



ESTABLISHED 1961

THE FIRST DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF

TUESDAY, MARCH 22, 2016

JAMADA ALTHANI 13, 1437 AH

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Cabinet
deplores
Istanbul
bombing

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Syrian govt
rules out
talks on
Assad fate

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Clinton launches
another attack
on Trump in
her speech

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Khawaja leads
Aussies to
victory over
Bangladesh

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150 FILLS

NO: 16821

40 PAGES

OBAMA, CASTRO HOLD HISTORIC TALKS IN CUBA

TWO COUNTRIES TAKE ANOTHER STRIDE AWAY FROM COLD WAR-ERA ENMITY



Min 18°

Max 32°

High Tide

11:20 & 23:00

Low Tide

05:05 & 17:20

UN-LED YEMENI PEACE TALKS IN KUWAIT LIKELY

DUBAI: A new round of UN-brokered Yemeni peace talks could be held by the end of this month in Kuwait, a government official said yesterday. The talks would be accompanied by a ceasefire, much-needed in the war-torn country where a Saudi-led coalition launched a military campaign in support of the internationally-recognized government one year ago, said the Yemeni official who requested anonymity. Yemen's warring parties who met with UN envoy Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed last week have agreed on "the principle of holding a new round of talks in late March in Kuwait," the official told AFP.

The UN envoy wrote on his Facebook page late on Sunday that he held "positive and constructive talks" in rebel-held Sanaa with the Iran-backed Houthis and their allies-supporters of former president Ali Abdullah Saleh. "Preparations are ongoing for the next round of peace talks on Yemen," he wrote, without giving a specific date or location for the awaited negotiations.

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HAVANA: President Barack Obama holds talks with Cuban President Raul Castro during a meeting at the Palace of the Revolution yesterday in Havana. — AP

HAVANA: US President Barack Obama and President Raul Castro held historic talks in Havana yesterday, discussing enduring disagreements over Cuba's human rights record and Washington's trade embargo as the two countries took another stride away from Cold War-era animosity.

Obama arrived in Cuba on Sunday for the first visit by a US president in almost 90 years, achieving a goal for his final year in office that became possible after secret talks led to a 2014 agreement to normalize relations. The opening ended decades of US efforts to force Cuba to change through isolation. But Obama is under pressure from critics at home to push Castro's government to allow political dissent and to further open its Soviet-style state-run economy.

Obama began his first full day in the symbolic heart of Cuba's Communist system, starting in Revolution Square, where for decades Raul Castro's brother, Fidel Castro, led million-strong rallies against the evils of US "imperialism."

Obama laid a wreath at the memorial to independence hero Jose Marti, overlooked by a huge metal portrait of legendary rebel fighter Ernesto "Che" Guevara. "It is a great honor to pay tribute to Jose Marti, who gave his life for independence of his homeland. His passion for liberty, freedom, and self-determination lives on in the Cuban people today," Obama wrote in a guest book there. Marti was a 19th century poet and writer whose activism helped spur Cuba's freedom from Spain and whose legacy was later adopted by Fidel Castro's revolutionaries as a symbol of anti-imperialism.

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KUWAIT DEPORTS 14 FOR HEZBOLLAH LINKS

11 LEBANESE AND 3 IRAQIS EXPELLED

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti authorities have deported 11 Lebanese and three Iraqis for alleged links with Hezbollah, the movement classified by Gulf monarchies as a "terrorist" group, a local newspaper said yesterday. The 14 were recently expelled at the request of Kuwaiti security services after they were found to belong to Hezbollah, daily Al-Qabas reported, without providing further details.

The newspaper quoted a security official saying that a list had been prepared of Lebanese and Iraqi citizens, some in top corporate positions, "who are unwelcome and should be deported" from Kuwait. The deportations came amid an increasing crackdown by Gulf states on foreign citizens with alleged links to Iran-backed Hezbollah.

Al-Qabas cited a security source as saying

the 14 people had been expelled at the request of the state security service. The Interior Ministry was not immediately available for comment. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) named Hezbollah, an Iranian-allied Islamist political movement that is fighting for President Bashar Al-Assad in Syria's civil war, a terrorist group on March 2.

The Arab League declared Hezbollah a "terrorist" group on March 11, after Gulf monarchies did the same earlier this month over the movement's support for Assad's regime in Syria's war. Last week, Bahrain deported an unspecified number of Lebanese residents for alleged links to Hezbollah and Saudi Arabia warned that it will punish citizens and residents who "support or demonstrate belonging" to the group.

Riyadh last month halted a \$3 billion program for military aid to Beirut in protest against Hezbollah, which is a key political force in Lebanon and has lawmakers in its parliament.

The daily said Kuwait's state security body had prepared a list of "unwanted" Lebanese and Iraqis, including advisers to major companies, for deportation "in the public interest". At the time of the GCC decision, Secretary-General Abdullah Al-Zayani accused Hezbollah of recruiting young men to carry out terrorist attacks in Gulf states, smuggling in weapons and explosives, and inciting chaos, violence and political unrest. Hezbollah called the GCC decision "reckless and hostile" and blamed it on Saudi Arabia. — Agencies



CUPERTINO: Apple CEO Tim Cook, speaks at an event to announce new products and an update to the Apple Watch at Apple headquarters yesterday in Cupertino, California. — AP (See Also Page 27)

APPLE CUTS PRICE FOR NEW, MORE COMPACT IPHONE

CUPERTINO: Apple yesterday unveiled a new iPhone with a four-inch screen, aiming to reach consumers looking for a handset that is more affordable and compact than its flagship models. The new device-called the iPhone SE-will debut at \$399 for US customers without a contract subsidy, in a significant cut from the price of its larger iPhones.

Apple vice president Greg Joswiak said many consumers prefer smaller handsets, which accounted for 30 million units sold in 2015. "They want the most compact iPhone design," he told an Apple event in

Cupertino, California. "Some people asked us, pleaded with us to keep the four-inch iPhone in our lineup." The iPhone SE will be aimed at first-time Apple buyers and those who want to upgrade from the iPhone 5S and 5C, which have not been updated in over two years.

The iPhone 6S, the lowest-cost handset in the large-screen family, starts at \$649. Apple will be taking orders Thursday for the new phone in the United States, Britain, Australia, Canada, China, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Japan, New Zealand and Singapore, with more markets to come online in April. — AFP

KUWAIT URGES RECONSIDERED TALKS WITH IOC

KUWAIT: The head of the Kuwaiti government negotiation delegation for roadmap meeting with the International Olympic Committee (IOC) yesterday called for reconsidering the current way of negotiations between Kuwait and the IOC over the "unfair" Olympic suspension of Kuwaiti sports.

Dr Mohammad Alfili said the Kuwaiti move came following recent claims by IOC Deputy Director General for Relations Pere Miro that the Kuwaiti government had twice approved a draft deal with the IOC that was formulated during a Geneva meeting last January.

He voiced regret at the issuance of such "false claims and baseless statements" against Kuwait and its negotiation team, confirming that the IOC's team was not serious about finding a solution to lift the suspension of Kuwaiti sports. The IOC's suspension decision was based on misleading information claiming that Kuwaiti sports laws are not in compliance with the Olympic Charter and international sports regulations, he said. It was built on "side issues and questions as the IOC insisted during the negotiations on putting on table the extension of the deal between the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) and the Kuwaiti government which had recently severed its relationship with the OCA.

"Raising this issue pushes us to believe that the suspension decision whose reasons were announced officially, was not, in fact, due to the problem of sports laws, since it reflected a deliberate attempt to raise side issues and questions that have nothing to do whatsoever with the decision itself," Alfili lamented.

Asked if the Kuwaiti government negotiation team would continue its task, he said the team can do nothing but only to present recommendations

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BRUSSELS: In this image provided by the Belgian Federal Police yesterday, a combo photograph shows Najim Laachraoui, who was previously identified in a false passport as Soufiane Kayal by Belgium Federal Police, during a money transfer on Nov 17, 2015 in a Western Union bank in the Brussels region of Belgium. — AP

PARIS ATTACKS 'ACCOMPLICE' DNA FOUND ON EXPLOSIVES

BRUSSELS: Police have found the DNA of a newly-identified suspect on explosives used in last year's Paris attacks, a French source revealed yesterday, but Belgium's prosecutor admitted they are "far from solving the puzzle" of the massacre. Belgian and French prosecutors met in Brussels to discuss the probe into the November carnage following Friday's dramatic arrest of prime suspect Salah Abdeslam in the Belgian capital after four months on the run.

Belgian investigators named a suspected accomplice in the deadly November 13 attacks as Najim Laachraoui, who was previously known by the false name of Soufiane Kayal. Laachraoui used the false name to travel to Hungary in September with Abdeslam, who is the last known sur-

vivor of the 10 Paris attackers. Laachraoui is also believed to have travelled to Syria in February 2013.

Traces of DNA from the 24-year-old, who is still at large, were found on the explosives used in the gun and suicide attacks in Paris, a source close to the French investigation said. "We have not a bad amount of pieces of the puzzle and in the last few days several pieces have found their place," Frederic Van Leeuw told a news conference in Brussels, flanked by Paris prosecutor Francois Molins.

"But... we are still, far from solving the puzzle." Van Leeuw also admitted they "don't have the full timeline" for what Abdeslam did between November 14,

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QATAR OFFSHORE RIG CATCHES FIRE, 6 HURT

DUBAI: Fire broke out on an offshore rig run by the subsidiary of a Qatar-based drilling company, injuring six workers, the firm said yesterday, in the second disruption within a year aboard one of its platforms. Gulf International Services, partly owned by state-run Qatar Petroleum, announced the fire at its GDI-3 rig in a statement published on the Qatar Stock Exchange. It said workers had been preparing to move the Gulf Drilling International rig to a new location and later repaired it.

"Injured personnel consisting of six GDI employees were immediately transported to nearby hospitals and most of them (were) discharged after having received treatment," the statement said.

The statement did not say when the fire started, where the rig was or how much it cost to repair it. Phone numbers listed for

the company and its affiliate rang unanswered yesterday afternoon and officials did not immediately respond to email queries about the fire. The state-run Qatar News Agency reported the blaze yesterday, without offering any additional details.

Shares in GIS dropped 2 percent yesterday on the Qatar Stock Exchange to close at 37.45 Qatari riyals (\$10.28). This is the second major incident to strike a GIS rig. In July 2015, the newly built Qatari offshore rig Rumailah suffered what the company described as a "punch-through incident" while in the Al-Shaheen oil field off Qatar's northeastern coast. Norway's Aftenbladet newspaper published pictures purporting to show the accommodation unit listing and partially submerged after it collapsed into the water, its legs bent at an angle and small orange boats at its side. — AP



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives credentials of the newly-appointed Ambassador of Pakistan to Kuwait. —Amiri Diwan photos



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives credentials of the newly-appointed Ambassador of Montenegro to Kuwait.



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with members of the Islamic Center in Canada.

AMIR RECEIVES CREDENTIALS OF NEWLY-APPOINTED AMBASSADORS

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah yesterday received, at Bayan Palace, credentials of newly-appointed ambassadors of Pakistan, the Republic of Azerbaijan, Lesotho, Equatorial Guinea, Finland, Slovenia and Montenegro.

The ceremony was attended by First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Amiri Diwan Advisor Lieutenant General Khaled Abdullah Bodaj, Undersecretary of the Amiri Diwan Ibrahim Al-Shatti, Director of the Office of His Highness the Amir Ambassador Ahmad Fahad Al-Fahad, Amiri Diwan Adviser Mohammad Abulhassan, chief of Amiri Protocol Sheikh Khaled Al-Sabah, assistant foreign minister for protocol affairs Ambassador Dhari Al-Ajran and Chief of the Amiri Guards, Staff Brigadier Fahad Al-Zaid.

His Highness also received the outgoing Cambodian Ambassador Sman Manan, on the occasion of the end of the Ambassador's tenure.



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with the outgoing Cambodian Ambassador Sman Manan.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir received Sheikh Awwad Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Chairman of Sheikh Abdullah Al-

Nouri charity Jamal Al-Nouri and Supervisor of the Islamic Center in Canada Mohammad Abushahada.

His Highness the Amir extolled the center's philanthropic and humanitarian efforts, while wishing the center continued success and prosperity.

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah also received Sheikh Awwad and the rest of the Islamic Center in Canada members. He extolled the center's philanthropic and humanitarian efforts, which help showcase the bright, genuine image of the Islamic faith.

Also yesterday, His Highness the Crown Prince received Deputy Chief of the Ruling Family Board Sheikh Dr Ibrahim Al-Duajj Al-Sabah, Chief of Kuwait's National Security Bureau Sheikh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, as well as head of the Municipal Council Mhahalh Nasser Al-Khaled, who presented him with a copy of a book that chronicles recent Municipal Council accomplishments. —KUNA

FRANCOPHONE COUNTRIES, KUWAIT SHARE VALUES: SHEIKH NASSER

KUWAIT: His Highness Sheikh Nasser Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah said Sunday French-speaking countries and Kuwait share common values like freedom, equality, fraternity and tolerance which would contribute to further boost their mutual relations.

Celebrating the International Francophonie Day is not only a celebration of the French language "but about the culture built by this language, the culture of freedom, equality and fraternity, values of tolerance," His Highness Sheikh Nasser said.

"This culture is not different than ours, which was established years ago in Kuwait which made our society open to other cultures," His Highness Sheikh Nasser said in an event to mark the International Francophonie Day, held at the residency of the French Ambassador to Kuwait.

The event was held under the auspices of His Highness Sheikh Nasser. He said that the forefathers of Kuwait travelled to ports in the Indian Ocean and through deserts which got them acquainted with other cultures, ways of thinking and languages. "We inherited tolerance, accepting and recognizing the others which makes Kuwait eligible to be a vital and active cultural center in the region," he added.

Cultural investment

His Highness Sheikh Nasser called on the Francophone countries to embark on cultural investment in the region and to

begin from Kuwait. He cited the establishment of the French Language and Literature Department at the Faculty of Art in Kuwait University (KU) in cooperation with the Sorbonne, and welcomed the imminent opening of a branch of the Sorbonne in Kuwait, a matter that would further develop relations between Kuwait and France.

His Highness Sheikh Nasser expressed admiration in the francophonie, which was boosting dialogue and diversification among cultures. He noted that language was a social necessity and the most important tools of expression and thoughts.

His Highness Sheikh Nasser said the French language was world third largest in terms of vocabularies, with around 274 million people spoke the language around the world. Kuwait hosted 10 days ago cultural celebrations that would accompany the International Francophonie Day. The celebrations were co-held by the French Embassy and the National Council of Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL).

The celebrations were to highlight richness of French language and culture as well as the French language presence and spread in Kuwaiti educational and intellectual domains. The International Francophonie Day is observed within the International Organization of La Francophonie's 77 member states on March 20 to celebrate the French language and Francophone culture. —KUNA



KUWAIT: His Highness Sheikh Nasser Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah addresses the audience at a ceremony to celebrate the International Francophonie Day. —KUNA

KUWAITI WOMEN ENJOY CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS: MP

LUSAKA: A Kuwaiti member of parliament said yesterday that Kuwaiti women enjoy constitutional rights, primarily effective political involvement, and religious and legal protection. Speaking to reporters after attending an International Parliamentary Union (IPU) democracy committee meeting in the Zambian capital of Lusaka, MP Awwad Al-Rowaie said Kuwait has enabled women to practice their political rights thanks to religious legislations and historical practices.

He stressed that Kuwaiti women have never been subject to any form of intimidation and violence in the country. He opined that the issue of women's empowerment regarding effective political participation sharing responsibility with men is occasionally put on table owing to cultural and historical differences among people. "However, belief in women's political rights and empowerment differs from one person to another," the Kuwaiti MP argued.

Rowaie is a member of the Kuwaiti delegation, headed by National Assembly Speaker and Chairman of the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union Marzouq Al-Ghanem, to the 134th meeting of the IPU and meetings of the standing committees of International Peace and Security, Sustainable Development, Finance and Trade, Democracy and Human Rights and UN Affairs. The delegation also includes MPs Humoud Al-Hamdan, Faisal Al-Shaya, Hamdan Al-Azmi, Khalil Abdullah, and National Assembly Secretary General Allam Al-Kandari.

Globalization

Meanwhile, MP Abdullah said that it is necessary to fend off any influence by globalization on cultural particularities of different nations. Speaking at a debate of the IPU committee on sustainable development, Khalil Abdullah said the committee had discussed a draft resolution on permanent protection for cultural, material and non-material heritage, together with sever-

al other issues that seriously affect sustainable development and economy.

The Kuwaiti parliamentarian listed such main issues as conflicts, wars, growing terrorism and climate change worldwide. However, he emphasized that there are other reasons that could destroy cultural heritage, chiefly globalization that has much influence on cultural particularities. Abdullah underlined that resolutions bearing on globalization and global economic integration should envision effective safeguards that could protect and maintain people's cultures and civilizations.

War on terror

MP Hamdan had stated on Sunday that Kuwait is on the front-line of the international war on terror. "Kuwait stands on the front line in the war on terror," MP Hamdan said in his speech at a meeting of the Standing International Peace and Security Committee held on the sidelines of the IPU meeting.

He reiterated Kuwait's commitment to work hand in hand with regional and international partners to uproot terrorism scourge. He recalled His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's announcement that "terrorism has no religion," and his firm support to regional and international efforts to defeat it.

In this regard, Hamdan noted that the Kuwaiti government has rushed to sign the International Convention on the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism and the Arab Anti-Money Laundering and Combating of the Terrorism Finance. He pointed out that the international statistics show that over 48,000 terror attacks were carried out in the past 14 years and claimed the lives of over 107,000 people.

Hamdan stressed the crucial role of the parliaments in taking pre-emptive measures to dry up the resources of the terrorist groups and combat the spread of their destructive ideologies as well as to address the root causes of extremism. —KUNA



LUSAKA: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem delivers his speech at the 134th meeting of the International Parliamentary Union (IPU). —KUNA



KUWAIT: Envoy of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Mohammad Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah delivered a letter to UAE President Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan that touched on bilateral ties. The letter also discussed common issues that bond the two countries together. The letter was handed over to UAE Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan. —KUNA



KUWAIT: The Commercial Bank of Kuwait sponsored Kuwait National English School's annual charity day which was organized recently featuring several activities.

ISRAEL USES 'FORMAL' DEMOCRACY TO REPRESS PALESTINIANS: GHANEM

LUSAKA: National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem yesterday said the world cannot accept entities like Israel that practices all forms of repression, harassment and exclusion against people under "formal" democracy. Ghanem made the statement in his address at the 134th meeting of the International Parliamentary Union (IPU), held in Zambia under the theme "Rejuvenating democracy, giving voice to youth."

What is really worrying is the collective perception that as long as there is a firm form of democratic ruling, then all practices of a certain institution is accepted to live with and legalized, even if this entity contradicts all concepts of democracy, he said.

Here lies the enigma and the paradox as such institutions were created to reinforce the essence of democratic ruling and its philosophy - based on tolerance, equality and justice - as well as maintaining human rights. Once they deviate from the right path to achieve these goals, they pose a greater threat, he added.

According to Ghanem, it is hurtful and causes despair that all calls for democracy rejuvenation are quashed once the ordeal and daily events against the Palestinians in their occupied territories come to mind. It is injustice that has been running over seven decades, he said.

Concept of rights

Ghanem stressed that the concept behind democracy is first and last one of "rights," closely related to justice, equality

and freedom. The Kuwaiti chief parliamentarian referred to the daily scenes of perils and killing against the Palestinian people, running against the essence of the "rights" concept of democracy.

An Israeli soldier kills a Palestinian young man who uses a knife or a stone to defend his house, garden or school against heavily armed occupation forces. The soldier's act is legitimized through an elected parliament, the Knesset, while the "victim" is designated as a terrorist. This is the order of the day in the Palestinian territories. Is there a more absurd image or equation? He wondered.

The young man does not have a fire arm, but the international community tends to forget the fact that he is armed with the genuine right to defend his property and his people, and with the UN Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, issued decades ago, in addition to statements from the UNRWA, the FAO, the UNICEF as well as all international conventions that are supposed to preserve his natural right to live in peace on his land, Ghanem said.

Traditional terrorism, and the state terrorism Israeli practices, are two faces of the same coin, each using the other to make up flimsy excuses and justifications to "legitimize terrorism," Ghanem said. He concluded by reviewing a multitude of Israel's rights violations endorsed by the Knesset. Ghanem held the international community ethically responsible for countering and ending these violations. —KUNA



LUSAKA: MP Awwad Al-Rowaie (left) participates in the IPU's democracy committee meeting. —KUNA

CABINET DEPLORES ISTANBUL BOMBING

KUWAIT: The cabinet yesterday condemned a recent suicide explosion that targeted a shopping mall in Turkey's Istanbul City and left scores of people dead or injured, billing it as a "terrorist act." Five people were killed and at least 38 others wounded in a suicide attack that took place in central Istanbul on Saturday.

The cabinet denounced in a statement issued following its routine weekly meeting such terrorist acts that violate all international conventions and human values and norms, and prayed to Allah the Almighty to bless the victims' souls with mercy and those injured swift recovery.

Yemeni President

The cabinet was also informed about the outcomes of a recent visit to Kuwait by Yemeni President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi and his talks with His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, which had focused on the latest political and military developments in Yemen and bilateral cooperation in all domains.

Afterwards, the cabinet listened to a presentation by Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Mohammad Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah on the outcomes of his recent visits to Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar and Oman, during which he delivered letters from His Highness the Amir to their leaders on Gulf unity, cooperation, regional peace and stability and the latest regional and international developments.

At the onset of the meeting, the cabinet was apprised of a letter sent to His Highness the Amir by Swiss President Johann Schneider-Ammann on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of forging diplomatic relations between Kuwait and Switzerland.

In his letter, the Swiss president hailed historical relations between both nations and accepted an invitation from His Highness the Amir to former Swiss president Simonetta Sommaruga to visit Kuwait. The cabinet was also briefed on a letter sent to His Highness the Amir from Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk on existing ties between both friendly countries and ways of developing them in various fields.

Anti-corruption

In light of Law 2/2016 regarding the anti-corruption authority, the cabinet approved a draft decree appointing the body's chairman and deputy chairman, and referred it to His Highness the Amir. The cabinet also approved two draft decrees pertinent to an agreement between Kuwait and New Zealand on air services and a memo of understanding between Kuwait and Spain on economic cooperation. Furthermore, the cabinet appreciated Minister of Social Affairs and Minister of State for Planning and Development Hind Al-Subaih's reply to the recent parliamentary grilling and commended the MPs' understanding and responsibility during the discussions. — KUNA

BARRAK FINISHES MEDICAL TESTS, TAKEN BACK TO PRISON

MUNICIPAL COUNCIL AGENDA • CO-OPS CENSURED FOR PRICES

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: Former MP Musallam Al-Barrak yesterday finished undergoing medical tests at the Chest Hospital in the Sabah medical area in Shuwaikh and was returned to prison. Results of the tests have yet to be released. The firebrand populist ex-lawmaker is currently serving a two year jail sentence for insulting His Highness the Amir. Two photos of Al-Barrak walking through the hospital after the tests showed him surrounded by special forces. He was escorted to the hospital in handcuffs.

MP Hamdan Al-Azmi said that the transfer of Al-Barrak in such a high profile way with so much State Security was akin to the treatment of prisoners in the Guantanamo Bay prison and that the government was being provocative. Azmi described the measures as 'stricter than those followed with Gitmo detainees'. "The government has been proving on a daily basis that it is incapable of being up to responsibilities and only shows off by 'bullying' the Kuwaiti people," he said, noting that the current government had taken its full opportunity and that it was time it stepped down because Kuwait needs a stronger one capable of handling and solving the country's problems.

Municipal Council weekly meeting
The Municipal Council yesterday held its

weekly meeting which lasted for five hours and was headed by chairman Muhallal Al-Khaled. Speaking on the occasion, the council member and head of the legal and financial affairs committee, Mane' Al-Ajmi wondered about who was responsible for closing down Al-Qurain markets, especially when the municipality lost some related cases. He also expected that officials responsible for what he described as a 'financial crisis' would be prosecuted.

Discussing the telecom towers issue, Al-Ajmi stressed that the committee totally rejects installing them on co-ops and in residential areas because of health-related concerns expressed by the health ministry. The council also agreed to removing piles of used tires from Mina Abdullah to Erhayya area within a month.

Further, the council rejected a proposal to name the area to the north east of Suliabikhat 'Al-Kout'. It also refused changing the locations allotted for a power generation and water distillation plant in Nuwaiseeb to avoid violating the border security barriers in the south.

In addition, the council approved a proposal to name the main road in the diplomatic area in Mishref after the late Saudi Prince Saud Al-Faisal Al Saud. The council also approved a request made by the industry authority to increase the heights of the hotels being built in the fourth phase of the Avenues project in Al-Rai by 50 percent,



KUWAIT: Former MP Musallam Al-Barrak is being escorted out of the Chest Hospital under tightened security after he underwent medical tests.

noting that the project had become a major touristic attraction in Kuwait.

Violating co-ops may lose boards

The head of the prices committee at the Union of Consumer Cooperative Societies (UCCS), Sami Al-Munayyeh warned that co-ops that repeatedly violated the union's price-related directives might face the dissolution of their boards among other censures. He also noted that his committee's task in the process was to make the concerned reports and refer them to ministry

of social affairs and labor.

Speaking at the sidelines of an inspection he led at Hatteen Co-op, Munayyeh called for granting UCCS inspectors wider powers. He also said that Hatteen coOp was fined for not following the prices directives in seven items and stressed that a report would be accordingly submitted. Further, Munayyeh added that co-ops would also be fined for reducing prices without permission from the ministry of commerce the way they do during promotional sales.



Vehicles impounded during a crackdown at Abdullah Port stables, targeting reckless drivers.

MAN ARRESTED FOR SELLING FORGED WORK PERMITS

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Police arrested an employer's representative for selling forged work permits. Investigations went underway after an immigration department employee became suspicious when he received a transaction to issue a work permit for a farm that already had 60 registered workers. Detectives eventually discovered that the representative who worked for the farm's owner would forge transactions and issue work permits behind his employer's back. Moreover, it was discovered that the suspect is wanted to authorities to serve a three-year jail sentence for forgery. Police questioned a number of workers registered on the farm, and they said that each has paid nearly KD 500 to receive their work permits. The Indian man was subsequently arrested and referred to the relevant authorities for further action.

Meanwhile, detectives arrested an Egyptian man who entered Kuwait with a forged visa. The man had first gone to the foreign ministry for a transaction, but an employee there discovered that the visa was forged and referred him to detectives. The suspect said he gave his papers

to a person in Egypt to authenticate the work permit and criminal record, because he is not fit health wise. The man said that he paid 5,000 Egyptian pounds to receive the forged visa.

Vehicles impounded

Twelve vehicles were impounded during a crackdown carried out yesterday at Abdullah Port stables, targeting reckless drivers. In addition, police impounded 10 all-terrain vehicles (ATV), and arrested three persons with expired visas, four without valid IDs and one person for a money-related crime.

Burnt victim identified

Police managed to identify a person whose charred body was found behind a gas station in Sabah Al-Salem recently. A statement by the Interior Ministry's Relations and Security Media Department identified the victim as Mokhtar Ahmad, Indian national. Meanwhile, the case was filed as suicide, according to investigations which indicate that the man soaked himself with gasoline before setting himself ablaze. The man worked as a driver and lived with his father in Farwaniya. He left a message at home before com-

mitting suicide, telling his father that he will leave.

Suicide

A Pakistani barber committed suicide by hanging on the rooftop of his house in Sulaibikhat yesterday. Police found the body hanging from a wooden ladder, and summoned paramedics who pronounced him dead on the scene. Investigations are underway to determine the man's motives being committing suicide.

Sorcery

Ahmadi detectives arrested an Egyptian man for importing sorcery tools into Kuwait. Detectives learned that he imports sorcery material, and practices witchcraft in exchange of KD 300 - KD 500 per client. Detectives sent an agent under cover, then arrested the man re-handled. The suspect confessed that he had been practicing sorcery for years, and receives up to KD 1,000 per client based on request. Further investigations revealed that the man used to smuggle the sorcery items by hiding them in stuffed chicken that he brought with him back to Kuwait whenever he traveled. He is currently held pending deportation.

COMMERCE MINISTER REJECTS CRITICISM

ASSEMBLY NEWS • NEW PHARMACIES LAW

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Minister of Commerce and Industry Dr Yousuf Al-Ali rejected criticisms that he had failed to respond to a lawmaker's request for information in a timely manner. Ali said that he would never ignore any parliamentary inquiry and that he always transparently responded to inquiries providing all needed information regardless of the time and effort. Ali said he would check to find out why his office had not asked for a longer grace period to prepare responses to questions sent by MP Ahmed Al-Qudhiabi. The lawmaker has warned that he would grill the minister for failing to respond to his inquiries within the official period as stipulated by National Assembly regulations. The subject of the Qudhiabi's query was not revealed.

Lawmaker slams Dashti

MP Dr Abdullah Maayouf strongly slammed recent statements made by his colleague MP Abdul Hameed Dashti and accused him of insisting on embarrassing both the government and the parliament as well as slandering Gulf Cooperation Council states. Maayouf criticized a statement made by the controversial MP Dashti regarding Bashar Al-Assad. Maayouf also called for measures to be taken against Dashti, such as withdrawing his citizenship.

Moussa rejects criticism over grilling

MP Majed Moussa strongly denied criticism that he had changed his position on the grilling of Minister of Social Affairs and Labor Hind Al-Subaih and stressed that he did sign the no confidence motion. "Reports claiming that I withdrew my signature from the no confidence motion are untrue and everybody knows that lack of quorum was the reason behind not declaring the names of the motion supporters," he explained noting that some leaks had used his name for unknown reasons. Moussa also warned that he would expose and refute such allegations and attempts to defame him.

Divorced women's fund

Minister of Justice, Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Yaqoub Al-Sane announced plans



Commerce Minister Yousuf Al-Ali

to launch a special fund to grant divorced women loans to help them until they received a final court order on mandating their divorce and marital expenses. "It is unacceptable to leave a divorced women facing problems alone or taking loans from other bodies," he said, noting that a special committee had been formed to present simple loans that would be paid back to the fund once beneficiary women received their expenses through court verdicts.

Pharmacies law

The parliamentary health affairs committee finished discussing amendments to law number 23/1996 pertaining organizing pharmaceutical practices. In this regard, committee chairman Talal Al-Jallal stressed that the suggested amendments would have positive impact on medicine prices and would restrict pharmacy licenses to Kuwaitis, private hospitals (with over 50 beds) and co-ops, provided that the pharmacists working in co-op pharmacies are Kuwaiti nationals. The amendments also included allowing co-ops that have more than a supermarket to open more than one pharmacy provided issuing a license for each and appointing Kuwaiti pharmacists in them.

EPA CONDUCTS CAMPAIGN AT SUBHAN INDUSTRIAL AREA

KUWAIT: The Environment Public Authority (EPA) carried out an unscheduled campaign at the Subhan industrial area to make sure that factories are committed to environment standards. It is the fifth campaign launched by the authority against factories which violate the law, Dr Meshaal Al-Ibrahim, head of EPA's department of industrial environment, told reporters on Sunday during the tour that they registered some violations committed by three factories which did not abide by the law of environment.

The violations are related to engineering-related terms of factories like storage capacity, safety of workers, ventilation, dangerous wastes and liquid wastes, he added. The violators may face heavy penalties like a three-year jail sentence and a fine from KD 5,000 to 50,000, he said, adding that they are given a grace period of 15 days to pay the fine. He underlined the necessity of abiding by the terms and standards of the environment so as to avoid risks, indicating that the authority continues launching such campaigns to apply the law. — KUNA

In Brief

CROWN PRINCE PATRONIZES STUDENTS' GRADUATION

KUWAIT: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah will patronize and attend Kuwait University's (KU) annual graduation ceremony for the academic year, 2014-2015. The graduation ceremony is scheduled today at the KU sports stadium in Shuwaikh district, starting at 6:00 pm. — KUNA



AUSTRALIAN OFFICIAL LAUDS ECONOMIC TIES WITH GCC

CANBERRA: Australian Minister for Trade and Investment Steven Ciobo yesterday stressed on his country's keenness on developing cooperation with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, particularly in trade and investment. This came during talks between Minister Ciobo and GCC ambassadors to Australia, held in the capital Canberra. The two parties, during the meeting, tackled bilateral relations and ways of developing the ties, Kuwait Embassy in Australia said in a statement. — KUNA



TANZANIA EXTOLS KUWAITI CHARITY

KUWAIT: Tanzanian Prime Minister Kassim Majaliwa yesterday praised the Kuwaiti charity societies for their efforts to help the needy in his country. During a meeting with Director General of the Kuwaiti Direct Aid Society Abdullah Al-Sumait, Majaliwa pointed to the prime importance of the projects carried out by these societies in the East African country. — KUNA



Photo

of the day



KUWAIT: The Palace of Justice is seen through the window of a building in Kuwait City.— Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

KISR HOSTS REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON MANAGEMENT OF PROTECTED AREAS

KUWAIT: Director General of Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) Dr Samira Omar on Sunday highlighted the importance of conserving the ecosystem particularly at nature reserves. "KISR plays an important role in drawing up the national strategy for environment protection and conservation of nature," she said in an inaugural speech to a regional workshop on "conservation and management of protected areas."

The event is co-organized by KISR and the West Asia Commission on Ecosystem Management (CEM) of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). "This function reflected the KISR commitment to upgrading the management of protected areas and conserving the biodiversity and ecosystem," Dr Omar pointed out.

KISR is working out solutions and programs for protecting the wildlife based on the latest standards and preventing the depletion of natural resources, thus contributing to the economic development, she noted.

Impact of climate change, pollutants

On the agenda of the event, she said it includes debates on management of protected areas, the far-reaching impacts of the climate change and pollutants on wildlife, and surveillance of the ecosystem.

Meanwhile, Fayza Al-Yamani, executive director of KISR environment research center, said the workshop gathered environment experts from the IUCN West Asia member countries and beyond to review the latest techniques for protecting land and marine wildlife.

"The discussions will focus on the best practices for protecting the endangered species and challenges facing the environmentally sustainable development due to urban expansion," she disclosed.

"The State of Kuwait and other countries in the region face an accelerated depletion of the wildlife which constitutes a treasure of natural resources, including the flora and fauna life and mineral resources," she went on.

Al-Yamani cited the IUCN studies as showing that the cause of the degenerating ecosystem within and beyond the region lies in ineffective and poor govern-



KUWAIT: Director General of Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR) Dr Samira Omar speaks during the workshop. —KUNA

nance of use of natural resources. She pointed out that KISR is assessing the impacts of the oil pollutants and human activities, including the urban expansions, on environment and developed programs for rehabilitating the damaged areas.

Kuwait's nature preserves

KISR designated Kabad as the first protected area which turned later into an environment research station. Sabah Al-Ahmad area became the second nature reserve in the country, Al-Yamani said. KISR suggests established other nature reserves in Boubyan Island and the northern area, and including them in the list of protected areas of the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (known as the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands), she added.

Adopted in the Iranian city of Ramsar in 1971 and came into force in 1975, the Convention provides the framework for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. IUCN West Asia member countries are Kuwait, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Bahrain, Qatar, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Yemen, Iraq and Iran. — KUNA

HANDICAPPED GOES GLOBETROTTING TO SPREAD MESSAGE OF SAFE DRIVING

By Sajeev K Peter

KUWAIT: In his handicap motorbike, Indian national B V Narayan set off from the city of Bangalore in February 2015 on a single-minded, globetrotting mission to create awareness about safe driving. An ex-cyclist and handicapped, he arrived in Kuwait from Bahrain on March 6 as part of his expedition to cover 25 countries.

"I want to tell all parents not to give two-wheelers to young children. Never use cell phones while driving and walking on roads. Never drink and drive," Narayan said, cautioning people about the common, but often ignored rules about road safety.

Sitting in the library of the Indian Embassy in Kuwait, he spoke to Kuwait Times briefly as to why he has undertaken the mission to go around the world on his motorbike. He also seeks to encourage the handicapped people not to get disheartened or feel helpless because they are physically challenged.

90,000 kilometers

As a young cyclist, Narayan set out on a cycle expedition across the world in 1980s in order to spread the message of road safety. Then he completed 59 countries covering

around 90,000 kilometers in a bicycle that was designed by himself. "I undertook the journey in order to create awareness among youngsters about the importance of road safety so that we can help reduce the number of handicapped people in the world," he said.

"During my first journey when I travelled across the world, things were much easier. There were not many problems in the world as we see today. I used to get visa within 15 minutes or maximum by a day. I could cover all the Gulf countries by road. Now, on a motorbike, I take more time because of visa restrictions," he recalled. That time Narayan visited most of the African and European countries, South American states, the United States and Canada.

Experience

Recalling his experience, Narayan said he himself became a minor handicapped after he was hit by a college student while he was walking on the road in Bangalore. He came to know that he became a victim of a reckless bike race organized by college students.

During the second expedition, Narayan covered almost all states of India by September 2015 and continued his next leg of the journey through the GCC states. "I have

so far covered Dubai, Qatar, Saudi and Bahrain. Then I had to go back to India on some emergency," he said. From India, Narayan went back to Bahrain and reached Kuwait. From Kuwait, Narayan plans to take a ferry to Iran as he is not permitted to travel through Iraq by road. From Iraq, he will visit Turkey and then to Europe on way to the US and Canada. On his return, he plans to cover African countries.

Inspiration

Narayan, a 10th grade dropout, got inspiration from his father, who was a mechanical engineer. He started designing special vehicle for the handicapped during his young age and used to support the handicapped people to become self-sufficient in travel.

Narayan also designed a unique wheelchair for the disabled which is fully equipped with a protection guard and alarm safety measures. It is self-propelled unlike usual wheelchairs. "In this wheelchair, the user can sleep, eat, read and even use a laptop," he said. Narayan is expected to get his visa to Iran in another one week's time. In the meantime, he will be available for people or associations for consultations or holding sessions on road safety.



KUWAIT: B V Narayan, who arrived in Kuwait on March 6 as part of his expedition to cover 25 countries, sits in the library of the Indian Embassy in Kuwait.



A motorbike designed by Narayan for the handicapped.



KUWAIT: Minister of Information Sheikh Salman Al-Sabah opens the 'Architectural Modernism in Kuwait' exhibition. —KUNA



MINISTER OPENS ARCHITECTURAL MODERNISM EXHIBITION

KUWAIT: Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Sheikh Salman Sabah Al-Sabah on Sunday highlighted the significance of the 'Architectural Modernism in Kuwait' exhibition and the book ensuing from the event. The exhibition is being organized by Dar Al-Athar al-Islamiyyah (DAI) in collaboration with Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Science (KFAS).

