

Sawaber tenants fume; evacuation ultimatum expires



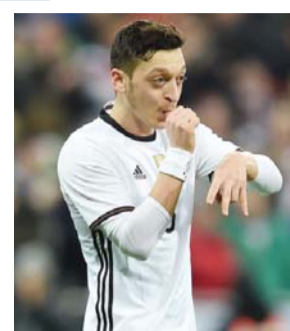
Suspect remanded as hijacking sparks social media buzz



From Senegal to Libya: An African student joins IS



Germany beat Italy; 1st time in over 20 years



KUWAIT AND KOREAN FIRMS SEAL \$2.9 BILLION LNG DEAL

KPC, BP TO EXPLORE OPPORTUNITIES IN OIL, GAS, PETROCHEMICALS



Min 14°
Max 27°
High Tide 05:22 & 15:53
Low Tide 10:22 & 23:29



150 FILS
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BRUSSELS: People hang a flag of Kuwait on the Place de la Bourse (Beursplein) in central Brussels, days after a triple bomb attack hit Brussels' airport and the Maalbeek subway station, killing 32 people and wounding 300 others. — AFP

KUWAIT: Kuwait yesterday inked a \$2.93 billion contract with three South Korean firms for the construction of the largest Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) import facility in the oil-rich country. The project, to be built at the Al-Zour refinery near the border with Saudi Arabia, was awarded to Hyundai Engineering Co, Hyundai Engineering & Construction Co and Korea Gas Corporation.

CEO of national refiner Kuwait National Petroleum Co Mohammad Al-Mutairi, who signed the contract, said the project is slated to be completed in the first quarter of 2021. OPEC member Kuwait is rich with crude oil but its natural gas production is too small to meet its needs. Every year it imports large LNG quantities to supply power plants, especially during the summer, and for use in the petrochemicals industry.

The facility will be part of a huge complex being built in Al-Zour, south of Kuwait City, which will also house a state-of-the-art 615,000 barrel-per-day refinery and a petrochemicals plant. Mutairi said the cost of the complex is expected to reach \$30 billion. In October, Kuwait awarded contracts worth \$13.2 billion to 10 international firms to build the refinery, which is set to come on stream in late 2019. In 2014, the State gave out contracts for a \$12 billion project to upgrade two of its three existing refineries. Kuwait sits on 101.5 billion barrels of crude reserves-equivalent to around 7.0 percent of the world's proven reserves, according to the latest OPEC figures-and pumps around 3.0 million barrels per day.

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KUWAIT: Representatives of the Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) and South Korean representatives of the Hyundai Engineering and Construction (HDEC) pose for a family photo after signing an agreement as part of a Liquefied Natural Gas import project yesterday at the KNPC headquarters in Al-Ahmadi. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

DUBAI INTRODUCES 'PASSENGER TAX'

\$9.50 AIRPORT TAX PER TRAVELER

DUBAI: The emirate of Dubai, whose airport is the world's busiest for international passengers, announced yesterday it was introducing a tax on travelers to help finance expansion, as Gulf governments grapple with plummeting revenues. The 35-dirham (\$9.50) fee will apply to all passengers, including those transiting in Dubai, on all flights from June 30, according to a statement carried by WAM state news agency.

It is the first time Dubai has announced a passenger tax, which is imposed in many airports worldwide. More than 78 million passengers passed through Dubai International in 2015, keeping its place as the world's busiest for international passengers since overtaking London Heathrow in 2014. Last month, Dubai Airports increased the capacity of its main airport to 90 million passengers with the opening of con-

course D, at a cost of \$1.2 billion. Dubai has a smaller second airport, Al-Maktoum International, which opened in 2013 and will receive 120 million passengers a year once completed.

The receipts of the new tax will be channeled into funding the expansion of Dubai airports, the statement said. Although part of the oil-rich United Arab Emirates, Dubai has dwindling oil wealth, and its revenues are diversified compared to its oil-dependent Gulf peers. But the whole region is struggling to cope with a sharp drop in oil revenues since crude prices nosedived. Situated on transcontinental air routes, Dubai is one of several Gulf-based airports to experience prodigious growth in recent years. Around 100 airlines fly to more than 240 destinations from the international hub, which is also home to carrier Emirates. — AFP



KUWAIT: The Minister of Social Affairs and Labor and Minister of State for Planning and Development Affairs Hind Al-Subaih (center) is pictured with some Kuwait MPs during the parliamentary session yesterday. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

ASSEMBLY PANEL TO DISCUSS POWER RATES NEXT SUNDAY

MPs DEBATE KIA REPORT

KUWAIT: Head of the National Assembly Financial and Economic Affairs Committee MP Faisal A-Shaye said yesterday the panel received a government draft law stipulating increases to electricity charges. Shaye said the committee will meet on Sunday to study the bill but expected that major changes will be made to the bill to reduce the proposed increases to electricity and water charges. The draft law, which was approved by the cabinet on Monday, stipulates to raise electricity charges on the basis of consumption by several folds. It divides the proposed charges for expatriates and citizens.

For private houses (normally inhabited by Kuwaitis), the bill proposes to raise cur-

rent electricity charges of 2 fils per kilowatt to as follows: For consumption of up to 3,000 kilowatts - 5 fils per kilowatt; For consumption of between 3,000 - 6,000 - 8 fils per kilowatt; For consumption between 6,000-9,000 - 10 fils per kilowatt; For consumption above 9,000 - 15 fils per kilowatt; As for apartments (normally refers to expatriate), the new proposed rates are as follow; For consumption of up to 1,000 kilowatt - 5 fils per kilowatt; For consumption between 1,000-2,000 - 10 fils per kilowatt; For consumption above 2,000 kilowatt - 15 fils per kilowatt. The bill also proposes smaller increases to water charges.

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News

in brief

Civil ID fee raised from 'KD 2 to KD 5'

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: The Public Authority of Civil Information (PACI)'s director Musaed Al-Assoussi said that the new civil ID fees would be in effect from Sunday and that the fee would be KD 5 instead of KD 2. Al-Assoussi added that the decision includes increasing the fees re-issue in cases of loss or damage from KD 10 to 20. The civil ID fees could be paid online at the PACI's website.

Saudi executes two citizens for murder

RIVADH: Saudi Arabia executed two citizens convicted of murder yesterday, raising to 81 the number of death sentences carried out in the ultra-conservative kingdom this year. Dhafer and Hussein al-Mutliq were found guilty of killing fellow Saudis Azeb and Mahdi Al-Moamer in a dispute between the two families, the interior ministry said. They were both executed in Najran, in the south, a ministry statement carried by the official SPA news agency said. Most people put to death in Saudi Arabia are beheaded with a sword. The executions so far this year include 47 for "terrorism" carried out in a single day on January 2. In 2015, Saudi Arabia executed 153 people, most of them for drug trafficking or murder, according to an AFP count.

NZ men charged over red-hot chilli assault

WELLINGTON: Two men who allegedly forced a teenager to eat red-hot bongo chillies have been charged with assault in New Zealand. Police did not detail the alleged crimes but the victim, an 18-year-old who cannot be named for legal reasons, recounted his ordeal to Fairfax New Zealand earlier this month. He claimed a group of men assaulted him in a basement after an argument over a prank telephone call, punching him and forcing him to eat bongo chilli peppers. The chillies, cultivated in Fiji, reportedly measure 100,000-350,000 Scoville heat units, compared to 3,500-8,000 for a jalapeno.

Yemeni troops push Qaeda back in Aden

ADEN: Loyalist forces pushed Al-Qaeda out of parts of Aden yesterday in a new drive against the jihadists in Yemen's second city where the internationally recognized government is based, military sources said. Troops and militia retook the central prison and deployed on main roads across the Mansura residential district after a three-hour gun-battle with the jihadists, the sources said. There was no immediate word on casualties.



DUBAI: An Emirati looks at classic cars displayed in downtown Dubai. Dubai, whose airport is the world's busiest for international passengers, announced yesterday it will introduce a tax on travelers to help finance expansion, as Gulf governments grapple with plummeting revenues. — AFP

ISLAMIC STATE THREAT RAISES STAKES FOR US NUKE SUMMIT

WASHINGTON: The specter of the Islamic State group obtaining a "dirty bomb" will loom over a top-level nuclear security summit hosted by President Barack Obama in Washington today and tomorrow. Obama welcomes several leaders from countries as diverse as China and Nigeria, as well as representatives from nearly 50 other nations, for the summit aimed at elevating the problem of shaky safeguards from the desks of technocrats to the highest corridors of power.

The meeting comes just days after 32 people were killed and 340 were injured in bombings at Brussels airport and the Belgian capital's metro. The attacks featured conventional explosives, but two of the suicide bombers-Ibrahim and Khalid El Bakraoui-have been linked to possible

efforts by the Islamic State (IS) group to secure fissile material. Late last year, Belgian police investigating the November 13 Paris terror attacks found 10 hours of video surveillance detailing the comings and goings of a senior Belgian nuclear official.

Belgian media have since reported that the brothers were linked to the surveillance. The incident has only heightened existing concerns about IS efforts to get nuclear material. "Having a portion of the discussion that is focused on counter-ISIL is a decision that was made in January," said Laura Holgate, the National Security Council's senior director for weapons of mass destruction, terrorism and threat reduction. "But it turns out that it is obviously very timely, unfortunately."

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On the occasion of World Autism Awareness Day
Autism Partnership Kuwait (APK) invites you to Support kids with autism

Saturday April 2, 2016

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(Walk-A-Thon) WALK WITH US

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AMIR RECEIVES INVITATION TO GCC-US SUMMIT



RIYADH: Kuwait's Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah attends the 15th GCC Ministerial Committee meeting yesterday. — KUNA

GCC CHALKS UP MOMENTOUS ACHIEVEMENTS: OFFICIAL

RIYADH: The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) has achieved much over the years and its resolutions reflect the joint efforts of the member states to further advance and develop their societies, said a Kuwait official yesterday.

In a statement at the conclusion of the 15th GCC Ministerial Committee meeting tasked with following up on implementation of resolutions related to inter-GCC cooperation, Kuwaiti Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah, who attended the meeting, said that all but very few resolutions by the committee have been satisfactorily implemented. He commended the perceptive vision of Saudi King Salman Bin Abdul-Aziz, adopted by the 36th GCC summit in Riyadh last December, regarding the imperative to further develop the GCC construct.

Jarallah expressed optimism as to the future of the GCC, noting that the meeting here in Riyadh carried a highly positive tone reflective of the wish of the leaders and peoples of the GCC for more joint work and close integration. Moreover, he emphasized that the committee was expediting the implementation of major resolutions dealing with high-profile concerns such as a common GCC market and a joint customs and tariffs union.

Joint action

Addressing the meeting, Saudi Minister of State and Cabinet's Member for Shura Council Affairs Mohammad Abu Saq stressed the importance of such meetings as they serve the joint Gulf action through

promoting means of integration, cooperation and coordination. He added that there are more than 140 decisions which are implemented year after year in GCC member states.

Meanwhile, GCC Secretary General Abdul-Latif Al-Zayani affirmed during a similar speech keenness of GCC leaders on enhancing the march of joint action, indicating that the 36th Gulf summit held in Riyadh last December materialized the vision of Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz on the joint action.

The vision aims to establish the concept of promoting real cooperation among GCC member states in security, military, social, political and economic fields, and raise the level of cooperation and cohesion among them in all domains as well, he added.

It also seeks to boost role of GCC countries on Arab, Islamic and international levels so as to serve issues that interest the Gulf countries and their nations, and meet their aspirations as well as support Arab and Islamic issues, he made clear.

Zayani lauded sincere efforts exerted by the ministerial committee's members that contributed to taking executive and legislative steps of many decisions on the joint action. He stressed the importance of continued action in order to implement all decisions to implement directives of GCC leaders, and meet hopes and aspirations of the Gulf nations. The ministerial committee was formed by a decree issued by the Gulf summit in 2008, with the aim of following up the implementation of all decisions pertaining to the joint Gulf action. — KUNA

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received yesterday a written message from the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, the Monarch of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, inviting His Highness to the Summit due to group Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) leaders with the President of the United States of America, Barack Obama, in Riyadh, next month. The invitation was handed over by Saudi Ambassador to Kuwait Abdulaziz Bin Ibrahim Al-Fayez, during a reception attended by Deputy Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir received a message from the President of the Swiss Confederation Johann Schneider-Ammann dealing with bilateral relations and means of boosting cooperation in various fields as well as issues of mutual interest. The message was delivered by Swiss Confederation Ambassador to Kuwait Aldo de Luca to Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah.

Allegiance

Also yesterday, His Highness the Amir received Kawthar Al-Jowan, Anissa Jaafar, Laila Al-Othman and Siham Al-Qabandi, who presented a document of allegiance from the institute of women for development and peace. His Highness also received chairperson of the Kuwaiti Association for Learning Differences Amal Al-Sayer and head of the 'teach me right' committee Hanadi Al-Duaij and committee members, who presented to His Highness a national document on educational services for special needs students.

Earlier, His Highness the Amir received His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Ghanem, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

New officials

Separately, His Highness the Crown Prince received Ghanem, His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak, Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Mohammad Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah.

