right of a citizen to vote and we take this opportunity as a blessing," said Sonam, a 22-year-old Tibetan student in Nepal who did not give her full name. She expressed hope the Nepal government would allow voting to go ahead after authorities confiscated ballot boxes in 2011, apparently under pressure from neighboring China. China has widely been seen as waiting for the Dalai Lama's death, believing that the movement for Tibetan rights will not survive without its charismatic and world-famous leader.—AFP

PRINCE HARRY VISITS NEPAL QUAKE VICTIMS, DAMAGED STRUCTURES

KATHMANDU: Britain's Prince Harry yesterday visited with families living at a camp in Nepal for people made homeless by last April's devastating earthquake as he continued a trip that many hope will draw attention to Nepal's struggle to recover from the disaster.

Harry talked to families living in the camp at Bhaktapur, just east of the capital, Kathmandu, inquiring about the living conditions. He also spent part of the second day of his five-day official visit to the Himalayan nation at palace and temple areas damaged in the quake.

About 60 families have been living in tents at the Bhaktapur camp for nearly a year and remain uncertain about when they'll receive government assistance to rebuild their houses.

It's just one of the camps scattered around Nepal where people have been forced to live since the earthquake struck, killing nearly 9,000 people and destroying about 1 million homes.

Authorities have been slow to push ahead with quake rebuilding efforts. A government reconstruction agency was finally appointed in December, but has yet to provide promised aid money to displaced families and guidelines to build new houses and structures.

Purushottam Suwal, 14, who guided Harry around the camp, said the prince asked about the living conditions and the traditions of the families.

Earlier yesterday, Harry traveled to Patan, south of Kathmandu, visiting the city's old palace and Golden Temple areas, which suffered major damage in the earthquake. "Now that a big international figure has come here, we hope it will internationalize our plight and hope we will get some help to reconstruct the damaged structures in the near future," said Bikash Ratna Dhakhwa, chief of the committee that takes care of the Golden Temple.

While the temple itself was mostly spared by the earthquake, the adjoining monastery, prayer house and assembly halls were all damaged. It's estimated that the repairs will cost 25 million rupees (\$227,000), but so far only a fraction of that has been collected from private donors.

Hundreds of people gathered and cheered in the areas where Harry visited on Sunday. "I had never imagined that he would come," said Sambidhi Rayamaji, a college student. "I am feeling really lucky, I am feeling really happy."

On Saturday, Harry met with Nepal's prime minister and attended a ceremony to mark 200 years of relations between Britain and Nepal.

During his trip, the prince also plans to visit a forest conservation area and meet several retired Gurkha soldiers and their families. The prince served with a Gurkha battalion during a tour of duty in Afghanistan.—AP



KATHMANDU: Britain's Prince Harry visits heritage sites at Patan Durbar Square yesterday.—AP

MISSING CHINESE JOURNALIST HAS BEEN DETAINED

BEIJING: A Chinese journalist who has been missing for several days has been detained because he is "implicated in a case," his lawyer Sunday cited authorities as saying.

Jia Jia disappeared Tuesday shortly after going through customs at Beijing international airport while preparing to board a flight to Hong Kong where he was to attend an academic conference,

according to a close friend cited by Amnesty International. "Because of his implication in a case, Jia Jia was detained at Beijing airport terminal on March 15," said lawyer Yan Xin on his WeChat account, adding that the information came from the city's Public Security Bureau.

No details were given about the nature of the case. Amnesty and the

Committee to Protect Journalists linked the journalist's disappearance to the publication this month on the Chinese news website Wujie News of an open letter calling for the resignation of Chinese President Xi Jinping.

The letter, which was rapidly removed, was signed "Loyal Communist Party members," but little else is known about its authorship. "His going missing

is most likely related to the publishing of the letter and perhaps the authorities' implication of his involvement or knowledge of the letter," Amnesty China researcher William Nee told AFP earlier.

However, Jia's lawyer Yan has said his disappearance may not be connected to the letter. Since Xi came to power the Chinese Communist Party has increased pressure on civil society, arresting or

questioning more than 200 lawyers and human rights activists. China is currently in the spotlight over the disappearance last year of five Hong Kong booksellers who reappeared on the mainland, as well as the use of televised confessions from suspects. The five booksellers were from Hong Kong's Mighty Current publishing house, known for its salacious titles critical of Beijing.—AFP

PASSENGER SCARE DELAYS RUSSIAN PLANE IN THAILAND

BANGKOK: A Moscow-bound flight with 369 passengers on board was grounded temporarily at Phuket airport in southern Thailand yesterday after a passenger refused to fly, saying that his presence endangered the aircraft.

The incident comes a day after all 62 people aboard a Flydubai Boeing 737-800 flying from Dubai to southern Russia were killed when their plane crashed on its second attempt to land.

Yesterday's Phuket to Moscow flight operated by Russia's Nordwind Airlines was due to depart at 10.35 a.m. local time but the captain asked to suspend the flight because of a passenger incident, Airports of Thailand said in a state-

ment. The company, which runs Thailand's international airports, said: "As the plane was leaving Bay number 6 a passenger named Alexander Nosov asked not to fly. He said: 'If I travel with this plane, this plane will not be safe.'"

An inspection by an explosive ordnance disposal team found nothing suspicious on the aircraft, the company said. The passenger was detained for questioning at the airport, police said, and did not fly with the plane when it took off more than six hours behind schedule.

The Thai holiday island of Phuket is popular with Russian holidaymakers and is home to a large Russian expatriate community.—Reuters

TRUMP CANDIDACY STIRS ALLIANCE ANGST IN JAPAN

TOKYO: US presidential candidate Donald Trump's portrayal of Japan as a free-rider on security is stirring worries in Tokyo about damage to its US alliance, and could embolden hardliners keen to bolster Japan's military in the face of a rising China.

The US-Japan alliance has been the lynchpin of Tokyo's security policy for decades, but worries have simmered in recent years as to whether Washington will continue to be willing and able to defend its key Asian ally.

Comments from the Republican Party frontrunner have done little to allay those fears. "If somebody attacks Japan, we have to immediately go and start World War III, okay? If we get attacked, Japan doesn't have to help us," Trump said at a campaign speech late last year. "Somehow, that doesn't sound so fair."

Trump has also accused Japan of stealing jobs and criticized the US-led 12-nation Trans-Pacific Partnership trade pact that Tokyo sees as vital for strategic as well as economic reasons.

"If you listen to his comments (on security), the United States would become isolated so I think there is great anxiety for allied countries," Itsunori Onodera, who served as defense minister under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, told Reuters.

Last year, Abe spent considerable political capital enacting controversial legislation that allows Japan's military to defend friendly countries under attack, a major reinterpretation of the country's pacifist constitution.

"It is incumbent on Japan to protect itself and its defense is necessary for the alliance to be maintained in the best possible posture," said a source close to Abe.

OUTDATED VISION

Abe also wants to formally revise the post-war charter to further loosen limits on military action overseas.

"Most people consider Trump bad news, but for those who want to revise the constitution and strengthen the military, it actually provides a boost for their

position," said a former Western diplomat still in touch with Japanese policymakers.

As host to around 50,000 US troops, Japan is vital to Washington's "rebalance" of its economic and security focus to the Asia-Pacific region. Trump did not respond to requests for comments about the US-Japan alliance.

Both Washington and Tokyo are alarmed by China's increasing assertiveness in the South China Sea, where Beijing has territorial rows with several Southeast Asian nations. Japan has a separate dispute with China over tiny islands in the East China Sea.

Like many Trump observers around the world, Japanese policy makers at first watched with amusement and then disbelief as the reality TV star and property tycoon garnered growing momentum.

Only in recent weeks have they begun taking Trump's chances seriously and are now scrambling to find out who is advising him on security, another government source said.

Japanese policymakers have not geared up specifically to counter what they see as his misleading rhetoric, which seems to hark back to an outdated 1980s vision of Japan, the source close to Abe said. "I think it's too early. Number one, he has not made it known even to the American voters whom he counts on as far as foreign policy goals," the source said, adding they expected Trump would change if elected. "We are fully aware campaign rhetoric is dramatically different from real policies pursued by incumbents." For now, though, Japanese government insiders say they are betting that if Trump becomes the Republican nominee and goes on to win the Nov. 8 presidential election, he would surround himself with experts who would draft more realistic policies.

Publicly, Japan is playing it politely. Asked about Trump's candidacy on Wednesday, Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told reporters: "We are of course watching this because of the impact such a large country has, but we cannot otherwise comment on another country's election."—Reuters

US, PHILIPPINES AGREE ON LOCATIONS COVERED BY DEFENSE PACT 'RELIABLE PARTNER'

WASHINGTON: The US and the Philippines announced Friday five locations where American forces will have access under a new defense pact, including one facing disputed islands in the South China Sea.

The announcement came at strategic talks in Washington, where the allies reiterated their opposition to the militarization of outposts in those waters, where six Asian governments have competing claims.

China has built artificial islands with airstrips and military facilities as it asserts its claim to virtually all the South China Sea, including land features claimed by the Philippines. Another of the five Philippine military bases where the US will have access is on southern Mindanao island, where the US is concerned about the presence of Muslim extremist groups.

The 10-year defense pact was signed by US and Philippine officials in 2014, but it only got the green light this January after the Philippine Supreme Court ruled it was constitutional. It is a key part of the Obama administration effort to reassert its presence in Asia.

Philip Goldberg, the US ambassador to the Philippines, said the pact would allow the US to rotate more forces and military assets through that country on a basis of mutual agreement with Manila. It can also conduct construction and position supplies, including for humanitarian relief. Goldberg said the US is not establishing its own bases as it had in the Philippines until 1992. They were closed amid a tide of Philippine nationalism. Senior US defense official Amy Searight said Defense Secretary Ash Carter would travel to the Philippines in April to discuss implementation of the pact.

Goldberg said he could not set a date for when US forces would be deployed but he expected movement of supplies and personnel to begin "very soon."

US Defense Undersecretary Pio Lorenzo Batino said the Philippines was a "reliable partner" and was looking forward to working with the US to develop the agreed-upon locations. The implementation of the defense pact comes



BANGKOK: US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Daniel Russel, speaks during a news conference.—AP

at a time of heightened tension in the South China Sea and will be opposed by China, which views the increased US presence in the region as an attempt at containment.

The locations are at Antonio Bautista Air Base on western Palawan island, which faces the hotly disputed Spratly islands in the South China Sea; Lumbia Air Base on southern Mindanao island; Basa Air Base and Fort Magsaysay, north of the capital, Manila; and Mactan-Benito Ebuen Air Base on Cebu.

US officials say the pact will also enable it help train the Philippines' military but isn't aimed at China. "It is not aimed at any country, but rather at improving our bilateral relationship" with the Philippines and boosting the US

rebalance to Asia, Goldberg told reporters. Searight said the administration has notified Congress that it intends to spend \$50 million on boosting the maritime security of Southeast Asian nations, and most would go to the Philippines.

The Philippines is far outgunned by China, and has sought legal recourse as well as bolstering its security. By midyear, an international tribunal is expected to rule on a case brought by the Philippines that challenges the legal basis of China's sweeping claims in the South China Sea.

Daniel Russel, top US diplomat for East Asia, said that would be a critical moment for "rules-based" future of the region, although China says it is not bound by the arbitration.—AP



HONG KONG: Student protester Joshua Wong (C), 19, and other members of pro-democracy campaign group Scholarism look on at the start of a press conference regarding the group's future plans yesterday.—AFP

HONG KONG STUDENT LEADER WONG TO SET UP POLITICAL PARTY

HONG KONG: The teenage face of Hong Kong's pro-democracy movement announced yesterday that he will head a new political party to be set up to contest legislative elections in September.

Joshua Wong, 19, was at the forefront of mass rallies which brought parts of the semi-autonomous Chinese city to a standstill in 2014 as residents called for fully free elections for future leaders. The 79-day protest which blocked several major roads failed to win any concessions from the Hong Kong or Chinese governments.

Wong's announcement came at a time when more radical young activists are gaining a foothold in mainstream politics, with one student leader who calls for independence from China taking tens of thousands of votes in a recent poll.

"It's time for us to change our position," Wong told a press conference at which he announced he was disbanding the student activist group Scholarism, of which he is convenor, to form the new party. He said the new party would aim to nurture politicians who could push for "self-determination" among residents over the city's future.

Wong cannot himself stand for election until he is 21. Hong Kong was returned to China by Britain in 1997 under a "one country, two systems" deal which for at least 50 years allows it much greater freedoms than seen on the mainland. But there are fears that Beijing's influence is

increasing and these freedoms are being eroded. Some "localist" activists are calling for greater

autonomy from Beijing or even independence—an unthinkable option for Beijing.—AFP

MALAYSIAN FORMER EXEC SENTENCED TO 5 YEARS FOR NAVY SCHEME

SAN DIEGO: A former manager of a Singapore-based company servicing US Navy ships has been sentenced to more than five years in prison after pleading guilty to a fraud scheme that overbilled the maritime branch by more than \$34 million.

US District Judge Janis L. Sammartino in San Diego also ordered Alex Wisidagama to pay \$34.8 million in restitution to the Navy.

The 42-year-old businessman was the global manager of Glenn Defense Marine Asia, or GDMA, and the cousin of its top executive, Leonard Glenn Francis. Francis, nicknamed "Fat Leonard" because of his wide girth, is awaiting sentencing after pleading guilty in one of the military's biggest bribery cases.

Ten people, including several Navy officers, have been charged in the case and all but one have pleaded guilty. Wisidagama is the third defendant to be sentenced.

In his plea agreement, he acknowledged creating false price quotations, invoices and other documents to carry out the scheme

involving the sale of goods and fuel. He also inflated port tariff expenses. His attorney, Knut S. Johnson, said 30 months would have been an appropriate sentence for his client. He said Wisidagama did not receive any of the Navy's money personally and does not have the means to pay back the military.

"I expect that no one living in Singapore with Mr. Wisidagama's earning potential after this case, (he is) debarred from ever working on government contracts), could afford more than about \$200.00 per month," Johnson said in an email to The Associated Press. "At that rate, he would repay the government for the money that went to Mr. Francis in 14,166 years."

Wisidagama has said the scheme cost the Navy more than \$34 million. He admitted that in 2011 the company charged \$2.7 million for servicing the USS Mustin during a port visit to Thailand, and more than \$1.5 million were fraudulent charges, according to his plea agreement. GDMA has serviced US Navy ships in Asia for 25 years.—AP



FOUNTAIN HILLS: Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump speaks at Fountain Park during a campaign rally on Saturday.—AFP

FOR BLACK CUBANS, OBAMA VISIT A SOURCE OF PRIDE, INSPIRATION

HAVANA: Yolanda Mauri's ancestors almost certainly came to Cuba in chains, laboring as slaves on an island of French coffee plantations and fields of Spanish sugarcane. Her parents became their family's first professionals, graduating with engineering degrees after Cuba's 1959 revolution ended segregation. Mauri, 26, graduated from an elite technical university with a degree in computer programming. Today, she struggles to patch together a living from poorly paid government work and freelance jobs like building websites. She feels the sting of racism in casual derogatory comments or a maître d's refusal to seat her in an expensive restaurant.

For Mauri and hundreds of thousands of black Cubans, Barack Obama isn't just the first US leader to visit their country in nearly nine decades. He's a black man whose rise to the world's most powerful job is a source of pride and inspiration. Obama's March 20-22 visit has raised Cubans' hopes that a new era in relations with the United States will bring an end to the US trade embargo and improve life for everyone on the island. For Afro-Cubans in particular, the presidential trip carries a special charge, a hope that an African-American leader's near-universal popularity among Cubans of all races will help end lingering prejudice and inequality.

"He's black and in some moment of his life he must have realized that as an African-American he had to elevate his performance level because as a black person you have to work twice as hard to get the same result as a white," Mauri said. "I identify a lot with him because of that."

Cuba's culture is a blend of African and Spanish influence. The island's world-renowned music and dance traditions draw deeply from the cultures of the West Africans brought to the island as slaves. Its Santería religion is a blend of Catholicism and the Yoruba practices of western Africa.

One of Fidel Castro's first acts after overthrowing Cuba's government was to declare an end to a regimen of segregation that mirrored unequal conditions for blacks in the United States. Afro-Cubans praise the country's incorporation of anti-racism into its official ideology, and acknowledge that black Cubans have made dramatic advances thanks to the revolution.

But nearly 60 years later, Afro-Cubans

are underrepresented in the ranks of Cuba's political and economic elites and make up a disproportionate number of the urban and rural poor. Black Cubans have benefited less than their white counterparts from closer relations with the United States. Relatively few hold coveted, lucrative jobs serving foreign visitors.

Hospitality

Discriminatory hiring is particularly egregious in the elegant private restaurants where Cubans can earn more in a night in tips from tourists than the average monthly salary. There, as with many jobs in hospitality and tourism in Cuba, waiters, waitresses and bartenders are overwhelmingly white or light-skinned, mixed-race Cubans. Cuba's state ideology of race-blindness means there's little official discussion of race, and few programs to help black Cubans overcome the legacy of slavery and segregation.

"People here look at blacks like they're the worst, and since Obama's black it's like we have a bit more status, here and over there," said Rosa Lopez, who sells snacks in a public market in a working-class Havana neighborhood of La Lisa. "Having a black president of the United States gives us just a little more pride." Some black Cubans have taken to affectionately referring to Obama as "el negro," "the black guy," in enthusiastic conversation about the president's pending arrival, and some of the most popular memorabilia for sale ahead of the trip are images of the president and first lady shown talking to each other with distinctively Afro-Cuban Spanish dialogue jokingly superimposed.

According to official figures, 10 percent of the population of 11 million identify as black. Another quarter identify themselves to census-takers as mixed-race, a racial class that also suffers social discrimination in Cuba, although often to lesser degrees.

In remarkably warm descriptions of his regard for the American president, Cuban President Raul Castro has specifically cited Obama's personal background as a factor in the new US-Cuban relationship, without talking directly about race. "I admire his humble origins and I think that his way of thinking stems from those humble origins," Castro said before holding a meeting with Obama at the Summit of the Americas in Panama on April 11. —AP



ISTANBUL: People walk in Istiklal Street near the site of Saturday's bomb explosion, in Istanbul, yesterday. — AP

SCENIC BRUGES, ALSO HOME TO 'BELGIUM'S GUANTANAMO'

BRUGES, Belgium: A stone's throw from its picture-postcard canals and medieval buildings, the scenic city of Bruges has an altogether darker secret: one of Belgium's largest and most high-security jails, housing some of its most-wanted suspects.

The Bruges Penitentiary Complex on Saturday received the tourist town's latest high-profile "guest" when Paris terror attack suspect Salah Abdeslam arrived at the modern facility, following his dramatic arrest in a Brussels suburb a day before. "When I heard a helicopter yesterday (Saturday) I thought 'that is it, Salah has arrived'" said Carine, who has lived 50 metres (yards) away from the prison for the last three decades.

Carine, who did not give her last name, told AFP she followed the hunt for Europe's most wanted suspect blow-by-blow on television. "There are already two or three terror suspects here," she said, and every time "there is a bit of anxiety" when a new one arrives. "Everybody knows the prison is here. The authorities should be a bit more discreet about it," said Carine, whose mind wondered

back to a spectacular escape in July 2009.

That day there was the sound of a helicopter too, except that it had come to spring three criminals from jail including Ashraf Sekkaki, described as a "dyed-in-the-wool psychopath" and one of Belgium's most dangerous criminals. A year earlier, Sekkaki himself denounced the maximum security prison as "Belgium's Guantanamo"-referring to the notorious US prison in Cuba which houses suspected war criminals.

The three fugitives were arrested three weeks later in Morocco. Today, Abdeslam is in solitary confinement in the same wing that also has Mehdi Nemmouche, who carried out a fatal attack on the Jewish Museum in Brussels in 2014. Two men who helped Abdeslam flee Paris after last year's November 13 attacks in Paris, in which 130 people died, are also held at the prison.

'Venice of the North'

Located on the outskirts of a city that draws hordes of tourists year-round to its historic market square, the large brick complex is

surrounded by moats and high fences. "The biggest terrorists are here," said Peter Smet, who adds "in Bruges there aren't many factories and not much work." "Apart from tourism and the harbour, there's the prison. A lot of people work there," said Smet, an accountant. On the other side of the fence-inside the prison-Abdeslam's arrival has also aroused great interest. "They are talking about it, even though they can't see it," Jenifer, who had just visited her husband in the prison told AFP.

Four kilometres away on Bruges's Great Market square, tourists share an order of traditional Belgian fries, climb into waiting carriages for tours or take a romantic stroll in the city, known as the "Venice of the North." "We've heard of it, but it's not really a concern," said Nicola, a tourist from Britain. "We saw the border controls and we see things are going on, but that doesn't mean we should stop living," added Felix Gaulier, who came with a group of friends from Lille. "But it is a bit strange, this discrepancy between the fact that we're having a party and that there are also other kinds of people here." — AFP

RUSSIANS MOURN CRASH VICTIMS...

Continued from Page 1

"We have high confidence in the Russian authorities who are capable of managing local conditions for flights," he said. "We fully trust the Russian authorities in this," he said.

Al-Ghaith said it was too early to determine the cause of the crash, but officials have suggested it could have been caused by pilot error, a technical problem or strong winds at the airport. Speaking at a news conference in Dubai yesterday he said: "We have high confidence in the Russian authorities who are capable of managing local conditions for flights," he said. "We fully trust the Russian authorities in this." "The airport was open. It was good enough to operate and good enough to land, as per the authorities," he added. "The weather conditions were good enough for the flight." Flydubai said in a statement it was organizing hardship payments to families of the victims amounting to \$20,000 per passenger, in accordance with its conditions of carriage. The airline has not cancelled or delayed any flights because of the crash, it added, and Russian Transport Minister Maxim Sokolov said the airport would

reopen today morning. Russia's airline regulator said work had started extracting information from the doomed plane's flight recorders, which were badly damaged in the crash. "The received recorders are badly damaged mechanically," Russia's Interstate Aviation Committee (IAC) said in a statement on its website, alongside a photo of a crumpled recorder.

"Specialists ... have started the inspection, opening and removing the memory modules from their protective coverings for further work to restore the cable connections and prepare to copy the data," the IAC said. RIA news agency cited an IAC official as saying it could take one month to decode information from the recorders.

Under international aviation rules, the investigation will be led by Russia's air safety investigation agency with representatives from the United States, where the jet was made, and the United Arab Emirates, where the airline is based. Security services in the Middle East and Russia are on heightened alert for militant threats to aviation following the Islamic State claim of responsibility for downing a Russian passenger plane over Egypt's Sinai Peninsula in late October. — Agencies

600-PLUS LEFT FRANCE FOR SYRIA TO JOIN IS

Continued from Page 1

"We are in a battle on our soil," Walls said in a speech to Socialist party supporters. "Each day (we) ... trace networks, locate cells, arrest individuals. Today 2029 French citizens or residents are implicated in jihadist networks."

European governments have been tightening anti-terrorism laws as the Syrian conflict enters its sixth year, agreeing to share more intelligence and taking down radical websites to try to stop their citizens from going to fight in the Middle East and bringing militancy home. Breaking down the figures, Walls said 609 people who are French nationals or have French resident's status are currently among fighters, including 283 women and 18 minors. Almost 170 have been killed while in Syria or Iraq and 300 have returned to France from those countries.

"Almost 800 would today like to go to these wars zones, according to intelligence services," Walls said, adding that 1,000 people are being monitored closely. In February 2015, only weeks after an attack in Paris that killed 17 people, Walls said there were 1,400 French citizens or residents linked to jihadist networks, with 410 present in Syria and

Iraq and about 80 killed on the ground. Detained Paris terror attack suspect Salah Abdeslam has told investigators he had been planning to target Brussels, Belgium's foreign minister Didier Reynders said yesterday. "...he was ready to restart something in Brussels, and it may be the reality because we have found a lot of weapons, heavy weapons, in the first investigations and we have found a new network around him in Brussels," Reynders was quoted in a statement as saying at a panel discussion in the Belgian capital. Abdeslam, Europe's most wanted man, was captured in a dramatic raid in Brussels on Friday. Reynders, speaking in English at the Brussels Forum, an annual US-organized transatlantic conference, said police were still working to track down suspects involved in the attacks in which 130 people died.

"We are sure that for the moment we have found more than 30 people involved in the terrorist attacks in Paris, but we are sure there are others," Reynders said. Paris prosecutor Francois Molins on Saturday told reporters Abdeslam had played a "central role" in planning the November 2015 attacks, which targeted bars, restaurants and the Bataclan concert hall and were claimed by the Islamic State group (IS). — Agencies



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Issues

RIVAL PROTESTS IGNITE
DEBATE ON RACE
AND CLASS IN BRAZIL

By Joshua Howat Berger

The rival protests sweeping Brazil have exposed a demographic divide between President Dilma Rousseff's haters and backers, igniting a national debate about race and class that is only increasing tensions. Waving the red banners of the ruling Workers' Party, Rousseff's left-wing base sought to seize back the streets this week, after tides of protesters draped in the yellow and green of the national flag marched nationwide last Sunday calling for her impeachment.

The opposing theme colors were not the only difference in hue: the anti-government protesters were a visibly whiter crowd than the Rousseff supporters. They were also wealthier and better-educated than average Brazilians, pollsters found. Mafa Nogueira, a Rousseff supporter who joined the rally in the capital Brasilia Friday, described the people calling for impeachment as elites panicked by the social changes reshaping Brazil after 13 years of leftist rule.

"The people who are desperate for this government to fall are the ones who lost their privileges," said the 42-year-old musician. Brazil has undergone a transformation since Rousseff's predecessor and mentor, Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, took office in 2003. In the decade that followed, strong economic growth and progressive social programs lifted more than 26 million people from poverty.

Historian John French said he sees a conservative backlash against this new social order in the anti-government protests. "They're discomfited by the fact that people are rising to places where they're not supposed to be," said French, a Brazil specialist at Duke University.

"For example, a lot of poor people are now flying in airplanes, which really outrages them, because airports used to be an upper-class preserve. Or the tripling of the number of people going to higher education."

Troubled history

Anti-Rousseff protesters reject that characterization. Jefferson Banks, a leader of the anti-government movement in Brasilia, said talk of race and class divisions seeks to distract from the issues that have left Rousseff hanging by a thread: a colossal corruption scandal, a drawn-out recession and government dysfunctionality.

"It takes the focus off the real issue our movement raises and shifts the debate to other issues: whites and blacks, rich and poor," he said. Banks said his movement is color-blind.

But the numbers are awkward in a country known for its racial diversity and a troubled history of inequality dating back to the time of slavery-abolished in 1888. At the largest anti-Rousseff protest, in Sao Paulo, 77 percent of the demonstrators self-identified as white, and 77 percent were university graduates, according to polling firm Datafolha.

Nationwide, those figures are 48 percent and 13 percent, respectively. Half the demonstrators earned between five and 20 times the minimum wage-more than double the percentage of people in that income bracket citywide.

A house divided

The anti-government protests are less broad-based than the ones that swept Brazil in 2013, in the build-up to hosting the World Cup. Then, Brazilians from many walks of life took to the streets demanding better services such as transportation, education and health care.

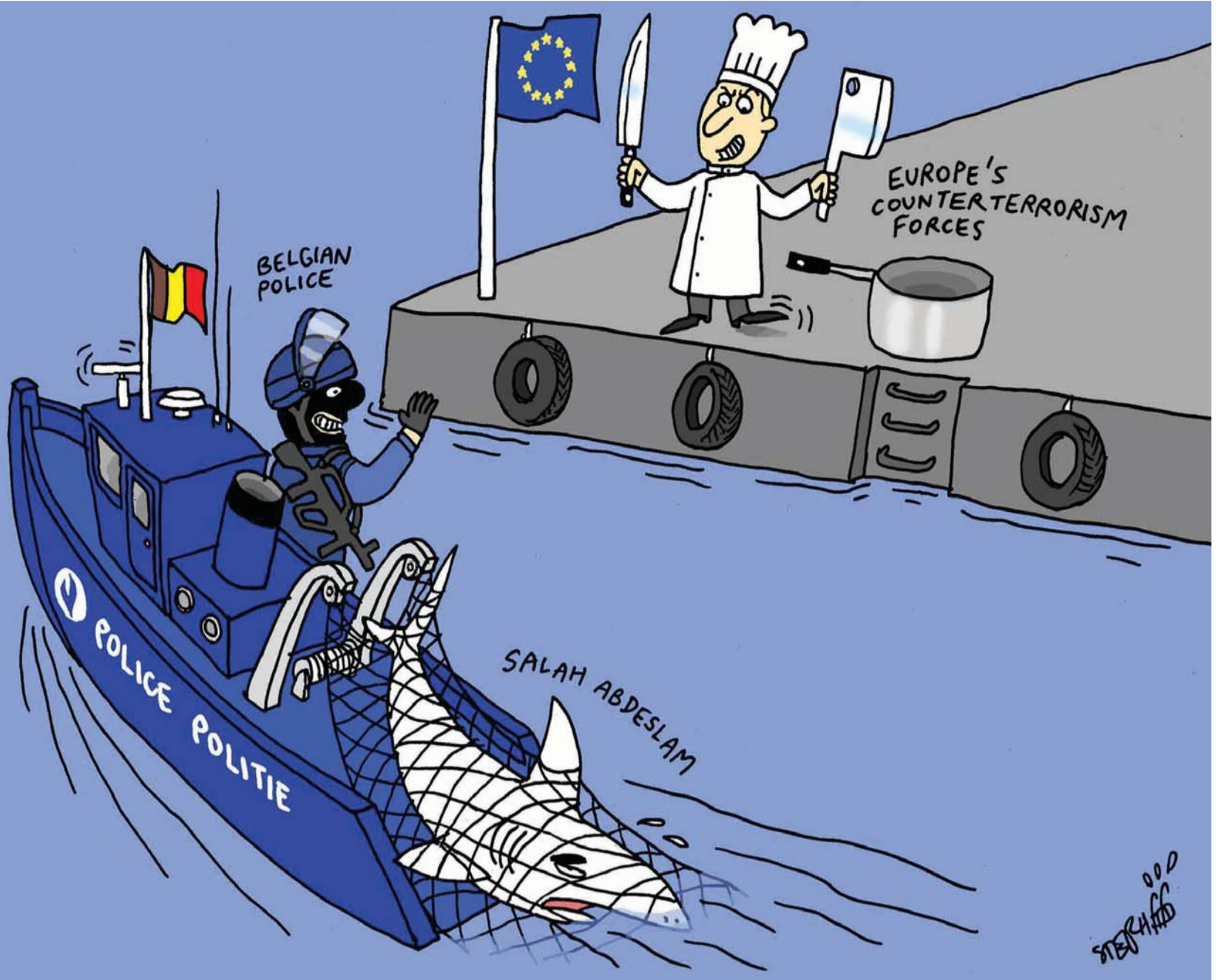
At the time, some political analysts suggested the Workers' Party was a victim of its own success: gains in income and education were making voters more demanding of their government. Despite the tumult, Rousseff went on to narrowly win re-election in 2014. But with the economy in a tailspin and scandal ensnaring top officials-including Lula, who faces charges of accepting bribes-her popularity has now plunged to 10 percent.

A full 68 percent of Brazilians support impeaching her, a new poll found Saturday. But only a portion of those who disapprove of her are taking to the street. The fact that the current protests have drawn a narrower demographic has raised suspicions of undemocratic ulterior motives.

"Corruption is systemic in Brazil. It wasn't invented by the Workers' Party. They're using that argument to hide their real objective: to seize power," said retiree Margarita Brega at Friday's pro-government demo in Rio de Janeiro.

In the highly polarized atmosphere, many Brazilians complain that the tone of the debate has turned vitriolic. "People complain that they're losing friends because of political hatred," said political analyst Michael Mohalleem.

"People are not hearing each other, they're not reasoning with each other." —AFP



SHAKY EU-TURKEY DEAL FACES REALITY CHECKS

By Paul Taylor

A deal between the European Union and Turkey meant to curb the flow of migrants into Europe in return for financial and political rewards could unravel within months because neither side looks able to deliver on its commitments. Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu and European Council President Donald Tusk wore relieved smiles on Friday as they sealed a pact for Ankara to take back all migrants and refugees who cross to Greece in exchange for more money, faster visa-free travel for Turks and slightly accelerated EU membership talks.

But for Turkey to halt the flow of migrants to Europe will require a major redeployment of its security apparatus to shut down a lucrative people-smuggling business at a time when President Tayyip Erdogan has more pressing priorities. With impeccable timing, Turkish authorities announced they had detained 3,000 would-be migrants on Friday, but Greek officials say Ankara has done little to stop the flow since November, when the EU and Turkey made a first deal.

Yet Erdogan is more focused on extending his presidential powers, fighting Kurdish militants and preventing spillover from Syria's civil war. For Greece to be able to process and send back those migrants who continue to reach its islands would require a transformation of its threadbare asylum and justice systems with scant resources and uncertain EU assistance. The European Court of Human rights considers Athens' system so poor that it ruled that sending migrants back there from other European countries was inhumane.

Yet the new arrangements are supposed to start from Sunday, with the first returns set for April 4. One EU diplomat said that was like expecting Greece to turn itself into the Netherlands over a weekend. For the EU to resettle, as promised, thousands of legal Syrian refugees directly from Turkey - one for each Syrian returned from the Greek islands - will require most member states to take in more refugees than they have been willing to share out so far. In the current climate of anti-immigration populism in many countries, that may be a tall order.

The joint statement did not spell out who would return potentially unwilling migrants from Greece to Turkey, a task that may fall to the EU's Frontex border agency under the critical gaze of the media and humanitarian groups. Greek officials say they are worried it could turn violent.

Images of Afghans, Iraqis or Syrians being removed against their will could lead to an international outcry. In a foretaste, rights group Amnesty International posted a harrowing picture of refugees cowering behind barbed wire outside the EU summit centre with the slogan "Don't trade refugees. Stop the deal!"

visa regime with other, notably Muslim countries. The EU managed to sidestep a potential stumbling block over Cyprus by agreeing to limit Turkey's progress in snail's pace membership negotiations to one policy area - budget - which Nicosia has not blocked. That got around a stand-off over Ankara's refusal to open Turkish ports and airports to Cypriot traffic. A late addition to the agreement also reminds Ankara of its commitments to the Turkey-EU customs union under which it should open its ports.

If both sides are lucky, the vexed Cyprus issue may not impinge on the migration

deal was the best the EU could do for now. "A piece of something is better than a piece of nothing," he said.

"There are many bits of this deal that clearly don't add up," a senior EU official acknowledged. "Much of the details will be left to be worked out at lower level later on."

The optimistic version, voiced by Dutch Foreign Minister Bert Koenders, is that some "intelligent synchronisation" can be found between the Cyprus peace process and Turkey's migration deal. Critics say that is just EU wishful thinking.

'NO BETTER PLAN'

Some experts believe Turkish leaders don't expect the EU to keep its word on visas, refugee resettlement or the membership talks and are planning to turn a predictable failure to domestic political advantage. "Davutoglu and Erdogan know perfectly well that neither side will deliver," said Michael Leigh, senior fellow at the German Marshall Fund think-tank and a former director-general of the EU's enlargement department.

"What Erdogan wants is a constitutional power change ... so he will present it at the right moment as a European betrayal and call a vote to get more powers," Leigh said. At most, he said, the EU could fulfil the financial part of the bargain if Germany pays the lion's share of the extra 3 billion euros (\$3.4 billion) Ankara was promised to support Syrian refugees in Turkey.

Sidelined by Merkel when she drafted the outline deal with Davutoglu last week, French President Francois Hollande made clear he would hold Turkey to meeting EU visa standards in full.

"Visas can only be liberalized if all the conditions are met and I remind you there are 72 of them," Hollande told reporters. A French diplomat said Turkey had only fulfilled 10 benchmarks fully so far and another 26 were under way. EU diplomats are skeptical that Ankara will be able to meet all the required benchmarks in time, but such is the urgent need to get the migration crisis under control that they would rather clinch a deal now and deal with shortcomings later. "It's difficult but everyone has an interest in trying to make this work and no one has a better plan," a senior EU diplomat said. —Reuters



A migrant girl cries at a temporary shelter on the Greek island of Lesbos. For every Syrian returned, the EU will resettle one from a Turkish refugee camp. —AFP

LOGISTICAL CHALLENGE

Greece already faces a huge logistical challenge with 43,000 migrants bottled up in the economically ravaged country since its northern neighbors shut their borders, and more continuing to arrive daily, albeit at a slower pace. And all this is before the summer weather and calmer seas that facilitated last year's mass influx.

For the EU to give Turks visa-free travel by the end of June also requires a leap of faith, since Ankara has so far met fewer than half of the 72 conditions. European officials stress the ball is in Turkey's court to pass the necessary laws and change its

deal for months, leaving time for peace talks now under way that may lead to the reunification of the east Mediterranean island after more than 40 years of division.

EU leaders desperate to stop the chaotic migration flow were willing to suspend their disbelief and swallow legal qualms - at least in public - because they had no better alternative.

But they have few illusions. German Chancellor Angela Merkel, the deal's co-architect, said there were bound to be setbacks and big legal challenges but she hoped the deal had "irreversible momentum".

Tusk, who chaired the summit, said the

SADR, IRAQ'S 'ENFANT TERRIBLE', BACK IN SPOTLIGHT

By Jean Marc Mojon

A string of mass protests culminating in an ongoing sit-in at the gates of Baghdad's Green Zone have thrust the mercurial Shiite cleric Moqtada Sadr back on to centrestage.

The scion of an influential clerical family from the holy city of Najaf, he first made a name for himself at the age of 30 as a vociferous anti-American cleric who raised a rebellion. His influence ebbed after the 2011 US pullout but he retained strong support among the lower classes and is now casting himself as the champion of the fight against graft. "This is your time to root out corruption and the corrupt," he said earlier this month in a call to his supporters to march on the fortified Green Zone and set up protest camps. Thousands of them defied a government ban on Friday to heed their leader's call and set up tents at the main entrances of the vast restricted area in central Baghdad which houses key state institutions as well as foreign embassies.