"The event and the book helped document the creative works of Kuwaiti architects that contributed to Kuwait's urban development between 1949 and 1989," he said after inaugurating the event tonight.

Sheikh Salman, also president of the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL), attributed the success of the event to DAI's commitment to the principle of corporate social responsibility and the support of KFAS. He renewed NCCAL's commitment to support the innovative activities of DAI. He advised the Kuwaiti architects to read the book to benefit from the useful information on the experiences of the old generation of architects while contributing to the urban development in the

country.

Sheikha Hessa Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, the general supervisor of DAI, said the event is meant to shed light on the contributions of the founders of Kuwait's modern architecture. She noted that Kuwait was able to attract the world's best architects in the 1960s and 1970s to lay the groundwork for urban development and design school, hospital and government buildings. KFAS Director General Dr Adnan Shehab-Eddin said in his inaugural speech that the gathering of veteran architects aims to explore the unique dimensions of the Kuwaiti architecture which features the cultural identity of the country. "The designs of buildings, homes, streets and marketplaces built in middle of the last century are marked by great aesthetic appeal," he added.

Former minister of public works Khaled Al-Isa, former minister of municipal affairs Dr Ibrahim Al-Shaheen and professor of architecture at Kuwait University's College of Engineering and Petroleum Dr Mohammad Al-Jassar addressed at the event about their previous experiences. —KUNA

CULTURAL DAYS INTRODUCE AUDIENCE TO BEAUTY OF TAJIKISTAN: ENVOY

'KUWAITI INVESTORS CAN COME TO TAJIKISTAN WITHOUT VISA'

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The opening of the Tajik cultural days in Kuwait takes place during celebrations of Kuwait as the capital of Islamic culture in 2016. The opening ceremony takes place on Thursday, March 24th, 2016 at Abdul Hussain Abdul Redha Theatre in Salmiya. Officials, ambassadors, poets and writers who are interested in culture are set to attend the event.

Speaking to Kuwait Times, Dr Zubaydullo Zubaydov, Ambassador of Tajikistan to Kuwait, said that the Embassy of Tajikistan appreciates the existing cultural ties between the two countries. He further emphasized the importance of such exchanges in strengthening bilateral relations. He underscored the fact that shared cultural affinities and similar religious values helped build relations and cement friendships on the people to people level between the two countries.

"Kuwait was among the first Arab and GCC countries to establish diplomatic relations with Tajikistan in 1993 and several high level exchanges have taken place during these 21 years of relations," Zubaydov said. "There has been remarkable progress in relations between the two countries since then."

Beauty of Tajikistan

Zubaydov told Kuwait Times that the culture week, where 35 organizations are set to participate, is going to introduce the

beauty of Tajikistan to the Kuwaiti people. The embassy will be offering a Tajik food event as well as a variety of Tajik cultural, art and music shows, he said. The Tajik cultural week will also celebrate the anniversary of 25 years of founding Tajikistan as an independent country.

On a cultural note, Ambassador Dr Zubaydov told Kuwait Times

country would be in a festive mood, the ambassador said.

Tourism

About tourism in Tajikistan, the ambassador said that his country has 'amazing potential' when it comes to tourism, with its historical sites and hospitable people. "Tajikistan is famous since ancient times with its high moun-

Asia comes from Tajikistan," he pointed out.

Ambassador Zubaydov reiterated that Tajikistan and Kuwait have a lot in common from shared cultural affinities to shared religious values. "This will help renew our friendship and bring the people of the two nations closer together," he remarked.

Students' trip

Ambassador Dr Zubaydov disclosed that a trip to Tajikistan organized by the embassy will take a group of students and professors from Kuwait University to visit his country in September and witness the beauty of Tajikistan and have the chance to write a report about it.

This will pave the way for more visitors to come and see for themselves the facilities and natural beauty his country has to offer. "Tajikistan is a very exciting and peaceful country," he added. "Peaceful time can be spent while surrounded by rich nature, culture and history. It also takes you three hours to be there. Kuwaitis can receive their visas in one day, and investors can go there without a visa." The ambassador hoped more travelers from Kuwait would begin visiting his country.

In conclusion, Ambassador Zubaydov thanked His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and people of Kuwait for their unwavering support and cooperation, and wish Kuwait peace and prosperity.



KUWAIT: Zubaydullo Zubaydov, Ambassador of Tajikistan speaks to Kuwait Times. —Photo by Joseph Shagra

about Nowruz, the annual feast of Tajikistan. Nowruz, meaning the first day of spring, is celebrated as the beginning of a new year, and the awakening of life. Many customs, ceremonies and performances are celebrated during Nowruz. Tajikistan celebrates Nowruz on March 21 every year with great pomp and joy, it is declared a three-day holiday, and the whole

lands, rivers, monuments and beautiful landscapes," the ambassador indicated. "It lies on the Great Silk Road route, and is a favorite place for tourists." Furthermore, he urged investors to invest in Tajikistan because of its location and nature. "More than 90 percent of the land is covered by mountains and 60 percent of the water in Central

EGYPTIAN ACADEMIC CONSIDERS ISLAMIC CALLIGRAPHY AS RITUAL

KUWAIT: Islamic calligraphy distinguished with Quranic and poetic verses is a form of rites, opined a visiting Egyptian academic Dr Heba Barakat, in a lecture about Islamic art at Kuwait University, narrated the historic story of assembling the Holy Book, the Quran, since times of the first Caliph, Abu Bakr Al-Seddeeq, indicating that the wording of the holy book signaled a new stage in documenting the Arabic composition and gram-

mar, noting that the first dictionaries were intended to preserve the Holy Book and make it easy for ordinary people to fathom its explicit and illicit interpretations and meanings.

The professor was speaking at a seminar, organized by the Egyptian Cultural Office, in cooperation with the National Council of Culture, Arts and Letters, as part of celebrations marking Kuwait as the

Islamic Cultural Capital.

Ordnance and tools used in the old wars were adorned with Quranic verses to empower the combatant with high morale, she said, noting that "La ilaha illallah" (There is no God but Allah) was engraved on a wide scale on the old arms and military pieces. Kuwait was proclaimed the Islamic Cultural Capital during the seventh conference of the Islamic ministers of culture. —KUNA

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Crime

Report

AMBASSADOR DENIES
MEDIATING IN KIDNAPPING

KUWAIT: Kuwait Ambassador to Iraq Ghassan Al-Zawawi denied that he was authorized to mediate in a kidnapping. Reports suggested that Zawawi was involved in the exchange of the bodies of three alleged Hezbollah members for the release of several Qataris detained in Iraq. Zawawi said "What was said about my authorization is totally untrue." Saudi media reported that "kidnappers of the Qataris in Iraq offered to exchange them with three bodies of Hezbollah fighters, who were among nine of the organization detained by the Islamic State (IS). Quoting an unnamed Iraqi source, the Saudi-owned newspaper Asharq Alawsat reported that "The original kidnappers of the Qataris had handed the captives to the Iraqi-based Hezbollah faction- which is directly affiliated with the Lebanon-based Hezbollah- and requested that negotiations be kept confidential. A measure taken for the conservatism of discretion was employing the Kuwaiti ambassador to carry out negotiations."

Car thieves arrested

Relations and Security Information Department said capital detectives arrested three women who were caught on video tape breaking into cars parked in front of houses in the Jaber Al-Ahmad area. The video tape was widely shared on social media across Kuwait. The department said the young women, whose ages were not made public, were sent to concerned authorities.

Fake detective robs man

A thief stole KD 9,000 from a cigarettes company representative, after claiming he was a detective and used a forged ID. The man handcuffed his victim in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh and then made off with the cash. A security source said an Indian who works for a tobacco company went to Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh police station while handcuffed, and told them that while he was distributing cigarettes to grocery stores, a man stopped him and tied him with a plastic tie, then searched his car and found a bag with KD 9,000 inside. The victim gave police the license plate number of the suspect.

Sorcery accusations

A citizen accused her relative of throwing sorcery items in front of her house in Qurain area, to keep her sisters from getting married. A security source said the woman lodged a complaint and told her they saw her relatives throwing papers and sorcery items in front of her house. She said she thought it was because the relative wanted her sisters to remain spinsters. Police are investigating.

Man steals ATM card

A Bangladeshi man accused a money exchange employee of stealing his ATM card, and gave him another when he transferred money to his country. A source said that the Bangladeshi went to the police station and told that after transferring the money, he left the shop then found out the ATM card was not his, then when he went back to the shop but the employee denied exchanging the card, then when he went and got a new card, he discovered that money was withdrawn from his account. — Al-Rai

PAAAFR TO ALLOW
CONDITIONED BBQ IN
CERTAIN PARKS: HASAWI

KUWAIT: Following repeated demands to allow picnickers to barbecue at public parks and beaches, Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources (PAAAFR) will soon allow barbecuing in parks according to rules and conditions that would be declared following their discussion with Kuwait Municipality next week.

The conditions include making sure that the barbecuing is done within the park, that the place is cleaned afterwards, and that security and safety procedures to protect picnickers as well as trees and the plants from fire are followed, PAAAFR Director Faisal Al-Hasawi said. He added that fires and damages caused by barbecuing in parks in the past cost the state around KD 4 million annually. Kuwait Municipality had banned barbecuing at public beaches and parks for environmental and safety reasons. Furthermore, Hasawi said that PAAAFR is also considering allowing barbecuing at parks located far enough from residential areas in order to protect residents from smoke emitting from the process. He also denied intentions to collect fees for barbecuing in parks.

Meanwhile, Hasawi said that there are 54 parks that will be built in new cities, to be added to the total number of parks in Kuwait which currently stands at 148. Increasing the number of parks number comes within the government's plan to increase greenery and recreational facilities, he explained. — Al-Rai

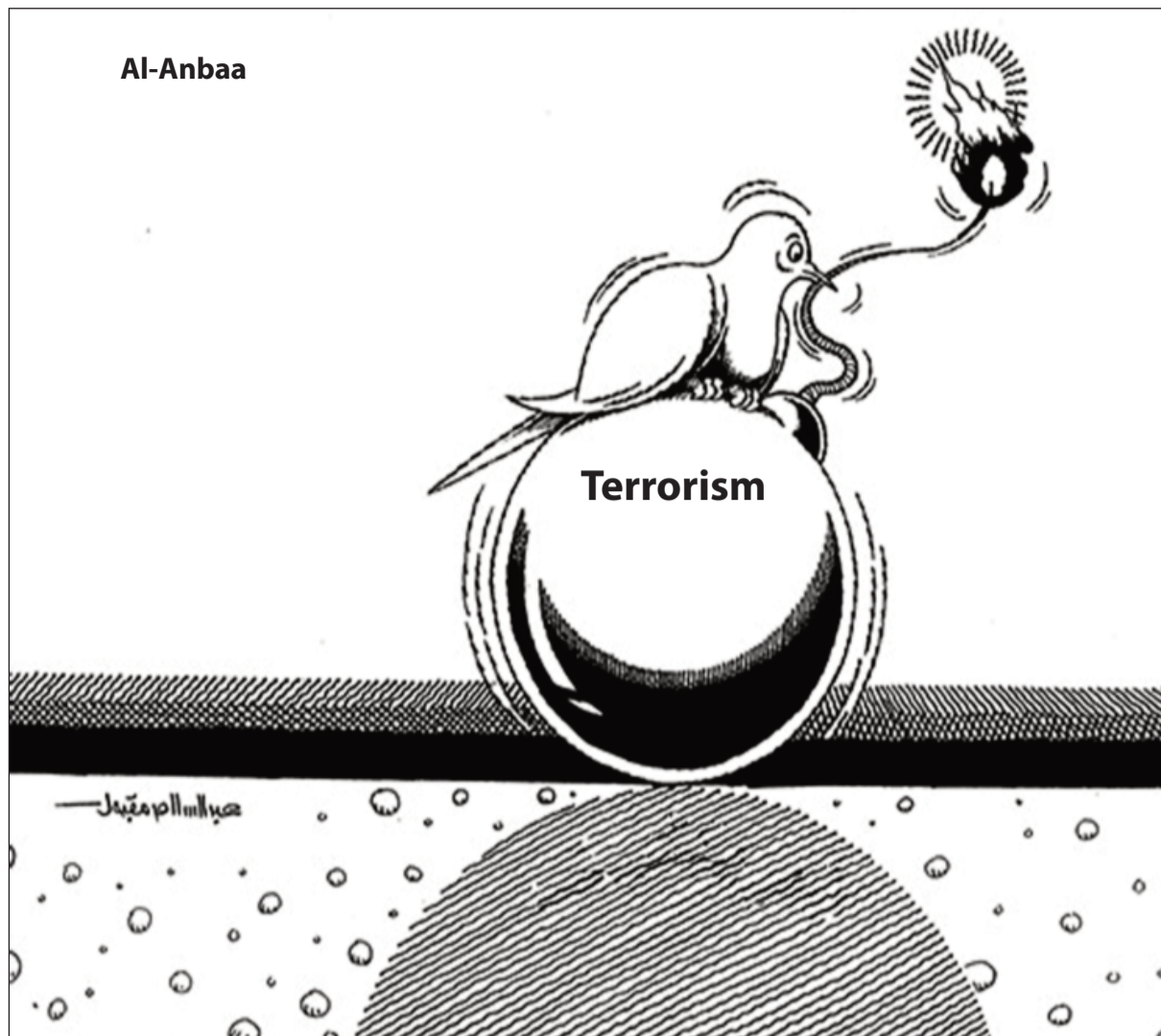
OFFICIAL DENIES ZUBAIDI
EXTENSION RUMORS

KUWAIT: An official source at the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources (PAAAFR) denied rumors that the Zubaidi fish (silver pomphret) has become endangered in Kuwaiti waters. The reduction in Zubaidi numbers at this time of year is normal, and is not an indication that it has reached an alarming rate, the source said. Fishing for Zubaidi is banned every year from June 1 to July 15. Retailers are allowed to import Zubaidi during the ban period, provided that they obtain permission from the PAAAFR. A similar ban on shrimp fishing is also enforced annually from mid-January until the first of September.

Kuwait has started in recent years to ban fishing for certain species for a specific period in order to protect those species from overfishing. Local authorities has identified Zubaidi, considered by many as the most popular seafood item in the Kuwaiti cuisine, as a main species that has come under threat of overfishing, and therefore a ban period was necessary to protect its numbers.

Meanwhile, the source said that PAAAFR still plans to establish the so-called 'floating cages project' on the long term, in order to help increase the fish reserves in Kuwait during the year. — Al-Anbaa

Al-Anbaa

KFH RECOGNIZED FOR PATRONIZING
GCC TRAFFIC WEEK 2016

KUWAIT: On the occasion of the unified GCC traffic week The Undersecretary - Ministry of Interior Major General Abdullah Al-Muhanna eulogizes Kuwait Finance House (KFH) on its efforts for supporting the educational security initiatives adopted by the Ministry and other activities organized by KFH in cooperation with the ministry. This cooperation comes to reiterate the significance of security in supporting economic environment. This support has

also highlighted KFH focus on performing its social mission.

KFH has been participating in this annual event for the seventh year in a row, emanating from its firm belief in the importance of synergy and concerted efforts of both private and public sectors for the sake of urging drivers and pedestrians to adhere to traffic rules and respect the law, which highlights the country's civilized face.

Moreover, he hailed the strong ties

between KFH and the Ministry of Interior, underscoring the key role of policemen in minimizing traffic congestions and achieving the highest levels of traffic security. He said that all GCC countries celebrate the GCC traffic week, revealing that it is filled with activities that encompass workshops, seminars, distributing leaflets and awareness brochures for road users in collaboration and coordination with ministries and official bodies.

OIL SECTOR EMPLOYEES'
UNIONS LASH OUT AT KPC

KUWAIT: Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) will continue with its 'rationalization' program including reduction in salaries, benefits and other incentives of staff despite oil workers' unions threats to strike. "KPC has a strategic plan ready to face any strikes," said unnamed sources within the industry quoted by the Al-Anbaa Arabic daily newspaper. The sources noted that the National Guards and oil facilities security staff would be used to run operations in case a strike takes place. The sources added that crews hired by contractors and expatriate employees would also be used to do the jobs of Kuwaiti employees on strike. Employees who strike will also be penalized for it.

Notably, oil sector syndicates have called on all members to meet today to decide on and declare measures to reject a 'payroll strategic alternative project' which would threaten salaries and benefits. They worry that the conflict will reach a dead end unless the government interferes and discusses the problem with oil syndicates and employees' unions.

Speaking on the occasion, the head of the KOC employees syndicate, Salah Al-Marzouq urged oil employees in general, and those of KOC in particular, to attend a rally today to declare their absolute rejection of KPC's plan to reduce incentives. "Oil employees' jobs are so dangerous. They deal with hazardous, toxic and lethal gases,

heights, dangerous drilling and operational units as well as remnant explosives leftover since the Iraqi invasion," Marzouq said.

Chairman of KNPC's employees syndicate Mohamed Al-Hajri stressed that his syndicate would fully cooperate with the oil employees union and other syndicates to protect employees rights. He added that today's meeting at the union's headquarters in Ahmadi would sound a loud message against attempts to undermine those rights. "Employees' responses will rock and everybody will realize that they cannot be taken as scapegoats," he underscored accusing oil sector officials' unsuccessful policies of forcing competent staff to quit working for the sector. — Al-Anbaa

الأنباء

Al-Anbaa

'SHEEP SPARE
PARTS FOR SALE'

By Thaar Al-Rasheedi

He is fifty years old. He first started working as a journalist for over ten years in his home country and specialized in feature stories, as he told me. Now, he has been working as a butcher in Kuwait for over 12 years. Well, I did not wish to go into the details of such a shift in life that made him switch careers from working in the world of journalism to work in the world of slaughterhouses. From someone holding a pen to report news and information, to another person holding a cleaver and selling sheep tongues, brains and legs. I did ask him however about how he shifted from being a journalist to become a butcher. "It is much better to fill people's stomachs with useful food than to fill their minds with harmful, incomplete and twisted information," he answered.

Honestly speaking, that answer was not convincing enough for me because I do not think his ideal justification of shifting from the world of ink into the world of blood. However, I believe that he is a 'media' person because he was the only butcher in Mubarakiya meat market whose store sign read like: 'Sheep Spare Parts for Sale.' It was a statement he had created, as he told me, and I believe that such a phrase can only be created by a real journalist.

The question here is; does the media really provide incomplete information? As a matter of fact, traditional media provides daily news and, according to the theory of the Gate Guards, those responsible for traditional media, be that the press or TV, do sift, validate and check the credibility of news before broadcasting it to recipients, which is the true technical media methodology. On the other hand, modern media (that of the people or the social media) is posted by normal unspecialized people who lack verification tools and skills. They do not even know them nor do they know how to source stories. So, their blogs are usually full of completely false stories. They might even, intentionally or with good will, spread rumors that might terrify the audience without any due cause.

Many of those working in modern media might not understand the meaning of true professional journalism, but I think that after passing the e-crimes and e-publication laws in Kuwait, things are back on the right track especially in terms of the seriousness of operators or such services are committed to simple publication principles. What is important now is that those taking modern media as a profession or a hobby should work on improving their journalistic skills through Kuwait University's Ongoing Educational Programs because they have become an integral part of Kuwait's media and new media platforms. So, developing their tools will benefit them, their readers and the media in general.

Some of modern media practitioners have overwhelming publicity and, at the same time, completely observe journalistic principles in the news they publish. I hope this includes them all because the media arena really needs new potentials shifting from amateurs to professionals.

— Translated by Kuwait Times

KU TO FREEZE
EXPAT JOBS

KUWAIT: Kuwait University Secretariat General has asked its administration to list 56 non Kuwaiti employees at the university in order to freeze their jobs in the next fiscal year 2016/2017. This means that the expats on the list will lose their jobs or their contracts will not be renewed and the positions will not be reopened again for expatriates but reserved only for Kuwaiti nationals. The secretariat said in an official letter that the decision follows from the Civil Service Commission (13/2007), in regards to the Kuwaitization of government jobs, and requirements to reduce non-Kuwaiti staff by 15 percent each year.

FOOD PROJECTS
DOMINATE
SMES IN KUWAIT

KUWAIT: Eighty three percent of small and medium enterprises (SME) in Kuwait are food-related, a parliament committee said. During a recent study for project under the National Fund for Supporting Small and Medium Enterprises, the National Assembly's budgets committee found that 49 out of 59 projects, or 83 percent, can be categorized under the nutrition sector. Committee chairman MP Adnan Abdulsamad said meanwhile that there are ten projects from Sabah Al-Ahmad Center for Giftedness and Creativity, adding the committee recommends having a strategic plan to guarantee the best distribution of projects supported by the fund. — Al-Qabas

MINISTRY PLANS TO
BUILD NEW CO-OPS

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor is preparing to establish more co-operative societies as part of a plan to expand this key sector, informed sources said. Building new co-ops, especially in new areas, helps create more fair play and competition between co-ops, thus benefiting shareholders in the process, the sources explained.

As part of the plan, the ministry has already agreed to establish new co-ops in Abu Fatira, Na'eem and Mangaf. Kuwait currently has 58 co-ops, most of which established recently, the sources said, adding that the ministry is trying hard to meet citizens' demands by establishing new co-ops. They said the total number of shareholders at those co-ops is 471,947, including 274,343 male and 197,604 female shareholders.

About dividing existing co-ops, sources said law number 118/2013 mentioned conditions of establishing, splitting up and establishing any co-op. The condition indicates that a new co-op must have at least 50 founders, all Kuwaiti and aged over 21, and none of them is convicted in a felony or misdemeanor related to honesty or credibility.

The sources said the ministry looks into applications submitted by founders related to dividing or establishing a co-op. — Al-Jarida



Breaking taboo, Hindu widows celebrate festival of colors

CLINTON LAUNCHES ANOTHER ATTACK ON TRUMP IN HER AIPAC SPEECH

REFUGEE DEAL 'UPHILL EFFORT', SAYS GREEK PM

EU'S MOGHERINI VOWS MORE AID FOR LEBANON WITH SYRIA REFUGEES



ATHENS: A girl looks out of a bus window after her arrival by ferry with hundreds other migrants and refugees from the northeastern Greek island of Lesbos to the port of Elefsina, west of Athens, yesterday. — AP

ATHENS: Greece's prime minister warned yesterday that an international agreement to limit the number of refugees traveling to Europe could not be properly implemented unless smugglers on the Turkish coast are stopped. Turkey's president, meanwhile, slammed European countries for their criticism of his country's record on human rights and media freedoms and accused them of failing to protect the rights of refugees.

The refugee agreement went into effect Sunday, under which Greek authorities will detain newly-arrived refugees and send them back to Turkey and the European Union will settle more refugees directly from Turkey and speed up financial aid to help Turkey care for the 2.7 million Syrian refugees it is hosting. Yesterday, however, the two sides were still working out details of how the migrants will be sent back.

"We have to make an uphill effort because implementation of this agreement will not be an easy issue," Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras said. Tsipras met in Athens with EU Migration Commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos and asked the EU to increase pressure on Turkey to crack down on smugglers. Greek government figures released yesterday said the number of stranded refugees in Greece now exceed 50,000 with no significant letdown in the number of daily arrivals. "Unfortunately, yesterday, there was a high number of arrivals, some 1,500," Tsipras said. "If a reduction of (refugee) flows does not occur, we will not be able to evacuate the islands successfully so that the deal can start to be implemented fully."

Four migrants died Sunday while trying to reach Greece, two men off the island of Lesbos and two girls off the tiny islet of Ro, the coast guard said, as smugglers appeared to be opting for more overnight trips and increasingly dangerous routes. Monitors from Turkey arrived Monday on the Greek islands of Lesbos and Chios to help supervise the agreement and were to stay for at least one week.

Greece's conservative opposition criticized the Turkish arrivals, a controversial topic as Greece and Turkey have ongoing boundary disputes in the Aegean Sea. In Istanbul, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Turkey had agreed to the refugee deal with the EU to prevent Syrian refugees from being subjected to "derogatory treatment" as they piled up at closed European borders.

He also criticized Western countries for rejecting Turkish proposals for the creation of a no-fly zone or other secure zones in Syria, which he said would have prevented Europe's refugee crisis. "All those who have not accepted a no-fly zone and a zone cleared of terror in Syria, and everyone who complains about the refugees are two-faced and hypocritical," the Turkish president said. On the Greek mainland, army person-

nel expanded refugee shelters at sites in central and northern Greece - mostly at former army bases - so migrants who traveled to the Greek islands before the agreement came into effect could be resettled. Ferries transporting them from the islands were using the port of Elefsina, west of Athens, instead of the main commercial port of Piraeus, to allow authorities to cope with the increased numbers of migrants.

More aid

EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini pledged yesterday during a visit to Lebanon to step up assistance to the tiny Mediterranean nation which is hosting over a million Syrian refugees. After meeting Lebanese Prime Minister Tammam Salam in Beirut, Mogherini told reporters the talks had centered on "how we can help each other in managing the immense refugee crisis we are both facing."

"We agreed from the European Union side to increase the support to Lebanon that has been significant so far," she said. "We are together in managing one of the worst if not the worst humanitarian crisis," she said after

also holding talks with Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil.

The EU has already granted Lebanon 1.5 billion euros (\$1.7 billion) since the outbreak of war in neighboring Syria in 2011, she said. Mogherini's visit came as Europe grapples with its worst migrant crisis since World War II. But while over a million migrants reached Europe's shores in 2015 alone, Syria's neighbors have shouldered the bulk of the refugee crisis triggered by the five-year war. Fragile Lebanon alone is hosting more than 1.1 million refugees—a huge number for a country of four million people. Mogherini's visit also came as a landmark EU-Turkish deal took effect, with Brussels seeking to curb the influx to Europe.

"Our work on Syrian refugees isn't only in Turkey but also very strong and from the very beginning in Lebanon," she said, adding that she would "bring the same message" on a visit to Amman today. Lebanon has since the outbreak of war in Syria become home to the world's highest refugee population per capita. Turkey hosts 2.7 million Syrians, while over 630,000 have sought shelter in Jordan, according to the United Nations. — Agencies

UN CHIEF FEARS OVER DR CONGO VOTE 'IMPASSE'

UNITED NATIONS: UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon expressed grave concern yesterday over the fate of elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo, warning of the danger of political violence. The DRC is supposed to hold elections in November, but the chances of them coming off has grown dimmer with each passing day and there are growing suspicions that President Joseph Kabila plans to extend his rule after his mandate runs out at the end of the year.

Speaking during a Security Council debate on the situation in Africa's Great Lakes region, Ban called on all parties "to settle their differences through dialogue and to create conditions conducive to holding timely and credible elections, in keeping with the constitution."

"I am very concerned by the impasse in the organization of the next elections," Ban said. "In the past, the political crises that have hit the Great Lakes region have turned into generalized violence and serious security problems. We must prevent this scenario from being repeated." —AFP

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PACIFIC NATIONS PAVE WAY PARIS CLIMATE ACCORD

MAJURO, Marshall Islands: Battered by massive cyclones, El Nino-fuelled drought and swollen king tides, fragile Pacific island nations vulnerable to climate change are leading the charge in implementing the landmark Paris climate deal.

The Marshall Islands is the latest Pacific nation after Fiji and Palau to adopt the historic deal which was agreed by 195 nations in December with the aim of curbing carbon emissions and limiting global warming. Scientists warn the low-lying island nations risk being swamped as sea levels rise, losing coastline, arable land and facing more extreme weather events.

Marshall Islands President Hilda Heine

said this vulnerability explained why the first three nations to confirm their Paris commitments were all from the Pacific. "By becoming one of the first countries to ratify the Paris agreement, we have shown our determination to continue to lead this fight from the front," she said after parliament ratified the Paris accord Friday.

The accord sets a target of limiting global warming to "well below" 2.0 degrees Celsius (3.6 Fahrenheit) compared to pre-industrial levels. World leaders will gather in New York on April 22 to formally sign the deal in an important statement of intent. However, ratification goes a step further, involving lawmakers agreeing on action plans that will take

concrete steps to address the problem.

The Pacific nations, among the strongest advocates for meaningful action in Paris, have been swift to ratify in the hope of setting an example for bigger nations. "(It) puts us closer to the goal we all set for (the) nation and ourselves to ensure that our children inherit a habitable, hospitable planet," Palau President Tommy Remengesau said when parliament voted to ratify last month.

'Walk the talk'

The Marshalls' ratification comes as the nation of about 55,000 people faces a severe drought that prompted Heine, elected in January, to declare a state of disaster last month. With almost no rain-

fall in the capital Majuro for months, tap water is rationed to four-hour blocks three days a week, when residents scramble to fill storage tanks and bottles.

The government has sent portable desalination units to remote communities as forecasters predict the drought may not ease until the second half of the year. The Marshalls' latest climate crisis follows extreme weather in recent years, including ferocious storms, and in 2014 the highest king tides recorded in three decades, which forced 1,000 to flee their homes and left more than US\$2.0 million worth of damage.

In Fiji, the urgency of the situation was underlined when super-cyclone Winston hit just days after the country ratified the

Paris agreement last month. The storm hammered the island nation, leaving 44 dead and about 50,000 homeless amid a trail of destruction. Palau-another ratification trailblazer-is in the grip of severe drought that has seen water rationing introduced after levels at the main dam servicing the capital Koror fell 90 percent.

These harsh climate realities have fuelled a push to ensure the Paris accord becomes more than just a deal on paper. "The Marshall Islands wants to lead by walking the talk," Heine said. She is planning to implement a US\$22 million solar project to produce renewable energy and has appointed former foreign minister Tony de Brum as the country's first climate change ambassador. —AFP

CLINTON LAUNCHES ANOTHER ATTACK ON TRUMP IN HER AIPAC SPEECH

'SORT OF A NEUTRAL GUY'

WASHINGTON: Hillary Clinton previewed an early line of Democratic attack against Donald Trump yesterday, casting the Republican front-runner as unqualified to handle heated international conflicts as commander in chief in her speech before a prominent pro-Israel advocacy organization.

Nearly all the presidential candidates are scheduled to address the annual policy conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, which draws top Jewish leaders from around the world. The event is a traditional stop for US politicians eager to demonstrate their foreign policy credentials.

Clinton rival Bernie Sanders, who is trying to become the first Jewish candidate to win a major party's presidential nomination, is skipping the AIPAC meeting for campaign appearances in Utah and Arizona, which have primary contests today.

Steady Hands

Clinton, a former secretary of state, used her address not only to highlight her decades of work in the Middle East but also to raise questions about Trump's credentials and trustworthiness. "We need steady hands," she told thousands of activists. "Not a president who says he's neutral on Monday, pro-Israel on Tuesday and who-knows-what on Wednesday because everything's negotiable." Israel's security, she proclaimed to loud applause, "is non-negotiable." Trump

sparked criticism from Republican allies of the Jewish state last month when he vowed to be a "sort of a neutral guy" on Israel. While the US is officially neutral in the Middle East conflict, his statement was a marked rhetorical departure for typically strongly pro-Israel US presidential candidates. Trump plans to details his plans for a peace deal in remarks before

He's meeting with nearly two dozen top party officials, consultants and members of Congress.

There were protests planned at many of his stops, with a group of rabbis planning to boycott his speech before AIPAC.

Mixed Record

Trump has a mixed record with



WASHINGTON: Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton speaks at the 2016 American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) yesterday. —AP

the organization on Monday night.

The billionaire businessman is using a rare day in Washington to try to woo a Republican establishment that's been reluctant, and in some cases, determined, to stop his rise to the party's nomination.

pro-Israel Republicans. He's refused to make the perennial Republican campaign promise of promising to move the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, drawing boos last year from the Republican Jewish Coalition.

Socially liberal Jews object to his controversial remarks about Mexican immigrants, women and Muslims, with some drawing analogies to the European persecution of Jews that eventually led to the Holocaust.

Clinton drew a similar parallel in her remarks, referencing a famous incident of a ship with Jewish refugees being turned away from the US in 1939. "We've had dark chapters in our history before," she said. "America should be better than this, and I believe it's our responsibility as citizens to say so. If you see bigotry, oppose it."

Clinton, who received a standing ovation from the group, has a long history in the Middle East, including overseeing as secretary of state the Obama administration's first attempt to broker Israeli-Palestinian peace. Her stance against Jewish settlements on land claimed by the Palestinians has been criticized by some in the pro-Israel community, but she has been received warmly by pro-Israel groups in the past.

She renewed promises to provide sophisticated defense technology to Israel and to quickly invite the country's prime minister to the White House, if elected president. And she offered subtle criticism of the Obama administration, which has had public rifts with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. —AP



BARCELONA: (Front row) Barcelona's mayor Ada Colau (3rd L), President of Catalan parliament Carme Forcadell (4th L), Catalan regional president Carles Puigdemont (5th L), rector of the University of Barcelona, Didac Ramirez (3rd R) and Spanish government delegate for Catalonia, Maria de los Llanos de Luna (2nd R), observe a minute's silence as they attend the tribute for the victims of Sunday's bus fatal accident at the University of Barcelona yesterday. —AFP

SPAIN: 7 OF 13 BUS CRASH VICTIMS WERE ITALIAN

MADRID: The 13 students killed in a bus crash in northeastern Spain this weekend were all women from other countries, including seven from Italy, a Catalan regional government official said yesterday. The other six included two Germans, an Austrian, a French woman, a Romanian and an Uzbekistani, Interior department director Jordi Jane said. Jane told reporters the victims were aged between 19 and 25 years.

The bus carrying 57 university students crashed Sunday near Freginals, halfway between the eastern coastal cities of Barcelona and Valencia. They were returning from a fireworks festival in Valencia. The students were studying in Barcelona as part of the Erasmus exchange program. Barcelona University planned to hold five minutes of silence at noon in memory of

the students. Twenty-three of the passengers remained in hospital, including six in serious condition, Jane said.

The official said the bus driver was being investigated for possible negligent homicide. The driver was initially reported to have been uninjured but was taken into a hospital in the town of Tortosa late Sunday with lung problems. He had been due to appear before a judge yesterday but the session was postponed.

Road conditions were good at the time of the crash. Spanish Interior Minister Jorge Fernandez Diaz said Sunday that the driver had passed alcohol and drug tests. Jane said families of the victims began arriving in Catalonia yesterday. The Erasmus program provides foreign exchange courses for students, mostly from the 28-nation European Union. —AP

CHAMPION RAMS FIGHT IN NIGERIA FOR CASH, GLORY

LAGOS: Champion ram King of Oils shows no visible signs of stress before his semi-final fight at the National Stadium in Lagos. The amber eyes of the snow-white ram barely register the raucous crowd 50 meters away but his outward tranquility belies a tenacity deep within.

Three and a half years ago, Dayo Folami bought King of Oils for less than 50,000 naira

It's exactly that innate will to battle that distinguishes ram fighting from other animal sports, Folami said. With eight weight categories and referees, the Ram Lovers Association of Nigeria (RLAM) is working to bring ram fighting into the mainstream by enforcing a strict set of rules to ensure ram safety and fair play. "We brought in rules and regulations of different weight cate-

between the hooves".

Agusto, his silver hair in a short mohawk and a thin gold chain necklace, said ram fighting is an escape from daily life in Nigeria, where poverty is endemic despite massive oil wealth. "They can't go to the polo club or golf club, never mind the boat club, so here they have an outlet to look forward to," he added.

Intimidating names

Hundreds of people gathered under a blazing sun to watch the rams fight on a sandy pitch, fenced off with orange and blue rope. Vendors sold popcorn and suya—a salty, spicy grilled meat served with red onions and tomatoes—while confectionists in striped outfits of mustard yellow and lime green performed in front of VIPs sitting in the shade under white tents.

Some rams are named after historic warriors (Attila the Hun, Spartacus), while others after devastating diseases (Ebola, Malaria). The Nigerian ram fighting rules state that at the start of a tournament rams are allowed to hit 30 "blows" before the referee calls a tie. By the finals, rams can headbutt up to 100 times.

But sometimes the fight never takes place at all, with unwilling rams high-tailing it to the safety of their owners amid laughs and jeers from the crowd.

At stake is a plethora of official prizes ranging from cars to kitchen appliances. More lucrative, however, is the gambling on the sidelines where men bet tens of thousands of naira on rams. "After football, this is what brings people together," said ram judging assistant Segun Odulate.

"If you come here you won't think anything more, you'll concentrate on the rams and you'll be happy." Perhaps no one was as happy as Folami, whose King of Oils won his semi-final match in just 10 blows. "I was very happy, I will fight in the final," he said. In the days before the ultimate match this coming weekend, Folami says no expense will be spared on King of Oils. "I'm going to give him special treatment, special food," he said. "I know we're going to win." —AFP



LAGOS: Two men negotiate the price of a bet at a ram fighting competition held at the National Stadium. —AFP

(\$250). Yet today the 39-year-old businessman says the ram is "priceless." "I've won a lot of money with the power he has," Folami, wearing a white T-shirt and dark jeans, said at Sunday's event. "He doesn't give up." What motivates King of Oils to dominate in the ring is a mystery, said Folami. "There is no winning secret of rams, you can never force them to fight."

gories, just like in boxing," RLAM member Basheer "Bash" Agusto said. "People expect to see fairness."

Agusto, the 68-year-old owner of champion ram Little Tiger—who competes in H, the lightest category—said the rams are "just like any other athlete". Once identified as a fighter "you make sure he's not lacking", Agusto explained, recommending to "give him vitamins and clean



GREECE: Migrants are reflected in a water puddle as they disembark a Greek coast guard vessel, off the coast of the Greek island of Lesbos, yesterday. More than 1 million migrants have entered Europe this year, the International Organization for Migration says. —AP

IS THE 17 MILLIONTH DUTCH RESIDENT A MIGRANT?

THE HAGUE: The official Dutch population counter has ticked over to 17 million amid speculation that the landmark may have been reached with the registration of a migrant rather than the birth of a child.

Earlier this month, the Central Bureau of Statistics said the 17 millionth inhabitant "could be a baby, a refugee from Syria, a worker from Poland, a student from China or a

returning Dutch person." It added "the chance is bigger that it is an immigrant than a baby" because more people are arriving in the country than are being born.

The population counter is an estimate tallied on the website of the government's official statistician. There is no way of knowing exactly who the small and densely populated nation's 17 millionth inhabitant really is. —AP

BRITISH PLANE SPOTTERS FACE JAIL IN KENYA

NAIROBI: Four British plane spotters were yesterday told to pay a fine or face a year in a Kenyan jail for photographing aircraft in the capital Nairobi. Aeroplane enthusiasts Paul Abbott, 47, Steve Gibson, 60, Ian Glover, 46, and Eddie Swift, 47, were arrested earlier this month at Wilson Airport, a small but busy regional hub used by bush pilots, tourists, humanitarian agencies and cargo carriers, after snapping pictures while sitting in an airport bar.