Moreover, His Highness received Minister of Justice and Minister of Awqaf and Islamic



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives a letter from King Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, delivered by Saudi Ambassador to Kuwait Abdulaziz Bin Ibrahim Al-Fayez. — Amiri Diwan photo



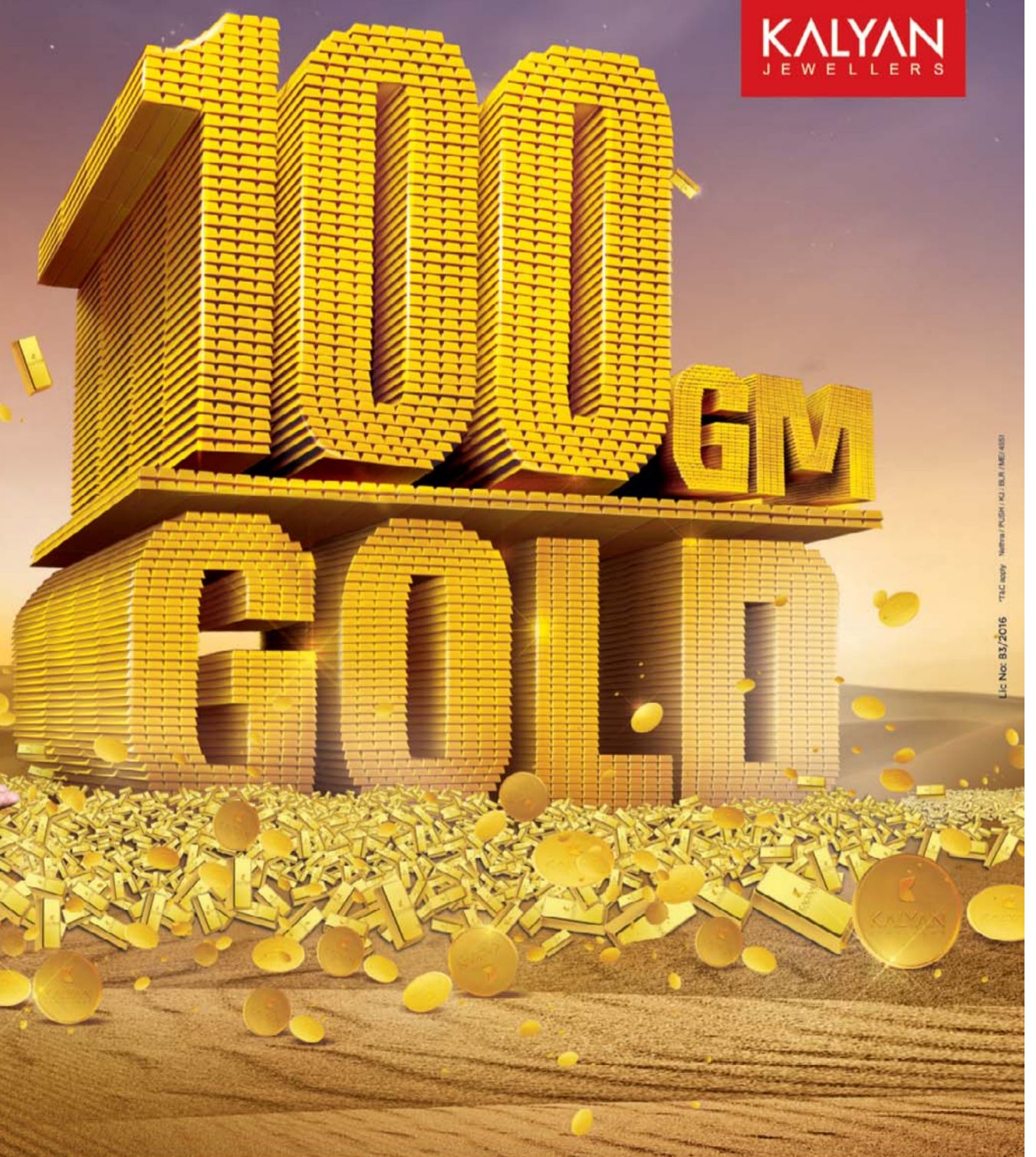
His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah receives a document of allegiance from the institute of women for development and peace, presented by Kawthar Al-Jowan (second from left), Laila Al-Othman (left), Anissa Jaafar (fourth from left) and Siham Al-Qabandi (right).

Affairs Yaqoub Al-Sana who presented the newly-appointed chairman of the Public Anti-Corruption Authority (PACA) Advisor Abdulrahman Al-Namash, deputy chairman Advisor Riyadh Al-Hajeri and members

Mishari Al-Mutairi, Dawoud Al-Jarrah, Mohammad Al-Subaie, Abdulwahab Al-Muzaini and Louai Al-Saleh. His Highness the Prime Minister also received minister Sane and the newly-appointed officials. — KUNA

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KUWAIT: Damages are seen at a mosque under construction in Qairawan after the roof collapsed yesterday, leaving four workers injured.

FOUR INJURED IN MOSQUE ROOF COLLAPSE

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Four workers were injured when the roof of a mosque under construction collapsed yesterday. Firefighters arrived to the scene located in Qairawan shortly after the incident was reported. They rescued the workers and handed them over to paramedics who transported them to the nearest medical facility. An investigation was opened. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs stressed that the mosque was still under construction, that it was being built by a donor and that it was not yet handed over to it. Ahmed Al-Qarawi, the Awqaf ministry's official spokesperson and director of its media department, said on that regard that the ministry was following up the latest news about the mosque and that the engineering affairs department at the mosques' sector was asked to prepare a detailed report about the incident to determine the cause of the collapse.

Fugitives caught

Weapons detectives launched a campaign in Kabd area that resulted in the

arrest of a citizen and a bedoon for possession of drugs and paraphernalia. Meanwhile, a citizen was arrested with possession of an unlicensed 9mm pistol and ammunition. Meanwhile, police arrested a Syrian national wanted for defaulting on a KD 46,000 payment. Police arrested another Syrian national wanted to serve an 11 years in prison sentence over bad cheques. Furthermore, police found a hyena in an animal's pen that was searched during the campaign. The animal was secured and transported to Kuwait Zoo, while orders were given to summon the pen's owner for questioning. In another case, Jahra police arrested three fugitives, bedoons, and found a shotgun with one of them.

No injuries in fire

A fire broke out in a Sabah Al-Nasser house yesterday. Firefighters from two different fire stations headed to the scene after the fire was reported. They discovered that there was a child and a domestic helper trapped behind flames in a basement where the fire started. They evacuated the two before putting out the fire. No injuries were reported.



The scene at a house's basement in Sabah Al-Nasser after fighters tackled a blaze there.

SAWABER EVACUATION ULTIMATUM EXPIRES TODAY, TENANTS THREATEN LEGAL ACTION

By A Saleh and Agencies

KUWAIT: As the ultimatum to evacuate the Sawaber Residential Complex expires today, and in light of the government's looming plans to demolish the key estate in downtown Kuwait City, the issue could be heading towards further complication as a number of residents still refuse to cooperate with evacuation calls and plan to seek legal action to keep hold on what they say is rightfully theirs.

The Ministry of Finance said yesterday that an announcement for a tender to demolish the Sawaber complex will be published in the next issue of the state's official gazette 'Kuwait Al-Youm'. The ministry explained that the bidding conditions would be set soon and that the company offering the highest bid would be authorized to pull down the complex provided all safety and security measures are followed.

Sit-in

This comes amid reports indicating that around a hundred citizens who still refuse to evacuate their apartments in the complex, shedding uncertainty about their fate as of today. Last week, the government announced that public services, including electricity and water would be cut from the complex after the deadline.

Al-Qabas yesterday quoted a statement by 24 apartment owners who he stressed that they would not yield to any threats or intimidation attempts, adding that they do possess proper lawful ownership deeds that prove their rights.

Citizen Faisal Ali, one of the owners, criticized what he described as lawmakers' silence about practices of the finance ministry and its state property department, including 'threats' to disconnect power. "The notices we received from the department are inhumane though we live in the Center of Humanity," he underlined, referring to a term Kuwait has been coined with by the United



KUWAIT: This file photo shows flames and smoke emitting from a building at the Sawaber Residential Complex in Kuwait City on June 15, 2010. Lingering problems surrounding the 35-year-old complex led the government to evacuate it and proceed with a plan to demolish it. —KUNA

Nations in 2014. He further urged National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem to 'undo the injustice' they had been suffering from. The owners also threatened to go on an 'open strike' and sue the concerned state authorities if those threats were put into practice.

Notably, the state property department at the finance ministry had given a grace period to 24 citizens living at the complex to evict their apartments by March 31, 2016 and to get clearances from the Ministry of Electricity and Water (MEW) to finish their transactions.

'Unfair pay'

In a related issue, Bader Al-Weqayyan, Director of the Public Authority for Housing

Welfare (PAHW) ordered paying the Sawaber complex eviction committee members KD 30 each for their efforts though they had worked for three months trying to convince tenants evict their apartments, Al-Anbaa reported yesterday quoting sources.

Most members received this news with frustration, the sources said, noting that they have been using their own vehicles, going to the complex on almost daily basis, and had to deal with rejection from many tenants because they did not have judicial powers. "The PAHW has previously rewarded Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Electricity and Water with a KD 1,000 reward each for taking part in other eviction operations," the sources argued.

DELAY IN PLANS FOR US SATELLITE CAMPUS

KUWAIT: Plans to open a satellite campus for the University of Massachusetts-Lowell in Kuwait have been shelved until at least 2017. Lowell Chancellor Jacqueline Moloney said that university, which is opening the campus in Kuwait in collaboration with GUST and US weapons manufacturer Raytheon, are now shooting for a September 2017 opening. The chancellor has blamed the delay

"changes with the authorities in Kuwait," though she did not provide specifics, according to a local newspaper report.

The \$50 million, seven-year plan would establish five undergraduate and 11-graduate degree programs, and supply Raytheon with a pipeline of talent. About 1,200 students are expected to earn degrees in business, education, engineering and science. The coopera-

tion aims to eventually allow Kuwaiti students to study at the UMass campus and alternatively to bring students and faculty from the US to Kuwait.

The agreement helps Raytheon fulfill its contractual obligation to invest in Kuwait, one of its customers. In return, the country has purchased Raytheon's high-tech weapons. — from The Lowell Sun

BEDOONS IN CALAIS

FRANCE: Al Jazeera has reported that there are approximately 300 stateless Arabs from Kuwait's bedoon population who are living in the illegal Calais camp in France. The men and at least one child reportedly traveled using forged documents via Iraq through Turkey and then across Europe to reach Calais. Thousands of illegal immigrants from Syria, Iraq, countries in Africa and elsewhere have made their way to Calais in the hopes of finding a means of sneaking illegally into the United Kingdom.

ABDALI APPEAL CASE ADJOURNED TO APRIL 13

MINISTER INVESTIGATES STUDENTS 'SLANDERING'

By Meshaal Al-Enezi and A Saleh

KUWAIT: The appeal court yesterday adjourned hearing the Abdaly case until April 13. The court also decided to hold the next hearing, where two state security officers and detectives would testify, behind closed doors restricting those attending to lawyers only. Addressing the court, chairman of the Egyptian lawyers syndicate and chairman of the Arab lawyers union, the defendants' lawyer, Sameh Ashour stressed that the wireless communication devices seized with his clients were nothing but toys sold in local markets. The criminal court had sentenced the first and the 23rd of the 25 defendants to death, the sixth to lifetime imprisonment, 15 defendants to 15 years in prison, three defendants to five years in prison and one defendant to 10 years with labor while it acquitted the first defendant's brother over charges of espionage and communicating with Iran and Hezbollah as well as possessing an arsenal of explosives and weapons.

Court orders

In other news, the appeals court yesterday sentenced two brothers

to ten years in prison each over charges of funding and fighting with the Islamic State (IS) in Syria. The two suspects had been sentenced to seven years in prison by the criminal court. The court also acquitted ten expatriate and Kuwaiti doctors of causing the death of a patient by medical errors. The court proved that the patient had died of causes other than the procedures of the surgery he underwent. Meanwhile, the misdemeanor court set April 13 to make its ruling in a case in which blogger Sara Al-Derais is accused of blasphemy.

Students offended

Minister of Education and Higher Education Dr Bader Al-Essa promised to investigate an issue pertaining with an educator who reportedly offended Kuwaiti students inside a public school. Photos taken from Snapchat have went viral recently on social media allegedly showing students in a Farwaniya school with captions that read slanderous remarks targeting the students. The footage were said to be uploaded by an Arab trainee who had been visiting the school on field training. These information could not immediately be verified.

New CMA headquarters

Chairman of the capital committee at the municipal council Dr Hassan Kamal said that the committee yesterday approved a request made to allocate a site to build a headquarters for CMA. The committee also approved a request made by MSAL to allocate an area of 435 square meters to build a wholesale and supplies branch at Daiya. Kamal added that other topics on the meeting's agenda, such as a proposal to build a financial district, were postponed. Kamal also stressed that the committee postponed removing violations in public property (unlicensed cafes and cabins) pending summoning the municipality' emergency team leader.

Salwa streets asphalt

Chairman of the Hawally committee at the municipal council, Yousif Al-Ghareeb urged relevant state authorities to immediately re-asphalt a number of streets in Salwa area because the asphalt layer had been damaged by rain. He added that so many citizens have been complaining about the streets condition noting that this had caused considerable damage to their vehicles.

Elegance is an attitude
Simon Baker

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KUWAIT, TANZANIA SIGN AVIATION SERVICES AGREEMENT

DODOMA: Kuwait and Tanzania yesterday signed an agreement on aviation services to simplify air travel between both countries. The agreement was signed by Director General of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) Yousef Al-Fouzan and Tanzanian Minister of Works, Transport and Communication Makame Mbwrawa, Kuwait's embassy in the East African nation said in a statement.

Fouzan and Mbwrawa held a press conference after the signing, in which both officials described the agreement as a launch pad for further cooperation. "Increased air travel

would pave the way for more Gulf tourists and investors to visit Tanzania," Mbwrawa noted. Moreover, Fouzan said that the agreement also aims to strengthen the commerce industry in both countries, as he underscored Kuwait's historic ties with Tanzania.

The DGCA Director General also announced that Kuwait Airways would soon be launching direct flights between Kuwait and Tanzania.