Sadr says the goal of the protests is the formation of a cabinet of technocrats to replace party-affiliated politicians he says have perpetuated a system based on nepotism and patronage. Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi himself made the proposal but he is being undermined by parties-including his own-whose barons are reluctant to relinquish

their positions and attendant privileges.

While ostensibly declaring his support for Abadi's proposed reforms, Sadr's decision to take to the street leaves the prime minister even closer to the brink. The sit-in and the huge security deployment around it have paralyzed central Baghdad and Sadr has given Abadi an ultimatum expiring in a week to present names for a new cabinet.

"This is a serious escalation," said Ahmed Ali, of the Institute of Regional and International Studies at the American University of Iraq. "Sadr started this thing and will not go silent now, he wants to go all the way," said Issam al-Faily, professor of political science at Baghdad's Mustansiriyah University.

Unpredictable

Since he took over the premiership in 2014, and despite the backing of the country's top Shiite cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, Abadi has ruled with very tenuous support from his own government. Now any reform that does go through would risk looking like a victory for Sadr and create more unease among the country's other, rival Shiite leaders.

"The Sadrist are attempting to reinvent themselves forcefully into the Iraqi Shiite political sphere which is getting more contentious by the moment," said Ahmed Ali.

The top players in the Shiite-majority country, many of

them aligned with Iran, are fretting at the resurgence of the populist cleric, who was once a Tehran client but has since reinvented himself as a nationalist. While his popularity had appeared to recede in recent years, the 42-year-old cleric can still mobilize large crowds like few others in Iraq. "Sadr began this as a new effort to co-opt the anti-corruption protest movement after a different effort failed last fall," said Kirk Sowell, publisher of the Inside Iraqi Politics newsletter.

Several stalwarts of the Sadr movement are in the government and some are widely seen as the least competent and more corrupt but the cleric has tried to deflect any criticism by distancing himself from his own ministers. "The solution should come from all parties. Once they are satisfied they can wield their influence through parliament, they should accept the formation of an independent government," said Faily.

Possibly the most predictable feature of Sadr is his unpredictability. "Impossible to know where this is going," said Sowell. "How he actually accomplishes anything meaningful, I don't know. It may help him in becoming the popular leader he wants to be." In a statement on Saturday, Sadr said he did not want to complain-but essentially did-about "the lack of coverage by Iraqi, Arab and international channels of the most important event in Iraq, the peaceful national sit-in." —AFP

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GERMAN FA INVESTIGATE DJILOBODJI'S GESTURE

BERLIN: The German FA (DFB) said yesterday they are investigating Werder Bremen defender Papy Djilobodji, on loan from Chelsea, for making a throat-cutting gesture at an opponent during a Bundesliga match. Referee Manuel Graefe missed the incident, but the German FA are looking into the matter after Djilobodji pulled his index finger across his throat in the direction of Mainz winger Pablo de Balsa during the 1-1 draw in Bremen on Saturday. In January, the Senegal international signed on loan from Chelsea until the end of the season. He could now be banned for his next league game at Borussia Dortmund on April 2 with Bremen battling to avoid relegation. In November 2009, St Pauli forward Deniz Naki made a similar gesture to Hansa Rostock fans during a German league match and received a three-match ban by the DFB. Werder coach Viktor Skripnik says Djilobodji has "a temper" and expects there to be consequences for his gesture, adding: "I'll accept whatever comes". Bremen's director of sport Thomas Eichin says he will speak to the player. "I'll have a serious talk to him about it and he won't do it again in the future," Eichin told Sky.—AFP



BIATHLON WORLD CUP SEASON ENDS

KHANTY-MANSIYSK: The biathlon World Cup season came to an abrupt end yesterday as the two final mass start races were canceled after strong winds damaged the course. Gale-force winds in the Siberian town of Khanty-Mansiysk tore down banners and even brought down a lighting tower at the shooting range. No one was hurt, the International Biathlon Union said. Following an initial attempt to delay the races until later in the day, the event was called off altogether, with athletes and spectators asked to leave the venue for safety reasons. "We have a really extreme wind," race director Borut Nunar said. "It's completely unsafe outside, all competitions are canceled. Safety is always and should be always the priority for us and for everybody." The cancellation of the 15-kilometer men's race and 12.5-kilometer women's race means that France's Martin Fourcade and Czech Gabriela Soukalova end the season top of the mass start standings. Fourcade and Soukalova were earlier confirmed as winners of the overall World Cup competition.—AP

RICCIARDO EYES RED BULL PODIUM CHALLENGE

MELBOURNE: Daniel Ricciardo missed out on a "fairytale" podium at his home Australian Grand Prix yesterday but felt Red Bull should be ready to challenge for one by the Montreal race in June. After starting eighth on the grid, Ricciardo completed a fine race to finish fourth behind Mercedes' winner Nico Rosberg, with the German's team mate Lewis Hamilton runner-up and Ferrari's Sebastian Vettel third. Reliability issues with the Renault engine blighted Ricciardo and Red Bull last year but Sunday's performance left the 26-year-old flashing his usual toothy grin. "I'm really happy, towards the end we were sitting in the top three and I had the fairytale in my mind of being on the podium here but I'm happy," he told Sky Sports. "Fourth is great but I'm probably more happy with the pace we had. Not far off Mercedes and Ferrari and we finished a fair step ahead of Williams and the rest of our competitors. To come out here in the first race and exceed expectations, you've got to be happy with that." It was a forgettable day for his team mate Daniil Kvyat, however, with the Russian unable to race after his car came to a halt with a power unit problem at the end of the formation lap.—Reuters



TOYOTA GAZOO RACING OUTLINES 2016 MOTORSPORTS ACTIVITIES

KUWAIT: Under the Toyota GAZOO Racing team name, Toyota will participate in the FIA World Endurance Championship (WEC), the Nürburgring 24 Hours endurance race and the Japanese Rally Championship. WEC 2016 will see the debut of the new Toyota TS050 Hybrid race vehicle, with which the team will aim to recapture the series championship and achieve its first win in the 24 Hours of Le Mans this June.

The TS050 Hybrid utilizes a new hybrid system developed at Toyota's Higashi-Fuji Technical Center. In the 2016 Nürburgring 24 Hours endurance race, Toyota will celebrate its tenth year of participation by entering three cars: the Toyota C-HR Racing, and the Lexus RC F and RC.

According to Takayuki Yoshitsugu, Chief Representative of Middle East & North Africa Representative Office, Toyota Motor Corporation, "Motorsports events offer a crucial means of conveying the excitement of driving, and are at the heart of Toyota's efforts to foster a greater following of car fans and enthusiasts. By taking part in these activities under the umbrella of Toyota GAZOO Racing, Toyota can focus on developing its people and improving its products, thereby contributing to the creation of better, more advanced cars."

FOCUS ON FUEL ECONOMY

Yoshitsugu added, "Know-how from our advanced hybrid race cars is already in use to enhance Toyota's road car hybrids, and the

WEC's focus on fuel economy and road-relevant technology is expected to see further technology transfer from track to road. We greatly appreciate the support from our customers who have always backed our racing efforts over the years." In the US, Toyota will continue to compete in NASCAR events, while in South America, Toyota will support Toyota Auto Body Co., Ltd., who will participate in the Dakar Rally in early 2017. Meanwhile, in Japan, Toyota will participate in the Super GT and Super Formula series, both of which are in the top tier of motorsports events within Japan, and will also compete in the Super Taikyu series with the 86 coupe. In 2017, Toyota will return to the FIA World Rally Championship (WRC). Preparations are ongoing, with a rally

vehicle based on the Yaris compact hatchback currently being developed to meet FIA 2017 regulations.

As part of its initiatives to cultivate young drivers who hope to compete in high-level international racing events, Toyota will continue to run the Toyota GAZOO Racing Rally Challenge Program for rallies, and the Toyota Young Drivers Program (TDP) for races.

MOTORSPORTS EVENTS

Toyota will also actively try to raise awareness of automotive culture, creating a new generation of car enthusiasts in the process. Key to these efforts will be a wide range of participative, informal motorsports events targeting participation by ordinary customers,

such as the Toyota GAZOO Racing 86/BRZ Race, Toyota GAZOO Racing Netz Cup Vitz Race and Toyota GAZOO Racing Rally Challenge. Furthermore, Toyota will continue to share information about upcoming races, rallies and events by utilizing digital platforms and social networking sites. Toyota will also share updates on its lineups of tuned and performance models, such as the GRMN and G's series, which have been adapted based on racing and rally experiences.

A new logo for Toyota GAZOO Racing activities has also been announced, along with a unified color scheme that will be implemented for all vehicles that race in WRC, WEC, the Nürburgring 24 Hours endurance race and the Japanese Rally Championship.

GEORGIA WINS 3RD NCAA WOMEN'S SWIMMING TITLE

ATLANTA: Even as Georgia got passed on the last lap of the final event, Jack Bauerle began to celebrate on the pool deck.

The coach knew his Lady Bulldogs had locked up another national title. It was especially sweet for Bauerle, considering he wasn't around for the last one and never expected this one.

Projected to finish no higher than fourth, the Lady Bulldogs led from start to finish at the NCAA women's swimming and diving championships, claiming the title for the third time in four years Saturday night. They held off Stanford and defending national champion California.

"The kids came together in a magnificent way since October," Bauerle said. "We were not this team then. Not even close." Olivia Smoliga gave the Lady Bulldogs a big boost by winning the 100-yard freestyle in 46.70 seconds. Georgia led after each session of the four-day meet and clinched the title in the final event, placing sec-

ond in the 400 free relay to finish with 414 points. Stanford was next with 395, followed by Cal at 358. It was the seventh national title for Bauerle, but he wasn't on deck for Georgia's last championship in 2014. The coach was barred from his job for a year after running afoul of the NCAA over allegations he made special arrangements for star swimmer Chase Kalisz to maintain his eligibility.

OVERBLOWN

Associate head coach Harvey Humphries ran the team in his Bauerle's place at the 2014 championships in Minneapolis, guiding the Lady Bulldogs to their second straight title though it went on Bauerle's record.

"Not many people can say they won one from the house," he quipped. While making it clear he felt the whole situation was overblown by the NCAA, Bauerle accepted his punishment and

returned to the team midway through the 2014-15 season. The Lady Bulldogs settled for a runner-up finish behind Cal, which was led by Missy Franklin.

The Olympic star has since turned pro and is getting ready for the Rio Games. Without Franklin, the Bears were denied their fourth national title in six years.

Smoliga held off 2012 Olympian Lia Neal of Stanford to take the 100 free, pounding the water with her right arm when she saw her time on the scoreboard at the McAuley Aquatic Center on Georgia Tech's campus, site of the aquatic competition at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics. "That was hopefully a boost of confidence for everyone because it definitely got me fired up," Smoliga said.

Stanford gave itself a shot going into the last event, picking up a total of 33 points in platform diving. Gracia Leydon-Mahoney won off the big tower and teammate Lilly Hinrichs was sixth. Georgia didn't have anyone in the diving final and had its lead sliced to 380-365.

But the Bulldogs were in front most of the way in the 400 free relay before Southern California's Anika Apostolon surged to the victory on the final leg, passing Hali Flickinger.

It didn't matter. The runner-up finish was enough to clinch the title, with Stanford in fourth and Cal struggling home sixth. Stanford's hopes were essentially ruined by a disqualification Thursday in the 200 free relay, costing the Cardinal an apparent victory.

FINAL NIGHT

Bauerle began pumping his fists as Flickinger made the next-to-last flip in the short-course pool; when she touched behind Apostolon, the coach hugged Humphries and began high-fiving his other swimmers on deck.

"This one was special because it was very unexpected," said Bauerle, having dried out after taking a celebratory dip in the pool with his team.

In other events on the final night of the meet, Lilly King led a 1-2 finish for Indiana in the 200 breaststroke. She set an American record of 2 minutes, 35.59 seconds, far ahead of teammate Miranda Tucker. Afterward, the freshman roommates watched the end of Indiana's victory over Kentucky in the NCAA basketball tournament on a TV in the media room.

Kentucky's Danielle Galyer captured the 200 backstroke in 1:49.71, leaving Virginia's Courtney Bartholomew with the fifth runner-up finish of her career. It was the senior's final race.—AP

CHAWRASIA CLAIMS THIRD EUROPEAN TOUR TITLE

NEW DELHI: India's S.S.P. Chawrasia, a second-place finisher in four previous Indian Opens, finally won the tournament yesterday with a two-stroke victory and clinched a third European Tour title in the process.

Chawrasia, 37, recorded a final-round 71 for a total of 273 — edging out South Korea's Jeunghun Wang who finished with 68 for a total of 275. Chawrasia's fellow countryman and defending champion Anirban Lahiri, who closed with a 69, was joint second.

Chawrasia broke his jinx to claim the long-awaited title at the challenging Delhi Golf Club and reclaim his European Tour playing privileges, which he narrowly lost last season after finishing 113th in the Race to Dubai.

"This is very important as I don't have a full (European) card. Hopefully, I am playing Olympics and World Cup and so it is important," said the three-time Asian Tour winner.

"I am happy. I was nervous a bit but I focused and breathed in and out and controlled my nerves," a visibly gleeful Chawrasia said.

"Actually I have been four times runner-up and I have been thinking I have to win this and it has always been a dream. So I am hap-

py to achieve it." Chawrasia was defeated by Lahiri in a play-off last year. He also finished second in 1999, 2006 and 2013.

Lahiri, 28, made an impressive start Sunday, firing a hat-trick of birdies in the first three holes, and was tied for the lead after Chawrasia dropped a shot on the sixth.

But Chawrasia turned the tables quickly with a birdie on the eighth and ended the tournament with a four-day total of 15-under par 273.

South Korea's Wang and Lahiri finished on 13-under. Filipino Angelo Que finished the day on 12-under after a flawless 65, along with Adilson da Silva of Brazil who closed with a 69.

Scores after final round:
273 - S.S.P. Chawrasia (IND) 67-67-68-71
275 - Jeunghun Wang (KOR) 67-74-66-68, Anirban Lahiri (IND) 68-71-67-69
276 - Angelo Que (PHI) 70-71-70-65, Adilson da Silva (BRA) 72-66-69-69
278 - Gregory Harvet (FRA) 68-70-71-69, Daniel Im (USA) 65-74-70-69, N. Thangaraja (SRI) 69-71-68-70, Rashid Khan (IND) 69-68-69-72. — AFP



CHINESE LEAD IN SALWA CUP

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Chinese domination, and Japanese and Singapore penetration during the last day of competition in Salwa Cup. The Chinese remained dominant of table tennis as 12 players qualified for the semifinals in the six categories they are participating in during the Kuwait International Table Tennis Tournament (Salwa Cup), being held at Salwa Al-Sabah Club Hall in Qurain area.

In the individual women's Xiaoxia Li and Ning Ding reached the semifinals, while in the doubles Ning Ding and Shiwen Liu, Xiaoxia Li and Yuling Zhu, made it the same round.

In the individual men's competition Ma

Long, Xin Xu, Jike Zhang and Zhendong Fan qualified for the semifinals, meanwhile in the doubles category Xin Xu and Jike Zhang also qualified.

The large number of Chinese players in due to the fact that table tennis is the number one game in China.

The tournament saw former champion of Salwa Cup Vladimir Samsonov exit, and the semifinals were void of any European players. The only exception was that Brazil's Hugo Calderona winning the U21 category.

Meanwhile, Japan's Kasumi Ishikawa succeeded in reaching the semifinals, as the Japanese ambassador was among those supporting her. Singapore's Tianwei Feng and Hong Kong's Peng Tang and Kuan Kit also made it to the men's semifinals.

PAKISTAN LEGEND JAHANGIR EXPECTS BRITISH OPEN BREAKTHROUGH

KINGSTON UPON HULL: A new era could emerge at this year's British Open, predicts legendary Pakistan squash player Jahangir Khan, who won the world's oldest tournament a record ten times.

Jahangir believes the new wave of players could break through at the tournament in the Airco Arena starting today.

"There were a lot of upsets in the World Open last year (in November) and we weren't expecting them," said 52-year-old Jahangir. "I think a new era is quite near. There could be a lot of upsets at the British Open too."

Jahangir identified three Egyptians as possible challengers—Ali Farag, a 23-year-old Harvard graduate, Karim Gawad, 24, and Omar Mosaad, a steadily improving 28-year-old.

Farag beat three top ten players on the way to the Detroit title in January,

Gawad rose to a career-high world number seven after capturing the Swedish Open the following month, and Mosaad is at world number four after reaching the World Open final.

"They are good talents coming up," Jahangir said. "They all know what the guys at the top of the rankings have to struggle with. And they are younger than the others and hungrier."

A spectacular exception to this is Gregory Gaultier, the Frenchman who has become world champion for the first time at the age of 32, belatedly achieving what many thought was past him.

Gaultier expects to return to competition next week after nine weeks out with a ruptured ankle, as he bids for a third British Open title.

Whether Gaultier achieves this may depend on how well he understands his body and mind after such an absence,

and perhaps also on how well Mohamed El Shorbagy, his conqueror in five games in last year's final, handles the pressure of a title defence.

"El Shorbagy's still quite young even though he's been around for a few years so he may have more hunger than the others as well," Jahangir said of the 25-year-old Egyptian. Successfully defending the Tournament of Champions title in New York in January should have aided El Shorbagy's self-belief, though he needed another five games in a hard final with Nick Matthew. This may quieten those who claim the Englishman is too old to win a fourth British Open at 35.

If Matthew does this he will have achieved a notable record. He is 18 months older than the Australian Geoff Hunt when he became the oldest British Open champion of the professional era in 1981. Another attempting to return from injury is Rami Ashour, perhaps the

sport's most popular player and its most talented. Three years ago he became the first Egyptian in almost 50 years to win, but he has been unable to compete for four months because of a chronically troublesome hamstring.

That is only one in a catalogue of ailments which have threatened Ashour's stop-start career, but if he is fit enough he is more than good enough to win again.

DAVID EYES SIXTH TITLE

Meanwhile, Malaysian Nicol David, 32, is seeded number two as she bids to capture the title for a sixth time.

Although David lasted a record 103 months as world number one she only captured one title last year, and now Laura Massaro, a fellow 32-year-old from England is the top seed.

These two could face significant challenges from at least three other players—

Camille Serme, the titleholder from France, Raneem El Welily, the Egyptian who succeeded David as number one last year, and her compatriot Nour El Sherbini, a 20-year-old who has beaten both David and Massaro this year.

Seeds Men

Mohamed Elshorbagy (EGY x1), Gregory Gaultier (FRA x2), Nick Matthew (ENG x3), Omar Mosaad (EGY x4), Rami Ashour (EGY x5), Miguel Angel Rodriguez (COL x6), Simon Roesner (GER x7), Mathieu Castagnet (FRA x8)

Women

Laura Massaro (ENG x1), Nicol David (MAS x2), Raneem El Welily (EGY x3), Nour El Sherbini (EGY x4), Camille Serme (FRA x5), Omneya Abdel Kawy (EGY x6), Amanda Sobhy (USA x7), Nouran Gohar (EGY x8). —AFP

ATHLETICS BRIEFS

Carter wins shot put gold

PORTLAND: Michelle Carter of the United States snatched a dramatic last throw victory in the women's shot put at the World Indoor Athletic Championships here Saturday. Carter, the bronze medalist at last year's World Championships in Beijing, took the gold with a throw of 20.21m. Anita Marton of Hungary won the silver with Valerie Adams of New Zealand claiming bronze. Carter attributed her gold medal-winning last throw to the power of prayer. "It came from a prayer," she laughed. "I just had to focus on what I knew I could and needed to do. I was able to take some time and put everything together." Kiwi star Adams—the two-time Olympic champion who had been chasing a remarkable fourth consecutive gold at the world indoors—said she was satisfied with her performance after only recently returning from injury. "I've been out for a while due to injuries, so it feels really good to be back," she said. "Everyone expects a miracle, but you have to work hard."

Maslak defends 400m crown

Reigning champion Pavel Maslak of the Czech Republic won the 400m at the World Indoor Athletics Championships here Saturday to successfully defend his title. The talented 25-year-old surged past Bralon Taplin of Grenada in the home straight to win in 45.44sec. Abdalelah Haroun of Qatar took silver in 45.59, while Deon Lendore of Trinidad and Tobago won bronze. Maslak's win makes him the first man in more than a decade to win back-to-back 400m indoor world titles.

Adekoya wins 400m gold

Oluwakemi Adekoya of Bahrain powered to victory in the women's 400m at the World Indoor Athletics Championships here Saturday. The Nigerian-born sprinter held off a fierce late challenge

from American duo Ashley Spencer and Quanera Hayes to take the tape in 51.45sec at the Oregon Convention Center. Spencer claimed silver while Hayes finished with a bronze. Adekoya, 23, controversially switched allegiances to Bahrain in 2014 despite complaints from athletics authorities in her native Nigeria. In 2014 while representing Bahrain she won the 400m and 400m hurdles at the 2014 Asian Games in Incheon, South Korea.

Berian wins 800m gold for USA

Boris Berian of the United States produced a superb display of front-running to win the men's 800m at the World Indoor Athletics Championships on Saturday. Berian led from start to finish to take the tape in 1 min 45.83sec, ahead of Burundi's Antoine Gekeme and compatriot Erik Sowinski who took bronze. The win was the biggest of 23-year-old Berian's unusual career. The college dropout was working in a McDonald's as recently as 2014 before resurrecting his career last season. "My game plan was simple—get the lead and hang on," Berian said after his victory. "It is so exciting to have two Americans (in the top three)," he added.

Dong strikes gold for China

Dong Bin became only the third athlete from China to win a gold medal in the history of the World Indoor Athletics Championships here Saturday after claiming victory in the triple jump. The 27-year-old from Changsha led the competition from start to finish, taking gold with a best leap of 17.33m at the Oregon Convention Center. Germany's Max Hess took silver with 17.14 while Frenchman Benjamin Compaore won bronze. Only two other Chinese athletes — sprint hurdler Liu Xiang in 2008 and shot putter Sui Xinmei in 1991 have won gold at the world indoors before. —AFP



PORTLAND: United States heptathlon winner Ashton Eaton, center, stands with Ukraine's Oleksiy Kasyanov, left, who finished second, and Germany's Mathias Brugger, second from right, during the World Indoor Athletics Championships, Saturday, in Portland, Ore. — AP

EATON CAPTURES 3RD STRAIGHT WORLD INDOOR HEPTATHLON TITLE

PORTLAND: His gold medal was nice. His wife's meant even more.

That is what Ashton Eaton told the hometown crowd on Saturday night, drawing quite a few "Ahs." Then again, he did win by a very comfortable margin — again.

Eaton captured his third straight heptathlon title at the world indoor track and field championships, taking all the suspense out of the competition with another dominating performance.

The only real drama was whether he could break his own indoor world mark, but an exhausted Eaton didn't have a burst in the 1,000 meters, the final event of seven. He finished with 6,470 points — 175 behind the indoor mark he set four years ago in Istanbul.

This has been quite a world indoor championships for Team Eaton, with his wife, Brianne Theisen-Eaton of Canada, winning the pentathlon title the day before with an incredible performance in the last event. He greeted her with a hug after her race. She greeted him this time, the crowd applauding for the first couple of multi-events who met at the University of Oregon.

"You know what, it didn't matter what happened to me today — (Brianne's performance) made the whole meet for me. You guys know, she stole the show," said Eaton, who beat Ukraine's Oleksiy Kasyanov by 288 points. Eaton now has six straight major titles, including gold at the 2012 London Olympics. He will be the overwhelming favorite to defend his crown at the Rio Games. His wife will be one of the favorites, too. Can both win in Rio?

"It can be done, of course," Eaton said. "We'll try everything we can to see if it can happen." American Barbara Pierre used a blazing start to beat a favored Dafne Schippers of the Netherlands in the women's 60-meter final.

"The crowd was very welcoming, especially when we all had to stay in the back (for the individual introductions) and then come out and I heard my name and was like, 'yeah,' said Pierre, who finished in a time of 7.02 seconds. "I felt like Ashton Eaton a little bit."

FROM FAST FOOD TO THE FAST LANE

Pierre's performance was part of a banner night for the United States, which now has eight gold medals and 15 total heading into the final day of the competition yesterday.

Some of the biggest names in track — Usain Bolt, Justin Gatlin and Allyson Felix — skipped the championships. The Russians aren't here, either, because of pending doping and corruption charges.

Boris Berian of Colorado Springs, Colorado, has been on quite a journey from fast food to the fast lane. Two years ago, he was working at McDonald's to fund his training. He ordered up a win in the 800 meters by taking the lead during the opening lap and then holding off a



PORTLAND: The Netherlands Dafne Schippers (L) and Jamaica's Elaine Thompson compete during the 60 meters race at the IAAF World Indoor athletic championships in Portland, Oregon. — AFP

talented field. "Got excited but stayed positive and trusted my training and hung on," explained Berian, who quit his job at McDonald's in November 2014.

Think this sort of day would ever arrive when working at the hamburger chain? "Not like this. Not this fast," Berian said. The most interesting look of the evening belonged to Italian high jumper Gianmarco Tamberi, who was clean shaven on the right side of his face and had stubble on the left. By a razor-thin margin, he won the event over Robert Grabarz of Britain.

Tamberi's half-beard look at major meets has become his trademark. He is the consummate entertainer, too, shaking hands with the fans and later executing a perfect flip into the mat after his win.

In other finals Saturday:

Dong Bin of China took gold in the men's triple jump and said the "future looks bright" for his nation in jumps.

Czech Republic's Pavel Maslak earned the men's 400 title.

Yulimar Rojas of Venezuela won the women's triple jump.

Sifan Hassan of the Netherlands beat two Ethiopians to earn gold in the women's 1,500.

Oluwakemi Adekoya of Bahrain held off Americans Ashley Spencer and Quanera Hayes to win the women's 400.

Michelle Carter set an American indoor record to win the women's shot put crown. She launched it 66 feet, 3 3/4 inches (20.21 meters) to beat a field that included three-time world indoor champion Valerie Adams of New Zealand. She took third. "I've been competing against Valerie for a long time, and she's done a lot for the sport and you can't take that away from her," said Carter, who also holds the U.S. outdoor record. "She's earned everything that she has. I'm looking forward to many great competitions this year. I think it's the year that women's shot put is really going to shine." — AP

ALONSO FLIPS CAR AFTER DRAMATIC COLLISION

MELBOURNE: Fernando Alonso thanked the advances in Formula One technology for being able to walk away from a horrific crash at the Australian Grand Prix yesterday. About a third of the way through the race, the right front tire on the Spaniard's McLaren collided with the left rear on Esteban Gutierrez's Haas as the Mexican driver braked to make the bend at Turn 3.

Alonso's car was launched at high speed into the trackside concrete barrier and was sent into a barrel roll, flipping twice before coming to rest in a crumpled wreck.

So violent was the force of the crash that fans were left fearing the worst before Alonso crawled out of the cockpit and limped away, shaking hands with a concerned Gutierrez and waving to the crowd.

"I'm thankful for the safety of these cars," Alonso said. "I'm alive thanks to the job of the last 10 to 15 years of Formula One."

Alonso would have been forgiven for

closing his eyes at the impact, but was alert throughout and his thoughts immediately went to family back home. "I was flying, so you see the sky then the ground, then the sky, then the ground," Alonso said.

"You want to stop but it doesn't stop. It keeps going and going and going. It was quite scary, but at the last moment the car stopped and I had a little space to go out and I said 'I will go out quickly because my mother will be watching at home.'"

Gutierrez quickly made his way over to the stricken McLaren and gave Alonso a handshake and embrace, clearly thankful that no greater harm was done.

"It was a big relief to see that he was fine," Gutierrez said. "It was a very scary moment and not very pleasant to see how his car ended up. 'We were both a bit shocked from the crash. We came together and spoke a little bit, but we're all good most importantly.' — AP

ROSBERG WINS DRAMATIC OPENER IN MELBOURNE

MELBOURNE: Nico Rosberg won a dramatic Australian Grand Prix yesterday after a bungled tyre strategy dashed Sebastian Vettel's chances of a season-opening triumph and Fernando Alonso survived a spectacular crash that left his McLaren wrecked.

Rosberg's 15th Formula One victory was also his fourth in succession after the German Mercedes driver won the final three races of last season. Pole-sitter Lewis Hamilton battled back to secure a Mercedes one-two after the defending world champion recovered from a chaotic start that pushed him back to sixth at the first turn to finish eight seconds behind his team mate.

Four-times world champion Vettel came third for Ferrari after leading for much of the race, but the German's victory hopes faded with an aggressive tyre strategy that fell flat after the race was halted due to Alonso's crash.

"The strategy was crucial today, so I'm really thankful the team did a good job on that," ecstatic German Rosberg told reporters.

"The car's just been unreal today... We've got to keep an eye on the red guys (Ferrari), they are very close as you saw today."

Ferrari enjoyed a brilliant start, with Vettel able to carve through the front-row occupying Mercedes duo on the run to the first turn. His Finnish team mate Kimi Raikkonen also got off to a flyer and he darted up the side to claim second place as Rosberg's rear left tyre made contact with Hamilton's front wing.

COMPOUND ISSUES

Vettel appeared poised for an unlikely win but the race turned on its head when Alonso crashed into Haas driver Esteban Gutierrez at high speed going into turn three of the 18th lap.

The Spaniard's car careened into a barrier and was smashed to pieces before it flipped, rolled and flew end-over-end into another barrier.

Alonso walked away from the wreckage but the red flag came out to halt the race for around 10 minutes as track staff swept away debris and repaired the barriers.

During the break, Mercedes opted to run both cars on medium compound tyres and rode them to the finish, while Ferrari took the more aggressive route, sticking with their super-softs, which were quicker but ultimately required another stop. — Reuters



ICC WORLD TWENTY20

DHONI LAUDS INDIA AS TURNAROUND KINGS

KOLKATA: Mahendra Singh Dhoni hailed India as cricket's bounceback kings after they again followed up an early defeat in a major tournament with an emphatic win and kick-started their bid for World Twenty20 glory.

After their shock defeat on Tuesday to New Zealand in their first match, the hosts cruised to a six-wicket victory over arch rivals Pakistan in Kolkata late Saturday.

The defeat against New Zealand had put a question mark over India's status as red-hot favourites and triggered accusations of complacency. But in a cauldron-like atmosphere of a packed Eden Gardens, Dhoni's men held their nerve and reached the target of 119 with 13 balls remaining.

The bounceback from the humiliating 47-run reverse against the Kiwis came as no sur-

prise to veteran skipper Dhoni who was captain when India won the inaugural World T20 in 2007 and the 2011 ODI World Cup after stuttering starts to their campaign.

India's prospects looked grim in 2011 after their first two matches against a traditional powerhouse included a tie with England followed by defeat to South Africa.

India also got off to a slow start in 2007 when they tied with Pakistan before winning a bowl-out and then lost to New Zealand.

"If you see we have been in this position many times. We know how to turn it around," Dhoni told reporters at Eden Gardens.

The man known as "Captain Cool" pointed out that India followed up their defeat in a 2014 Test series against England with victory in the ODIs and an otherwise poor recent tour

of Australia ended with India beating their hosts 3-0 in the T20s. "To have a very bad game or a very bad series and to come back strong, it's the kind of character the boys have.

"And I feel it's very important to back them and have confidence in them that they will bounce back and will come back strong."

Dhoni hit the winning runs at the finale in Kolkata where he played second fiddle to batting maestro Virat Kohli. Kohli appeared supremely calm during his unbeaten knock of 55, which was more than double the next highest score by a batsman on either side.

After India lost three early wickets, Kohli and Yuvraj Singh then put together a 61-run partnership before Yuvraj fell to Wahab Riaz, bringing Dhoni to the crease.

Indian newspapers hailed Kohli's "master-

class", with The Times of India saying he "appeared to be batting in a different zone".

"No batsman in the recent past has looked more assuring than him, calmer and composed, or more classy and skillful," said the daily. The Indian Express said the 37-ball knock "was a special innings even by Kohli's hugely lofty standards". India will now look to pick up the run-rate in their remaining group matches against Bangladesh and Australia, two teams who also lost their openers.

"I still feel there is still scope for improvement and in the coming two games that will be our priority," said Dhoni.

PAKISTAN'S JINX

Pakistan, who started the tournament with a bang by thrashing Bangladesh, failed to

shrug off their world cup jinx against India.

Pakistan have lost all their 11 matches to India in six 50-over World Cup meetings and five T20 clashes, but senior batsman Shoaib Malik did not read much into it.

"We would have fared badly against many other teams as well in the world cup, but the India bit gets highlighted more," said Malik.

Invited to bat on a moisture-laden pitch, Pakistan made 118 for five in a match reduced to 18 overs a side due to rain. Apart from Ahmed Shehzad (25) and Malik (26), no other batsmen got going against an Indian attack which utilised the conditions to their advantage. "It was a tough pitch to bat on but we could have put on a better target than this," said Malik. "Our total wasn't enough to defend against such a great batting line-up." — AFP

S AFRICA SURVIVES EARLY SCARE TO BEAT AFGHANISTAN

MUMBAI: South Africa avoided another bowling nightmare to revive its World Twenty20 campaign and beat inexperienced Afghanistan by 37 runs in the Group 1 match yesterday. Chasing South Africa's daunting 209-5, opener Mohammad Shahzad smashed 44 off just 19 balls before medium-fast Chris Morris grabbed 4-27 to dismiss Afghanistan for 172 in 20 overs. "We need to be a lot better, it's as simple as that," said South Africa captain Faf du Plessis, who won the toss and chose to bat. "It's a big challenge for the bowlers... I guess we are a bit soft in our execution which we need to improve on."

AB de Villiers had earlier capitalized on two dropped catches to hit 64 off 29 balls. Left-handed opener Quinton de Kock made 45 and du Plessis contributed 41.

South Africa lost the first match against England, which chased down a WT20 record 230-8 at the same venue on Friday to win by two wickets. It was Afghanistan's second loss in succession after it was beaten by defending champions Sri Lanka at Kolkata. Shahzad followed the England-style run rampage when he smashed five sixes and three fours in the first three overs from fast bowlers Kagiso Rabada and Kyle Abbott.

Morris cut short the cricketing carnage and knocked back the middle stump of Shahzad, before following it up with the wicket of captain Asghar Stanikzai. He returned to clean bowl Rashid Khan and

Dawlat Zadran in his last over. The South African pace proved too much for Afghanistan's middle-order batsmen as they kept losing wickets with wicketkeeper de Kock holding onto four catches and also stumping Noor Ali Zadran.

"This experience will be good for us," Stanikzai said. "Shahzad started well but unfortunately we gave some quick wickets and that's why we lost the match."

Earlier, de Kock and du Plessis set the pace of the South Africa innings by adding 65 off 42 balls after Hashim Amla was dismissed in the third over.

Afghanistan came back briefly when du Plessis was run out in the 10th over and two overs later de Kock was caught behind. De Villiers took his time to settle down and Samiullah Shenwari twice dropped him - on 26 and 35 - before the batsman launched a brutal counter-attack which saw South Africa scoring 78 runs in the last five overs.

De Villiers lofted 17-year Rashid Khan for four sixes and a four in the 17th over which cost the leg-spinner 29 runs before he holed out in the deep in the next over. JP Duminy (29) and David Miller (19) ensured South Africa crossed the 200-run mark when they hit medium fast Dawlat Zadran for 20 runs in the last over.

"Two dropped catches of de Villiers and conceding around 50 runs in the two overs at the end made the difference," Shahzad said. — AP



BANGALORE: West Indies' Johnson Charles, right, is bowled out by Sri Lanka's Jeffrey Vandersay during their ICC World Twenty20 2016 cricket match in Bangalore, India, yesterday. — AP

FLETCHER SHINES AS W INDIES DOWN S LANKA WITHOUT GAYLE

BANGALORE: Andre Fletcher powered the West Indies to a comprehensive seven-wicket victory against Sri Lanka in their World Twenty20 match in Bangalore yesterday, even without destructive opener Chris Gayle.

The 28-year-old smashed an unbeaten 84, including five sixes and six fours, as the Windies successfully chased down Sri Lanka's paltry score of 122 for nine. Fletcher spearheaded the attack with his 64-ball knock in the absence of explosive opener suffered Gayle, who suffered a tweak in his left hamstring while fielding during Sunday's match and did not bat. A Windies team representative told reporters that the 36-year-old's injury was "not major" but it raises questions about whether he will play in the rest of the tournament.

An unimpressed crowd repeatedly chanted "We want Gayle, We want Gayle", anxious to see the Jamaican who has played several seasons for the city's team in the glitzy Indian Premier League (IPL).

He teased the crowd by stepping out of the bunker with his bat after the third wicket fell, bringing roars from the stadium, only to walk back inside. Gayle smashed a scorching century last week during the West Indies' demolition of England by six wickets in their opening Group One Super 10 match. The West Indies are one of the weakest teams in Test cricket, but they remain a force in the shortest format and are gunning for their second World T20 title after winning the trophy in 2012.

STRUGGLING SRI LANKA

Johnson Charles made 10, before chopping the ball onto his stumps, while Marlon Samuels was gone for three and wicket keeper Danesh Ramdin was bowled for five. Andre Russell was not out on 20.

Defending champions Sri Lanka have been struggling for form since winning the trophy two years ago, slumping to seventh in the world rankings. On Sunday, they posted 122 for nine after West Indies captain Darren Sammy won the toss and elected to field.

All-rounder Thisara Perera top scored for Sri Lanka with 40, including five fours, off 29 balls at the M.Chinnaswamy Stadium, while skipper Angelo Mathews chipped in with 20.