Yesterday chief magistrate Heston Nyaga at

the Makadara court in Nairobi found the four guilty of trespassing in a restricted area and taking photographs without permission. He fined each man 200,000 Kenya shillings (\$2,000 or 1,400 British pounds), warning that failure to pay would result in a year in jail.

The four friends, all from Greater Manchester, were on a two-week African plane-spotting holiday that took them to Ethiopia and then Kenya, posting snaps of planes on their Facebook pages, according to British newspaper reports.

"Eddie and his mates are just chaps who like taking pictures of planes," Peter Smith told The Sun newspaper, describing his brother as an "anorak," a term for somebody with a compulsive hobby. He told Britain's Mail on Sunday that the four had been forced into confessing to the trespass charge. "They pleaded guilty under duress," Smith said.

British plane spotters abroad have frequently found themselves in court, arrested on suspicion of espionage or terrorism, but the cases rarely result in jail time. —AFP



NAIROBI: British nationals, (from left) - Eddie Swift, Ian Glover, Paul Abbot (hidden), and Steve Gibson, talk with a lawyer from holding cell at a magistrates court yesterday. —AFP

INDIAN CITY BANS GATHERINGS OVER WATER RIOT FEARS

NEW DELHI: Authorities in western India have banned groups of people from gathering near water sources in a drought-ridden city following violent skirmishes between increasingly desperate residents, officials said yesterday.

Dnyaneshwar Chavan, the police chief of Latur, in Maharashtra state, said no more than five people were allowed at wells and public storage tanks at any one time over growing fears of water riots. "There have been incidents of violence," Chavan said. Latur, about 400 kilometres east of Mumbai, lies deep in the heart of India's arid central belt and its half-a-million residents are reeling from years of below-par monsoon rains.

Latur is part of Maharashtra's drought-hit Marathwada region. Several media reports say thousands of people, mostly poor farmers, have left the area recently

because of water scarcity. Last year around 1,400 farmers committed suicide in the region over crop failure from a lack of water and an inability to meet loan payments.

And officials fear the worst this year as most of Marathwada's lakes and reservoirs lie empty months before the annual monsoon is expected to arrive.

"The reservoir has completely dried up. We are trying to get water from other sources to cater to the demand," local official Pandurang Pole said. He said water was only being supplied to households through main's taps once a month, and that some of the 200 water tankers sent to make up the shortfall had been looted. There have been daily altercations at water-filling points, leading local officials to issue a ban on gatherings for two months, he added. —AFP



KOLKATA: An Ambassador taxi makes its way through a busy street of Burrabazar wholesale market in Kolkata, India, yesterday. The maker of the iconic Ambassador halted production on 2014 and gradually is replaced by newer models forcing its disappearance from Indian roads. —AP

NEPAL QUAKE RECONSTRUCTION CHIEF FACES GRAFT INVESTIGATION

KATHMANDU: The head of Nepal's earthquake reconstruction authority is being investigated following complaints of corruption and other irregularities, an anti-graft official said yesterday.

Sushil Gyawali was in December appointed chief of the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA), charged with spending \$4.1 billion in funds raised after the quake which killed nearly 9,000 people and destroyed more than half a million homes last April.

Spokesman Krishna Hari Pushkar said the Commission for the Investigation of the Abuse of Authority had received complaints about Gyawali's handling of decisions in his previous job as executive director of the Town Development Fund, as well as in his current role.

"Several complaints have been filed against him that allege he is colluding with NGOs and INGOs (international non-governmental organizations) in a way that is against

our system and procedure," said Pushkar.

He said there were also concerns at the slow pace of reconstruction and relief efforts. Gyawali, who is accompanying Nepal's prime minister on an official visit to China, was not immediately available for comment. His spokesman also declined to comment.

The government vowed last June to set up the NRA to oversee rebuilding and ensure that all aid went to victims, as part of its bid to attract funding from skeptical foreign donors. But political bickering over leadership of the body held up its formation until December.

With tens of thousands of the April 25 quake victims still living in tents, the government has been strongly criticized for delays in disbursing aid pledged by donors.

Corruption is rife throughout Nepal, ranked 126th out of 175 countries in watchdog Transparency International's global corruption perception index. —AFP



KATHMANDU: Displaced Nepalese residents queue to receive food and goods at a relief camp for survivors of the Nepal earthquake. —AFP

INDIA GETS 'FIRST' GAY MARRIAGE BUREAU

AHMEDABAD: An Indian entrepreneur has set up what is claimed to be the country's first gay marriage bureau, seeking to arrange matches for homosexual couples.

Benhur Samson, who previously helped foreign gay couples use surrogacy services, said he founded the agency in response to interest from clients. "I was surprised to see the response from the gay people whom I came in touch with while counseling them on surrogacy issue," he told AFP. "This is how I came upon the idea of a marriage bureau for gay men and women who want to settle down with a partner."

Samson, who lives in the United States, has enlisted the help of Manvendrasingh Gohil, an openly gay Indian prince, to help sort out immigration issues. "Several gay people of

Indian origin wanted an arranged marriage and were looking for partners from India," he said.

"We already got over 200 enquiries and nearly two dozen people have enrolled with us. "We are now in the process of identifying the right match for them."

Enrolment costs \$5,000, an unthinkably high sum for most Indians, although the fee is refundable if no match is found. The agency conducts background checks, visits prospective partners at home and at work and provides counseling, Samson said.

"I have not heard about such gay marriage bureau anywhere else (in India)," said Gohil, who is also a gay rights activist. Gay marriage and gay sex are both illegal in the conservative country and homosexuality has long been a taboo subject. —AFP



NEW DELHI: Indian Hindu widows throw flower petals during Holi celebrations at the Gopinath temple yesterday. —AP

BREAKING TABOO, HINDU WIDOWS CELEBRATE FESTIVAL OF COLORS

'I AM HAPPY, VERY HAPPY'

VRINDAVAN: Aruna Samaddar threw fistfuls of colored powder into the air. Blue and red and green, the cheerful colors settled on her white sari and all over other women nearby.

In most of India, widows like Samaddar have no place in this joyful celebration of Holi, the Hindu festival of colors. The country's millions of observant Hindu widows are expected to live out their days in quiet worship, dressed only in white. They are typically barred from all religious festivities because their very presence is considered inauspicious.

So for Samaddar, Monday's celebration was a joy long denied. "I am so happy. I am playing Holi after 12 years. I am happy, very happy," said Samaddar, who appeared to be in her early 30s. The powder made her white sari and those of the widows around her shimmer in myriad colors. So deep is the ostracization of widows that they're often shunned by their families and forced to seek shelter in temples.

The holy city of Vrindavan, in India's Uttar Pradesh state, is known as the City of Widows because it has given so many women shelter. And in recent years, widows have found a bit of color and joy here as well.

Aid group Sulabh International has been organizing regular Holi celebrations in Vrindavan since 2013. Samaddar and more than 1,000 other widows gathered in the courtyard of one of the city's oldest temples - devoted to Krishna, the most playful of the Hindu gods. The festival of Holi falls on Thursday this year, but in Vrindavan and many other parts of the country, the playing of colors begins a week ahead.

Hindu priests chanted religious verses as hundreds of widows splashed colored powders and played with water pistols filled with colored water. Showers of flower petals filled the air.

As loud music blasted, the younger women jostled with each other as they played with the colors. For dozens of older women, years

of social conditioning proved hard to break. They applied only tiny dots of color to each other's foreheads.

"Their participation in Holi symbolizes a break from tradition, which forbids a widow from wearing a colored sari, among many other things," said Bindeshwar Pathak, the head of Sulabh International.

needs and gives them a stipend of 2,000 rupees (\$30) to buy essentials. They are taught to make incense sticks and garlands to ensure that they can earn a small amount of money on their own. But for most part, the women spend the day singing hymns to Krishna, for which they earn 10 rupees (15 cents).



NEW DELHI: An Indian Hindu widow lies on a bed of flower petals during Holi celebrations at the Gopinath temple. —AP

Sulabh was asked to oversee the lives of widows of the city by India's Supreme Court following news reports of the widows being forced to beg for food and into prostitution. While there are tens of thousands of widows in Vrindavan, the group has been appointed caretaker for about 1,500.

The organization looks after their basic

The women range in age from 22 to 100. Some were abandoned by their families decades ago. While some women were not comfortable joining in the celebration of colors Samaddar was determined to have at least one day of cheer. "We have got just one day to celebrate life," she said as she tossed the colors joyfully. "Let's do it to the hilt!" —AP

BANGLADESH BANS SHIPS IN RARE DOLPHIN SANCTUARIES

DHAKA: Yesterday Bangladesh banned boats from sailing through a key southwestern river after a ship loaded with coal capsized, threatening the sanctuaries of rare dolphins in the world's largest mangrove forest.

The authorities imposed the ban after the ship sank in the Shela river on Saturday carrying over a thousand tons of coal, raising fears for two sanctuaries of endangered Irrawaddy and Ganges river dolphins and the delicate ecology of the Sundarbans forest.

"We have decided to ban all types of naval movement at the Shela river indefinitely," shipping secretary Ashok Madhob Roy told AFP, saying the ships would be rerouted to another channel on the edge of the forest.

Bangladesh suspended cargo boat transport through the same river in 2014 after a catastrophic oil spill that damaged the Sundarbans and triggered concerns for the forest's dolphins and other endangered animals including Bengal tigers.

But the suspension was lifted under pressure from local trade groups, who have said

the Shela river must be open for cargo vessels to ensure the smooth supply of industrial goods and food-grains to the southwestern region.

Officials said the hull of the vessel, which sank carrying more than 1,200 metric tons of coal and is yet to be salvaged, was cracked. "The sunken coal could pose grave threat to the aquatic biodiversity of the Sundarbans," forest conservator Zahir Uddin Ahmed told AFP.

"If the coal contains too much sulphur and if it dissolves into the water, then it is a dire con-

cern," Ahmed said. "The effect of oil spillage from the ship could also be damaging." Spread over 10,000 square kilometers the Sundarbans is the world's largest mangrove forest and the core part of it is a UNESCO-listed World Heritage Site.

The forest is home to scores of endangered Bengal tigers, spotted deers, fresh-water crocodiles and rare dolphins.

The pristine mangrove forest, said to be the South Asian nation's largest protection against tsunamis and cyclones, is already facing unprecedented

human and industrial encroachment and poaching by gangs of sophisticated pirates.

This month thousands of Bangladeshi environmental activists joined a 250-kilometer long-march to the country's southwest to protest the construction of two coal-fired power plants near the Sundarbans.

Experts fear the industrial waste of the 1,320-megawatt plant, a \$1.7 billion joint venture of India and Bangladesh, and another one by a private company would destroy the forest. —AFP

RAMPAGING ELEPHANTS KILL FIVE VILLAGERS IN INDIA

KOLKATA: Five people have been killed by wild elephants that went on the rampage, triggering panic in a village in eastern India, a local official said yesterday.

Another man was critically injured by the four elephants, who entered the village of Bhatar in West Bengal state on Sunday morning after apparently straying from their herd.

West Bengal forest minister Benoy Krishna Burman said the victims were trampled after angering the elephants by throwing stones to try to scare them off.

The male elephant died when it was hit by a tran-

quillizer dart fired by forestry officials summoned to help, and the other three - a female and two calves - ran away, Burman said.

Wildlife experts say encounters between humans and elephants are increasing in India's rural areas due to the destruction of the animals' habitat.

Last month a wild elephant went on an hours-long rampage in a town in eastern India, damaging about 100 homes, shops and other buildings.

Photos showed the bewildered animal wandering around Siliguri, about 577 kilometers north of Kolkata, crashing into structures, as people scurried out of the way. —AFP

CHINA SAYS US-PHILIPPINES BASE DEAL RAISES QUESTIONS

BEIJING: China said yesterday that agreements like the one reached last week by the United States and the Philippines allowing for a US military presence at five Philippine bases raised questions about militarization in the South China Sea.

The United States is keen to boost the military capabilities of East Asian countries and its own regional presence in the face of China's assertive pursuit of territorial claims in the South China Sea, one of the world's busiest trade routes.

The United States and its regional allies have expressed concern that China is militarizing the South China Sea with moves to build airfields and other military facilities on the islands it occupies. Asked about the base deal, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said that US-Philippine cooperation should not be targeted at any third party nor harm other nations' sovereignty or security interests. "I also want to point out that recently the US military likes to talk

about the so-called militarization of the South China Sea," Hua told a daily news conference. "Can they then explain, isn't this kind of continued strengthening of military deployments in the South China Sea and areas surrounding it considered militarization?"

China claims most of the energy-rich waters through which about \$5 trillion in ship-borne trade passes every year. Neighbors Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam also have

claims. The United States says it takes no sides in the disputes but wants to ensure free navigation through the sea. It has said it will increase what it calls freedom-of-navigation operations by its navy ships through the waters. US allies Malaysia and Australia both reiterated yesterday's calls for freedom of navigation through the South China Sea. "We've been extremely consistent in saying that our activities will continue, that we will send our ships and our planes to that part of the world as we

require, as it is necessary in accordance to international law," Australian Defense Minister Marise Payne said after meeting her counterpart in Malaysia.

Malaysian Defense Minister Hishammuddin Hussein said that free movement in the air and waters should continue. China has never interfered with freedom of navigation and has stressed that some of the equipment it is installing on small islands and reefs will facilitate navigation. — Reuters

GAMBIA SIDES WITH CHINA AFTER REJECTING TAIWAN 'DIPLOMATIC WAR WITH TAIWAN'

BEIJING: The small African nation of Gambia has established formal diplomatic ties with China after turning its back on rival Taiwan, amid speculation over possible retaliation by Beijing following the election of a new independence-leaning government in Taipei.

The signing of a Chinese-Gambian diplomatic communique in Beijing on Thursday marks the latest development in the ongoing diplomatic rivalry between Taiwan and China, which claims the self-governing island democracy is Chinese territory with no right to diplomatic recognition. The move follows the election in January of Tsai Ing-wen as Taiwan's next president despite Beijing's warnings of possible disruptions in relations. Tsai has refused to meet Beijing's demand that she endorse China's claim that the two are part of a single Chinese nation and observers are watching closely at how China will respond in the run-up to her May 20 inauguration.

Renewing diplomatic pressure after an informal seven-year truce under current China-friendly Taiwanese President Ma Ying-jeou is considered one way Beijing might try to influence public opinion on the island of 23 million. Taiwan has just 22 diplomatic allies, mostly small nations in Africa, the Pacific, Central America and the Caribbean. On Friday, China's Communist Party newspaper Global Times warned Tsai's pro-independence Democratic Progressive

Party against "provoking the mainland," but said the diplomatic truce still held.

Beijing's relations with Gambia "shouldn't be interpreted as a sign that the mainland will restart a 'diplomatic war' with Taiwan," the paper said. "It is unnecessary for the mainland to flex its muscles toward Taiwan in this way. Otherwise, the Taiwanese will feel oppressed."

'Strong dissatisfaction'

Gambia severed relations with Taiwan in November 2013 in hopes of forging ties with China. It has pledged "not to establish any official relations or engage in any official contacts with Taiwan," according to the text of the communique posted on the Chinese Foreign Ministry's website.

China frequently woos Taiwan's allies with extensive promises of development aid, although Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang said only that China would discuss "friendly and reciprocal cooperation" following the resumption of ties. With just 2 million people and little in the way of natural resources, Gambia is one of Africa's smallest and poorest nations.

On a visit to diplomatic Belize, Taiwanese President Ma expressed "strong dissatisfaction" over the Chinese-Gambian move and said Taiwan's diplomatic installations around the world were on guard over attempts to downgrade relations. — AP



SEOUL: A man watches a TV screen showing a file footage of the missile launch conducted by North Korea, at Seoul Railway Station yesterday. — AP

SEOUL: NORTH KOREA FIRES 5 SHORT-RANGE PROJECTILES

PYONGYANG SEES SOUTH-US MILITARY DRILLS A PROVOCATION

SEOUL: North Korea fired five short-range projectiles into the sea yesterday, Seoul officials said, in a continuation of weapon launches it has carried out in an apparent response to ongoing South Korea-US military drills it sees as a provocation.

The projectiles launched from a site near the northeastern city of Hamhung flew about 200 kilometers before landing in waters off North Korea's east coast, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said.

The South Korean military was attempting to determine whether the projectiles were missiles, artillery or rockets. The firings came three days after Seoul said North Korea launched its first medium-range ballistic missile into the sea since early 2014, ignoring U.N. resolutions against such tests. The firings appear to be North Korea's response to annual springtime US-South Korean military exercises that it says are a rehearsal for an invasion. In the past two weeks North Korea has fired several short-range missiles and artillery shells into the sea and threatened pre-emptive nuclear strikes against Washington and Seoul.

This year's drills are the largest ever, and come after North Korea conducted a nuclear test and a long-range rocket launch earlier this year, leading the U.N. Security Council to impose its toughest sanctions on the country in two decades.

The US special representative for North Korean policy, Sung Kim, who is visiting Seoul, said yesterday that North Korea "should refrain from all provocative actions, including missile tests, which are clearly in violation of Security Council resolutions." On Sunday, North Korean state TV broadcast photos showing leader Kim Jong Un supervising landing and defensive drills. The photos showed artillery blazing, navy ships landing as shells fell nearby, and soldiers running with the national flag. North Korea has a history of photo manipulation



SEOUL: US State Department's Special Representative for North Korea Policy Ambassador Sung Kim, right, answers a reporter's question as Coordinator for Sanctions Policy Ambassador Daniel Fried, left, listens after finishing the high level sanctions meeting at the Foreign Ministry yesterday. — AP

and there was no way to verify the authenticity of the photos.

Last week, state media said Kim ordered tests of a nuclear warhead and ballistic missiles capable of carrying such warheads. He issued the orders while overseeing what state media called a successful simulated test of a re-entry vehicle aimed at returning a nuclear warhead to the atmosphere from space so it could hit its intended target. The re-entry vehicle is considered one of the last major

technologies North Korea must master to develop long-range missiles equipped with nuclear weapons capable of reaching the US mainland.

Analysts in South Korea said the medium-range missile launch last Friday may have been a test of the re-entry technology. North Korean state media have not commented on the reported launch.

South Korean defense officials say North Korea doesn't yet have functioning intercontinental ballistic missiles. — AP



BEIJING: Chinese Vice President Li Yuanchao, right, meets with Gambian Foreign Minister Neneh MacDouall-Gaye last Thursday. — AP

JAPAN PROVIDES USD 5M AID FOR THE SYRIAN PEOPLE

TOKYO: Japan will extend USD five million in emergency grant aid for supporting people in mainly hard-to-reach areas in Syria, the Foreign Ministry announced yesterday.

"The aid is to provide support such as providing food and non-food items, improving water, sanitation, health and medical care, as well as implementing risk education and clearance activities of explosive remnants of war in besieged areas in Syria, where urgent assistance is needed," the ministry said in a press release. The money will be provided through the International Committee of the Red Cross and United Nations Mine

Action Service of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, it added.

Major powers have recently hammered out a truce to halt hostilities in Syria. However, it has been repeatedly breached. Thousands of Syrian civilians have fallen victims of the five-year bloody conflict that has claimed more than 250,000 lives and left around nine million Syrians either homeless, relocated or refugees in neighboring and European countries. The internationally mediated truce is also intended to secure delivery of relief supplies to civilians on Syrian territories. — KUNA

CHINA URGES INDONESIA TO FREE CREW AS SEA ROW ESCALATES 'I WANT CHINA TO SHOW GOODWILL'

JAKARTA: China called on Indonesia yesterday to release the crew of a Chinese fishing boat detained during a maritime confrontation, as Jakarta lodged a furious protest in the escalating row.

The incident happened Saturday as Indonesian surveillance vessels tried to detain the trawler suspected of operating illegally near Indonesian islands in the South China Sea. After stopping the boat and removing eight crew members, the Indonesians were towing the vessel to shore when the Chinese coastguard appeared and rammed into the detained boat, helping to release it. However, Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying insisted yesterday that the area near Indonesia's Natuna Islands was a "traditional Chinese fishing ground," and that the Chinese boat had to be rescued by coastguards after facing harassment from an Indonesian vessel.

The two nations normally enjoy good relations and the flare-up in tensions is rare. Indonesia does not have overlapping territorial claims with China in the South China Sea, unlike other Asian nations. But it objects to China's "nine-dash line" defining its claims since this overlaps Indonesia's exclusive economic zone around the Natunas.

China's acting charge d'affaires in Jakarta,

Sun Weide—who was summoned by both the foreign ministry and fisheries ministry yesterday to hear protests-called for the release of the crew. But Indonesian Fisheries Minister Susi Pudjiastuti, who is leading a tough campaign against illegal fishing in the vast archipelago, said the eight would face justice in Indonesia and dismissed as "baseless" Beijing's claim that the boat was operating in Chinese fishing grounds.

'Peace efforts sabotaged'

"I want China to show goodwill and return the boat, which has broken the law by carrying out illegal fishing," said Pudjiastuti, adding that authorities were considering filing a case to an international tribunal over the incident.

"With what took place yesterday, we feel our years-long efforts and work to promote peace in the South China Sea were interrupted and sabotaged." Indonesia has in the past acted as a mediator in the region's disputes. Earlier, Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi lodged a strong protest with

Chinese embassy representatives, saying there had been a "violation by the Chinese coastguard of Indonesia's sovereign rights" and that Jakarta was seeking clarification about the incident. — AFP

INDONESIAN TAXI DRIVERS TO RALLY FOR BAN ON ONLINE TAXI APPS

JAKARTA: Thousands of Indonesian taxi drivers will take to the streets of the capital today for a protest rally to demand the government prohibits ride-hailing apps like Grab and Uber, as a price war intensifies.

The proliferation of cheap taxis using ride-sharing apps Go-Jek, Grab and Uber has made the traditional pick-up and drop-off taxi services unprofitable, threatening the business models of the country's top taxi firms PT Blue Bird and Express Transindo Utama.

"Online transport apps have destroyed some local taxis, mainly the small players," said Andre Djokosoetono, director of Blue Bird, the country's largest taxi operator. "We are fighting to make sure everyone is treated fairly and there aren't any players disadvantaged by these apps." The Transportation Ministry has asked that the taxi-hailing apps be banned since they are not registered as public transport.

But the Communications Ministry, which oversees the app operators, has said the firms can go on operating. Nasihin, a taxi driver for Express, said he used to earn about 250,000 rupiah (\$20) a day in salary before the arrival of the ride-hailing apps. Now he struggles to bring home a steady income. "Tomorrow, I have to go to the protest because what they are doing is illegal," he said. "Taxi drivers are getting very angry."

The mobile apps have shaken up the market, sparking a cut-throat price war and forcing diversification away from unprofitable taxis into motorcycle taxis. Go-Jek and Grab drivers say they regularly offer rides at below cost to grab

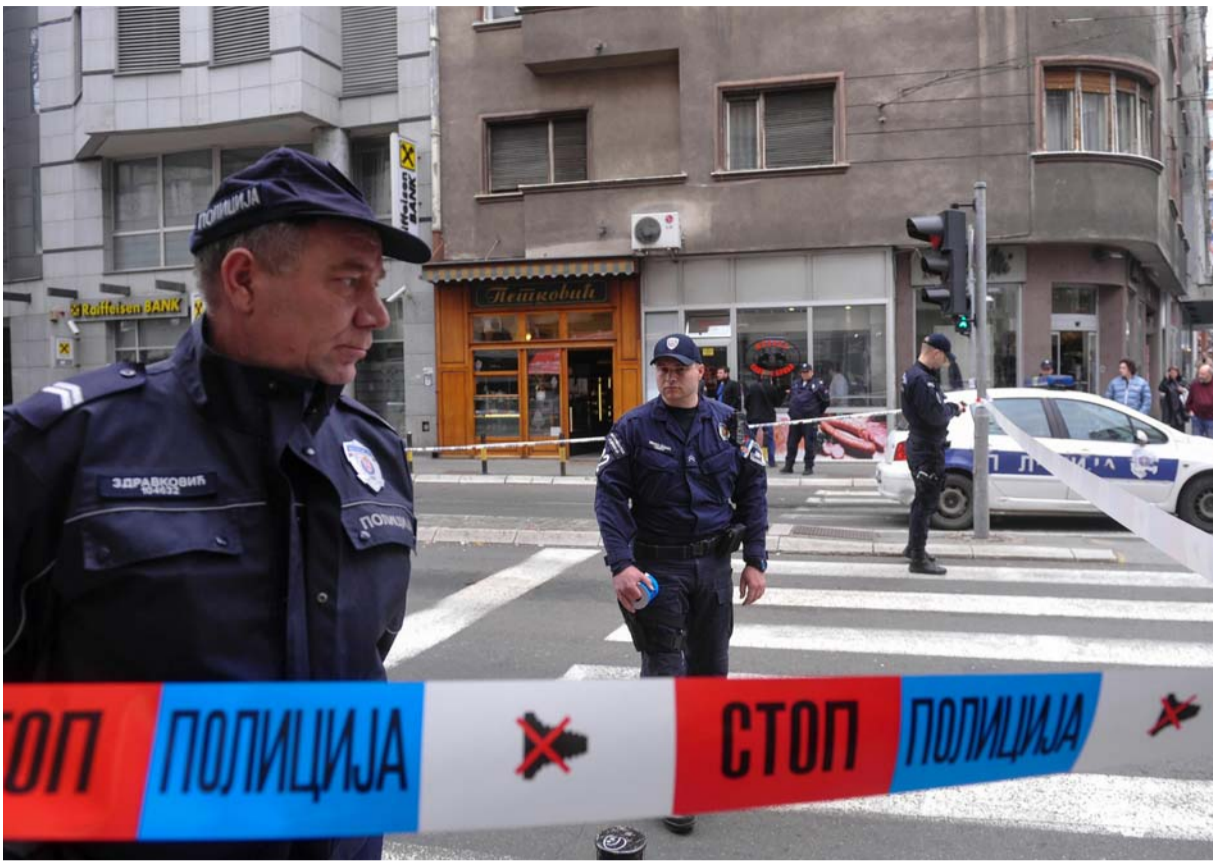
market share. The two privately held companies declined to provide details on pricing and their financial performances.

"A price war is not unusual for the introduction of a businesses like this ... as promotions are huge to seize market share," said Patrick Walujo, co-founder of private equity firm Northstar

Group, one of three investment companies that have together provided more than \$200 million in funding to Go-Jek. "Perhaps Grab is hoping it can squeeze us. The reality is that because we offer multiple services and products our drivers generate more revenues, and our investors understand that." — Reuters



CHENGDU: China's transport minister warned online taxi-hailing companies on March 14 over subsidies leading to "unfair" competition, as US giant Uber and homegrown rival Didi spend billions in their battle for market share. — AFP



BELGRADE: Policemen stand guard near a bakery where a man blew himself up in the centre of the Serbian capital Belgrade yesterday. — AFP

MAN BLOWS HIMSELF UP IN BELGRADE BAKERY

BELGRADE: A man blew himself up in a bakery in the centre of the Serbian capital Belgrade yesterday, police said, adding that the blast did not appear to be terror-related. No one else was hurt in the blast after the 50-year-old man asked everyone inside to leave, while damage to the surrounding area was minor, police said. "An unknown man was killed today at around 12:38 pm (1138 GMT) on Ilije Garasanina street after he activated an explosive device in a cake shop," a police statement said.

"Interior ministry officials are probing all the facts and circumstances of the event." A later police statement said the probe so far "shows that this was not a terrorist attack, because before the activation of the device the man asked two employees and one shopper to leave". Police sealed off the street after the incident, which occurred a few hundred metres from an open market, a high school and a sports centre.

An AFP reporter at the scene said the windows were still intact at the Petkovic bakery. "It was a not a strong blast, the sound was like two cars crashing. We didn't even understand what was going on until we heard the police," said a local shopkeeper, Ljubica, who gave only her first name. The website of daily newspaper Kurir, citing calls from readers, said the man went into the bakery, "forced everyone out of it, lay down on the bomb and blew himself up".

The shop is reportedly owned by Bratislav Petkovic, a former culture minister and former adviser to President Tomislav Nikolic. Police have previously said there could be several hundred thousand unregistered weapons in Serbia, including guns and grenades, remaining from the 1990s Balkan wars. Last year, the interior ministry urged citizens to hand over grenades rather than leave them in garbage cans as it sought to cut down on illegal arms. — AFP

PARIS ATTACKS 'ACCOMPLICE' DNA FOUND...

Continued from Page 1

when he evaded three French police checks and escaped to Brussels, and his arrest.

Investigators hope Abdeslam's arrest on Friday, in which he was slightly wounded in the leg, will generate new leads in the probe of the attacks which were claimed by the Islamic State jihadist group.

Belgian authorities have been embarrassed by the revelation that Abdeslam was found just around the corner from his family home in the gritty Brussels neighborhood of Molenbeek, and may have been aided by friends and family. Molins, the French prosecutor, meanwhile said that France expected Abdeslam to be extradited to face trial over the attacks, despite his lawyer saying that he would fight the process.

"There is a strong expectation from the French justice authorities and particularly from the families of the victims that Salah Abdeslam comes to explain himself," Molins said. French President Francois Hollande, who has said he wants Abdeslam extradited as quickly as possible, was due to hold his first formal meeting with relatives of the 130 Paris victims yesterday afternoon.

"The president, in light of recent events, will update them on what is happening," the presidential palace said. Molins said at the weekend that Abdeslam played a "central role" in the attacks and originally planned to "blow himself up" at the Stade de France stadium but changed his mind.

Belgian Foreign Minister Didier Reynders said Sunday that Abdeslam-who has been charged with "terrorist mur-

der" and belonging to a terrorist group-had already told investigators he was planning some sort of new attack in Brussels.

False name

Abdeslam's lawyer Sven Mary said his client was speaking to authorities and was "worth gold".

Mary has vowed to take legal action against French prosecutor Molins for allegedly breaching the confidentiality of the investigation by revealing details of Abdeslam's statements. He also blasted what he called political meddling by the Belgian foreign minister. The lawyer told Belgian Flemish-speaking daily De Standaard that France "has nothing to teach us" and should not criticise the Belgian justice system. Laachraoui is one of two suspects still wanted over the Paris attacks, along with Mohamed Abrini who became friends with Abdeslam when they were teenagers.

Prosecutors said Laachraoui's DNA had been found at an apartment used by the attackers in Auvelais, near the central Belgian city of Namur, which he had rented under a false name. Traces were also found at another suspected hideout in Schaerbeek, a district of Brussels. He used the same false name at the border between Austria and Hungary on September 9 when he was travelling with Abdeslam and Mohamed Belkaid. Belkaid, a 35-year-old Algerian, was shot dead on Tuesday during another police raid in the Forest district of Brussels. Abdeslam spent his second night in solitary confinement in a high-security prison in Bruges, the historic mediaeval tourist town about an hour's drive north of Brussels. — AFP

KUWAIT URGES RECONSIDERED TALKS WITH IOC

Continued from Page 1

and overtures to the Kuwaiti government in this regard. "It is the Kuwaiti government which can decide whether or not the negotiation team can pursue its mission as the IOC's delegation was neither serious nor honest during the negotiations," he added.

However, Alfili underlined the Kuwaiti delegation's keenness on the confidentiality of negotiations with the IOC's team out of the former's commitment to moral and legal rules, given that the UN participated in negotiations.

Miro was not a member of the IOC negotiation team during the meeting with the UN. Thus, it is shocking that he confidently gives statements pretending that he was part of the negotiations, he said. To clarify, the Kuwaiti delegation sat with three representatives from the IOC, none of whom were Miro. Either the IOC is intentionally delivering wrong messages to the world, or Miro has taken it upon himself to deliberately make false claims, he noted.

He reiterated that the negotiation delegation had refused the proposed roadmap from the IOC because they requested that the Kuwaiti delegation give approval for changing the laws of Kuwait.

"Kuwait is a democratic country with due process to follow - should a law need amending it must be voted on at the Parliament. Therefore, no delegation from our country has the right to approve such requests," the team head elaborated.

It was clear that the IOC suspended the Kuwait Olympic Committee on misleading information, which was clearly meant by the latest amendments to the sports legislations.

He went on to say: "At the end of our meeting, representatives from the IOC said that they understood our position, but at the same time they could not lose face in front of the international sport community. This is why the word 'amendment' had to be included in the roadmap proposal,

despite the fact that the Kuwait Government clearly explained and clarified the situation in an executive regulation issued by the public authority of sports board of directors."

Furthermore, the United Nation also witnessed Kuwait's refusal of the IOC's proposal to amend the Kuwaiti laws as they are in compliance with the Olympic charter and international sports regulations, Alfili noted.

The Kuwaiti Government has never signed any agreement, so Miro's claims that it approved a draft deal is categorically untrue, he said, asking Miro to come up with any signed document, if found. "As Mr Miro has revealed pieces of the negotiation, we must respond and let the international world of sport know the entire situation.

The IOC invited the Kuwaiti Government to the negotiating table under the assumption of the autonomy of sport, but in fact it used this bargaining chip in order to have the Olympic Council of Asia agreement renewed and have the legal cases against the IOC withdrawn in order to lift the suspension on the Kuwait Olympic Committee," he said. "Kuwait has always stood ready to discuss with the IOC and solve any misunderstandings, but we do not appreciate when an IOC representative openly misrepresents the facts of a meeting and tries to discredit our team to the international sport world," he added.

"Out of respect for the mediation of the United Nations, we agreed to meet with the IOC in Geneva on January 22 as well as to keep what happened in the Road Map meeting out of the media. However, as the IOC has not kept its word, they have left us no choice but to explain our position and if needed provide the correct documentation of the events in the meeting," Alfili affirmed.

On October 27th, the Public Authority for Sports had rejected the IOC's decision suspending the Kuwait Olympic Committee due to allegations that Kuwait's local laws contradict the Olympic Charter. — KUNA

OBAMA, CASTRO HOLD HISTORIC TALKS IN CUBA

Continued from Page 1

Obama then moved on to the adjacent Palace of the Revolution, where the Castros have led Cuba's resistance to US pressure going back decades. A US presidential visit to the inner sanctum of Cuban power was unthinkable before Obama and Raul Castro's rapprochement in December 2014. Obama and Castro have met three times before, but yesterday's meeting was set to be the most substantial as the two men move on from last year's restoration of diplomatic ties and attempt to rebuild the bilateral relationship. Inside the palace, Castro and Obama stood shoulder to shoulder while a military band played the Cuban national anthem and then the US anthem, and then they walked past a military honor guard.

Castro was all smiles as he greeted Obama. But he has said Cuba will not waver from its 57-year-old revolution. Government officials say the United States needs to end its economic embargo and return the Guantanamo Bay naval base to Cuba before the two countries can enjoy normal relations. Yesterday's formal ceremony contrasted with Obama's lower key arrival on Air Force One in Havana on Sunday. Castro did not meet the plane and there were no military honors.

INTERNET, POLITICAL DISSENT

Critics of Obama have accused him of rewarding Havana prematurely. "Freedom can come to Cuba, but it cannot happen by enriching and empowering the dictatorship," Republican presidential candidate Ted Cruz, a Cuban-American US senator from Texas, said in a tweet.

Obama is expected to encourage more economic reforms and greater access to the Internet for Cubans during the talks. Ahead of his meeting with Castro, Obama announced a deal that Google has reached with the island. "One of the things that we'll be announcing here is that Google has a deal to start setting up more Wi-Fi and broadband access on the island," Obama told ABC News in an interview that aired on Monday. He gave no other details, and representatives for Google could not be immediately reached.

His administration hopes changes might also come at a Communist Party congress next month, but doubts any political opening will be forthcoming. Cuban police backed by hundreds of shouting pro-government demonstrators broke up a Ladies in White march on Sunday, detaining dozens of people just hours before Obama landed.

Obama has urged Congress to rescind the 54-year-old embargo but has been rejected by the Republican leadership. He now has both Democratic and Republican elected officials with him on his Cuba trip and hopes Congress may act after the Nov 8 presidential election. Asked about the potential for US companies to lose out to other countries in the Cuban market, Obama told ABC: "There's no doubt that we still have some work to do, and part of that is bringing an end to the embargo that is currently in place." While it may not happen during his final year in office given the US presidential election, "it is inevitable," he added. Thwarted by Congress on the embargo, Obama has instead used his executive authority to take a series of steps loosening restrictions on trade and travel with the Caribbean island. Cuba has praised those measures but Castro will likely use Monday's meeting to press Obama to go further.

"We think the US government can take more steps to send clear and direct signals in this direction," Foreign Trade Minister Rodrigo Malmierca told reporters on Sunday. The US Treasury Department on Sunday granted hotel group Marriott permission to do business in Cuba, adding to the list of US companies allowed to sidestep the embargo. Marriott said it wants to build a hotel on the island but does not yet have a deal.

Obama and Castro met for half an hour during a regional summit in Panama last April and they also had a brief encounter at Nelson Mandela's funeral in 2013 and at longer meeting at the UN General Assembly last September. Besides meeting Castro, Obama also plans to visit a state-owned micro brewery and attend a state dinner yesterday. On Tuesday, he will deliver a speech on live Cuban television and attend an exhibition game between Major League Baseball's Tampa Bay Rays and Cuba's national team. — Reuters

UN-LED YEMENI PEACE TALKS IN KUWAIT LIKELY

Continued from Page 1

A resumption of talks must be accompanied by a "week-long truce that could be renewed if respected," he said, adding that discussions should focus on the implementation of UN Security Council resolution 2216. The resolution states that the rebels must withdraw from seized territories and disarm, before peace talks can progress. On Wednesday, the Arab coalition spokesman Brigadier General Ahmed Al-Assiri told AFP

that the alliance was at "the end of the major combat phase", raising hopes of a possible relaunch of peace talks. Kuwait is a member of the nine-nation coalition. Previous UN-sponsored negotiations between rebels and government officials failed to reach a breakthrough, and the most recent round ended in acrimony in December. The World Health Organization says fighting in Yemen has killed almost 6,300 people over the past year and the United Nations has warned of an unfolding humanitarian catastrophe. — AFP



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• Kuwait 1 (The New str.) • Kuwait 2 (Panasonic Tower) • Hawalli 1 (Tunis str.) • Hawalli 2 (Bin Khaldon str.) • Shuwaikh (4th Ring road) • Al-Rai (4th Ring road) • Salmiya (Salem Al-Mubarak str.) • Farwaniya (Behind police Station) • Fahaheel (Opp. General Parking) • Jahra (Opp. Main Co-op.) • Airport (Departure Hall)

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Issues

SOUTHERN LIBYA
COULD BE NEW
FRONTIER FOR IS

By Herve Bar

A potentially critical conflict has gone largely unnoticed in southern Libya yet could open up a gateway to sub-Saharan Africa for the Islamic State group, analysts say. IS has consolidated its hold along Libya's northern coast, and experts are concerned the jihadists may now be pushing into the remote desert region of Fezzan in the southwest of the country.