First Secretary at the Kuwaiti embassy in Tanzania Mohammad Al-Omairy, Diplomatic Attaché Meshaal Al-Humaidi and a DGCA delegation attended the proceedings. — KUNA



DODOMA: Director General of the General of Civil Aviation Yousef Al-Fouzan and Tanzanian Minister of Works, Transport and Communication Makame Mbwrawa sign the agreement. — KUNA



KUWAIT: Philippine Commission on Elections Head Andres Bautista (second from left) addresses the media yesterday at Costa Del Sol Hotel during 3-day training/seminar for OAV. With him are Philippine Ambassador to Kuwait Renato Pedro Villa, Philippine Ambassador to Bahrain Alfonso Ver and Philippine Ambassador to Qatar Wildredo Santos. — Photo by Joseph Shagra

FILIPINO OVERSEAS VOTE STARTS APRIL 9 ELECTION HEAD ENSURES CREDIBLE 'OAV'S' FOR FILIPINOS

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Filipinos in Kuwait, including Pinoy from other countries, may vote for their new country's leader starting April 9. The presidential election in the Philippines is slated for May 9, but Overseas Filipinos are given a one month grace period to cast their votes at their embassy's missions.

Overseas voters are allowed to elect president, vice president, senators and a party list representative. To ensure the success, clean and orderly Overseas Absentee Voting (OAV) in the region, Philippine Commission on Elections (Comelec) Chairman Andres Bautista, supervised a three-day training/seminar for the officers/members who will oversee the voting process in the Middle East. The event was hosted by Kuwait, with the attendance of some officers/members from other countries including Lebanon and the United Arab Emirates, and with the participation of Philippine Ambassador to Kuwait Renato Pedro Villa, Philippine Ambassador to Bahrain Alfonso Ver and Philippine Ambassador to Qatar Wildredo Santos. The three-day event is held at the Costa Del Sol Hotel, in Al-Shaab.

"I thanked the ambassadors of the Philippines to the Middle East for arranging this seminar for the Comelec. We are doing this to familiarize the special board of election inspectors and canvassers, in preparation for 9 April to 9 May Overseas Absentee Voting. The overseas voters are ahead for about one month, provided for by law. We would like to encourage Filipinos to come out and take advantage of the privileges to select, let their voices be heard in the upcoming elections. We are happy that OFWs have a vital role in the Philippine economy and we are grateful for that. The reason why I am here is that because we want to ensure clean and orderly elections," he said.

Asked if the Comelec is ready for this year's conduct of OAV, Baustita stressed under his

leadership, he will do his best and that the proof will be revealed after the elections. "The recent Supreme Court decision in the printing of the voters' receipts delayed some of our preparations, we shall overcome. We are hopeful, that with our partnership with the Department of Foreign Affairs, we would be able to conduct credible elections in the foreign posts," he said. He noted that all election materials are ready and many of them has been distributed to foreign posts. "Because of the fact that overseas voters will be one month ahead of our elections period in Manila, the thermal paper which we have in the stock room of the Comelec were already sent to foreign posts. As a matter of fact, we have them here ready," he reiterated.

The day of valor

Every year, April 9 is remembered as the Day of Valor (Araw ng Kagitingan) and traditionally, it is an official holiday in the Philippines, will there be some changes in the election date? "No, we stick to election dates overseas. As a matter of fact, it is somehow providential because the date falls on April 9, the start of choosing our government officials, we should really choose the next official with honor and pride. In foreign post, it is agreed that the embassy will be opened to voters from April 9 including weekends and holidays until May 9," he announced.

With regards to the sanctity and safety of ballots of overseas absentee voters, Baustita explained the voting machine is fully secured with additional safety features. "As provided by law Republic Act 8436, as amended by Republic Act 9369, all the safeguard features written in the law will be implemented by Comelec for this year's elections. We insure that all the standard operating procedures on OAV will be followed, that is exactly the reasons why we are conducting this seminar here in Kuwait right now, for them to be aware of the features and to protect the integrity and sanctity of election

ballots. We are also looking at the electronic transfer of results, similar to what we are already implementing in the Philippines for quicker transmission of results, we are still working on that," he noted.

Hacking of website

In response to queries about defacing of Comelec website about three days ago by a certain hacker calling itself 'Anonymous Philippines', Baustita pointed out that it was an unfortunate incident. "Hacking activities by certain groups can happen to whichever websites, may it be from the CIA, or a certain companies in New York and it happen to private and some government agencies in the Philippine and in some countries too. Comelec website is a public website, the message sent by the hacker to us was clear, they want to make sure that we have an honest and credible elections, and that all safeguards necessary for the elections will be implemented. That of course we vouched that everything mentioned in the law will be followed. But I want you to know that website that we are going to use during Election Day will be different from the public website already in the Comelec right now. Different website and different security features will be used during Election Day," he added.

Philippine Ambassador to Kuwait Renato Pedro Villa reminded the Filipino public that the canvassing of vote, (on May 9) will be opened to poll watchers/representatives of political parties at the embassy. "We want to show the transparency of the embassy on May 9, we will canvass the vote publicly. In Kuwait we have 49,000 registered voters. Our challenge in our post is to be able to encourage at least 30-40 percent of the voters. We want to ask the support of employers to allow their Filipino workers, if they are registered, to come out and vote for their government officials," he said.



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KUWAIT PIONEER IN AIDING SYRIAN REFUGEES: KI-MOON

GENEVA: UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon hailed Kuwait's efforts to provide financial support for Syrian refugees, in cooperation with Germany and the UK. In a speech at the UN's first conference for the resettlement of Syrian refugees held in Geneva yesterday, Ki-moon noted that Syria-neighboring countries are facing difficulties in receiving the rising numbers of refugees. All countries must cooperate to face the growing needs of Syrians living in severe conditions, he added.

The UN chief also said that the international organization is exerting huge efforts to provide the Syrian refugees with decent living conditions and grant them proper education to achieve their dreams of a bright future.

The recent donors conference for Syria held in London last February came with an important decision to provide refugee-hosting countries with funds to enable them to meet the needs of refugees, he said. The conference also stressed on resettling Syrians in other countries away from those neighboring Syria.

Ki-moon further noted that countries have pledged to provide 187,000 resettlement opportunity, hoping the number would increase to receive 480,000 Syrian refugees (ten percent) currently living in Syria-neighboring countries.

Mankind solidarity

Meanwhile, Kuwait hailed the freshly-launched international conference aimed at settling Syrian refugees as an event that depicts mankind solidarity, free from political, religious or racial considerations.

Objectives of this international gathering are in harmony with basic goals of the State of Kuwait's foreign policy, bases of which had been placed by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, said the permanent Kuwaiti envoy at the UN, ambassador Jamal Al-Ghneim, addressing the convention, organized by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

The State of Kuwait, since break-out of the Syrian crisis, has placed all available resources at the disposal of rallying international support for humanitarian operations, where its



UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon

diplomacy has resulted in several successful initiatives for relieving the Syrian people, namely by hosting three international conventions for raising donations, in addition to the fourth such gathering hosted by London on February 4th-co-chaired by Kuwait, Germany, Norway and Britain.

These four conventions resulted with pledges to allocate \$7 billion for the refugees. Kuwait has so far paid \$1.6 billion-with the lion's share shifting to the UNHCR, taking \$1.5 billion which benefited 3.5 million refugees.

Kuwait through the Arab Fund for Arab Economic Development (KAFED) contributed with financial allotments for relief plans in Syria's neighboring countries, he said, noting that Kuwait covered all of these projects.

In the third conference for pledging aid for the Syrians, Kuwait contributed with \$500 million, mostly addressed to the UN agencies operating in Syria, including \$100 million for refugees in countries around the country.

Hosting countries

Ambassador Ghneim said \$20 million had been earmarked for Jordan for development projects in regions hosting the refugees. An identical sum was allotted for Egypt for the same purpose. KFAED, he added, would grant Turkey \$20 million to minimize social and economic impact caused by hosting the refugees. Moreover, KFAED teams are currently present in Turkey, Egypt, Lebanon and Jordan to discuss plans for securing health services, education and water for the refugees. — KUNA

UNDP HONORS KUWAIT

AMMAN: The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) honored Kuwait in recognition of its international humanitarian and development efforts and its prominent role in aiding Syrian refugees. In a ceremony held late Tuesday to celebrate the program's 50 anniversary in Amman, Kuwaiti Ambassador to Jordan Hamad Al-Duaij received an honorary shield. Duaij expressed his keenness to receive the award, noting Kuwait's developmental and humanitarian projects around the world.

Speaking at the event, Jordanian Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour said that UNDP plays a huge role in supporting countries to face crisis and achieve development. Meanwhile, UNDP Resident Representative in Jordan Edward Kallon said that the program aims to achieve sustainable development in 170 countries. UNDP has been supporting projects in Jordan for 40 years and is exerting massive efforts to ease the suffering of Syrian refugees, he added.

Generous support

UNDP officials meanwhile applauded the partnership with Kuwait in the humanitarian and developmental work field, and hailed the "generous" support offered by Kuwait to boost developmental plans in developing countries. Furthermore, they applauded the wise instructions of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for relieving people in need and offering aid to developing countries all over the world.

Kallon described the Kuwaiti support as a "basic pillar" in continuing to host the Syrian refugees in the Syria's neighboring countries. The partnership between Kuwait and the UNDP is "promising" as the program is keen on cooperating with Kuwait on that matter, especially regarding the issue of Syrian refugees in the region. UNDP will soon focus on rehabilitating the infrastructure of areas hosting the Syrian refugees, and offering the appropriate environment to youth and society segments prone to marginalization, besides boosting efforts to prevent spread of terrorism and violence, he said.

Jordan itself hosts more than 1.4 million Syrians, including 630,000 refugees, from which 107,000 live in camps, while the others reside in residential areas, he added. This requires a group work between governmental and non-governmental organizations to alleviate the negative impact of the Syrian crisis on the hosting countries, he affirmed.

Remarkable partnership

UNDP country Director Zena Ahmed said "success and achievements" by the UNDP could not have seen light without the "generous support" from the donors, namely the State of Kuwait. She expressed pride of the strong ties and remarkable partnership with Kuwait in serving the cause of Syrian refugees and alleviating their suffering.

UNDP Program Manager Majida Al-Assaf said this celebration is shedding light on the UNDP achievements made in cooperation with its major partners including Kuwait. Cooperation with UNDP partners resulted in many projects which contributed to supporting Jordan in hosting the Syrian refugees since outbreak of the Syrian crisis before around six years, she said. — KUNA

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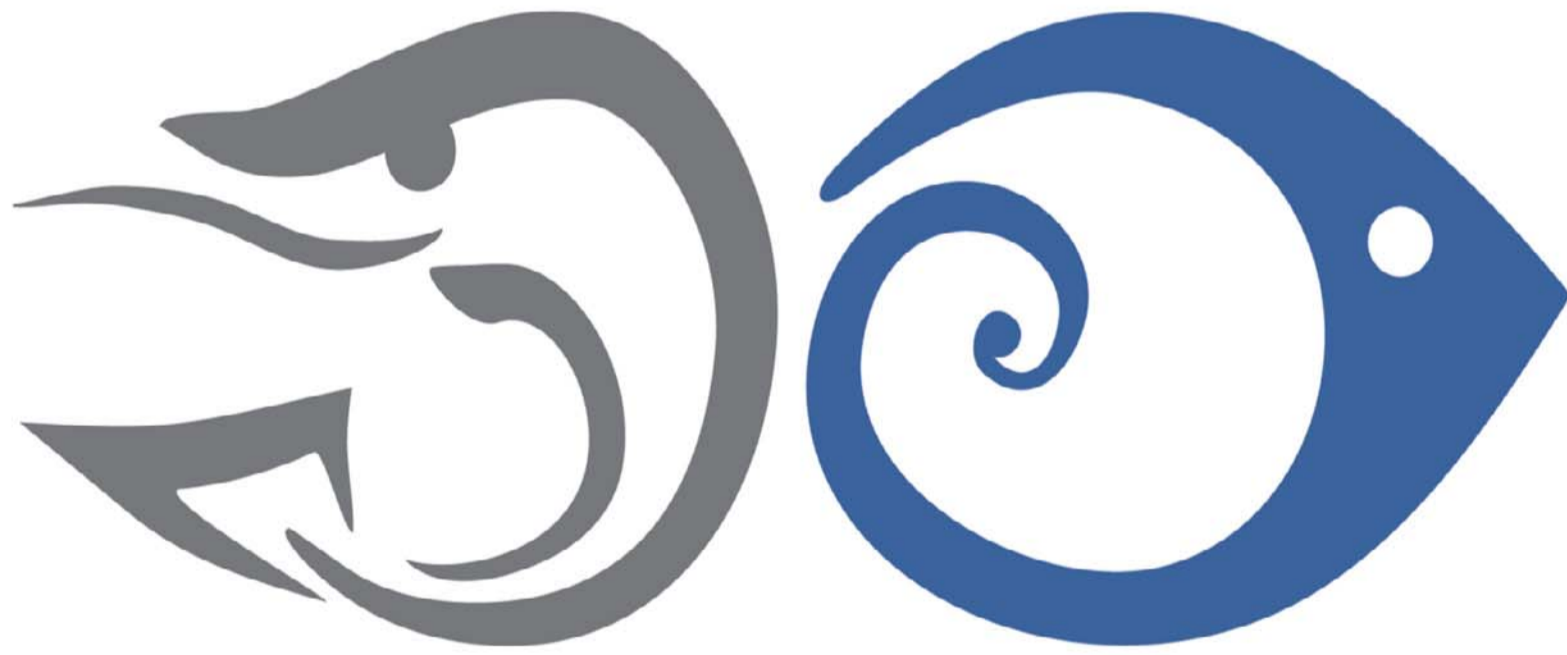
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Crime

Report

MAN ACCUSES WOMAN OF KILLING DOG

KUWAIT: Rumaithiya police detained an Asian domestic helper whose sponsor accused her of deliberately killing his pet dog. The citizen arrived at the police station in a hysterical state, along with an Asian woman he accused of killing his rare-breed dog. The man claimed that she did it on purpose to take revenge, adding that she admitted this to him. He insisted that she be charged with "premeditated murder," based on the animal protection law. He said if police did not take action, then he would, so the woman was kept at the police station for her own protection.