Opener Tillakaratne Dilshan, the star for Sri Lanka in their win over Afghanistan last week, started in promising style, smacking a six off

SCOREBOARD

BANGALORE, India: Scoreboard of the World Twenty20 match between the West Indies and Sri Lanka at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bangalore yesterday:

Sri Lanka	0, Brathwaite 4-0-36-1, Bravo 4-0-20-2
D. Chandimal run out	16
T. Dilshan lbw b Brathwaite	12
L. Thirimanne c Fletcher b Badree	5
C. Kapugedera st Ramdin b Badree	6
A. Mathews c Ramdin b Bravo	20
M. Siriwardana c Gayle b Badree	0
T. Perera c Russell b Bravo	40
N. Kulasekara b Russell	7
R. Herath run out	3
J. Vandersay not out	0
D. Chameera not out	0
Extras (lb 7, w5, nb1)	13
Total (for nine wickets, 20 overs)	122
Fall of wickets: 1-20 (Dilshan), 2-32 (Chandimal), 3-41 (Thirimanne), 4-47 (Kapugedera), 5-47 (Siriwardana), 6-91 (Mathews), 7-116 (Kulasekara), 8-121 (Herath), 9-121 (Perera)	
Bowling: Russell 4-0-34-1, Badree 4-0-12-3, Benn 4-0-13-	

West Indies	A. Fletcher not out 84
J. Charles b Vandersay	10
M. Samuels st Chandimal b Siriwardana	3
D. Ramdin b Siriwardana	5
A. Russell not out	20
Extras (w5)	5
Total (for 3 wickets, 18.2 overs)	127
Did not bat: C. Gayle, D. Bravo, D. Sammy, C. Brathwaite, S. Badree, S. Benn.	
Fall of wickets: 1-39 (Charles), 2-54 (Samuels), 3-72 (Ramdin)	
Bowling: Mathews 1-0-13-0, Herath 4-0-27-0, Kulasekara 2-0-17-0, Vandersay 4-1-11-1, Siriwardana 4-0-33-2, Chameera 3-0-15-0, Perera 0.2-0-11-0	
West Indies won by seven wickets.	

AUSTRALIA DETERMINED TO DEMOLISH BANGLADESH

BANGALORE: Australia will be determined to demolish underdogs Bangladesh in their World Twenty20 clash today, to secure their first points in the group stages and increase their chances of reaching the semi-finals.

Steve Smith's side lost a thriller to New Zealand on Friday in a big blow to their hopes of winning a T20 trophy that has so far proved elusive.

Australia also face Pakistan and then title favourites and T20 world number one India in Group 2 — and will likely need to overcome both to qualify for the semis.

Smith said he was sure his side could turn things around and defeat Bangladesh after the Black Caps edged past them on Friday, thanks largely to tight bowling.

"Absolutely. We're still confident," he said of his side's title hopes.

Although Australia top the Test rankings and won their fifth 50-over World Cup last year, they have struggled in the shortest form of the game. They have only made the World T20 final once, in 2010, when they lost to England.

Their chances were given a boost after the ICC announced on Saturday it was suspending Bangladesh's Arafat Sunny and Taskin Ahmed from bowling due to illegal actions.

Off-spinner Sunny and fast bowler Ahmed were reported by the umpires during a preliminary stage WorldT20 match against the Netherlands.

Bangladesh skipper Mashrafe Mortaza said on Sunday the suspensions were a "devastating" blow to the Tigers' chances of win-

ning a match, describing both as outstanding bowlers and critical to the team.

"It's a big blow. Two of our main players are out of the team. But we have to go through the process and continue to play hard," a downcast Mortaza said.

"We are going to miss everything from them. These two players have been good for us." Bangladesh need a victory if they are to have any hope of making the semi-finals, after being demolished by Pakistan in their first group stage match.

All-rounder Shakib Al Hasan and star batsman Tamin Iqbal were bright spots for Bangladesh in that match, scoring an unbeaten 50 and 24 respectively.

But Bangladesh, ranked 10th, have a rotten record in the World T20 — despite their recent improvements in 50-over cricket-and have not beaten Australia in any of their three previous World T20 clashes.

Teams:

Australia (from): Steve Smith (captain), David Warner, Ashton Agar, Nathan Coulter-Nile, James Faulkner, Aaron Finch, John Hastings, Josh Hazlewood, Usman Khawaja, Mitchell Marsh, Glenn Maxwell, Peter Nevill, Andrew Tye, Shane Watson, Adam Zampa.

Bangladesh (from): Mashrafe Mortaza (captain), Shakib Al Hasan, Abu Hider, Al-Amin Hossain, Mahmudullah, Mohammad Mithun, Mustafizur Rahman, Nasir Hossain, Nurul Hasan, Sabbir Rahman, Soumya Sarkar, Tamin Iqbal, Saqlain Sajib, Shuvagato Hom. — AFP

World Twenty20 standings

MUMBAI: World Twenty20 standings after yesterday's match between South Africa and Afghanistan (played, won, lost, tied, no result, points, run rate)

Super 10 Group 1	West Indies	1	1	0	0	0	2	+0.973
South Africa	2	1	1	0	0	0	2	+0.816
Sri Lanka	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	+0.580
England	2	1	1	0	0	0	2	-0.408
Afghanistan	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	-1.248
Group 2	New Zealand	2	2	0	0	0	4	+1.375
Pakistan	2	1	1	0	0	0	2	+0.999
India	2	1	1	0	0	0	2	-0.895
Australia	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	-0.400
Bangladesh	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	-2.750

3 NBK MasterCard CARD HOLDERS TO WIN PACKAGES TO UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

KUWAIT: MasterCard, in association with National Bank of Kuwait (NBK), brings the excitement of the UEFA Champions League 2015/16 to NBK MasterCard credit cardholders. NBK is offering three travel packages for two to attend the UEFA Champions League semi-finals and the UEFA Champions League Final Milan 2016 of what has become one of the most keenly followed sporting events in the world.

In an exclusive campaign valid until



NBK Deputy GM, Mohammed Al Othman

30th of April 2016, NBK MasterCard credit cardholders will have the chance to win one of two travel packages to the UEFA Champions League 2015/16 Semi-Finals and one exclusive travel package for the UEFA Champions League Final 2016 to be held in Milan on 28th of May 2016; tickets are courtesy of MasterCard.

Each travel package includes two round trip airline tickets, hotel accommodation, transfer service and match tickets for both the winner and a guest.

"The UEFA Champions League is one of the world's most popular sporting events, and NBK is the only bank in Kuwait offering its MasterCard credit cardholders a chance to win fully paid travel packages to take in the excitement of the UEFA Champions League Semi-Finals and the UEFA Champions League Final 2016 Milan - live at the venue," said NBK Deputy General Manager, Consumer Banking Group, Mohammed Al Othman.

Al Othman added, "NBK's leadership in the credit card market in Kuwait has been established by consistently delivering superior value to our customers. We always strive to develop innovative promotions to reward our customers. We

encourage our cardholders to use their NBK MasterCard(r) credit cards more during the promotion period to enjoy this exclusive offer."

"MasterCard has a proud tradition of supporting prestigious international football events and bringing football fans everywhere closer to the game. MasterCard credit cards are all about making everyday purchases more convenient and secure, and we are excited to offer our cardholders an even more rewarding reason to use their MasterCard credit cards and earn themselves a chance to win a truly priceless experience," said Raghav Prasad, General Manager - Gulf Countries, MasterCard.

NBK MasterCard credit cardholders get one chance to enter the draws for every 1 KD cumulatively spent using their NBK MasterCard credit cards for all local purchases during the promotion period. Cardholders also triple their chances of winning when using their cards while travelling overseas or when using their cards on international websites.

NBK credit cards are accepted worldwide and are the safest, most convenient and rewarding way to pay.



NBK UEFA campaign.

NHL Results/Standings

Los Angeles 2, Boston 1; Toronto 4, Buffalo 1; Ottawa 5, Montreal 0; Florida 3, Detroit 5; Columbus 6, New Jersey 3; Vancouver 0, St. Louis 3; Arizona 0, Tampa Bay 2; Dallas 3, NY Islanders 0; San Jose 4, NY Rangers 1; Minnesota 3, Carolina 2 (SO); Philadelphia 1, Pittsburgh 4.

Eastern Conference						Western Conference							
Atlantic Division						Pacific Division							
W	L	OT	GF	GA	PTS	W	L	OT	GF	GA	PTS		
Florida	40	23	9	205	177	89	Dallas	43	21	9	236	211	95
Tampa Bay	41	26	5	196	171	87	St. Louis	42	22	9	194	185	93
Boston	39	26	8	216	197	86	Chicago	42	24	6	201	176	90
Detroit	36	25	11	184	190	83	Nashville	36	23	13	197	185	85
Ottawa	34	31	8	211	223	76	Colorado	37	31	4	195	202	78
Montreal	33	33	6	191	205	72	Minnesota	33	28	11	191	184	77
Buffalo	29	34	10	173	198	68	Winnipeg	29	37	5	182	213	63
Toronto	25	35	11	169	207	61	Central Division						
Metropolitan Division						Los Angeles	44	22	5	196	160	93	
Washington	51	14	5	225	162	107	Anaheim	39	22	9	179	162	87
NY Rangers	40	24	8	203	190	88	San Jose	40	25	6	211	185	86
Pittsburgh	39	24	8	198	177	86	Arizona	31	33	7	188	214	69
NY Islanders	38	23	9	196	177	85	Calgary	30	35	6	196	222	66
Philadelphia	34	24	12	182	189	80	Vancouver	27	32	12	167	205	66
Carolina	31	27	14	175	195	76	Edmonton	29	38	7	179	216	65
New Jersey	34	31	7	164	188	75	Note: Overtime losses (OT) worth 1 pt and not included in loss column (L).						
Columbus	29	34	8	187	221	66							



CALIFORNIA: New York Rangers defenseman Dan Boyle (22) celebrates his goal with teammate Marc Staal (18) against the San Jose Sharks during the second period of an NHL hockey game Saturday, in San Jose, Calif. — AP

DJOKOVIC BEATS NADAL TO REACH INDIAN WELLS FINAL

INDIAN WELLS: Novak Djokovic continued his recent mastery of Rafael Nadal on hard courts, winning 7-6 (5), 6-2 on his sixth match point Saturday to reach the BNP Paribas Open final for the third straight year.

The world's top-ranked player will meet Milos Raonic in final, with Djokovic trying to win a record fifth title in the California desert. He has won the last two years. Djokovic extended his advantage over Nadal on hard courts to 18-7, winning the last seven times since the Spaniard beat him in the 2013 U.S. Open final. The Serb also owns a 25-23 edge in the longest running rivalry in the Open era, having won six straight meetings and 10 of the last 11.

"I managed to stay composed and serve well in important moments and just believed that I can win," Djokovic said. Nadal, a three-time winner here, came up short in making his 100th career singles final with his second loss to Djokovic this year. The Serb won in the final at Doha in January. Nadal hasn't won a title on hard courts since 2014 in Doha.

"Today was closer than the last couple of times against the best player of world, so was a very positive week for me," Nadal said. "If I am able to play weeks in a row at this level, then you start to think about the chances to compete for everything."

Djokovic and Nadal traded service breaks in the first before Djokovic held to force the tiebreaker. "I just served well and hung in there," Djokovic said. "I made him play an extra shot." Helped by three straight errors from Nadal, Djokovic built a 5-2 lead. Nadal recovered to win three straight points, two on errors by Djokovic. But the momentum quickly swung back to Djokovic, who closed out the set on Nadal's service return error and his netted backhand.

"I felt for a moment that I was competing at the highest level possible," said Nadal, clearly the crowd favorite in the packed stadium. "At the beginning of the tiebreak and at the end of the first set, I made a few mistakes with my forehand. That's the only thing."

SURVIVED

Nadal survived a four-deuce game to tie the second set 1-all and faced three deuces on his serve to hold at 2-all. Djokovic earned the only

break in the sixth game to go up 4-2 and then served a love game for a 5-2 lead.

Nadal made one last stand on his serve, fighting back from a triple match point with a big forehand in the corner to get to deuce. But his forehand let him down on two subsequent deuce points and Djokovic closed it out on his sixth match point.

Raonic fired 10 aces while overpowering David Goffin 6-3, 3-6, 6-3 in the other semifinal, improving to a career-best 14-1 this year.

Last year, Raonic saved three match points to beat Nadal in the semis before losing to Roger Federer in the final. "If Milos serves well, he can win against everybody," Nadal said.

Raonic defeated Roger Federer to win his first title of the year at Brisbane and reached the semis at the Australian Open before an injury he sustained Down Under forced him out of two tournaments and Davis Cup.

"Milos is probably playing the best tennis that he has ever played," Djokovic said. "His serve was phenomenal before the start of this season, but it seems like he has improved even more, especially the second serve. He's going for it more. He's not giving you the same look."

Raonic simply overwhelmed his smaller opponent, connecting on 63 percent of his first serves in the two-hour match. The 6-foot-5, 215-pound Canadian averaged 131 mph on his first serve and even his second serve was 2 mph faster than Goffin's first serve of 110. Raonic has yet to drop a set in four matches.

"Definitely have been playing higher level this year, but I think also when I have had those difficult moments or they say some kind of crisis throughout matches, I have found solutions better," Raonic said. "Maturity is a big part of it."

Raonic is 8-8 heading into his 17th career ATP Tour final. In his only other Masters 1000 finals, he lost to Nadal in 2013 and to Djokovic in 2014. "I have obviously a big challenge ahead of me, but I have been pretty good this year at finding solutions," he said.

In the women's doubles final, Bethanie Mattek-Sands and CoCo Vandeweghe defeated Julia Goerges and Karolina Pliskova, 4-6, 6-4, 10-6. It was the first major pro title for Vandeweghe, the 24-year-old niece of former NBA player and current league executive Kiki VanDeWeghe. She and Mattek-Sands earned \$336,920. —AP



INDIAN WELLS: Rafael Nadal of Spain in action in his match against Novak Djokovic of Serbia in the semi finals during day thirteen of the BNP Paribas Open at Indian Wells Tennis Garden on Saturday in Indian Wells, California. — AFP

PENGUINS TOP FLYERS IN NHL PLAYOFF CHASE FOR RIVALS

PHILADELPHIA: Trevor Daley, Carl Hagelin and Chris Kunitz scored, and the Pittsburgh Penguins beat the Philadelphia Flyers 4-1 on Saturday. The Penguins have won five straight and six of seven - all against Metropolitan Division opponents. Pittsburgh and Philadelphia play twice more in the final week of the season. Pittsburgh goaltender Marc-Andre Fleury made 16 saves in his 31st victory of the season, but was hardly challenged by the Flyers. After falling behind on a goal by Radko Gudas early in the second period, the Penguins answered quickly. Nick Bonino won a board battle with Flyers rookie defenseman Shayne Gostisbehere and fed Daley in left circle for the tying goal. Flyers goalie Steve Mason wasn't supposed to start but got the call after Michal Neuvirth appeared injured during warmups. The Flyers said during the game Neuvirth "didn't feel well." Mason finished with 31 stops.

SHARKS 4, RANGERS 1

Joel Ward scored twice, Joe Thornton broke a tie early in the third period and the Sharks overwhelmed Henrik Lundqvist and the Rangers. Lundqvist stopped 42 of the first 43 shots he faced before allowing three to Thornton, Ward and Joe Pavelski on four shots in a span of 3:20 that sent the Sharks to their third straight home win. Tomas Hertl had three assists and Martin Jones made 25 saves to help San Jose move within a point of second-place Anaheim in the Pacific Division. Former Shark Dan Boyle scored the lone goal for the Rangers, who stayed in the game for two periods because of Lundqvist's brilliance before falling apart in the third. Lundqvist made 43 saves before being pulled after the fourth goal. San Jose outshot New York 52-26 for the game.

WILD 3, HURRICANES 2, SO

Charlie Coyle and Zach Parise scored in the shootout, and Minnesota got a big win in the race for the final playoff spot in the Western Conference. David Jones and Jason Zucker scored in regulation, and Devan Dubnyk made 31 saves for the Wild, who are one point behind idle Colorado for eighth in the West. Carolina earned a point to keep its slim playoff hopes alive, losing in overtime for the third time in four games. Cam Ward made 30 saves for the Hurricanes. Chris Terry and Jordan Staal scored for Carolina, which entered play six points behind eighth-place Detroit in the East.

BLUE JACKETS 6, DEVILS 3

Rookie Oliver Bjorkstrand got his first two

NHL goals in the third period and the Columbus Blue Jackets beat the New Jersey Devils. Columbus also got a goal and an assist from Boone Jenner and two assists each for Alexander Wennberg and Matt Calvert. Sergei Bobrovsky made 27 saves. Kyle Palmieri had two goals and an assist for the Devils, who have lost two straight. The Blue Jackets are 4-0-0 against New Jersey this season and are 5-0-1 in the past six against them. The teams play again Sunday at the Prudential Center.

SENATORS 5, CANADIENS 0

Andrew Hammond stopped all 30 shots for his first shutout of the season and the Ottawa Senators scored three short-handed goals in a victory over the Montreal Canadiens. Jean-Gabriel Pageau, Curtis Lazar, and Alex Chiasson all scored with the Senators down a man. It was the fourth time in franchise history that the Senators had three short-handed goals in one game, and the first since an 8-2 win at Toronto on April 3, 2008. Marc Methot and Mika Zibanejad also had goals for Ottawa, which was coming off a 3-1 loss to Buffalo on Friday.

MAPLE LEAFS 4, SABRES 1

Connor Carrick scored his second goal in a week after ending a long drought and the Toronto Maple Leafs beat the Buffalo Sabres to win their fourth in six games and avoid elimination from the playoffs. Before scoring in Toronto's 4-1 win over Tampa Bay on Tuesday night, Carrick hadn't scored since Oct. 13, 2013. William Nylander, Martin Marinčin and Milan Michalek also scored for the Leafs. Brian Gionta had the Sabres' only goal.

RED WINGS 5, PANTHERS 3

Luke Glendening scored the go-ahead goal, Pavel Datsyuk had two goals and the Detroit Red Wings rebounded from a two-goal deficit and topped the Florida Panthers. Dylan Larkin had a goal and an assist, Tomas Tatar also scored and Niklas Kronwall recorded two assists for the Red Wings, who got 23 saves from Jimmy Howard. Teddy Purcell, Vincent Trocheck and Nick Bjugstad scored, and Roberto Luongo made 25 saves for the Panthers, who lost for the first time in three games.

STARS 3, ISLANDERS 0

Kari Lehtonen made 27 saves in Dallas' first shutout since December, and the Stars beat the New York Islanders to maintain their hold

on sole possession of first place in the Western Conference. Lehtonen earned his second shutout of the season and the 34th of his career. Cody Eakin, Patrick Eaves and Alex Hensky scored for a depleted Dallas offense. Tyler Seguin, the Stars' 33-goal scorer, is expected to miss the rest of the regular season after having surgery on Friday to repair a partially torn right Achilles tendon. Eakin stepped up with his 15th goal in the second period and Eaves with his eighth on a third-period breakaway. Hensky scored his 12th into an empty net with 2:54 remaining.

KINGS 2, BRUINS 1

Tanner Pearson and Alec Martinez scored and Jonathan Quick made 27 saves, leading the Los Angeles Kings over the Boston Bruins. Los Angeles' 11th victory in 14 games, coupled with the Arizona Coyotes' 2-0 loss to Tampa Bay, clinched a playoff berth for the Kings - who last season became the eighth team in NHL history to miss the postseason a year after winning the Stanley Cup. Tyler Randell scored for Boston and Tuukka Rask stopped 18 shots. The Bruins remained three points behind Florida in the Atlantic Division race with nine games remaining - including a showdown with the Panthers next Thursday in Boston.

BLUES 3, CANUCKS 0

Brian Elliott made 19 saves in his return from injury and the St. Louis Blues handed the Vancouver Canucks their second straight shutout loss. Troy Brouwer, Vladimir Tarasenko and Jaden Schwartz scored for the Blues, who are two points behind Dallas for the Central Division and Western Conference lead. This was Elliott's first game since Feb. 22, when he went down with a lower-body injury. Saturday was his second shutout this season and 32nd of his career. Vancouver slumped to its fourth straight loss to equal a season high. The struggling Canucks lost 2-0 in Edmonton on Friday.

LIGHTNING 2, COYOTES 0

Ben Bishop stopped 31 shots for his fifth shutout of the season, Ondrej Palat scored in the first period and the Tampa Bay Lightning used a superior penalty kill to hold off the Arizona Coyotes. Nikita Kucherov scored his team-best 27th goal into an empty net with 49.6 seconds left as the Lightning ended a two-game skid. Bishop's 17th career shutout allowed Tampa Bay to win for the second time in seven games following a nine-game winning streak. —AP

BAYERN BOSS ISSUES 'HANDS OFF' WARNING TO CITY

BERLIN: Bayern Munich chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge has issued a thinly-veiled 'hands off' warning to Manchester City after Pep Guardiola's future employers have been linked to a string of Bayern's stars.

"I have been wondering somewhat about statements made by our colleagues from Manchester City, because contracts are contracts and that also

applies to Manchester City," Rummenigge told German daily Bild. The Bayern boss commented after City's director of sport Txiki Begiristain had hinted that the big-spending English giants are interested in some of Bayern's stars. "I can't promise anything. Our goal is as always to put together a strong squad. Just like Bayern Munich are doing," the 51-year-old City boss, and a friend of Guardiola, told Sky.

"For months we have been working on a new team and who knows how things will come together."

Any interest in Bayern's stars from City's direction is particularly awkward for Guardiola after it was announced in January that the current Munich coach will take over from Manuel Pellegrini at the Premier League giants next season.

Rummenigge's reaction comes as no

surprise after it was announced Friday that Bayern has locked in left-back David Alaba on a contract until 2021, which came in the wake of reported interest from City. "It shows Bayern Munich are the ones at the wheel. That was our goal. And in the case of David Alaba, it shows that Bayern Munich decides what is going on and not just any English club who can make fancy offers," added

Rummenigge tersely. City have also been linked to Bayern's top-scorer Robert Lewandowski, who has a contract in Munich until 2019. Barely a week currently passes by without a top German player reportedly set to follow Guardiola to City with Borussia Dortmund midfielder Ilkay Gundogan the latest candidate after his agent met with Begiristain in Amsterdam a fortnight ago. —AFP

SPURS SMOTHER WARRIORS 87-79 IN CLASH OF TITANS

SAN ANTONIO: LaMarcus Aldridge had 26 points and 13 rebounds, and the San Antonio Spurs beat the Golden State Warriors 87-79 on Saturday night to remain perfect at the AT&T Center this season and extend their home dominance over the defending champions to 33 straight regular-season games. Kawhi Leonard added 18 points and 14 rebounds for San Antonio, which has won 44 straight at home in the regular season, tied for the second-longest streak in NBA history. The Spurs held Warriors superstar Stephen Curry to 14 points while limiting him to 1-for-12 shooting on 3-pointers. San Antonio (59-10) moved within three games of Golden State (62-7) for the league's top seed with two games remaining between the two teams. San Antonio was able to win a showdown between the league's top two teams with Tim Duncan coming off the bench for only the third time in his career.

HEAT 122, CAVALIERS 101

Dwyane Wade scored 24 points to surpass 20,000 for his career, Josh Richardson added 19 and Miami never trailed in beating Cleveland. Goran Dragic had 18 points and 11 assists for Miami, Joe Johnson also scored 18 and Hassan Whiteside finished with 16 points and 13 rebounds. Miami outrebounded Cleveland 42-26 and led by as many as 33 at one point. LeBron James had 26 points for Cleveland and sat out the final 15 minutes, the outcome already long being decided when his night ended. Richard Jefferson scored 20 and Kyrie Irving had 14 for the Cavaliers, who have lost 11 consecutive games in Miami.

THUNDER 115, PACERS 111

Russell Westbrook had his second triple-double in two nights, Kevin Durant had 33 points and 13 rebounds, and Oklahoma City overcame Paul George's 45 points to beat Indiana. Westbrook finished with 14 points, 11 rebounds and 14 assists, his 14th triple-double of the season. Durant nearly had one, too, finishing with eight assists to lead Oklahoma City to its fourth straight win. George added seven rebounds and four assists but missed a 3-pointer with 5.9 seconds left that could have tied it. Indiana erased a 10-point halftime deficit and regained the lead early in the fourth quarter, but couldn't hold it. After Indiana took its last lead at 98-97 with 8:28 to go, the Thunder answered with a 9-0 run.

NUGGETS 101, HORNETS 93

D.J. Augustin scored 24 points on 8-of-11 shooting, and Denver snapped a three-game road losing streak with a victory over Charlotte. Darrell Arthur and Gary Harris added 13 points apiece for the Nuggets, while Nikola Jokic had 11 points and 14 rebounds before fouling out midway through the fourth quarter. Nicolas Batum had 24 points, nine assists and eight rebounds for the Hornets, who lost at home for only the third time in the last 15 games. Jeremy Lin had 16 points and Kemba Walker added 15 for Charlotte. It was a costly loss for the Hornets, who had beaten Miami on Thursday night to pull into a tie with the Heat for the fourth-best record in the Eastern Conference.

GRIZZLIES 113, CLIPPERS 102

Zach Randolph recorded his first career triple-double with 28 points, 11 rebounds and 10 assists, Tony Allen added 22 points and Memphis beat the Clippers. Randolph, returning from a seven-game absence due to a sore knee, was 10 of 19 from the floor, while Allen

was 7 of 10. Ray McCallum added 14 for Memphis, including seven in the fourth quarter. Lance Stephenson had 12 points and JaMychal Green finished with 11 as Memphis snapped a four-game losing streak. Chris Paul had 25 points and six assists for the Clippers, while DeAndre Jordan added 16 points and seven rebounds. Paul Pierce contributed 12 points and Austin Rivers finished with 10. The Clippers have lost three of four.

HAWKS 109, ROCKETS 97

Al Horford scored 22 points and streaking Atlanta continued to feast on Western Conference teams by beating Michael Beasley and Houston. The Hawks have won five straight and eight of nine. They've also won six straight against Western Conference teams. Beasley led Houston with a season-high 30 points, including 12 of the team's 14 fourth-quarter points. James Harden had 25 and Dwight Howard had eight points and 17 rebounds. Tim Hardaway Jr. scored 20 points off Atlanta's bench, his second straight game with at least 20 points. He made five of seven 3-pointers.

BULLS 92, UTAH 85

Derrick Rose scored 22 points to lead short-handed Chicago past Utah, snapping the Jazz's four-game winning streak. Taj Gibson had 15 points and 10 rebounds, and Nikola Mirotic added 15 points for Chicago. Rose was 10 for 15 from the field as the Bulls won their second straight. Chicago (35-33) remained in eighth place in the Eastern Conference. The Bulls were playing without Pau Gasol (right knee swelling) and E'Twaun Moore (left hamstring). Derrick Favors led the Jazz with 24 points. Gordon Hayward, Utah's leading scorer with 20.1 points per game, had nine points on 4-for-13 shooting after missing two games with plantar fasciitis of the right foot.

WIZARDS 99, KNICKS 89

John Wall had 24 points and 10 assists, and Washington rallied from an 18-point, second-quarter deficit to beat New York for its fourth straight victory. Marcin Gortat added 15 points and 11 rebounds, while Markieff Morris added 17 points as all five Washington starters scored in double figures. It was the largest comeback win of the season for the Wizards, who began Saturday 10th in the Eastern Conference, but just 1 1/2 games out of the eighth and final playoff spot. Wall, who was seeking his third straight triple-double, fell short with two rebounds, but committed just one turnover after totaling 17 in his last two games. Kristaps Porzingis and Carmelo Anthony led the Knicks with 20 points apiece. Anthony, who averaged 35 in the teams' first two meetings, scored just 12 after the first quarter.

PISTONS 115, NETS 103

Anthony Tolliver scored all 17 of his points in the second half and Aron Baynes scored 17 of his 21 in the fourth quarter to lift Detroit over Brooklyn. The Pistons trailed by six in the third and were in danger of what would have been a terrible home loss, but they were eventually able to take advantage of Brook Lopez's absence. The Brooklyn big man missed the game with a virus. Tolliver helped turn the game around after not playing at all in the first half. He made four 3-pointers and matched his season high in scoring. Baynes, another Detroit backup, set a career high thanks to his big fourth quarter. Thaddeus Young scored 24 points for the Nets. Brooklyn has lost eight of 10. — AP



VILA-REAL: Villarreal's midfielder Samuel Castillejo (L) vies with Barcelona's Argentinian forward Lionel Messi during the Spanish league football match Villarreal CF vs FC Barcelona at El Madrigal stadium in Vila-real yesterday. — AFP

BARCELONA EXTEND ADVANTAGE DESPITE BLOWING TWO-GOAL LEAD

MADRID: Barcelona extended their lead at the top of La Liga to nine points despite blowing a two-goal advantage to draw 2-2 at Villarreal yesterday.

Ivan Rakitic and a controversial Neymar penalty had Barca on course for a 13th consecutive La Liga win before half-time.

Yet, Villarreal were more than worthy of a point and got their reward after the break through Cedric Bakambu and Jeremy Mathieu's own goal.

Real Madrid can move to within 10 points of Barca ahead of the meeting between the two sides in two weeks when they host Sevilla later yesterday. However, Sevilla also have the chance to close the gap on Villarreal to just three points in the fight for the fourth Champions League place. "It is a positive result for us," said Barca boss Luis Enrique.

"The best teams in the league have lost here, we've drawn. We were close to winning, but also could have lost. "It is a positive round of fixtures for us. One less (to go) and one point closer to our objectives."

The sides held a minute's silence before kick-off in memory of 13 people killed in a bus crash carrying foreign exchange students in Spain earlier yesterday. However, the sombre mood didn't affect

Villarreal's start as they hit the woodwork inside the first minute when a Manu Trigueros effort was turned towards his own goal by Arda Turan. Claudio Bravo then blocked Bakambu's effort from a narrow angle as Barca struggled to contain Villarreal's pace on the break.

Yet the visitors still struck first with some fortune as Lionel Messi's free-kick ricocheted off Luis Suarez and fell perfectly into the path of Rakitic to rifle home. The hosts were then furious when Gerard Pique was pardoned a second yellow card for clearly stopping a Villarreal attack by handling the ball on the ground after just 23 minutes.

Villarreal boss Marcelino was expelled from the touchline for taking his protests too far.

And worse was to come for the hosts when referee Jose Maria Sanchez Martinez pointed to the spot despite Sergio Asenjo clearly playing the ball as Neymar tried to round the goalkeeper. Neymar put Barca's recent troubles from the spot behind him to sink home the penalty for his 27th goal of the season.

Pique was replaced by Mathieu early in the second period as Luis Enrique looked to ensure his best defender was not suspended for the game

against Madrid just after the international break. But that proved to be the turning point as Mathieu was constantly caught out.

Bakambu halved the deficit with a simple finish after Bravo had parried Denis Suarez's initial effort. Mathieu then gifted Bakambu the ball straight from kick-off, but the Congolese forward tried to tee up Roberto Soldado instead of going for goal himself and Javier Mascherano intercepted.

Soldado then missed a huge chance to level as he headed wide when unmarked from point-blank range. Asenjo also made a crucial contribution to Villarreal's comeback with a stunning save to stop Neymar making it 3-1.

Moments later, Villarreal were level when the hapless Mathieu turned a corner into his own net. Barca regained their composure in the final quarter to ensure their unbeaten run in all competitions stretches to 39.

Asenjo, who only returned from an 11-month injury layoff against Bayer Leverkusen on Thursday, got down well to his left to turn behind Rakitic's header. And the Croatian failed to make a good connection when Asenjo's unconvincing punch landed at his feet seven minutes from time. —AFP

JUVE STRETCH UNBEATEN RUN ON RECORD DAY FOR BUFFON

MILAN: Champions Juventus took their Serie A unbeaten run to 20 games with a 4-1 derby win at Torino that saw goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon set a new clean sheet record of 973 minutes.

Juventus made the short trip to the Stadio Olimpico looking to make amends for their spectacular Champions League collapse at Bayern Munich on Wednesday.

And Massimiliano Allegri's men responded to their last 16 defeat in style, Paul Pogba firing the visitors ahead on 33 minutes before Sami Khedira took their half-time lead to 2-0.

Juventus were pegged back three minutes after the restart when Andrea Belotti reduced the arrears from the spot to end Buffon's new unbeaten record at 973 minutes, the keeper surpassing Sebastiano Rossi's record of 929 minutes for AC Milan in 1994.

But the champions restored their two-goal advantage just after the hour when Alvaro Morata, who had replaced Paulo Dybala after the Argentine crumpled to the pitch in pain, hit a brace before Khedira was sent off at the death for dissent. Juve's 22nd win stretches their lead over second-placed Napoli to six points ahead of their home game later Sunday with Genoa.

Allegri admitted after the game: "It was a great win because it's helped to put what happened in Munich behind us. "It wasn't an easy game for us but the lads did well to keep Torino's chances down and, although I had to replace Dybala, it worked out well for us with Morata in the end." Roma, who drew 1-1 with Inter on Saturday, remain third with a five-point lead on both Fiorentina, held to a scoreless stalemate at Frosinone, and Inter.

EARLY BLOW

Juve were devastated by their reverse in Munich, where Thomas Mueller scored a 91st minute leveller for the Germans to take the decider into extra-time, before Bayern sealed a 6-4 aggregate win.

Allegri was without defender Giorgio Chiellini, handing a start to Daniele Rugani, as well as midfielder Claudio Marchisio through injury, but welcomed back Dybala after he also sat out at the Allianz Arena.

Torino had lost 12 of their last 14 games with Juve, save for a 0-0 draw and a 2-1 win in April 2015. Juve suffered an early blow when Dybala collapsed while taking a free kick and was replaced by Morata, although that would be a blessing in disguise.

Pogba got the visitors off the mark just after the half hour with a free kick which he curled around the wall and into the near top corner and when Khedira waltzed through the middle to poke the ball home the visitors were 2-0 up on 42 minutes.

Torino were handed a lifeline by Belotti's spot-kick, which left Buffon rooted to the spot but with a new Serie A record in his possession.

Buffon said he was "happy" to be the new record-holder, but was quick to share the plaudits. "It also goes to my team-mates, who do all the defensive work well before the ball even gets near the goal," he said.

Torino's hopes, however, were ended by a

series of refereeing decisions that left Torino coach Giampietro Ventura fuming.

The hosts were unlucky with a wrong offside decision that saw Maxi Lopez's goal chalked off for what would have been the leveller.

Juve defender Alex Sandro was then lucky to escape conceding a penalty with a borderline challenge on Bruno Peres.

Ventura lashed out: "It's unbelievable to have lost in these circumstances. Fair enough they went 2-0 up, but after that I don't know what happened. "Alex Sandro should have been sent off, and in the second half we levelled 2-2 only to see the goal chalked off. "How can the referee get that wrong? I have great respect for Juventus, who are a great side but today I can't accept that. They should show us some respect as well." The setbacks hit Torino hard and 15 minutes later Morata chipped the onrushing Padelli from Pogba's perfect delivery, before completing his brace on 77 minutes. — AFP



TURIN: Juventus' midfielder Paul Pogba from France (R) fights for the ball with Torino's defender Bruno Peres from Brazil (C) during the Italian Serie A football match Torino Vs Juventus yesterday at the "Olympic Stadium" in Turin. — AFP

NBA results/standings

San Antonio 87, Golden State 79; Atlanta 109, Houston 97; Miami 122, Cleveland 101; Detroit 115, Brooklyn 103; Indiana 111, Oklahoma City 115; Washington 99, New York 89; Chicago 92, Utah 85; Memphis 113, LA Clippers 102; Charlotte 93, Denver 101.

Eastern Conference					Western Conference				
Atlantic Division					Northwest Division				
W	L	PCT	GB		Oklahoma City	48	22	.686	—
Toronto	47	21	.691	—	Portland	36	34	.514	12
Boston	39	30	.565	8.5	Utah	33	36	.478	14.5
New York	28	42	.400	20	Denver	29	41	.414	19
Brooklyn	19	50	.275	28.5	Minnesota	22	47	.319	25.5
Philadelphia	9	60	.130	38.5	Pacific Division				
Central Division					Golden State	62	7	.899	—
Cleveland	49	20	.710	—	LA Clippers	43	25	.632	18.5
Indiana	36	33	.522	13	Sacramento	26	42	.382	35.5
Chicago	35	33	.515	13.5	Phoenix	19	50	.275	43
Detroit	36	34	.514	13.5	LA Lakers	14	55	.203	48
Milwaukee	30	39	.435	19	Southwest Division				
Southeast Division					San Antonio	59	10	.855	—
Atlanta	41	29	.586	—	Memphis	40	30	.571	19.5
Miami	40	29	.580	0.5	Houston	35	35	.500	24.5
Charlotte	39	30	.565	1.5	Dallas	34	35	.493	25
Washington	34	35	.493	6.5	New Orleans	25	43	.368	33.5
Orlando	29	39	.426	11					

Sports

Chinese lead in Salwa Cup



Fletcher shines as W Indies down Sri Lanka without Gayle



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DJOKOVIC BEATS NADAL TO REACH INDIAN WELLS FINAL

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MANCHESTER: Manchester City's Eliaquim Mangala, top, and United's Jesse Lingard challenge for the ball during the English Premier League soccer match between Manchester City and Manchester United at the Etihad stadium in Manchester, yesterday. — AP

RASHFORD DOWNS MAN CITY IN DERBY



MANCHESTER: Teenage sensation Marcus Rashford struck again as Manchester United won 1-0 at Manchester City yesterday to rekindle their top-four challenge and fatally compromise their derby rivals' Premier League title hopes.

Rashford embarrassed hapless City defender Martin Demichelis to score the game's only goal in the 16th minute, taking his tally to five goals in eight first-team appearances and making him the

youngest ever Manchester derby goalscorer at the age of 18 years and 141 days.

Victory took Louis van Gaal's side to within a point of fourth-place City, stemming a damaging run of four games without victory and creating hope that United may yet finish a testing season by claiming a Champions League berth.

City's grip on fourth place is also at threat from West Ham United and although they retain a game in hand on the teams above them, they now trail leaders Leicester City by a massive 15 points.