Sitting on the crossroads between Algeria, Niger and Chad, Fezzan offers lucrative sources of income from smuggling and already acts as a hideout for Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQMI) and other jihadist groups. It is one of Africa's main drug routes, traversed by migrants from sub-Saharan Africa hoping to get to Europe as well as by foreign mercenaries, mostly African, heading to join IS at their Sirte stronghold in northeastern Libya.

Penetrating south through Fezzan could ultimately help IS link up with its brutal Nigerian sister organisation, Boko Haram, as well as providing a rear base in case of any international assault on its positions along the Mediterranean coast, analysts say.

However, the desert region remains something of an intelligence black hole and the extent of IS's intrusion is unclear. For now, the group's priority is holding on to its northern strongholds, said Jerome Tubiana, a researcher with the Small Arms Survey think-tank.

"That said, going down towards Niger, forming ties with Boko Haram—the IS arm in west Africa—and competing with AQMI could obviously be tempting for IS," he said.

Tribes, criminals, extremists

Jihadist groups are able to exploit a complex rash of local rivalries in Libya's southern desert region. Since the 2011 revolution that ousted longtime dictator Moamer Kadhafi, Fezzan has been embroiled in conflict involving the ethnic Tubus and Tuaregs, as well as two Arab tribes, the Zuwaya and the Awlad Suleiman.

"Military authority (in Fezzan) lies mainly with tribal, criminal and extremist groups," said a UN report this month. The Tubus are currently in the ascendant in Fezzan after helping to overthrow Kadhafi. Having been marginalized under the former regime, they now control much of the region's resources, including recently discovered gold mines spread across the three-way border between Libya, Chad and Niger.

"With the fall of Kadhafi, the Tubus... took control of the borders between these three countries and between Libya and Sudan," said Tubiana. That has given them control over much of the local smuggling and trade, and they are fighting for control of oil and petrol stations, he told AFP.

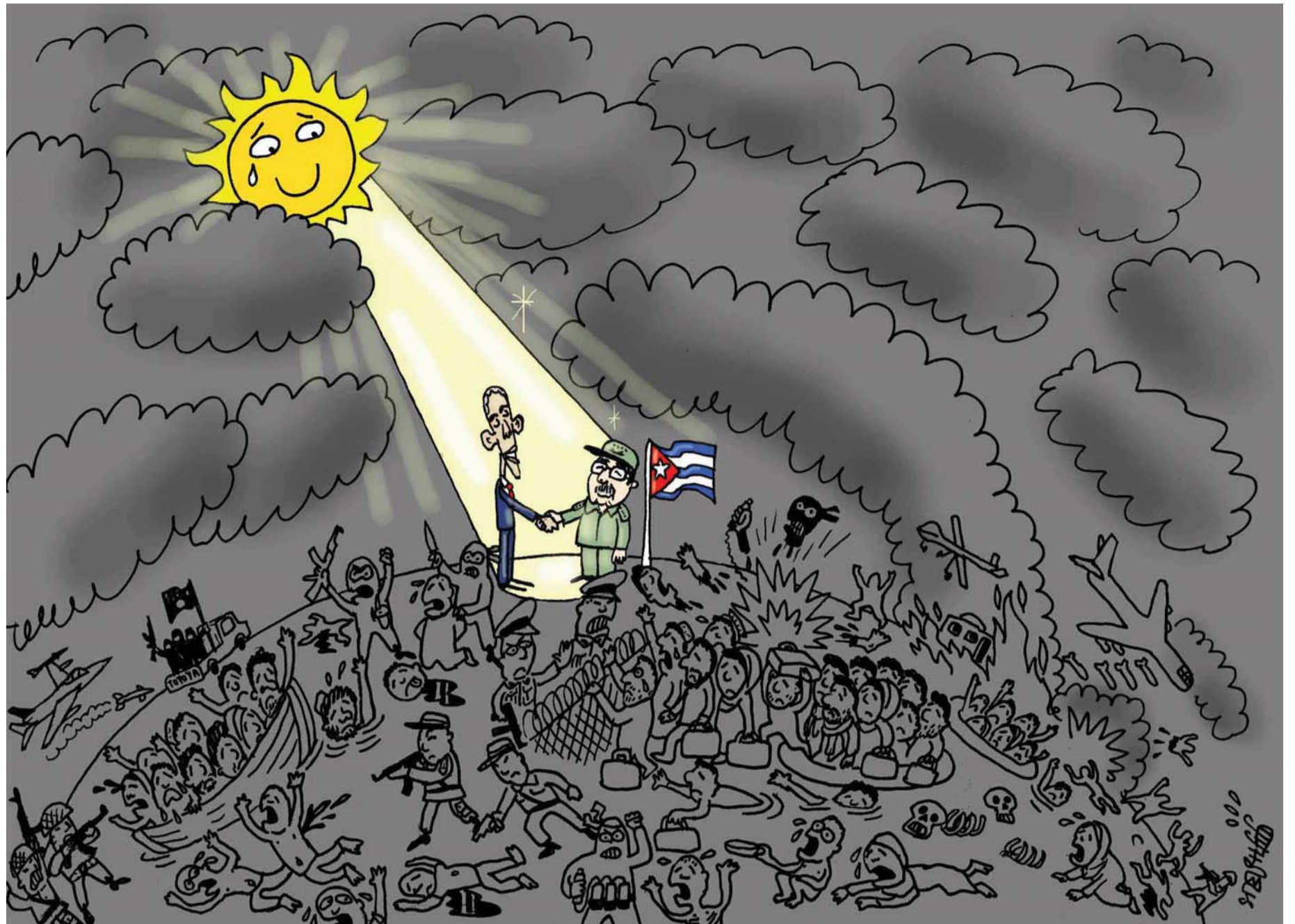
"Their militias have set up checkpoints on the main cross-Saharan roads... transporting food and manufactured goods from Libya and importing livestock from the Sahel," Tubiana said, adding that contraband such as cigarettes and cocaine also pass through the region.

Regional rivalry

For the Islamic State group, this presents opportunities as well as challenges. The many local militias means there are plenty of groups who would be hostile to a potential IS takeover. French soldiers stationed in the Sahel desert are also lying in wait, Tubiana said. So far, IS has carried out few attacks in the region, though analysts say this may be because it wishes to avoid reprisals from the many regional actors who take a close interest in Fezzan. The Tubus enjoy the backing of the internationally recognized government based in Libya's eastern city of Tobruk, while their Tuareg and Arab rivals have the support of the Islamist coalition that rules from Tripoli.

Regional powers have also been sucked into the conflict in southern Libya, with the Tubus' natural ally Chad finding itself in a proxy war with Qatar. In turn, that has dragged in more Middle Eastern governments: the United Arab Emirates and Egypt side with Chad, while Qatar is supported by Turkey and Sudan. IS "could be concerned about follow-up foreign intervention (air raids) that could weaken the position in the northern regions," said the TRACterrorism think-tank. —AFP

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OBAMA-CASTRO SUMMIT A KEY TEST FOR DETENTE

By Josh Lederman and Michael Weissenstein

Brushing past profound differences, President Barack Obama and Cuban President Raul Castro sat down at Havana's Palace of the Revolution for a historic meeting, offering critical clues about whether Obama's sharp U-turn in policy will be fully reciprocated.

For Obama, there's no better place than Havana to show that engagement can do more than isolation to bring about tangible change in the tiny communist nation. Yet for the Cubans, the glaring question is whether their own government is ready to prove the ambitious diplomatic opening is more than just talk. Obama opened the first presidential visit to Cuba in nearly 90 years on Sunday when Air Force One touched down in Havana. Strolling through the grand cobblestoned plazas of Old Havana with his wife, Michelle, and daughters Sasha and Malia, Obama created an indelible image for both Cubans and Americans of the peacemaking that he and Castro have cautiously but doggedly pursued.

"The time is right," Obama said in an ABC interview, when asked why he was proceeding now with the Cuba initiative. "Obviously our intention has always been to get a ball rolling," he said, "knowing that change wasn't going to happen overnight." Obama acknowledged in the interview with anchor David Muir that "we still have significant differences around human rights and civil liberties" but argued that making the trip at this time "would maximize our ability to prompt more change." He conceded that Cuba under President Raul I Castro "is still a one-party state" that exerts tight control over its people and stifles dissent.

Obama also revealed he plans to announce while visiting here that Google has made arrangements to upgrade Internet access on the island. Indeed, the US and Cuba are working more closely together now than at any time since relations took a nose dive amid Cuba's 1959 revolution. Yet while Americans are now flocking to Cuba in

greater numbers, closer ties have yet to bring about the degree of change that many Cubans hoped would follow after Obama and Castro moved to normalize relations 15 months ago. Since taking power in 2008, Castro has orchestrated economic and social reforms with lasting and broad-based impact, though to many Cubans and foreigners they appear slow to materialize. Not only are hundreds of thousands of Cubans now able to pursue free enterprise, but restrictions on cellphones and Internet have been eased and citizens feel more comfortable discussing Cuba's problems.

Empowering Cubans

Yet Castro has given little ground when it comes to changing Cuba's single-party system or easing strict limits on media, assembly and political dissent. His government has also repeatedly chided Obama for saying he wanted to empower Cubans.

None of that has dissuaded Obama, who insists that any intransigence by Cuba's government only proves why Cubans will be better off when they're intimately exposed to American values. "Let God will that this is good for all Cubans," said Odilia Collazo, a 79-year-old Havana resident, as she watched Obama's arrival on state television. "It seems to me that Obama wants to do something good before he leaves."

To that end, Obama came to Havana hoping his visit would spur Castro to offer gestures of good faith and meaningful change, which would undermine critics who accuse Obama of kowtowing to an authoritarian government. Though Cuba approved US hotel chains Starwood and Marriott to operate here and moved to lift fees on converting US dollars, those steps pale in comparison to sweeping changes Obama has enacted to lift decades-old US restrictions.

On his first full day in Cuba, Obama was to lay a wreath yesterday at the memorial to Jose Marti, a Cuban independence hero, before heading to Castro's presidential

offices. After a series of meetings, the two leaders planned to address reporters. The White House's attempts to get Castro to agree to a joint news conference appeared unsuccessful, and it was unclear whether they'd answer any questions. Castro appears to be closely and intensely managing what constitutes the most important change in Cuban foreign policy since the Cold War. Though Obama's aides have downplayed expectations for the meeting, Castro's remarks alongside Obama will be closely parsed for indications of whether he'll respond to Obama's opening with major new domestic changes.

Obama also planned an event with US and Cuban entrepreneurs aimed at championing Cuba's fledgling private sector. He was to be feted in the evening at a state dinner, an honor illustrating just how far the US and Cuba have come despite their deep ideological differences.

His visit was to continue today with a major speech that Cuban officials said would be carried on TV. Before departing for Argentina, Obama planned to meet with political dissidents and attend a game between Major League Baseball's Tampa Bay Rays and Cuba's beloved national team.

In his first few hours on the island, Obama created indelible images of a new US-Cuba relationship as he walked the rain-soaked streets of Havana and dined at a privately-owned restaurant in a bustling, working-class neighborhood. Jubilant crowds surged toward his heavily fortified motorcade, reminders of the Cuban people's deep affection for Americans despite decades of enmity between their governments.

Yet in a pointed reminder that Obama's aspirations for improved human rights in Cuba have yet to be fulfilled, a group of anti-government protesters were arrested while Air Force One was flying to Cuba, a scene that plays out weekly in Havana. Members of the Ladies in White group, one of Cuba's most prominent opposition groups, were expected to attend Obama's meeting with Cuban dissidents. —AP

BEIRUT BUSES PROVIDE RARE BRIDGE TO IS TURF

By Rouba El Hussein

"Raqqa! Manbij! Al-Bab!" drivers call out at a bus station in the heart of bustling Beirut looking for passengers to make the perilous journey to Islamic State group strongholds in Syria. "Just before we reach the first Daesh checkpoint, everyone throws out their cigarettes," said Abu Ali, a bus driver in his 40s, using a derogatory Arabic name for IS.

"And we spray perfume in the bus so that they can't smell the tobacco, otherwise we'll be whipped!" he said with concern etched into his expression, as he prepared to travel up to Manbij in northern Syria. The jihadists, who apply their own extreme interpretation of Islam in areas of Syria and Iraq that they have seized since 2013, do more than just inspect the bus for cigarettes.

"They even smell our hands to make sure we haven't smoked," said Jawad, another bus driver, also using a pseudonym for fear of retribution. Standing near his bus at the Charles Helou station near the Lebanese capital's harbor, another driver begged AFP journalists not to film either his face or his number plate.

"These people, they're dangerous, and they can recognize the bus even from the most minor detail," said the terrified man. The buses, which leave from a bus station located in one of Beirut's busiest districts, are a rare link between IS-held turf in Syria and the outside world.

'Nescafe, toys, sugar'

Since IS began conquering swathes of Syria in 2013, the buses have made two journeys a week to areas under the

jihadists' grip, often with no more than three passengers on board. In cities like Raqqa, the IS de facto capital in northern Syria, and Al-Bab to the west, residents are banned from smoking or wearing clothes deemed inappropriate under the jihadists' interpretation of sharia law.

"Women passengers always carry with them a full-face veil and they put it on before we reach the first IS checkpoint," located on the highway linking Dmeir near Damascus to the ancient city of Palmyra, Abu Ali said. Men must roll up their trousers to bare their ankles, also in line with IS rules on dress. Most of the

passengers are Syrians going home to towns and cities that have fallen to IS, taking with them food, clothes, medicine and cash for their families.

The drivers also act as delivery men, taking with them goods that are no longer available in parts of war-torn Syria. "We take coffee, Nescafe, toys and clothes for the children," said Mohammed, a driver just back in Beirut from Manbij.

Abu Ali says the drivers also carry with them packets of sugar, which has become very expensive. But "mortadella (cold cuts) is strictly forbidden, because

(IS fighters) can't be sure it's halal even if the packaging says it is".

No Kurds, Christians

On this frightening journey to jihadist-held turf, religious diversity is no longer welcome. "Before, our company would take members of the Assyrian, Syriac, Kurdish and Christian communities. Today, none of them can come on board," Jawad said. Marwan Zouro, a 55-year-old Kurdish labourer, said he would have to go to Damascus first, and then take a flight to his home city, Qamishli, in northeastern Syria. The journey is also made life-threatening by frequent fighting and air raids by the regime, Russia and the US-led coalition on areas along the way.

"Before the war, it took us four hours to make this journey; now, the route is 24 hours long," Abu Ali said. The buses leave from Beirut and pass through Damascus and Dmeir before reaching Palmyra in eastern Syria, in IS hands since spring last year.

The vehicles then head northwest towards Raqqa, Manbij, Maskana and Al-Bab near Turkey.

"When the fighting is fierce, the regime doesn't let us through and we are forced to spend one or two nights on the road before we can continue on our journey," Abu Ali explained.

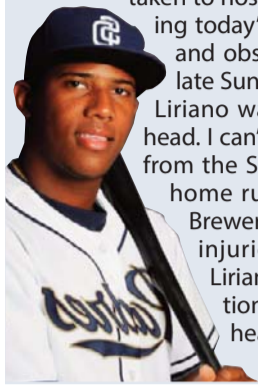
Yet on one of the world's most dangerous routes, neither drivers nor passengers can ever be sure they'll make it to their destinations alive. "My colleague was heading back several days ago on the Palmyra road, when fighting broke out," Mohammed said. "I recognized his bus, its front was completely smashed in. He didn't make it." —AFP



BEIRUT: People walk past a kiosk selling tickets to various areas in Syria at the Charles Helou bus station in the Lebanese capital Beirut. The buses, which leave from a bus station located in one of Beirut's busiest districts, are a rare link between IS-held turf in Syria and the outside world. —AFP

LIRIANO TAKES PITCH TO HEAD

LOS ANGELES: Milwaukee Brewers outfielder Rymer Liriano was stretched out and taken to hospital after being struck a horrifying blow to the face while batting against Los Angeles Dodgers right-hander Matt West in a pre-season game Sunday. West's pitch in the eighth inning struck Liriano flush on the left side of his face, just below the brim of his batting helmet and he crumpled to the ground, his arms and legs flailing. Team trainers and medical staff tended him before he was immobilized then driven off the field to a waiting ambulance and taken to hospital. "Rymer Liriano suffered multiple facial fractures during today's game and will remain in the hospital for further testing and observation," the Brewers wrote on their official Twitter feed late Sunday. Earlier Brewers manager Craig Counsell had said that Liriano was conscious but added: "It's serious." "He got hit in the head. I can't give you many details." The Brewers acquired Liriano, 25, from the San Diego Padres in the off-season. A .277 hitter with 68 home runs and 378 RBIs, he was expected to compete for the Brewers starting job and is out of minor league options. Head injuries are a growing area of concern in many sports. The Liriano incident comes just 16 months after Australian international cricketer Phillip Hughes died after being struck on the head while batting in a domestic match in Sydney. — AFP

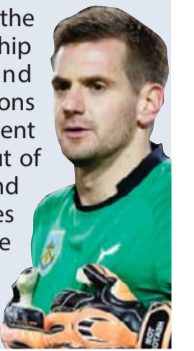


BURGESS CLEARED OF INJURY AFTER COLLISION

SYDNEY: Dual code England international Sam Burgess has been cleared of seriously damaging his neck or spine in a tackle during a National Rugby League match yesterday and is expected to be released from hospital in the coming days. A rain-soaked Sydney Cricket Ground fell silent when the South Sydney Rabbitohs forward charged head-first into a line of defenders only to slump to the ground shouting in pain in the 52nd minute of yesterday's loss to the St George Dragons. The 27-year-old, who returned to the field for the Rabbitohs earlier this month after an unsuccessful 18-month stint in English rugby union, had his neck immobilised on the pitch by medical staff. With his mother Julie distraught in the stands and his brothers and team mates Tom and George watching on anxiously, Burgess was taken from the field on a motorised stretcher and admitted to the nearby St Vincent's Hospital. "Sam Burgess has been cleared of serious neck and spinal injuries following scans conducted last night," his team said in a statement today. "MRI and CT scans have shown no damage to the vertebrae or spinal cord. —Reuters

ENGLAND CALL UP KEEPER HEATON FOR INJURED HART

LONDON: Burnley goalkeeper Tom Heaton was added to England's squad for the Euro 2016 warm-up matches against world champions Germany and the Netherlands after first choice Joe Hart was ruled out through injury today. Hart suffered a leg injury during Manchester City's Premier League defeat by Manchester United yesterday and could be out for several weeks, according to City boss Manuel Pellegrini. Heaton, uncapped at senior international level, was called up to the England squad last summer after an impressive campaign in Burnley's one-season stay in the Premier League. Burnley are currently top of the Championship (second tier). Heaton joins Stoke City's Jack Butland and Southampton's Fraser Forster as manager Roy Hodgson's options in goal. Hodgson said he would not be calling up a replacement for Hart's City colleague Raheem Sterling who also limped out of Sunday's derby. "Obviously it's very disappointing for Joe and Raheem to suffer injuries which will rule them out of our games against Germany and Holland," Hodgson told the FA's website (www.thefa.com). "They are important players in our squad and I wish them a speedy recovery." —Reuters



CHINA SWEEPS MAJOR TITLES AT KUWAIT TABLE TENNIS TOURNEY

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: China's Table Tennis players swept the titles of Kuwait 12th International Table Tennis Tournament (Salwa Cup) by winning all final matches yesterday, at the conclusion of the tournament in which 185 players from 35 countries participated.

Representative of HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah Amiri Diwan advisor Sheikh Fahad Saad Al-Abdallah handed the winners their prizes.

The number 2 seed in the tournament Jake Zhong, defeated his compatriot the number 1 seed Long Ma by a score of 4-1,

while on the women's side Xiaoxia Li took the women's singles title by defeating Nign Dign with a score of 4-1 also.

Players Xin Xu and Jake Zhang took the doubles title by defeating Peng Tank and Kit Kewan Ho by a score of 3-1 while on the women's side Ning Ding and Shiwen Liu defeated Xiaoxia Li and Yuling Zhu by a

score of 3-0. Deputy Chairperson of the Organizing Committee Sheikh Naeema Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber appreciated HH the Amir's patronage of the tournament making it one of the most important sports gathering in this particular game and thanked the representative of HH the Amir for his attendance.

Sheikha Naeema said the support of Information Minister, State Minister for Youth Affairs Sheikh Salman Sabah Al-Salem Al-Humoud Al-Sabah, and Director General of Sports Public Authority Sheikh Ahmad Al-Mansour had a major role in making it a success.



WORLD CHAMPION LORENZO CLAIMS QATAR TRIUMPH

DOHA: Defending world champion Jorge Lorenzo began his campaign for a fourth title by claiming victory in the season-opening Qatar Grand Prix yesterday.

The 28-year-old Spaniard, who started on pole, won the floodlit race in the Gulf for a third time, with Andrea Dovizioso on a Ducati taking second, 2.019sec behind, and Marc Marquez on a Honda in third at 2.287sec off the pace.

Nine-time world champion Valentino Rossi was fourth on the second factory Yamaha with whom he had signed a new two-year deal on Saturday. For Lorenzo, it was a 62nd career win and 41st in the elite class, coming at the circuit where he made his debut in 2008.

Lorenzo had lost first place at the end of the opening lap to Ducati's Andrea Iannone but the unpredictable Italian's race ended on the sixth lap when he crashed out spectacularly at turn 13 at the Losail track.

That briefly allowed Ducati teammate Dovizioso to snatch the lead but with 14 laps of the 22-lap race to go, Lorenzo charged through to take back the lead which he never relinquished. Two-time world champion Marquez

slipped past Dovizioso with four laps left but the Italian pulled off a spectacular pass on the penultimate lap to make sure of second spot.

Lorenzo, who won the 2015 world title at the season finale in Valencia, said his last-minute decision to switch tyres from hard to soft was key to victory. "This race has been one of the best of my whole career and that was why I was able to win and could make this little difference in the last three laps that gave me the victory," said Lorenzo. "It was a little down and up with the tyres. We made the decision to put on the soft rear tyre, because with the hard one we couldn't be so fast. "The harder compound should become better and better, but I think what happened was the opposite. The softer tyre should get worse and worse, but it was faster and faster so this little difference was the difference between me and Dovizioso and Marquez."

Dovizioso had started at six on the grid and gave an indication of the title-challenging qualities of Ducati who have been linked with a move for Lorenzo next season. "It's always hard to fight with Marquez at the end of the race

but my engine really helped me," said Dovizioso. "We did some good testing in the winter and this result continues that work." Marquez said he was satisfied with third spot on a circuit which is not traditionally friendly to Honda. "The race was faster than we expected and we had a great weekend, because we got 100% out of our performance at a circuit that we find hard," said the Spaniard.

"I spent much of the race behind Dovizioso because I couldn't pass him, and it was difficult to make up the ground lost with his better acceleration on the straight. Whenever I got close, I'd lose him again."

Switzerland's Thomas Luthi, riding a Kalex, won the Moto2 race for his 11th career triumph.

Luthi, who was 125cc world champion in 2005, finished ahead of Spain's Luis Salom, also on a Kalex, and Italy's Simone Corsi on board a Speed Up machine.

Niccolo Antonelli on a Honda won the Moto3 category. The 20-year-old Italian came in first just a fraction of a second ahead of South Africa's Brad Binder on a KTM. —AFP



DOHA: Spanish rider Jorge Lorenzo of Movistar Yamaha MotoGP crosses the finish line to win the MotoGP race of the Qatar Grand Prix yesterday at the Losail International Circuit in the Qatari capital Doha. — AFP

COE PROMISES TO FIGHT NESTLE TO SAVE KIDS PROGRAMME

PORTLAND: The IAAF will not let Nestle walk away from an agreement that benefits millions of young people and trainers without a fight, athletics chief Sebastian Coe told Reuters.

The Swiss food giant said last month it would end its partnership with the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) Kids Athletics programme because of widespread allegations of corruption and bribery in the sport. An independent commission of the World Anti-Doping Agency said in a report that "corruption was embedded" at the IAAF. The report said a clique run

by former IAAF president Lamine Diack covered up organised doping and blackmailed athletes while senior officials looked the other way. Diack is under formal investigation in France on suspicion of corruption and money-laundering linked to concealing positive drug tests, in concert with Russian officials. Coe disputed Nestle's move. "We saw no justification in the way they went about their termination," he said in an interview at the IAAF world indoor championships that ended on Sunday. "They were not a global partner," the former British Olympic champion said. "This was actu-

ally removing the opportunity for thousands of young people, millions of young people across 15 different countries, and in the space of one year removing the ability to coach and train three-four thousand coaches and trainers." Nestle said in its February statement that it believed the allegations against the IAAF "could negatively impact our reputation and image and (we) will therefore terminate our existing agreement with the IAAF, established in 2012."

STRONG REACTION

Coe reacted strongly to the termina-

tion at the time and he promised in the Portland interview to continue to fight for the programme.

"I am still slightly bemused by the decision given that their issue is about reputation, yet at the height of the Lance Armstrong issue they re-signed with the Tour de France. You were left being a little confused by their motives," he said. The BBC has reported German sportswear company Adidas AG will also end its sponsorship deal with the IAAF almost four years early.

Coe told Reuters though, "Adidas is staying with us through 2016 and we

will keep talking to them." He said he had spent a lot of time the past two months speaking to global partners, taking them through the reform agenda he has initiated to bring trust back to the sport. "We take it very seriously and in a large part, overwhelmingly in large part, they (sponsors) actually normally concluded they want to be part of the change process," said Coe, who became president of the IAAF in August. "I have said, help us do this. You are world-class businesses. You've had your own difficult times too in your own histories, now help us shape this." — Reuters

ETHIOPIANS SHAKE OFF DOPING CONCERNS TO STRIKE GOLD

PORTLAND: Ethiopia, one of five countries under the watchful eye of the IAAF over concern for their drug-testing systems, dominated the long races to finish second at the world indoor championships that ended on Sunday.

Led by world record holder Genzebe Dibaba, the African nation swept the top two spots in the women's 3,000 metres and claimed gold in the men's 3,000m on Sunday.

The strong showing came a day after Ethiopian-born athletes took the first four places in the women's 1,500m.

"I think it is the altitude and hard training," Dibaba told Reuters when asked why Ethiopian men and women are so impressive in the distance events.

Ethiopia, Kenya, Morocco, Ukraine and Belarus have been identified by IAAF president Sebastian Coe as countries in need of "critical care" because of their drug-test systems.

"Ethiopia and Morocco-as a matter of urgency-need a robust testing program put in place," Coe said. "Kenya, Ukraine and Belarus need to get compliant by the end of the year."

The countries are in no immediate danger of being banned from athletics and missing the Olympics, Coe said. But six Ethiopian athletes are being investigated for doping, officials have said.

Ethiopian-born Swede Abeba Aregawi, a former world indoor champion, also has been banned for a positive doping test.

"Doping is not good news for athletes," said Dibaba, who outran countrywoman Meseret Defar for the 3,000m title. Yomif Kejelcha gave Ethiopia their other gold of the day, defeating American Ryan Hill and Kenyan Augustine Choge in the men's 3,000m.

On Saturday, Dutch runner Sifan Hassan, who was born in Ethiopia, led former countrywomen Dawit Seyaum, Gudaf Tsegay and Axumawit Embaye in the women's 1,500m. "It is so sad that people use that," Hassan said of the Ethiopian doping problem.

Kenya, usually a powerhouse in the middle distance race, won only two medals in the championships. Choge said he hoped his nation soon passed anti-doping legislation. "They really need to pull up their socks so the corruption will be killed forever," he told Reuters.

More than 40 Kenyan athletes including top marathoner Rita Jeptoo have been banned for doping in the past three years and three athletics officials have been suspended over corruption allegations.

"It's a fairly corrupt time to be in the sport because of everything that is going on but I can only control what I can do," said British runner Tom Farrell. — Reuters



PORTLAND: United States' Marquis Dendy, center, celebrates after he won the men's long jump final during the World Indoor Athletics Championships, Sunday, in Portland, Ore. China's Huang Changzhou, left, finished third, and Australia's Fabrice Lapierre, right, finished second. — AFP

SIBLING RIVALRY SPURS DIBABA TOWARD RIO GAMES

PORTLAND: Genzebe Dibaba has set her sights on emulating her big sister's Olympic exploits after making a successful defence of her 3,000m crown at the World Indoor Championships here Sunday.

The 25-year-old Ethiopian distance runner has become accustomed to living in the shadow of elder sibling Tirunesh, the three-time Olympic gold medallist and five-time world champion.

But Dibaba said Sunday she is targeting an Olympic gold medal of her own in Rio in August after another dominant indoor display. Dibaba laughed off comparisons with her sister, emphasizing that her achievements so far were modest in comparison.

"I can't say that I'm greater than her. There's a lot that she's done," Dibaba said. "I don't have any Olympic medals, and I've only got one Outdoor World Championships medal. I just have to keep working harder, and hopefully

emulate her at the Olympics." On Sunday, Dibaba's victory was never in doubt at the Oregon Convention Center. Dibaba powered home around 50 meters clear of her nearest rival, compatriot Meseret Defar, clocking a time of 8min 47.43sec. Shannon Rowbury of the United States took the bronze. It was a third consecutive world indoors gold medal for Dibaba, who won the 1,500m crown in 2012 and the 3,000m title two years ago in Sopot, Poland. Dibaba said she was disappointed that the schedule had not allowed her to attempt a 1,500m and 3,000m double in Portland. "I'm very happy with this performance. I ran a lot of it alone, I was feeling very strong," she said.

"I am a little disappointed that I was unable to double with the 1,500 meters because the 3,000 meters ended up being a straight final, and I would have liked to have tried both. I did run alone after the first kilometer, and it was easy and I felt very comfortable." — AFP

US DOMINATES ON FINAL DAY OF WORLD INDOORS

PORTLAND: The United States won five gold medals as the host nation dominated the final day of the World Indoor Athletics Championships on Sunday to complete their best ever showing in the event. American athletes won gold in the men's and women's 4x400m relays, the men's 1,500m, the men's long jump and women's high jump as the first major championships since Russia was banned from track and field came to a close. The four-day event wrapped up before a sell-out crowd of 7,191 at the Oregon Convention Center, with the host nation finishing on top of the medal table with 13 golds, six silver and four bronze.

Ethiopia-whose athletics federation was warned earlier this month they could be banned unless they improve its anti-doping regime-finished second in the medal after winning two golds on the final day. Ethiopian star Genzebe Dibaba successfully defended her 3,000m crown, a third consecutive gold medal at the world indoor championships after her victories in the 1,500m in 2012 and 3,000m two years ago in Sopot, Poland. Dibaba powered home around 50 meters clear of her nearest rival, compatriot Meseret Defar, clocking a time of 8min 47.43sec, with Shannon Rowbury of the United States taking bronze.

Earlier, Dibaba's compatriot Yomif Kejelcha won the men's 3,000m, coming home in 7:57.21 to deny Ryan Hill of the United States, who took silver. Kenya's Augustine Choge won bronze.

'DOPING NO GOOD'

Dibaba meanwhile frowned when asked about the drugs scourge swirling around track and field since revelations of systemic doping in Russia which led to the country's suspension.

"Doping is not good news for our sport, doping is no good for athletes," said Dibaba, before reflecting on her win. "I'm so happy, it's my third world indoor medal already. It was easy for me because the field was not that strong."

Sunday's action also confirmed the emergence of a rising star in track and field, with American teenager Vashti Cunningham taking gold in the women's high jump.

Cunningham, still only 18, won gold with a leap of 1.96m ahead of Ruth Beitia of Spain in second place and Poland's Kamila Licwinko in third. Cunningham-the daughter of legendary Philadelphia Eagles quarterback Randall Cunningham-only competed in Portland after receiving a special invitation from track and field's governing body, the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF).

However the high school student showed no signs of being overawed by the occasion as she comfortably cleared the first four heights with her first attempt on each.

American distance runner Matthew Centrowitz, a silver medallist at the 2013 World Championships in Moscow, drew one of the biggest cheers of the day with victory in the 1,500m, winning in 3:44.22 ahead of Czech Jakub Holusa and Nicholas Willis of New Zealand.

IAAF officials meanwhile reported a total attendance of 39,283 over four days of competition, with several sessions selling out. IAAF President Sebastian Coe said the attendances showed athletics was on the road to recovery after months of scandal.

"Nobody is denying the challenges that lie



PORTLAND: In this photo made with a fish-eye lens, the United States' 4x400-meter women's relay team of (from left) Ashley Spencer, Courtney Okolo, Quanera Hayes, and Natasha Hastings, hold flags after they won the 4x400-meters women's relay during the World Indoor Athletics Championships, Sunday, in Portland, Ore. — AP

ahead to regain trust but this has been a pretty good start," Coe told AFP.

Reflecting on the absence of Russian athletes, Coe added: "It's a sad moment for our sport ...

but it hasn't stopped this from being a fantastic athletic experience for spectators and athletes alike. It shows you that the sport is still very strong." — AFP

ATHLETICS WORLD INDOOR MEDALS

PORTLAND: Medals table from 2016 World Indoor Athletics Championships (gold, silver, bronze, total) that concluded yesterday:

United States	13	6	4	23	Great Britain	0	1	2	3
Ethiopia	2	2	1	5	Poland	0	1	2	3
France	1	1	2	4	Romania	0	1	1	2
Jamaica	1	1	1	3	Australia	0	1	0	1
Burundi	1	1	0	2	Bahamas	0	1	0	1
Netherlands	1	1	0	2	Spain	0	1	0	1
Czech Republic	1	1	0	2	Hungary	0	1	0	1
New Zealand	1	0	2	3	Qatar	0	1	0	1
China	1	0	1	2	Serbia	0	1	0	1
Bahrain	1	0	0	1	Greece	0	0	2	2
Canada	1	0	0	1	Kenya	0	0	2	2
Italy	1	0	0	1	Trinidad&Tobago	0	0	2	2
Venezuela	1	0	0	1	Barbados	0	0	1	1
Germany	0	2	1	3	Croatia	0	0	1	1
Ukraine	0	2	1	3					



PORTLAND: United States' Vashti Cunningham hold the U.S. flag after she won the women's high jump final during the World Indoor Athletics Championships, Sunday, in Portland, Oregon. Cunningham won the event. — AP



ICC WORLD TWENTY20



NEW DELHI: This combination photograph shows (L to R) England's Moeen Ali, Liam Dawson, Liam Plunkett, Adil Rashid and Chris Jordan bowling in nets during a training session at the Feroz Shah Kotla cricket ground in New Delhi yesterday. England will play their World T20 cricket match against Afghanistan tomorrow. — AFP

BATTERED BOWLERS HOPING FOR RESPITE, SAYS ALI

NEW DELHI: Spinner Moeen Ali admitted England's bowlers are hoping for some respite Monday as they lick their wounds after being pummelled by South Africa and a rampant Chris Gayle in cricket's World Twenty20.

Although England are on a high after their record-breaking win over South Africa on Friday, their bowlers were once again clattered to all corners at Mumbai's Wankhede Stadium as the Proteas raced to a huge total of 229.

Reece Topley went for 33 in just two overs while Chris Jordan conceded 49 in a three-

over stint against the South Africans whose own star bowler, Dale Steyn, was subsequently carted around the ground.

Ali was the most economic bowler against South Africa but still went for nearly nine an over and was one of those on the receiving end last Wednesday when Chris Gayle smashed 11 sixes in a brutal century.

"I have not enjoyed bowling in Mumbai so far," said Ali after England arrived in New Delhi where they will play their next two group matches against Afghanistan on Wednesday

and the holders Sri Lanka on Saturday.

"I think the (Delhi) wicket is going to be a little bit slower, though I haven't seen it so I don't expect the runs to be coming as quick as Mumbai."

Ali said he and his fellow spinner Adil Rashid had felt they "would love to be bowling" on other pitches which have turned sharply in the tournament, such as Nagpur where India lost to New Zealand.

But he conceded it has been tough for England's quicker bowlers as well. "I don't

think it has been very easy for the seamers. The grounds have been a little bit smaller and the pitches have been beautiful to bat on," he said.

"Hopefully the bowlers are going to win us a game in the future."

Despite their victory over South Africa, England not only need to win their last two matches but must up their run-rate after losing to the West Indies.

England's batsmen were generally in awe-some form against South Africa but Ali, who

has opened for the team but now bats at seven, has missed out in both matches and warned against complacency towards Afghanistan.

"They are a very good side. We saw yesterday they competed very well," he added in reference to Afghanistan's match against South Africa on Sunday when the minnows at one stage threatened an upset by reaching 105 for two while chasing 210. "We are not going to take them lightly... It's a tough game but hopefully we can win in the game." —AFP

PAKISTAN FACE BLACK CAPS IN MUST-WIN T20

MOHALI: A resurgent New Zealand will be eyeing a semi-final berth when they take on a deflated Pakistan in a World Twenty20 group match in Mohali today.

Smarting under a six-wicket defeat to arch rivals India, Shahid Afridi's men need a victory against the table-topping Kiwis to keep their hopes alive of winning the trophy for a second time.

Pakistan won their opener against Bangladesh comfortably but things have since gone downhill as they unravelled against the Indians on Saturday, sparking an angry backlash from fans back home.

The Black Caps in contrast have been riding high with their horses for courses policy paying rich dividends against India and Australia.

New Zealand are perched on top of Group 2 with four points followed by India and Pakistan on two each from as many games.

Skipper Kane Williamson has won plaudits after he packed his side with unheralded spinners and leaving out tested fast bowlers Trent Boult and Tim Southee in the key opening game against favourites India.

Their strategy worked well against Australia too with rookie spinners Mitchell Santner and Ish Sodhi combining with recalled paceman Mitchell McClenaghan to wreak havoc in the opposition ranks.

McClenaghan was a surprise replacement for Nathan McCullum, one of the heroes of New Zealand's dramatic victory over India.

"I think we were fortunate to play on

two wickets which were very similar. We adopted similar tactics," Williamson said after the win over his trans-Tasman rivals.

"You have to try and read the conditions and select accordingly." Another win will see New Zealand cruise through to the knockout stage of the tournament which would be a commendable feat for a young side.

Afridi, 36, will be under pressure to deliver after taking flak for his tactics against India. Former Pakistani spin great Saqlain Mushtaq was surprised at the team selection by Afridi, who is tipped to retire at the end of the WT20.