Citizen arrested with machine gun

A citizen was arrested by weapons detectives in his Adan home with an unlicensed machine gun along with ammunition. Detectives were informed that the citizen owns several unlicensed weapons, so they confirmed the details and discovered that the man works for an oil company, and lives in an Adan area house. A warrant was obtained and the houses raided where the weapons were found. He was sent to the public prosecution for further legal action.

Strange hugging and caressing

A police officer cadet accused a classmate of his of hugging and caressing him in a strange way. When the classmate repeated the actions, the cadet complained to Saad Al-Abdalah Academy administration, but no action was taken. The first year student said he was surprised when another student in the non-commissioned officers institute harassed him with unwanted physical contact. The administration questioned the student who denied the accusation. He admitted to hugging the cadet but said he did so because he was an orphan and wanted some affection. A source said the college did not take any further action. But then the man repeated the advances and even chased the cadet into the toilet at night, keeping others from entering, and insulted him with indecencies. The student told a relative of his what was going on and the relative took the cadet to the Abdallah Al-Mubarak police station and lodged a complaint. The source said the accused student was sent to the prosecution, and he was detained in central prison for 10 days as the case will go to court.— Al-Rai



Al-Anbaa

SILLY FIGHT ABOVE THE CLOUDS

By Abdulmohsen Al-Meshari

In a nice article written by Meshaal Al-Sedairi, he told in detail the story of what once happened to an Algerian friend of his at a 33,000 feet altitude aboard an Algerian flight heading from Algeria to Paris.

The friend said that when the plane was flying over Marseille, he heard shouts and noises of a fight near the captain's cabin.

"Well, the story started when the captain had to go to the toilet, leaving his co-pilot, an Algerian woman, to take over flying the plane," said the Algerian passenger. "The co-pilot apparently asked a flight attendant for something which she did not bring, and therefore, the co-pilot left her seat to scold her. The hostess talked back so rudely and loudly, which started the fight. Hearing the noise while getting out of the toilet, the pilot decided to close the cockpit's door in order not to disturb his co-pilot, thinking that she was inside, and went to check out on what was going on. To his surprise, he found the co-pilot fighting instead of being inside the cabin. He rushed like a madman to the cockpit's door trying to open it with no use because, after 9/11, all cockpit doors were designed only to open from the inside to prevent hijacking. The pilot and crew members reached to an emergency ax and used it in an attempt to break open the fortified door. At that time, the plane had been flying alone without a pilot and flight control had been calling with no response,

which made French authorities opt to standard security measures and send military fighters to escort the plane thinking it was hijacked by a suicide bomber. "The fighters were authorized to bomb the plane down if it reached Paris."

"Shouts got louder and all passengers panicked," he said. "Seeing the pilot and a few crew members trying to break open the cockpit's door, we thought they were terrorists dressed in crew uniform and thus attacked them, starting a fierce fight. One of us managed to snatch the ax and run towards the tail, but the crew chased him and got it back by force. When I tried to take it from them, I received a blow to my face and started bleeding. I immediately charged at the pilot knocking him down to the ground while he was shouting 'I am the pilot, I am the pilot!' 'You are a terrorist, a criminal', I shouted back and bit his arm so hard that he started screaming in pain. Someone hit me on the back of my head and I fainted. They managed to get the ax and open the door just in time to get the pilot back in his seat, control the plane and contact the traffic control to tell them what happened."

"We later on learnt that had the pilot not opened the cockpit in time, we had only ten more minutes before French fighters shot the plane down as ordered," he continued. "All this happened because of a silly fight between two women."

—Translated by Kuwait Times

News

in brief

38 expat municipality employees terminated

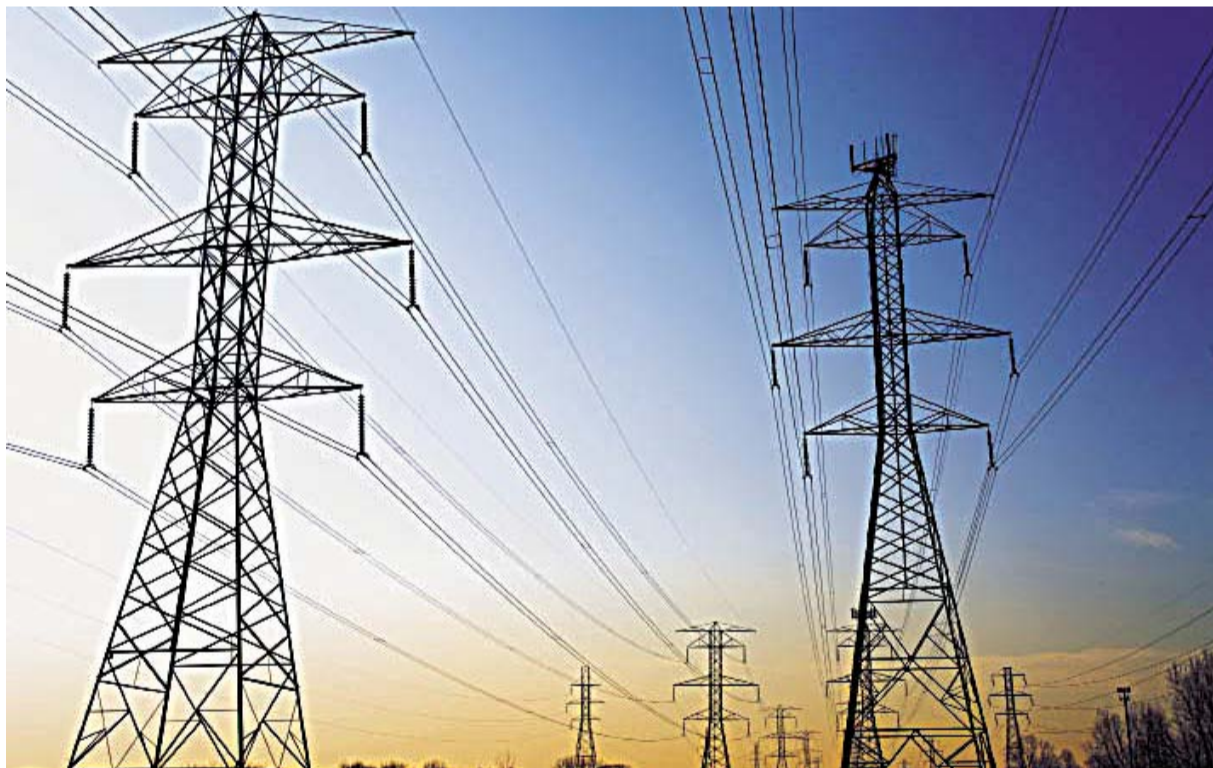
KUWAIT: Thirty eight expatriate employees at Kuwait Municipality were informed by phone not to report to work starting at the end of this month, as they were relieved of their duties. The employees were hired under the 'services assistance' category which allows state departments to hire extra workers outside of their annual payroll budget. The employees were told that they were released because there was 'no extra budget to cover their salaries.' According to a sources familiar with the situation, the employees expressed disappointment towards the way their contracts were terminated without being given a period to adjust their status.—Al-Rai

Ministry to track medical errors in private hospitals

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Health approved new regulations that would allow it to have 'strict supervision' to prevent medical errors in private hospitals and clinics, sources said. They did not provide much details, but indicated that the ministry informed private medical facilities that they are required to report back any case in which a patient is sent to a public hospital, which might indicate that negligence was involved. This would allow investigations to take place and determine whether or not medical errors took place, the sources explained.—Al-Anbaa

Kuwaiti women to be hired as school guards

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Education is preparing four contracts to appoint Kuwaiti women as guards in public schools for girls next year. The guards will officially be referred to as 'security officers' and will officially be hired on July 1, 2016, Assistant Undersecretary for Financial Affairs Yousuf Al-Najjar said. Kuwaiti women wishing to apply for this job will be hired through private companies in coordination with the Manpower and Government Restructuring Program (MGRP), Najjar said. Each employee will receive a starting salary of KD 260 a month, added to it the government's monthly labor support allowance, he indicated.—Al-Rai



ENERGY BILL INCREASE TO HIKE RENTS, PRICES

KUWAIT: Kuwait has been buzzing with questions since the cabinet announced Monday approving a proposal to increase electricity and water fees, which would increase the cost four fold for consumers according to the indications of ordinary consumption. Furthermore, it is widely expected that the fees' increase will automatically and unwillingly reflect on other fields, starting with apartment rents, and includes factories that produce national products and every facility that uses energy.

The proposal would increase electricity fees as follows: for private houses (normally inhabited by Kuwaitis), the bill proposes to raise current electricity charges of 2 fils per kilowatt to as follows: For consumption of up to 3,000 kilowatts - 5 fils per kilowatt; For consumption of between 3,000 - 6,000 - 8 fils per kilowatt; For consumption between 6,000-9,000 - 10 fils per kilowatt; For consumption above 9,000 - 15 fils per kilowatt. As for apartments (mostly inhabited by expatriate), the new proposed rates are as follow; For consumption of up to 1,000 kilowatt - 5 fils per kilowatt; For consumption between 1,000-2,000 - 10 fils per kilowatt; For consumption

above 2,000 kilowatt - 15 fils per kilowatt. The bill also proposes smaller increases to water charges.

Third category

According to sources, most citizens would be classified in the third category, and would pay 10 fils per kilowatt according to current consumption rates. The sources questioned the government's argument that the bill encourages saving energy, saying that the majority of consumption goes to power air conditioning "that cannot be replaced" during Kuwait's long and extremely hot summer.

"How can rationalization reduce an invoice valued at KD 100 if air conditioning consumes nearly 70 percent of the bill?" the sources wondered. Specialists meanwhile warned that real estate owners will be left with no other choice but to increase rents to compensate for the increase in energy bills.

Houses

Ministry of Electricity and Water (MEW) statistics show that the average consumption of power in private residences (houses) of an area between 300 to 1,000 square meters reaches 7,500 kilowatts, which is

equal to an invoice of KD 15 according to the old tariff, while it will reach KD 54 according to the new price. This means that the annual bill would increase from KD 180 to KD 648.

The average consumption of water in these residences is 30,000 imperial gallons, for a value that will reach KD 60 according to the new tariff, from the current KD 24.

Apartments

As for residential apartments, where the average consumption of a two room flat is 2,700 kilowatts, the bill will increase fivefold from KD 5 to KD 25 a month. Four bedroom apartments with an area exceeding 400 square meters will go up to KD 75 per month, from KD 12 only.

Industrial sector

The industrial sector will probably be the most affected. With an average monthly consumption of 400,000 kilowatts, the monthly bill would jump from KD 800 to KD 4,000, since the tariff under the proposed plan increases from 2 to 10 fils per kilowatt. This would obviously lead to increasing the prices of products that these facilities provide.—Al-Rai

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Rousseff clinging to power as Brazil coalition collapses

TEARS FLOW AS MYANMAR SWEARS IN 'FIRST PRESIDENT'

EGYPTIAN REMANDED AS HIJACKING SPARKS ONLINE BUZZ

CYPRUS DETAINS HIJACKER WHO WANTED TO SEE EX-WIFE

LARNACA: The man accused of hijacking an Egyptian plane with a fake suicide belt and diverting it to Cyprus was remanded into custody yesterday, as social media buzzed with ridicule about the bizarre incident. A judge in Larnaca on the island's southern coast ordered 58-year-old Egyptian Seif Al-Din Mohamed Mostafa held for eight days as he made his first court appearance after Tuesday's hijacking. Mostafa is accused of forcing the Alexandria-to-Cairo flight to divert to Cyprus, where he demanded to see his Cypriot ex-wife, with whom he has children.

Police told the court that Mostafa described by officials as "psychologically unstable"-faces possible charges of hijacking, kidnapping, reckless and threatening behavior, and breaches of the anti-terror law. Police prosecutor Andreas Lambrianou said witnesses saw the suspect wearing a belt around his waist stuffed with cylindrical objects connected by wires to what appeared to be a hand-held detonator button. At one point, the suspect had threatened to detonate the belt if his demands weren't met, he alleged. Mostafa will not face any formal charges until a later hearing and only at that point will he be expected to enter a plea.

He flashed journalists the victory sign as he was driven away by police from the courthouse, which is less than a kilometer from Larnaca airport where a six-hour standoff unfolded after the hijacking. Most of the 55 passengers on the EgyptAir flight were quickly released after it landed in Larnaca but it took hours of negotiations, including a conversation with his ex-wife, before Mostafa surrendered to police. "What's someone supposed to do when he hasn't seen his wife and children in 24 years and the Egyptian government won't let you?" the police prosecutor quoted him as telling officers after his arrest.

Some passengers and crew escaped only minutes before the standoff ended, including



LARNACA: Seif Al-Din Mohamed Mostafa, an Egyptian man who hijacked an EgyptAir passenger plane and forced it to divert to Cyprus demanding to see his ex-wife, flashes the 'V' for victory sign as he leaves the court in Larnaca in a police car yesterday. — AFP

one uniformed man who was seen clambering out of a cockpit window and dropping to the ground. Among them was a 26-year-old British man, Ben Innes, who asked crew to snap a photograph of him standing beside Mostafa

that has been widely shared on social media. The image features a grinning Innes standing next to Mostafa, with what appears to be a rudimentary suicide vest strapped to his chest. "I figured if his bomb was real I'd nothing to

lose anyway, so took a chance to get a closer look at it," Innes, a health and safety auditor from Leeds, told Britain's The Sun newspaper. "So I stood by him and smiled for the camera while a stewardess did the snap. It has to

be the best selfie ever," he said. As it became clear on Tuesday that the hijacker was trying to contact his ex-wife and was likely not a real danger, Egyptians also took to social media to poke fun at the incident, many using the Twitter hashtag #loveisintheair. "This is what happens when you block your ex," one person wrote on Twitter, while another opined: "Some may wonder why the hijacker didn't just email his wife. They don't realise how terrible Egypt's Internet is."