Compounding a miserable last derby for outgoing City manager Manuel Pellegrini, the hosts lost both goalkeeper Joe Hart and winger Raheem Sterling to injury. With Vincent Kompany and Nicolas Otamendi having both succumbed to injury against Dynamo Kiev on Tuesday, it has been a week that Pellegrini may come to rue when his side cross paths with Paris Saint-Germain in the

Champions League next month. Buoyed by their historic Champions League success against Dynamo, City had attacked the game with purpose and twice went close to taking the lead through Jesus Navas in the early stages.

Fernandinho also headed over the bar from a Navas corner, but United's pace on the break gave them a ready outlet and in the 16th minute they struck. Juan Mata fed Rashford on the edge of the box and the youngster planted Demichelis on his backside before tucking a shot past Hart to claim his own piece of derby history.

Shorn of captain Kompany and Otamendi, City were always likely to be vulnerable in central defence and Hart was called into action moments later to beat away a shot from Anthony Martial.

At the other end, Demichelis got his head to David Silva's free-kick, but the ball passed the wrong side of David de Gea's left-hand post.

An apparent groin injury to Sterling gave Pellegrini an opportunity to bolster his midfield, with Fernando entering in place of the England international and Yaya Toure moving forward.

It put Toure in a better position to inflict damage and he twice went close to equalising, curling narrowly wide with his left foot and then stabbing off-target after Bacary Sagna flicked on a Navas free-kick. But Rashford had not finished his torment of Demichelis and in first-half stoppage time he went down in the box after the Argentine stepped across his path, only for referee Michael Oliver to dismiss his penalty appeal.

There was more to come for Demichelis after the break as an under-hit back-pass almost let Martial in, obliging Hart to make a rushed clearance.

In doing so, the England goalkeeper damaged his calf and had to be stretchered off, with League Cup final penalty shootout hero Willy Caballero tak-

ing his place. Demichelis's nightmare was brought to an end shortly after when he was hooked in favour of Wilfried Bony, which saw Fernandinho drop into central defence.

City looked there for the taking and United poured forward in search of the reassurance a second goal would bring, Caballero parrying a deflected effort from Martial and Fernandinho blocking fortuitously from Rashford.

But the hosts survived to go in search of an equaliser, with Sergio Aguero lashing a shot wide and heading against the post from Toure's cross.

Still City came forward, but Toure was unable to pick out Bony after Aguero looped a header across goal and both Navas and Fernandinho sent efforts into the stand behind De Gea's goal.

Six minutes of injury brought one last sight of goal for Aguero, but after chesting down Silva's pass, he slammed wide. — AFP

MITROVIC SAVES NEWCASTLE, MANE SINKS LIVERPOOL



MANCHESTER: Aleksandar Mitrovic scored an 83rd-minute equaliser as Newcastle United prevented northeast rivals Sunderland from escaping the Premier League relegation zone in a 1-1 draw yesterday. Seeking a seventh successive win over Newcastle, Sunderland took the lead in the 44th minute at St James' Park when Jermain Defoe volleyed home left-footed after Rob Elliot had parried a shot from Fabio Borini.

But with seven minutes remaining, Georginio Wijnaldum crossed for Serbian striker Mitrovic to score with a downward header, sparing Newcastle manager Rafael Benitez from defeat in his first home game and keeping both teams in the bottom three.

"The players fought till the end and the fans were behind us in a difficult situation," said Benitez. "We have to do this from the first minute to the last to get more points. I think we can stay up." With eight games each to play, third-bottom Sunderland are two points from safety, with Newcastle a point behind in 19th place. In the day's other early game, Sadio Mane

scored twice-and squandered a penalty-as Southampton checked Liverpool's charge towards the top four by storming back from 2-0 down to win 3-2 at St Mary's.

Jürgen Klopp's Liverpool went 2-0 up inside 22 minutes, Philippe Coutinho curling in a fine effort from 25 yards and Divock Origi teeing up Daniel Sturridge to score.

Senegal international Mane, a half-time replacement for Dusan Tadic, saw a penalty saved by Simon Mignolet early in the second half after Martin Skrtel was adjudged to have fouled Graziano Pelle. But Mane sped past Mamadou Sakho to reduce the arrears and after Pelle equalised with a vicious shot in the 83rd minute, the Italian freed Mane to run through and score an 86th-minute winner.

"The first half we played brilliant football," said Klopp. "We have to close the game out. You have to accept that in the second half they controlled the game."

It meant that Liverpool failed to put pressure on Manchester City and Manchester United, who face off at the Etihad Stadium later. City currently occupy the fourth and final Champions League berth, a point above West Ham United and four points above both Manchester United and Southampton, with Liverpool three points further back in ninth place. The day's other game sees second-place Tottenham Hotspur host Bournemouth, with Mauricio Pochettino's side bidding to cut leaders Leicester City's advantage back to five points. — AFP

LETHAL KANE KEEPS SPURS IN TITLE HUNT



LONDON: Harry Kane blew Bournemouth away as title-chasing Tottenham kept the pressure on Premier League leaders Leicester with a swaggering 3-0 victory yesterday. Kane took just 44 seconds to open the scoring at White Hart Lane and the Tottenham striker netted again 15 minutes later to effectively kill off Bournemouth before half-time. Christian Eriksen added Tottenham's third goal after the interval to keep his side firmly in the hunt for a first English title since 1961. Mauricio Pochettino's second-placed team are only five points behind Leicester and, with seven games remaining, they go into the international break as the most credible candidates to profit from any slips by the leaders in the closing weeks.

This was a high-class Tottenham display and Kane, who had scored twice to seal last weekend's victory at Aston Villa, looks almost unstoppable at present.

Keeping the England star fit and in-form is the key to Tottenham's bid for a first title since the glory days of Danny Blanchflower and Dave Mackay, and Pochettino seems well aware of that.

Leicester's win at Crystal Palace on Saturday had left Tottenham with no margin for error but, crucially, Pochettino had rested Kane, Eriksen, Mousa Dembele and Kyle Walker for Thursday's Europa League defeat against Borussia Dortmund. The Argentine's gamble was vindicated when two of his refreshed stars com-



LONDON: Tottenham's Christian Eriksen, left, attempts a shot during the English Premier League soccer match between Tottenham Hotspur and Bournemouth at White Hart Lane in London, yesterday. — AP

combined to give Tottenham the lead before the sell-out crowd had even got comfortable in their seats.

After struggling in the opening weeks, Kane had kick-started his season with a hat-trick in Tottenham's 5-1 win at Bournemouth in October and he took less than a minute to feast on the Cherries' defence yet again. Walker advanced unchecked down the right flank and whipped over a low cross that Kane met with a perfectly-timed run into the six-yard box, where he deftly guided the ball into the far corner.

It was Kane's 22nd goal in his last 30 club appearances and took him to 20 Premier League goals for a

second consecutive season. With their top-flight survival almost secured after three successive victories, Bournemouth had less motivation than their high-flying opponents and it showed as Tottenham tore through them again to double their advantage in the 16th minute.

Following a lengthy spell of probing possession, Dele Alli twisted the knife, playing a sumptuous pass to locate Kane's intelligent run and the England striker's predatory instincts did the rest as he fired a precise low drive past Artur Boruc from the edge of the penalty area. — AFP

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KHAMENEI SAYS ECONOMY FIRST AS NEW IRANIAN YEAR BEGINS

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BEIJING: International Monetary Fund Managing Director Christine Lagarde, left, Chinese Vice Premier Zhang Gaoli, center, and former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger listen to a speech during the opening ceremony of the China Development Forum at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse. — AP

HOPE SPRINGS FOR FOREIGN COMPANIES IN CHINA CHINA'S TOP PLANNER PROMISES ACCESS TO MARKETS

BEIJING: China's top planner tried to reassure foreign companies they are welcome in its slowing, state-dominated economy in a speech yesterday aimed at dispelling growing anxiety Beijing is squeezing them out of promising industries.

Speaking to an audience that included executives of top global companies at a government-organized conference, Xu Shaoshi pledged to "promote two-way opening up and liberalization." Xu promised foreign companies equal treatment with local enterprises as Beijing carries out a sweeping overhaul aimed at promoting self-sustaining growth based on domestic consumption and making state companies that dominate a range of industries more competitive and efficient.

"We are ready to share these growth opportunities with you," said Xu, chairman of the Cabinet's National Reform and Development Commission. The China Development Forum 2016 is being closely watched by global companies because it comes at the start of the ruling Communist Party's latest five-year development plan that runs through 2020.

Eager for details

Executives are eager to learn details of how the party might carry out pledges to make the economy more competitive, open more industries to private and possibly foreign competitors and to shrink bloated, money-losing industries including coal, steel and cement. The guest list for the weekend conference at a government guesthouse in the Chinese capital included executives of US, European and Asian banks, manufacturers, Internet and other companies.

The ruling party's plan promises to give the private sector a bigger economic role, but business groups say regulators are trying to shield Chinese rivals from competition or compel foreign companies to hand over technology in exchange for market access.

Business groups say Beijing has yet to carry out most of the reforms promised in a separate 2013 plan that called for giving market forces a "decisive role" in the economy. They point to limits on foreign ownership in an array of industries and say in some areas such as information security technology for banks regulators are reducing or blocking market

access. "The big question is whether foreign companies will be able to access that growth," John Frisbie, president of the US-China Business Council, said in an interview last week. Companies are getting "mixed signals" from Chinese regulators, said Frisbie. "That uncertainty is weakening business confidence."

Restore faith

Meanwhile, Chinese leaders also are trying to restore faith in their ability as economic managers following a stock market collapse and currency turmoil. Senior officials including Premier Li Keqiang have spent the past month making an unusually prominent series of statements that the economy is on track and trying to dispel fears Beijing might weaken its yuan to boost exports.

Yesterday, Xu announced no new initiatives but promised to make "markets more open, more efficient and more sustainable." Xu promised to reduce "regional and industrial monopolies," a reference to repeated promises to cut back the dominance of state companies in industries including banking, ener-

gy and telecoms that reform advocates complain are a drag on the economy. Reform advocates complain the ruling party is dragging its feet on carrying out promises to open more industries to private competition. The party has given itself until 2018 to show the first results from its overhaul of state industry but reformers say with growth falling steadily, they need to act faster.

Last year's economic growth fell to a 25-year low of 6.9 percent and forecasters

including the International Monetary Fund say it will decline further. This year's official target is 6.5 to 7 percent, but the IMF and others say it is more likely to fall as low as 6.3 percent. Beijing wants to promote "new growth drivers" and encourage "mass innovation" in areas such as clean energy, medical technology and artificial intelligence, Xu said. He promised to "lower the threshold" for entrepreneurs to get into promising new fields. — AP

OMV, ADNOC TO EXPLORE ABU DHABI OIL, GAS FIELDS

VIENNA: OMV has signed a four-year program to evaluate offshore oil and gas fields northwest of Abu Dhabi with the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company and US firm Occidental Petroleum, the Austrian company said. The fields the companies will analyze through seismic, drilling and engineering studies include the Ghasha and Hail

areas with a view to appraising and developing them. OMV is already working with ADNOC on the appraisal of the Shuwaihat field. OMV under new Chief Executive Rainer Seele is increasingly looking towards Russia and the United Arab Emirates, the home of its second-biggest shareholder IPIC, for future output. — Reuters

GISS SUPPORTS QATAR, UAE SOFT AS ETISALAT STAGNANT

DUBAI: Strength in drilling rig provider Gulf International Services (GISS) supported Qatar's stock market in early trade yesterday, while United Arab Emirates markets fell as telecommunications giant Etisalat sagged.

GISS, Qatar's most heavily traded stock, gained 0.9 percent after it said it had taken steps boost its asset utilisation rates; operating charges would now be indexed to crude oil prices, enabling positive changes when oil prices increased, it said. Qatar's index was roughly flat in the opening minutes as six of the 10 most active stocks rose.

Abu Dhabi's index slid 2.8 percent as

Etisalat sank 2.2 percent. At the end of last week, international index compiler FTSE Russell added Etisalat to its All-World and other indexes; the stock dropped 4.0 percent on Thursday in very heavy trade, and yesterday's decline suggested traders who had bought in anticipation of the inclusion, hoping to sell to passive funds entering the stock, were continuing to unload it. Dubai's index fell 0.8 percent as blue chip Emar Properties pulled back 2.4 percent, but six of the 10 most heavily traded stocks were higher, with GFH Financial adding 2.2 percent. — Reuters

SAUDI OFFERS TO FUND EGYPT'S SINAI PROJECTS

CAIRO: Egypt said yesterday that Saudi Arabia has offered \$1.5 billion to help finance economic projects in the Sinai Peninsula, as Riyadh continues to bolster its ties with Cairo. Saudi Arabia, a staunch supporter of President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's regime, has previously offered billions of dollars in aid to Egypt since the 2013 ouster of Islamist leader Mohamed Morsi.

In December, Riyadh pledged eight billion dollars in investment and aid to Egypt over five years, but it was unclear whether the Sinai offer was part of this. Egypt's International Cooperation Minister Sahar Nasr signed a "\$1.5 billion agreement with the Saudi Development Fund for developing projects in the Sinai Peninsula," a ministry statement said.

The funds will be used "for development proj-

ects" in agriculture and to build 26 residential complexes that would also include hospitals and schools. The peninsula's northern part is a bastion of the Egyptian affiliate of the jihadist Islamic State group, which has carried out deadly attacks on Egyptian security forces since Morsi's ouster.

On Saturday, 15 policemen were killed in an attack on a police checkpoint in the area. The attack was claimed by IS. Yesterday, Saudi Arabia also signed a separate five-year agreement to help Egypt finance its petrol needs, the ministry said.

The fuel agreement comes despite a sharp fall in Saudi Arabia's own oil earnings amid the global decline in crude prices. Yesterday's agreements come ahead of an official visit by Saudi

King Salman to Cairo on April 4. Ties between Cairo and Riyadh have strengthened since then army chief Sisi ousted Morsi in July 2013, with Egypt joining a Saudi-led coalition that has battled Iran-backed rebels in Yemen since March last year.

Egypt's Gulf allies Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates each offered \$4 billion in investment and aid to Cairo in March 2015. Cairo, fighting the deadly IS-led insurgency in North Sinai, has been criticized by rights groups for its blistering crackdown on Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood since 2013. The police crackdown has left hundreds of people dead and thousands imprisoned. Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have all declared the Muslim Brotherhood to be a "terrorist group." — AFP

FEDERAL RESERVE WORRIED ABOUT THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

By Hayder Tawfik



Finally the most powerful central bank in the world is taking notice of the health of the world economy when deciding on its own monetary policy. This seems an historical shift for the Federal Reserve. Continuous and disturbing global financial markets can no longer be ignored for the sake of a healthy US economy. If allowed to persist it could set back US economic growth and slow the pace of corporate hiring. Such concerns could easily rule out any further rise in US interest rates in the near term.

Governments and central banks around the world should commend the Federal Reserve for such excellent work it did and continue doing since the financial crises back in 2008. The US economy had made continued progress, but now it faces much higher risks from the slowdown in China and some other important trading partners of the US. Also, there is a greater risk from the global financial markets. The global financial conditions had become less accommodative in supporting economic growth. In spite of very low interest rates or even in some cases negative rates, global equity

markets has become very volatile and credit costs for riskier borrowers have shot up in recent months.

All of these recent developments, if they prove persistent, could weigh on the outlook for the global economic activity and the employment market. Although declines in longer-term interest rates and oil prices provide some great relief, at least in the short term. The Federal Reserve has not completely backed away from a gradual increase in its interest rates as it talked about the continued increase in employment in the US while stimulative monetary policies overseas should buoy world growth.

I believe there has been a historical shift for the US Federal Reserve in setting its monetary policy. It seems that the Federal Reserve can no longer ignore global economic and financial events when it sets its monetary policy. The reason for this is that the Euro-zone and China has become a very big component of the world economy.

Weak economic activity in those economies can have big impact on US economy. Most US multinational companies are big player in the world. When it last raised rates by 0.25%, then the Federal Reserve hailed its decision as a sign of the progress that had been made by the US economy since the Great Recession. But now it is very worried about the shape of the global economy.

Since then the global financial markets have had a very volatile start for the year. Collapsing com-

modity prices, big sell off in oil price, fears over China's growth and concerns about central banks' ability to continue propping up growth. These developments have increased discussion among economists about the possibility of the US economy entering recession. This has pushed some economists to criticizing the Federal Reserve for its December decision to tighten its monetary policy.

The yield curve of US Treasury bonds, which has been a regular market indicator of recessions, has flattened sharply lately, with the difference between two and 10-year Treasury yields slipping just below 1 percentage point for the first time since January 2008. A flat or inverted yield curve spread between 2 and 10 years US treasury bonds, usually is an indication of investors expectation of an upcoming US economic recession.

China being the second biggest economy in the world and the biggest US trading partner has become the focus of the Federal Reserve and have been given lots of attention. The Federal Reserve sees China as a central risk factor. Recent economic indicators coming out of China did not suggest a sharp slowdown in Chinese growth, but the declines in the value of its currency have intensified uncertainty about China's exchange rate policy and the prospects for its economy.

Given the extent of the global gloom and the latest actions by the Bank of Japan and the European

Central bank that have pushed their interest rates to negative territories, some economists have questioned whether the Federal Reserve might have to follow suit and cut rates to negative territory. The Federal Reserve not raising rates last week must explain its concern. At present there is no possibility of the Federal Reserve reversing its last December rate raise but it did say that in the spirit of prudent planning the central bank always looked at the options available to it. Also it said that it was not aware of anything that would prevent them from having negative interest rates in the US but the central bank had not yet fully explored the legal issues.

For the time being US economic growth is on the right track and could also exceed the Federal Reserve's projections. That assume oil prices stay low for a while so it can provide a sustainable boost to consumers than the central bank expected. Also assumes global economic activity does not falter suddenly. The chances of those two factors are not encouraging indeed. Negative interest rates are not the sign of good things to come. They are bad for banks and savers and anyone else with cash balances. It gives the consumers and corporates the impression that the central banks are anticipating economic activities or something else that are getting worse. I believe even in an environment with very low interest rates or even negative rates, cash is still highly recommended.



TEHRAN: This photo released by official website of the Iranian Presidency office on Tuesday, March 1, 2016, President Hassan Rouhani looks at the engine of a car while visiting the "International Car Industry Show". — AP

KHAMENEI SAYS ECONOMY FIRST AS NEW IRANIAN YEAR BEGINS DOMESTIC PRODUCTION THE BEST ROUTE TO STRONG RECOVERY

TEHRAN: Iran's supreme leader said yesterday that the economy must come first, insisting in a Persian new year's day message that domestic production is the best route to a strong recovery. The Nowruz holiday comes just two months after implementation began of a landmark nuclear deal between Iran and world powers led by the United States, triggering the lifting of a raft of international sanctions and raising the prospect of renewed foreign investment.

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has said repeatedly that foreign investment will only help if it is used to develop Iran's domestic industries. "Hopes exist for the year 1395 but to achieve these hopes we must make efforts day and night without interruption," Khamenei said in a pre-recorded television address. "The economy must be our priority," he said, dubbing 1395 "the year of the resistance

economy and action". The ending of the 13-year standoff over Iran's nuclear program has raised expectations of recovery after years of economic difficulties, including high inflation which dramatically reduced Iranians' purchasing power. The economy exited a deep recession little more than a year ago. But although international oil sales have resumed and exports risen since the nuclear deal went into effect in January, the price of crude means receipts have been low, and growth remains weak. "The solution is the economy of resistance," Khamenei said.

"With the economy of resistance, we can fight unemployment and recession, control inflation and confront the threats of enemies," he said the government of President Hassan Rouhani had put in place "extensive measures" to repair the economy.

"Steps have been taken and these preliminary actions must continue," the supreme leader said, in a possible nod to Rouhani's taming of inflation, which has fallen to 13 percent from more than 40 percent when the president took office in August 2013. "I do not expect that these problems will be solved in a year, but I'm sure that if appropriate actions are taken, we will see the effects at the end of the year."

Unemployment in Iran stands at a little over 10 percent but youth unemployment is around 25 percent, making job creation vital. In a separate message, broadcast immediately after Khamenei's, Rouhani echoed the supreme leader, and said economic growth of five percent was his aim for the next 12 months. "I have hope, and am certain that with interaction with the world, we can move towards economic prosperity," he said. — AFP

ITL WORLD SET TO INAUGURATE ITS FIRST OFFICE IN KUWAIT

KUWAIT: After Omani football legend Ali Al Habsi kicking open ITL World's first office in Oman on the 27th Jan 2016, ITL World, a leading travel management company in the region, is all set to fulfill its ambition of establishing fully owned & operating office across the GCC by gearing up to inaugurate their 36th branch worldwide and their first office in Kuwait on Monday, 21 March at the Safat Tower in Salhiya area.

Rated consecutively as the 5th most powerful travel management company in the Middle East by Arabian Travel News, ITL World has been catering to a wide portfolio of clientele across Asia and the Middle East since the company's founding over three decades ago.

"We are excited to have the opportunity to operate in Kuwait and offer ITL World's unique flavor of travel services to clients in both the corporate and leisure segments across Kuwait," said Dr Siddeek Ahmed, the Chairman & the Managing Director of the Eram Group which is the parent company of ITL World.

ITL World has been a preferred partner of several global brand and tourism boards in the region, including most recently by globally renowned corporate travel giant - CTM (Corporate



Dr Siddeek Ahmed

Travel Management), which chose ITL World as their partner across the Middle East.

Deploying cutting-edge, in-house developed travel technologies, as well as the industry's leading Global Distribution Systems, ITL World facilitates an enhanced 360 degree client experience. With well-known travel brands such as 'Miceminds', 'Arabian Experience' and 'EduVoyage' under its portfolio, ITL World offers travel solutions to government entities, corporate conglomerates, Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Events (MICE segments), luxury travel, sports travel, wellness travel, student travel and much more.

OMAN AIR NARROWS LOSSES, NEEDS LESS GOVT SUPPORT

MUSCAT: State carrier Oman Air's losses narrowed last year and it required less financial support from the government as the airline boosted its capacity, chairman Darwish Al-Balushi said yesterday. The fate of the carrier, which has been loss-making for years, is important to Oman's economy as the government tries to repair state finances damaged by low oil prices while diversifying the economy into non-oil sectors such as tourism.

Oman Air's losses narrowed 21 percent in 2015 to 86 million rials (\$233 million), while its revenues expanded 14 percent to 466 million rials as it

took delivery of nine new aircraft and increased its flight schedule.

This allowed the airline to reduce the support it received from the government to 54 million rials last year, Balushi said without giving a figure for support in 2014. He said the airline would request a further reduction in support this year, and was on track to break even on an operating basis by the end of 2017. Oman Air has a fleet of 41 planes and plans to expand this to 70 by 2020, according to its website. Last October, the government approved a restructuring of the airline that created subsidiaries and ventures to handle some businesses.— Reuters

EXCHANGE RATES

AL-MUZAINI EXCHANGE CO.

ASIAN COUNTRIES

Japanese Yen	2.663
Indian Rupees	4.499
Pakistani Rupees	2.884
Sri Lankan Rupees	2.086
Nepali Rupees	2.806
Singapore Dollar	219.690
Hongkong Dollar	38.918
Bangladesh Taka	3.850
Philippine Peso	6.453
Thai Baht	8.622

GCC COUNTRIES

Saudi Riyal	80.576
Qatari Riyal	83.001
Omani Riyal	784.823
Bahraini Dinar	802.440
UAE Dirham	82.266

ARAB COUNTRIES

Egyptian Pound - Cash	35.500
Egyptian Pound - Transfer	35.524
Yemen Riyal/for 1000	1.410
Tunisian Dinar	150.100
Jordanian Dinar	425.860
Lebanese Lira/for 1000	2.013
Syrian Lira	2.153
Morocco Dirham	31.295

EUROPEAN & AMERICAN COUNTRIES

US Dollar Transfer	302.000
Euro	336.730
Sterling Pound	428.390
Canadian dollar	226.810
Turkish lira	104.680
Swiss Franc	307.070
Australian Dollar	226.650
US Dollar Buying	300.800

20 Gram	253.510
10 Gram	129.510
5 Gram	65.600

UAE EXCHANGE CENTRE WLL

CURRENCIES

Australian Dollar	201.91
Canadian Dollar	219.82
Swiss Franc	306.95
Euro	336.85
US Dollar	299.90
Sterling Pound	431.04
Japanese Yen	2.67
Bangladesh Taka	3.817
Indian Rupee	4.375
Sri Lankan Rupee	2.083
Nepali Rupee	2.732
Pakistani Rupee	2.860
UAE Dirhams	0.08161
Bahraini Dinar	0.7970
Egyptian Pound	0.03819
Jordanian Dinar	0.4265
Omani Riyal	0.7788
Qatari Riyal	0.08269
Saudi Riyal	0.07994

DOLLARCO EXCHANGE CO. LTD

Rate for Transfer	Selling Rate
US Dollar	302.050
Canadian Dollar	229.115
Sterling Pound	432.050
Euro	336.620
Swiss Franc	299.080
Bahrain Dinar	799.075
UAE Dirhams	82.480
Qatari Riyals	83.690

Saudi Riyals	81.225
Jordanian Dinar	425.495
Egyptian Pound	33.652
Sri Lankan Rupees	2.084
Indian Rupees	4.489
Pakistani Rupees	2.879
Bangladesh Taka	3.842
Philippines Peso	6.458
Cyprus pound	575.305
Japanese Yen	2.675
Syrian Pound	2.370
Nepalese Rupees	3.800
Malaysian Ringgit	74.070
Chinese Yuan Renminbi	46.745
Thai Bhat	9.575
Turkish Lira	105.395

BAHRAIN EXCHANGE COMPANY

CURRENCY	BUY	SELL
Europe		
British Pound	0.419857	0.428857
Czech Korune	0.004368	0.016368
Danish Krone	0.040835	0.045835
Euro	0.329413	0.337413
Norwegian Krone	0.031196	0.036396
Romanian Leu	0.074716	0.074716
Slovakia	0.008988	0.018988
Swedish Krona	0.032155	0.037155
Swiss Franc	0.299035	0.309235
Turkish Lira	0.099183	0.109483
Australasia		
Australian Dollar	0.216770	0.228270
New Zealand Dollar	0.193129	0.202629
America		
Canadian Dollar	0.220541	0.229041
US Dollars	0.297900	0.302400

US Dollars Mint	0.298400	0.302400
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Asia		
Bangladesh Taka	0.003432	0.004006
Chinese Yuan	0.044925	0.048425
Hong Kong Dollar	0.036822	0.039572
Indian Rupee	0.004280	0.004670
Indonesian Rupiah	0.000019	0.000025
Japanese Yen	0.002576	0.002756
Kenyan Shilling	0.002970	0.002970
Korean Won	0.000243	0.000258
Malaysian Ringgit	0.069488	0.075488
Nepalese Rupee	0.002863	0.003033
Pakistan Rupee	0.002708	0.002988
Philippine Peso	0.006391	0.006671
Sierra Leone	0.000071	0.000077
Singapore Dollar	0.215302	0.221302
South African Rand	0.012881	0.021381
Sri Lankan Rupee	0.001707	0.002287
Taiwan	0.009080	0.009260
Thai Baht	0.008293	0.008483

Arab		
Bahraini Dinar	0.794492	0.802492
Egyptian Pound	0.031523	0.036641
Iranian Riyal	0.000084	0.000085
Iraqi Dinar	0.000194	0.000254
Jordanian Dinar	0.421942	0.429442
Kuwaiti Dinar	1.000000	1.000000
Lebanese Pound	0.000150	0.000250
Moroccan Dirhams	0.020573	0.044573
Nigerian Naira	0.001244	0.001879
Omani Riyal	0.777996	0.783676
Qatar Riyal	0.082241	0.083454
Saudi Riyal	0.079647	0.080597
Syrian Pound	0.001280	0.001500
Tunisian Dinar	0.146597	0.154597
Turkish Lira	0.099183	0.109483
UAE Dirhams	0.081242	0.082391
Yemeni Riyal	0.001365	0.001445

IS 'HELICOPTER MONEY' MOVING ON ECB'S RADAR?

FRANKFURT: It's a concept that conjures up images of European Central Bank chief Mario Draghi donning his flying suit, starting his helicopter and flying out over the Euro-zone to throw money to the crowds below.

In the question-and-answer session of his traditional post-meeting press conference last week, Draghi was asked whether "helicopter money" was part of the ECB's toolbox in its long-and so far largely ineffectual-fight against the specter of deflation in the euro area. But the Italian central banker replied that the ECB had not "really thought or talked about helicopter money" at this stage.

"We haven't really studied (it) yet," he said, but added: "It's a very interesting concept that is now being discussed by academic economists and in various environments." "Helicopter money" was originally posited by US economist Milton Friedman in 1969 when he suggested in a thought game that a helicopter fly over a community and drop bills from the sky in the hope that by putting more money directly into consumers' pockets, they would scurry to the shops to spend their windfalls. The ensuing surge in demand would revitalize the economy and avert the threat of deflation by persuading retailers to raise their prices, Friedman argued. It is a concept that has never been tried out in real

life by any major central bank.

But with growing concern that quantitative easing and zero or even negative interest rates have lost their power to kickstart the economy, it is clear that Draghi, however terse his remarks were, is not dismissing the idea entirely out of hand. It would "clearly involve complexities, both accounting-wise and legal-wise, for our view," he said, but conceded it could "mean many different things, and so we have to see."

"Helicopter money is currently the object of intense reflection in academic and central bank circles," said Marcel Fratzscher, head of the German DIW economic think tank. But "it would really be an instrument of last resort, if nothing else worked," he said.

175 Euros per month

Over the past two years, the ECB has pulled out all the stops to prevent the single currency area from slipping into deflation-a dangerous downward spiral of falling prices. It has slashed interest rates to zero and lower, pumped unprecedented amounts of liquidity into the financial system, made an unlimited amount of cheap loans available to banks, and bought up massive quantities of bonds via its quantitative easing (QE) program.

The idea is to kickstart lending-the finan-

cial lubricant that keeps the economy up and running smoothly-and by extension boost growth and recovery. But for all the ECB's efforts, Euro-zone inflation is still a long way short of the level of "close to but just below 2.0 percent" that the central bank believes is conducive to healthy economic growth.

In fact, falling oil prices pushed Euro-zone inflation back into negative territory in February. Lending is still sluggish and the hundreds of billions the ECB has pumped into the system are still not reaching households and businesses. A campaign coalition calling itself "QE for People" has calculated that if the amount pumped into the economy so far were shared out among all the citizens of the eurozone, it would amount to 175 Euros per month for everyone.

Technical, legal difficulties

But helicopter money need not take the form of air-dropping cash.

It could also be implemented by cutting taxes or healthcare payments, all financed by money printed by the ECB. Michael Malquarti, economist at Swiss bank SYZ, has argued for years that the Swiss National Bank should pay money directly to citizens via the country's healthcare system.

"I'd like to see Switzerland be a pioneer in



FRANKFURT: The ECB could further slash its super-low interest rates if the economic outlook worsens, its chief economist Peter Praet said on March 18, 2016, stressing the bank still has ammunition to fight deflation. — AFP

this area. That could break down a psychological barrier," he told AFP. But implementing such financial relief in an area as big as the 19 countries that share the euro would encounter a number of technical and ethical

hurdles, not to mention legal ones. Under the ECB's own statutes, it is expressly forbidden from financing governments, even if there appears to be nothing to stop it from handing cash out to citizens. — AFP



MANILA: A Philippine banker shifted 81 million USD stolen from Bangladesh's central bank into various accounts because she feared for her life, her colleague told a parliamentary investigation on March 17. — AFP

BANGLADESH BANK HEIST EXPOSES PHILIPPINE DIRTY MONEY SECRETS

WORTHY OF A JOHN LE CARRE SPY NOVEL

MANILA: When mystery hackers launched a stunning raid on Bangladesh's foreign reserves, a plot worthy of a John Le Carre spy novel was sparked in the Philippines, exposing the Southeast Asian nation as a dirty money haven.

The \$81 million stolen from the Bangladesh central bank's American accounts last month was immediately sent via electronic transfer to the Philippines' RCBC bank, with the thieves deliberately targeting their laundering location. The Philippines has some of the world's strictest bank secrecy laws to protect account holders, while its casinos are exempt from rules altogether aimed at preventing money laundering.

"The Philippines is very attractive (for dirty money) because our laws have gaping holes. It's easy to launder money here," Senator Sergio Osmena, who is pushing for stronger anti-money laundering laws, told AFP. Still, if the thieves were to get away with their audacious heist, the money had to be moved quickly through the banking system and into the casinos. And it did.

Authorities took four days to order a recall of the money. But by then it had vanished-leaving in its place a tale of death threats, bribes, shady business figures and a bank manager who could be the villain or a victim. "I did not do anything wrong. If this is a nightmare, I want to wake up now," the manager of RCBC bank, Maia Santos Deguito, told ABS-CBN television this week after authorities stopped her at Manila airport from trying to leave the country. "I live everyday in fear."

With authorities in Bangladesh and elsewhere bamboozled over who masterminded the cyber-heist, Deguito's role as manager of the bank that accepted and shifted the money has come under intense scrutiny. She has accused the bank's president, Lorenzo Tan, of ordering her to move the money. He has fiercely denied the accusations.

Philippine senators who launched an inquiry this week into the affair are yet to determine whether she was a scapegoat or not, but are convinced she was not the mastermind. "It's a big operation. This could not have been done out of the Philippines alone," Senator Ralph Recto said. The Senate inquiry and another probe by the Philippines' Anti-Money Laundering Council have hit several major hurdles, including a security camera at the bank not working when the money was shifted. Accusations and counter-accusations between Deguito and RCBC management have further confused investigators.

'Money trail'

A final roadblock has emerged at the casinos, with the money apparently vanishing in mountains of gambling chips and mysterious middlemen. "Our money trail ended at the casinos," Julia Abad, deputy director of the anti-money laundering council, told senators Tuesday. On February 5, the same day Bangladesh Bank was hacked, the money was sent electronically to four accounts in Deguito's RCBC branch in the financial capital of Makati, according to testimony to the Senate inquiry.

Those accounts appeared to have been set up solely for that purpose because they were done using aliases, the Senate inquiry heard. After that, the bulk of the money was transferred into accounts of a local ethnic Chinese businessman, William Go, who has since protested his innocence. He said his signature was forged to set up the accounts.

From there, the money was briefly held by Philrem, a foreign exchange brokerage. Philrem President Salud Bautista told the Senate inquiry \$30 million went to a man named Weikang Xu. He was described as a casino junkie operator but senators have said they know little more about him other than he is of Chinese origin.

The anti-money laundering council said another \$29 million ended up in Solaira, a casino on a glittering Manila bayside strip that the Philippines hopes will become one of the world's biggest gambling destinations. That money was exchanged into chips but could only be turned back into cash after being played in the casino, its management told the Senate inquiry. Another \$21 million was sent to Eastern Hawaii Leisure, which runs a sparsely furnished casino with Chinese-only television in Santa Ana, a sleepy town in the far northern Philippines, according to the council. Senator Osmena said the case was likely just the tip of the iceberg. "This could have happened hundreds of times already," he said. "We discovered this one only because someone complained. But normally, if a drug dealer from Burma (Myanmar) or China would send money here, no one would complain." — AFP

CORPORATES LINING UP TO CASH IN ON ECB FUNDING

PARIS: The European Central Bank's plan to buy corporate bonds to help the Euro-zone economy is boosting the private-sector debt market which promptly responded with a new record-sized company bond.

With interest rates near or below zero and few other monetary policy tools left in its arsenal, the ECB announced earlier this month that it would begin buying non-bank corporate bonds in addition to the government bonds it has been purchasing to stimulate the economy. That immediately livened up the corporate debt market, with companies rushing out issues and borrowing costs falling.

Less than a week after the ECB's announcement, and months before it is to actually buy any bonds, a new record for a euro-denominated corporate bond issue was set on Wednesday when brewer Anheuser-Busch InBev said it was seeking to raise 13.25 billion Euros (\$14.9 billion). That easily beat the previous record of just under 10 billion set by Swiss pharmaceutical group Roche in 2009.

In a sign of a broader response, the volume of new corporate and bank issues on Wednesday struck the highest daily level since May 2001, the Financial Times reported, citing information from data company Dealogic.

"In our view this highlights the current positive backdrop for primary issuance induced by the ECB's new easing measures" and particularly the new corporate bond program, credit analysts at Dutch bank ING wrote in a note to clients.

Deutsche Telekom also returned to the market for the first time since 2013, to raise 4.5 billion Euros. Borrowing costs have come down sharply. The return to investors on bonds issued by French yoghurt giant Danone due in 2020 fell from 0.39 percent on March 9, a day before the ECB's announcement, to 0.25 percent a week later.

The yield on bonds maturing in 2021 issued by German manufacturing giant Siemens similarly slid from 0.30 percent to 0.25 percent. Details of the ECB's plan have yet to be decided, although it is to begin mid-year and the central bank will only purchase euro-denominated debt with an investment-grade rating from credit ratings agencies.

Effect will spread

The corporate debt market has already benefitted indirectly as ECB purchases of government bonds have pushed investors into the corporate market, lowering borrowing rates. But

the ECB wading into the corporate market directly will cut risk further as it offers reassurance in case of a return of angst about the economy.

Competition for assets will increase, thus likely lowering borrowing costs for companies even further, and the effect will probably spread as investors look to also buy assets outside the ECB's scope of action. In fact, that's what the central bank hopes will happen.

ECB executive board member Peter Praet said in an interview with Italian daily La Repubblica on Friday that "the initial effect of our purchases will spread to other assets and other markets". Analysts at Citi Research called the purchasing of corporate debt an important broadening of the ECB's policy toolkit. "This appears to place more emphasis on liquidity- and credit-easing relative to interest rates," said Citi analysts.

Despite interest rates coming down and access to low-cost central bank funding, commercial banks haven't stepped up lending, which has been holding up growth. In addition to the corporate bond purchases, the ECB also announced earlier this month a program to effectively pay banks if they step up their lending.