"They couldn't read the pitch. For such a high profile match they should have played a proper spinner," Mushtaq was quoted as saying by the Press Trust of India news agency on Sunday. "It was not a pitch to field four fast bowlers," he said.

Teams:

Pakistan (from): Shahid Afridi (captain), Anwar Ali, Imad Wasim, Khalid Latif, Khurram Manzoor, Mohammad Amir, Mohammad Hafeez, Mohammad Irfan, Mohammad Nawaz, Mohammad Sami, Sarfraz Ahmed, Shoaib Malik, Sharjeel Khan, Umar Akmal, Wahab Riaz.

New Zealand (from): Kane Williamson (captain), Corey Anderson, Trent Boult, Martin Guptill, Grant Elliott, Colin Munro, Mitchell McClenaghan, Nathan McCullum, Adam Milne, Henry Nicholls, Luke Ronchi, Mitchell Santner, Ish Sodhi, Tim Southee, Ross Taylor. — AFP



BANGALORE: Australian batsman Steve Smith hits a six during the World T20 cricket tournament match between Australia and Bangladesh at The Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bangalore yesterday. — AFP

KHAWAJA LEADS AUSSIES TO VICTORY OVER BANGLADESH

BANGALORE: Usman Khawaja hit a quick-fire half-century to help Australia to a thrilling three-wicket victory against Bangladesh in their World Twenty20 clash in Bangalore yesterday.

The left-handed opener smashed 58 off 45 balls as Australia successfully chased down Bangladesh's total of 156 for five. The victory puts Australia's bid for a first ever World T20 trophy back on track after the top-ranked Test side lost to New Zealand in their opening match.

The 29-year-old Khawaja whacked seven fours and one six before he was bowled by Al-Amin Hossain in their Super 10 Group Two match. Khawaja, born in Pakistan, and Shane Watson put on a solid 62-run opening partnership before the veteran all-rounder was run out for 21.

Bangladesh's string of bowlers mounted a spirited attack against the Aussies, after suffering a devastating blow when Taskin Ahmed and Arafat Sunny were suspended for illegal bowling actions at the weekend.

Skipper Steve Smith was bowled for 14 by Mustafizur Rahman and David Warner was caught and bowled for 17 by Shakib Al Hasan. Glenn Maxwell was stumped for 26 off 15 balls.

James Faulkner hit the winning runs with nine balls to spare. Bangladesh, demolished by Pakistan in their first group match, are now unlikely to qualify for the semi-finals, sitting at the bottom of their group with two matches left to play. After Australia won the toss and elected to field, Mahmudullah top scored for the Tigers, striking an aggressive unbeaten 49, that included seven fours and one six.

Seasoned T20 campaigner Shakib also chipped in with 33 off 25 balls, as Bangladesh desperately tried to notch up their first points in the group stage.

Shakib struck three fours and one six before being caught by Nathan Coulter-Nile off Adam Zampa for the fifth wicket. Spinner Zampa, 23, spearheaded the Australian bowling attack by taking three wickets, his first in T20 internationals, while Watson claimed two.

Right-hander Mohammad Mithun struck a tidy 23 off 22 balls before being caught by Watson at deep midwicket off Zampa. Opener

Soumya Sarkar was caught for one trying to slash a Watson delivery, only for Maxwell to take a strightforward catch at point.

Sabbir Rahman scored 12 off 17 balls before Faulkner took a diving catch off a Watson delivery in the sixth over at the Chinnaswamy Stadium.

Shuvagata Hom, rushed into the side as one of the replacements for Taskin and Sunny, was lbw to Zampa for 13.

Bangladesh now play India on Wednesday also in Bangalore, while Australia take on Pakistan on Friday in Mohali. — AFP

SCOREBOARD

BANGALORE, India: Scoreboard of the World Twenty20 match between Australia and Bangladesh at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bangalore yesterday:

Bangladesh:		Shane Watson run out	21
Mohammad Mithun c Watson b Zampa	23	Steve Smith b Mustafizur	14
Soumya Sarkar c Maxwell b Watson	1	David Warner c & b Shakib	17
Sabbir Rahman c Faulkner b Watson	12	Glenn Maxwell st Mushfiqur b Shakib	26
Shakib Al Hasan c Coulter-Nile b Zampa	33	Mitchell Marsh c Shakib b Mustafizur	6
Shuvagata Hom lbw b Zampa	13	James Faulkner not out	5
Mahmudullah not out	49	John Hastings c Soumya b Shakib	3
Mushfiqur Rahim not out	15	Peter Nevill not out	1
Extras (lb 7, w 3)	10	Extras (lb 2, w 4)	6
Total (for 5 wickets, 20 overs)	156	Total (7 wickets; 18.3 overs)	157
Did not bat: Mashrafe Mortaza, Al-Amin Hossain, Saqlain Sajib, Mustafizur Rahman		Did not bat: Nathan Coulter-Nile, Adam Zampa	
Fall of wickets: 1-2 (Soumya), 2-25 (Sabbir), 3-62 (Mithun), 4-78 (Shuvagata), 5-105 (Shakib)		Fall of wickets: 1-62 (Watson), 2-95 (Smith), 3-115 (Khawaja), 4-119 (Warner), 5-135 (Marsh), 6-148 (Maxwell), 7-152 (Hastings)	
Bowling: Coulter-Nile 4-0-21-0, Watson 4-0-31-2, Hastings 3-0-24-0, Marsh 1-0-12-0, Maxwell 1-0-12-0, Zampa 4-0-23-3, Faulkner 3-0-26-0		Bowling: Mortaza 1-0-9-0, Mahmudullah 2-0-22-0, Al-Amin 2-0-14-1, Mustafizur 4-0-30-2, Shakib 4-0-27-3, Saqlain 3.3-0-40-0, Shuvagata 2-0-13-0	
Australia:		Result: Australia won by 3 wickets.	
Usman Khawaja b Al-Amin Hossain	58		



MOHALI: Pakistan's Wahab Riaz (L) and Mohammad Sami take part in a training session at Punjab Cricket Association Cricket Stadium in Mohali, India yesterday. — AFP



OOREDOO ORGANIZES SECOND ANNUAL FOOTBALL TOURNAMENT

KUWAIT: Ooredoo Kuwait, a member of international Ooredoo Group, announced the kick-off of the second edition of its annual football tournament, which officially started on Friday at the Gulf University of Science and Technology soccer field.

This is the second time that Ooredoo holds this event which aims to further engage with employees from different departments and divisions. The event aims to gather employees in a casual friendly atmosphere, outside office atmosphere and working hours.

Ooredoo's Director of Corporate Communications, Mijbil Alayoub said: "At Ooredoo we seek those opportunities to better engage with our employees in fun-filled activities which they like and take part of, last year's football tournament was a success and we look forward to another great one this year. Best of luck to all participants and looking forward to meeting you in the various games"

The opening ceremony included a draw for relatives of the participants. At the end of the tournament, first ranking team will be presented with a cup while other top performing teams will be presented with medals, as well as many other valuable prizes as recognition for their accomplishment.



FANTASY BECOMING REALITY IN PREMIER LEAGUE SHAKEUP

LONDON: With two months of a gripping Premier League season left Leicester City are closing on the title and it is not fanciful to suggest that Tottenham Hotspur, West Ham United and Southampton could complete the top four.

The idea of Chelsea, Arsenal, Manchester United, Manchester City and Liverpool, or even just two of them, finishing fifth or lower, would have been laughed off as absurd before a ball was kicked in August.

But fantasy has become the new reality in the world's richest soccer league.

Leicester, 5000-1 shots to win the title at the start of the season, need six wins from their last seven matches to guarantee becoming champions of England for the first time.

Tottenham, without a title since 1961, are their nearest challengers and West Ham United, in fifth place level on points with sixth-placed Manchester United, are sniffing a first-ever qualification for the Champions League.

Southampton, who came from two goals down to beat Liverpool on Sunday, are just four points behind fourth-placed Manchester City who are caught in a downward spiral.

Jose Mourinho knows only too well that reputations no longer count for anything in the Premier League.

The man who led Chelsea to the title last

season was sacked in December after losing nine of their first 16 games.

"Every club has very good players so I think it's difficult for the top teams in England because of the competitive nature," he had predicted in August after watching the likes of Crystal Palace, Stoke City and West Ham sign world class players.

One statistic sums the shift in power this season.

Chelsea, Arsenal, Manchester City, Manchester United, and Liverpool have a lower combined points total so far than Leicester, West Ham, Southampton, Stoke and West Bromwich Albion (241 to 248).

Many expect normal service to resume next season when Man City will be buoyed by the arrival of Pep Guardiola, Chelsea re-group under a new manager and United could possibly have Mourinho at the Old Trafford helm.

YOUNG TALENT

But according to Stoke's manager Mark Hughes, the days when the establishment dominated the top five or six places is over.

"This year isn't a one-off, it will be more prevalent in years to come and I think maybe there has been a changing of the guard somewhat," Hughes, whose side are on course for their highest Premier League finish, was quoted as saying in The Telegraph.—Reuters



PARIS: PSG's Zlatan Ibrahimovic kicks the ball during his French League One soccer match against Monaco, at the Parc des Princes stadium, in Paris, Sunday. — AP

MONACO RUINS PSG'S TITLE CELEBRATIONS

PARIS: Monaco ruined Paris Saint-Germain's Ligue 1 title celebrations as a clinical second-half performance gave the principality side a 2-0 victory at the Parc des Princes on Sunday.

PSG wrapped up a fourth consecutive league title in record time with eight matches to spare by thrashing Troyes 9-0 a week ago, but they were uncharacteristically flat in the capital.

After a drab opening 45 minutes it was the visitors who turned on the style, as Vagner Love's fourth goal for the club gave them a deserved 65th-minute lead. A David Luiz error gave Monaco a penalty that was coolly converted by Fabinho just three minutes later, as PSG slumped to just a second league defeat of the season, and a first at home since May 2014. The victory is a timely one for Leonardo Jardim's Monaco in the race for the top three and the Champions League, as they stay second in the table and now have the cushion of a six-point gap back to fourth-placed Lyon.

"This is a very important victory, but in getting this the team has actually only maintained our gap to our competitors," Jardim said. "Paris is a big team, one of the top four in Europe, and they could win the Champions League. My players played a great game. In football, you have not won or lost before the match, everything is played on the pitch."

PSG manager Laurent Blanc selected an attacking line-up, with Zlatan Ibrahimovic, Edinson Cavani, Lucas Moura and Angel Di Maria all starting on a night when the home fans expected to party.

But they started slowly, and the hosts' frustration at their lacklustre opening half an hour was clear, as Cavani thumped the turf in anger after ballooning an acrobatic effort well wide.

PSG improved in the minutes before half-time, with Cavani heading a Marquinhos cross wastefully off target when totally unmarked.

The visitors grew in confidence in the second period and home keeper Kevin Trapp had to beat clear Fabinho's drive after a mistake by Luiz, before the German also had to save well at his near post from Thomas Lemar. PSG were pleasing the crowd with plenty of neat tricks and flicks, but rarely looked like breaking their opponents down.

LOVESTUCK

While Blanc's men appeared to be resting on

their record-breaking efforts from last week, there was a hunger and desire about Champions League-chasing Monaco that brought the opening goal. Some quick passing released Lemar, who crossed low to the back post to give Love a simple tap-in with Trapp out of the picture.

Less than two minutes later and the principality side were gifted the chance to double their lead from the penalty spot. Another horror-show in the PSG defence culminated in Luiz pulling back Fabinho, and the Brazilian full-back picked himself up to calmly chip his spot-kick down the middle.

Unsurprisingly PSG pushed forward in numbers and, after Subasic had brilliantly clawed away a Cavani header, Ibrahimovic somehow contrived to head the ball over the top from two yards out with the goal at his mercy. It was not Ibrahimovic's day, the league's top scorer was left red-faced again after volleying over an unguarded net from point-

blank range. Monaco held on in the face of heavy pressure to record a first win against PSG in over six years. Blanc said that his side's missed chances were the key, and played down suggestions that his men had eased off after winning the title.

"In the first half we created many chances, we controlled the game against a very defensive team," he said. "I do not feel as though there was a party tonight, we will celebrate the title when we receive the trophy on the final day."

Hatem Ben Arfa's latest breathtaking strike set Nice up for a 3-0 win over struggling Gazelec Ajaccio that keeps them in contention for a surprise top-three finish. Ben Arfa collected possession wide on the right and skipped away from two challenges as he cut into the box before curling a shot beyond goalkeeper Clement Maury to set Nice on their way in the 14th minute at the Allianz Riviera.—AFP

REAL MADRID ENJOY 4-0 WIN OVER SEVILLA

MADRID: Real Madrid warmed up for their crunch meeting against Barcelona by thrashing Sevilla 4-0 on Sunday and coach Zinedine Zidane believes his team "can do great things" if they match the performance they produced against Unai Emery's side. Zidane was able to start Gareth Bale, Karim Benzema and Cristiano Ronaldo together for the first time since Jan. 17 and he highlighted the impact his three key forwards had on the game.

"It's only the third time (since he became coach) we've had them playing and it's so important to have all your players available, it gives you a big boost," he said.

French striker Benzema marked his return from three weeks out with a hamstring problem by meeting a cross from Bale on the half volley to put Madrid ahead after six minutes.

Ronaldo made up for a penalty miss by doubling the home side's lead midway through the second half before Benzema teed up Bale for Madrid's third, which saw

the Wales winger become the all-time top scoring British player in La Liga.

Substitute Jese netted late on to complete the rout. "If we play like this all the time we can do great things and the players know it," Zidane told a news conference.

"But every game is different and we need to put in the same levels of intensity and have the same commitment in all of them. If we do that I'll have nothing to be worried about."

Should all his players return from international duty unscathed, Zidane can take a full squad to the Nou Camp on April 2 to face arch rivals Barcelona, who blew a two-goal lead to draw 2-2 with Villarreal on Sunday.

Although Luis Enrique's side sit 10 points above his side, Zidane is feeling optimistic about the game.

"It's always best to go after a victory and we have proved a lot today," he added. "It's a different game, a special game. We know we're ready. It'll be a great game between two great teams." — Reuters



MADRID: Real Madrid's Portuguese forward Cristiano Ronaldo vies with Sevilla's goalkeeper Sergio Rico Gonzalez (L) during the Spanish league football match Real Madrid CF vs Sevilla FC at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium in Madrid yesterday. — AFP

Sports

China sweeps major titles at Kuwait table tennis tourney



Khawaja leads Aussies to victory over Bangladesh



TUESDAY, MARCH 22, 2016

KIM WINS LPGA FOUNDERS CUP IN RECORD FASHION Page 18



DALLAS: Dallas Mavericks forward Dirk Nowitzki (41) battles Portland Trail Blazers guard Allen Crabbe (23) for space during the second half of an NBA basketball game Sunday, in Dallas. —AP

NOWITZKI, WILLIAMS LEAD MAVERICKS PAST BLAZERS

DALLAS: Dirk Nowitzki scored 40 points and Deron Williams had 31 points and 16 assists, leading the Dallas Mavericks to a 132-120 overtime win over the Portland Trail Blazers on Sunday. Nowitzki and Williams capped season-high scoring efforts with the first 11 points in overtime. Williams made a tiebreaking 3-pointer before Nowitzki scored eight straight points. The Mavericks' victory moved them within a half-game of the Trail Blazers for the sixth playoff position in the Western Conference. Dallas has 12 games to play, and Portland 11. The Mavericks (35-35) also gained a tiebreaker by winning the first two of three games in the season series against the Trail Blazers (36-35). The teams play again in Portland on Wednesday. Damian Lillard led the Trail Blazers with 26 points. Allen Crabbe scored 24 points, and C.J. McCollum had 22. Miles Plumlee had 14 points and 19 rebounds.

RAPTORS 105, MAGIC 100

DeMar DeRozan scored 25 points, leading Toronto to the win. Luis Scola had 20 points as the Raptors moved within one game of idle Cleveland for the top spot in the Eastern Conference. Evan Fournier and Victor Oladipo each had 21 points for Orlando, which lost its seventh straight game in Toronto and has now lost 13 of the last 14 meetings with the Raptors.

A 3-pointer from Fournier with 1:11 remaining trimmed Toronto's lead to 97-96, but DeRozan responded with a floating jumper with

53.9 seconds left and added the free throw after being fouled by Ersan Ilyasova.

PELICANS 109, CLIPPERS 105

Jrue Holiday scored 22 points, helping the injury-riddled Pelicans to the victory. Omer Asik scored a season-high 15 points and tied his season best with 14 rebounds for New Orleans, while Dante Cunningham scored a season-high 19 points. Reserve guard Tim Frazier added a season-high 17 points. Chris Paul and J.J. Redick each scored 24 points, and Paul also had 13 assists for the Clippers, who lost in Memphis on Saturday night and were playing their second game in less than 24 hours. Los Angeles missed 19 3-point attempts and 13 free throws. The Pelicans tipped off shortly after announcing All-Star forward Anthony Davis, who hurt his left knee on Friday night, would miss the rest of the season to treat that injury as well as a torn labrum in his left shoulder that he played with for much of the season.

KINGS 88, KNICKS 80

DeMarcus Cousins had 24 points and 20 rebounds, and Sacramento had its best defensive performance of the season. The Kings, who came in allowing a league-worst 109.6 points per game, easily surpassed their previous best of 88 points allowed, shutting down a Knicks team that played without leading scorer Carmelo Anthony. Cousins emerged the winner in a good big-man duel with Robin Lopez, who

finished with 23 points and 20 rebounds for the Knicks, playing through his usual frustrations with the officiating and even a security guard in this one. New York fell to 0-8 this season without Anthony, who was still bothered by symptoms of a migraine that he began suffering from Saturday night in a loss at Washington.

CELTICS 120, 76ERS 105

Isaiah Thomas led six Celtics players in double figures with 26 points as Boston ended a four-game skid. Jared Sullinger added 17 points and 13 rebounds for Boston, which swept the four-game season series against the 76ers to make it eight consecutive wins against Philadelphia. The Celtics avoided matching their longest losing streak of the season with the victory. Carl Landry scored 26 points for the 76ers, who have lost five in a row and 18 of the last 19 to fall to 9-61.

JAZZ 94, BUCKS 85

Gordon Hayward scored 18 points, including 13 during a decisive third quarter, as the Jazz won for the fifth time in six games. Utah remained one game behind Dallas for the eighth and final playoff spot in the Western Conference. Trey Lyles added 14 points for the Jazz, and Shelvin Mack had 13 points and 12 assists. Rudy Gobert finished with 12 points and 14 rebounds. Milwaukee is 4-18 in its last 22 games against Utah. Jabari Parker had 19 points and eight rebounds for the Bucks. —AP

NBA results/standings

Dallas 132, Portland 120 (OT); Toronto 105, Orlando 100; Boston 120, Philadelphia 105; New Orleans 109, LA Clippers 105; Utah 94, Milwaukee 85; Sacramento 88, NY Knicks 80.

Eastern Conference			Western Conference						
Atlantic Division			Northwest Division						
W	L	PCT	GB						
Toronto	48	21	.696	-	Oklahoma City	48	22	.686	-
Boston	40	30	.571	8.5	Portland	36	35	.507	12.5
NY Knicks	28	43	.394	21	Utah	34	36	.486	14
Brooklyn	19	50	.275	29	Denver	29	41	.414	19
Philadelphia	9	61	.129	39.5	Minnesota	22	47	.319	25.5
Central Division			Pacific Division						
Cleveland	49	20	.710	-	Golden State	62	7	.899	-
Indiana	36	33	.522	13	LA Clippers	43	26	.623	19
Chicago	35	33	.515	13.5	Sacramento	27	42	.391	35
Detroit	36	34	.514	13.5	Phoenix	19	50	.275	43
Milwaukee	30	40	.429	19.5	LA Lakers	14	55	.203	48
Southeast Division			Southwest Division						
Atlanta	41	29	.586	-	San Antonio	59	10	.855	-
Miami	40	29	.580	0.5	Memphis	40	30	.571	19.5
Charlotte	39	30	.565	1.5	Houston	35	35	.500	24.5
Washington	34	35	.493	6.5	Dallas	35	35	.500	24.5
Orlando	29	40	.420	11.5	New Orleans	26	43	.377	33

RUSSIAN SWIMMER EFIMOVA SUSPENDED OVER DOPING

MOSCOW: Olympic swimming medalist Yulia Efimova of Russia faces a possible lifetime ban after being provisionally suspended for a second doping violation. Her US-based coach said Efimova has indicated she wants to fight the accusation.

The 23-year-old breaststroke specialist who has won four world titles and an Olympic bronze medal is the latest high-profile name caught up in the series of doping scandals that have dogged Russia over the past two years. She owns the world's fastest time in the 100-meter breaststroke and the second quickest in the 200 breast this year, and is considered one of Russia's top medal hopes for the Rio Olympics in August.

In a brief statement, the Russian Swimming Federation said it had received documents from international governing body FINA stating that Efimova was suspended "in connection with a possible breach of anti-doping rules."

The federation did not confirm reports in the Russian media that Efimova tested positive for meldonium, the same substance found in tennis star Maria Sharapova's sample at the Australian Open in January.

If Efimova's case is confirmed to be a positive test for meldonium, her earlier medals would not be affected because the substance has only been banned since Jan. 1.

Efimova trains in Los Angeles under Dave Salo, who coaches at the University of Southern California.

"Yulia stopped taking it (meldonium) in December when it became evident it was

going to be on the banned list," Salo told The Associated Press by phone Thursday from Atlanta, where he is coaching at the NCAA women's swimming and diving championships. "She sent me a text almost immediately yesterday and tried to assure me that she hadn't done anything since December."



Yulia Efimova

Salo said any athlete training under him is subject to drug testing by WADA and USADA, which visit his pool weekly, unlike some other countries where testing is less stringent.

"It's not coming from me, it never has come from me," Salo said. "I don't think kids need supplementation of any sort. I've

never counseled kids to take anything. They know my stance on it."

Salo said his role in Efimova's career involves only training and coaching in the pool, and she has others who oversee her physical therapy, weight training and nutrition.

"We've created an environment where there's an expectation that these kids have to take something," he said. Efimova, who won bronze in the 200-meter breaststroke at the 2012 London Olympics, could be banned for life if found guilty of a second career doping offense. She was stripped of five European championship medals after testing positive for the banned steroid DHEA in 2013. Efimova's ban on that occasion was reduced from two years to 16 months after she argued that she had taken the substance by accident while trying to buy a legal supplement.

Efimova returned from that ban to win gold in the 100-meter breaststroke at last year's world championships in Kazan, Russia. Salo said he would speak to Efimova when he returns to Los Angeles next week.

"Her text was, 'Please believe me. I didn't do this on purpose,'" he said. "I believe her. She's culpable to the extent that she has a lot of other people in her ear." Efimova is in the US as part of a program in which the Russian swimming federation sends top athletes abroad for specialized coaching. Federation coach Sergei Ilin told Russian news agency RIA Novosti that none of the other top Russians based in the United States was under suspicion of doping.

"If we're talking about the group of athletes in the US, then so far this case is just about Efimova," he said. —AP

ten to outside influences such as doctors, yoga instructors and other swimmers, as well as some coaches who suggest supplements.

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ZIDANE WANTS A FIT AND FOCUSED BENZEMA

MADRID: Real Madrid boss Zinedine Zidane wants star striker Karim Benzema to concentrate on regaining his form and fitness rather than a series of off-field scandals affecting the French international in his homeland.

Benzema wasn't included in Didier Deschamps' latest French squad on Thursday due to an ongoing investigation into his role in a sex-tape blackmail plot involving international teammate Mathieu Valbuena. The 28-year-old has also given evidence to French authorities in a separate money laundering investigation. "I am not going to say whether the treatment of Benzema is fair or unfair," Zidane said on Saturday ahead of Sevilla's visit to the Santiago Bernabeu. "The only thing I want of the player is that he concentrates solely on football and the game tomorrow. We have spoken together and we believe the best thing is to think about football." The French Football Federation faces sporting pressure to bring Benzema back into the national side in time for the European Championship in June, which France will host.

However, leading French figures, including Prime Minister Manuel Valls, have called into question whether Benzema should be given the honour of representing his country given his off-field behaviour. "For young people, a great sportsman must be exemplary," said Valls. "12 seasons that I'm professional: 541 matches played 0 red card 11 yellow cards!!! And some talk about me being exemplary???" Benzema tweeted in reply to Valls's comments this week. Benzema has been sidelined for the past three weeks due to a thigh problem, but is expected to return to the starting line-up against Sevilla on Sunday.

"I see him concentrated on what he needs to do on the field," added Zidane. "The most important thing right now is that physically he is good. He is not feeling the effects of his injuries. Physically, after a break of 23 days it is difficult, but he has trained well since Tuesday and little by little is recovering his fitness. —AFP

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US HOME SALES SLUMP IN FEBRUARY AS SUPPLY SHORTAGE HITS MARKET

DECLINE FOLLOWS ROBUST YEARLY SALES RATES

WASHINGTON: Americans retreated from home-buying in February, reversing months of prior gains as low inventories push up prices to levels that restrict sales. The National Association of Realtors said yesterday that sales of existing homes fell 7.1 percent last month to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 5.08 million. The decline follows robust yearly sales rates of 5.47 million in January and 5.45 million in December, a new regulation had delayed closings in November.

The housing market enters the traditional spring buying season facing a quandary: There are relatively few properties listed for sale, even as steady job gains and low mortgage rates have bolstered demand from would-be buyers. The limited supplies have fueled rising prices that have, in turn, reduced affordability and limited sales levels. These cost pressures were further enhanced by a volatile stock market that hit down payment savings. "We assume the plunge in the stock market in the first six weeks of this year persuaded some potential homebuyers to reconsider, at least temporarily," said Ian Shepherdson, chief economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics. Shepherdson noted that sales momentum "stalled" in February, but sales volumes might pick-up in the spring.

The median home sales price was \$210,800 in February, a 4.4 percent annual increase from a year ago. Tight supplies have driven the increases in home prices, forcing buyers to bid more for hotly contested homes. Listings in February fell 1.1 percent from a year ago. Many homeowners are hesitant to sell, since they would need more equity to cover the down payment for stepping-up to a new property. Investors have also turned homes into rentals, further depriving the market of supplies.



FLORIDA: This Tuesday, Jan 26, 2016, photo, shows an existing home for sale in Valrico. — AP

Faster than wages

The Realtors have forecast that overall sales levels will be nearly unchanged this year, after a 6.5 percent gain in 2015. But median sales prices are forecast to rise 4 percent, meaningfully faster than wages. Homebuying fell sharply in the Northeast and Midwest last month, while slipping less severely in the South and West.

Investors accounted for 18 percent of

sales in February. First-time buyers made up 30 percent of purchases, staying persistently below their historic share of 40 percent. The shortage remains a consequence of the burst housing bubble, which initially flooded the market with distressed foreclosures and then left a limited selection of homes for buyers as the recovery from the Great Recession surpassed 6 1/2 years.

Inventory is particularly low for starter

homes, keeping first-time buyers out of the market, according to a separate report released yesterday by the real estate firm Trulia. At the bottom of the housing market in 2012, a typical homebuyer only needed to commit 32.2 percent of their income to buy the median priced starter home. That share of income has climbed to 37.7 percent, putting home ownership out of reach for many. —AP

GOLD FALLS AS STRONGER DOLLAR WEIGHS ON PRICES

LONDON: Gold fell more than 1 percent yesterday, extending losses for a third day as the dollar strengthened, but prices remained underpinned by expectations that the ultra-low interest rate environment will persist on a global level.

The dollar is up 0.1 percent against the euro after falling for three successive weeks, most recently after US Federal Reserve policymakers revised down the number of times they expect to raise interest rates this year to two from four. Spot gold was down 0.8 percent at \$1,244.91 an ounce at 1000 GMT, while US gold futures for April delivery were down \$8.60 an ounce at \$1,245.70. The metal has risen 17 percent this year as expectations for fresh rate hikes faded. Gold rallied on Wednesday after the Fed cut the number of interest rate hikes it foresees this year, but the metal failed to revisit the previous week's 13-month high and quickly slid lower as the US unit bounced back.

Under pressure

"(Gold is) under pressure once again this morning as the dollar strengthens," Mitsubishi analyst Jonathan Butler said. "Despite the Fed's 'lower for longer' stance, it still looks to be one of the more hawkish central banks, compared with the European Central Bank and Bank of Japan with zero and negative interest rate policies respectively." Ultra-low interest rates cut the opportunity cost of holding non-yielding assets like gold, as well as stoking longer-term fears over inflation. Market indicators are signaling that investors see stronger risks of inflation, which has been almost non-existent since the credit crisis, despite skepticism from the Fed and the relatively slow pace of US economic growth.

Holdings of gold-backed exchange-traded funds, which issue securities backed by physical metal, continued to rise. The largest, New York-listed SPDR Gold Shares, reported an inflow of another 11.9 tons on Friday, bringing its total inflow for the year to 176.6 tons, up from 40.8 tons in the same period of last year.

Trading was quiet in the big physical gold markets in Asia overnight, with Japan closed for a holiday. "Gold opened right where we closed last week and it was primarily small offers which dominated early flows," MKS said in a note. "The turnover on Ecomex was noticeably lower than what we saw last week and may continue for the rest of the week, considering the shortened Easter holiday week for most Western markets." — Reuters

Global trust.. US\$ 3 billion raised
in local and international bonds markets



كيبكو
KIPCO
شركة مشاريع الكويت (القابضة)
Kuwait Projects Company (Holding)



PARIS: AXA group chief executive and chairman Henri de Castries (C) poses with his successors Denis Duverne (L) as non-executive chairman of the board of directors and Thomas Buberl (R) as chief executive officer of AXA and a member of the board, prior to a press conference yesterday at AXA headquarters. — AFP

FRANCE'S AXA INSURANCE CHIEF TO STEP DOWN AS REPORTEDLY TIPPED FOR HSBC

PARIS: France's biggest insurance group AXA said yesterday that its boss Henri de Castries is to step down, with a British newspaper saying he may take over at banking giant HSBC. "After 27 years in the group, and close to 17 years as chief executive officer, Henri de Castries, chairman and CEO of AXA, has announced his decision to retire and to step down from the board of directors on September 1st, 2016," AXA said in a statement.

The Sunday Times, citing an unnamed source, said at the weekend that the AXA chief was favorite to succeed current HSBC chairman Douglas Flint after joining the board of the British global bank, Europe's largest, on March 1. A spokesman for HSBC in London dismissed the report as "speculation" in an email to AFP.

Last week, Flint told HSBC shareholders that the bank had started looking for his successor who would probably be named next year "but the exact timing is clearly dependent upon identifying and securing the appropriate candidate," he said. De Castries, 61, is from an old French aristocratic family and reportedly a descendant of the notorious Marquis de Sade.

He went to the ENA elite school for top civil servants at the same time as President Francois Hollande, Hollande's former partner and current Environment Minister Segolene Royal and Michel Sapin, who is now finance minister. His early jobs in government included a stint at the French Treasury in the 1980s, where he was closely involved with former prime minister Edouard Balladur's privatization program and later became head of the Treasury's foreign exchange operations.

He is said to be close to both Hollande and former president Nicolas Sarkozy. He often speaks out on French politics, society and economics in media interviews. AXA, second in Europe only to German giant Allianz, said its board had unanimously

decided at a meeting Saturday to separate the chairman and chief executive functions. Replacing de Castries will be Denis Duverne as non-executive chairman of the board of directors and Thomas Buberl as chief executive officer of AXA and a member of its board.

'Great shape'

De Castries has been at the helm of AXA since 2000 and led the insurer's refocusing on its core businesses insurance and asset management, its expansion into emerging markets and the sale of underperforming assets. This led to a sharp drop in its gearing-or debt level compared to share capital-which stood at 23 percent at the end of 2015 compared to 54 percent when de Castries took over in 2000.

Last month AXA said net profit surged 12 percent in 2015 to 5.61 billion Euros (\$6.16 billion). In a letter to colleagues, de Castries said he believed his "deeply and carefully thought-out choice" to step down came at "the best moment" to hand over the leadership as the group had "never been in such a great shape".

"The best moment because it is only natural that a new team launches and manages our new strategic plan to be announced in June 2016" and expected to set out plans for the group's digital transformation, he added. The Sunday Times said former Diageo boss Paul Walsh is also in the running to take the helm at HSBC but that he had run into opposition from one of the bank's large shareholders.

HSBC said last month that it would remain headquartered in Britain, after examining the possibility of moving to Hong Kong. HSBC has been based in Britain since 1992 when it took over Midland Bank and shifted its headquarters from Hong Kong to London. It was founded in Hong Kong and Shanghai in 1865 and 48,000 of its 257,000 global staff are in Britain. — AFP



ABIDJAN: Nigerian President of the African Bank of development Akinwumi Adesina delivers a speech at the opening ceremony of the Africa CEO Forum Awards that honors the best economy performances of African Chief Executive Officers and African companies, at the Hotel Ivoire. — AFP

STUDY FOR EUROPEAN BANKS SAYS BREXIT WOULD HARM SECTOR

LONDON: Banks in London would be hit hard if Britain left the European Union to trigger a long spell of uncertainty, a study conducted for European banking lobby AFME said yesterday. The 68-page study commissioned from law firm Clifford Chance looked at the potential impact of "Brexit", or Britain voting to leave the EU in a referendum on June 23.

It is the latest warning that Brexit would be bad news for the financial services industry, Britain's biggest tax-earning sector and which operates across the EU. "Banks and investment firms are likely to be significantly and adversely affected by new restrictions on cross-border business," the study said.

Many banks, including international ones such as JPMorgan, Morgan Stanley and Goldman Sachs, have their European bases in London, the EU's biggest financial centre, and would lose their "passport" under EU law to offer services across the bloc. "This 'passport' is key to the UK's appeal for many non-EU financial institutions," the study said.

Campaigners who want Britain to leave the EU say the UK could negotiate favorable new trading terms given the size of its financial centre and economy. They also argue Britain could

write its own financial rules outside the EU.

The study said the EU can grant passports to non-EU lenders, which "could be an important mitigant allowing wholesale cross-border investment services to be provided in the EU". But to obtain a passport, a non-EU lender would have to comply with rules the EU deemed to be "equivalent", or as strict as its own.

Like Norway, Britain would need to be a member of the European Economic Area (EEA), which offers some of the benefits of the EU's single market without being an EU member. Unless Britain was in the EEA, any replacement trade agreement would have the potential to restrict cross-border trading, the study added.

"There is likely to be a long period of uncertainty after a vote to leave as to whether these regimes will be available, which will affect market participants' business planning," said Chris Bates, a partner at Clifford Chance. Exchanges and clearing and settlement houses for securities could also be hit by new restrictions unless they are recognised as "equivalent", the study said. Last week Deutsche Boerse and the London Stock Exchange said their plans to merge would not be derailed by a Brexit. — Reuters

MONEY TO BURN? CHINA FIRMS SEEK INVESTORS

FROM 'BANK OF HELL' CURRENCY TO EVENT PARAPHERNALIA

SHANTOU: The Guangdong Yixiang Folk Culture Co has a license to print money-thousands of lookalike US dollars roll off its clattering presses every minute, intended as burnt offerings for the heavenly bank accounts of Chinese ancestors. But in the earthly realm, small- and medium-sized companies like this have a devil of a time getting a loan from China's big state-owned banks, which prefer to lend to large, often state-owned, firms.

Business is booming, says general manager Xu Shaohong, and it is ready to expand its products from "Bank of Hell" currency to paraphernalia for events earlier in the cycle of life, such as weddings and births. Like thousands of other capital-starved enterprises in the upside-down world of Chinese corporate finance, it has applied to list on the National Equities Exchange and Quotations (NEEQ), a little-known stock market based in Beijing.

The NEEQ, also known as the "New Third Board", has exploded, growing from 356 companies at the end of 2013 to more than 6,000 today-with nearly 1,000 joining since January 1. It already has twice as many listings as the Shanghai and Shenzhen stock exchanges combined and is expected to add as many as 5,000 more by the end of 2016. "It's the next NASDAQ," Xu said, referring to the US exchange favored by technology startups.

Death and taxes

As the world's second-largest economy falters, Beijing is counting on small, private companies to help move it away from dependency on heavy industry and plodding state-owned enterprises. Guangdong Yixiang is a prime example. Its offices in the southern city of Shantou are bright and modern. It has almost 80 employees and mostly exports to Hong Kong and Diaspora Chinese communities across Asia.

Documents submitted to NEEQ as part of its listing application show three years of healthy profits-more than two million yuan (\$300,000) in 2015. With reliable income from one of life's two certainties, it would seem to be an attractive borrower.

For years, China has promised to make it easier for such firms to access capital, and last year Premier Li Keqiang urged the country's banks to increase financing for them. But lenders remain risk-averse, said Suzie Wu, a managing partner at Tianxing Capital, which invests in NEEQ-quoted firms.

"They actually only support the big companies," she said, leaving companies like

Guangdong Yixiang to turn to "shadow banks", unofficial lenders that often charge exorbitant, profit-sapping interest rates. "Until the NEEQ market came, it was very difficult for the small, medium enterprises to get financial support."

Open goal

There were 2,565 share issues on NEEQ last year, generating \$18.7 billion, according to data from the exchange, with another \$4.07 billion raised in the first two months of this year. But unlike most major global stock exchanges, joining NEEQ does not of itself provide corporate funding, as new listings do not necessarily sell shares in an initial public offering.

When Chinese and Asian football champions Guangzhou Evergrande Taobao-one of the most high-profile companies quoted on NEEQ-listed last year, it simply declared its shares to be worth 40 yuan apiece. It was not until this January that it sold new investors a little more than five percent of itself, raising 869 million yuan-giving it a market capitalisation close to that of Manchester United.

More than half the listed companies have never recorded a single share sale on the board, data on the NEEQ website shows. But

companies who cannot find buyers can still use their shares as "collateral for loans", said Christopher Balding, of Peking University's HSBC Business School in Shenzhen. As such "being on the New Third Board is better than not being on the New Third Board", explained Yang Peng, a consultant for Guangdong Yixiang.

If nothing else "it will definitely make it much easier to get a bank loan". Loose listing requirements are another large part of the NEEQ's appeal, a contrast to the heavily regulated flotation process in Shanghai and Shenzhen. Until now, companies wanting to go public in China have generally had to show years of profitability, but the New Third Board asks them to demonstrate little more than two years of existence and that their business activities are legal.