'Non-prohibited' items

HA Hellyer, an Arab affairs specialist at the Royal United Services Institute in London, tweeted: "My wife just told me: 'You don't love me enough. You haven't hijacked a plane to talk to me. Sort it out'" After several hours in Larnaca, passengers on the flight were flown to Cairo late on Tuesday. "Fifteen minutes after departure we saw on the screens that the plane was not going to Cairo and it was crossing the sea," passenger Noha Saleh said on arrival in the Egyptian capital. "They said it was a technical problem and they needed to go to Cyprus or Greece to fix it... they were professional and their attitude was normal," she said.

Concerns were raised about security at Egyptian airports after a Russian airliner was downed on October 31 over the Sinai Peninsula, killing all 224 people on board. The Islamic State group claimed to have smuggled a bomb on board.

The police prosecutor said Cypriot authorities would seek the help of Interpol to discover how the fake suicide belt passed through airport security in Alexandria. But Egypt's interior ministry said in a statement that all security measures had been applied. The accused hijacker and his luggage were scanned, it said, and he had used "non-prohibited belongings" in his handbag "to imply that he was wearing an explosive belt and to threaten the crew and passengers." — AFP

ASH COATS VILLAGE AREAS NEAR ERUPTING VOLCANO IN ALASKA

ANCHORAGE: A village not far from an erupting Alaska volcano urged residents to stay indoors after the mountain rained down ash, coating ground areas and turning some rooftops and car windows black. The volcano kept pumping out new ash Tuesday that could threaten aircraft, but it came in smaller amounts at lower heights, according to the Alaska Volcano Observatory.

Pavlof Volcano, 625 miles southwest of Anchorage on the Alaska Peninsula, erupted Sunday. The initial eruption continued for about 17 hours and put out an ash cloud that reached 37,000 feet. US Geological Survey geologist Kristi Wallace said there were reports of a significant ash

fall in Nelson Lagoon, a village of 39 people about 55 miles northeast of the volcano. Residents reported one-eighth to two-thirds of an inch of ash. Cpl Barrett Taylor, a village public safety officer in Nelson Lagoon, saw ash falling early Monday. "It was raining ash for a little bit," Taylor said. "It turned everything black, the rooftops, the fuel tanks, homes."

The ash was worse Tuesday, he said, because wind coming in off the ocean was whipping it around. Officials say ash can be hazardous to eyes, skin and breathing passages. The community has put out a health advisory to stay inside until today. Taylor is hoping strong wind or rain will sweep some of the ash away. "I

actually saw an eagle land on the grass today, and as he landed, a big pile of ash came up and flew away," he said. The plume blew northeast and by Tuesday had reached Canada, but Dave Schneider, a USGS geophysicist at the observatory, said activity had calmed from the continuous eruptive phase.

"Over the last six to eight hours the activity is more intermittent," he said Tuesday. "There are short duration, small explosive events that are occurring, as opposed to sort of a continuous plume." The original ash cloud crossed Bristol Bay, spread into interior Alaska, and stretched into northern Canada, said Don Moore, meteorologist in charge of the National Weather Service Alaska Aviation Weather Unit. "The extent of the plume is certainly greater but the concentration of the ash is becoming less," Moore said. "The plume is becoming thinner over time."

Volcanic ash is angular and sharp and can cause a jet engine to shut down. Alaska Airlines canceled 41 flights within the state Monday, and 28 more Tuesday. Sherry Keever has lived in Healy, Alaska, for only a year and was trying to get home from a vacation in California when ash from the volcano prompted the cancellation of her flight. "I'm kind of new, and I wasn't even aware there were volcanoes that could affect the flight patterns, and I'm OK with it," she said while sitting in a waiting area of Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport, waiting to see if she could get her flight to Fairbanks on Tuesday. The volcano in the 8,261-foot mountain is one of Alaska's most active. It has had 40 known eruptions.

Pavlof eruptions in the past 20 years have not been as intense, but the current eruption is not unprecedented for the volcano, Schneider said. The length of the eruption was a major factor in the size of the ash cloud, Schneider said.

So were the winds and possibly the smaller size of the ash, which takes longer to fall out of the atmosphere. Pat Walsh, a wildlife biologist for the Togiak National Wildlife Refuge, saw ash 25 miles west of Dillingham as a gray haze as he tracked wolves from the air in the refuge. He could also see traces of ash in fresh wolf tracks and in the snow.

Tisha Christensen, a health aide at the clinic in Port Heiden, said gray ash mixed with snow fell Monday night in the community on the Bering Sea side of the Alaska Peninsula. It affected her 8-year-old son, who has asthma but tried going to school Tuesday.

"He didn't even make it a half-hour and had to come home and have a nebulizer treatment," she said. Only trace amounts of ash had been reported from Pavlof eruptions since 1996. In the past, the volcano has erupted intermittently over months or shut off abruptly. — AP

NUCLEAR SUMMIT: WHAT'S AT STAKE

WASHINGTON: President Barack Obama hosts an international summit in Washington today and tomorrow aimed at ensuring that nuclear material in the world's roughly 1,000 atomic facilities is secured. Here is a breakdown of what's at stake:

founder of anti-nuclear group Global Zero. "We should have an agenda ... that would cover all fissile materials, civilian and military."

New dangers

Since the summits began, 14 nations have eliminated their fissile material stockpiles, and other countries have stepped up efforts to secure theirs. But at the same time, other nations are ramping up their nuclear capabilities. Countries like Pakistan, India and North Korea have built new bombs, and experts warn these fall behind in safety standards aimed at preventing accidental detonation.

The Islamic State group has already used chemical weapons, and experts fear the jihadists are trying to secure fissile material to make a "dirty bomb." Such a device is a regular bomb, but would explode radioactive material across an area. Highlighting the risks, Belgian police investigating the November 13 Paris terror attacks found 10 hours of video of the comings and goings of a senior Belgian nuclear official. One agenda item at the summit will see leaders discussing a hypothetical nuclear security crisis.

Possible outcomes

Sharon Squassoni, director and senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies' proliferation prevention program, said the latest summit aims to consolidate progress made so far, such as seeing countries that committed to certain actions implement these. The 2014 summit saw 35 countries sign up to various pledges-but key players including China, India, Russia and Pakistan did not join in. "It would be really important for those countries to sign on," Squassoni said. —AFP

Large stockpiles

Obama convened the first Nuclear Security Summit in 2010, followed by similar gatherings in Seoul in 2012 and The Hague in 2014. The meetings focus on preventing criminals from accessing stockpiles of radioactive materials, reducing highly enriched uranium and separated plutonium, enhancing the detection of smuggling, and cybersecurity. Considerable progress has been made, with several countries reducing or eliminating their stockpiles of nuclear material. For example, Japan this month is returning to the United States enough plutonium to make 50 nuclear bombs. But despite these advances, a January report by the Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI), a leading US nonproliferation watchdog, found basic weaknesses persist in securing the world's fissile materials. And according to a 2015 study by the International Panel on Fissile Materials, enough plutonium and highly enriched uranium stockpiles remain to make the equivalent of 200,000 weapons of the magnitude that leveled Hiroshima in 1945.

Narrow scope?

The fissile materials in question do not include state-owned nuclear weapons, leading critics to say the summits are not broad enough in scope. "This is an important mission, but it's beneath the pay grade of the 50 or 60 heads of state that are going to convene in Washington," said Bruce Blair, co-

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BEIRUT: Syrian refugee Mohammed Al-Shareef, 20, who fled with his family from Damascus, Syria, performs a breakdance on the Mediterranean waterfront promenade in Beirut. — AP

TRANSITIONAL GOVT MUST INCLUDE SYRIAN REGIME, OPPOSITION: ASSAD

ECONOMIC, INFRASTRUCTURE DAMAGE 'EXCEEDS \$200 BILLION'

MOSCOW: President Bashar Al-Assad said yesterday that any transitional government in Syria should include both the regime and opposition, as UN chief Ban Ki-moon urged greater efforts to tackle the country's refugee crisis. In an interview published Wednesday, Assad told Russia's RIA Novosti state news agency it would be "logical for there to be independent forces, opposition forces and forces loyal to the government represented" in any transition-

paused last week, but the sides remained deadlocked over the fate of Assad, whom the opposition insists must leave power before a transitional government is agreed.

In the interview, Assad did not touch on his own future, saying only that the make-up of the transitional government should be agreed upon at the negotiations in Switzerland. "There are many questions that need to be discussed in Geneva, but there are not difficult questions," Assad

and special forces on the ground. Soldiers yesterday were locked in heavy fighting with IS fighters in central Syria as they pressed their offensive following the seizure of the UNESCO world heritage site.

A ceasefire between Damascus and non-jihadist opposition forces has broadly held since February 27, prompting a glimmer of hope that a political solution might be on the horizon. But the fighting has left vast swathes of the country in ruin and Assad estimated that economic and infrastructure damage to the country "exceeds \$200 billion".

10 percent

The aim of the Geneva conference is to secure relocation pledges within three years for 10 percent of Syria's refugees, or 480,000 people, whom the UN wants moved outside of Syria's immediate neighbors who are currently absorbing an enormous human burden. Ban said the 480,000 figure was "a relatively small number," compared with those being hosted by Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. The Geneva meet follows a conference in London in February where nations pledged \$11 billion (9.7 billion euros) to help manage one of the largest displacements of people since World War II. More than one million migrants-about half of them Syrians-reached Europe via the Mediterranean last year, a rate of arrivals that has continued through the first three months of 2016. Thousands have died making the harrowing journey, often on rickety boats run by people smugglers. Some European states have temporarily shut borders and called for tough measures to stem the movement of people through the continent. The British charity Oxfam on Tuesday noted that wealthy countries had so far only resettled 67,100 Syrian refugees-a mere 1.39 percent of those forced to flee. — AFP



al body. Assad did not specify which opposition groups should be included in the government but the statement comes as Damascus faces international pressure to compromise at UN-mediated talks aimed at ending the five-year conflict that has killed some 270,000 people.

In a sign of how high the stakes are, the UN chief exhorted a conference in Geneva "to address the biggest refugee and displacement crisis of our time" which has seen an estimated 4.8 million Syrians fleeing their homeland. "There is no alternative to negotiating a political transition that will lead to a new Syria," Ban said. Talks led by Ban's Syria envoy Staffan de Mistura

said, "I don't consider them difficult, they can all be resolved."

Draft constitution

The US and Russia are pushing for a transitional government and draft constitution to be established by August, according to a plan agreed by world powers last year. Assad said a preliminary draft version of the constitution could be drawn up "within a few weeks" but insisted that the country would only adopt a new constitution "after the Syrian people vote on it". Assad has been buoyed after his forces recaptured the ancient city of Palmyra from Islamic State (IS) jihadists over the weekend, in an advanced backed by Russian air strikes

RUSSIA, SHIP MORE TO SYRIA THAN REMOVING

A DRAW DOWN?

MOSCOW: When Vladimir Putin announced the withdrawal of most of Russia's military contingent from Syria there was an expectation that the Yauza, a Russian naval icebreaker and one of the mission's main supply vessels, would return home to its Arctic Ocean port. Instead, three days after Putin's March 14 declaration, the Yauza, part of the "Syrian Express", the nickname given to the ships that have kept Russian forces supplied, left the Russian Black Sea port of Novorossiysk for Tartous, Russia's naval facility in Syria. Whatever it was carrying was heavy; it sat so low in the water that its load line was barely visible.

Its movements and those of other Russian ships in the two weeks since Putin's announcement of a partial withdrawal suggest Moscow has in fact shipped more equipment and supplies to Syria than it has brought back in the same period, a Reuters analysis shows. It is not known what the ships were carrying or how much equipment has been flown out in giant cargo planes accompanying returning war planes. But the movements - while only a partial snapshot - suggest Russia is working intensively to maintain its military infrastructure in Syria and to supply the Syrian army so that it can scale up again swiftly if need be.

Putin has not detailed what would prompt such a move, but any perceived threat to Russia's bases in Syria or any sign that President Bashar Al-Assad, Moscow's closest Middle East ally, was in peril would be likely to trigger a powerful return. Russia operates an air base in Hmeymim and a naval facility at Tartous. Putin has said Russia will keep both and that they will need to be well protected. "Since the main part of the force de facto stayed there, there is no reason to reduce the traffic," said Mikhail Barabanov, a senior research fellow at the Moscow-based CAST military think tank. "Supplies for the Syrian army remain significant as well."

Moscow has not revealed the size of its force in Syria, nor has it given details of its partial withdrawal. Reuters has calculated that around half of Russia's fixed-wing strike force based in Syria flew out of the country in the days after the partial draw down was made public. The precise number of planes Russia had was secret, but analysis suggested it had about 36 fixed-wing military jets there. On Monday, state TV showed three heavy attack helicopters being flown out of Syria along with some support staff.

Naval firepower

But an examination of shipping data, official information, tips from maritime security sources and photographs from bloggers of Russian ships passing the Bosphorus strait en route from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean, shows no signs that the "Syrian Express" is being wound down. A Reuters analysis of the same data shows Russia is also likely to have reinforced its naval force in the Mediterranean and now appears to have more war ships near the Syrian coast than at the time of Putin's declaration. Their role is to protect cargo ships. Their

presence also gives Moscow the option of firing cruise missiles from the sea.

Russia appears to have more than a dozen military vessels in the Mediterranean, including the Zeleniy Dol warship equipped with terrain-hugging Kalibr cruise missiles which are accurate to within three metres, according to Russian state media and the database of Bosphorus Naval News, a Turkish online project. Moscow is likely to maintain that strength, said CAST's Barabanov. "Russia doesn't have too many ships that it can keep in the Mediterranean. The role of the force was to ensure the activity of the 'Syrian Express' and to demonstrate it to the West and, later, to Turkey."

The Russian defense ministry did not reply to questions about what the Russian navy was doing in the Mediterranean or whether there were plans to reduce its presence. Russia's military ships and most auxiliary vessels are not shown in publicly available databases. But most of its ships are seen and photographed when they pass the Bosphorus on their way from Russia to the Mediterranean or vice versa. In most cases it is impossible to track military shipments to destination ports however, meaning data is only partial.