Enough bonds for ECB?

Analysts are however concerned about some of the practical aspects of the plan to buy corporate bonds. "Nobody knows how the ECB will do it," said bond market analyst Rene Defossez at Natixis. "The problem is that there isn't a considerable stock as the market is much smaller than that of sovereign debt."

Some 400 to 500 billion Euros of bonds meet those criteria, according to a study by the German lender Deutsche Bank. Valentine Ainoz, a credit strategist at Amundi, a top asset management firm, expressed concern "the ECB may find it difficult to buy on the secondary market" where already-issued corporate bonds are traded.

"It is thus possible that it moves into the primary market" and buy bonds directly when they are issued, which is something it cannot legally do with government debt, she said. But primary market purchases could see the central bank accused of picking winners and losers among Euro-zone companies. For its part, Deutsche Bank said it believes "meaningful execution risks remain" and that the "ECB might turn out to purchase significantly less than the market may be expecting at the moment." — AFP



ARAGON: 2016 was poised to be a good year for Spanish builders but the lack of a government three months after an inconclusive general election has put the brakes on economic activity. — AFP

SPAIN'S POLITICAL STALEMATE STARTS TAKING ECONOMIC TOLL

MADRID: This year was supposed to be a good one for Spanish builders but the lack of a government three months after an inconclusive general election has put the brakes on economic activity. "Everything that has to do with construction in this country is blocked," said Carlos Luaces, director general of Spain's association of sand and gravel producers, Anefa.

Spain has been locked in a political stalemate since a general election on December 20 resulted in a parliament divided among the country's four main parties-none of which won enough seats to govern alone. No party has so far been able to cobble together a workable coalition and Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy's caretaker government has limited powers and cannot approve projects that involve new spending.

As a result the number of tenders for public works projects launched by the central government plunged by 69 percent in January compared to the same month last year, according to Seopan, an association that represents Spanish builders. "There are no more public works tenders, the sector is paral-

ysed," said the director of a public works firm in the southwestern region of Extremadura, which employs 800 people.

"This brutal stoppage will mean we will have to let people go and reduce costs," the 42-year-old, who asked not to be identified, added. The political stalemate comes as Spain is grappling with a jobless rate of 20.9 percent, the highest in the European Union after Greece. Spending on public works projects typically rises before an election as politicians seek photo opportunities on the campaign trail and then fall off. Rajoy stepped up the number of inaugurations of new roads and bridges at the end of last year.

"It was clear that the machine would slow down once the ribbons were cut and the photo was taken," said Josep Ramon Fontana, a senior researcher at Catalan Institute of Construction Technology (Itec). But what was not expected was that it would take so long to form a government after the general election, he added. "We all expected that a central government would be formed by January 1, which would be able to tell us roughly what its policy would be in terms of infrastructure," he added.

'Critical situation'

Until a government is formed, certain projects such as a planned expansion of Spain's high-speed railway will be delayed. "It is not just an impasse, it is a critical situation," said Luaces. The political uncertainty is paralyzing other areas such as the food and agriculture sector as well, said Antonio Masa, the head of the chamber of commerce of Badajoz, Extremadura's largest city. "Entrepreneurs are putting the brakes on their investments due to the political situation in Spain," he said.

Businesses are waiting to see if a new government will change legislation before spending money. Spain's economy, the Euro-zone's fourth largest, grew by 3.2 percent in 2015, its second year of growth as the country emerged from five years of on-off recession sparked by the bursting of a property bubble. But analysts predict economic growth will slow this year. Spanish bank BBVA predicts that the political uncertainty could knock up to 0.5 percentage points off its forecast growth rate of 2.7 percent for 2016. — AFP

EYES ON THE DOLLAR WITH STOCKS OUT OF THE HOLE

NEW YORK: US stock market investors will be watching currency markets next week for signs that the recent, related trends of a weakening dollar and a strengthening stock market will continue.

Many investors had been concerned over the dollar's strength, as it can crimp exports, earnings and economic growth. Between Sept. 17 and mid-February, the dollar had risen more than 2 percent against a basket of major currencies, as the U.S. Federal Reserve embarked on a tighter policy while other central banks were easing.

time this year, fueled in part by a drop in the dollar, which has fallen more than 3 percent over the last three weeks. The dollar's losses accelerated this week in the wake of the Fed's policy statement on Wednesday, which cut projections for the number of interest rate hikes this year in half. The dollar suffered its biggest two-day drop in six weeks following the announcement. That drop helped propel sharp gains in oil prices,

back above the \$40 mark for the first time this year, in turn lifting energy shares.

the U.S. dollar should weaken even more and that is an even bigger support for stocks."

Two-day hiccup

"After we get through this two-day hiccup, the knee-jerk to the policy move, I would expect the dollar to resume its rally," said Michael O'Rourke, chief market strategist at JonesTrading in Greenwich, Connecticut, who highlighted the difference in U.S. interest rates versus the ECB and Bank of Japan.

But Thomas Lee, managing partner at Fundstrat Global Advisors in New York, expects the dollar to continue to weaken as he believes it is more tied to inflation than central bank policies. With dollar strength and oil weakness a headwind for equities in 2015, Lee feels the reversal of those moves should be a benefit for stocks.

Good Friday

With a short trading week ahead of the Easter holiday, volume is expected to be light as markets move closer to the Good Friday holiday, when the final reading on fourth-quarter gross domestic product is released.

Other economic data scheduled for release include February durable goods and several manufacturing surveys. Investors will be looking for signs of improvement after regional manufacturing surveys for New York and Philadelphia this week came in above expectations. While regional Fed surveys on their own can be considered minor, when taken as a whole they give investors a good idea of "whether we are off that bottom in terms of manufacturing," said Quincy Krosby, market strategist at Prudential Financial in Newark, New Jersey.

Daily Kuwait Stock Exchange Report. Global Stock Exchange Report. Sunday 20 March 2016. Index: Price index, Weighted Index, KXSX 15. Volume: 187,151,871. Value (KWD): 13,814,533. Number of Trades: 3,282. Global Stock Indices table with columns: Index, Previous Close, Last Price, Change, Daily Performance, Yearly Performance. MENA Stock Indices table with columns: Index, Previous Close, Last Price, Change, Daily Performance, Yearly Performance. Global Currencies Exchange Rate table with columns: Currency, Kuwaiti Dinar, Saudi Riyal, US Dollar, Euro, etc. MENA Currencies Exchange Rate table with columns: Currency, US Dollar, Kuwaiti Dinar, Saudi Riyal, etc. Global Interest Rates table with columns: Currency, 1-Week, 1-Month, 3-Month, 6-Month, 1-Year. Global Bond Yields table with columns: Country, 2-Year, 5-Year, 10-Year, 30-Year. Commodities table with columns: Index, Previous Close, Last Price, Change, Daily Performance, Yearly Performance. Source: National Bank of Kuwait.

US FEDERAL RESERVE SURPRISES THE MARKET

FED EXPECTS TO HIKE TWICE IN 2016

This week, the US Federal Reserve kept interest rates unchanged and indicated that reasonable US economic growth and strong labor market performance would allow it to tighten policy in 2016, with fresh projections showing Fed officials expecting two quarter-point interest rate hikes by the year's end, half the number projected last December. However, the US central bank noted global economic and financial changes continue to pose risks and will keep inflation rates low for the remainder of 2016.

On the foreign exchange side, the US Dollar plunged after the Federal Reserve scaled down its own expectations of the number of US rate hikes likely over the next nine months. Meanwhile, the rally in global foreign exchange market continued, currencies such as the Japanese Yen and Swiss Franc rallied on the back of the risk-off trade. The US Dollar Index opened the week at 96.161 and dropped to a five-month low of 94.578, and closed the week at 94.063.

The Euro rose significantly last week, extending its previous week's gains and surging to a five-month high, as financial markets continued to digest the dovish monetary policy decision from the Federal Reserve. The Euro opened the week at 1.1149 and reached a high of 1.1342. Finally the single currency closed at 1.1266.

The Sterling Pound extended its gains against the US Dollar after the Bank of England maintained interest rates on hold and cautioned that increasing doubt over Brexit could adversely affect the economy. The BoE's monetary policy committee voted to leave borrowing costs at their current record low of 0.5%, extending a run dating back to March 2009. The Sterling Pound opened the week at 1.4382 and reached a high of 1.4515. Finally the currency closed at 1.4479.

The Japanese Yen improved significantly last week as investors flew to safety. The US Dollar opened the week at 113.82 against the Yen only to drop sharply and reach a 16-month low at 110.65. The Dollar's recent weakness against the Yen presents a possible problem for Japan. The country would

like to see the Yen remain fairly weak to support its exporters, but the market thinks Japan has to tread carefully in case it is accused of engineering competitive devaluations.

The Australian dollar opened the week on a strong footing as risk appetite improved, despite dovish RBA March meeting minutes indicating the possibility of further interest rate cuts. The central bank acknowledged that employment growth had stalled in January following a surge in late 2015. The Bank is also paying considerable attention to developments in China that could prompt consideration for policy change. The Aussie opened the week at 0.7542 and managed to reach a nine-month high of 0.7680. Finally, the currency closed



the week at 0.7614.

Similarly, taking benefit of the risk-off trade, the Swiss Franc gained against a broadly weaker US Dollar. The US Dollar opened the week at 0.9982 against the franc and reached a low of 0.9647. The pair closed the

NBK WEEKLY MONEY MARKET REPORT

week at 0.9697. On the commodities side, commodity-linked currencies rose strongly as products such as oil and iron ore soared after the Fed's decision. Brent crude reached three-month high of \$41.71 a Barrel and Gold rose to \$1,270.90 per Ounce.

US FOMC meeting outcome

The US central bank left interest rates unchanged at 0.50% as expected. However, there were little changes to the statement from the January meeting, the new FOMC projections now see 2 rate hikes during 2016, instead of the four previously expect-

continue to pose risks. The vote was not unanimous, Esther L. George, voted against the decision of the FOMC and preferred to raise the target range for the Fed Funds rate to 0.50% - 0.75%.

US retail Sales m/mDrop

US retail sales dropped less than expected in February, but a sharp downward revision to January's data could reignite concerns about the economy's growth prospects. Retail sales dipped 0.1% last month as automobile purchases fell. January's retail sales were revised down to show a 0.4

firming labor market as the economy recovers momentum after a slow fourth quarter. Initial claims for state unemployment benefits increased 7,000 to a seasonally adjusted 265,000. Claims have now been below 300,000, a threshold associated with healthy labor market conditions, for 54 weeks, the longest stretch since 1973. Additionally, the four-week moving average of claims rose by 750 to 268,000 last week.

Core CPI m/mDrop

United States consumer prices dropped in February due mainly to cheaper gasoline prices, but other indication pointed to steadily building inflation pressures that could encourage the Federal Reserve as it considers hiking short-term interest rates. The consumer-price index weakened 0.2% over the month. However, the core prices rose 0.3% last month, as items like rent, medical care and clothing became more costly. Over the past year core prices rose 2.3%, the strongest 12-month improvement since May 2012.

US Housing Starts improve

Housing starts increased 5.2% to a seasonally adjusted annual pace of 1.18 million units last month, the maximum level in five months. The housing sector is being supported by a strong labor market, which is encouraging young adults to leave their parents' homes. However, home producers cannot keep up with the demand for housing because of a shortage of skilled labor, which is pushing rents higher in major metropolitan areas.

EUROPE

Euro Zone industrial production improve

The Euro zone industrial production improved more than expected in January, supported by increased output of capital goods. Industrial production was 2.1% higher in January than in December, and grew by 2.8% year-on-year. The data was significantly higher than expectations. Economists had forecasted a 1.7% month-on-month increase, and an

output rise of only 1.4% on a yearly basis.

Bank of England keeps rates steady

The Bank of England officials voted unanimously to maintain rates unchanged. However, they said that interest rates were more probable to rise than not over the next two years and that when they did the rise would be slow. The central bank said the upcoming vote on June 23 could postpone some spending choices, though it said recent indicators suggested growth would stay at the same momentum this quarter as it had at the end of last year.

Britain's wage growth improves and unemployment rates steady

UK's wages rose more than expected in the three months to January, offering hope that the slowdown in wages in late 2015 has bottomed out. Additionally, Britain's unemployment rate stayed stable at a 10-year low of 5.1%, as expected, for the third consecutive month. For the month of January wages jumped 2.5%, the biggest rise since August, after a 1.7% rise in December.

ASIA

China says trade deteriorations will ease

The Chinese Commerce Ministry said, declines in China's foreign trade will ease after March, though trade conditions are expected to be more difficult this year than in 2015. However, they blamed the weak trade performance in January and February on the Lunar New Year holidays, saying the long holiday and festivities interrupted business activity.

Japan Feb exports tumble

In Japan, the impact of the stronger yen continued to harm Japanese trade in February, as imports and exports dropped. Imports were down 14.2% year-on-year, better than the 15.8% contraction economists expected. Exports dropped 4% in February, an improvement from the previous month's 12.9% drop, but steeper than the 3% decline expected.

KIPCO AND SUBSIDIARIES HOST WORKSHOP FOR NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

KUWAIT: Kuwait Projects Company (Holding) (KIPCO) and its subsidiaries in cooperation with some of Kuwait's leading companies in the local private sector will hold a social responsibility forum. Participants in the forum will include National Bank of Kuwait, Zain and Equate Petrochemical Company, who play a prominent role in the community. Al Rai Group will also be participating in the event as media partners. The corporate social responsibility (CSR) driven forum titled, "Creating Partnerships for a Better Society" will include a workshop dedicated to helping Kuwaiti charitable organizations improve their sponsorship exposure and fund-raising capabilities. The workshop will also serve as a learning curve for local organizations by providing insight and advice towards approaching and communicating with companies within the private sector.

Select KIPCO Group subsidiaries, which include KAMCO Investment Company, the American University of Kuwait and Burgan Bank, will participate in the first panel discussion about the cooperation between non-governmental organizations and companies within the

private sector. The panel discussion will address some of the important issues related to both NGOs and the private sector in order to establish new partnerships and strengthen current ones.

The second panel discussion will involve the four non-KIPCO group companies previously mentioned, in partnership with the Kuwait Foundations for the Advancement of Science, to discuss their roles in improving and developing the community through a variety of CSR activities. The panel discussion will cover the companies' accumulated years of experience and knowledge in implementing socially responsible activities, at times with the support of NGOs.

Manager of KIPCO's Corporate Social Responsibility Department, Ms. Abeer Al Omar, said, "This workshop follows on from a successful predecessor held three years ago to ensure continuous outreach within the local community. Working side by side with multiple NGOs and associations, in cooperation with the KIPCO Group subsidiaries, previous and current participating leaders, we have covered a variety of different sectors in Kuwait to ensure sustainable development within

our community."

Ms Al Omar added, "We were keen to invite a group of social media activists to attend this workshop to gain their support and highlight important issues in the community through the different social media platforms, which play a significant role in our society today. Having said that, we have organized this workshop, titled "Creating Partnerships for a Better Society", to strategically gather some of the most influential NGOs and associations under KIPCO's socially responsible initiative to enhance the local community as a whole."

She concluded by saying, "We are delighted to share this experience with reputable companies such as Zain, National Bank of Kuwait, EQUATE Petrochemical Company and Al Rai Media Group as our partners in this workshop. Their level of consciousness and response calls attention towards the vital role that corporate social responsibility plays in our society." The "Creating Partnerships for a Better Society" workshop is free of charge to all participating organizations, but due to space constraints, attendance at the event is by invitation only.

STARWOOD SCORES FIRST CUBA HOTEL DEALS SINCE 1959

NEW YORK: Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide said Saturday it has signed three hotel deals in Cuba, a first for a US hospitality company since the 1959 revolution on the communist-run island. Starwood said two of the hotels would open later this year and that it had signed a letter of intent for a third.

The announcement came on the eve of a historic visit to Cuba by US President Barack Obama. "We are confident Starwood is the right partner to help write the next chapter of relations between Cuba and American business, and we moved quickly and enthusiastically to pursue opportunities following recent government actions," said Kenneth Siegel, Starwood's chief administrative officer and general counsel.

Instead of building from the ground up, Starwood is moving into existing upscale properties in need of renovations: the landmark Hotel Inglaterra will become a member of its Luxury Collection and the Hotel Quinta Avenida will be rebranded as Four Points by Sheraton Havana. A letter of intent was signed with Cuba's Habaguanex, owner of the Hotel Santa Isabel, to also convert it to a member of the Luxury Collection.

"As we've seen throughout the world, our entry into new markets has a positive effect on local communities, preserving and protecting the culture and delicate ecosystems while improving employment opportunities, which



HAVANA: Starwood Hotels and Resorts Chief of Latin American Operations Jorge Giannattasio speaks to reporters. —AP

were driving forces in our discussions," Siegel said.

Timing is everything

Starwood's chief executive underscored the importance of timing in scoring the deals. "With Cuba's rich history, natural beauty and strong culture, there is no question the entire US hospitality industry has watched Cuba with great interest, and we are thrilled to lead the charge and bring our sophisticated, high-end brands into the market at this inflection point," said Thomas Mangas.

Already booming tourism is set to explode in the wake of Obama's visit, when he'll bury a more than half-century-

long conflict that left Cuba the last major undeveloped market in the Caribbean. Obama, First Lady Michelle Obama and their two daughters arrive in Havana Sunday for the symbolic three-day trip.

It won't just be the first visit by a sitting US president since Fidel Castro's guerrillas overthrew the US-backed government of Fulgencio Batista in 1959, but the first since President Calvin Coolidge came 88 years ago. Obama and Cuban President Raul Castro surprised the world in simultaneous speeches announcing their countries would begin normalizing relations back on December 17, 2014. —AFP



BRASIL: A woman shows poster written in Portuguese "There will not be a coup" next to a picture of Brazil's President Dilma Rousseff, during a rally in her support and of former President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. — AP

BRAZIL BUSINESS WORLD BETS ON ROUSSEFF EXIT

RIO DE JANEIRO: The Federation of Sao Paulo Industries is lit up in the green and yellow of the Brazilian flag, a giant black banner cutting across its facade with a blunt message: "Resign now." The powerful industry group is not the only major player in the Brazilian economy that is openly hostile to embattled President Dilma Rousseff.

With Latin America's largest economy plunged in its deepest recession in 25 years, business chiefs have exuberantly welcomed new impeachment proceedings against the leftist leader, who is accused of manipulating the government's accounts. The Sao Paulo stock exchange leapt 6.6 percent Thursday, its biggest gain in seven years, after the latest series of damaging setbacks for Rousseff.

"The market is celebrating the end of this government," economic analyst Andre Leite of TAG Investimentos said. Markets normally abhor instability, but Brazil's toxic combination of runaway recession, inflation and debt-plus an explosive corruption scandal centered on state oil company Petrobras-have the financial world rooting for the downfall of Rousseff and her Workers' Party.

Investors seem to be betting that the Workers' Party and Dilma will lose power, giving rise to better times,"

said David Rees, an economist and Latin America specialist at consultancy Capital Economics. Analysts have been critical of Rousseff's economic policy, bemoaning a lack of budgetary oversight or strong measures to escape the current crisis. "Every time Dilma seems close to going down, stocks go up and the country risk rating goes down," said Margarida Gutierrez, a professor of macroeconomics at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro.

Deeper problems

On Thursday, the Federation of Sao Paulo Industries (FIESP), an umbrella group of some 130,000 businesses, publicly came out in favor of impeaching Rousseff. "Society wants a change. It wants the removal of the president," said FIESP president Paulo Skaf. He then slipped into a reverie about a Brazil where it will be possible to "renew investment, job creation, entrepreneurship, strengthening businesses."

But Rees, of Capital Economics, was more circumspect. "We are not convinced that better policy-making lies ahead," he said. "Even if there was a change of government, it's not clear that anyone would have the ability to get tough reforms passed, so the structural problems in the economy

could remain for some time."

The impeachment process is long and complicated: It can take six months or more and requires two-thirds of votes in both the lower house and the Senate. That timeline could be sped up in a climate of growing hostility toward the government, said Joao Augusto de Castro Neves, Latin America director at the Eurasia Group consultancy.

"The odds of a government change are definitely increasing. This could happen as soon as early May," he said. If Rousseff is removed, Vice President Michel Temer of the centrist PMDB party would serve out the rest of her term, until the winner of the 2018 presidential election takes office. "It is sure that the Temer administration will have a honeymoon period, but the question is, how long will it last?" said Castro Neves.

"Even if we believe Temer will introduce positive changes in the economy, he won't have the political capital to implement ambitious reforms," he warned that Temer also risked stumbling himself, if he or his allies become bogged down in scandal. Several leading PMDB figures are implicated in the Petrobras scandal, which has already felled a Who's Who of powerful politicians and business execs. — AFP



119TH CANTON FAIR UNVEILS HUGE BUSINESS PROSPECTS FOR TRADERS

KUWAIT: The China Foreign Trade Centre, organizers of the China Import and Export Fair, have announced that its 119th Canton Fair will be held in Guangzhou, China from 15 April to 5 May 2016. The announcement was made at a video conference in Kuwait attended by journalists aimed at presenting the huge opportunities for further bilateral trade with the Gulf state.

Co-hosted by the Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China and the People's Government of Guangdong Province, the Canton Fair is regarded as one of the largest comprehensive trade fairs in the world. In playing a key role in the advancement of Chinese foreign trade and trade exchanges between China and the world, this year event will have 60,000 exhibition stands over a vast area of 1.18 million square meters. It will also feature 150,000 categories of high quality prod-

ucts divided into 16 exhibit sections.

The Canton Fair will have an International Pavilion covering 20,000 square meters with 1,000 stands. Over 24,000 outstanding enterprises from all over the world have showcased their key products at every session of the Canton Fair.

"Out of the total 177,544 professional buyers from 213 countries and regions who visited the 118th Canton Fair last autumn, 507 of them came from Kuwait," said Hakel Wen, International VIP Service Executive, International Communication Department of the China Foreign Trade Centre. "These professional buyers from Kuwait mainly sourced their requirement for electronics & household electrical appliances, home decorations and consumer goods."

"Considering the population of Kuwait,

this group represented a huge group of businessmen," he added. "This is reflective of the strong commercial ties between Kuwait and China. I am therefore confident that, with China and Kuwait's firm commitment at maintaining such healthy trade relations, we will see an even bigger contingent from Kuwait. Rest assured, we are ready and prepared to welcome more Kuwaiti traders to the 119th Canton Fair."

The overall bilateral trade relations between China and Kuwait are valued at 11.3 billion US dollars at the year of 2015. Among the main exports from China to Kuwait are electrical products, clothes and textiles, while Kuwait's exports to China include petrol and plastic. To further reach out to a wider audience, the Canton Fair has launched a Facebook page in six languages: English, French, Spanish, Arabic, Simplified Chinese and Traditional Chinese.

In opening up a new channel for all its followers to find fresh pictures, lovely videos, special offers and the latest information about the Canton Fair, the page now enjoys 420,000 fans all over the world.

As part of its online presence, the Canton Fair home website has also launched a 'Highlight Products' section that displays the highest quality products online prior to the actual staging of the Canton Fair. Over 1,800 well-known enterprises have already participated and displayed over 20,000 products. The aim of the online 'Highlight Products' section is to allow buyers to get a preview of the 119th Canton Fair, collect interesting exhibits and enjoy the Made-in-China style through this platform.

On one hand, For traders who wish to have a hassle-free and experience, the Canton fair has opened its overseas VIP

Club. This is aimed at providing Canton Fair VIP members with a host of VIP services in Area A (Elite VIP Club), Area B and Area C (Overseas VIP Club).

On the other hand, to facilitate sourcing, the Canton Fair has also established its Multinational Enterprises Sourcing Services. This will enable over 38 international famous retailers such as Carrefour and Wal-Mart to gather business information, meet Chinese suppliers, and hold a 'sourcing day' with customized theme activities.

Lastly, to ensure that traders will experience cost-effective and luxurious travel to China, Qatar Airways has been appointed as the Official Airline Partner of the 119th and 120th Canton Fair. Accordingly, Qatar Airways will be launching a series of special airfare offers for the buyers from Middle East & African countries.

CHINA FOCUSES ON STRUCTURAL REFORMS AND GROWTH

BEIJING: The annual session of China's parliament - the National People's Congress (NPC), which concluded in March 16 - was one of the most widely expected political events of the year. Crucial policy decisions are ratified there every year: for example, growth targets.

The authorities recognized the reality of the deceleration by lowering economic growth goals, from 7% in 2015 to 7%-6.5% in 2016. Many details on fiscal policy and reforms were also disclosed. China faces a conundrum. The country needs reforms to ensure long-term growth, but most of those reforms could hurt growth in the short term. The leadership is aware of that, and is trying to combine the different tools.

The country will need fiscal and monetary stimulus in 2016 to prevent a hard landing, and

the NPC disclosed some of the actions that will be adopted. For instance, there will be a bigger fiscal deficit. The goal has been raised, from 2.5% in 2015 to 3.0% of GDP in 2016. Infrastructure spending will probably be maintained, although its size is difficult to estimate because is traditionally included in the local budgets, not in the central government's.

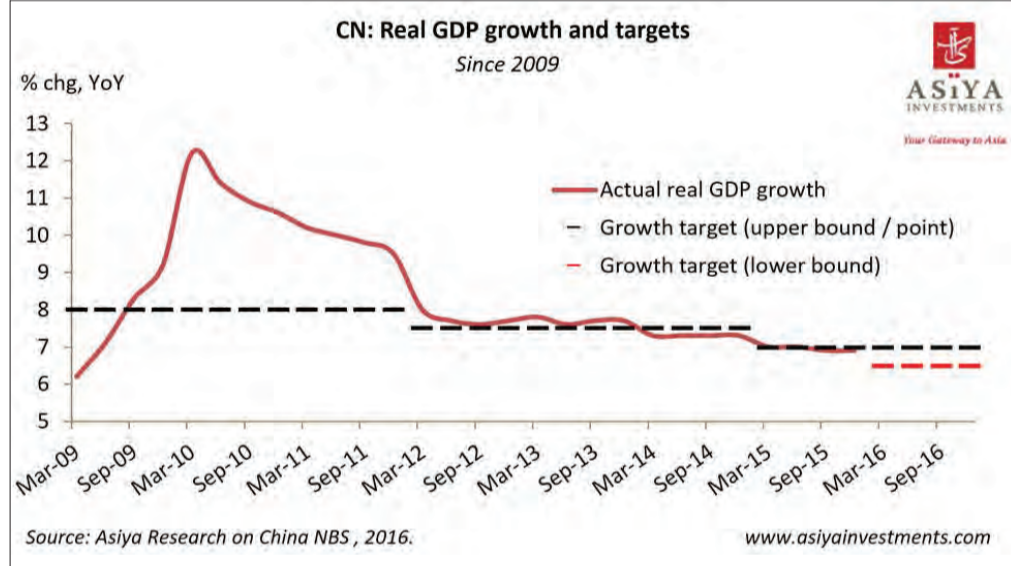
In the monetary policy front, it seems that the country will be cautious. The latest comments of the central bank governor Zhou Xiaochuan show that they are concerned about financial stability and triggering capital outflows if more stimulus weakens the currency. Still, policy will remain accommodative and we expect cuts in the reserve requirement ratio (RRR) and policy rate. The targets for money supply (M2) growth and inflation were set at 13% and 3%

respectively, signaling some degree of accommodation.

But the most important policy tool are reforms. The main objective is to rebalance the economy, from investment-based to consumption-intensive, with a larger services sector and a prominent role for innovation. To achieve this transition, the government pledged liberalizing reforms such as opening sectors to foreign and private investment. State-owned enterprises will be reformed, both in terms of governance and ownership. Entrepreneurship will be supported by favorable tax breaks. International trade will be encouraged through bilateral agreements with other states.

Chinese leaders also raised the research and development objective, from 2.1% to 2.5% of GDP. Overcapacity in industries such as steel, cement or aluminum will be reduced. Some estimates suggest that about six million workers will have to be fired, but the adjustment will probably be gradual, avoiding massive layoffs of workers. The government will prioritize mergers, to seek efficiency gains, over closing down companies.

In summary, the Chinese policy agenda for 2016 will emphasize fiscal over monetary policy, although RRR and the lending rate will be cut further. There will be no competitive devaluation because the risk of financial instability is high. The focus on reforms will intensify, particularly in the areas that are less prone to damage short-term growth such as the entrance of foreign and private capital to previously restricted sectors. Judging by the speeches of the annual congress, Chinese authorities understood the need of acting beyond fiscal and monetary measures and embraced the idea of solving structural issues. Only time will tell if action is aligned with their speech.



IBPC HONORS JOY ALUKKAS WITH THE 'BUSINESS EXCELLENCE AWARD 2016'

DUBAI: Visionary entrepreneur Joy Alukkas was honored with the 'Business Excellence Award 2016' at a gala event organized by the Indian Business & Professionals Council (IBPC) the only representative organization of Indian Business & Professionals in Dubai.

Joy Alukkas is considered the man with the midas touch, he has grown his business from a single jewelry showroom to multi-billion dollar global business empire in a short span of 29 years. His flagship business is Joyalukkas Jewelry, which is today a 120 plus showroom chain spread across 11 countries around the world. Joy Alukkas's other business interests include; Money Exchange, Malls, Fashion & Silks retail, Realty and Luxury Air Charter.

"Every recognition is heart-warming and being honored with the Business Excellence Award by the esteemed IBPC makes me feel very special. I am an Indian who owes my success to the UAE and its visionary leaders, the IBPC also works towards the interests of Indian Businesses and Professionals in the UAE, which means they play an important role in helping business men like me in many important aspects of my business interests. I thank all the office bearers of IBPC for this honor" said Joy Alukkas, Chairman & MD, Joyalukkas Group.

The Business Excellence Award was presented to Mr Joy Alukkas, Chairman & MD, Joyalukkas Group by HH Sheikh Nahyan Bin Mubarak Al Nahyan, UAE Minister of Culture, Youth and Social Development at the event conducted Dubai World Trade Centre on 17th March 2016.

Brand 'Joyalukkas' today is a household name across the world, thanks Joy Alukkas's vision and commitment to excel and constantly innovate. For someone who has rarely -if ever- based his decisions on the modern management tools such as graphs, scales and projections, Joy Alukkas's meteoric rise is a role model of entrepreneurial grit and intuitive enterprise.



JAZEERA AIRWAYS REWARDS MOTHERS ON MOTHER'S DAY

KUWAIT: On the occasion of Mother's Day, Jazeera Airways yesterday announced it will be rewarding 10 lucky mothers with a free ticket through a draw on bookings made on Mother's Day, March 21, via the airline's call center 177.

The exclusive promotion aims to encourage sons and daughters to travel with their mothers. All mothers who book on Mother's Day are qualified to enter the draw and an opportunity to win their ticket value credited to their account for future bookings. Ten lucky winners will be chosen through a random draw. To qualify, travelers must provide verified document of proof of being a travelling mother with children, such as a birth certificate or passport displaying the mother's name.

The Mother's Day promotion is the latest in a series of promotions from Jazeera Airways. On March 8, International Women's Day, women who booked on the day entered a draw to win a free ticket (8 winners) or business class upgrade (8 win-

ners). The airline's mother's and women's promotions aim to reward, support and engage its travelers across the region through social activities. The Jazeera Airways Mother's Day offer runs all day on Monday, March 21 via the airline's 177 call center in Kuwait. This year, Mother's Day and International Women's Day happened to coincide with the airline's 10-year anniversary celebrations, which included a 40-prize call center promotion.

Based in Kuwait, Jazeera Airways serves popular destinations in the Middle East. The airline operates a fleet of seven Airbus A320 aircraft with two class cabins comprising a Business Class and an Economy Class. Business Class travelers get both an upgraded experience and exclusivity, starting with exclusive check-in lines, business lounge access, up to 60 kilograms in free baggage allowance, and an exclusive on-board cabin. The airline's Economy Class offers travelers free baggage allowance of 40 kilograms and free on-board meals.

AL DANAH

10 DAYS LEFT

TO WIN KD200,000

Stay tuned for our 1st quarterly draw on March 31st live on the Al-Dewaniya Show on Marina FM at 1 PM

Open or deposit now to enter the upcoming daily, quarterly and KD Millions draws

Disclaimer: Salary & red account quarterly draw will take place during the show

e-gulfbank.com • 1 805 805

10 DAYS LEFT UNTIL THE QUARTERLY TRIO DRAW

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank has announced that its Trio Quarterly draw is scheduled to take place 10 days from today at 1pm, 31 March 2016, on Marina FM's Diwaniya Show. 3 Draws will take place at the same time and location. The Al Danah draw will be for cash prize of KD200,000. While the Salary & Red Account draws include a brand new Cadillac CTS and cash prizes up to KD1,000. The draw event will be held in the presence of a representative from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

To participate in the Al Danah draws, customers must have an Al Danah account containing at least KD 200. Customers can open a new Al Danah account at any one of the 55 Gulf Bank branches in Kuwait. Those who already have an account can increase their chances of winning by increasing

their deposits. This will also increase their chances of winning one of the two KD1,000 prizes, which are drawn each working day.

Furthermore, new Red Account or Salary Account customers who open an account and transfer their student allowance or salary will also be eligible to enter the monthly cash draws for a chance to also win up to KD 1,000. In addition, the quarterly car draw will be for 1 lucky winner who will have a chance to win a new Cadillac CTS. For further information about the Al Danah, Salary and Red accounts and prize draws, visit one of Gulf Bank's 55 branches, or call Gulf Bank's Customer Contact Center on 1805805. General information about Gulf Bank's products and services, can also be found at the Bank's website at www.e-gulfbank.com

CELEBRATE MOTHER'S DAY AT 360 MALL WITH KUWAIT AIRWAYS

KUWAIT: Kuwait Airways has announced a special new travel promotion to celebrate Mother's Day. Now you can take your mum, a loved one or someone special to somewhere special for an incredible price, as Kuwait Airways is offering up to 15% discount on tickets on 21st March 2016 only.

The offer can be booked online at kuwaitairways.com, at Kuwait Airways' sales shops and at your preferred travel agency. This offer gives you and your mum an opportunity to discover Kuwait Airways' modern and comfortable fleet, including the new Airbus 320 and Airbus 330 aircraft introduced in recent months.

On top of this, Kuwait Airways will be present at the 360 Mall throughout the day on 21st March - especially to celebrate Mother's Day. Our 'Mother's Day crew' will present various activities and valuable prizes for everyone who joins in



on the stand. And there'll be special entertaining activities at the kids' corner, including face painting and much more.

This special Mother's Day offer presents a unique chance for children of all ages to present a wonderful gift for their mothers - a flight to the destination of her choice with Kuwait Airways. This promotion also reflects Kuwait Airways' appreciation for the great and vital role played by mothers in all fields of life across the nation, and is our way to say a big 'thank you' to mums everywhere! Kuwait Airways would like to wish a very happy Mother's Day, and invites everyone to visit its booth at the 360 Mall on Monday, March 21.



Charles Nahas, General Manager, Microsoft Kuwait, makes a presentation during the 'Innovation Bazaar'. —Photos by Joseph Shagra

MICROSOFT SHOWCASES FUTURE IT TRENDS AND SOLUTIONS 'INNOVATION BAZAAR' BRINGS TOGETHER IT SPEAKERS, EXPERTS

KUWAIT: Microsoft Kuwait has taken the lead in showcasing game-changing technology products and solutions at 'Innovation Bazaar', a full-day event at Salwa Al Sabah Theatre & Hall, Kuwait. The Bazaar brought together speakers from Microsoft, its industry peers and partners to provide the IT industry with insights into the empowering devices, apps and solutions that represent the future. The event has been sponsored by Dell, Intel and Lenovo, and event partners include Diyar United Company and EBLA Computer Consultancy Company.

Microsoft vision, products and solutions at the event include IoT, Microsoft Azure, Office 365, and Windows 10, in addition to the Surface, Lumia devices and Windows 10 tablets. The event also included interactive sessions and demonstration stations at which Microsoft experts provided insights into how Microsoft is empowering businesses, educators, governments and individuals to be most effective and productive.

Speaking at the event, Charles Nahas, General Manager, Microsoft Kuwait, said: "Innovation Bazaar is a unique platform to experience all the latest innovation from Microsoft. The world of IT is evolving at a rapid pace and we continue to present technologies and solutions that are in-line with megatrends such as IoT, Personal Computing, Business Intelligence, and more. At Microsoft, we are committed to empowering Kuwait Businesses, Government and Individuals and enabling them to succeed with technology as a key enabler."

"As Microsoft's first partner to ship Windows 10 on our new PCs last summer, we believe that Windows 10 brings the best of mobility together in a more secure and easier-to-implement package, giving businesses a good reason to take a fresh look at mobility. By placing



KUWAIT: Charles Nahas, General Manager, Microsoft Kuwait with Jaime Galviz, COO, Microsoft Gulf.

a higher importance on 2-in-1 devices, Dell has been helping small businesses truly reap the benefits of a mobile and collaborative workplace. We are delighted to attend Microsoft's Innovation Bazaar to showcase out

newest devices on Windows 10," said Emad Sallam, Client Solutions Marketing Manager, Dell | Middle East - Commercial.

"We are delighted to continue our innovation jour-

ney with Microsoft by introducing our newest X1 family members at the event. Powered by Windows 10, the X1 portfolio is optimized with unique features and for greater performance, better cloud access and class-leading security and durability to help businesses use technology as their secret weapon," said Mohammed Hillili, Lenovo General Manager for Gulf & Saudi Arabia.

Bashar Atout, CEO, Diyar United Company said "We are pleased to partner with Microsoft for Innovation Bazaar, which is aligned with our vision of creating new possibilities for technology to have a meaningful impact on people, businesses, governments and society. As the only Kuwaiti company from the Middle East region which has been ranked the 'Fifth Top Most Competent Microsoft Partner' we are always keen to engage with IT and Business professionals through Innovation Bazaar to introduce them to the latest innovation."