As such, Balding said, the bourse does not require "full and accurate disclosure" of the "financial risks that investors might be facing". But Xu, the banknote printer, had no qualms, imagining a future financed by NEEQ investors, with automated production lines and orders fulfilled online. Who knows, she said, "maybe we can even make tombstones". — AFP



BEIJING: Chinese President Xi Jinping (R) and German President Joachim Gauck (L) attend the opening ceremony of Sino-German Youth Friendly Exchange Year at the Great Hall of the People. — AFP

DECISION DELAYED ON RETRIAL FOR FRENCH ROGUE TRADER KERVIEL

PARIS: Investigators postponed a decision yesterday on whether French rogue trader Jerome Kerviel has the right to a retrial over his conviction for gambling away 4.9 billion Euros (\$5.5 billion), lawyers said. The 39-year-old's unauthorized trading almost bankrupted his employer Societe Generale, one of Europe's biggest banks, but his defenders say he has been made a scapegoat.

He was sentenced to three years in prison in 2010, but was given a conditional release in September 2014 after spending less than five months behind bars. He insists his employers were aware of his actions and launched a bid for a retrial in January saying the initial trial was "rigged".

"It's going to be a long battle. We are ready," he said yesterday after an investigating committee said it was postponing its decision on whether to support a retrial. His lawyer claimed the delay proved their request was "well-founded", while Societe Generale's lawyer Jean Veil said there was "no doubt" the demand would ultimately be rejected.

'Manipulated'

Kerviel is basing his bid on testimony given last year by Nathalie Le Roy, a top detective in the case. She told a court behind closed doors in April 2015 that she felt Societe Generale had "manipulated" her during the investigation in 2008.

According to a transcript seen by AFP, Le Roy told the court: "I had the feeling, then the certainty that Jerome Kerviel's superiors could not have been unaware" that he was taking wildly risky bets on equity derivatives. In a bombshell revelation in January, Le Roy presented recordings of a former deputy prosecutor in the case, Chantal de Leiris, saying it was "obvious" that the bank was aware of Kerviel's shady dealings. "When the subject comes up, anyone even a little bit involved in finance laughs, knowing very well that Societe Generale knew... it's obvious, obvious," says de Leiris in the recordings, made in June 2015.

'Pseudo-revelations'

Kerviel's trades could have bankrupted

Societe Generale had they not been discovered and unwound in time. He was convicted of breach of trust, forgery and entering false data, but claimed his bosses turned a blind eye to his malfeasance as long as the profits kept rolling in. Societe Generale has rejected what it called "pseudo-revelations" and a "new media manipulation" in the case.

Veil has dismissed as "nonsense" the idea that the bank knew of the rogue trading. It is "implausible that those directly above Jerome Kerviel or the people who worked with him every day knew but didn't say anything," Veil told AFP in January. He said Kerviel's colleagues would have no interest in covering up his risky maneuvers for fear of jeopardizing their bonuses, which depended on the performance of the team.

Kerviel was initially ordered to repay to Societe Generale the 4.9 billion Euros he lost, but an appeals court overturned the order, arguing that the bank's internal oversight mechanisms had failed. Societe Generale launched a fresh court bid to recover the money in January, but a decision was delayed until mid-June to see if Kerviel would face a new criminal retrial.



VERSAILLES: The investigation panel of the Court of revision and review gives its decision yesterday on the application for review of the trial of Jerome Kerviel, convicted criminal to five years' imprisonment, three years firm. — AFP

AUSTRALIAN STOCK EXCHANGE CEO QUILTS AMID BRIBE INVESTIGATION

SYDNEY: The head of Australia's main stock exchange resigned yesterday amid an investigation into allegations that a gaming firm he once ran made a bribery payment several years ago to the family of Cambodia's prime minister. The resignation of Australian Securities Exchange CEO Elmer Funke Kupper is effective immediately, ASX chairman Rick Holliday-Smith said in a statement. Funke Kupper has denied any wrongdoing.

The shakeup follows a report published last week by Australia's Fairfax newspapers regarding a 200,000 Australian dollar (\$152,000) payment allegedly made by Australian gaming giant Tabcorp to a consulting company linked to Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen's family in 2010.

At the time, Funke Kupper was Tabcorp's CEO and the company was reportedly looking to launch an online gaming operation in Cambodia. Tabcorp would have needed permission from Hun Sen or his senior officials to obtain a Cambodian gaming license. Funke Kupper, who has been CEO of the ASX since 2011, told Fairfax that he couldn't recall any such payment. But the Australian Federal Police has confirmed it is investigating whether Tabcorp violated any foreign bribery laws.

"The ASX Board accepted that Elmer wanted to direct his full focus to the investigations which may be made into the Tabcorp matter and not have them interfere with the important role of leading the ASX," Holliday-Smith said in the statement.

Funke Kupper did not immediately respond to a request for comment, but told the Australian Financial Review on Monday that he had done nothing wrong. "I have not been told I am being investigated," he told the newspaper. "My job is to take control of the situation. I am not doing this because I have done anything wrong under the law." Last week, Tabcorp confirmed that it had explored a business opportunity with Cambodia in 2009, but said it ultimately chose not to pursue it. Holliday-Smith said he will take over as executive chairman of the ASX until a new CEO is chosen. — AP

DUBAI'S PROPERTY SERVICE CHARGE REQUIRES NEW COMPUTATION

DUBAI: Variations in calculation methods for average property service charges continue to cause disputes between landlords and developers in Dubai, resulting in the need for a new computation approach to come up with fair and reasonable fees, according to a new industry report released by Orient Planet Research, an Orient Planet Group venture.

Titled 'A Methodology for More Accurate Service Charge Calculation in Freehold Buildings in Dubai, UAE,' the report launched today (Saturday, March 19, 2016) offers to bridge this gap by presenting a step-by-step methodology for accurate calculation of costs involved in the management, operation, maintenance, and repair of buildings' common areas.

With the proper implementation of the methodology, the report said asset owners can efficiently measure ongoing costs to arrive at a more realistic budget allotment. It will also encourage discussions and record decisions regarding the maintenance

of common areas. Most importantly, the report will provide data on the common assets' actual performance that can be utilized for future planning and benchmarking.

Nidal Abou Zaki, Managing Director, Orient Planet Group, said: "Property service charges have always been a controversial issue not only in the UAE but also across the globe. This shows the need to focus on a long-lasting solution that is acceptable and fair for all involved parties. We seek to bridge the current gap and provide valuable insights into the issue by launching our new report. Our study details a comprehensive, step-by-step approach to compute costs involved in the maintenance of common areas. Asset owners will benefit immensely from the invaluable information contained in the report which will assist them in arriving at a more reasonable calculation for property service charges."

Focusing on freehold buildings, the study explains what is included in

service charges and ways to estimate the costs. Its specifically measures the utility consumption of assets found in common areas, taking into consideration how utility expenses account for the majority of service charges. The report also looks into the specific conditions to correctly track and monitor the ongoing costs.

Nahla Nana, Director-Research and Innovation of Orient Planet Research and Marketing Consultant for Dubai Real Estate Institute of Dubai Land Department, said: "Many landlords have been studying service charge fees not only to maximize their incomes but also to ensure that the rates are reasonable. Our report offers a unique solution to different variations in service charge computation to guide asset owners and property developers. We also present the many advantages and opportunities our new methodology offers. We particularly focus on freehold buildings in Dubai for a clearer presentation of our methodology and hope that we



Nahla Nana, Director-Research and Innovation of Orient Planet Research and Marketing Consultant for Dubai Real Estate Institute of Dubai Land Department.

will help set new benchmarks across the UAE."

Other insights to be gained from the paper include Dubai laws on ownership of jointly-owned properties, estimating service charges, tables containing key data for computation, how to use unit rates to convert man-

days to actual expenses, and the allocation of service charges for common areas. The report is available on the website of Orient Planet Research at www.opresearch.me.

Orient Planet Research develops comprehensive macro-level reports on media, communications, business, technology and other key sectors in the Arab World. In addition to offering up-to-date reports offering valuable insights on country-specific industries, Orient Planet Research provides customized research services according to the client's particular requirements.

It is backed by a team of highly qualified researchers who have strong experience in developing comprehensive reports that offer actionable insights. Orient Planet Group is headquartered in Dubai, UAE and manages a comprehensive network of offices, affiliates and partners to address all its clients' needs across the Gulf, Levant and North Africa regions.

CYPRUS ECONOMY: TURNING THE PAGE

By Nikos Christodoulides
Government Spokesman of the Republic of Cyprus

Overcoming an unprecedented financial crisis, Cyprus has recovered impressively following a three year period of robust reform, bank restructuring and fiscal consolidation. Following the March 2013 unprecedented decision to use the "bail-in" instrument for the first time as a remedy to the Cyprus banking crisis, very few could have predicted that three years later Cyprus would register economic growth of 1.6%, a nearly balanced budget with a primary surplus of around 2.5%, a steadily reducing public debt, a well-capitalized banking sector and that the country would not be requesting an extension of the support program.

In fact, Cyprus is now referred to as a role model of economic reform and consolidation. Key to this success is the fact that Cyprus managed to successfully turn the crisis into an opportunity to effectively address and correct long-term weaknesses, and to re-build a strong economy anchored on solid foundations.

This was done not by increasing taxes, but rather by cutting public spending, freezing new hiring in the public sector and rationalizing welfare spending through completely reforming the welfare system. A policy of privatization and licensing encompasses the ports, an integrated casino resort, new marinas, the national lottery and partially the telecommunications sector.

The banking sector has been transformed through restructuring, resulting in a smaller yet much healthier banking sector, which operates under stricter supervision and oversight. With strong recapitalization, achieved mainly through significant foreign investments, and with new management in most of the Cypriot banks, it is fair to say that the Cypriot banking system has turned the page.

Equally significant, if not more so, is the strategic reorientation of the business and financial services sector, which no longer relies on an oversized banking sector, nor on notably high foreign deposits. Notwithstanding the leaps of progress, it is certainly acknowledged that challenges remain, such as high unemployment and non-performing loans.

As Cyprus decisively continues to reform and restructure, we are confident that we will overcome the remaining challenges. In the last three years, Cyprus has proven that it has learned from past mistakes, that its economy and its people are resilient, that it has the commitment and the capability to build and sustain a stable economy and to be a credible member of the EU and the euro-zone.

The results of this effort have undoubtedly been a product of close cooperation between the Government, political parties, social partners and above all the Cypriot people. This collective effort will continue. The completion of the aid program is therefore not the end of the road for Cyprus but signifies the continuation of our plans, with a strong emphasis on sustainable reforms.



SAN FRANCISCO: This file photo taken on November 15, 2015 shows a Marriott hotel. — AFP

MARRIOTT BID FOR STARWOOD HOTELS TOPS CHINA'S ANBANG

NEW YORK: Marriott International is close to winning a bidding war for Starwood Hotels & Resorts that would create the global hotel leader, trumping an offer from China's Anbang. Marriott improved its November cash-and-stock offer for Starwood by more than \$1 billion, to \$13.6 billion, in an amended deal approved by their respective boards of directors, the companies announced in a joint statement yesterday.

"The companies have signed an amendment to their definitive merger agreement that creates the world's largest hotel company," they said. The merger would combine Marriott's more than 4,400 properties worldwide, with a portfolio of brands including The Ritz-Carlton, JW Marriott and Gaylord Hotels, with Starwood's 1,270 properties in 100 countries and the Westin and W brands among others.

The merger will help Marriott expand in China, India and Europe, regions where Starwood has a strong presence. "After five months of extensive due diligence and joint integration planning with Starwood, including a careful analysis of the brand architecture and future development prospects, we are even more excited about the power of the combined companies and the upside growth opportunities," said Arne Sorenson, president and chief executive of Marriott.

Marriott said it is confident it can achieve \$250 million in annual cost synergies within two years after closing, raising it from \$200 million estimated in November 2015 when the two announced their original merger agreement.

Marriott substantially improved the cash component of its offer. The amended deal has Starwood receiving \$21 in cash and 0.8 share of Marriott stock for each share of Starwood. Under the terms of the November agreement it was \$2 and 0.92 share. On Friday Starwood had announced it favored the offer from a consortium led by Anbang of \$13.2 billion, or \$78 per share, and would notify Marriott that their agreed merger was off.

Anbang offer not 'superior'

But yesterday, Starwood said it no longer viewed the Anbang bid as "superior", ending talks with the insurer and its partners, China-based Primavera Capital and US private equity investor JC Flowers & Co. Marriott and Starwood said they had already cleared potential regulatory hurdles for their tie-up, including pre-merger antitrust reviews in the US and Canada. The companies agreed to hold shareholder meetings on March 28 to vote on the merger.

They said they expect the deal to close by mid-2016. "The company will have a broader global footprint and the most powerful frequent

traveler programs in the industry, strengthening Marriott's ability to serve guests wherever they travel," Sorenson said. Shares in Marriott were down 1.1 percent at \$72.34 after an hour of trade; Starwood leaped 4.2 percent to \$83.95.

Starwood would have to pay Marriott a \$450 million break-up fee if it decides to terminate the amended merger deal, up from \$400 million in the original agreement. RBC Capital Markets analysts said in a client note that if Anbang wants to Pursue Starwood, it would need to bid "at least \$84 in order to compensate Starwood for a longer closing period and increased uncer-

tainty on the regulatory front."

The deep-pocketed Chinese company has been on a shopping spree in the US hotel sector. In October 2014 it acquired the landmark Waldorf Astoria Hotel in Manhattan for nearly \$2 billion from Hilton Worldwide Holdings. Then last week, in addition to the Starwood bid, it announced the \$6.5 billion purchase of Strategic Hotels & Resorts from Blackstone. The Strategic purchase comprises 16 luxury hotels and resorts in the US, including the JW Marriott Essex House in Manhattan and the Hotel Del Coronado in San Diego. — AFP

INDIA'S THIRST FOR GASOLINE HELPS GLOBAL OIL DEMAND

LONDON: India's gasoline consumption is surging and has become one of the fastest-growing components of global oil demand. With other parts of the global economy struggling, continued growth in gasoline consumption in India, together with the United States and China, has become one of the most important indicators for global oil prices.

Saudi Arabia and other members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries are relying on India's continued consumption growth to help absorb excess crude supply and rebalance the oil market in 2016/17. India's drivers used 500,000 barrels per day of motor spirit in the 12 months ending in February 2016, according to the Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell of the Ministry of Petroleum.

Gasoline consumption rose by more than 60,000 bpd in 2015 compared with an increase of 240,000 bpd in the (much larger) US market. Gasoline still accounts for a relatively small share, about 12 percent, of refined petroleum products consumed in India. The corresponding figure for the United States is 47 percent. But gasoline consumption has been growing much faster than petroleum demand as a whole as the country becomes more affluent and the expanding urban middle class become car owners.

Gasoline consumption has grown at a compound annual rate of 11 percent over the last five years compared with 5 percent for other products. Gasoline consumption growth surged to around 14 percent over the last year compared with 9 percent for other products. Gasoline consumption has doubled since the start of 2009 and quadrupled since

1999, according to India's Central Statistics Office.

Growing drivers

India's growing number of drivers provided the third-largest increase in gasoline consumption anywhere in the world last year after the United States and China. The Ministry of Petroleum predicts gasoline consumption will increase further to almost 800,000 bpd by 2021/2022. Since actual consumption is already running ahead of the five-year plan the eventual outturn could be higher.

Sales of passenger cars and utility vehicles are expected to grow by as much as 12 percent in 2016/17 up from 6 percent in 2015/16, which translates to around 230,000 new vehicles hitting the roads every month. The government plans to spend around \$14 billion in the next fiscal year upgrading the country's road network. Consumption of other fuels and lubricants is also growing, although not as fast as the super-charged gasoline market.

India's total petroleum consumption has increased by around 340,000 bpd over the last year, with gasoline accounting for more than 18 percent of the increase. India's fuel markets have become one of the most important sources of global oil demand growth. India accounted for more than one barrel in every six of extra oil demand reported in 2015, according to estimates prepared by the International Energy Agency. Total consumption of petroleum products has doubled from 2 million bpd in 1998/99 to almost 4 million bpd in 2015/16. India's oil ministry predicts consumption will hit 5.4 million bpd by 2021/22. — Reuters



TOKYO: The Pacific Egret, one of the two British-flagged ships arrived in Japan, is anchored at a port in the village of Tokai. — AP

BRITISH SHIPS ARRIVE IN JAPAN TO CARRY PLUTONIUM TO US

TOKYO: Two British ships arrived in eastern Japan yesterday to transport a shipment of plutonium - enough to make dozens of atomic bombs - to the US for storage under a bilateral agreement. The ships arrived at the coastal village of Tokai, northeast of Tokyo, home to the country's main nuclear research facility, the Japan Atomic and Energy Agency, according to the Kyodo News agency and citizens' groups. It will take several hours to load the plutonium-filled casks onto the ships, both fitted with naval guns and other protection.

The Pacific Egret and Pacific Heron, both operated by Pacific Nuclear Transport Ltd, will take the 331 kilograms of plutonium to the Savannah River Site, a US government facility in South Carolina, under a pledge made by Japan in 2014. The plutonium, mostly from Britain, and some from the US and France, had been used for research purposes.

The Pacific Egret docked first and appeared to be loading the plutonium, with the second ship standing by off-shore, according to media reports and Japanese and international anti-nuclear groups. Japanese officials refused to confirm details, citing security reasons. Japan's stockpile and its fuel-reprocessing ambitions to use plutonium as fuel for power generation have been a source of international security concerns.

Massive stockpile

Japan has accumulated a massive stockpile of plutonium - 11 metric tons in Japan and another 36 tons that have been reprocessed in Britain and France and are waiting to be returned to Japan - enough to make nearly 6,000 atomic bombs. The latest shipment comes just ahead of a nuclear secu-

ritty summit in Washington later this month, and is seen as a step to showcase both countries' nuclear nonproliferation efforts.

Washington has increasingly voiced concerns about the nuclear spent-fuel-reprocessing plans by Japan and China to produce plutonium for energy generation, a technology South Korea also wants to acquire, saying they pose security and proliferation risks.

The US environmental group Savannah River Site Watch said it recognized the need to secure plutonium, but asked why plutonium of foreign origins had to be brought onto American soil for storage.

In a statement yesterday, group director Tom Clemens also urged Washington to "reassess its position at the summit and push hard for Japan to cease reprocessing and plutonium stockpiling due to the proliferation threat those programs pose."

Japan began building a major reprocessing plant with French state-owned company Areva in the early 1990s. The trouble-plagued project has been delayed ever since, and in November its opening was postponed until 2018 to allow for more safety upgrades and inspections.

Experts say launching the Rokkasho reprocessing plant would not ease the situation, because Japan has little hope of achieving a spent fuel recycling program. Japan's plutonium-burning fast breeder reactor Monju, suspended for more than 20 years, is now on the verge of being closed due to poor safety records and technical problems, while optional plans to burn uranium-plutonium mixtures of MOX fuel in conventional reactors have been delayed since the Fukushima crisis. Only two of Japan's 43 workable reactors are currently online. — AP

البنك الأهلي المتحد ahli united bank

'AHLI UNITED BANK' ANNOUNCES WINNERS IN ITS WEEKLY DRAW

KUWAIT: Ahli United Bank held its weekly draw of Al-Hassad Islamic Saving program on March 16, 2016. This program offers the biggest prize amount to the largest number of winners. The prize program succeeded in becoming the first and only prize account in Kuwait compliant with the Islamic Shari'a principles.

The program has been developed to fulfill the needs of the bank's customers and increase their opportunities in winning sizeable and attractive prizes in addition to enjoying the latest banking advantages

that Ahli United Bank provides.

On this occasion, the bank issued the following press release: Al Hassad Islamic Saving program offers the highest amounts of prizes which amount to KD 3.4 Million per year. This program also offers 26 weekly prizes, with the highest number of weekly winners. The Islamic Hassad Saving Account may be opened by the lowest amount to open an account, which is KD 100. The winner of the weekly grand prize in the amount of KD 25,000/- is: Zainab Husain Al-Saeed.



خدمة مصرفية 24 ساعة
24 Hours Banking



ABK INSTALLS NEW ATM MACHINES FOR CUSTOMERS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

KUWAIT: Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) recently announced that it has installed new ATM machines that are specifically designed to service customers with special needs. This initiative comes in line with the Central Bank's program, which focuses on supporting the special needs segment in Kuwait and is also aligned with the Bank's strategy which focuses on special needs.

The installment of these ATM machines is one of a series of requirements from the Central Bank, who have devised a fully-fledged program that entails a set of initiatives and enhancements that cater to the banking needs of individuals with special needs.

Fawzy ALThunayan, General Manager of Board Affairs said: "ABK is happy to

install the new ATM machines for people with special needs. We are committed to making a difference to the lives of individuals on a corporate and social level. Initially, the newly installed ATM machines will cater to the paraplegic community and in the very near future an audio jack will be installed to support the blind. The Bank will also be making other enhancements across the branches to facilitate the banking process for this segment".

ABK has adopted the 'Special Needs' cause and has made it a primary CSR focus for this year. The Bank has been supporting related initiatives in an effort to raise further awareness of this segment among the public to further encourage socialization and equality.

TELECOM ITALIA CHIEF ON THE WAY OUT AFTER VIVENDI CLASH

MILAN: Italy's Telecom Italia said yesterday it was in "advanced negotiations" on the resignation of its chief executive Marco Patuano, after reports of disagreements with its main shareholder, France's Vivendi. After weeks of speculation, investors seemed to welcome the statement, with shares in Telecom Italia trading 2.7 percent higher in early business on the Milan stock exchange.

The Italian company said the move came after a request by Italy's financial markets regulator, CONSOB. "Telecom Italia announces that negotiations are ongoing with the chief executive officer aimed at the definition of an agreement to be submitted to the relevant corporate bodies-on the consensual suspension of the offices held by the CEO within the group," it said in a brief statement, whose headline spoke of "advanced negotiations".

The announcement follows reports in recent weeks of Patuano's possible departure as well as of bad relations between him and chairman

Giuseppe Recchi. Recchi could assume the helm in the interim, Italy's AGI news agency reported.

The AGI news agency also said that Patuano's recent visit to Vivendi's Paris headquarters apparently accelerated his exit from the company with the French firm calling for a "discontinuity" in Telecom Italia's management. Vivendi owns nearly a quarter of the Italian operator.

Other media have also reported on differences between Patuano and Vivendi. According to the online version of financial daily Il Sole-24 Ore, Vivendi asked Patuano for spending cuts that went deeper than the 600 million Euros (\$675 million) for 2016-2018 that the chief executive already had planned. Telecom Italia posted a net loss of 72 million Euros last year after a profit the previous year of 1.35 billion, while sales dropped more than eight percent. Media reports say that among his possible successors is private rail transporter NTV's Flavio Cattaneo. —AFP

JOLLY SILKS LAUNCHES BIGGEST MONTH-LONG TEXTILE SALE IN KUWAIT CITY

KUWAIT: Jolly Silks, the fashion and silks division of Joyalukkas Group, welcomes the changing of seasons with a mega sale on textiles. Located at the iconic Panasonic Tower, Jolly Silks is known for its extensive selection of high-quality designer silks and fabrics, as well as traditional wear.

"Celebrations are a big part of life, especially for the Indian community," says Mr Joy Alukkas, Chairman & MD, Joyalukkas Group. "And there are specific clothing requirements for each occasion. Jolly Silks aims to fulfill these needs for our value-

conscious patrons and inspire them to make every moment unforgettable."

At the Jolly Silks Mega Sale, from 17th March to 16th April 2016, customers enjoy up to 50% discount on all textiles, including fabulous churidar and saree materials, as well as luxurious wedding finery. Jolly Silks offers a blend of contemporary fashion and tradition in a wide range of textiles, daily apparel and traditional women's wear. It is also the preferred destination for formal dress materials for weddings and other major occasions.

ZAIN LAUNCHES DAILY DRAW CAMPAIGN FOR POSTPAID CUSTOMERS

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading telecommunications company in Kuwait, yesterday announced the launch of an exciting new draw campaign which entitles postpaid customers paying their bills through Zain's digital channels a chance to win a daily prize as well as a final cash prize of \$2000. Zain launched this exciting promotional campaign to reinforce its leadership position and its pledge in offering the best services and offers to meet its customers' personal telecommunications needs, who are considered Kuwait's biggest family of subscribers.

The draw, held throughout the next three weeks, ends at April 10th, and will see daily winners of iPhone 6s (128GBs) devices as well as a final cash prize of \$2000. For every 1KD paid through Zain's digital channels, including the company's website and smartphone app, postpaid customers will get one



chance to enter the daily draws as well as the final cash draw.

Yesterday's announcement is a testament of Zain's tireless efforts

in rewarding its customer base, the largest in the country. The campaign further demonstrates Zain's pivotal role in Kuwait's telecom

sector, sparing no effort in introducing exceptional offerings for technology and smartphone enthusiasts.

WARBA BANK LAUNCHES NEW INTERACTIVE WEBSITE

KUWAIT: Warba Bank, the fastest growing Bank in Kuwait providing entire spectrum of world-class Sharia compliant banking and investment services locally and internationally, announces the launch of its brand new customer-centric and user-friendly website designed to enhance customer experience.

The new, easy to use, state-of-the-art website is an additional achievement in the Bank's Strategy Plan aiming at enhancing customers' digital banking experience. The new website has been launched with innovative designs reflecting the Bank's core values centered on creativity and modernity.

In this context, Mr Haitham Al-Turkait, Chief Technology Officer at Warba Bank, said: "The new sophisticated design of Warba Bank website is now easily used by customers to provide them a better banking experience that is more interactive. For keeping pace with the increased adoption of digital technology in the region, our website is fully compatible with all devices such as computers, laptops, tablets and Smartphones".

He added, "At Warba we are keen to provide customers with easy and flexible services to experience a quick access to the Bank's products and services. The new website is designed to enhance our relationships with customers and at the same time to provide them with all their banking data and information by way of sophisticated high quality technique".

Recent years, there have been significant changes taking place in the way customers use

banking services. When Warba Bank decided to revamp its site, its key goals have been to provide visitors with easy access to content through simplified search tools, smooth access to the Bank services and products and easy use all in an atmosphere of attractive design. In other words: providing better online banking experience.

In order to assist visitors to easily get in touch with the Bank or locate any of its branches, a separate section on the site has been dedicated for displaying an interactive compact map

using programming interfaces of map apps.

The new and improved site boasts a new live chat feature where a professional team is dedicated for directly answering customers inquiries. Customers can contact the professional team an online live chat thus saving the time and effort and at the same time customers are provided with whatever information they need instantly.

No doubt that the new website has brought about significant improvement in customers' experience and providing suitable medium for existing and potential customers to access to the information they seek on products and services.

Warba Bank is keen to keep up with online technological progress. The Bank has recently provided its customers with new Online Banking services, Warba Bank's applications for Android and iOS smartphones under the framework of Warba's continuous quest to enhance customers' experience. The new services package enables customers to carry on a number of financial transactions online free of charge at the highest quality, speed and safety standards. Such transactions previously required customer's attendance to branches

By launching several online services one time, updating and developing other services, Warba Bank tries to stress its leading role in the online banking services to make such services easier and more comfortable. The Bank offers a wide range of banking products and services to its corporate and retail customers through its nine branches network.



Haitham Al-Turkait

FOR BANK HEIST HACKERS, THE PHILIPPINES WAS A BLACK HOLE

MANILA: In February 2013, the Philippines was up against a deadline to amend its Anti-Money Laundering Act and get itself off the 'grey list' of a global watchdog, and lawmakers were bickering over whether to include casinos under the legislation.

With one day to go, a Congressional committee heard repeated pleas not to hamstring an industry that could rival other Asian gambling meccas by obliging casinos to report suspicious transactions. Finally, the senator chairing the meeting agreed "with a heavy heart" to exclude them, a transcript of the proceedings shows.

That same senator now heads a panel trying to fathom how \$81 million hacked last month from the New York Federal Reserve account of Bangladesh's central bank wound up with two casinos and a junket operator in the Philippines - and then disappeared. It is one of the biggest cyber heists in history, and since the money trail has gone cold in the Philippines, the perpetrators may never be identified.

The senator, Teofisto Guingona, told Reuters after a public hearing on the case last week that fierce lobbying by the gaming industry over the law had left the Philippines one of the world's softest targets for money launderers, putting the financial system at serious risk. "It can wreak havoc on the economy," he said. "Any money coming in and out of the country will come under scrutiny. People might just say 'to hell with it, it's not worth doing business with the Philippines.'"

The Philippines depends heavily on remittances from workers abroad, which account for about 10 percent of its GDP. The country's central bank chief said last week financial markets had shown no signs of distress over the scandal, but added: "We have to recognize there is a risk that is associated with this."

Unknown hackers breached the computer systems of Bangladesh Bank in early February and attempted to steal \$951 million from its account at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, which it uses for international settlements. Some attempted transfers were blocked, but \$81 million wound up in the Philippines.

Security researchers blamed malware and a faulty printer but said Bangladesh central bank officials were also responsible because of weak security procedures. The bank's governor and two deputy governors quit their

jobs over the scandal last week. Bangladesh said on Saturday it had formally sought the assistance of the US Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Bank secrecy law

Public hearings on the heist in the Philippines' Senate last week focused on the manager of a Manila branch of Rizal Commercial Banking Corp (RCBC). Her bank received the stolen money on Feb. 4 and transferred it to a foreign exchange broker who passed it on in tranches, including \$30 million in banknotes that officials say would have weighed 1,500 kg.

A colleague of the manager testified he saw her drive off in her car with 20 million pesos (\$431,000) in cash from one of several fictitious accounts to which the money was wired. The branch manager declined to give evidence in public.

According to an Anti-Money Laundering Council (AMLC) document seen by Reuters, on Feb. 8 Bangladesh Bank sent RCBC several messages via the SWIFT interbank communications network requesting transactions be stopped and the funds returned. However, five withdrawals were made from the accounts in 73 minutes the next morning. When RCBC responded to the SWIFT message later that day, all that remained of the \$81 million was \$68,305.

RCBC President Lorenzo Tan told the Senate he could not discuss what happened because of the country's bank deposit secrecy law, one of the world's strictest and a legacy of the martial-law era of President Ferdinand Marcos in the 1970s.

"Prevention of ... money laundering is being hampered by the very strict bank deposit secrecy law," central bank Governor Amando Tetangco told reporters. "Once the funds go into a bank deposit account, that's it. The trail turns cold." Sergio Osmena, another senator probing the bank heist, has pressed for years to amend the bank laws. He made no headway, he said, because secrecy suits businesses that want to evade taxes and can bribe lawmakers to resist legislative change.

"I am quite happy that a scandal like this has happened," Osmena told Reuters, explaining he believes the Bangladesh case is the tip of an iceberg alerting people to hundreds of money laundering crimes going unreported every year.

Casinos a 'weak link'

In a March 2 report, the US State Department said only 49 anti-money laundering cases have been filed since the AMLC began operating in 2001. The number of prosecutions and convictions has been virtually nil.

Recent efforts to include casinos in the law have been held up because of forthcoming elections and extensive lobbying from the gaming industry, which the report said was "a weak link" in the Philippines' anti-money laundering regime.

"Money laundering is a serious concern due to the Philippines' international narcotics trade, high degree of corruption among government officials, trafficking in persons, and the high volume of remittances from Filipinos living abroad," the US report said.

With ambitions to become one of Asia's gaming hubs alongside Macau and Singapore, the government opened a tract of reclaimed land near Manila airport for casinos. Two world-class resorts now operate there, counting Chinese high rollers among nearly half of their VIP clients, and two more are under construction.

The Senate hearing was told \$29 million of Bangladesh's money was transferred to one of these casinos, Solaire, owned and operated by Bloomberg Resorts Corp. "We did not know it was dirty money," Silverio Benny Tan, corporate secretary of Bloomberg Resorts, told reporters.

The Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corporation, which regulates the industry, says that to prevent laundering, money transferred to casinos for players must be exchanged for 'dead chips' that can only be cashed in from winnings. But, for Senator Guingona, the disappearance of such large sums into casinos underlines the weakness of Manila's anti-laundering regime and could push the country back into the 'grey list' of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

A spokeswoman for FATF, a Paris-based inter-governmental organization that combats laundering and terrorist financing, said an Asia-Pacific body was responsible for reviewing Manila. "We cannot comment on the current case being reported in the media," said Alexandra Wijmenga-Daniel. "However, ongoing deficiencies in the anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist finance regime of the Philippines would be of concern." —Reuters

ONLINE LODGING SERVICE AIRBNB OPENS CUBA LISTINGS TO WORLD

HAVANA: Online lodging service Airbnb is allowing travelers from around the world to book stays in private homes in Cuba after the San Francisco-based company received a special authorization from the Obama administration, Airbnb announced yesterday.

Airbnb was the first major American company to enter Cuba after Presidents Barack Obama and Raul Castro declared detente on Dec. 17, 2014. The service handles online listing, booking and payments for people looking to

stay in private homes instead of hotels. Cuba has become its fastest-growing market, with about 4,000 homes added over the last year. Airbnb had only been allowed to let US travelers use its services in Cuba under a relatively limited Obama administration exception to the half-century old US trade embargo on the island. The expansion of that license gives Airbnb the ability to become a one-stop shop for travelers seeking lodging in private homes, which have seen a flood of demand from travelers seeking an alternative to

state-run hotels. Airbnb's new authorization was announced on the morning of an historic three-day trip by Obama to Cuba and a day after Starwood Hotels announced that it had signed a deal to run three Cuban hotels, becoming the first US hotel company in Cuba since Fidel Castro took power in 1959 and took over the island's hotels. Airbnb said world travelers could begin booking in Cuba in April 2, the anniversary of the country's start of operations on the island.

All hotels in Cuba are now owned by

government agencies and many are known for poor service and decrepit infrastructure. Foreign hotel chains operate some of the island's larger and more luxurious hotels, which are running at full capacity thanks to a post-detente boom in tourism that saw visitor numbers surge nearly 20 percent last year.

One of the first openings in Cuba's centrally planned economy came when the government allowed families to rent rooms in their homes for a few dollars a night, starting in the 1990s. That

has become a full-blown private hospitality industry, with many Cubans using capital from relatives abroad and even foreign investors to transform crumbling homes into the equivalents of small boutique hotels. Many websites allow foreigners to book Cuban private homes, known as "casas particulares," but none has emerged as a dominant player. Many travelers still find it hard to guarantee bookings and make electronic or credit card payments. Airbnb is promoting its service as a solution to those problems in Cuba. —AP



CUPERTINO: The exterior of Apple headquarters is seen before an event to announce new products at the company's headquarters yesterday in Cupertino, California. —AP

AN IPHONE-HACKING TOOL LIKELY WOULDN'T STAY SECRET FOR LONG

NEW YORK: Suppose Apple loses its court fight with the FBI and has to produce a software tool that would help agents hack into an iPhone - specifically, a device used by one of the San Bernardino mass shooters. Could that tool really remain secret and locked away from potential misuse?

Not very likely, according to security and legal experts, who say a "potentially unlimited" number of people could end up getting a close at the tool's inner workings. Apple's tool would have to run a gauntlet of tests and challenges before any information it helps produce can be used in court, exposing the company's work to additional scrutiny by forensics experts and defense lawyers - and increasing the likelihood of leaks with every step. True, the Justice Department says it only wants a tool that would only work on the San Bernardino phone and that would be useless to anyone who steals it without Apple's closely guarded digital signature.

But widespread disclosure of the software's underlying code could allow government agents, private companies and hackers across the world to dissect Apple's methods and incorporate them into their own device-cracking software. That work might also point to previously unknown vulnerabilities in iPhone software that hackers and spies could exploit. Cases in which prosecutors have signaled interest in the Apple tool, or one like it, continue to pile up. In Manhattan, for instance, the district attorney's office says it holds 205 encrypted iPhones that neither it nor Apple can currently unlock, up from 111 in November. Such pent-up demand for the tool spells danger, says Andrea Matwyshyn, a professor of law and computer science at Northeastern University, since its widespread dissemination presents a clear threat to the security of innocent iPhone users.

"That's when people get uncomfortable with a potentially unlimited number of people being able to use this in a potentially unlimited number of cases," Matwyshyn says.

THE CREATION PROCESS

The concerns raised by experts mirror those in Apple's own court filings, where the company argues that the tool would be "used repeatedly and poses grave security risks." Outside experts note that nothing would prevent other prosecutors from asking Apple to rewrite the tool for the phones they want to unlock, or hackers from reverse engineering it for their own purposes.

Apple's long history of corporate secrecy suggests it could keep the tool secure during development and testing, says John Dickson, principal at Denim Group, a San Antonio, Texas-based software security firm. But after that, "the genie is out of the bottle," he says. Even if the software is destroyed after use in the San Bernardino case, government authorities - in the US or elsewhere - could always compel them to recreate it.

HIRING GO-GO DANCERS AT XBOX PARTY WAS WRONG: MICROSOFT

SAN FRANCISCO: Microsoft says it was "unequivocally wrong" for hosting a party with scantily dressed female dancers during a video game developers' conference. The party sparked a firestorm of criticism this week, in an industry that's been struggling to overcome longstanding complaints that it has objectified women and made them feel unwelcome as players and game-builders. In response, the head of Microsoft's Xbox division issued a statement saying the after-hours entertainment "represented Xbox and Microsoft in a way that was absolutely not consistent or aligned to our values."

An Xbox spokeswoman declined to answer questions about the dancers, who wore abbreviated school-girl outfits as they reportedly greeted party-goers and

danced on platforms. The party was held Thursday night during the annual Game Developers Conference in San Francisco.

Several people who attended the after-hours party complained on social media that they were offended and disappointed at seeing the go-go dancers. Some also noted the irony that, just hours earlier, Microsoft had sponsored a "Women in Gaming" luncheon to promote diversity in the industry.

In a statement, Xbox chief Phil Spencer acknowledged the event "disappointed many people" and pledged to "do better in the future." Xbox also released an email that Spencer sent to employees, which said the criticism was deserved. "I am personally committed to ensuring that diversity and inclusion is central to our everyday business," he added. —AP

APPLE STARTS BUSY WEEK WITH NEW IPHONE LAUNCH
GIANT TECH FIRM TO HOST REPORTERS, ANALYSTS TODAY

SAN FRANCISCO: Apple is kicking off a busy week: Today the giant tech company will host reporters and analysts at its Silicon Valley headquarters for a product launch event. On Tuesday, its lawyers will square off with authorities in federal court over the FBI's demand for help unlocking a San Bernardino killer's encrypted iPhone.

The tech giant's dispute with the government has commanded headlines for weeks, but it may get scant mention at the company's product event. Instead, CEO Tim Cook is expected to show off some new additions to the current family of iPhone and iPad devices at yesterday's gathering.

Apple could use a lift. iPhone sales are leveling off, after surging last year to record levels that made Apple the world's biggest company, by stock market value. And many are wondering if Cook can come up with another big hit.