Low in the water

Since Moscow began to scale back in Syria, Russia has sent two landing ships, which are typically used to transport troops and armor - the Caesar Kunikov and the Saratov - to the Mediterranean

along with the Yauza, an auxiliary cargo vessel. The Saratov looked loaded when it passed the strait on Thursday going south towards Syria. Its load line was visibly lower than on March 14 when it was photographed going the other way, towards Russia. At the same time, two warships - the Alexander Otrakovsky and the Minsk - and the Dvinita-50, an auxiliary vessel, were photographed by Turkish bloggers passing the Bosphorus en route back to Russia. At least two of the returning ships, the Alexander Otrakovsky and the Dvinita-50, looked unloaded on their way back.

Photographs show that the Otrakovsky, a large landing ship, sat higher in the water on its return to Russia compared to March 2 when it crossed the strait in the other direction. It was not clear if it carried troops or equipment. The load line of the Dvinita-50 was also high above the water when it was photographed in the Bosphorus on March 20 on its way back to Russia. It seems unlikely that Russian troops or equipment were on board any of the returning ships. None of them looked like they had heavy cargo onboard. The Minsk has already headed back towards Syria. On Tuesday, it was photographed passing the Bosphorus. Its bow sat deep in the water; its cargo could not be discerned. Non-military cargo traffic between Russia and Syria also shows no signs of flagging. Four cargo ships involved in the supply operation called at Syria in the two weeks before Putin announced the draw down. — Reuters

IRAQIS KEPT IN THE DARK ABOUT MOSUL DAM EMERGENCY PLANS

BAGHDAD: Despite intense US pressure to act to keep Iraq's largest dam from collapsing, Baghdad has done little to prepare Iraqis for the possibility of a burst that could unleash a flood reaching the capital and killing hundreds of thousands of people. The government signed a \$296-million contract with Italy's Trevi Group last month to reinforce northern Iraq's fragile Mosul Dam, but it has not announced any specific plans to try to rescue people in the event of a breach or instructed them in detail how to react safely.

Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi's most significant public statement on the dam, which was not widely distributed, advised millions of people living in the path of a potential flood that they should move to higher ground, but provided few specifics.

US officials have said Washington feels Baghdad has failed to take the threat seriously enough. A US government briefing paper released in late February said the 500,000 to 1.47 million Iraqis living in the highest-risk areas along the Tigris River "probably would not survive" the impact of a flood's impact unless they evacuated. Swept hundreds of miles along in the waters would be unexploded ordnance, chemicals, bodies and buildings. A senior official at the US Agency for International Development (USAID)

said the most lives could be saved by advising people in advance of what to do in the event of a breach of the structure, once known as Saddam Dam and opened in the mid 1980s. "You want to make sure when you have a major hazard risk that the population that is going to be potentially affected is aware of that, that they know what to do about it when it happens, and they understand how they're going to be alerted to it," the official said.

Instead, Iraqi authorities have downplayed the threat. The water minister estimated last month there was only a one in 1,000 chance of failure, a "risk level present in all the world's dams". On Jan 21, US Secretary of State John Kerry met with Abadi in Davos, Switzerland, and handed him a confidential note from President Barack Obama pleading for urgent action. The president's personal intervention indicated how the dam's fragility has moved to the forefront of US concerns over Iraq, reflecting fears its failure would also undermine US efforts to stabilize Abadi's government and complicate the war against Islamic State. Iraqi forces launched a new offensive last week in Makhmour, 60 km south of Mosul, as the beginning of a broader campaign to clear areas around the city but so far progress has been slow. — Reuters

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TWO REPUBLICAN GOVERNORS, TWO DIFFERENT CALCULATIONS

ATLANTA: Two Republican governors. Two proposals at the heart of LGBT rights. One rejection. One new law. Georgia's Gov Nathan Deal said he was preventing discrimination and protecting commerce when he announced his veto of a measure that would have allowed certain individuals, businesses and faith organizations to deny services based on "sincerely held religious beliefs." In North Carolina, Gov Pat McCrory said he was protecting his citizens' privacy and using "common sense" when he signed into law a bill that, among other things, prohibits local anti-discrimination ordinances and obligates transgender people to use restrooms matching the gender on their birth certificates.

Their moves highlight a familiar GOP fault line between business conservatives, led by large corporations that have embraced LGBT rights, and social conservatives, who have ramped up their calls for their own legal protections since the US Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage last year. The tussle is particularly fierce in statehouses like those in Atlanta and Raleigh, where the GOP holds overwhelmingly majorities. "There was no escape hatch," former Deal aide Brian Robinson said. "He was getting torn between two factions ... both of which have supported him strongly for years."

Political reality

Yet there's a stark political reality in the governors' different conclusions: Deal is a 74-year-old in his second term, unable to seek a third consecutive term and almost certain never to face Georgia voters again; McCrory is a 59-year-old running for re-election, with a newfound general election issue smoldering in his lap. So Deal was free to wax eloquent Monday about constitutional freedoms, largely avoiding explicit commentary on same-sex marriage and LGBT rights as he explained his decision. "If indeed our religious liberty is conferred by God and not by man-made government, we should heed the 'hands-off' admonition of the First Amendment to our Constitution," he said. The veto disappointed some religious conservatives and enraged others, all of them promising to press the matter again. But Deal stood his ground, alluding to his own lifelong Southern

Baptist affiliation. "I do not think we have to discriminate against anyone," he said, "to protect the faith-based community." Conversely, McCrory now must try to frame the new North Carolina law in his favor, while his Democratic general election opponent, North Carolina Attorney General Roy Cooper, does the same. The challenge for both men is to placate their respective party bases - gay-rights supporting liberals for Cooper, social conservatives for McCrory - while appealing to independents who hold sway in the closely divided state.

Multistall bathrooms

McCrory and his aides focus on provisions that require people to use multistall bathrooms of the sex matching their birth certificates at state agencies, schools and universities. The law was the product of a special session Republicans called essentially to override a city of Charlotte ordinance allowing transgender individuals to use the bathroom assigned to their gender identity. Chris LaCivita, McCrory's chief campaign strategist, said it's a simple question: "Can a male use a female bathroom and a female locker room?" LaCivita said McCrory "has always maintained that this is a case about reasonable expectations of privacy." Opponents of an anti-discrimination ordinance in Houston successfully used the same arguments in a 2015 referendum.

Cooper answered Tuesday that the North Carolina law is a "national embarrassment," and he said he would not defend it as attorney general against a pending federal lawsuit. He and other Democrats also tried to define the bill by more than transgender bathroom access. The law blocks workers from suing in state courts over workplace discrimination based on race, religion, color, national origin, age, sex or handicap; and it bars local anti-discrimination measures to protect people on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity, while separately preventing local governments from setting their own minimum wage or requiring businesses to provide paid sick leave.

All that "will set North Carolina's economy back if we don't repeal it," Cooper said, echoing the argument business leaders made in pressuring Deal for a veto in Georgia. More than 500 companies joined a coalition led by Coca-Cola and other big-name Georgia firms. The Walt Disney Co, Marvel Studios and Salesforce.com threatened to take business elsewhere. The NFL suggested Atlanta could lose its bids for the 2019 or 2020 Super Bowl. McCrory heeded such arguments last year when he vetoed a "religious freedom" bill that was more limited than what Deal nixed. (The Legislature overrode McCrory's veto.)

On Monday, McCrory doubled down, saying he'd "not had one corporation tell me that they're threatening to leave," though the NBA has now suggested it could move professional basketball's 2017 All-Star game from Charlotte. Georgia Republican consultant Chip Lake said those arguments are what ultimately drive the issue, regardless of specific and often complicated provisions that McCrory, Cooper, Deal and others try to parse. "We get caught up in arguments of what's right and what's wrong, but this becomes an issue where we just have to ask, 'Are the economic consequences real or perceived?'" Lake said. "You can call it economic extortion. We can talk about 'that's unfair,' but that's the reality." —AP

BRAZIL COALITION COLLAPSES

ROUSSEFF LEFT CLINGING TO POWER

BRASILIA: Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff was left scrambling for votes to save her presidency in a looming impeachment showdown after her main coalition partner walked out of the government Tuesday. The PMDB, the country's largest party, voted to immediately end its alliance with Rousseff's leftist Workers' Party, or PT, and go into opposition. "From today, at this historic meeting of the PMDB, the PMDB withdraws from the government of President Rousseff," said Senator Romero Juca, the party vice president. The meeting, broadcast live on national television, was the culmination of a long divorce with Rousseff, leaving Brazil's first female president grasping at straws as she tries to stay in power. The vote and announcement took no more than three minutes and was accompanied by singing of the national anthem and shouts of "PT out!" The split plunges Rousseff's government into fresh crisis mode and, more seriously, greatly reduces her chances of mustering the one-third votes in the lower house of Congress that she needs to defeat a first impeachment vote, expected in April. "If you look at the numbers, that's basically it," said Everaldo Moraes, a political science professor at Brasilia National University. Rousseff cancelled a trip to Washington for a nuclear safety summit on Thursday and Friday, the state news agency said. A government spokesman said that in "the current political context," it was not advisable.

Last nail in coffin?

If the lower house votes in favor, an impeachment trial would start in the Senate, where a two-thirds vote would force Rousseff from office. PMDB head Michel Temer who remains vice president under Rousseff despite the break-up would take over as interim president. Eliseu Padilha, a high-ranking PMDB member who served as minister of civil aviation in Rousseff's government, predicted that Rousseff had only weeks left. "In less than three months we'll have a new government in two months," he told AFP. Senator Aécio Neves, who heads the PSDB opposition party and who narrowly lost to Rousseff when she won re-election in 2014, said: "The exit of the PMDB is the last nail in the coffin." The PMDB has 69 of the 513 lower house seats and 60 of these deputies will vote for impeachment, Padilha said. Analysts say that the PMDB's exit could also encourage minor coalition partners to quit. Lawmakers from the center-right Progressive Party, which has 49 deputies, and the center-left Social Democratic Party, which has 32, said their parties would meet this week on a possible split.

However, Workers' Party loyalists are negotiating intensely with individual deputies, trying to persuade them to vote against the grain. "We can't give an exact evaluation, but they are exaggerating the support for impeachment among PMDB deputies," said Alfonso Florencio, from the Workers' Party, who represents the government in the lower house. Echoing Rousseff, Florencio said the opposition was effectively mounting "a coup." The impeachment case alleges that Rousseff illegally borrowed money to boost public spending and mask the severity of the recession from voters during her re-election. The Brazilian bar association filed a new impeachment petition Monday, seeking to expand the accusations to include allegations of



BRASILIA: Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff (right) and World Trade Organization (WTO) Director-General Roberto Azevedo meet at Planalto Palace in Brasilia. —AFP

involvement by Rousseff in the multibillion-dollar corruption scandal centered on state oil company Petrobras.

Lula controversy

Although still vice president, Temer, 75, increasingly resembles a politician preparing for power. The growing instability has spilled onto the streets with millions of Brazilians marching against Rousseff and smaller, but still

vigorous, rallies held in her defense. Another round of pro-Rousseff protests was planned for this Thursday. Rousseff has called on her mentor, former president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, to become chief of staff so that he could stiffen resolve in the ranks and put his negotiating skills to use. But the move prompted a swift backlash from opponents who see the appointment as a bid to give Lula ministerial immunity and protect him from corruption allegations related to the Petrobras probe. —AFP

TEMER: THE MAN WHO WOULD BE BRAZIL'S NEXT PRESIDENT

SAO PAULO: When Brazil Vice President Michel Temer complained to embattled President Dilma Rousseff that he didn't like being a "decorative" figure, he was being serious. Now he could be about to take her job. Temer and Rousseff always made an awkward couple. As head of the PMDB centrist party, Temer represented the biggest force in leftist Rousseff's shaky coalition.

For years, the PMDB has played that kingmaker role and it worked. But on Tuesday, the party voted to quit the government and go into opposition, supporting an ever stronger push to impeach Rousseff. And if she is removed from office, the outwardly dour Temer becomes interim president. The 75-year-old lawyer has a low profile for someone in such a lynchpin position at the top of Latin America's biggest country and economy. If anything, the constitutional scholar is perhaps best known to voters for having a 32-year-old former beauty contestant as a wife. But now, with his boss sliding toward political oblivion, Temer appears hungry to take himself and his party out of the shadows.

Preparing for big job

Temer, seen as a master operator in the snakepit of Brasilia's Congressional politics, played his cards cautiously. For months he has been making his displeasure at Rousseff known, including sending a letter in December where he complained of feeling undervalued as "a decorative vice president." But he was careful to stay on the fence, even as other PMDB members openly attacked Rousseff and pushed ahead the impeachment momentum.

Occasionally, he let the mask slip, publishing a document in October called "A bridge to the future" in which he criticized the "excesses" in government policies. But while lower-level supporters liked to refer to him as "President Temer," he insisted he had no ambitions, except perhaps at the next scheduled elections in 2018. Then over the last few days the party publicly discussed governing plans in the event of a Rousseff exit. And on Monday, Temer came out into the open, calling on the PMDB to abandon the government and go into opposition-making good on that threat Tuesday. —AFP

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US AWARD FOR FRENCH MOTHER COURAGE BATTLING HATE

WASHINGTON: After her beloved son, a French soldier, was murdered by an Islamist gunman, Latifa Ibn Ziaten formed a group to prevent radicalization and promote dialogue. "No more

Merahs," she declared, after the troubled petty criminal turned jihadist Mohamed Merah cut down her boy. But since that day in 2012, extremist attacks in Europe have only grown in



WASHINGTON: French recipient of the 2016 International Women of Courage Award, Latifa Ibn Ziaten (left), shakes hands with US Secretary of State John Kerry at the State Department in Washington. —AFP

scale, and Ibn Ziaten admits she has much more work to do, refusing to "surrender to fear." On Tuesday, the US government named her one of 14 "International Women of Courage" and invited her to explain her anti-radicalization message in American cities.