"Technology innovation has played a vital role in the growth and productivity of the region. We see our partnership with Microsoft for the Innovation Bazaar as an opportunity to align with technology majors and share the latest trends in productivity through real-time conversations," said Hilal Arnaoot, CEO/BLA Computer Consultancy Company.

The demonstration of the highly-acclaimed Windows 10 was one of the main attractions during the Innovation Bazaar. Microsoft also showcased Office 365, Azure and IoT. Additionally, there were demonstrations from its latest Line-of-Business and applications designed specifically to meet the requirements of users in Kuwait looking to utilize the innovation, technology, learning and networking.

APPLE AIMING TO BOLSTER LINEUP WITH NEW IPHONE

SAN FRANCISCO: New iPhone and iPad models likely to be unveiled today are aimed at helping Apple keep momentum in the fast-evolving mobile device market. The media gathering at the company's intimate Town Hall auditorium in Silicon Valley will also give Apple a chance to restate its case for fighting a US government demand that it break into an attacker's iPhone.

Apple is widely expected to release a small-screen iPhone to encourage replacement of the 5S and 5C models, which have four-inch displays. The new device is to be called the iPhone SE or 5SE, reports said. This would help Apple in a traditionally slow season before the likely upgrades to the large-screen iPhone 6 family later this year.

But in keeping with its practice, Apple has been tight-lipped about what it will reveal.

A message on copies of the invitations posted online simply states "Let us loop you in," prompting some to speculate that new bands for the Apple Watch would be among the announcements. A four-inch screen iPhone which boasts improvements under the hood could help spur replacements.

Such an iPhone would be "an incremental positive" for Apple, ensuring that lovers of the company's smaller smartphones don't switch to rival devices powered by Android software, RBC Capital Markets said in a note to investors. RBC projected that sales of a new handset would tally between 10 million to 15 million annually, giving Apple fans an option for upgrading before an iPhone 7 debuts late in the year. The new iPhone will likely be priced to shore up the low-end of Apple's line but not to compete in the budget-priced smartphone market, according to analysts.

"I am not expecting a ton of surprises," Creative Strategies analyst Ben Bajarin said of what Apple has in store for today. "The biggest news will be pricing for the newer iPhone."

Reaching buyers in India?

If Apple lowers the price for the new device-existing big-screen iPhones start at around \$650 — it may be able to expand to new segments of consumers. "I suspect this is far more about boosting off-season sales than it is about introducing a new iPhone at a dramatically lower price point, for example, for emerging markets," said Jan Dawson of

Jackdaw Research in a blog post.

But Dawson said the new handset could be priced as low as \$450 without subsidy to help Apple make inroads in new markets. This would enable Apple to sell refurbished iPhones at \$250 to \$350, according to Dawson and "suddenly allows the iPhone to hit price points it's never been able to hit before, which in turn could make it more viable in markets like India."

Reports have also said Apple is poised to introduce a new iPad tailored for use by businesses.

Talking encryption

The media event takes place a day before a federal judge in Southern California hears arguments in the encryption case. "I do expect to hear a little bit from them because it is so central, not just to Apple," Current Analysis research director Avi Greengart told AFP. "Encryption is pretty much the entire digital economy. There is an argument to be made that Apple is out in front and taking the heat for a crucial, industry-wide issue."

The new iPad may have keyboard and Apple Pencil stylus features that make it more attractive for getting work done. Apple has been trying to ignite sales of its tablets, which declined in the final quarter or last year. Focusing exclusively on Apple hardware can be deceiving, since the company has won legions of devotees by weaving software, applications and devices together to provide people with experiences they enjoy, according to analysts.

"What you are really paying for is software and user experience," Greengart said of buying into Apple's world. "That has been Apple's business model for many years." Apple has built privacy protection into its ecosystem and its valuable brand.

Apple has repeatedly argued that the FBI was overstepping legal bounds by using the 1789 All Writs Act—a broad law which allows the courts to help law enforcement to compel the company to help break an iPhone used by one of the shooters in the December attack in San Bernardino, California.

Apple, which is backed by a broad coalition of powerful rival technology firms and activists, argues that the FBI is seeking a "back door" into all iPhones as part of the probe. The government brief, in sharp contrast, argued it is a single case of technical assistance in an important national security investigation. —AFP

THE APPLE-FBI FIGHT MAY BE FIRST SALVO IN A BIGGER WAR

SAN FRANCISCO: The Apple-FBI fight may just be the opening salvo in a broader war over encryption, as technology companies continue to lock up their users' messages, photos and other data to shield them from thieves and spies - and, incidentally, criminal investigators.

WhatsApp, the globally popular messaging system owned by Facebook, has already run into trouble on this front in Brazil. WhatsApp encrypts all user messages in "end to end" fashion, meaning that no one but the sender and recipient can read them. Brazilian authorities arrested a Facebook executive earlier this month after the company said it couldn't unscramble encrypted messages sought by police.

US officials are debating how to enforce a similar wiretap order for WhatsApp communications in a US criminal case, the New York Times reported. WhatsApp started as a way to exchange written messages over the Internet, but it has added services like photo-sharing and voice calling, while gradually building encryption into all those formats.

Spokesmen for WhatsApp and the Justice Department declined comment on the Times report, which said the wiretap order had been sealed to keep details secret. The Brazilian case is still pending, although the Facebook executive was released from jail after a day. For now, US authorities and the tech industry are watching for the outcome of Apple's legal battle against the FBI, which wants to force the company to help unlock an encrypted iPhone used by one of the San Bernardino mass shooters. But as more companies explore adding encryption, further confrontations are likely.

"I think we can say, without a doubt, there's going to be more pressure on app-makers now," said Nate Cardozo, staff attorney at the Electronic Frontier Foundation.

Cardozo said he's aware of other recent cases in which US authorities have approached individual companies that use encryption and warned them that criminals or terrorists are using their services. Cardozo declined to name the companies, but said authorities have urged those companies to "try harder" - by

redesigning their apps or providing other technical solutions that would let agents read the encrypted messages.

Tech companies say they don't want to interfere with legitimate criminal investigations or national security matters. Instead, they argue they're concerned about criminal hacking, privacy invasion and violations of civil rights. "It's the government's job to protect public safety," said Denelle Dixon-Thayer, chief legal and business officer at Mozilla, which makes the Firefox Web browser. "Our job in

Tech-industry encryption efforts expanded following 2013 disclosures by former National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden that showed extensive government collection of Internet users' data. The resulting controversy helped spur companies like Apple, Google, Facebook and Yahoo to step up their security efforts, although the companies say they already had those plans in the works.

"There was a fundamental shift in relationships after the Snowden revelations," said Ed McAndrew, a

iPhones and even some voice calls. Founder Jan Koum traces his concerns about data-security stem to his parents' fear of government agents listening to phone calls in their native Ukraine. While Apple uses similar end-to-end encryption for its iMessage service, some other leading messaging and email services do not. Google uses encryption extensively to foil outsiders who might try to read users' data, but in many cases the company can access the data itself - and will turn it over to authorities when presented with legal orders.



MUNICH: People wait in front of an Apple store in Munich, Germany before the worldwide launch of the iPhone 6s. Tech and legal experts say if Apple were to create the iPhone-hacking software demanded by the FBI, it would have a tough time staying secret, given the "potentially unlimited" number of people that would likely get a look at its inner workings. —AP

the tech sector is to support that goal by providing the best data security."

While law enforcement authorities have chafed at tech companies' use of encryption, national security officials have warned against weakening encryption. "We're foursquare behind strong data security and encryption," Defense Secretary Ash Carter told a tech audience this month. He drew applause when he added, "I'm not a believer in back doors or a single technical approach to what is a complex problem."

former federal prosecutor now practicing law in Philadelphia, who said he has worked extensively with those companies on cybercrime investigations over the last decade. The companies felt "burned," he said, "so they decided to improve the privacy of their products."

WhatsApp, which boasts a billion users around the globe, first added encryption for its Android smartphone app in 2014. It's been gradually incorporating similar protections into other services, including messages sent on

Some newer messaging services, including Signal and Wickr, use end-to-end encryption. So does Telegram, which recently announced it has 100 million users around the world. The year-old messaging app Wire said this month that it's adding similar protection for video communications.

More companies may follow suit as a result of the high-profile iPhone dispute, said Mozilla's Dixon-Thayer. The controversy has raised public awareness of encryption, she said. "We might see even more demand from users." —AP

WHO SENDS SPECIALISTS IN RESPONSE TO GUINEA EBOLA FLARE-UP

CONAKRY, Guinea: The World Health Organization deployed specialists to southeast Guinea on Friday after two new Ebola cases were confirmed. The cases were announced just hours after Sierra Leone heralded the end of its recent Ebola flare-up, again dashing hopes that the deadly disease was gone from West Africa. The new cases occurred in Koropara, in the remote N'Zerekore prefecture in southeast Guinea, 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) from the capital, said Ibrahim Sylla, a spokesman for the national coordination for the fight against Ebola.

Guinea officials on Wednesday alerted WHO to three unexplained deaths in Koropara and said members of the same family were showing Ebola symptoms, according to a statement from WHO issued Friday. Samples were taken from four peo-

ple. "A mother and her 5-year-old son, relatives of the deceased, confirmed positive for Ebola virus disease in lab tests," WHO said. The two have been taken to a treatment facility, WHO said.

WHO sent specialists including surveillance experts and contact tracers to N'Zerekore, and more specialists should arrive "in the coming days," according to the statement. The deadliest Ebola outbreak in history has killed more than 11,300 people, mostly in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea.

Guinea, where the first cases were confirmed in early 2014, was declared free of Ebola transmission on Dec 29. It was on track to celebrate the end of its 90-day heightened surveillance period at the end of March. Experts have long warned that more flare-ups are likely and have urged health officials to remain ready to respond to new cases. — AP



CONAKRY, Guinea: A health worker, center, takes the temperature of people to see if they might be infected by the Ebola virus inside the Ignace Deen government hospital in Conakry, Guinea. — AP



BRAZIL: File photo shows two-week-old Sophia, born with microcephaly, during a physical therapy session at the Pedro I hospital in Campina Grande. — AP

BRAZIL BATTLES NEGLECT, CASH CRUNCH IN FIGHT AGAINST ZIKA

'A MOSQUITO IS NOT STRONGER THAN AN ENTIRE COUNTRY'

CAMPINA GRANDE, Brazil: In May, as the first cases of the Zika virus were being detected in Brazil, Rossandra Oliveira stopped receiving a critical tool she needed to do her job: insecticide. Monthly shipments from the government to her office at the epicenter of the outbreak stopped. Oliveira, who manages mosquito control for this city of 400,000, was left helpless. The shortages continued even after President Dilma Rousseff's government declared the mosquito-borne virus a national health emergency Nov 11. It wasn't an isolated case. For several months last year cities and states on the front lines of the epidemic in Brazil's northeast ran out of larvicide, and supplies nationwide had to be rationed, according to interviews with local health officials and documents obtained by The Associated Press from prosecutors investigating the shortages.

The lack of larvicide is only one of a string of public health failings crippling Brazil's ability to manage the Zika outbreak and the surge in rare birth defects thought to be linked to it. A week-long tour by AP of several cities and towns in the northeast found public hospitals starved for funding and local health officials scrambling to care for the stricken babies. "In 19 years of working in environmental control I've never seen so much disorganization as I'm seeing now," said Oliveira, whose team of 169 health inspectors in Campina Grande had to carry out door-to-door inspections without the insecticide during the shortage. "We're paying the consequences for having underestimated the enemy."

The immediate culprit is Brazil's deepest recession since the 1930s, which is forcing belt-tightening across Latin America's largest economy. But experts say the collective failure to tackle corruption, crushing inequality and chronic underfunding of the public health system is also to blame. If addressing such longstanding scourges weren't a steep enough challenge, Rousseff must now do so while fighting for her political survival.

Presidential palace

Yesterday, hundreds of thousands of Brazilians poured into the streets to demand she resign over a widening corruption scandal now implicating former President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. On Thursday, she entrenched behind her political mentor, swearing in Silva as her chief of staff. Health Minister Marcelo Castro was at a loss to explain what happened. "If there was this shortage - which I cannot attest to whether there was or not - it was for a short time, and was an isolated incident that does not affect the overall situation," he said in an interview from his office in Brasilia that looks onto the striking modernist presidential palace.

But documents obtained by the AP and interviews with local health officials indicate that the shortages lasted several months and rationing nationwide occurred between August and October, when many women were pregnant and, unbeknownst to them at the time, potentially transmitting Zika to their unborn babies. The problems occurred despite an alert from the World Health Organization urging nations to strengthen mosquito control in the face of a surge in dengue and chikungunya - viruses transmitted by the same Aedes aegypti mosquito that carries Zika.

In a technical note sent in September to the 185 municipalities in Pernambuco, the state's top disease control official even discussed substitutes, such as using household bleach to kill mosquito larvae, or small fish to eat them. Castro said the reported problems coincided with a cooler period of reduced breeding and

larvicide shipments have been normalized since he took office in October. He said the most effective way to fight mosquitoes isn't with chemicals but by eliminating the breeding sites inside people's homes - an effort reinforced by Rousseff's decision to deploy the military to carry out house-to-house inspections. While the effectiveness of almost any strategy to eradicate pesky mosquitoes is debated by some experts, Brazilian authorities consider larvicide an important part of their toolkit, especially when eliminating breeding in makeshift cisterns that proliferate in the northeast due to a lack of reliable running water.

Direct consequences

The pesticide's disappearance, however temporary, is a sign of deep-seated government neglect in a battle that, in the tropics, has to be waged every day, said Dr Artur Timerman, a virologist and president of Brazil's Society of Dengue and Arbovirus. "In a war like the one Brazil is facing, any gap has serious, direct consequences," Timerman said. While Brazilian scientists won international praise for quickly identifying a possible link between Zika and microcephaly, authorities so far have been unable to leverage those discoveries into public health victories.

Instead of focusing on decades of government failures, Rousseff has been appealing to national pride. The T-shirt she wore recently to kick off a nationwide clean-up campaign bore the slogan "A mosquito is not stronger than an entire country." It's a strategy that for weeks seemed to have succeeded in diverting the nation's attention from the debilitating economic and political crisis. "My entire government is engaged in dealing with this emergency," she told lawmakers last month in her annual state of the union address. "There will be no shortage of resources so we can reverse this Zika epidemic in the quickest and most adequate way possible." But resources are tight.

Ground zero for the epidemic is Pernambuco and Paraiba, in Brazil's impoverished northeast. Since Zika was first detected in Brazil, the two states have accounted for more than 40 percent of the 6,480 reported cases of babies born with shrunken heads, a rare condition known as microcephaly. While only 863 of those suspected cases have been confirmed, and 1,349 discarded as wrongly diagnosed, the number dwarfs the 200 reported previously by Brazil, leading researchers to investigate possible links between the virus' spread and the birth defects. In Monteiro, a dusty town in the parched northeast, the mayor declared a health emergency just before Christmas as the number of walk-ins to the sole emergency care hospital more than tripled to 5,178 patients - equal to almost a fifth of the town's population. In one particularly frenzied 24-hour period, the hospital burned through a month's supply of pain killers, with many patients suffering from Zika and other mosquito-borne illnesses receiving treatment in overcrowded hallways.

"It was a very sad New Year's. There were no parties, no fireworks. Every family had at least one person sick," recalls Ana Paula Barbosa Oliveira, the hospital's pregnant director, who worked non-stop throughout the panic until falling ill herself with what she feared was Zika. "I was working so much that I thought the mosquito wouldn't catch up with me," she said, half-joking to lighten the burden of having to wait months to find out if her blood test was positive for Zika.

Regional ambulance service

The clinic was forced to handle the stampede of patients amid a collapse in funding.

For 15 months, after the state's governor inaugurated the clinic, he stopped sending the checks to keep the facility and a regional ambulance service running. The town sued last year and the state government was ordered by a judge to resume payments, which account for about a third of the hospital's funding. But over \$1 million in back payments remains uncollected.

Paraiba's health secretary said it assisted local authorities during the health emergency with two visits to the town. But when pressed repeatedly by email and phone the secretariat didn't provide further details. Corruption may also be playing a role. In Paraiba, prosecutors have 96 ongoing investigations into local officials embezzling federal funds meant to build clinics, buy medications and maintain health facilities in the state. Castro said he was unaware of any investigations. But the region's long history of backward politics and awe-striking poverty make it fertile ground for abuse.

"Paraiba is national champion in infant mortality," said Jose Godoy, the federal prosecutor leading the investigations into the alleged abuses. "If basic maternal care is difficult, just imagine how we're going to be able to work with babies born with microcephaly." The city-run Pedro I hospital in Campina Grande is another case in point of government neglect. There, 29 babies with microcephaly are receiving early intellectual and physical stimulation that can make a significant contribution to their long-term development. The mayor's request for \$1.5 million to the Health Ministry to buy an MRI scanner has so far gone unmet.

Well before the Zika outbreak, Brazil's public health care system was on life support, the result of years of mismanagement, underfunding, and more recently, the economic crisis after a decade-long spending spree fueled by China's thirst for South America's commodities. In Rio de Janeiro, more than 20 hospitals and clinics had to close for several days over Christmas as the government fell behind on salaries and even basic supplies like surgical gloves and cotton balls ran out. The situation now is getting worse. As part of across-the-board budget cuts in February, the Health Ministry was down about \$650 million, or almost 3 percent of planned spending.

In Recife, a city of 1.6 million, more than 300 babies have been reported born with microcephaly - the largest number in the nation. There too, a number of health providers told the AP they're financially strapped. The Altino Ventura Foundation, for example, runs a state-of-the-art rehab clinic built with a donation from the German government that treats 135 microcephaly babies. The nonprofit, which for 30 years has been geared to treating the poor, says the Pernambuco government began falling behind on payments last May, and as recently as February owed more than \$3 million. Some of the money from federal outlays was transferred to the state's coffers but never passed along as required, according to public expense tracking records provided by the foundation.

After the AP asked Pernambuco's health secretary about the debt, authorities began to settle outstanding payments. In the interim, half-built concrete pillars signal an abandoned construction project, with workers parking their cars among tall weeds. The foundation has cut by half the normal number of eye surgeries it performs each month, delayed payments to its own suppliers and for the first time is seeking loans from banks to avoid more drastic cuts. — AP

WHO SUSPENDS TB DRUGS FROM BIG INDIA SUPPLIER ON QUALITY FEARS

LONDON: The World Health Organization has suspended the approval of tuberculosis drugs made by India's Svizera Labs, a major supplier to developing countries, following an investigation into standards. The United Nations agency, which acts as a drug watchdog in markets lacking robust local regulation, said on Friday it had suspended all TB products made at Svizera's Mumbai site because manufacturing standards and quality management were unreliable. It also said independent experts should retest batches of medicine already on the market and it might be necessary to recall supplies, depending on the outcome of those tests.

The move is a fresh blow for India's pharmaceuticals industry, which supplies cheap generic medicines to countries worldwide but has been tarnished by a series of quality problems in recent years, denting confidence in its products. The WHO had previously issued a warning letter to Mumbai-based Svizera Labs, part of Maneesh Pharmaceuticals,

in September 2015, after finding dirty surfaces, black mould in a cleaning area, low hygiene standards and inadequate record-keeping. The latest "notice of suspension" letter was posted on the WHO's website 15 days after being sent to the company. It highlighted several complaints about the quality of certain drug batches.

Boudewijn Ploos van Amstel, managing director of Svizera Europe, said the company disagreed with the assessment, adding that the WHO had ignored information from the company showing that Svizera's operations were up to standard. "The letter of suspension is very misleading," he told Reuters by telephone from the Netherlands. The WHO plays a critical role in monitoring drug quality in poorer countries through its Prequalification of Medicines Program, which ensures that treatments supplied by UN agencies such as UNICEF are of acceptable quality. The program is also used by governments to guide the bulk purchase of medicines.—Reuters

ALGAL BLOOM PLAGUING CHILEAN SALMON BEGINS RECEDING

SANTIAGO: An algal bloom in Chile that has killed up to 20 percent of the country's farmed salmon, causing higher prices globally, has started to recede along with fish deaths, the government said on Friday. "What the scientists have told us is that the algae has diminished, and what we also have detected is that fish deaths have ceased," said Jose Miguel Burgos, head of the government's fisheries body. "Today we hope that we are within view of this declining and definitively ending."

Chile is the world's second largest producer of salmon and trout after Norway. The government has said that salmon farmers have had production losses of around 100,000 tons, worth about \$800,000 million. Abnormally

warm weather and a lack of rain, partially due to the El Niño weather phenomenon, have been identified as contributing factors.

Late summer rains have begun in southern Chile, cooling ocean temperatures and reducing the bloom. The decline in Chilean salmon has caused prices to rise, as reflected in an increase of 25 percent to \$5 per pound last week in Miami, a reference market for the industry. Shares in a number of salmon producers operating in Chile have risen in tandem with prices over the past two weeks. Chilean companies AquaChile, Blumar, Camanchaca, Australis Seafoods, Multiexport Foods, Invermar, and the local unit of Norway's Marine Harvest have Chilean salmon farming operations. — Reuters

WOMEN OUTLIVE MEN BUT SUFFER LONG YEARS OF DISABILITY

NEW YORK: Women may have a longer life expectancy than men, but they are spending more of their golden years living with disabilities, a US study finds. Researchers analyzed studies of people 65 and older enrolled in Medicare, the US health program for the elderly. The studies asked how often disabilities kept people from fully participating in daily activities and then followed them over time to see how long they lived. They looked at data from 1982, 2004 and 2011.

Over that period, the age an average 65-year-old woman could expect to live to increased by two years, from 82.5 years to 85.5 years, the analysis found. Men don't live as long, but they gained more years - five - expanding their life expectancy at age 65 to a further 19 years from 14 years. But women shouldn't necessarily celebrate getting those extra birthdays.

After age 65, women consistently spent an estimated 30 percent of their remaining years with a disability. Men, on the other hand, started out spending 22 percent of their remaining years after 65 disabled and saw that decrease to 19 percent by the end of the study. It's hard to say exactly why women may experience more years of disability, but some of this might be due to unequal progress in treating their health conditions or different shifts in gender lifestyle habits like smoking and exercise over time, said lead study author Vicki Freedman, of the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

"Older women also have fewer economic resources than men on average so they may not be as able to accommodate their declines in functioning when they do occur," Freedman said by email. "Whatever the reason, this is an important trend to continue to monitor as the large Baby Boom cohorts continue to reach old age," Freedman added.

Disabilities might make it harder to complete daily activities like dressing, bathing, cooking, shopping or driving.

Severe disability - when people had trouble with at least three different activities - declined for both women and men over the study period, researchers report in the American Journal of Public Health.

In 1982, 13.2 percent of women and 10.7 percent of men experienced severe disability after age 65. By 2011, this dropped to about 10 percent of women and 7 percent of men. One limitation of the study is its reliance on data from just three individual years, which made it impossible to explore how disability onset or recovery might influence life expectancy, the authors note. They also limited the analysis of disability to mobility and completion of daily activities, which excludes other impairments that can influence health and quality of life.

It's possible, though, that the same heartiness that makes women live longer than men also contributes to their greater propensity toward disability in their later years, said Dr James Kirkland, director of the Robert and Arlene Kogod Center on Aging at the Mayo Clinic. "Women are biologically more hearty than men so instead of dying from a heart attack or something like that they recover, but they recover disabled," said Kirkland, who wasn't involved in the study.

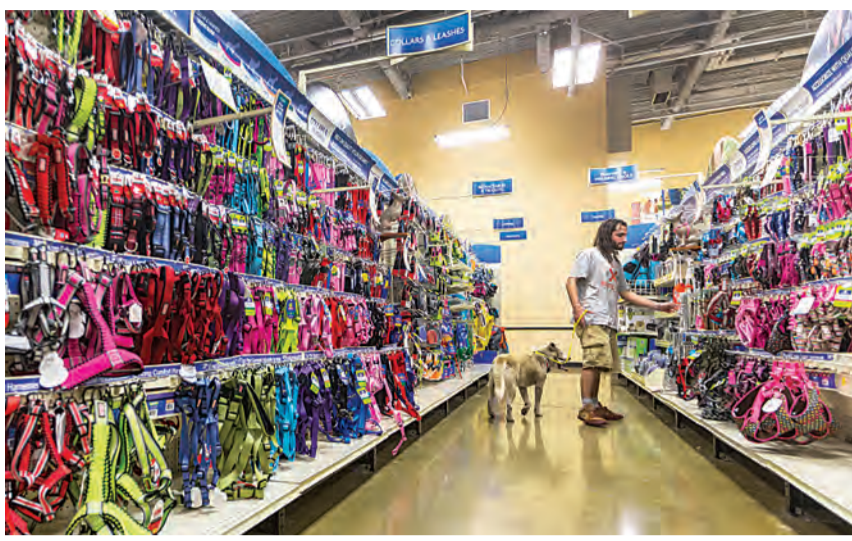
Many women may also assume caretaker roles that leave less time for recreational, social, and self-fulfilling activities that might help keep disability at bay, noted Dr Lili Lustig, a family medicine specialist with the Cleveland Clinic in Warrensville Heights, Ohio. At the same time, some women may also lack the financial resources to stop working as they get older or to pay for services they need, particularly if they are poor, Lustig, who wasn't involved in the study, added by email. They may also struggle to pay for basic needs like food, medicine and housing. "Women are not prepared for the golden years," Lustig said. "The idea of the idyllic retirement portrayed on TV does not exist." — Reuters

AMERICANS PONY UP RECORD \$60B KEEPING PETS HEALTHY, HAPPY

LOS ANGELES: Americans spent just over \$60 billion on their pets last year, a record fueled by a big jump in what owners shelled out for services like grooming, boarding and training. Two age groups drove the increase: millennials, because of their lifestyle, and baby boomers, because of their age, said Bob Vetere, president and CEO of the American Pet Products Association. Those groups in particular often look to others to keep their pets exercised and looking and feeling good. They also tend to hire pet-sitters and use boarding services. Americans spent \$5.4 billion on such pet services last year, up nearly 12 percent from 2014, according to the association's annual report released Thursday at the Global Pet Expo trade show in Florida. Here are some of its other findings:

No love lost

By having others care for their pets, are owners not showing as much love as they used to? "No, no, no," Vetere said. "I don't see this as a way people are trying to farm out their love for a pet. I think it's a way of increasing exposure to loving people." The spike in service spending is expected to moderate in 2016 but still increase nearly 6 percent, more than any other area of pet spending.



LOS ANGELES: Kevin Geiger shops with his newly-adopted Korean Jindo mix dog, Astro, at the PetSmart Midtown store. — AP photos

More pills, fewer visits to the vet

The proliferation of reality TV shows featuring veterinarians like "The Incredible Dr Pol" and "Dr Oakley, Yukon Vet" have focused more attention on the profession. But the spending report found people are turning more to pharmacies, pet stores and food supplement stores for products to increase their animals' health and

longevity. Medications are being refined and mass marketed, increasing their quality and availability. Spending on pet supplies and medication increased nearly 4 percent, compared with a 2.5 percent hike for veterinary services. "If a pet is sick or injured, today's owner will run to the vet, but routine visits to the vet are down," Vetere said.



LOS ANGELES: Pet owner Buffy Lyn Broney, left, checks the weight of her 11-year-old Mastiff, Bubba, totaling 207 Pounds, about 94 Kilograms, at the PetSmart Midtown store.

Live long and prosper

Americans are spending more to take care of their pets, but they aren't buying as many pets to begin with. People in the US spent about \$2.1 billion on animals last year, down 1.4 percent from 2014. It was the second year in row that sales fell, and a third dip is expected in 2016, though the decline

should moderate.

Reasons for the drop: Pets are living longer. The oldest baby boomers are reaching 70 and not replacing their animal companions. Also, a growing number of cities across the country have banned the sale of dogs in pet stores in efforts to put puppy mills out of business. — AP



BEIJING: Actor Leonardo DiCaprio, second from left, and his Chinese fans pose next to a mock Oscar award made by roses, a gift by his fans during a news conference of the movie "The Revenant" at a hotel yesterday. — AP photos

DICAPRIO SAYS CHINA CAN BE 'CLIMATE CHANGE HERO'

BEIJING: Leonardo DiCaprio praised China's work to combat climate change on a trip to Beijing yesterday, and said he believes the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases could be "the hero of the environmental movement." The actor and environmentalist, who called for action to combat climate change during his Oscar acceptance speech last month, praised China's shift toward renewable forms of energy to lower carbon emissions. "As we all know, the United States and China are the two biggest contributors, and I think that China has made radical movements forward as far as alternative energy and ways to be sustainable," he said at a news conference.

"I really think that China can be the hero of the environmental movement, they can be the hero of the climate change movement," he said. "They have an opportunity to change the

world and I have all the confidence in the world that that is their intention." DiCaprio was in Beijing to promote "The Revenant," which won him his first Oscar, for best actor, at this year's ceremony. The movie was released in mainland China on Friday and has already earned 100 million yuan (\$15 million) at the Chinese box office, according to an announcement at yesterday's news conference.

DiCaprio, who has made several trips to China in the past, is one of China's most popular Hollywood actors, mainly because of his performance in "Titanic," one of his few films that have been shown in mainland Chinese cinemas. He is affectionately called Xiao Li, or Little Lee, by Chinese. China is the world's largest coal user and producer, but has also become a leading investor in renewable forms of energy, such as solar and wind power. — AP



BEIJING: Leonardo DiCaprio speaks during a news conference of the movie "The Revenant" yesterday.

NO LOGGING AT PROTECTED TASMANIAN FOREST

SYDNEY: Australian authorities yesterday said there would be no logging in the World Heritage-listed Tasmanian Wilderness, following recommendations in a report submitted to the United Nations' cultural body UNESCO. One of the last expanses of temperate wilderness in the world, the forest in Tasmania covers nearly 20 percent, or 1.4 million hectares, of the southern island state. The conservative federal government in 2014 controversially tried but failed to have UNESCO revoke World Heritage status for parts of the wilderness to allow more access to loggers.

It was the first time a developed country had asked for a delisting. "Today we confirm that we accept the recommendation of the monitoring mission that special species timber harvesting should not be allowed anywhere in the World Heritage Area," Tasmania's Environment Minister Matthew Groom said in a statement. "It was important that the mission experts had the opportunity to hear all sides of the debate,

and having done so, their clear advice to the World Heritage Committee is that there should be no timber harvesting in the World Heritage Area including for specialty timbers."

The report was compiled by experts from the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) after they visited the site in November. Federal Environment Minister Greg Hunt said yesterday his government would respond to the report's recommendations ahead of the World Heritage Committee's July meeting on the state of the wilderness' conservation.

The announcement came days after Australia's parliamentary upper house said it would hold an inquiry into bushfires in the forest to investigate the impact of global warming on fire frequency, and on measures to protect the area. The blazes this summer reportedly burnt some two percent of the protected region. — AFP

UNESCO ADDS 20 NEW SITES TO LIST OF BIOSPHERE RESERVES

LIMA: The United Nations' cultural body UNESCO has added 20 new sites to its network of protected biosphere nature reserves, including two in Canada and two in Portugal. The status was conferred during a two-day meeting in Lima that ended Saturday, which brought the total number of biosphere reserves to 669 across 120 countries. In Canada, the Tsa Tse area in the country's Northwest Territories that includes the last pristine arctic lake was added to the list, as was the Beaver Hills region of Alberta, which has a landscape formed by a retreating glacier.

Britain's Isle of Man, located in the Irish Sea in a biologically diverse marine environment, and

Mexico's Isla Cozumel were also selected for the network. And in Portugal, the entire Island of Sao Jorge, the fourth largest in the Azores Archipelago, was designated a reserve in addition to the Tajo River region between Portugal and Spain. The list of new UNESCO biosphere reserves also includes sites in Algeria, Ghana, Haiti, India, Indonesia, Iran, Italy, Kazakhstan, Madagascar, Morocco, Peru, the Philippines and Tanzania. Of the hundreds of locations on the list, 16 are sites that stretch across more than one country. Spain is the country with the largest number of registered reserves. During the meeting, nine extensions to existing biosphere reserves were also approved. — AFP

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BELGIUM EMBASSY HOLDS CULTURAL CONCERT

By Faten Omar

The embassy of Belgium in Kuwait, in collaboration with the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters invited the popu-

lar Belgian band 'Isbells' for a concert on Saturday at Abdullhussain Abduredha Theater in Salmiya. Isbells are a big successful Belgian band from the city of Leuven and have performed in major festivals like Rock Werchter and Pukkelpop. During

his opening speech, Andy Detaille, Ambassador of Belgium to Kuwait, said "I'm glad to see so many people attend the concert after the hard work to organize it. I first saw the Isbells at a major rock festival back in Belgium, and I'm very

happy that we were able to convince them to come over tonight." He also expressed his gratitude of the hard work of the Secretary General of the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL) Ali Al-Yoha and his team, wife, and the

embassy's team. The concert was a successful, a large enthusiastic crowd singing along to every word. The band played a perfect set primarily focused on their most recent album 'Billy' but included a few fan favorites as well.



MOVENPICK HOTEL PARTICIPATES IN 'EARTH HOUR 2016' INITIATIVE

Movenpick Hotel Kuwait Free Trade Zone participated in the international initiative "Earth Hour 2016" aimed at drawing attention to the risks of Global Warming. Hotel staff switched off lights in all Hotel facilities for one hour, from 08:30pm till 09:30pm on 19th March. This is the third successive year that the Hotel participates in this initiative.

The participation is seen as part of the

Environmental Awareness Program of "Movenpick Hotels & Resorts", international hotel chain focusing on the importance of Environment continuity and saving power and thus saving the Earth.

Hotel General Manager, Rushdi Al Ashkar, announced: "Earth Hour is an international environmental event for individuals and companies alike to partake by switching off the lights and other electrical equipment for

one hour on a given day. We aim at raising environmental awareness with all community individuals regarding climate change and its present and future impact to life on Earth. As we see it, this small act which we do during Earth Hour has a positive impact to bringing into view the level of environmental awareness we have managed to achieve."

Participants in the initiative encircled the huge fountain of the Hotel where they light-

ed candles and small lanterns to bring light into the darkness and captured some memorial photos. Food and beverage staff put candles in all Hotel restaurants from 08:30pm till 09:30pm so as to allow Hotel guests the opportunity to enjoy their dinner around soft lights of candles to celebrate this occasion also they enjoyed extravagant chocolate hour during Earth Hour

It is also important to note that Earth

Hour initiative has been launched for the first time in 2007 in Sydney, Australia, when about 2.2 million people and more than 2 thousand companies have switched off their lights for a whole hour to express their attitude against climate change. Only one year later, Earth Hour has become a continued global movement where more than 50 million individuals throughout 35 countries have participated.



CROWNE PLAZA CELEBRATES EARTH HOUR

Crowne Plaza Kuwait Al Thuraya City and Holiday Inn Kuwait Al Thuraya City joined communities around the globe in observing Earth Hour by dimming their lights for an hour on Saturday, 19th March. Lights were dimmed from 8:30 pm to 9:30 pm in the lobbies, reception areas, and in Silk, Crowne

Plaza's new signature restaurant, where candles were displayed as an alternative source of light.

Guests staying at both hotels were also encouraged to switch off non-essential lighting in their rooms for the specified hour.

Commenting on the event, Russell Loughland,

Executive Assistant Manager, highlighted the important role hotels play in preserving and protecting the planet through their day-to-day operations. "We at Al Thuraya City are proud to support Earth Hour and are committed to taking care of our environment in Kuwait," he added.

CEREMONY POSTPONED

Chairperson of the Kuwaiti Ideal Family Society Sheikha Fraiha Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah announced that the Ideal Mother Award ceremony, which was set to take place yesterday, has been postponed for emergency reasons. The event will take place instead on Thursday, March 24, 2016 at the Dasma Theater, Block 3, starting from 7:30 pm.



HONORING CEREMONY OF IWG

By Athoob Al-Shuaibi

Under the patronage of the Secretary General of the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL), an honoring ceremony was held yesterday at the National Library of Kuwait for participants in "Textiles from the Islamic World" exhibition and fashion show. The event was organized by the International Women's Group in cooperation with Tareq Rajab museum and hosted by the National Council for Culture, Arts and

Letters at Crowne Plaza hotel two weeks ago. Dr Heba Barakat, wife of HE the Egyptian ambassador said that participating in this event was important to all of the ambassadors' wives.

Meanwhile, social activist and event organizer Narjis Al-Shatti said: "It's a happy coincidence to honor those amazing ladies behind this event while the world is celebrating Mother's day. The International Women's Group came up with two projects and both were approved by the Secretary General Ali Al-Youha and embraced by

Mohammed Al-Asousi, the Assistant Secretary of the (NCCAL) with the support of the Assistant Undersecretary for Financial Affairs of the Council, Tahani Al-Adwani. One we did last February about the woman's role in the Islamic history and the latter was the Textile from the Islamic World exhibition.

Therefore, honoring organizing team and our supporters is the least we do to show our appreciation for their massive effort, especially, the wives of the ambassadors. Speaking of which, I would like to express my sincere grat-

itude to the Sudanese ambassador of Kuwait, Yahya Abdul Jalil for providing an office to run the group meetings during the preparation to our event".

Al-Shatti, in addition, directed her thanks to the Kuwait Times for always being there to cover the International Women's Group activities. Throughout the ceremony, certificates of appreciation were distributed to the wives of ambassadors and models praising their role in a friendly atmosphere. The ceremony was wrapped up by a tea party at the lounge of the National Library.