So far, however, there have been no hints of any dramatic announcements, such as last year's highly anticipated Apple Watch debut, or major initiatives like the company's long-rumored but yet-to-materialize streaming TV service. And even though Cook has been outspoken about his opposition to a judge's order compelling Apple to write software that overrides iPhone security features, tech analysts say he probably won't risk overshadowing the company's products by discussing the case at yesterday's event.

While Apple has been mum about its plans, several analysts expect the company will introduce an upgrade to its older, four-inch iPhone 5S - aimed at consumers who haven't sprung for the bigger-screen iPhone 6 models that Apple introduced over the last two years. The new phone may come with features like Apple Pay and the company's fastest processor, which have previously been offered only on versions of the iPhone 6.

Analysts and tech blogs say Apple also may unveil a new model of the iPad Pro, which the company introduced last year with several features - like a detachable keyboard and stylus - designed for business users. A four-inch iPhone isn't likely to see the kind of blockbuster demand that Apple enjoyed with its large-screen iPhone 6 and 6S models, according to several financial analysts, but it could help Apple boost overall sales. The smaller phone might also draw some

signaled demand in the current three-month period will fall short of the 61 million iPhones sold in the January-March quarter last year.

Even with new features, analysts say the 4-inch iPhone should sell at a lower price than the larger models, which list at \$549 or more. That means it may appeal to some shoppers, especially in overseas markets, who want a premium phone at lower cost. It may also draw interest from owners of older iPhone 5 models who find the larger models

by late Apple cofounder Steve Jobs - on producing fewer products that it believes are superior to competitors' offerings. By contrast, Samsung is known for selling a multitude of phones and tablets at various sizes and prices. But Apple has gradually expanded its family of devices in recent years to reach consumers in different market categories, which also helps the company sell more online goods and services, said Gartner tech analyst Brian Blau.

"Tim Cook has said he thinks



SAN FRANCISCO: Apple CEO Tim Cook waves during the Apple event at the Bill Graham Civic Auditorium in San Francisco. Apple unveiled some new additions to its current family of iPhone and iPad devices at the company's product announcement yesterday. —AP

additional users into the market for Apple's online services, including Apple Music, Apple Pay and the highly profitable mobile App Store.

While shoppers bought a record 74.8 million iPhones in the final three months of 2015, Apple has

unwieldy. Many analysts expect Apple will release a more dramatically revamped new iPhone 7 in the fall. The proliferation of iPhone and iPad models may seem contrary to Apple's traditional focus - espoused

there's a lot of life left in the iPhone product line, despite the media and investor community pressuring Apple over the potential decline in premium iPhone sales," Blau said. "I think it's exactly these types of things that he has in mind." —AP

AUTONOMOUS CARS AREN'T PERFECT, BUT HOW SAFE MUST THEY BE?

DETROIT: As autonomous car technology rapidly progresses, makers of the cars face the difficult question of how safe they must be before they're ready to move people on highways and city streets.

Right now, companies such as Google, Audi, and Mercedes-Benz are testing the cars in a small number of cities to demonstrate they can be safer than human drivers. They also must figure out what level of risk is acceptable to both government regulators and a potentially skeptical public.

Government statistics show that human mistakes are responsible for 94 percent of the 33,000 traffic fatalities each year. Autonomous cars won't get drowsy, distracted or drunk, so in theory they could eliminate those mistakes and save an estimated 31,000 lives a year.

But as a Valentine's Day fender-bender involving a Google autonomous Lexus and a public bus

shows, cars that drive themselves can make mistakes. "We cannot expect any technology, any solution to be perfect all the time," says Raj Rajkumar, a computer engineering professor at Carnegie Mellon University who has led autonomous vehicle research for 15 years. "We live in a very uncertain world where lots of things happen."

Given that, regulators and would-be passengers may have to accept that the cars will cause a limited number of crashes, including deadly ones, if overall they save thousands of lives. "We should be concerned about automated vehicles," says Bryant Walker Smith, a University of South Carolina law professor who studies the technology. "But we should be terrified about today's drivers."

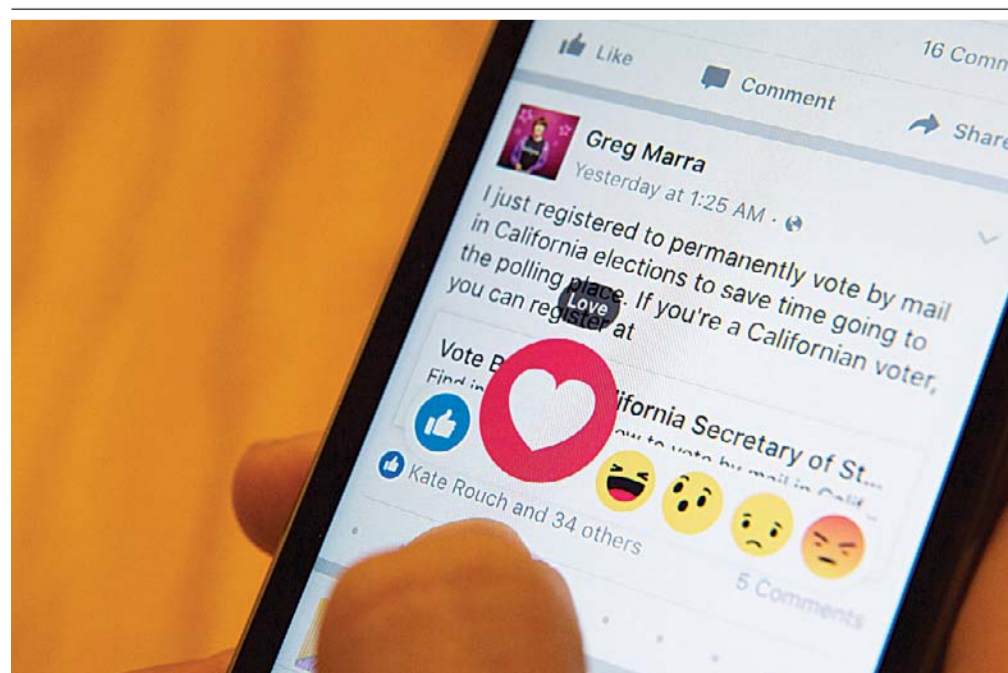
Google is testing a fleet of 56 autonomous cars on the streets of Mountain View, California; Austin, Texas; and Kirkland, Washington. The cars have driv-

en themselves almost 1.5 million miles, with a person as backup in the driver seat. The company also uses a simulator to test the cars in a variety of scenarios. Other companies such as Nissan, software firm Cruise Automation and parts suppliers Bosch and Delphi also are testing on public roads. Test cities also include San Francisco, Las Vegas and Pittsburgh.

Chris Urmsen, head of Google's self-driving car program, wrote in a January blog that during the past two years, drivers took control 13 times when their cars likely would have hit something. He noted that the rate of human intervention is dropping and he expects it to keep falling.

In the bus crash, Google for the first time admitted its car was at least partly responsible. The computer and human driver assumed the bus would yield as the car moved around sandbags. Instead, the bus kept going and the car hit its side. Google has updated its software. In about a dozen other crashes on city streets, Google blamed the human driver of the other vehicle. Google wants to make cars available to the public around the end of 2019, assuming its data shows the time is right for deployment. A Virginia Tech University study commissioned by Google found that the company's autonomous cars crashed 3.2 times per million miles compared with 4.2 times for human drivers. But the study had limitations. The human figures were increased to include an estimate of minor crashes that weren't reported to police. All autonomous car crashes in California, however, must be reported. The study also didn't include potential crashes that were avoided when human backup drivers took control. US traffic deaths have declined steadily for most of the past decade, from 43,510 in 2005 to 32,675 in 2014. But estimates show they spiked 9 percent in the first nine months of last year due mainly to increased miles traveled, texting and other distractions.

If autonomous cars are the answer to sharply reducing those figures, they'll first have to gain the public's trust. A January poll by AAA found that three-quarters of US drivers are "afraid" to ride in an autonomous car. A University of Michigan poll found similar results in Japan, China, India and elsewhere. Unlike Google, which wants to test cars without human drivers, automakers and parts companies are rolling out autonomous features as they are ready. —AP



In this Feb 18, 2016, file photo, Julie Zhuo, product design director at Facebook, demonstrates the new emoji icons. With more than 270 billion text messages sent a day, those tiny pictures and symbols have exploded beyond their initial fan base of 14-year-old girls. Now businesses, charities and events are scrambling to come up with their own. —AP

SEARCHING FOR THE LAST LIONS IN NIGERIA

YANKARI GAME RESERVE: Under a starless night sky in Yankari Game Reserve, Martial Kiki stands on the back of a battered pick-up truck searching for the last lions in Nigeria. From the white Toyota Hilux, its sides lacerated by branches, the 31-year-old researcher from the republic of Benin plays the tormented sound of a distressed buffalo calf over a megaphone.

In theory, the lions are supposed to hear the buffalo and come for an easy meal. Then Kiki would shine a floodlight on the hungry, nocturnal cats and count them for a population estimate. But despite broadcasting 29 hours of calls and trekking 150 kilometers through Yankari looking for tracks, Kiki hasn't seen one lion yet. Not even a paw print.

"I expected to see more than this," Kiki said in the heart of the reserve, an expanse of savannah the size of Luxembourg in Nigeria's northeast, dubbed the country's "richest wildlife oasis." The situation has become worse. There has been no response, no tracks," he said, inadvertently likening the situation to one of the darkest scenes from Disney's "The Lion King," when the protagonist's pride is overrun by a pack of mangy scavengers. "In five, 10 years, lions can disappear completely from Nigeria," said Kiki, a languid, boyish man with

broad shoulders wearing a worn beige baseball cap. "Now everywhere we're going there are hyena prints."

'Urgent situation'

There are only two areas in Nigeria home to lions: Kainji Lake National Park, in the northwest, where some 30 cats are living, and Yankari, where researchers believe there are just under five. The numbers for West Africa are equally dire, with just 400 lions remaining in the region, according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), out of a total population of 20,000 lions living in the wild around the world.

"When we started our first comprehensive West Africa lion survey in 2009, lions had already lost 99 per cent of their West African range," said Philipp Henschel, a survey coordinator at the lion conservation organization Panthera. There is no simple solution to saving the West African lions, whose males have shorter manes than their southern counterparts, and in December were listed as endangered by the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

With chronic mismanagement in the past and underfunding, Yankari today is struggling to attract the funds it needs to preserve its last lions. Parks famous for their lions, including Tanzania's Serengeti

Park and South Africa's Kruger National Park, run on a budget of approximately \$500 (450 Euros) per square kilometer.

In contrast, most West African parks with lions operate on a budget of just \$36 per square kilometer. "Yankari is one of the few areas where fencing makes sense because the situation is so urgent," said Henschel, speaking from Libreville. To protect the animals and allow rangers to patrol more efficiently, fences need to be built around the perimeter of the park, he added. "We know how to conserve cats," he said. "We just need money to do it."

Bloody skirmishes

Kiki has to go through the whole park for his surveys, even though he knows that in the searing heat of March, when there is no rain, the lions are probably closer to the river to hunt thirsty prey. Field work is difficult. Unmaintained roads render swathes of the reserve inaccessible to rangers' patrol vehicles, which gun-toting, machete-wielding poachers who hunt on foot exploit.

Bloody skirmishes are common, so Kiki is escorted at all times by six armed rangers, who have had to defend him more than once during his buffalo calls. "We shot to scare them but instead of them trying to run away, they shot us," he



West African lions are genetically distinct from their southern and eastern counterparts and face possible extinction due to habitat loss, lack of prey and animal/human conflict. With an estimated 35 lions of the West African subspecies living in two protected natural areas in Nigeria, and ever-diminishing genetic diversity, lion conservation in Nigeria faces a unique challenge. — AFP

laughed before adding more seriously: "I used to like camping in the bush but now I think it's too dangerous."

By the end of his trip, it's clear Kiki's survey will only serve to document the last lions living in Nigeria unless a dramatic conservation effort is put in place-

and fast. "You know when you are standing on the same ground as the lion, you feel how strong they are, you can feel your heart beating. You really feel that this is the king of the jungle," he said. "But not in Yankari. Here you can only see lions in pictures." — AFP

TO WOO STUDENTS, MORE COLLEGES NOW HAND-DELIVER ACCEPTANCES

FRANKLIN: The visitors walking up her family's driveway mystified Maya Wolf. Four wore blue jackets. One was in a lion mascot costume. Then, as it clicked, she reached to her mouth in surprise. "Congratulations on your acceptance," said one of the men, who introduced himself as Grant Gosselin, the admissions dean for Wheaton College. He handed Wolf an oversize white envelope. "We've heard great things about you."

Instead of mailing an acceptance letter, Wheaton College had sent its president, admissions chief, the school mascot and others to surprise the 17-year-old Wolf on Tuesday. At the same time, nine other teams of employees from the Massachusetts school were scattered across New England delivering letters to a total of 75 students. After wiping away tears and catching her breath, Wolf thanked her visitors and beamed for a group photo.

Wheaton's blitz was remarkable in scope, but it joins a wave of colleges that have started to deliver small batches of acceptance letters in the style of a surprise television sweepstakes. For the first time last year, the University of Maryland sent a bus of employees to surprise six students. A month later, the University at Albany in New York brought members of the marching band to one student's home, while the president of Rowan University in New Jersey visited five students. The California Institute of Technology made its first personal delivery this year.

Unexpected visits

In most cases, the unexpected visits ended up in flashy online videos produced by the schools. "The message we're trying to send is that Wheaton is a place that's intensely personal," Gosselin said. "We certainly won't shy away from any exposure it brings, but the No. 1 goal is to help those students."

Experts say the idea is spreading as schools face tougher competition for students. By adding a personal touch, colleges hope to boost the share of students who pick them, known as the yield. Some schools choose a random sample of students to visit, or limit it by geographic area. Others try to curry favor with top students who are also likely to get attention from competing institutions.

"If a hand-delivered acceptance letter gets a college a leg up on the chance of being able to enroll that student and capture the yield, they're going to do it," said Phillip Trout, president of the National Association for College Admission Counseling. The vast majority of letters are still dispatched by mail or email, but in the era of social media, even visits to one or two students can be shared with many

more. Online videos capturing scenes of shocked and overjoyed students have attracted thousands of views.

"They're the most popular thing that we do in our social media effort," said Kirk Brennan, director of admission at the University of Southern California, which has made personal deliveries since 2012. "We've now made it a regular part of our social media strategy."

Attracting students

Amid the scramble to attract more students, other aspects of the admission process are changing, too. Even the standardized letter, once a simple finale to an anxious wait, has gotten a glitzy update at many colleges. Iowa State University sends customized videos to accepted students, starring a news anchor who congratulates them in a mock TV broadcast. Others send boxes of merchandise, or mail out letters weeks earlier than in the past, hoping to reach the best students first.

Alongside the hard currency of scholarship money, some experts say, personal attention has become a soft currency that colleges wield to show they have big character, if not big coffers. "Some schools are trying to lure students with extra money, which resonates, but I think sometimes students and families pick a school for the wrong reason," said Tim Lee, director of admissions for the University at Albany.

But not all schools are interested in making the admission process a grand production. Tulane University in Louisiana prides itself on a no-frills acceptance message. "We're not all about the crazy bells and whistles," said Jeff Schiffman, interim director of admission at Tulane. "It becomes an arms race over which school can do the most over-the-top stuff."

"At the end of the day, just getting admitted to the institution is special," he added. Schiffman also questions whether a hand-delivered letter can sway an applicant's decision, but some students insist it matters. Before he got a surprise acceptance from USC last year, Nicolaus Jakowec was seriously considering several schools. But after getting the personal delivery at his Los Angeles high school, he quickly decided to enroll at USC.

"It definitely blew all the other schools out of the water," said Jakowec, 18, a freshman. "I almost felt compelled to go there once I got invited personally." For Wolf, who applied to five other schools besides Wheaton, the surprise was a lighthearted moment to end a stressful wait. "I'm definitely very excited, but they're the first school I've gotten a letter back from," she said. "I still have a lot of decisions to make." — AP



KARACHI: In this photograph taken on February 18, 2016, Pakistani children ride on swings in the predominantly Pashtun Korangi District. — AFP

NEIGHBORS RELIEVE FEARS IN PAKISTAN POLIO FIGHT

ANTI-POLIO CAMPAIGN A LONG, DANGEROUS TASK

KARACHI: In a rundown district of Karachi, Rabia balks at a neighbor's proposal to vaccinate her children, demonstrating one of the biggest hurdles to eradicating polio in Pakistan by the end of the year: confused and frightened parents. Rabia, perplexed and surrounded by children in her modest two-room home, voices fears the vaccine to the crippling disease may in fact cause infertility.

"She was afraid there might be some harmful elements in the vaccine," says Sharmeen Aslam, neighborhood supervisor of a team of vaccinators. "I told her there weren't and now, since I live here, she knows she can come and see me if there are any problems, so now she believes me."

Each month, Aslam and her team divide a handful of dusty streets, each going alone to knock at door after ornate door armed with nothing but their anti-polio drops. She is part of a community vaccination program launched in Pakistan's biggest city two years ago to ease distrust and suspicion from parents by using staff from their local area.

Pakistan's anti-polio campaign has long been a dangerous task. One hundred people—both police and health workers—have been killed in attacks targeting polio vaccination campaigns since 2012, including three in Korangi in eastern Karachi in 2014, who were not part of the community program. The Muslim nation of some 200 million people is one of only two countries in the world where polio remains endemic—the other being war-torn Afghanistan, just over a porous border.

Some Taliban and ultra-conservative religious leaders spread rumors that the vaccine contains ingredients forbidden in Islam, such as pork derivatives, or that can cause infertility as part of a Western plot to reduce the population. Vaccinators are accused of being paid spies, a widespread suspicion which only intensified after the CIA used a fake vaccination campaign to help track down former Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden in northern Pakistan in 2011.

'Everyone knows me'

To dispel doubts, in 2014 the Sindh Emergency Operation Centre (EOC), spearheading the fight against polio in Karachi, began hiring local women to take the lead on vaccinations. "Here, everybody knows me, I do not have to worry about my safety," says vaccinators Shahnaz Ayaz.

She has worked in other neighborhoods before, she says, but admits she was "a bit afraid." Ayaz marks each door with a chalk "R" if the inhabitants refuse vaccinations, and darkens the pinky fingernail of children who have been

vaccinated with a black marker, a sign that the drops have been administered.

Some 2,500 neighborhood vaccinators like Shahnaz are now working in the metropolis of 20 million. In areas of Karachi covered by the community vaccination program, staff are no longer accompanied by police escorts, with a discreet police presence now deemed sufficient. Escorts are still necessary in neighbourhoods of Karachi with no community programs and parts of other provinces, but a shortage of officers can often hamper progress.

Pakistan's goals are ambitious: authorities want to vaccinate 35 million children under the age of five, eradicating the crippling childhood disease by the end of 2016. Authorities are now targeting the main geographical incubators of the disease, the tribal areas bordering Afghanistan and the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in the northwest.

Karachi is a hub for migrants from these areas, posing a major risk to eradication hopes, polio officials say. Vaccinators had previously found it almost impossible to penetrate the

remote tribal areas, where Islamists had operated with impunity. But a major Pakistani military operation against extremists there is giving authorities new leverage—such as refusing to allow families fleeing the fighting through checkpoints unless they allow their children to be vaccinated.

'We need healthy children'

These measures saw the number of new polio cases drop to 54 in 2015, down sharply from 306 new cases in 2014 — but the improvement did not prevent 18-month-old Mohammed from losing the use of his right foot before learning to walk.

In Baldia, the Karachi neighborhood where he lives, vaccination has long been hampered by insecurity and distrust, but is now being targeted by the community program. "I dream of the day we have so much community support that children will be walked to the vaccination centre to the beat of the drum, as I heard it happens in Yemen," sighed Shahnaz Wazir Ali, a provincial polio adviser. —AFP

SCIENTISTS ALARMED AT NEW CORAL BLEACHING

SYDNEY: Australian scientists managing the Great Barrier Reef have lifted their emergency response to the highest level following the publication of video footage of damage caused by coral bleaching. Authorities this month said that areas of the World Heritage site were experiencing the worst bleaching in 15 years, at least partially as a result of the current El Niño, one of the strongest in two decades.

Coral bleaching is a process by which coral expels living algae, causing it to calcify. Coral can only survive within a narrow band of ocean temperature. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority on Sunday said it was lifting its response to level three, authority chairman Dr Russell Reichelt said.

"A level-three response level means we're stepping up surveys in response to the coral mortality to help us better understand the effects of various pressures on the reef and help guide management actions," Reichelt said in a statement. The footage, shot on Saturday by the University of Queensland's CoralWatch group, has raised serious concerns amongst scientists and environmental groups

about the growing impact of climate change.

"The new video and stills are very concerning and show large sections of coral drained of all color and fighting for survival," World Wildlife Fund spokesman Richard Leck said in a statement. "This is the worst coral bleaching event ever to hit this most pristine part of the Great Barrier Reef."

Scientists said the Great Barrier Reef needs a break in El Niño conditions within weeks if some coral areas are to survive, but the Australian Bureau of Meteorology's most recent forecast calls for a continuation of El Niño conditions. This year will be the hottest on record and 2016 could be even hotter due to El Niño, the World Meteorological Organization has said.

The Great Barrier Reef stretches 2,000 km along Australia's northeast coast and is the world's largest living ecosystem. It brings in billions of dollars a year in tourism revenue. UNESCO's World Heritage Committee last May stopped short of placing the Great Barrier Reef on an "in danger" list, but the ruling raised long-term concerns about its future. —Reuters



FRANKLIN: In this Tuesday, March 15, 2016 photo, Maya Wolf, 17, center, is handed an acceptance letter by Wheaton College Vice President for Enrollment, Dean of Admission, Grant M Gosselin, in front of her home. —AP



Human Rights Watch — who interviewed around 150 people for their report, from the mentally ill to health professionals — said there are currently almost 19,000 people in Indonesia who are either shackled or locked up in a confined space, a practice known locally as “pasung”. — AFP photos

INDONESIA’S MENTALLY ILL LANGUISHING IN SHACKLES

RIFE ACROSS RURAL AREAS WITH LIMITED HEALTHCARE

BREBES: In a small faith healing centre in rural Indonesia, Sulaiman chanted in a confused fashion, tugged at a chain attached to his ankle, and shifted restlessly on a hard, wooden bench. The emaciated man has been chained up for the past two years, and is one of thousands of Indonesians with a mental illness currently shackled, according to a Human Rights Watch (HRW) report released yesterday.

Chaining up the mentally ill has been illegal in Indonesia for nearly 40 years but remains rife across the country, especially in rural areas where health services are limited and belief in evil spirits prevail, according to HRW. “Nobody should have to be shackled in Indonesia in 2016 — people told us again and again that it’s like living in hell,” Kriti Sharma, disability rights researcher at the group and author of the report said.

Multiple abuses

As well as shackling, the report listed a litany of other abuses the mentally ill face in Indonesia—sexual violence, electroshock therapy, and restraint and seclusion in often overcrowded, unsanitary institutions. There are just 48 mental hospitals in Indonesia, a country of 250 million, most of them in urban areas. Treatment options are scarce for the millions living in remote regions, leaving desperate families to turn to faith healers in the Muslim-majority nation, some of whom chain up patients.

The story of Sulaiman, who like many Indonesians goes

by one name, is all too common. His family did not know what to do when he began throwing rocks through his neighbor’s windows, so they took him to the faith healing centre near the town of Brebes on the main island of Java. Now he spends his days chained to a wooden bench, either in the dilapidated, foul-smelling courtyard of the centre or in a dark room with bare, concrete walls.

“I am a stupid man,” he chanted, during a recent visit by AFP, as he squirmed around on the bench. Nearby, another shackled man urinated where he stood unable to reach two reeking, doorless bathrooms. In a dark, cell-like room, a man who only gave his name as Awan said he was often chained up to a wooden bed “24 hours a day”.

Treated with prayers, baths

There is no attempt to give the patients a proper diagnosis, with Sholeh Mushadad, one of the men running the centre, simply saying their families bring them in as they are “not normal”. Those confined in the facility are not given medicine but treated with prayers and baths in herbal concoctions, explained Mushadad, who with his brother and elderly father oversee the roughly 25 patients.

He also defended the practice of shackling them: “We don’t have any other option. It’s for safety reasons that their feet are chained.” HRW—who interviewed around 150 people for their report, from the mentally ill to health professionals—said there are currently almost 19,000 people in Indonesia who are either shackled or locked up in a con-

finied space, a practice known locally as “pasung”.

At least 14 million people in Indonesia aged 15 and over are thought to be suffering from some form of mental illness, according to health ministry data. Shackling of mentally ill people happens across Asia but is particularly common in Indonesia, with studies showing that it is due to poor mental health services in rural areas and a lack of knowledge about suitable treatments.

Families that choose not to send mentally ill relatives to faith healers sometimes take matters into their own hands. In a simple home near Brebes, 25-year-old Waspih has been locked in a goat shed alongside bleating farm animals for three days, her parents only letting her out to use the bathroom before returning her to the cramped bamboo cage. Her elderly father Fatoni told AFP the family locked her up after she ran away from home and began disturbing the neighbors, but insisted it would only be a temporary measure—not like a previous occasion when they kept her confined for two years.

The Indonesian social affairs ministry vowed in January to stamp out “pasung” but identical campaigns in the past have failed to break the widely held belief that chaining or confining the mentally ill in stocks or isolated rooms is acceptable. Nahar, who is the head of disability issues at the social affairs ministry, acknowledged that shackling remained a big problem but said it would take time to fix. “The main problem is fear, fear of what could happen if a shackled person is released,” he said. —AFP

BEAR BONE DISCOVERY HELPS RE-WRITE HUMAN HISTORY

LONDON: Analysis of a bear bone found in an Irish cave has provided evidence of human existence in Ireland 2,500 years earlier than previously thought, academics announced Sunday. For decades, the earliest evidence of human life in Ireland dated from 8,000 BC. But radiocarbon dating of a bear’s knee bone indicated it had been butchered by a human in about 10,500 BC—some 12,500 years ago and far earlier than the previous date.

“This find adds a new chapter to the human history of Ireland,” said Marion Dowd, an archaeologist at the Institute of Technology Sligo who made the discovery along with Ruth Carden, a research associate with the National Museum of Ireland. The knee bone, which is marked by cuts from a sharp tool, was one of thousands of bones first found in 1903 in a cave in County Clare on the west coast of Ireland.

It was stored in the National Museum of Ireland since the 1920s, until Carden and Dowd re-examined it and applied for funding to have it radiocarbon dated—a technique developed in the 1940s—by Queen’s University Belfast. The team sent a second sample to the University of Oxford to double-check the result. Both tests indicated the bear had been cut up by a human about 12,500 years ago.

The new date means there was human activity in Ireland in the Stone Age or Palaeolithic period, whereas previously, scientists only had evidence of humans in Ireland in the later Mesolithic period. “Archaeologists have been searching for the Irish Palaeolithic since the 19th century, and now, finally, the first piece of the jigsaw has been revealed,” Dowd said.

Three experts further confirmed that the cut marks on the bone had been made when the bone was fresh, confirming they dated from the same time as the bone. The results were revealed in a paper published in the journal *Quaternary Science Reviews*. As well as pushing back the date of human history in Ireland, the find may have important implications for zoology, as scientists have not previously considered that humans could have influenced extinctions of species in Ireland so long ago.

“From a zoological point of view, this is very exciting,” Carden said. “This paper should generate a lot of discussion within the zoological research world and it’s time to start thinking outside the box... or even dismantling it entirely!” The National Museum of Ireland noted that approximately two million more specimens are held in its collections and could reveal more secrets.

“All are available for research and we never know what may emerge,” said Nigel Monaghan, keeper of the natural history division of the National Museum of Ireland. “Radiocarbon dating is something never imagined by the people who excavated these bones in caves over a century ago, and these collections may have much more to reveal about Ireland’s ancient past.” —AFP

TRANSGENDER INMATE PLANNING TO HAVE SURGERY ON HER OWN

SAN FRANCISCO: A transgender inmate who was paroled after a judge ordered California to pay for her sex reassignment surgery is making plans to have the surgery on her own this summer through coverage provided by the state’s low-income health insurance program, she told a California newspaper.

A federal judge ordered the state to provide the surgery to Michelle Norsworthy in 2015, just the second time that any judge in the United States directed a state prison system to provide the operation. But Norsworthy was paroled before she received it. Norsworthy, 52, told the San Francisco Chronicle she is proud of her fight

with the state. State officials have announced new standards for treating transgender inmates undergoing hormone therapy and approved surgery for one prisoner, Shiloh Quine, the first time any US prison system has authorized such an operation, the Chronicle reported.

Norsworthy said she is still adjusting to life outside prison, particularly being around other women. She lives at a halfway house in San Francisco and is looking for long-term housing and a job. “I had to adapt my personality in order to survive,” she said about her time in prison. “I had to be a man just to be a woman. Now I’m in an all-female facility...I go to sleep knowing

nobody’s going to hurt me or rape me. That’s a relief.”

A judge sentenced Norsworthy in 1987 to 17 years to life in prison on a second-degree murder conviction in the slaying of a man at a bar. Norsworthy said she was in denial at the time about who she was and acted “overly male,” carrying guns and being tough. She said her crime still haunts her. She began openly identifying as a transgender woman in prison in the 1990s and received hormone therapy. The state, however, balked at prison doctors’ recommendation in 2012 that she receive sex-reassignment surgery. It eventually dropped its challenge to her case. —AP



SAN FRANCISCO: In this March 19, 2016 photo, Michelle-Lael Norsworthy poses for a portrait in a park. — AP

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COSTA COFFEE: A HOME AWAY FROM HOME

By Ben Garcia

Despite the hot weather conditions in this part of the world, Kuwaitis and expats alike are addicted to coffee. Haamed Al-Fulajji, the General Manager of Costa Coffee at Alghanim Industries spoke to Kuwait Times about changes in the attitude towards consuming coffee in Kuwait. "What we have discovered is that in the West you get a dose of coffee before starting work, while in Kuwait and other GCC countries, people are looking for a place where they can socialize outside their homes. They want to be in an environment where they are comfortable and can be with their friends for hours," he said. "At Costa Coffee, we provide the right ingredients, exceptional service, ambiance and convenience. So a coffee shop is now considered a home away from home," Al-Fulajji said.

Some excerpts:

KT: Tell us about the Costa Coffee branch at Sheikhia Complex? Why do you consider this a flagship store?

Al-Fulajji: Yes, this is a flagship store of Costa Coffee in the Middle East and a very significant milestone for Costa in the Middle East. This is a 150-sq-m location with a beautiful terrace and view of the sea and the sunrise. The veranda alone can accommodate about 100 customers. This is the first Atlas Design store outside England. It's been specifically designed to suit individual tastes. The store is divided into various zones. You will feel the ambiance meeting the tastes and needs of our customers. There is a quiet section,

smoking area, a spacious area with lower tables, all in relaxing colors.

We agreed that there should be no new two stores that look identical. Costa Coffee has over 2,000 locations in the UK, and more than 1,000 locations worldwide, and 34 locations in Kuwait. The goal is to make Costa Coffee known and be present in various countries around the world. The design must be related to each country's needs and tastes.



Haamed Al-Fulajji

KT: Tell me about the position of Costa Coffee compared to other competitors?

Al-Fulajji: Kuwait is certainly one of the most sophisticated markets with sophisticated customers when it comes to food and coffee. So where do we stand with our customers and competitors in Kuwait? We work in three different ways - one is around the quality of the coffee we serve; secondly, we have realized that great coffee deserves great food as well, so we partnered with Le Notre, one of

the best catering companies in Kuwait. Thirdly, we have built stores that provide a comfortable, relaxing and warm atmosphere.

Our baristas don't rely on machines - They grind and dose the exact amount of beans to deliver the perfect extraction of espresso, which is the core component of every cup of coffee. We only use fresh milk for all our coffees, and our baristas undergo weeks of training at our training center before they are certified. Our training manager got certified in London and now is able to train staff here in Kuwait.

KT: Do you change coffee flavors/menus often?

Al-Fulajji: Yes, we have menus catered to every season and we keep innovating and changing recipes best suited to our customers. We have coffee for summer and winter, and new products will be added to old menus. We do change flavors, however, we never change our coffee bean, and the signature of Costa Coffee is our 'Mocha Italia' beans. Some people may see this as a weakness, but we see it as strength. It is extremely difficult to have the same and exact coffee bean throughout the year; coffee grows in different regions around the world depending on the season. But we serve the same coffee beans in all seasons. We have a dedicated team in the UK that makes Mocha Italia perfect to be consistent regardless of the season all year round.

We launched additional cold coffees six months ago, and introduced Frostino and other beverages specifically tailored to customers who are in Costa Coffee for hours, like double chocolate and strawberry Frostino.

KT: What is the market share of Costa Coffee in Kuwait?

Al-Fulajji: Although Costa launched in Kuwait back 1998, its growth was not as fast as other mainstream coffee shops in Kuwait. We have been focusing on changing that since our acquisition of the brand back in July 2013. For example, January saw the opening of four new Costa locations. This is why we have declared 2016 as the year of



growth. In the past two months, we opened six locations, which is impressive. We are doing our best to be present in most locations.

KT: What do you consider for Costa Coffee locations?

Al-Fulajji: Accessibility and presence of customers. Our customers deserve the better locations. We are not focused only on opening stores, but on customers' convenience, visibility and accessibility. For example, Jahra was an area that we didn't have a branch in but many of the Jahra residence are Costa fans and tend to go to our

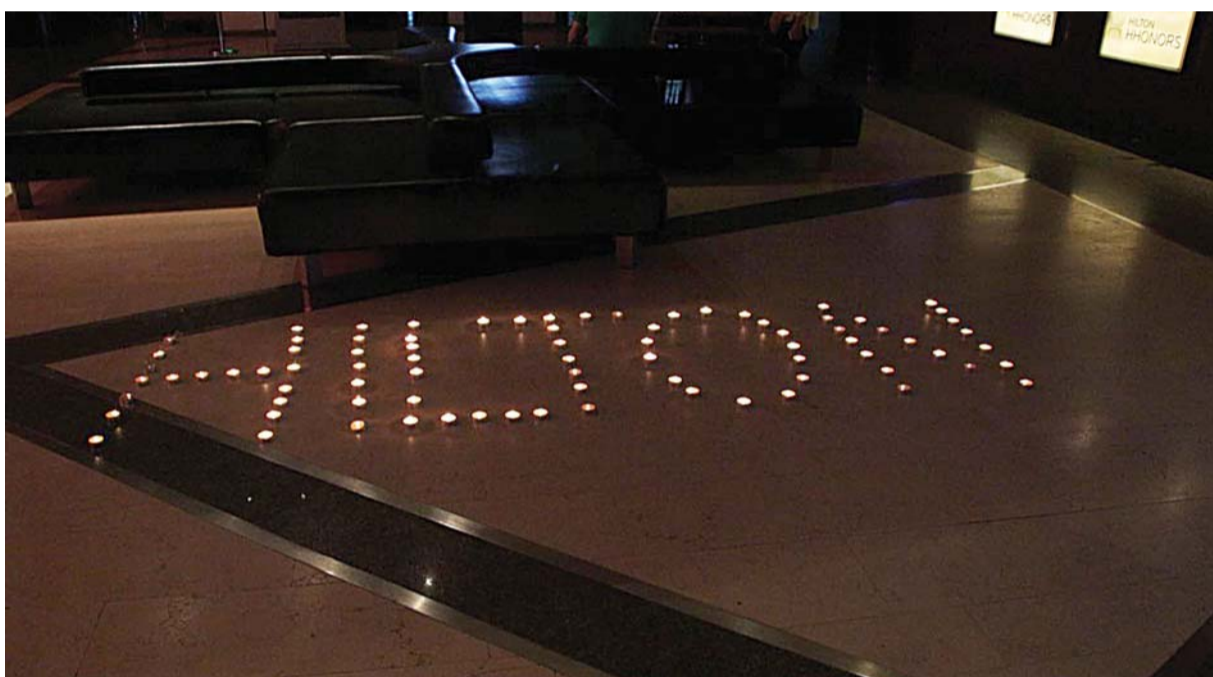
Avenues location. Last year, we opened our first Costa branch in Jahra in an effort to make going to Costa convenient for all our customers.

KT: Where do you see Costa Coffee in Kuwait in the next year or so?

Al-Fulajji: I want to see eight to 10 more Costa stores spread throughout Kuwait. We want to be present at universities, and are focusing on cooperative societies too. We are opening more branches because we want to be at the forefront. We also want to see our presence in residential areas.

KT: Tell us about the history/background of Costa in Kuwait.

Al-Fulajji: Costa Coffee was launched in Kuwait in 1998 by KASCO, a subsidiary of Kuwait Airways. In 2011, it was transferred to Behbehani, then in 2013, Alghanim Industries acquired Costa. We knew Costa will be more active and saw opportunities in coffee business in Kuwait, so we took over. Immediately after taking over, we saw an opportunity to bring Costa to the next level, so we focused on three major things. We listened to customers' comments and immediately acted on them. We refurbished the stores and took them to a new level. Each individual store has its own identity. We closed nine stores that were not doing well when we took over Costa in 2013, but we replaced them with new stores in the best locations. Finally, we revamped our food range through partnership with Lenotre. Results have been positive so far with Costa Kuwait receiving multiple awards from Costa International for highest like for like sales growth and fastest network growth for the year 2014-2015.



HILTON KUWAIT RESORT CELEBRATES EARTH HOUR

Hilton Kuwait Resort celebrated Earth Hour 2016 from 8:30 pm - 9:30 pm local time on Saturday, March 19th. The hotel joined thousands of Hilton Worldwide's more than 4,600 properties across 102 countries in switching off energy and shining a light on climate change by hosting various Earth Hour activities for Team Members, franchised employees and guests to take part in reducing energy use and preserving the environment. This year, Hilton Worldwide is expanding environmental celebrations to the full month of March, reinforcing the company's commitment to addressing climate

change and driving an even larger impact.

Ziad Tantawi, General Manager for Hilton Kuwait Resort commented "Earth Hour 2016 is more than just an hour of darkness. It's a chance for people to come together and send out a global message about protecting our planet. We all want a brighter future so as we switch off the lights this year the focus will be on the kind of energy we use. Our planet needs us to move away from dirty fuels to clean renewable energy, but we need to make that change right now."