The ghettos

France was hit by two bloody jihadist attacks last year, and neighboring Belgium last week, but Ibn Ziaten has not abandoned her message of dialogue and compassion. "We need to open up the housing projects, the ghettos. We need to promote diversity in schools, equality of opportunity," she explained. "We need to listen to those young people who, when they speak at all, say 'the republic has forgotten us'," she said.

But not the last. Before he was killed by police 11 days later, the gunman would kill two more off-duty soldiers, then a rabbi and three young children in an attack on a Jewish school. Latifa Ibn Ziaten did not leave the matter there. She formed an association in memory of her son and began to tour prisons and schools to preach inter-faith respect.

I forgave

The goal is to identify early signs of violent extremism. "Today, some parents say: 'We didn't pay attention. We didn't notice,'" she warned. "A child left alone, living in his own head, this is what happens. That's why I forgave Mohamed Merah," she said. "When I looked at his journey and I

saw that he grew up in a vacuum, without love, affection, that he knew pain, prison, drugs—that's what made him, made him a monster. "I forgave him for what he was but not for what he had done." Ibn Ziaten found the inspiration for her quest at the scene of Merah's last stand, cut down in a hail of police bullets after the siege of his apartment. Heading into his neighborhood she asked herself: "Who was he? Why so much hate?" She fell upon a group of young people who were speaking about the slain jihadist as a martyr, as a hero. "It was as if they had killed my son a second time," she said. "They were the cause of my suffering. But I felt I had to reach out my hand, to help them." Already a recipient of France's highest award, the Legion of Honor, the wronged mother said the US award would only encourage her in her mission. But, as she begins a tour of US cities with the 13 other activists, lawyers and reformers to win the award she will encounter some angry American attitudes. The US presidential campaign has only heightened the angry debate about Islam's role in western society. "You can't mix religion and citizenship," she insisted. "When you're a citizen, religion should remain personal." —AFP

HOLLANDE SCRAPS REFORMS TO STRIP TERRORISTS OF NATIONALITY EMBARRASSING U-TURN FOR GOVT AFTER HOWLS OF PROTESTS

PARIS: French President Francois Hollande said yesterday he was scrapping contested constitutional reforms proposed after the Paris attacks, in an embarrassing U-turn for his already beleaguered government. The reforms included a plan to strip convicted terrorists of their French nationality which led to howls of protests from the left flank of his Socialist party. Hollande also wanted to enshrine in the constitution a state of emergency adopted after the November 13 Paris attacks, in which suicide bombers and gunmen from

the Islamic State group killed 130 people. But after four months of fierce debate, the lower house National Assembly and opposition-dominated Senate failed to agree on the text. "A compromise appears out of reach on the stripping of terrorists' nationality," Hollande said. "I also note that a section of the opposition is hostile to any constitutional revision. I deeply regret this attitude," the president said in a brief televised statement. "I have decided to close the constitutional debate (but) I will not deviate from the commitments I

have taken... to ensure the security of our country." Hollande's move to drop the reform comes as authorities in Europe face increasing criticism over laxism and security failings in the face of the spread of radical Islam. Links have emerged between the IS cell which attacked Paris and the suicide bombers who struck Brussels last week, killing 32 people. "The threat remains higher than ever," said Hollande. "Islamist terrorism has declared war against us, against France, Europe, the entire world."

'Sad spectacle' The decision to abandon the constitutional reform comes as a massive blow to Hollande who is hoping to run for re-election in presidential polls next year. Hollande was France's most unpopular leader in modern history when Paris suffered its first terror attack of 2015, when gunmen killed 17 people at the offices of Charlie Hebdo magazine and at a Jewish supermarket in January. His popularity briefly rose over his handling of the attacks, but not for long, and the constitutional debate as well as fierce opposition from the street to proposed labor reforms have further eroded his support. The leader of the far-right National Front (FN) Marine Le Pen said Hollande's decision to scrap the constitutional reform was "a historical failure".



PARIS: French President Francois Hollande (2ndR) and Mauritius President Ameenah Gurib-Fakim (2ndL) during their meeting yesterday at the Elysee Presidential Palace in Paris. —AFP

TURKISH COMPANIES STRUGGLE IN RUSSIA AMID DIPLOMATIC ROW

MOSCOW: Four months after President Vladimir Putin accused Ankara of a "stab in the back," Turkish business executives in Russia are getting used to saying hasty goodbyes. "Every week another friend calls to say he's leaving," one Turkish businessman based in Moscow told Reuters. "It's become very difficult for Turks to do business here." The row erupted in November when Turkish military jets shot down a Russian warplane near the Syrian border, and is still weighing on what had been a close economic relationship. Putin has imposed sanctions on Turkey and trade between the two countries - which back opposing sides in the five-year Syrian conflict - has divided due to the combined effects of the measures and the collapse in global oil prices.

The businessmen requested that their names and those of their firms not be published, citing fears that public comments could result in further pressure from Russian officials. Russia's Interior Ministry did not respond to a Reuters request for comment. The Economy Ministry said the problems outlined by Turkish businessmen did not fall within its remit. Ikbal Durre, a Moscow-based commentator on Russian-Turkish affairs, expressed hope that the row would eventually blow over. "The situation is moving towards stabilisation, just not particularly quickly. The first shockwave has passed," he said.

FIRST SHOCKWAVE

But the cost has been high. Turkish exports to Russia fell to around \$108 million in January, according to the Turkish statistics service, down two-thirds on the previous year. Russian exports to Turkey, mainly of energy, were 30 percent lower at \$1.3 billion, reflecting weak oil prices. The sanctions include a ban on Russian firms importing a range of Turkish foodstuffs as well as cancelling a visa-free regime and restricting Turkish firms from working in certain Russian business sectors including tourism. Turkish firms had stood to gain from an earlier set of Russian sanctions - restrictions on Western food imports imposed in retaliation for US and European Union sanctions over the Ukraine crisis.

Now Turkish businessmen say that over-zealous Russian officials are subjecting their goods to additional checks at customs and have conducted impromptu searches at their premises. Dagir Khasavov, managing partner of Moscow-based legal firm Drakonta which has Turkish clients, described the attitude of Russian law enforcement agencies towards Turkish citizens since the downing of the plane as "hostile". FEELING LIKE A THIEF One Turkish businessman said he had registered his firm, which serves Russia's metals industry, in

the name of a Russian friend to try to avoid problems. "I used to own 100 percent of my firm. Now I feel like a thief of my own goods," he said. The first businessman cited in this article said shipments of Turkish textiles were sometimes held up for as much as 20 days at the Russian border, longer than previously. A Turkish diplomatic source said it was too early to say the two sides had found a way to resolve the dispute. "We hope that a compromise can be found, but we haven't seen any big shifts so far," the source said. Around 80,000 Turkish citizens live in Russia, although not all are involved in business. NO CERTAINTY Earlier in March a small group of Turkish businessmen based in Moscow returned home to share their concerns with economic policymakers there, one of the businessmen said. They explained that if the exodus of their compatriots from Russia continues, it will be difficult for Turkish business to regain its former standing in Russia. "Investment is a sensitive thing, and at the moment there's no certainty," one businessman said. The diplomatic spat has also cast a pall over Turkey's tourism sector as Russians cut back on trips there. One potential bright spot is that a Turkish firm, Renaissance Construction, won a tender this month to build a terminal and tunnel at Moscow's Sheremetyevo Airport. However, Renaissance Construction submitted its bid via its Russian subsidiary and the airport operator had no choice on the nationality of its contractor - the only other bidder was another Turkish firm, Limak. A Russian employee at a Russian-Turkish business group in Moscow said all joint investment projects had been frozen in line with a Russian government order. "For the moment there is a lock-down," he said. "Informal contacts continue, but it looks like projects will be frozen for this year at least." —Reuters



BANGUI: Central African Republic's Prime Minister Faustin Archange Touadera looking on as he takes part in a march for peace in Bangui. —AFP

TOUADERA: THE MATHS PROFESSOR NOW TAKING ON C AFRICA CHAOS

BANGUI, Central African Republic: The new president of the Central African Republic Faustin-Archange Touadera, dubbed the "People's candidate" is a former maths teacher now tasked with restoring stability to a dirt-poor country wracked by sectarian violence. The 58-year-old, who was sworn in yesterday, was the last prime minister under Francois Bozize, whose overthrow in 2013 plunged the country into violent chaos. Touadera, a former rector of the University of Bangui, stood as an independent candidate and took almost 20 percent of the votes in the first round of a contest among 30 contenders. The second round on February 14 pitted him against Anicet Georges Dologuele, a banker and former prime minister who was seen as the likely victor until Touadera surprisingly won the vote with a comfortable 62.7 percent.

In the country's west with regions that had been strongholds of loyalists to Bozize—a general who took power in a 2003 coup—Touadera was dubbed "the candidate of the people", though Bozize's party had urged people to vote for his rival. Observers noted that Bozize's last prime minister (2008-2013) was highly regarded for ending decades of repeated delays in paying the wages of state employees, which plunged many deep into debt. "He'll remain known as the one who paid the civil servants and he is much appreciated for that," a diplomatic source in Bangui said. Dologuele, sometimes dubbed "Mr Clean" for his firm management of the government under President Ange-Felix Patasse in 1999-2001, levelled allegations of "organised fraud" and "intimidation by leaders of armed militias" after he lost the election. A key challenge facing Touadera is tackling the militias, undisciplined soldiers and other armed bands active in parts of the country. About one million people in a population of 4.8 million fled villages and urban homes because of the atrocities perpetrated by mainly Muslim rebels who ousted Bozize and the ruthless vengeance of Christian vigilantes. 'A vast construction site' As prime minister, Touadera was successful in bringing about talks between the authorities, the political opposition, rebel movements and civil society, which led to the signing of several peace agreements. However no pacts could prevent renewed violence, which saw about 12,000 troops and police deployed in the CAR by the United Nations, alongside French soldiers and an African Union military force that was incorporated into the UN mission. Without questioning Touadera's integrity, some wonder whether he can deal with unruly armed bands prone to attacking civilians and illegally exploiting the country's gold production. "Nothing entitles us to say today that he has the clout to stand up to these soldiers who sowed terror and hatred under Bozize to the point of plunging the country into crisis. The same men are surrounding him and making themselves his personal guard," Bangui University student Euloge Ngate Linzonzo said. While Touadera has yet to prove his mettle, many traditional supporters of Bozize's KNK party threw their weight behind him and he is renowned for hard work. Even while he was prime minister, he went on taking classes at the university. As a pure mathematician, the new leader faces a complex equation in restoring the wrecked economy of a mostly rural country where the administration has vanished in entire regions roamed by armed groups. —AFP

SPAIN CLOSER TO NEW GOVT THAN FRESH ELECTIONS

MADRID: Spain's Socialist party said yesterday it is closer to forming a government and averting fresh elections following its meeting with the far-left Podemos party. The Socialists, who won 90 seats in the 350-seat parliament in inconclusive Dec. 20 elections, are struggling to win support to form a government and end the four-year stint in power of the conservative Popular Party. They have already made a deal with the business-friendly Ciudadanos party, which won 40 seats, but also need the backing of Podemos, which controls 69 seats. Socialist leader Pedro Sanchez said

that in his two-hour talk with Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias both agreed they want to avoid fresh elections but also oust the Popular Party government of acting Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy. Rajoy's party won the most seats - 123 - but failed to retain its 2011-2015 parliamentary majority and cannot find anyone to back its bid to stay in office. To date, Podemos has refused to back Sanchez unless he breaks with Ciudadanos, which it views as being too far right. But Sanchez said Iglesias had dropped that demand. So far, Ciudadanos has rejected deals including Podemos. —AP



ISLAMABAD: Pakistani supporters of convicted murderer Mumtaz Qadri gather during an anti-government protest in front of the parliament building in Islamabad yesterday. — AFP

PAKISTAN PROTESTERS REFUSE TO END ISLAMABAD SIT-IN

ISLAMABAD: Islamist protesters gathered in the Pakistani capital said yesterday they would not end their days-long sit-in and were "willing to die", as armed security forces readied to clear the camp.

The stand-off, which comes as Pakistan mourns more than 70 people killed in a Taliban suicide bombing targeting Christians celebrating Easter Sunday in Lahore, underscores deep religious divisions fuelling the Muslim country's long battle with extremism. The protesters—who numbered some 25,000 at their peak—had gathered Sunday in support of Mumtaz Qadri, who was hanged in late February five years after he assassinated a liberal Punjab governor over his calls to reform the country's blasphemy laws.

They clashed with security forces in Islamabad before setting up camp outside key government buildings along the capital's main Constitution Avenue. The government gave the demonstrators an ultimatum to leave late Tuesday, but it went unheeded, prompting authorities to issue a second call saying security forces would begin an operation to clear the area Wednesday morning.

That deadline, too, passed. Protesters were calm yesterday as leaders said they were holding talks that stretched into the afternoon with authorities. "We won't move from this place until and unless all 10 demands are accepted," said protest leader Ashraf Asif Jalali.

"Our workers are willing to die. If the government takes action they will not run away but face the bullets. They are not armed with guns but with clubs." A police source said more than 7,000 security forces were poised to clear the sit-in, including

the paramilitary Rangers and Frontier Corps with reinforcements from the Punjab police. Army troops were already standing guard at government buildings. Analyst Hasan Askari said authorities were hesitant to act due to "both indecisiveness and caution", saying the government "does not want to offend religious circles due to political considerations".

Qadri's legacy

Hailed as a hero by right-wing religious groups when he murdered Punjab governor Salmaan Taseer, the demonstrators have demanded that Qadri be named a "martyr" and called for the execution of Asia Bibi, a Christian mother of five convicted of blasphemy. Pakistan has 17 people on death row for blasphemy including Bibi, but has not executed anyone yet. The protesters have also demanded the imposition of Sharia law. The government has so far rejected their demands.