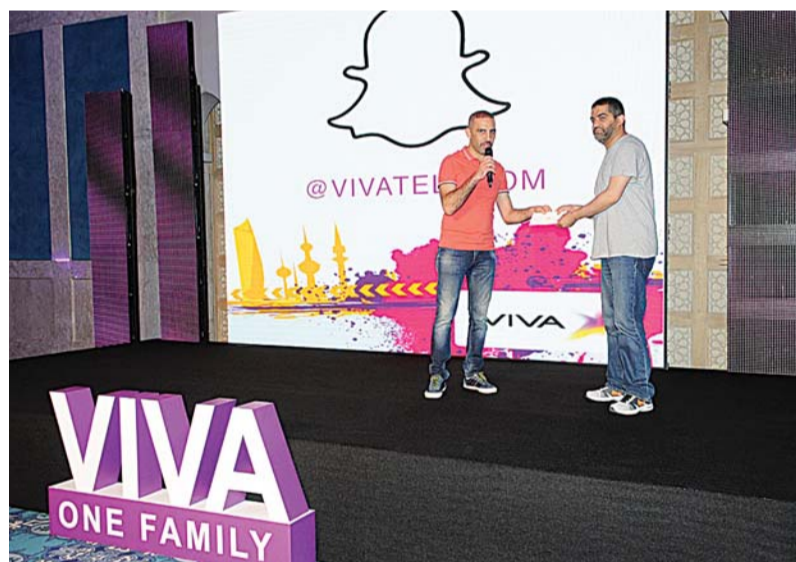
ENTERTECH, ASHRAE HOLD FORUM ON 'DISTRICT COOLING'

In association with Kuwait Ashrae chapter, Entertech for Training and Management Consulting company held a scientific forum on 'District Cooling' on Thursday, March 17, 2016. The forum was held at Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Science (KFAS) and was sponsored by KFAS and DAIKIN company.

The forum attracted audience from various ministries and authorities in addition to professionals from various engineering office in Kuwait. Speaking on the occasion, Entertech's marketing and development manager, Sameer Al-Najdi stressed that adapting the district cooling technology would save up to 25 per cent of power consumption rates, especially since cooling and

air-conditioning have been consuming 70 per cent of the power used in Kuwait. "The new technology would save 10-15 per cent of capital cost of constructing complexes and residential buildings", Al-Najdi explained.

Al-Najdi also pointed that the forum aims to present the proper design of district cooling and the benefits of installing the system that include reducing power consumption by at least 29 per cent, decreasing capital and operational cost, providing availability of cooling with no downtimes, reducing landlords investment cost, enhancing real estate areas, reducing carbon dioxide emissions and reducing reliance on burned fuel to generate electricity.



VIVA ORGANIZES AN OPEN DAY FOR ITS STAFF

VIVA, Kuwait's fastest-growing and most developed telecom operator, organized an open day for its staff, to foster the social and work relationships among VIVA's family members, and promote the engagement, one of VIVA's Values, between them, in the presence of the CEO Eng. Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al-Badran, and executives at VIVA. VIVA aims through this open day in addition to different internal events, to sow the culture of being member in VIVA's big family between the employees and reiterate the connections between them. The event included the distribution of valuable prizes and gifts for the winners as part of many various competitions and draws, and concluded with a barbecue. Employees expressed their happiness to participate in such social event and thanked their company VIVA for this lovely gesture.

SHERATON KUWAIT GOES DARK TO SHINE A LIGHT ON CLIMATE CHANGE

Sheraton Kuwait and Four Points by Sheraton Kuwait goes dark to shine the light on climate change with Earth Hour 2016, where the hotels joined millions around the world in turning off lights for one hour on March 19th to illuminate a powerful message about environ-

mental awareness and action.

The theme of the 2016 Earth Hour event focuses on climate change, emphasizing the threat of global warming and the need to reduce carbon emissions and today has grown to hundreds of millions of people around the world participating

in this event to make a change to our planet.

Sheraton Kuwait and Four Points by Sheraton Kuwait participated by turning off exterior signage lighting; dim non-essential interior lighting; used candlelight in public areas such as restaurants and other facilities in the hotels; as well as placing lobby digital signage messages and contacting our guests through "Let's Chat" application to inform them about Earth Hour observances taking place and invite them to participate. In addition; some of the hotels' employees helped in gathering dimmed light candles together to form the number "60+" which represents the slogan of "Earth Hour" in the center of Sheraton Kuwait lobby. Likewise, the employees have participated also by switching off lights in their accommodations and replacing it with candle lights for an hour.

"It's a privilege for us to support such a powerful movement with such a simple gesture" said Mr Fahed Abushaar - General Manager of Sheraton Kuwait, he also assured the ongoing commitment of the hotels toward social responsibilities and climate through a message extended to over 50 years of absolute commitment to society and forming a better environment and a sustainable world. Mr Mounir Amer - General Manager of Four Points by Sheraton Kuwait added: "Earth Hour reflects a philosophy we try to practice year-round that we all must do our part and together we can make a big difference".



PALM SUNDAY CELEBRATION AT ST STEPHEN'S INDIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

The Palm Sunday celebration of St Stephen's Indian Orthodox Church, Kuwait was attended by hundreds of Orthodox Church members from various part of Kuwait. It was celebrated in Indian Community School, Khaithan.

Palm Sunday is otherwise known as Osana Njayarazhcha or Kuruthala Perunnal in Malayalam is celebrated in preparation for the Holy Week. Palm Sunday with religious reverence marking the beginning of Holy Week ends with Easter. Palm Sunday is celebrated with a lot of reverence around the world with churches distributing palm leaves freshly cut from coconut trees to

commemorate Jesus Christ's entry into Jerusalem, when palm branches were placed in his path, before his arrest and crucifixion on Good Friday.

The blessed palm leaves that are used by the faithful will be preserved at their homes and displayed in the best part of the home and on the coming Christmas Eve it's returned to the church and burnt during Christmas service. Fr Philip Tharakan Thevalakkara, Vice President of Orthodox Christian Youth Movement and Fr Sanju John, the vicar of St Stephen's Indian Orthodox Church were the chief celebrants.

AMC

01:10	Monster's Ball
03:00	Raging Bull
05:05	How To Murder Your Wife
07:05	Late For Dinner
08:40	Teen Witch
10:10	Little Sister
11:45	Movers And Shakers
13:05	Breakin'
14:30	Beauty Shop
16:15	True Heart
17:45	Punks
19:20	Lords Of Dogtown
21:00	Night Manager
22:00	Unlabeled Heart
23:40	They Call Me Mister Tibbs!

15:15	China 24
16:00	News Update
16:15	Global Business
17:00	News Update
17:15	World InSight
18:00	Asia Today
18:30	Culture Express
19:00	News Update
19:30	Spectrum Asia
20:00	Africa Live
21:00	Global Business
21:30	Dialogue
22:00	News Update
22:15	China 24
23:00	News Update
23:15	World InSight

13:00	The Will
13:50	I Almost Got Away With It
14:40	California Investigator
15:05	Dr. G. Medical Examiner
15:55	Fatal Encounters
16:45	On The Case With Paula Zahn
17:35	Murder Shift
18:25	I Almost Got Away With It
19:15	The Will
20:05	Deadly Affairs
20:55	True Crime With Aphrodite Jones
21:45	California Investigator

ANIMAL PLANET HD

00:50	Gator Boys
02:40	Hunt For The Tasmanian Tiger
03:35	Wildest India
04:25	Bahama Blue
05:15	Wildest Arctic
06:02	Sharks Of Palau
06:49	Biggest And Baddest
07:36	Monkey Life
08:00	Monkey Life
08:25	Preposterous Pets
09:15	Big Fish Man
10:10	Treehouse Masters
11:05	Tanked
12:00	Preposterous Pets
12:55	Dr. Jeff: Rocky Mountain Vet
13:50	Big Fish Man
14:45	Gator Boys
15:40	Treehouse Masters
16:35	Tanked
17:30	Echo And The Elephants Of Amboseli
18:25	River Monsters
19:20	From WAGs To Riches
20:15	Tanked
21:10	Echo And The Elephants Of Amboseli
22:05	Treehouse Masters
23:00	From WAGs To Riches
23:55	Gator Boys

CNBC

00:00	Access: Middle East
00:30	Managing Asia
01:00	The Rundown
02:00	Asia Squawk Box
05:00	Asia Street Signs
07:00	CNBC Originals
08:00	Capital Connection
09:00	Squawk Box Europe
12:00	Europe Street Signs
13:00	Worldwide Exchange
14:00	U.S. Squawk Box
17:00	Squawk On The Street
19:00	U.S. Squawk Alley
20:00	Fast Money: Half Time Report
21:00	U.S. Power Lunch
23:00	U.S. Closing Bell

DISCOVERY SCIENCE

00:35	Science Of The Movies
01:20	Sci-Trek
02:08	Invent It Rich
02:55	Da Vinci's Machines
03:42	Mighty Ships
04:29	Unchained Reaction
05:16	Mega Builders
06:03	Food Factory
06:25	Food Factory
06:50	Food Factory
07:13	Food Factory
07:37	How Do They Do It?
08:00	How Do They Do It?
08:23	Killer Robots: Robogames 2011
09:08	Sci-Trek
09:53	Mighty Ships
10:38	How It's Made
11:00	How It's Made
11:23	Da Vinci's Machines
12:08	Space Voyages
12:53	Mighty Ships
13:38	Killer Robots: Robogames 2011
14:23	How It's Made
14:46	How It's Made
15:10	Sci-Trek
15:57	Da Vinci's Machines
16:44	Space Voyages
17:31	Mighty Ships
18:18	Sci-Trek
19:05	Superhuman Showdown
19:50	You Have Been Warned
20:40	Space Voyages
21:25	How It's Made
21:50	How It's Made
22:15	Sci-Trek
23:00	You Have Been Warned
23:45	Space Voyages

CRIME & INVESTIGATION NETWORK

00:00	Britain's Darkest Taboos
01:00	The Haunting Of...
02:00	The Haunting Of...
03:00	Killers: Behind The Myth
04:00	Britain's Darkest Taboos
05:00	I Married My Killer
06:00	The Haunting Of...
07:00	The FBI Files
08:00	The FBI Files
09:00	Homicide Hunter
10:00	Beyond Scared Straight
11:00	I Married My Killer
12:00	Crimes That Shook Britain
13:00	Nightmare In Suburbia
14:00	The First 48
15:00	Homicide Hunter
16:00	Deadly Wives
17:00	The FBI Files
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20:00	The First 48
21:00	Homicide Hunter
22:00	I Married My Killer
23:00	Britain's Darkest Taboos

DISCOVERY WORLD

00:40	Secrets Of The Arsenal
01:30	Zero Hour
02:20	Zero Hour
03:05	Zero Hour
4:35	Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations
05:20	Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations
06:05	Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations
06:50	Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations
07:35	Chasing Classic Cars
08:00	Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations
08:50	Bush Pilots
09:40	Extreme Engineering
10:30	Codes And Conspiracies
11:20	Origins
11:45	Chasing Classic Cars
12:10	Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations
13:00	Bush Pilots
13:50	Extreme Engineering
14:40	Codes And Conspiracies
15:30	Origins
15:55	Chasing Classic Cars
16:20	Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations
17:10	Bush Pilots
18:00	Extreme Engineering
18:50	Codes And Conspiracies
19:40	Origins
20:05	Chasing Classic Cars
20:30	Aircrash Unsolved: The Mystery Of...
21:20	Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations
22:10	Extreme Engineering
23:00	Aircrash Unsolved: The Mystery Of...

BBC FIRST

00:25	Doctors
00:55	Doctors
01:25	Silent Witness
02:20	Silent Witness
03:15	Doctors
03:45	Doctors
04:15	Frankie
05:10	Father Brown
06:00	Doctors
06:30	Doctors
07:00	Frankie
07:55	Call The Midwife
08:55	Doctor Who
09:45	Doctors
10:15	Doctors
10:45	Father Brown
11:40	Frankie
12:35	Call The Midwife
13:30	Doctor Who
14:20	Doctors
14:55	Doctors
15:25	Frankie
16:20	Call The Midwife
17:20	Doctor Who
18:15	Mr Stink
19:15	Father Brown
20:05	Prey
21:00	Happy Valley
21:55	Happy Valley
22:45	Father Brown
23:40	Death In Paradise

DISCOVERY CHANNEL HD

00:20	Fast N' Loud
01:10	Manhunt With Joel Lambert
02:00	Steven Avery: Innocent Or Guilty?
02:50	Killing Fields
03:40	What's In The Barn?
04:05	The Liquidator
04:30	Garage Gold
05:00	How Do They Do It?
05:30	Chasing Classic Cars
06:00	Flying Wild Alaska
06:50	Wheeler Dealers
07:40	Fast N' Loud
08:30	What's In The Barn?
08:55	The Liquidator
09:20	Garage Gold
09:45	How Do They Do It?
10:10	Chasing Classic Cars
10:35	Fast N' Loud Clip Shows
11:25	Street Outlaws
12:15	Extreme Car Hoarders
13:05	What's In The Barn?
13:30	The Liquidator
13:55	Garage Gold
14:20	Flying Wild Alaska
15:10	Wheeler Dealers
16:00	Fast N' Loud
16:50	Chasing Classic Cars
17:15	How Do They Do It?
17:40	Gold Rush

DISCOVERY CHANNEL HD

00:05	Henry Hugglemonster
00:20	Calimero
00:35	Zou
00:50	Loopdidoo
01:05	Art Attack
01:30	Henry Hugglemonster
01:45	Calimero
02:00	Zou
02:15	Loopdidoo
02:30	Art Attack
02:55	Henry Hugglemonster
03:05	Calimero
03:20	Zou
03:30	Loopdidoo
03:45	Art Attack
04:10	Henry Hugglemonster
04:20	Calimero
04:35	Zou
04:45	Loopdidoo
05:00	Art Attack
05:25	Henry Hugglemonster
05:35	Calimero
05:50	Zou
06:00	Loopdidoo
06:15	Art Attack
06:35	Henry Hugglemonster
06:50	Calimero
07:00	Zou
07:20	Loopdidoo
07:35	Art Attack
08:00	Calimero
08:10	Zou
08:25	Loopdidoo
08:40	Miles From Tomorrow
09:05	Sofia The First
09:30	Goldie & Bear
09:45	Jake And The Never Land Pirates
10:10	Mickey Mouse Clubhouse
10:35	Doc McStuffins
11:00	Sofia The First
11:30	Goldie & Bear
12:00	Miles From Tomorrow
12:25	Special Agent Oso
12:40	The Hive
12:50	Handy Manny
13:15	Jungle Junction
13:30	Mickey Mouse Clubhouse
14:00	Sofia The First
14:25	Goldie & Bear
14:50	Doc McStuffins
15:15	Zou
15:30	Mickey Mouse Clubhouse
15:55	Loopdidoo
16:10	Miles From Tomorrow
16:35	Jake And The Never Land Pirates
17:00	Sofia The First
17:25	Cyber Chase
17:50	Aladdin
18:15	Gummi Bears
18:40	Goldie & Bear
19:05	Miles From Tomorrow
19:30	Sofia The First
19:55	Doc McStuffins
20:10	Jake And The Never Land Pirates
20:35	Miles From Tomorrow
21:00	Goldie & Bear
21:30	Sofia The First
22:00	Jungle Cubs
22:25	Aladdin
22:50	Gummi Bears
23:20	Lilo And Stitch
23:50	Zou



BATTLE OF THE DAMNED ON OSN MOVIES ACTION HD

DISNEY JUNIOR

00:05	Henry Hugglemonster
00:20	Calimero
00:35	Zou
00:50	Loopdidoo
01:05	Art Attack
01:30	Henry Hugglemonster
01:45	Calimero
02:00	Zou
02:15	Loopdidoo
02:30	Art Attack
02:55	Henry Hugglemonster
03:05	Calimero
03:20	Zou
03:30	Loopdidoo
03:45	Art Attack
04:10	Henry Hugglemonster
04:20	Calimero
04:35	Zou
04:45	Loopdidoo
05:00	Art Attack
05:25	Henry Hugglemonster
05:35	Calimero
05:50	Zou
06:00	Loopdidoo
06:15	Art Attack
06:35	Henry Hugglemonster
06:50	Calimero
07:00	Zou
07:20	Loopdidoo
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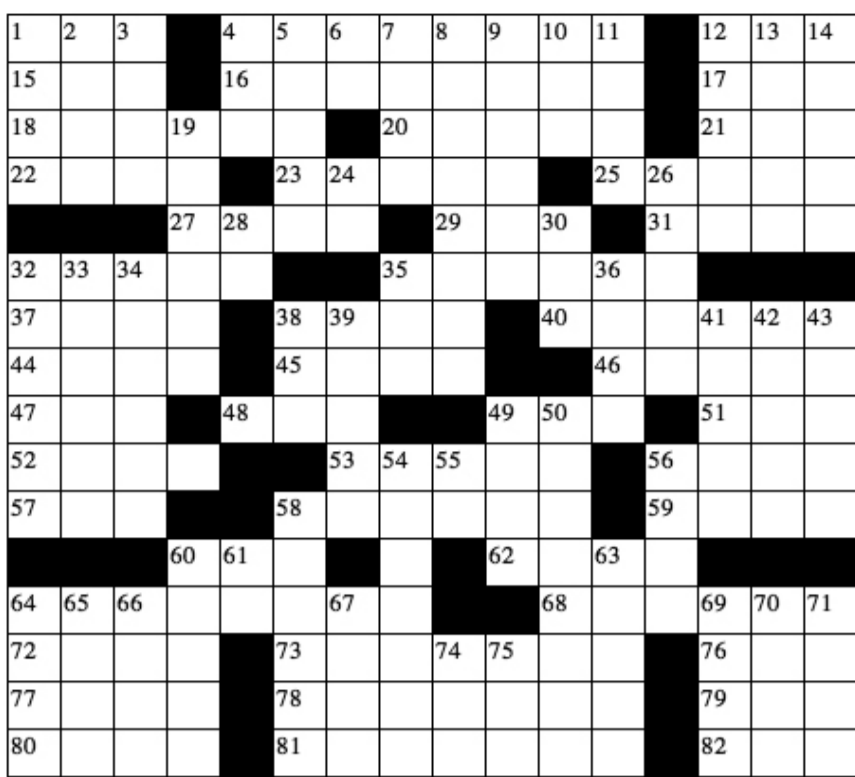
XD

00:00	Programmes Start At 7:00am KSA
00:05	Star vs The Forces Of Evil
00:25	K. C. Undercover
00:50	Supa Strikas
01:15	Annedroids
01:40	Lab Rats
01:55	Kirby Buckets
02:20	Wander Over Yonder
02:45	Lab Rats
03:10	Lab Rats
03:35	K. C. Undercover
04:00	K. C. Undercover
04:25	Supa Strikas
04:50	Supa Strikas
05:15	Gamers Guide To Pretty Much Everything
05:40	Annedroids
06:05	Mighty Med
06:30	Mighty Med
06:55	Kickin' It
07:20	Kickin' It
07:45	Guardians Of The Galaxy
08:10	Rocket Monkeys
08:35	Guardians Of The Galaxy
09:00	Guardians Of The Galaxy
09:25	Kirby Buckets
09:50	Gamers Guide To Pretty Much Everything
10:15	K. C. Undercover
10:40	Supa Strikas
11:05	Lab Rats
11:30	Mighty Med
11:55	Annedroids
12:20	Star vs The Forces Of Evil
12:45	Kirby Buckets
13:10	Gamers Guide To Pretty Much Everything
13:35	K. C. Undercover
14:00	Pickie And Peanut
14:25	Lab Rats
14:50	Mighty Med
15:15	Super Matrak
15:40	Super Matrak

HISTORY HD

00:20	Pawn Stars Australia
00:45	Pawn Stars Australia
01:10	American Restoration
01:35	American Restoration
02:00	Duck Dynasty
02:25	Duck Dynasty
02:50	American Pickers
03:15	Shipping Wars
03:40	Shipping Wars
04:05	Shipping Wars
04:30	Pawn Stars
05:00	Hunting Hitler
06:00	American Restoration
06:25	American Restoration
06:50	Counting Cars
07:15	Counting Cars
07:40	Ax Men
08:30	Storage Wars
08:55	Swamp People
09:45	Down East Dickering
10:35	American Pickers
11:25	Hunting Hitler
12:15	Pawn Stars
13:05	Shipping Wars
13:55	Pawn Stars
14:20	Pawn Stars
14:45	Pawn Stars Australia
15:10	Pawn Stars Australia
15:35	Storage Wars
16:00	American Pickers
16:50	American Restoration
17:15	American Restoration
17:40	Counting Cars
18:05	Counting Cars
18:30	Hunting Hitler
19:20	Duck Dynasty
19:45	Duck Dynasty
20:10	Pawn Stars
20:35	Pawn Stars

CROSSWORD 1202



ACROSS

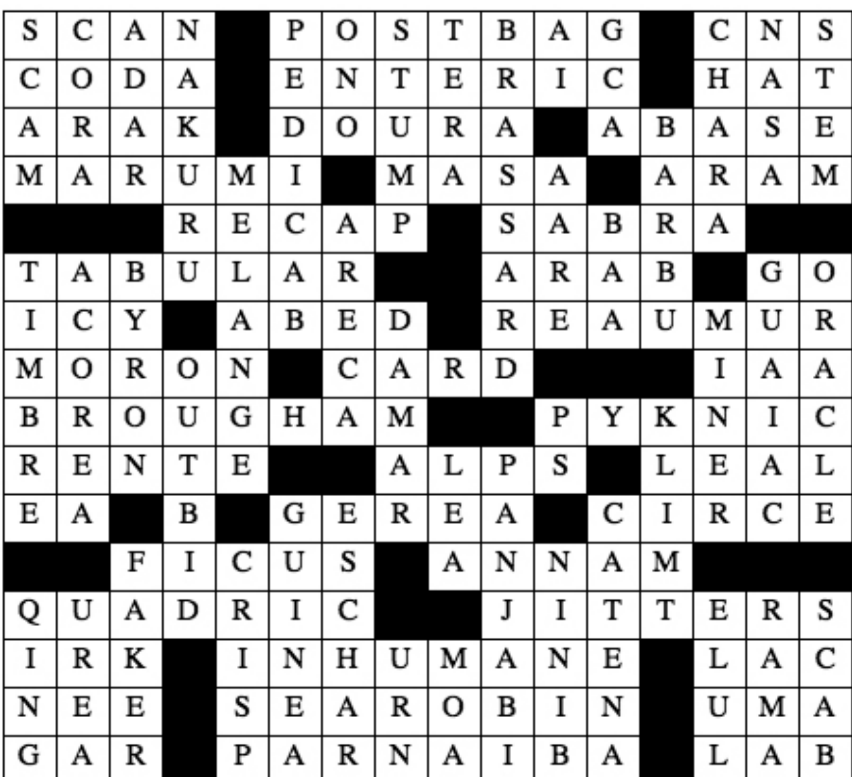
- Anterior pituitary hormone that stimulates the function of the thyroid gland.
- Made clean by scrubbing.
- A solution containing a phosphate buffer.
- South American wood sorrel cultivated for its edible tubers.
- A watercourse that carries water away from a mill or water wheel or turbine.
- A broad flat muscle on either side of the back.
- A member of the Manchu speaking people of Mongolian race of Manchuria.
- The dried fibrous part of the fruit of a plant of the genus Luffa.
- Water frozen in the solid state.
- Tropical starchy tuberous root.
- Of inferior or mixed breed.
- The capital and largest city of Bangladesh.
- A small ball with a hole through the middle.
- An ugly evil-looking old woman.
- Any of numerous local fertility and nature deities worshipped by ancient Semitic peoples.
- The capital and largest city of Yemen.
- A hymn of praise (especially one sung in ancient Greece to invoke or thank a deity).
- A stupid mistake.
- Largest known toad species.
- Large burrowing rodent of South and Central America.
- Yellow-fever mosquitos.
- A widely distributed system consisting of all the cells able to ingest bacteria or colloidal particles etc, except for certain white blood cells.
- A young woman making her debut into society.
- The universal time coordinated when an event is received on Earth.
- A unit of weight used in east Asia approximately equal to 1.3 ounces.
- The address where a person lives.
- (Irish) Mother of the ancient Irish gods.
- (botany) Of or relating to the axil.
- Tropical woody herb with showy yellow flowers and flat pods.
- A British imperial capacity measure (liquid or dry) equal to 60 minims or 3.5516 cubic centimeters.
- Remote city of Kazakhstan that (ostensibly for security reasons) was made the capital in 1998.
- Norse chieftan who became the first duke of Normandy (860-931).
- Any of various forms of aluminum oxide occurring naturally as corundum.
- (in golf) The standard number of strokes set for each hole on a golf course, or for the entire course.
- Bulky grayish-brown eagle with a short wedge-shaped white tail.
- A tricycle (usually propelled by pedalling).
- A graphical record of electric currents associated with muscle contractions.
- A drop of the clear salty saline solution secreted by the lacrimal glands.
- A turner with a narrow flexible blade.
- Of or relating to a member of the Buddhist people inhabiting the Mekong river in Laos and Thailand.

DOWN

- A (usually) large and scholarly book.
- Any of a number of fishes of the family Carangidae.
- The (prehensile) extremity of the superi-

- or limb.
- A hormone produced by the anterior pituitary gland.
- (law) A comprehensive term for any proceeding in a court of law whereby an individual seeks a legal remedy.
- A state in New England.
- (Norse mythology) One of the Aesir known for his beauty and skill with bow and skis.
- Loud confused noise from many sources.
- African tree having an exceedingly thick trunk and fruit that resembles a gourd and has an edible pulp called monkey bread.
- Liquid containing proteins and electrolytes including the liquid in blood plasma and interstitial fluid.
- No longer having or seeming to have or expecting to have life.
- A folded part (as a fold of skin or muscle).
- An indehiscent fruit derived from a single ovary having one or many seeds within a fleshy wall or pericarp.
- An advantageous purchase.
- A small tent used as a dressing room beside the sea or a swimming pool.
- Being one hundred more than three hundred.
- Make less active or intense.
- (Akkadian) God of wisdom.
- Light informal conversation for social occasions.
- Of or relating to or characteristic of the prehistoric Aegean civilization.
- The state that precedes vomiting.
- Being one hundred more than two hundred.
- A light springing movement upwards or forwards.
- Any of various primates with short tails or no tail at all.
- A region of Malaysia in northeastern Borneo.
- Conforming to an ultimate standard of perfection or excellence.
- Spanish missionary who founded Franciscan missions in California (1713-1784).
- Formed by reaction between an acid and an alcohol with elimination of water.
- (Babylonian) God of storms and wind.
- A colorless poisonous gas.
- A group of islands in the Atlantic off the Carolina coast.
- A Russian river.
- Any of various aromatic resinous substances used for healing and soothing.
- Food that is discarded (as from a kitchen).
- A prisoner serving a term of life imprisonment.
- A public promotion of some product or service.
- Jordan's port.
- Knowledge gained through tradition or anecdote.
- The inner and longer of the two bones of the human forearm.
- A city in northwestern Syria.
- German industrialist who was the first in Germany to use an assembly line in manufacturing automobiles (1871-1948).
- A Tibetan or Mongolian priest of Lamaism.
- Formerly a large constellation in the southern hemisphere between Canis Major and the Southern Cross.
- An engineering university in Cambridge.
- A hospital unit staffed and equipped to provide intensive care.

Yesterday's Solution



STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

This is a great day to plant flowers. Take a little trip, or get outside. You may want to break that routine and try something new or different on your day away from work. You may uncover answers of day-to-day problems that will be of great value later. Perhaps this is a time to think and study-you have a real appreciation for ideas and thoughts. You may find yourself enjoying long conversations, writing letters or making phone calls. This is a great time to be with friends, family, neighbors, etc. A new exhibit or entertainment may be the choice for this afternoon. This evening you may recognize the need to step up and lend your expertise in some type of equipment. If you are giving help, you may have been asked; your guidance is highly regarded.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Too many emotional involvements may have drained your enthusiasm a bit. Look back for a moment and see how you can give yourself more credit, more time and less anxiety. We all learn from the difficult times and you are no exception. You can look forward to some good accomplishments for the remainder of this month but today... Take it easy-let go and enjoy a little down time. There are a few things happening soon with the lineup of the planets that will begin to influence you in positive ways. You will enjoy all sorts of improvements in many areas of your life. There is a new eagerness focused on creative endeavors today-planning is good. Whatever you begin now will be successful-monetary rewards are available.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

You may feel that you can give to others more generously now-perhaps charities and friends. Everything conspires to value and to bring out your more unique and unusual qualities. Communicating and getting your message across to others is at a high just now. Your timing should be perfect and those around you should find you most spontaneous and energetic. This is a time when you will enjoy good relations with family members and the financial position may improve because of your association with a relative. You have a natural sense for communicating with others, especially those younger than yourself. Spending quality time with your loved ones should be your main priority this evening. Block out distractions.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

You and your friends may talk of a great weekend adventure that will be coming up soon. This could depend upon the weather, but everything looks promising. Perhaps renting a cabin near a lake or family picnic is the choice. Whatever the case, the whole idea is to be with others in a friendly atmosphere to laugh and enjoy the surroundings of the new springtime sights. Plans for this fun gathering are going in the right direction. Stick as close as possible to your budget-don't give in. Financial changes for the good are in the forecast but the lessons learned as you practice thrift are very important. You are held to your promise this afternoon and may find yourself running errands for a family member. Relations with friends and family are strong.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

Neighbors or relatives-brothers or sisters in particular-can be subjects for concern. Vocally, you have been quiet, but now the family or some of your friends turn to you for help or advice. Now is the time to make it clear that they are the captains of their own ships and then give them your experience; they will listen. Offensive or hurt feelings are never the case when you come from the truth. You may be asked to help for a short while at a local charity this afternoon. There is a lot of laughter in this environment and you may come away with a new feeling of lightness. Your help to others is returned many times. A friend or loved one takes you out to dine at a fun place this evening. A difficult beginning has turned into quite a spirit-filled day.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

The first thing on the agenda this morning is to clear the path to a healthier you! A high-protein diet and eating more slowly will probably be all you need as far as dieting is concerned. A more routine-oriented meal time, as well as exercise, will improve your energies as well as your body. Aesthetics and abstract thinking take precedence over emotions. Somehow you can perceive a kinship between various aspects of the universe that seemed unrelated before. Sensitivity to beauty, truth and the arts is certainly heightened. It is a good day for all sorts of thinking and that includes personal matters, as well as lending your thoughts to help another. Also, this is a perfect time to discuss your relationship with someone on an abstract level. Declare your love!



Libra (September 23-October 22)

This is a superb day for any mental effort you might want to exercise. It is a favorable day to figure out what you want to do with that hobby or that personal paperwork that you have been putting off for another time. The time has come... You will be pleased at how quickly you can complete whatever task is before you. If you are already the most highly developed individual and have no chores or hobbies to keep you busy, perhaps you could find some form of exercise that will help you get rid of the jitters-nervousness. If you write music, today is the time to create that best selling hit! Later today you will find yourself more involved with neighbors or siblings. Communicating feelings becomes important.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

After a full morning of spirit-filled insights, you and your loved ones or friends may enjoy eating food away from home with others today. This is an excellent time for taking part in social activities with friends. A little time and a listening ear may be all that is needed to mend a misunderstanding or to gain some insight. There is a feeling of knowing things without knowing how you know them. Interaction with others can confirm or adjust your thinking. The mystical, the universal and the eternal are the things that most often stir your curiosity. This afternoon you may get into conversations surrounding current affairs and what might result in the near future. You will notice some strong support for your ideas.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 19)

Rewards are for the taking today. Someone will pay back a debt owed to you and some monetary results are prevalent in a financial investment. Finances show improvement after you see what is left in your budget. An advisor might offer positive insights about the best ways to manage your funds in the future. Preach or teach what is on your mind this afternoon. Your words contain a timely message that is good for all to hear. The romantic dreamier side of you is in full blossom. This is not the best time to engage in strenuous activity, however. Your mind is quickened, making you receptive to all external stimuli. Be diplomatic in your discussions with loved ones this afternoon. You may find yourself serving to guide a young adult this evening.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Domestic tranquility is wonderful this morning but you could be looking forward to viewing some form of entertainment with your friends this afternoon. You can be truly relaxed when it comes time to take it easy with friends. You are compassionate and giving to all around you and love to get into all sorts of conversations with these friends. There is a conscious effort at this time to balance your response to some of the questions of others. You listen and keep your end of the conversation realistic but fun. It can be quite surprising how much you learn about someone when you ask him or her to tell you about one of the most memorable and positive times of his or her childhood. Tears of laughter may be easy to see.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

The time is ripe for some sudden and unexpected changes in the normal routine of family life. It could be that a vacation is in order, a family member moves in or leaves home or a move happens. This could also be a time when the home is used as a place other than a place to live. Others could be put off by your seriousness today but you may have lots on your mind. Some of the ideas are about creative ways to move forward in your profession. You do not want to be held back. You may have a new understanding that a small house will hold as much happiness as a big one. Try to loosen up with your love relationship this evening. Don't be afraid to express your wants and desires. Your devotion and selflessness will reap unexpected rewards.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

You may appear very comfortable with yourself and your surroundings. Your efforts are successful and you may feel you can do anything. Doubts fade into the background and reserve is more and more a thing of the past. Your personal goals are also being achieved successfully-full speed ahead is your motto-for better or for worse! Careful; others want to be in your life with you, especially today. There is time later this afternoon for fun with your friends and celebration with family. Any time today is wonderful to reflect and understand your own situation, just how you feel about your accomplishments. Emotions, or the feelings of those around you, may be very clear. Enjoy your surroundings.

Wordsearch Puzzle

Pizza

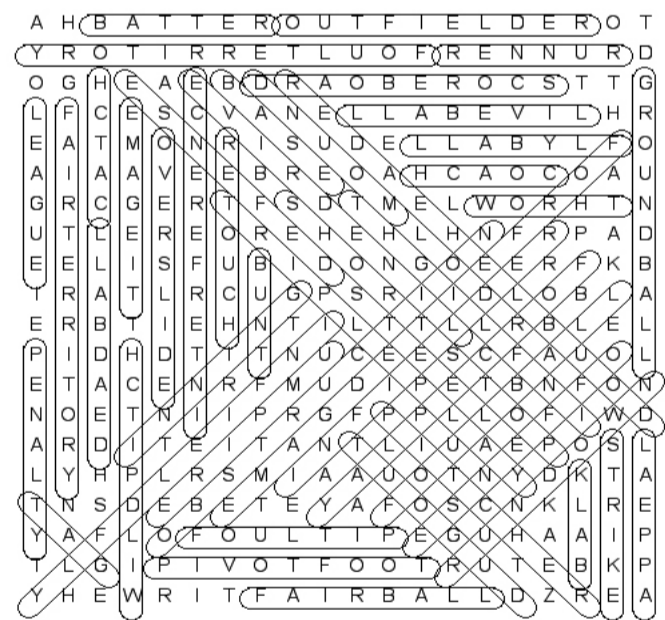
Find and circle all of the pizza ingredients and toppings that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell four additional pizza toppings.



- | | | | |
|------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| ARTICHOKE HEARTS | CRUST | JALAPENOS | PROVOLONE |
| ASIAGO | EGGPLANT | MONTENEY JACK | RICOTTA |
| ASPARAGUS | FETA | MOZZARELLA | SALAMI |
| BACON | GARLIC | MUSHROOMS | SAUSAGE |
| BANANA PEPPERS | GOAT CHEESE | OLIVE OIL | SHRIMP |
| BASIL | GOUDA | ONIONS | SPINACH |
| BELL PEPPERS | GREEN OLIVES | OYSTERS | TOMATO SAUCE |
| BLACK OLIVES | GROUND BEEF | PARMESAN | TOMATOES |
| BROCCOLI | HAM | PEPPERONI | ZUCCHINI |

Yesterday's Solution

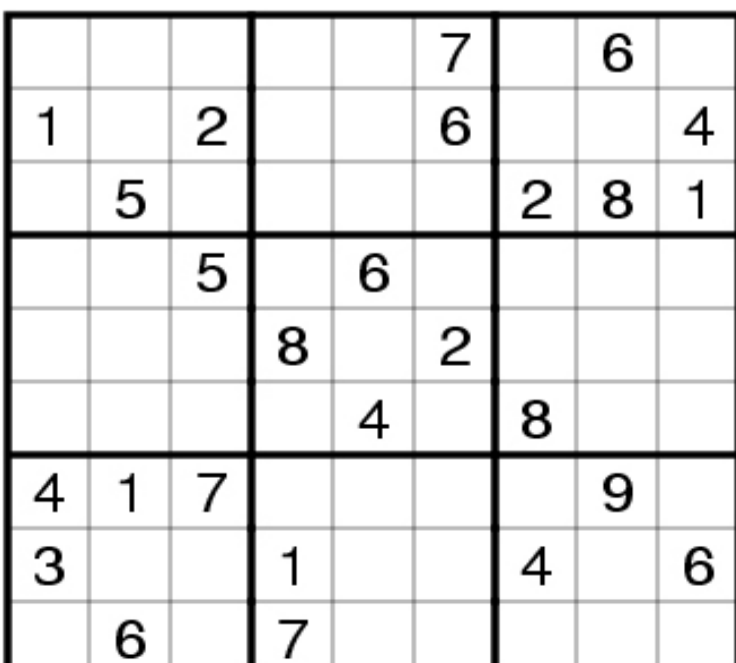
Baseball



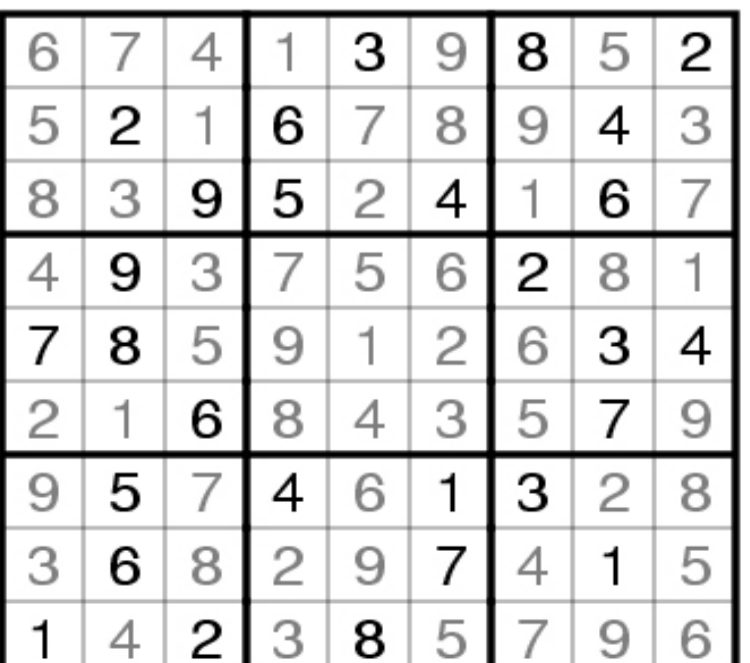
- | | | | |
|---------------|----------------|--------------|-------------|
| APPEAL | FAIR TERRITORY | INTERFERENCE | RETOUCH |
| BALK | FLY BALL | LEAGUE | RUN DOWN |
| BASE | FORCE PLAY | LIVE BALL | SCOREBOARD |
| BATTER | FORFEITED GAME | MOUND | SHORTSTOP |
| BUNT | FOUL BALL | OBSTRUCTION | STRIKE |
| CATCH | FOUL TERRITORY | OFFENSE | TAG |
| COACH | FOUL TIP | OUTFIELDER | THROW |
| DEAD BALL | GROUND BALL | OVERSLIDE | TIE GAME |
| DEFENSE | IN FLIGHT | PENALTY | TRIPLE PLAY |
| DOUBLE HEADER | INFIELD FLY | PITCHER | UMPIRE |
| DUGOUT | INFIELDER | PIVOT FOOT | WILD PITCH |
| FAIR BALL | INNING | | |

Hidden sentence: A HOT DOG AT THE BALL PARK IS BETTER THAN STEAK AT THE RITZ

Daily SuDoku



Yesterday's Solution





Affleck says Batman-fan son too young to see new film

Ben Affleck might be Batman to his 4-year-old fan-boy son, Samuel, but that doesn't mean he'll get to see his dad in action in "Batman v Superman" with the rest of the world when it hits theaters next week. "Four years old is a little young to see this whole movie," Affleck said in a Friday interview. "I don't want him to have nightmares." Affleck has often said he partly took on the role for his three kids - his son in particular. And from dressing up as the dark knight for Samuel's themed birthday party to

tipping the FedEx delivery guy a few bucks to stage a fake fight just because Samuel believes that he's the Joker, it's a part that hasn't gone away for Affleck when the cameras stop rolling, especially with the starry-eyed youngster around. Samuel has seen his dad in trailers for the film and whatever footage is available online, though, and, according to Affleck, those two-minute clips are basically "his whole attention span anyway." Affleck said at the very least, his oldest daughter, Violet, 10, can see the PG-13

rated film. In addition to Violet and Samuel, Affleck and Jennifer Garner also have a 7-year-old daughter, Seraphina. The couple separated last year after 10 years of marriage. As for Samuel, Affleck said he'll be able to see some of "Batman v Superman" soon, even if it's chopped up. "I'll have to con one of the editors into giving me a truncated version of the movie without some of the scarier stuff," he said.