Hilton Kuwait Resort carried out various initiatives by hosting candlelit dinners in all our

main outlets. This includes Teatro and Naranj restaurants as well as Song Bird Cafe. In addition, the hotel turned off lights in main property areas. Created by World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Earth Hour began in 2007 as a way for individuals and businesses to show how simple steps can make a significant impact on addressing climate change. The idea was conceived during a WWF meeting held at the Hilton Sydney, Australia. In its first year, more than two million people turned off their lights for an hour and reduced the city's energy consumption by more than 10 percent. It became a global movement in 2008 with more than 50

million people participating, and today it is the largest grassroots environmental movement in the world with more than 7,000 cities and towns in 172 countries and territories and hundreds of millions of people participating across seven continents. In 2015, over 620,000 actions were taken to combat climate change during Earth Hour.

Hilton Worldwide is committed to Preserving Environments, one of the three pillars of the company's responsibility and sustainability strategy, Travel with Purpose. Hilton is one of the first major multi-brand hospitality companies to make sustainability measure-

ment and reporting a brand standard. LightStay, Hilton Worldwide's proprietary measurement platform, is used to measure, analyze and report on global data to drive greater efficiencies, savings and value for hotels and communities around the world. Hotels are able to record their efforts including Earth Hour activities and other environmental and social initiatives into the measurement platform. Hilton is also the first global hospitality company to be ISO 50001 certified - of the more than 11,500 facilities worldwide that are ISO 50001 certified, more than 4,600 of those buildings are in the Hilton portfolio.



PRISMOLOGIE LAUNCHED IN KUWAIT

Prismologie group launched in Kuwait recently during an event held at the Al Ostoura store at the Thuraiya complex. Prismologie founders Sheikhia Intisar Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah and Sheikhia Fatima Mubarak Al-Sabah, as well as Al Ostoura Company's Chairman Rami Tubai'at held a press conference during the event to introduce the audience to Prismologie's products which are inspired by colors and gemstones. Prismologie was founded in the United Kingdom in 2015. —Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



AOU PARTICIPATES IN THE SECOND CONFERENCE FOR BUSINESS SCHOOLS OF GCC UNIVERSITIES

The Arab Open University (AOU) participated in the Second Conference for Business Schools of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Universities, which was organized by the College of Business Administration at Kuwait University, under the patronage of His Highness the Crown Prince. The Conference, which lasted for two days during 16-17 March 2016, was inaugurated by Dr Hussein Al-Ansari, President of Kuwait University, on behalf of Dr Bader Al-Essa, Minister of Education. AOU Vice Presidents, a number of

Deans and Department Directors, and Public Relations and Student Affairs Heads, attended the event. In addition, the AOU Oman Branch Director, Dr Moosa Al-Kindi, chaired one of the conference sessions on the second day. AOU also took part in the exhibition for educational institutions and universities, held on the sidelines of the conference.

The AOU booth introduced the University's mission and objective in addition to its academic programs offered across its eight branches operating in a number of Arab coun-

tries, including Kuwait. This participation, under the directive of Prof Moudi Al-Humoud, the President of AOU, came to strengthen the University's presence in all cultural and academic events and to exchange ideas and experiences in addition to activate cooperation and partnership programs and communication with different educational systems at the local and international levels. This reflects that AOU is one of the biggest higher education institutions in the world of learning and teaching in the Arab world.



SWISS BELHOTEL PLAZA MARK EARTH HOUR 2016

Swiss Belhotel Plaza Kuwait staff joined millions around the world Saturday night in turning off their lights to mark Earth Hour, celebrating the ninth year of the annual event. Earth Hour was launched in Australia in 2007 as a way to draw attention to environmental issues including climate change. It has grown to a worldwide event involving 162 countries.



'THE WANTED 18' SCREENING HELD AT KUWAIT NATIONAL MUSEUM

By Faten Omar

The Boycott Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) and the Kuwait Graduates Society organized a film screening 'The Wanted 18' on Sunday at the theatre of Kuwait National Museum. 'The Wanted 18' is inspired by the a story that happened during the civil disobedience as part of the Palestinian non-violent resistance in 1987. The movie is by Palestinian Director Amer Shomali and Canadian Director Pal Cowan.

Samar Younis, a BDS member, said that the Kuwaiti youth primarily play an educational and awareness role in the boycott campaign, stressing that it is very important to reintroduce the Palestinian cause to the Kuwaiti society, as a matter of the Palestinian people's rights in the Arab lands that were looted, as well as the issue

of occupation and Israeli settlement. An award-winning film, 'The wanted 18' tells the story of 18 cows that were hunted down by the Israeli army during the first intifada, she added.

The documentary distinguishes itself by using a combination of animation, interviews, and reenactments to tell the story of the cows, who were used for "independent milk production" on a Palestinian collective farm at the height of the boycott of Israeli products. In the film, Israel considered the cows to be a "threat to the national security of the state of Israel."

'The Wanted 18' also tells the true story of a Palestinian committee in the town of Beit Sahour, near Bethlehem, that purchased a herd of cows from a friendly kibbutz owner and used them in a bid to undermine Israeli control. It was a step towards self-sufficiency beset by problems: Palestinians are not a cow-rearing

people, which accounts for some agricultural setbacks along the way, and the Israeli authorities did not look kindly even on the smallest gestures of independence - the cows were declared "dangerous for the security of the state of Israel" and became fugitives from the law.

Amer Shomali was born in Kuwait and is currently based in Ramallah. A multidisciplinary artist, animator, and activist, he made his film debut with the animated short Dying of the Light in 2008. 'The Wanted 18' is his first feature.

Paul Cowan was born in Montreal. He has directed several feature documentaries for television and film, including The Kid Who Couldn't Missin 1983, Democracy on Trial: The Morgentaler Affair in 1984, Justice Denied in 1989, and Westray in 2001, which won the Genie Award for Best Documentary. 'The Wanted 18' is his latest film.



HOLIDAY INN SALMIYA PARTICIPATES IN EARTH HOUR

As part of its commitment towards the Community and the environment, Holiday Inn Kuwait-Salmiya participated in the global initiative "Earth Hour" by operating at minimum lights and turning off all the exterior lighting for 60 minutes starting at 8:30 pm.

The hotel also arranged for another activity to engage its guests to participate in this cause through offering a candle light dinner at all the outlets. The hotel management and staff in their turn made sure to turn off all non-essential lighting inside their offices to reduce the electrici-

ty usage during this one hour as symbol of hope for a cause that grows more urgent with every passing minute.

The global warming is rapidly increasing, and so it should be for all the efforts dedicated to raising level of awareness on environmental preservation and climate

changes. Taking part in the world's largest global climate change initiative, voiced the thoughts of the management of the Holiday Inn Kuwait as they stood together towards working better for the creation of a brighter future for our planet.

MILLENNIUM HOTEL AND CONVENTION CENTRE WINS GUEST REVIEW AWARD FROM BOOKING.COM

Booking.com, the world's leading accommodation website has recognized Millennium Hotel and Convention Centre Kuwait as a top performing hotel with a guest review score of 8.7, reflecting the high level of guest satisfaction that the hotel was able to achieve in less than one year of operation.

"We are pleased to receive this prestigious recognition from Booking.com, a pioneer in the tourism field. Having earned such a high customer rating so quickly, we intend on enhancing the customer experience even further in accordance with the Millennium brand's global vision," explained Dani Saleh, Area General Manager of Millennium and Copthorne Hotels Kuwait.

Saleh expressed his gratitude towards all Millennium Hotel and

Convention Centre staff for their outstanding work and ongoing commitment to the hotel's vision.

The Booking.com Guest Review Award honors hotels for hospitality excellence based on overall guest review scores. In order to be considered for the award, hotels must receive an average review of 8.0 or more.

Launched in May 2015, Millennium Hotel and Convention Centre is one of the premier 5-star hotels in the country, offering 295 luxurious accommodations, attractive dining outlets, recreation facilities and a world-class convention center. The property is operated by Millennium and Copthorne Hotels plc, a leading global hospitality management and real estate group with 120 hotels world-wide.



Kuwaiti traditional sword dance

GUST SIGNS MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING WITH KISR

Gulf University for Science and Technology (GUST) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (KISR). The event was organized and conducted on campus in the presence of GUST President, Professor Donald Bates and A M Al-Refai Library Director, Shobhita Kohli, along with KISR Director, Ghaneema Nadher, Scientific Referencing and Indexing Department Manager, Waheed Safar, and Technical Service Department Manager, Fatemah Abdul-Hameed.

Benefiting GUST faculty and students, this agreement will facilitate mutual interlibrary loaning between the two institutions. It will optimize user access to wide range of printed books in their field of interest. This will also benefit and support both libraries by mutual sharing of

resources, compliment collection development policies, control the cost of other services, and solve duplication issues.

GUST President, Professor Donald Bates, said, "GUST constantly aims to improve what it offers its students in any subject and at all levels. This agreement helps to provide them with a wider range of access to different kinds of books, and a more diverse array of subjects."

GUST had previously signed an MOU with the Public Affairs (PA) Section of the US Embassy in Kuwait in 2006. Under this partnership, the PA section provides print and audiovisual resources which are displayed in the American Corner in GUST's A M Al-Refai Library. Additionally, GUST also coordinates with the Embassy over lecture series and digital video conferences with faculty on topics of interests for their classes.

GULF BANK'S STAFF ENJOY DESERT DURING ANNUAL OPEN DAY 2016

Gulf Bank's recently held its annual staff open day, which was held this year in a desert camp in the area of Mutlaa, north of Kuwait City. The day long occasion is part of the Bank's drive to engage all its employees and their families in a day of fun. Over 1,000 people attended the event, which consisted of a wide range of activities, competitions, entertainment and free hospitality.

The day featured a number of sporting competitions, such as soccer, basket shooting, volleyball, badminton, and table tennis, as well as draws for over 25 prizes with a main cash prize of KD 1,000. Other attrac-



Presenting the winner of the main cash prize of KD 1,000

tions included an Indian, Egyptian, and Dabkah show, as well as a Kuwaiti traditional sword dance. The kids were entertained by Barney and his friends, along with a magic show.

Particular emphasis was given to children's entertainment, and featured attractions such as a mini bouncy castle city, camel and pony rides, falcons, a nursery tent, kites

and frisbees, amongst other activities geared for an older crowd such as; soap making and magnetic pottery drawing.

Catering for the event was provided by Lazurd, one of the region's major catering companies, which was supplemented with potato and corn stands, ice cream from KDD, Edamame, and cotton candy and popcorn from Popcornopolis.

Gulf Bank values the dedication of its employees, and expresses its appreciation for their hard work and loyalty by regularly holding events for them throughout the year, as well as creating numerous exclusive for the bank's employees.

For labor-related inquiries and complaints: Call MSAL hotline 128

Hospitals

Table with 2 columns: Hospital Name, Phone Number. Includes Sabah Hospital, Amiri Hospital, Maternity Hospital, Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital, Chest Hospital, Farwaniya Hospital, Adan Hospital, Ibn Sina Hospital, Al-Razi Hospital, Physiotherapy Hospital.

Clinics

Table with 2 columns: Clinic Name, Phone Number. Includes Kaizen center, Rawda, Adaliya, Khaldiya, Kaifan, Shamiya, Shuwaikh, Abdullah Salem, Nuzha, Industrial Shuwaikh, Qadsiya, Dasmah, Bneid Al-Gar, Shaab, Qibla, Ayoun Al-Qibla, Mirqab, Sharq, Salmiya, Jabriya, Maidan Hawally, Bayan, Mishref, W Hawally, Sabah, Jahra, New Jahra, West Jahra, South Jahra, North Jahra, North Jleeb, Ardhiya, Firdous, Omariya, N Khaitan, Fintas.



PHARMACIES ON 24 HRS DUTY

Table with 4 columns: GOVERNORATE, PHARMACY, ADDRESS, PHONE. Lists pharmacies across different governorates like Ahmadi, Jahra, Capital, Farwaniya, and Hawally.

STATE OF KUWAIT DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF CIVIL AVIATION METEOROLOGICAL DEPARTMENT



Tel: (+965) 161 Ext: 2627 - 2630 Fax: (+965) 24348714 www.met.gov.kw

DAY: Monday

21/03/2016

Issue Time 07:00

Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

BY DAY: Partly cloudy with light to moderate freshening gradually at times south easterly to southerly wind, with speed of 15 - 40 km/h causing raising dust with a chance for rain that might be thundery at times

BY NIGHT: Clouds will decrease gradually with light to moderate freshening gradually at times south easterly changing to north westerly wind, with speed of 15 - 40 km/h with a chance for rain that might be

Weather warning section with WEATHER WARNING table, SFC. CHART, 4 DAYS FORECAST, PRAYER TIMES, and RECORDED YESTERDAY AT KUWAIT AIRPORT.

All times are local time unless otherwise stated. U.P.0

2016/03/21 09:36 UTC V1.00 T2.3 ق.ت.خ.ع.ل.ج.ك.م.ن.و.ح.ط.ز.

INTERNATIONAL CALLS



Large table listing international call numbers for various countries from Afghanistan to Lesotho.



PRIVATE CLINICS

Grid of private clinics with columns for Ophthalmologists, Plastic Surgeons, Paediatricians, Endocrinologist, Family Doctor, Psychiatrists, Gynaecologists & Obstetricians, Dermatologists, Dentists, Neurologists, Gastrologists, Physiotherapists & VD, Rheumatologists, Internist, Chest & Heart, Consultant Cardiologist, and Urologists.

Contact information for various clinics including Soor Center, Kaizen center, Noor Clinic, and William Schuilenberg.



Members of Japanese taiko drumming company KODO perform on the stage of Madureira park which is located at the birthplace of two of Rio's traditional samba schools, Portela and Imperio Serrano, during their final show on Brazil tour in Rio de Janeiro yesterday. — AFP

Nigerian royals welcome return of bronze artifact

Nigerian royals have welcomed moves at Britain's Cambridge University to return a bronze cockerel stolen with other artifacts during colonialist looting in the 19th century. Jesus College earlier this month said it was taking down the statue, known as "Okukor", pillaged from the former kingdom of Benin and was looking at the possibility of its repatriation.

The move followed a student protest and came as their counterparts at Oxford University mounted a campaign to remove a statue of British imperialist and donor Cecil Rhodes at Oriel College. The kingdom of Benin was one of the greatest and richest in West Africa and at its height extended as far as modern-day Ghana. The younger brother of the Oba (king) of Benin, Prince Edun Akenzua, described the cockerel's removal as a "welcome development".

"We knew we have this kind of thing in Cambridge and we have always called for its return and the other 3,500 to 4,000 artifacts carted away during the 1897 invasion of the palace. "We commend the initiative of the Cambridge students. They have done what they should do. "We appeal to European countries to return our cultural properties dotting museums and galleries in London, Paris, Berlin and other cities around the world," he said.

'Pages of our history'

The tale of the artifacts began when nine British officers were killed while on a trade mission to the then-independent kingdom of Benin in 1897. The British reaction was fierce, leaving several thousand local people dead as the city set ablaze and forcing the Oba into exile as his palace was looted.

Hundreds of artworks were removed, including the Benin Bronzes, which showed highly decorative images of the Oba and his courtiers from centuries earlier.

In June 2014, two statues were returned to the palace by a British retired medical consultant whose grandfather was involved in the original invasion. The statues were presented to the current Oba, Uku Akpolokpolo Erediauwu I, at a colorful ceremony in the city.

Nigerian calls for the repatriation of all the bronzes was reignited when the Cambridge students urged the cockerel to be removed from Jesus College's main hall. The protesters called the sculpture, which was donated to the college in 1929, a celebration of Britain's racist and colonial past.

Some academics and historians criticized the students, saying they had "declared war on the past".

Prince Akenzua, who is also known as the Enogie of Obazuwa, said replicas of the stolen treasures could be made for foreign museums should they still be wanted for display.

But the originals would be better appreciated at home rather than abroad, calling them "pages of our history". The issue of the repatriation of looted treasures and compensation was raised in the early 1990s, when former military ruler Ibrahim Babangida set up his African Repatriation Movement. But the organisation made little headway before Babangida left office.

Preservation

A senior official of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments in Benin City, who asked not to be identified, said Nigeria would use "whatever means possible" to get back the art. "We will enter into negotiation with museums, private and public institutions where these works are kept so that we can have them back," he added.

James Ezomo, a member of the Oba's court, however, doubted whether locals would be able to preserve the artifacts once they were returned. "In as much as I want those works back, my fear is whether we will be able to maintain them as priceless treasures," he said. "The white people are using technology to preserve the works and I don't think we have the wherewithal to do the same here."

But Prince Akenzua disagreed: "If a man stole my car and admitted that he stole it and returned it to me, what is his business whether I have a garage or not to keep the car? "These artifacts belong to our ancestors. They must be returned to us. It's nobody's business how we preserve them." — AFP

Hidden treasures of ancient Rome to get first showing

Hidden for decades, one of the world's greatest collections of ancient Roman statues and sculptures is reputedly so dazzling that a prominent archaeologist once disguised himself as a garbage man to grab a sneak glimpse. Now a selection of the priceless works held by the Torlonia family, one of Rome's oldest dynasties, is finally to go on public view following an agreement this week between the Italian ministry of culture and the family foundation. Under the deal, between 60 and 90 of the works in a collection which counts

620 pieces will be displayed in Rome in the second half of 2017.

An overseas tour is to follow before they are finally housed in a permanent center in Rome. Having amassed a fortune from banking in the 18th Century, the Torlonia family went on to become important collectors of antiquities and objets d'art, often accepting individual pieces as security against loans. The bulk of the collection has spent decades in the basement of a family palace in the Trastevere neighborhood of central Rome

after Prince Alessandro Torlonia decided to convert the building into a 90-flat condominium.

Legend has it that curiosity over the treasures that lay below the block promoted renowned archaeologist Rannuccio Bianchi Bandinelli to disguise himself as a refuse collector in order to get in and check them out. The Italian state has made repeated requests for the marble works to be handed over to public ownership, so far in vain. — AFP



A sculpture of Ulysses coming from the antrum of Polyphemus.



A bust of Roman Emperor Servius Sulpicius Galba, the successor to Nero.



This handout picture released by the Fondazione Torlonia Onlus (Foundation Torlonia) shows an Etruscan sculpture found in Vulci. — AFP photos

Michelin-starred French chef rises to gluten-free challenge

Atop French chef has transformed her Michelin-starred restaurant in Provence into a gluten-free haven after teaming up with her daughter, a trained chemist who suffers from coeliac disease. L'Auberge de la Feniere, in a stone farmhouse set in vineyards near the southeastern town of Lourmarin, has had no trouble holding on to its old customers, while attracting new ones with its coeliac-friendly if quirky haute cuisine. "I've replaced gastronomy with gluten by gastronomy without gluten and everyone has signed on... going from one to the other without realizing it," said Reine Sammut, a self-taught chef who earned her Michelin star back in 1995.

Her daughter Nadia, 35, developed an intolerance to gluten and lactose at a very young age, a condition that stunted her growth. Hospitalized at age 29, she spent the next two years bedridden until finally she was diagnosed with coeliac disease, which is now known to affect about one in 100 people in Europe and the United States.



These file photos show French chef Reine Sammut (left) and her daughter Nadia (right), former chemist, preparing gluten-free bread, in the kitchen of the 'Auberge de Feniere' in Lourmarin, the first French gourmet restaurant 100% gluten-free. — AFP

"Thirty-five years ago, doctors didn't know about coeliac disease," Nadia says. "The doctors told me that I had destroyed my immune system, I was at the height of the illness." Nadia, a trained chemist who is passionate about food, easily persuaded her mother to drop traditional ingredients in favor of gluten-free alternatives "so that everyone could eat at the same table."

"The basic ingredients needed are not easy to find, but Nadia tracked them down. I only had to test them," Reine says. The restaurant, part of a 12-bedroom hotel run by the Sammuts along with a cooking school, offers a special 55 euro (\$60) menu, half the usual price, to encourage guests to sample the best of gluten-free cuisine. While the Auberge de la Feniere is France's only gluten-free restaurant to boast a Michelin star, many top restaurants such as Le Castellaras in the southern resort city of Cannes are prepared for gluten-free requests. "For Valentine's Day, one couple never imagined we could offer a gluten-free menu," said Le Castellaras's Hermance Joplet, who served up a nutty risotto of locally grown spelt with sauteed baby vegetables for them. Among the house specialties that proved particularly challenging for the Auberge de la Feniere to recreate without resorting to gluten ingredients was its truffles in puff pastry.

Chestnut and quinoa flour

Nadia achieved the "impossible" by using a blend of chestnut and quinoa flour to produce the pastry. Squash flour and almond extract substitute for wheat flour in their signature dessert dubbed the Paris-Lourmarin, a re-imagined Paris-Brest, the traditional ring-shaped choux pastry filled with a praline-flavored cream. Guaranteeing the absence of gluten entails heavy emphasis on traceability, and mother and daughter select their ingredients with utmost care, as well as growing them in their organic garden.

The restaurant's pork meat comes from a farmer in the nearby Luberon mountains who feeds his pigs on chickpeas; the fish comes from Martigues, near Marseille and "if there's no fishing, there's no fish" on the menu, Nadia says. Their rice comes from a farmer in the Camargue who uses weed-loving ducks instead of herbicides. — AFP

John Wayne's hat, Disney's Mickey Mouse ears up for auction

A collection of memorabilia including Babe Ruth's baseball glove and Walt Disney's Mickey Mouse ears is coming up for auction off the beaten path in Maine, far from the Big Apple where Ruth smacked home runs and the theme park and studio Disney created in California. The items that once belonged to the late New York TV and radio personality Joe Franklin include several dozen hats from a bygone era such as Frank Sinatra's fedora and John Wayne's Stetson.

The auction will take place April 2 at Maine-based Saco River Auction, a small auction house far from the entertainment hubs of New York and Los Angeles. Auctioneer Troy Thibodeau said the items came from a collector who wishes to remain anonymous who spent years purchasing items from the collection of Franklin, a talk show host who encouraged his famous guests to leave a souvenir after appearing on his show.

The items include leather jackets belonging to Steve McQueen and Marlon Brando, Laurel and Hardy's boxing gloves, a baseball glove used by Joe DiMaggio and a harmonica used by Janis Joplin. In addition to John Wayne's Stetson, the collection includes the actor's cowboy boots and spurs. Franklin's era included the heyday of hats. The collection includes pillbox hats that belonged to Marilyn Monroe and Audrey Hepburn, Charlie Chaplin's derby, Babe Ruth's Gatsby, a leather hat belonging to Jimi Hendrix, a tattered straw hat worn by Buddy Ebsen and a sombrero owned by Slim Pickens.

Others who donated hats included Grace Kelly, Judy Garland, Walter Matthau, Humphrey Bogart, James Cagney, Ray Charles, Mae West, Johnny Carson, Burt Lancaster and Vincent Price. Franklin, who died in January 2015 at age 88, was a talk show institution in New York. He amassed so much memorabilia - either as gifts or through his own purchases - that his office was a cluttered mess. He even rented expensive storage

units to handle the overflow, said Steve Garrin, long-time producer and friend.

"His office was never to ceiling with stuff," said Garrin. Though Franklin never had the national exposure of talk show hosts who followed, he was an icon in New York where he hosted radio and TV shows for decades. Garrin and Franklin joined a restaurateur to open "Joe Franklin's Memory Lane Restaurant" in Manhattan's theater district.



This Aug 6, 1993, file photo shows TV personality Joe Franklin in New York. — AP

Franklin, who logged more than 300,000 guests during his career, auctioned off some of the items himself in 2002. Some of those items including Jack Benny's stage violin are back up for sale again as part of the collection in Saco, Thibodeau said. The small auction house made a name for itself in recent years with some high-profile items, including the oldest known recording of black vocal group and a rare baseball card from 1865. — AP

Fashion



Kris Jenner, left, and Corey Gamble arrive at Daily Front Row's Fashion Los Angeles Awards at the Sunset Tower hotel on Sunday. — AP photos



The Weeknd, left, and Bella Hadid.



Kate Hudson



Jennifer Lopez

FASHION LOS ANGELES AWARDS 2016



Lady Gaga



Model Alessandra Ambrosio



Rosie Huntington-Whiteley

Designer of the Year
Brandon Maxwell
Women's Stylist of the Year
Rob Zangardi and Mariel Haenn
Editor of the Year
Lady Gaga - V magazine
Model of the Year
Bella Hadid

Fashion Innovator
Eva Chow
Jewelry Designer
Jennifer Meyer
Magazine of the Year
Carine Roitfeld's CR Fashion Book
Fashion Icon
Karl Lagerfeld-www.dailymail.co.uk



Designers Alber Elbaz and Eva Chow.

Shoexpress presents spring/summer collection 2016

Shoexpress has concocted a creatively relaxing change for men, women and children this Spring Summer. Ladies it's time to stash away your winter clothes! You can hop into spring with our great variety of casual to sporty shoes that are updated in forms and materials. Come fall in love with our Shining Star, our range of sneakers that are laceless, with elastic stretch, meshed, wedged, exotic serpentine textured, chain detailed, soft leathered like "nappa" or high gloss finished!

We start the season off where everything is soft and pretty! Neutrals highlighted with minty greens, lilacs and lavenders, baby blues and pastel pinks are the perfect way to step into the season. Metallics are still on trend, with gold, silver and bronze featuring as the new day-to-night colours.

Moving towards the middle of the season, our colours brighten up and we add an exciting range of gladiator sandals & lace up styles that are weather appropriate for that nice chill-out session in style with the use of different types of lacing and straps that are natural looking, which can be casual and formal looking in nature. Ultra flat and heeled silhouettes are equally important this season, this footwear is perfect for almost anything in your wardrobe that is casual, be it your jeans, dresses or shorts.

Smart casual dressing

For men this is the season for outdoor activities, fun times with friends and family by staying active under this breezy and marvelous weather! Shoexpress' Spring 2016 collection for Men covers this seasons' essential footwear to make you officially spring-ready and trendier than usual. Step up your game with our range of sporty footwear of trendy to cult classic sneaker designs that wouldn't fail to impress your game quotient in fashion. Our range of mid cut casual boots, and modernized formal shoes brings out the luxe-look in sporty to a smart casual dressing that you

can easily pull-off! Lock your casual coolness with our generous range of canvas shoes that are delightfully impressive in a very practical price, perfect for the modern man who values his look without breaking the bank.

Kids will be overjoyed with Shoexpress' Spring 2016 collection starting with our wide range of trainer shoes, sneakers and athletic sandals that are available in sleek forms. Made in canvas, netted, soft leather-like materials and denim, perfect for that "luxury sport" style with a breath of fresh air. These are lightweight, breathable, com-



fortable and grippy active footwear that won't constrain their feet; providing proper foot development, by allowing the shoe to mold to a child's foot for a good fit, perfect for a long day of sports and other fun activities.

Fashionable designs like bejeweled and glittered shoes that add glamour and sense of magic, are few of the key styles this season we have for the little girls. Our updated classic dainty styled shoes in metallic and pastel colored ballerinas and "mary jane", in high shine and lace materials

are perfect for that sweet and polished look. The exotic serpentine textured footwear is one of the popular growing trends this season, giving your kid the spunky edge in style. Floral prints are abloom in this spring collection, perfectly embodying the lushness of the season for your little princess.

Disney character

One of our smashing products in the store every season is our Character lines that you, yourself would want your



kids to own! We have various footwear designs of Hello Kitty, Frozen, Minions, Spider man, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Disney Princesses, Dora and Batman in varieties of slip on sneakers, trainers, slippers, rubber clogs for your little ones and additional ballerina shoe range for the girls!

The easiest way to update your look is with a stylish new accessory! Our Spring 16 bag shapes range from top-handled, backpacks, totes, cross-bodies, as well as shoulder bags that are modified in terms of functionality (business or casual)and style requirements to suit every age, taste and style. We welcome the season with a touch of metallic - gold, bronze and silver, that are no more limited to just eveningwear. Add to those delectable pastel shades of blush, pistachio greens, cottony blues and creamy beiges and you have the perfect start to Spring! Further into the season, our styles are illuminated by fluorescent colors that will make your look Pop and Dazzle! Be fresh as a daisy with our range of floral printed bags that are blooming with spring time splendor in lush tones of bold emeralds and cobalts.

While it is so easy to lean towards a black bag, step out of your comfort zone and switch up your style. Add a bag to your collection that adds sizzle to any outfit in your wardrobe. Our bags are both functional and fashionable and are available at modest prices. This season is all about finding the right new look for you and we have made sure that your special moments are taken care of with our matching shoes and accessories! Bling up your wardrobe with our amazing range of Jewellery and you will be stepping out in style! Shoexpress Spring Summer 2016 collection is available at Star Mall -Al Rai, Souk Al- Mubarakiya, Dabbous Mall -Farwaniya and The Avenues. Make the freshest statement this season for less!



British actor Henry Cavill, cast as Superman, pose for photos during the red carpet event promoting 'Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice' at the Auditorio Nacional in Mexico City. — AP photos



British actor Henry Cavill cast as Superman, Israeli actress Gal Gadot cast as Wonder Woman, and American actor Ben Affleck cast as Batman, pose for photos during a press conference to promote their movie, 'Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice'.



Amy Adams attends the premiere of 'Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice'.

Ben Affleck says he's serious about playing Batman

Ben Affleck hopes Batman fans who were skeptical of him playing the caped crusader in "Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice" realize how seriously he took the role. "The most difficult thing about making this movie, honestly, was the physical aspect," Affleck told The Associated Press on Sunday on the red carpet for the film's New York premiere at Radio City Music Hall. Affleck said he wanted to be in shape, so he worked out hard.

"Having to be in the gym every day, six in the morning ... I wasn't used to that kind of workout regimen," Affleck said. "Fans have come to expect that if you're going to play a super-

hero, you got to look in the body like a superhero. I knew the camera was going to be looking at me and the guillotine was there so I knew I had to be ready."

When Warner Bros. made the announcement nearly three years ago that Affleck would play Batman, some fans weren't thrilled, and the backlash led to petitions asking the studio to remove him. Eventually, it blew over, and the two-time Oscar winner feels proud to be part of the Batman legacy. "I'm really honored to be part of a tradition that Christian Bale and Christopher Nolan, great talents, worked on. Michael Keaton, Val Kilmer, George Clooney, Tim Burton, great talents. So I just

wanted to do my best. I think we did something different, but something that is still very much Batman," Affleck said.

Co-star Jesse Eisenberg shared a similar experience when he was cast as Superman's arch-nemesis, Lex Luthor. Eisenberg, famous for his role as Mark Zuckerberg in "The Social Network," empathized with his critics. "I can assure them as critical as they are of me, I'm more critical. No one is more concerned or critical or worried about doing a good job than I am," Eisenberg said.

Amy Adams, who plays Lois Lane in the film, praised both Eisenberg and Affleck. "I think the audience is going to have to

decide for themselves. (I) got to see it, and I was blown away," Adams said. "They both bring something we've never seen before in these characters, but something that really pays homage to the canon, so I think they are going to be really happy." "I think people are going to like it," Affleck said. "All you can do is do your best." — AP



Tao Okamoto attends the premiere of "Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice".



Will Smith



Nina Agdal



Erin Richards

Australia's SBS weighs Asian version of Eurovision song contest

Asia-Pacific nations could soon have the chance to compete in their own version of the Eurovision Song Contest, pitting K-pop and Bollywood talent against stars from China and Japan. Australian broadcaster SBS said in a statement yesterday it had secured an exclusive option to bring the concept to the region, with an inaugural event in Australia possible as early as 2017. If finalized, Eurovision Asia would bring together songwriters and performers from 20 countries and would be hosted in other competitor nations following its Australian debut. SBS Eurovision production partners Blink TV, who would help develop Eurovision Asia for broadcast, said the show could reach an Asian audience of more than a billion.

The existing competition is watched every year by around 200 million. "Asia has an astonishing set of musical and visual cultures, and it will make for brilliant television," said Blink TV director Paul Clark. "Imagine—the musical virtuosity of Bollywood, the cutting edge of K-pop, and the excitement of Chinese and Japanese artists—now the biggest music consumers in the world... it's a thrilling idea." Last November Australia said it would compete at this year's Eurovision Song Contest for the second time, following its wildcard entry last year. Eurovision, now in its 61st year, features acts ranging from the brilliant to the bizarre and pulls in a TV audience from around the world, including in Australia where it has long enjoyed a cult following. It was shown in China for the first time in 2015. — AFP



Gap presents spring 2016 collection

Gap, the classic American clothing brand, kicks off spring with a collection rooted in an array of foundational pieces for the modern wardrobe, showcasing everyday style essentials of denim, khaki, and knits, both favorite and new. Introducing sky blue washes, Gap's new blues signal the return of the great American jean in all your favorite fits.

In a range of Authentic Blues, Gap's 1969 denim takes shape with new silhouettes, colors, and washes from light to dark and skinny to wide. Key fits for women include the Crop

Kick, Flare, Ankle, and Skinny. New denim fabrications offer everyday wear-ability, shape, and comfort in authentic, stretch fabric. The Girlfriend Chino is just the right bit of laid-back with a polished boyfriend fit, available in a range of one-of-a-kind colors. Garment-dyed vintage wash and cotton-modal modern tees are the perfect layering pieces in short and long sleeve tank, crew, and v-neck options. Styled back to sailor stripe tops, utility jackets, and the Best Girlfriend and Summer Short Shorts add variety in length with a cool vintage look.

The men's collection offers t-shirts from casual to dressy. In a premium cotton yarn, the new fit and feel is available in a range of defining neutrals cut with shades of on-trend colors. With vintage wash tees and standard fit shirts paring back to the iconic 1969 denim, key fits include Skinny, Slim, and Straight, authentic, and stretch fabrications. Gap's standard washed khaki is the new go-everywhere pant, washed for softness and character. Woven and sweat shorts also style back to comfortable pique polos and denim jackets. Gap also introduces sun wash sweats, soft, relaxed styles to mix into your every-day for women and men.

GapKids has active-inspired trends in new knit bottoms with pull-on leggings for girls and authentic athletic bottoms and shorts for boys. Denim washes and silhouettes range from rip & repair to embroidery detailing. Head-to-toe outfitting completes the season with woven and knit, dressy and casual options for girls and chino and twill shorts, woven tops, and denim jacket layering for boys. Shorts are also offered for every boy and girl in a wide range of styles and fabrications. BabyGap captures baby's first spring day with modern retro dresses, light cardigans, and sandals for girls with colorful wind-breakers, crews, and woven joggers for boys.





Musicians and other entertainers have found it hard to make a name and living for themselves in the Hamas-run Gaza Strip as they struggle to find venues and instruments, let alone get permission to play. — AFP photos

Gaza rockers and rappers struggle to carve out a space



Khamiss Abu Shaban's band would love to wow the kinds of crowds seen elsewhere, but in Hamas-run Gaza they struggle to find venues and instruments, let alone get permission to play. Even so, that hasn't dispelled the enthusiasm for popular music in the Palestinian territory, where 70 percent of the population is under 30 years old. "Gazans are fans of music. They flock to every concert," Abu Shaban, a 22-year-old bass player in Watar Band, says on the small stage of a sold-out 200-seat theatre.

It was only their third performance for the past year and a half. Musicians and other entertainers have found it hard to make a name and living for themselves in the hard-scrabble Palestinian territory's few venues. That is the paradox of Gaza, a fact not lost on advertisers who seek to woo young breakdancers and devotees of parkour—the urban sport combining running, acrobatics and gymnastics. But the rewards are few for the rappers, other musicians, dancers and acrobats trying to carve out a niche for themselves. If they want to rehearse, record or be filmed, they must do it in whatever space they can find, often in their own homes.

Without official authorization and performance space, they cannot have grandiose dreams, they say. There is also a lack of instruments and equipment, thanks to an Israeli blockade of the strip in place for nearly a decade. The French Cultural Centre was one of the few places where young Gazans could get away briefly from Palestinian political divisions, repeated wars with Israel, poverty and chronic unemployment, but it has closed its doors. In December 2014, it was hit by a bombing claimed by Salafist jihadists. Gaza is a narrow strip of land into which 1.8 million Palestinians are jammed, wedged between Egypt, Israel and the Mediterranean Sea. Starved of permanent performance spaces, dancers and musicians are using the Internet to display their talents.

Singing and dancing through war

Even at the height of the grueling war of summer 2014, Watar Band and rapper Ayman Mghamesh posted songs and videos shot in the ruins of bombed-out buildings because they believed people needed to hear music. "In Gaza, it's life or death, it's the same," chants Mghamesh, a Gaza rap pioneer. "They can put up more checkpoints and barriers/I shall not weary, believe me/our dreams will survive/even if I myself die," he intones in a clip viewed tens of thousands of times online.

It was online that Mahmud Saradi, 21, dressed in sportswear and a green and blue baseball cap, was initiated into breakdancing moves. The dance style that spread among African-American youths in the 1970s and '80s is the best way to banish "despair, stress, everything we

suffer" in Gaza, says Karim Azzam, 18. Gazans are for the most part physically confined to their sliver of Palestinian territory. An Israeli blockade imposed in 2006 severely restricts the movement of people and goods. Egypt has largely kept its border with Gaza closed since 2013 and has destroyed Palestinian tunnels under the frontier used for smuggling.

Saradi and Azzam have given up hope of taking part in international competitions and even Palestinian

shadow. In the Gaza Strip, battered by three wars with Israel since 2008, electricity flows for just eight hours each day. There is no lighting and music played from a laptop computer will last only as long as the battery holds out. The authorities are constantly asking us for official authorizations," says Mohamed Al-Lumani, a 35-year-old IT engineer and guitarist with Watar Band.

"We know that we have to struggle for every concert we play. It's a tiring struggle but the audience's joy is our



national events are beyond reach as Israel rarely allows passage to Jerusalem or the occupied West Bank. Young artists also face obstacles placed by their own conservative society, ruled for the past 10 years by Hamas. "We wanted to open our own Centre in Gaza City but three times the authorities refused to give us a permit," says Abderrahim Zrii, 22, who runs the makeshift training facilities of break-dancing crew B-Boy Funk. "They said, 'You're dancers? Then this Centre is not art, it's a nightclub.'"

Dropped from the program

The crew made do with the house of the father of three members who all fled Gaza for the United States and Europe. On a cloudy afternoon in the Nuseirat refugee camp, the improvised centre in an alleyway — where dozens of youngsters learn moves—is deep in

reward." Bass player Abu Shaban says "artists in Gaza are in the worst possible position: prevented from movement by the blockade and with concerts so rare that they are forced to do something else in order to eat." Rapper Mghamesh believes the authorities are afraid of the crowds of young people attracted to performances. "Whenever a rap performance is scheduled they cancel it," he says. "They accuse us of performing music imported from the West and of wearing indecent dress," he adds, still amused at the reception given to his low-slung cargo pants. In Gaza, he says, "nobody respects your freedom to think." — AFP