O'Brien injured on set of 'Maze Runner' sequel

Dylan O'Brien has been injured on the set of "Maze Runner: The Death Cure" during production in British Columbia. 20th Century Fox said in a statement Friday that O'Brien was immediately transferred to a local hospital after being injured Thursday. The studio said shooting will be shut down while the actor recovers. A representative for O'Brien didn't immediately respond to messages Friday. The 24-year-old is the star of the dystopian science-fiction series. "The Death Cure" is the third in the franchise. Trish Knight Chernecki, spokeswoman for the provincial occupational health and safety regulator WorkSafeBC, said an investigation officer has been dispatched to the set to investigate. WorkSafeBC Prevention Officers are on-site at a film set at Cache Creek airport - about 215 miles northeast of Vancouver. James Dashner, the author of the "Maze Runner" book trilogy, posted on Twitter Friday that O'Brien had been hurt but he was going to be OK and his injuries were "not life-threatening in any way." "Production is postponed but certainly not cancelled. All that matters now is that Dylan recovers," he wrote. "We love you, Dylan!!!" O'Brien is also known for his co-starring role in the MTV series "Teen Wolf."



Trainor was called a 'fat whale'

Meghan Trainor was called a "fat whale" after winning her Grammy. The 'Lips Are Moving' hitmaker came across all kinds of nasty messages on her Twitter account after she picked up the prize for Best New Artist at the prestigious awards ceremony last month and admits she particularly found reading people's fat-shaming comments "hurtful". She said: "I woke up after the Grammys to messages saying: 'You fat whale, that award should have gone to Tori Kelly, give it back'. These people can be ruthless. I try not to read online comments as they can be really hurtful." Asked if she suffers from insecurity, the blonde beauty added: "All the time." Meanwhile, talking about a time when she went to try on a coat in a shop and could just about fit into the extra large sized garment, she admitted moments like that can make her feel "p****d off and upset." She explained: "I went into a store recently to buy a winter jacket, and the only size I could get into was an XL. Even that barely fit. People always tell me: 'You're not even that big' But moments like that can sting. I left the shop feeling sad and p****d off." However, the 22-year-old singer isn't going to go on a diet just to please other people, as well as, not approving of body modifications including tattoos. She explained to The Sun newspaper's Fabulous magazine: "I don't get the whole massive lips thing. I don't like the idea of plastic surgery - you're cutting into your face. We don't even do tattoos in my family. I know my body will sag and I don't want tattoos I've paid for to end up as an ugly blob."

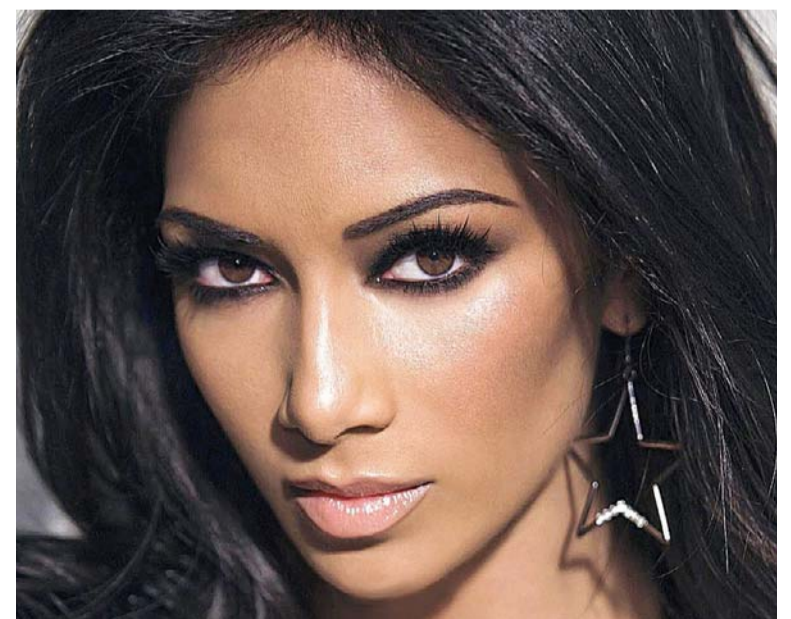


Carey refuses to talk about her relationship

Mariah Carey admits she is a "pretty insecure" person. The 45-year-old singer has refused to open up about her romance with her fiance James Packer because she is a "private person" and would rather keep the finer details of their love life under wraps as it could get misinterpreted and cause her family problems. She said: "I'm a pretty insecure person. But I have to get over that because it's the reality of my life. "If I start talking about this relationship, people will interpret it in their own way, so I think it's safer for everyone involved to just not talk about the very personal aspects. I am a private person." Meanwhile, asked if their wedding is planned, the 'Hero' hitmaker - who was previously married twice, once to Tommy Mottola and then to Nick Cannon - with whom she has twins Moroccan and Monroe with - again insisted it was "secret" and that it is better that way because it won't disrupt her children's lives. Asked about her wedding to the billionaire, she told The Sunday Times Style magazine: "It's a secret. I'm not doing this for laughs. I enjoy it. When you grow up without a lot of things ... I try not to take things for granted. "I am very traditional. I have babies, it's more appropriate. I don't know if most people can relate to that, but that's just how I feel!"

Nicole Scherzinger is petrified of social media

The 'Poison' singer gets really bad "anxiety" using Twitter and Facebook because she is extremely "protective" of which aspects of her life she wants to keep to herself or share with her legions of fans because she fears people will misinterpret what she intended to say. She explained: "Social media gives me the heebie-frickin'-jeebies. It gives me so much anxiety ... It's unnatural for me, I'm protective of what I want to share, I'll take a million pictures and stare at them and figure out a filter - then I think do I even want to share this? Because I know if my big toe is in the wrong place it's gonna be on the cover of the papers. "It takes up too much frickin' time and then I end up not posting anything and it sucks." However, the 37-year-old beauty - who previously dated Formula 1 racing driver champion Lewis Hamilton - would love to be able to have the courage to share more things with her 5.4 million Twitter followers, but she will forever be careful just in case people try and "ridicule" her. She told the Daily Mirror's Notebook magazine: "I wish I could. I want to share so much but I get afraid people will pick it apart and ridicule you."



Clémence Poésy hates social media



The 'Harry Potter' actress thinks sites such as Instagram and Twitter are incredibly "self-centred" and are having a negative impact on society. She said: "Selfies will kill us. I really didn't want to join but there was a fake account that people started believing was mine. "I only post covers of books, posters for films and sometimes music. "I try not to use it as a tool for endless self-promotion. "I think it's going to change our brains, but not for the better. That kind of self-centered thing - how did we go from people inviting us round to show us their holiday albums, and thinking that was the most boring way to spend an evening, to this?" The 33-year-old beauty spent much of her younger years without a television at home and when her parents finally "caved in" and bought one, they told their children it would only work for watching videos on. She told InStyle: "My parents took me and my sister to watch a lot of films and to the theatre. "At some point they caved in and got something that could play tapes and films and pretended that the TV part didn't work. "We bought it until we caught my dad watching tennis.



Prince to write a memoir

Prince is writing a memoir titled 'The Beautiful Ones'. The 'Purple Rain' hitmaker announced the news of his book at a concert at the club Avenue in New York on Friday night. He told the crowd: "The good people of Random House have made me an offer I can't refuse! "It's going to be called 'The Beautiful Ones'. I literally just got off the plane. I'm going to go home and change and put some dancing clothes on. Props to my brother Harry Belafonte." It's expected to be released by publishers Random House in Autumn next year. The 57-year-old singer has enlisted the help of critic Dan Piepenbring who writes for the Paris Review to help pen the tell-all piece. In a bid to get a reaction from the crowd, he asked: "You all still read books, right? My brother Dan-Dan Piepenbring of the Paris Review is helping with it. He's a good critic. That's what I need. Not a yes man." After he'd made the big reveal, he told the club full of people he was off home to get into his dancing clothes and he'd return ready to dance with everyone. He said: "If you don't mind, I'm going to go home and change real quick and come back and dance with y'all!" The book will follow his magnificent career from the very beginning to his showstopping performance at the Super Bowl in 2007.



In this Sept 16, 1969 file photo, Shirley Temple Black raises her hand at the United Nations as she is sworn in as a UN delegate.



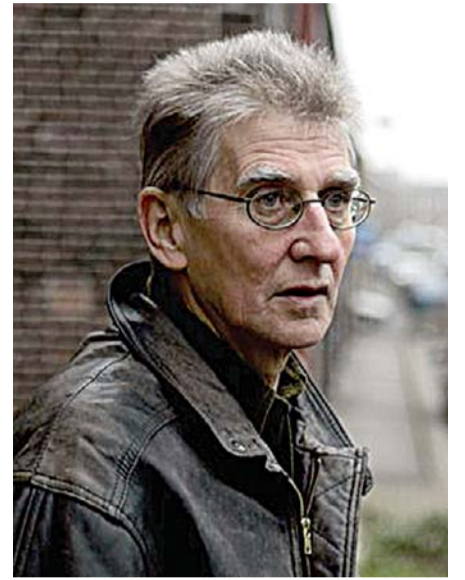
This Sept 10, 1935 file photo shows actress Shirley Temple in Los Angeles.

‘Kes’ writer Barry Hines dies in Britain

Author Barry Hines, whose novel “A Kestrel For A Knave” captured the spirit of 1960s British working-class youth and was the basis for Ken Loach’s award-winning film “Kes”, has died, friends said yesterday. “Very sad news: the great writer Barry Hines, creator of Barnsley’s defining myth A Kestrel For A Knave, has died. Rest in peace,” poet Ian McMillan, who shared a publisher with Hines, wrote on Twitter. Mark Hodgkinson, founder of Hines’s publishers Pomona, confirmed the author’s death aged 76 in an obituary for the Guardian newspaper. He was reportedly diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease in recent years.

Published in 1968, Hines’s most famous book is a work of social realism which tells the story of Billy Casper, a boy who escapes his troubled life by training a kestrel. His brother Richard recently published a memoir which detailed how he had been a teenage falconer and had inspired his brother’s work. Hines was born in 1939 in a northern English pit village near Barnsley, South Yorkshire, the son of a miner. He worked briefly as a teacher before the first of his books, “The Blinder”, was published in 1966. “A Kestrel For A Knave” followed two years later. In 1969, Hines helped write the screenplay for “Kes”, the film directed by Loach which was based on the book. The film won two BAFTA awards.

Fellow writers paid tribute to Hines on Twitter. “Chocolat” author Joanne Harris said: “I hated and loved him at the same time - for writ-



Barry Hines

ing the world I saw every day, and for giving me hope to escape it...” Jonathan Coe added that “A Kestrel For A Knave” had left “an indelible mark on all who read it”. Hines’s other work included 1984’s “Threads”, a terrifying TV film which envisioned the impact of a Cold War nuclear attack on the northern English city of Sheffield. —AFP



This undated photo provided by Sotheby’s shows the 9.54 carat blue diamond ring worn for decades by child star-turned-ambassador Shirley Temple, which is going up for auction on April 19, 2016 by Sotheby’s in New York. —AP photos

Blue diamond worn for years by Shirley Temple up for auction

A blue diamond ring that child star-turned-diplomat Shirley Temple wore for decades is going up for auction. Sotheby’s says the 9.54 carat ring is among the more than 300 lots in the “Magnificent Jewels” auction scheduled for April 19 in New York. It has a pre-sale estimate of between \$25 million and \$35 million. Sotheby’s says Temple’s father bought the cushion-cut stone for her around her 12th birthday in 1940 for \$7,210. She wore it throughout her life, as can be seen in a photograph from The Associated Press from September 1969.

“This was a treasured piece of jewelry that she wore and enjoyed her entire life,” said Frank Everett, sales director for Sotheby’s jewelry department in New York. The actress was the immensely popular star of numerous movies in the 1930s, known for her bouncy curls and outgoing personality. As Shirley Temple Black, she had a long career in public service. She died in February 2014 at the age of 85.

Everett said that the ring had been sold by her estate to a private buyer and that buyer was now putting it up for auction. The ring is being sold in its original platinum and diamond setting, and a gold setting Temple had made for it will be included as well, Everett said. —AP

China punishes ‘Ip Man 3’ distributor for box office fraud

China’s film authorities have suspended the license of a distributor that inflated box office figures for Hong Kong martial arts movie “Ip Man 3,” according to state media. The third installment of the franchise starring Donnie Yen opened in mainland China on March 4 and soon attracted allegations of fraud after it reportedly earned more than 500 million yuan (\$77 million) in just four days. The movie’s distributor, Dayinmu, which is also known as Beijing Max Screen, admitted to having bought 56 million yuan’s (\$9 million’s) worth of tickets, the official Xinhua News Agency reported Saturday.

“The conspirators fabricated more than 7,600 screenings of the film that they claimed generated 32 million yuan (\$5 million) in ticket sales,” Xinhua added. It cited China’s film bureau under the broadcasting regulator. “These kinds of issues could be considered inevitable in a

young industry, but box office fraud has become so serious that it is already harming Chinese cinema,” Zhang Hongsen, head of the film bureau, was quoted as saying. The bureau ordered the company to suspend distribution for a month while it “rectifies all malpractices” and gave formal warnings to three electronic ticket-selling groups involved in the fraud, as well as 73 cinemas, Xinhua said.

No phone number was listed for Dayinmu, and it had no immediate statement on its official microblog. Chinese cinemas and distributors have been accused of faking ticket sales in the past, for example by buying up tickets or counting some of the earnings of one film as those of another. While a distributor will have to fork out money to buy thousands of cinema tickets, the bulk-buying may boost the movie’s profile enough to become a talking-point and attract a bigger audience. —AP



Safat Home announces the ‘Bath & Tiles’ event in Kuwait

As part of holding the biggest bathrooms event of the year on Saturday, Safat Home was proud to bring two of the world’s well-known tile brands to Kuwait and exclusively to its Al-Shuwaikh showroom, from 6:00 pm to 9:00 pm, plus new products from existing brands: TOTO, KLUDI and KLUDI RAK.

Al-Forsan Ceramics from Saudi Arabia and Royal Tiles from Egypt equally reflect today’s contemporary needs with a touch of elegance and attention to detail. Safat Home’s tile offerings hail from the world’s most creative minds and experienced professionals who have worked in ceram-

ics and tiles manufacturing for years, utilizing high-end equipment that ensures maximum production efficiency and value for the customer. Combining minimalist designs with modern functionality, the new tiles are immediately fashionable, whose styles are characterized as effortlessly simple while being elegantly unique. Made from high quality material with state-of-the-art technology, smartly priced to fit all budgets, the new tiles range is designed to transform any bathroom into a contemporary heaven of luxury.

Safat Home is also the existing home

to three internationally renowned sanitary ware manufacturers: TOTO, KLUDI Germany and KLUDI RAK. TOTO is Japan’s leading producer of sanitary ware, whose technological innovations and high standard of quality have made it an iconic and much-loved brand in Japan, brilliantly elevating the bathroom from the merely functional to the restorative and meditative. Along with the brand’s life-enhancing Clean Technology, all TOTO products come with a five-year warranty.

KLUDI Germany, which thanks to its craftsmanship, skills, and wealth of experience, is more than capable to offer

designs solutions that meet the demands of everyday life, not to mention a range of mixers and accessories, plus a 10-year warranty.

KLUDI RAK, the Emirate-based ceramics and sanitary ware manufacturer that built its outstanding reputation by delivering technically perfect and highly functional products and solutions that serve the needs from the middle-tier to the high-end. Offering a 10-year warranty as well, the innovative and trendsetting new designs of KLUDI RAK are all set to take the field of bathroom architecture to a new level.



—Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Models display creations by Japanese designer Hiroko Koshino at her 2016 autumn/winter collection show during Tokyo Fashion Week. — AFP

Japan's

Apparel industry in hi-tech bid to secure future

From ready-to-wear knits manufactured instantly to customized dresses produced on inkjet printers, Japan's apparel industry is turning to state-of-the-art technology in a bold bid to cut labor costs and secure its future. At manufacturing giant Shima Seiki's factory in western Japan, garments materialize in minutes, thanks to digitally-programmed automated machines that can turn out a sample seam-free pullover in half an hour with a push of a button.

The WholeGarment system patented by the Japanese manufacturer and sold to knitwear companies like Italian luxury brand Max Mara includes a digital design system that allows users to choose patterns, colors and cuts. Originally known for glove-making machinery, Shima Seiki took a technological leap in the 1990s in an effort to revive the flagging fortunes of Japanese apparel manufacturers. "Everyone was going overseas to cheaper destinations for manufacturing and we wanted to stop that from happening," said Kenji Iwamoto of Shima Seiki.

The WholeGarment system allows one worker to operate 10 machines—thereby lowering labor costs—and uses limited raw material to create seam-free

garments that generate no waste, since they require no cutting or sewing. After a slow start that saw around a dozen brands from Japan and Italy sign up the first year, today some 800 companies—nearly half of them Japanese—have jumped on board, contributing to Shima Seiki's 60 percent share of the global market for knitting machines.

The initiative is part of a push by Japan's knitwear industry to capitalize on its technical know-how to create garments that cannot be replicated elsewhere at a lower cost. For young knitwear designers like Motohiro Tanji and Ken Oe, manufacturing outside of Japan isn't an option. "It's easier for me to work with Japanese manufacturers," Tanji told AFP after his show at Tokyo Fashion Week. "My designs are complicated and demand a high level of technical skill which I can find here," said Tanji, who relies on Japanese factories to produce his sculptural, sophisticated knits. Designer Oe's label Coohem emerged out of a push to save his grandfather's textile company, Yonetomi, which had been in the throes of a decline since the 1990s recession. Oe joined the company six years ago and introduced an emphasis on using digital tools to create intricate high-fashion



tweed suits that are now stocked at leading stores, including New York-based Jeffrey and Harvey Nichols in Hong Kong. "We use about five yarns at a time to design original textiles... (which) other brands cannot copy," Oe told AFP.

One of a kind

The focus on technique and technology has already paid off, with Japan's knitwear sector registering a 40 percent increase in exports over a 10-year period beginning in 2006, a rare bright spot in an otherwise dismal picture for textile and apparel exports from the country. Recognizing the need for reinvention in the apparel sector, Japanese textile company Seiren, known more for manufacturing curtains and car interiors, is now fusing fashion and digital know-how to launch a customised clothing line for the masses.

The Viscotecs brand, available to customers at Tokyo's Takashimaya department stores since September, invites customers to try on a sample outfit in a dressing room specially fitted with a camera that downloads their image onto a hand-held device. They can then choose from a dizzying array of

options—including patterns, fabrics, colors and lengths—displayed on the tablet to create a one-of-a-kind dress.

The design data is digitally transmitted to Seiren's factory in central Japan where the garment is brought to life via pattern-cutting machines and inkjet printers before being delivered to the store in three weeks. The process has the potential to transform the fashion industry by cutting down on unsold inventory, which either ends up in the bargain bin or as landfill. In addition, the use of inkjet printers slashes the amount of water and energy utilized in conventional dyeing methods by at least 80 percent, Nami Yoshida, a spokeswoman for Seiren, told AFP.

However, buying into the brand comes at a cost, with dresses priced between 65,000 to 80,000 yen (\$600 to \$700). "It may take time but we are confident that once customers know the brand, sales will follow," said Mayumi Yamakawa, a spokeswoman for Takashimaya. For Oe, whose label derives its name from a Japanese word, "kouhen," a reference to knitting specialists, the revival of his industry is inseparable from an investment in technique and technology alike. — AFP

How Japan's first dressmaking school changed women's lives

Born out of a drive to make Western-style clothing accessible, Tokyo's Bunka Fashion College unleashed a sartorial and social revolution among Japanese women after it opened nearly a century ago. And while its current 21-storey concrete structure in the heart of Tokyo's business district doesn't scream high-fashion, it is the place to be for anyone aspiring to work in Japan's design industry. Dressed in head-turning outfits, Bunka students—young, confident and largely female—make no attempt to blend in with the hordes of suited salary-men marching to work.

"We are used to standing out," said 21-year-old Erika Yoshino, towering over passers-by in six-inch platform shoes. "If you spot someone fashionable around here you just know they are from Bunka," she told AFP at the end of a long night working on her final-year collection. Japanese fashion is now associated with cutting-edge designers—and Bunka graduates—like Yohji Yamamoto and Kenzo Takada. But when Isaburo Namiki founded the country's first dressmaking school in 1923 the traditional kimono still dominated women's wardrobes.

"Western-style clothing for women wasn't very easy to find and even when you could find dresses, they didn't necessarily fit Japanese bodies well," said Samuel Thomas, lecturer at Bunka Gakuen University, the graduate school associated with the college. In the beginning, most applicants were looking for alternatives to the complicated, layered kimono and simply wanted to learn how to make clothes for themselves.

"Bunka offered these women a chance to access the modernity represented by western clothing," Thomas told AFP. "The change in

how the body was presented—from being wrapped in layers in a kimono to the mobility offered by a dress—allowed women to redefine themselves," he said. Buoyed by Bunka's success, dressmaking schools sprouted up across Japan. "After the war ended, the number of women attending dressmaking schools drastically increased," said Izumi Miyachi, deputy managing editor of Yomiuri Shimbun newspaper, referring to World War II.

"Women who had lost their husbands believed that dressmaking skills would help them support themselves," said Miyachi, who has long covered fashion. Among the students was Fumi Yamamoto, a young war widow and single mother who opened a dressmaking shop in Tokyo after graduating from Bunka. By 1955, Japan was home to some 2,700 dressmaking schools, up from 400 just eight years earlier, according to Miyachi.

Dressmakers to designers

With Western-style clothing no longer a novelty, Bunka students were eager to experiment and soon, another fashion revolution was on the way with a new generation eager to make the transition from dressmaker to designer. Many of them were the children of dressmakers like Fumi Yamamoto's son, the renowned Yohji Yamamoto, and the Koshino sisters—Hiroko, Junko and Michiko whose mother, Ayako, ran a tailoring studio outside Osaka. "For every 100 female students, there were some five male students," Hiroko Koshino told AFP in the run-up to her latest showing at Tokyo fashion week.

"Boys were quiet while girls played an active role," she added. Koshino said that she saw the fashion world as the domain of



women who believed in "the idea that women can design clothes for women." After Kenzo Takada made his debut in New York in 1970, Hiroko Koshino followed up his success by becoming the first Japanese designer to show in Rome in 1978. Junko Koshino debuted her collection in Paris the same year while youngest sibling Michiko's trendsetting label, Michiko London, became a hit on the clubbing circuit in 1980s Britain.

Decades later, the sisters and Hiroko's



Born out of a drive to make Western-style clothing accessible, Tokyo's Bunka Fashion College unleashed a sartorial and social revolution among Japanese women after it opened nearly a century ago. — AFP photos



daughter, Yuma, all run their own labels, responsible for businesses that span the globe—a rarity in Japan's male-dominated society. Women still outnumber men signifi-

cantly at Bunka, where anyone who can cope with a raft of deadlines and master a demanding curriculum—often working on a single stitch for hours until it's deemed perfect—leaves with a degree that opens doors across the competitive industry. "The students are held to a tough standard regardless of whether they are male or female," said Thomas, the lecturer. "That said, there are a lot of women at Bunka and it tends to be an empowering experience for them."

The ability to thrive in a high-pressure environment helps explain why many of Bunka's 300,000 alumnae—who have their pick of applicants—hire interns from the same pool, effectively ensuring its dominance of Japanese fashion. "Everyone remembers what it's like to go through the Bunka process, how difficult it can be, so they tend to hire people with the Bunka seal of approval," Thomas said. — AFP



Blouses and purses on display at the Encore Plus consignment store in Boca Raton, Fla.



A floor-length Chanel sequin dress greets shoppers at the Fashionista consignment store in Palm Beach, Fla.

Bargains abound in Palm Beach's upscale consignment shops



A rack of fur coats on display at the Fashionista consignment store in Palm Beach, Fla.



A display of shoes, shirts and jackets are seen at the Encore Plus consignment store in Boca Raton, Fla.



A pair of evening gowns are displayed at the Paradise Lost consignment store in Palm Beach, Fla.

On the sunny island of Palm Beach, black-tie galas are common, Sunday brunch is \$100 and a beachside hotel room can cost more than \$2,000 a night in high season. But there are bargains to be found. The snowbird's paradise has a thriving high-end consignment market for designer and often barely worn castoffs. The island's busy society calendar means twice-daily costume changes in a land of labels that include Chanel, Hermes, Valentino, Gucci and Prada. Many of these garments and accessories make their way to a handful of exclusive consignment boutiques and a few even trickle down to bargain thrift shops.

"They sometimes don't even wear it. They're shopping constantly. If it's last season they can't wear it anymore. And they wear it all just once, including the shoes and the handbag," says Monique Javarone, owner of Fashionista Palm Beach, an upscale boutique that specializes in vintage. Often store owners go to multi-million dollar estates and sort through racks of designer clothing for clients who don't want the stigma of being seen in a consignment store or who have too much to transport.

"It's wonderful here. You can look like a million for under a hundred," said Paulette Cooper Noble, author of "Bargain Shopping in Palm Beach and Broward Counties." While the stores are full of colorful, lightweight Missoni, Pucci and even Lilly Pulitzer garments on the lower end, there's one label that reigns. "The thing that everybody wants year after year is Chanel. It's still the No. 1 consignment handbag. Even the shoes are still No. 1 ... it's that very classic, never go out of style look," said Sean Connolly, owner of the Paradise Lost boutiques.

Popular items

At Encore Plus Boutique in Boca Raton, Ayla Habibi said Chanel purses are also her No. 1 seller and range from \$800 to \$4,700 (sold new, the purses can exceed \$5,000). Handbags are the most popular items at most of the stores, where Hermes and Louis Vuitton are close seconds. "The Chanel and Hermes fly out the door," said Lisa Stark, owner of Serendipity in Boca Raton, who also posts items on Instagram. "As soon as we post things, the phone starts ringing."



A variety of Hermes scarves and bags are displayed at the Serendipity consignment store in Boca Raton, Fla. — AP photos

When she first started more than a decade ago, the in-demand items were ball gowns and St. John, a luxury knitwear brand, but now she says women dress more casually. The Palm Beach hand-me-downs are so good that fashionistas from all over the world vie for them online. A handful of the stores have started selling their items at upscale web retailers like 1stdibs. "Half of what we sell goes overseas," said Javarone, who says her online business has doubled in recent years. Many customers seek out the store after first seeing her items online.

From time to time

If the upscale boutiques aren't interested, the clothes and accessories may make their way to some of the area's thrift shops. The thrift stores are also a good spot for lower-end designers like Tory Burch, Lilly Pulitzer and Milly. "We do get Hermes from time to time, men's ties, scarves, pocket squares," said Goodwill Embassy Boutique assistance store manager Becky Shore. The store recently had Christian Dior china and sold a slightly chipped Baccarat crystal horse for \$199. —AP



A display at the Serendipity consignment store in Boca Raton, Fla.



Photo shows the Chanel room at the Classic Collections consignment store in Palm Beach, Fla.



A variety of Louis Vuitton bags are seen at the Paradise Lost consignment store in Palm Beach, Fla.

Workers' revenge on France's richest man is feelgood cinema hit

It's the year's least likely feelgood hit film in which the little guys take on France's richest man and end up laughing all the way to the bank. A documentary about an unemployed middle aged couple in one of France's poorest towns so desperately in debt that they were on the point of burning their home has been playing to packed cinemas, with audiences cheering in the aisles.

"Merci Patron!" (Thanks boss!) may sound like a film to slit your wrists to, but it has become a hilarious rallying cry for thousands of French workers who have lost their jobs-or fear losing them-to cheaper foreign labor.

In the film, former textile workers Jocelyne and Serge Klur not only take on the "king of the catwalk" Bernard Arnault for "ruining their lives" by delocalizing their jobs to Poland-they make him pay. With the help of leftwing activist and film-maker Francois Ruffin they set up a sting operation to get the cash to save their home and land Serge a full-time job, running rings round Arnault's sidekicks, including a former intelligence officer and a politician from the ruling Socialist party. In the process the couple, from the depressed Nord region close to the Belgium border where Arnault built his LVMH

fashion and luxury goods empire, have become the country's new working-class heroes.

David and Goliath

Protestors demonstrating against reforms of France's labor laws have taken up the film's title as a slogan on marches and sung its "Merci Patron!" theme song-a 1970s comic skit urging bosses and workers to swap places. The billionaire himself has remained tightlipped about the affair, with LVMH-which owns such fabled brands as Dior, Givenchy and Louis Vuitton-declining to comment to AFP. Critics however have hailed the film as a "David and Goliath stick-up that does the heart good" with Telerama calling it a "joyous thriller... with a perfect mix of humor and social comment."

It also tops French website Allocine's audience ratings of the best films currently on release alongside another documentary, "Demain" (Tomorrow), which showcases positive solutions to the global climate crisis. Ruffin said the film's magic was its "liberating effect" on audiences. "When you see such an empire trembling in front of something so insignificant it has a liberating effect," he insisted. "People leave the cinema enthusiastic and ready to act."



"Thank you boss" ("Merci patron") is the first documentary of French journalist Francois Ruffin. — AFP

Sociologist Michel Pincon said its Michael Moore-style scenario had caught the mood of a country where "people crave a little security in a world where capitalism has become more and

more unbridled." Pincon admitted that the movie's "audiences were mostly middle class" but the debates after screenings "prove that they too are also worried for themselves and their children".

Drink and stinky cheese

The film plays strongly on France's working-class northern "Ch'ti" culture, contrasting the locals love of drinks, French fries and stinky Maroilles cheese with Arnault, who owns the Moet & Chandon, Dom Perignon and Veuve Clicquot drink houses. John Baxter, an American who saw the film in Paris, described the atmosphere in the packed cinema as "electric".

But he could never imagine a US business leader compensating former workers years after getting rid of them. "Arnault is the bad guy of course-and the sting is at his expense-but he doesn't come out of it all bad. He clearly has some kind of a conscience. Most American business leaders would not give these people the time of day. They would just blow them off," he added.

Arnault sparked the wrath of the French left in 2012 when he applied for Belgian nationality after the government proposed higher taxes on

the rich, prompting the Liberation newspaper to run the front page headline, "Clear off, rich loser!" Like its protagonists, the film faced an against-the-odds battle to get made, losing half of its tiny 30,000-euro (\$33,000) budget when state funding was withdrawn "without explanation" at the last minute.

Journalists working at France's highest selling national newspaper, Le Parisien-which is owned by Arnault-claimed they were banned from writing about it.

The host of a top radio show also admitted that the film's director Ruffin was "uninvited" from his show after management intervened, apparently fearing they would lose advertising from Arnault's businesses.

But with more 120,000 people flocking to see the film on little more than word of mouth, it is now being expanded onto nine times as many screens across France.

Meanwhile, the Kenzo suits that the Klurs once made in Poix-du-Nord are now manufactured in Bulgaria after LVMH switched production from Poland after wages rose. But salaries have fallen so sharply in crisis-hit Greece that the Bulgarian factory's owners are considering moving some operations there. — AFP

Lifestyle

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An Iranian woman paints on a giant decorative egg at the Mellat park during an event organized by the municipality of Tehran, ahead of the Persian new year Noruz. — AFP

Century-old Beirut racetrack faces run for money

Beirut's Hippodrome has survived wars and relentless upheaval but the iconic racetrack, where rival fighters once gathered to bet on their days off, approaches its centenary facing an uncertain future. The Hippodrome was built in 1916 by the Ottoman Turks. During the civil war it was used as a neutral site where enemy combatants could meet. One of the city's last remaining green spaces, it is now suffering financial difficulties and a dearth of investment. Should the racecourse close for good, the land could fall into the hands of property developers who have already turned Beirut into a concrete jungle.

"The city council refuses to invest, each time offering a different excuse, and this really worries us," said Nabil de Freige, head of the Society for the Protection and Improvement of the Arabian Horse. De Freige, who is also Lebanon's minister for administrative reform, fears that the country's ancient tradition of horse breeding will suffer a heavy blow if the racetrack shuts. "This place provides a livelihood for trainers, jockeys, grooms, employees, vets, breeders and farmers — 1,500 families in total, and all that will disappear," he said. Before Lebanon's 1975-1990 civil war, the track was the only one in the Middle East where horse-racing fans could gather to place their bets.

Races were held twice a week, bringing in about half a million dollars (450,000 euros) a week in wagers. But the war reduced the number of horses kept in stables around the racecourse from 1,500 to 350. "Races were no longer held, and the bets dropped to no more than \$150,000" a week, said racecourse general manager Nabil Nasrallah. The Hippodrome, a potential gold mine for developers, covers an area of 200,000 square meters in the heart of the Lebanese capital.

'Project for the rich'

"If the Hippodrome closes, what guarantee would there be?" de Freige asked, questioning how the land could be kept from the developers. Nasrallah believes the only way forward is for the city council, which owns the racecourse, to invest in rebuilding the site. "We should be subsidized, like in any other country where there are horse



racers," he said. Beirut mayor Bilal Hamad, a Sunni Muslim, is reluctant to invest public money in a site where betting-prohibited in Islam-takes place. "The Hippodrome is part of Beirut's heritage. Why should bettors alone have access to it?" said Hamad, who would only agree to pour public funds into the racecourse if it were "opened to all" residents.

Hamad plans instead to set up what he calls Beirut Central Park—a golf course complete with an artificial lake, as well as a riding school. But Mohammed Ayoub, who heads an NGO named Nahnoo (We), denounced the idea. "A golf course—that's a project for the rich. Also, how can we create an artificial lake while we're suffering from a water shortage?" he said. "The city council wants to set up a costly commercial project and then hand it over to a private company."

Militia meeting point

Situated on a former civil war frontline that divided Christian, Sunni and Shiite neighborhoods, the racecourse is a mirror of recent

Lebanese history. A wall, riddled with bullet holes, still shows the green and red symbol of the French Foreign Legion, painted in 1982 by soldiers



deployed in the small Mediterranean country at the height of the war. "Militia fighters used to shoot at each other all week and meet here on

Sunday to place their bets," recalled trainer Ali Ahmed Seif Eddine. Enemy militia leaders would even meet in a secret hall under the stands.

The racecourse's various entrances allowed fighters to access the site from parts of the city that were blocked off from each other, and it was public enough to allay any fear of ambush or kidnapping. During the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, Israeli forces positioned behind the Hippodrome pounded Palestinian fighters on the other side. With the stables caught in the crossfire, it became impossible to access them. About 350 horses fell ill in the stifling summer heat and 17 lost their lives.

To evacuate the surviving animals, de Freige secured a truce thanks to then-president Elias Sarkis, a true lover of horses, and US special envoy Philip Habib. Like much of Beirut however, the racecourse did not fully recover. Once the horses had been evacuated, "Israel's air force and tanks destroyed all the stands, for no reason at all," de Freige said, and reconstruction was never completed. — AFP



Beirut's Hippodrome has survived wars and relentless upheaval but the iconic racetrack, where rival fighters once gathered to bet on their days off, approaches its centenary facing an uncertain future. — AFP photos