Qadri's hanging, hailed as a "key moment" by analysts in Pakistan's war on religious extremism, has become a flashpoint for the deep divisions in the conservative Muslim country. His funeral earlier this month drew tens of thousands in an extremist show of force that alarmed moderate Muslims, while the call to hang Bibi along with the Easter attack in Lahore has underscored a growing sense of insecurity for Pakistan's minorities.

Yesterday the death toll from the Lahore bombing climbed again to 74. Dozens more remain in hospital, seven of them critical, medical staff told AFP. "It's a sense of great grief, sorrow and fear," Shamoone Gill, spokesman for the All Pakistan Minorities Alliance, said. — AFP

MALLYA MAKES OFFER TO CLEAR MASSIVE DEBTS

BUSINESSMAN TO REPAY 40% OF DEBTS BY SEPTEMBER

NEW DELHI: Flamboyant Indian businessman Vijay Mallya, who is accused of fleeing to London this month owing more than a billion dollars to Indian banks, told India's top court yesterday that he would repay over 40 percent of his debts by September, one of his lawyers said. Mallya, who has failed to appear for questioning by authorities, made the offer to the Supreme Court and gave documents to the Indian lenders, said the lawyer, C.S. Vaidyanathan.

The Press Trust of India news agency reported that the court gave the banks a week to respond to Mallya's proposal. If they decline to accept it, then he will face prosecution. Mallya has failed to appear for questioning by India's Enforcement Directorate, which has been investigating his massive debt liability since he left for London earlier this month. On March 9, the Supreme Court had sought Mallya's response within two weeks to pleas by the State Bank of India and other lenders seeking cancellation of his passport and his presence in the court.

The opposition Congress party has accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government of letting Mallya fly out of India on March 2 while he was being pursued by the banks over massive debts amounting to 9 billion rupees (\$1.3 billion). India's finance minister, Arun Jaitley, defended Mallya's exit, saying the banks had not initiated the legal process to prevent him from leaving the country by the time he boarded a flight out of India.

Mallya was once hailed as India's version of Richard Branson for his investments in a brewing



NEW DELHI: Indian business tycoon and owner of Kingfisher Airlines Vijay Mallya gets into his car outside the Parliament in New Delhi. Mallya told India's top court yesterday he would repay over 40 percent of his debts by September, one of his lawyers said. — AP

and liquor company, an airline, a Formula One team and an Indian Premier League cricket club.

His downfall was triggered by the failure of Kingfisher Airlines, which he launched in 2005. The Indian government in 2012 suspended the license of the airline after it failed to pay pilots and engineers for months. Mallya ceded management control of his flagship United Spirits Limited

to global spirits company Diageo. Diageo's agreement last month to pay \$75 million in exchange for resigning as chairman of USL prompted the latest legal push by competing creditors, who say they should have the first claim to that money. Mallya is famous for his flashy lifestyle and lavish parties attended by fashion models, Bollywood movie stars and cricket players. — AP

FIGHT WITH TALEBAN KILLS 15 SECURITY TROOPS

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan: A late night gunbattle with the Taliban killed at least 15 members of the Afghan security forces in the volatile southern Uruzgan province, an official said yesterday. The fighting took place late Tuesday during an operation to reopen an important highway in the province, said Mohammad Nabi Niazo, the Dihrawud district police chief. Taliban gunmen had blocked the highway between Dihrawud and the provincial capital, Tarin Kot, for almost four days, he said.

Following the deadly firefight, Afghan forces have retaken control of the road, Niazo said. Eight members of the security forces were wounded during the operation. However, Taliban spokesman Qari Yousaf Ahmadi told The Associated Press that the battle for control of the highway is still going on. The insurgents often exaggerate their battlefield prowess. Niazo had no information of any insurgent casualties during the battle. The Taliban

have in recent months stepped up their attacks in Uruzgan and neighboring provinces in the south, including the Taliban heartland of Helmand where much of the world's illicit opium is produced. The crop, along with other contraband, funds the insurgency, now in its fifteenth year. In Zabul province yesterday, two children were killed in an explosion behind the police headquarters in Qalat, the provincial capital, said Asadullah Kakar, a member of the provincial council. Another civilian was wounded in the blast, he said, adding that the target was unclear and the incident is under investigation.

No group immediately claimed responsibility for the attack. Roadside bombs, planted by insurgents, are a major threat for both Afghan security forces and civilians across the country.

In northern Balkh province, fighting yesterday killed two police officers and eight militants in Charhar Bolak district, on the western border of the province, said Gen. Abdul Razaq Qaderi, Balkh's

deputy police chief. "Around 100 Taliban insurgents, including foreign fighters, attacked police check points," Qaderi said. "The Taliban were pushed back after reinforcements arrived and right now the battle is going on in neighboring Jawzjan province." The Taliban did not immediately comment on the Balkh report.

US F-16 crashes

A US F-16 warplane crashed Tuesday while taking off from Bagram airfield in Afghanistan, an official said. The pilot ejected safely. Pentagon press secretary Peter Cook said the fighter from the 455th Air Expeditionary Wing crashed around 8:30 pm (1630 GMT). "Coalition forces are securing the crash site. The cause of this accident will be investigated," Cook said. The Taliban said their fighters shot down the jet, claiming that all on board had been killed. The insurgent group is well known for exaggerating battlefield claims. — Agencies

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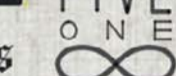
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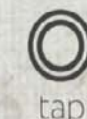
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PHILIPPINES MULLS SUBMARINES AS CHINA ROW SIMMERS

MANILA: The Philippines may invest in its first-ever submarine fleet to help protect its territory in the disputed South China Sea, President Benigno Aquino said yesterday. The impoverished nation, which has never before operated submarines and until now relied largely on US surplus ships, has been ramping up defence spending in response to China's military expansion in the region.

China claims almost all of the South China Sea despite conflicting claims from the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Taiwan and Brunei. Aquino said the Philippines could lose control of its entire west coast should China succeed in enforcing its claims. "We've had to accelerate the modernization of our armed forces for self-defence needs," he told reporters. "We are a natural transit point into the Pacific and we are now studying whether or not we do need a submarine force," he said. Beijing has reclaimed more than 2,900 acres (1,174 hectares) from the South China Sea in less than two years in an intensive island-building campaign, and has deployed surface-to-air missiles on a disputed island there,

according to Taipei and Washington.

China's military dwarfs that of the Philippines, despite Aquino's efforts to raise defence spending to record levels and the acquisition of new warships and fighter jets.

This year China's proposed defense spending of 954 billion yuan (\$147 billion) is about 59 times that of the Philippines. The Philippines has turned to its longtime ally the United States and former wartime foe Japan to bolster its military hardware.

It has also asked a United Nations-backed arbitration panel to declare China's sea claims illegal, with a ruling expected later this year. China boycotted the arbitration hearings at The Hague.

'Be realistic'

However, buying submarines would not solve the disputes as the Philippines could not match China's military might, said Benito Lim, a political science professor at the Ateneo de Manila University. "Aquino should be realistic. He needs force to counter force," Lim told AFP, adding the Philippines should reopen dialogue with China. "A submarine



MANILA: Filipino boys play on floaters beside their creekside homes in Manila yesterday. The government continues to clear garbage and shanties along the creeks to avoid flooding in parts of the city. — AP

will be a very expensive investment, and it may not address the problem in the most reasonable way," he said. Aquino said the South China Sea dispute concerns every country since it could disrupt trade in shipping lanes through which about a third of the world's oil passes. "The uncertainty breeds instability. Instability does not promote prosperity," he said. But while the Philippines is fortifying its defenses, Aquino—who will step down in June when his single six-year term ends—said that as an impoverished nation the government would prioritize "butter rather than guns."

"We have no illusions of ever trying to match, trying to engage anybody in an arms race or in a military build-up," he said. In a separate development a defense department official confirmed that the Philippines had sealed an agreement to acquire two anti-submarine helicopters. The Anglo-Italian AW159 helicopters will be delivered in a little over a year, said defense undersecretary Fernando Manalo, adding they would be the nation's first. He did not disclose the cost. — AFP

MYANMAR TAKES HISTORIC STEP WITH NEW PRESIDENT

SUU KYI AIDE KYAW TAKES OVER IN TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY

NAYPYITAW, Myanmar: Myanmar's slow transition to democracy took a momentous step yesterday as a trusted aide to ruling-party leader Aung San Suu Kyi took over as the country's president, officially ending more than 50 years of the military's control over government.

In a day full of ceremony and symbolism, Htin Kyaw was sworn in along with his two vice presidents and 18 Cabinet ministers. Suu Kyi, the Nobel Peace laureate and face of Myanmar's pro-democracy movement, takes on a prominent role as the country's new foreign minister and the head of three other ministries - education, energy and the presidential office. "The Union Parliament has elected me as president, which is a historic moment for this country," Htin Kyaw, 70, said in a speech after being sworn in. He pledged to work toward national reconciliation, strive for peace with warring ethnic rebels and improving the lives of Myanmar's 54 million people.

While it was a historic day for the impoverished Southeast Asian country, democracy remains incomplete. The military retains considerable power in the government and parliament, and the president himself will play second fiddle to Suu Kyi. She cannot be president because of a constitutional manipulation engineered by the military, and has repeatedly said she will run the country from behind the scenes.

"I am very happy that we have a president who represents people," said Mar Thin, a 50-year-old street cleaner. She said she used to own 70 acres (28 hectares) of land that she and her sister inherited from their father before the military kicked them out and appropriated the land for the defense ministry.

"I hope that the new government can solve the land confiscation problem and let us own our land as farmers. All we want is enough food, and to live without fear. I hope that President Htin Kyaw will do that for us because Daw Suu promised us a lot of things, and we love her too," Mar Thin said, using an affectionate term for Suu Kyi. US President Barack Obama noted the continuing challenges for Myanmar, also known as Burma, in a statement in which he called Htin Kyaw's election "a historic milestone in the country's transition to a democratically elected, civilian-led government."

Challenges

"Burma will face significant challenges going forward, including achieving broad-based economic development, advancing national reconciliation, and promoting the rights and freedoms of all its people," Obama said. "The United States looks forward to being a friend and partner of the new government and the people of Burma as they make progress toward building a more inclusive, peaceful, and prosperous future."

Htin Kyaw's swearing-in was held in an austere hall of parliament, with lawmakers dressed in traditional costume. A few hours later, outgoing President Thein Sein shook hands with his successor and handed him a letter and a golden sash, officially transferring power.

It was Suu Kyi who led her National League for Democracy party to a landslide win in November elections, ushering in Myanmar's first civilian government after 54 years of direct and indirect military rule. Suu Kyi endured decades of house arrest and harassment by military rulers without ever giving up on her nonviolent campaign to unseat them.

The constitutional clause that denied her the presidency excludes anyone from the position who has a foreign spouse or child. Suu Kyi's two sons are British, as was her late husband. The clause is widely seen as having been written by the military with Suu Kyi in mind. She has repeatedly made it clear that she will run the government from behind the scenes, and in his speech yesterday, Htin Kyaw paid obeisance to Suu Kyi.

"The new parliament and new government are formed in accord with the policies of the National League for Democracy led by Aung San Suu Kyi,"



New Myanmar President Htin Kyaw (centre left) and outgoing president Thein Sein (centre right) arrive for the handover ceremony at the presidential palace in Naypyidaw yesterday. — AFP

he said, and referred to the party's goal to amend the constitution. "I have the obligation to work toward achieving a constitution that has democratic norms and is suitable for the nation," Htin Kyaw said. "I want to tell the new government, we must constantly try to fulfill the hope and will of the people of this country. I wish all citizens of this country a successful and peaceful life." The constitution, drafted under the former junta, reserves 25 percent of the seats in parliament for military officers, guaranteeing that no government can amend the constitution without the army's approval. The military also heads the Home Ministry, the Border Affairs Ministry and the Defense Ministry, which gives it control over the corrections department, ensuring that the release of political prisoners is its decision to make.

The military also ensured that one of Htin Kyaw's two vice presidents is a former general, Myint Swe, a close ally of former junta leader Than Shwe. Myint Swe remains on a U.S. Treasury Department blacklist that bars American companies from doing business with several tycoons and senior military figures connected with the former junta.

As Htin Kyaw was sworn in, Suu Kyi sat in the front row watching. The same pledge was simultaneously read by First Vice President Myint Swe and Second Vice President Henry Van Tio. After a 20-minute tea break, the 18 members of Htin

Kyaw's Cabinet, including Suu Kyi, took a joint oath of office read out by the speaker.

Suu Kyi's leadership of four ministries is unusual, and the lack of public criticism of her wide power is likely a sign of her continuing broad support.

Despite her inability to become president, Suu Kyi's entry into the government is a remarkable turn of fortune not only for her, but also for the country, which had been under iron-fisted military rule for decades beginning in 1962. The junta kept Myanmar in isolation and economic stagnation while refusing to listen to international counsel or homegrown demands for democracy.

Suu Kyi came to prominence in 1988, when popular protests were building up. The junta crushed the protests, which had turned into anti-government riots, killing thousands of people and placing Suu Kyi under house arrest in 1989. The junta called elections in 1990, but refused to hand over power when Suu Kyi's party won overwhelmingly. She was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize a year later while under house arrest. The junta finally started loosening its grip on power in 2010, allowing elections that were won by a military-allied party after Suu Kyi's party boycotted the polls as unfair. Thein Sein, a former general, was installed as president for a five-year term that started March 30, 2011, and ended yesterday. — AP



NAYPYIDAW: Myanmar Foreign Minister Aung San Suu Kyi (left) speaks with Vice President Henry Van Thio as they attend the handover ceremony from outgoing President Thein Sein to new Myanmar President Htin Kyaw at the presidential palace in Naypyidaw yesterday. — AFP

ALLY OF DISGRACED CHINA SECURITY CHIEF GETS 12 YEARS IN JAIL

BEIJING: A former deputy governor of China's southern province of Hainan has been sentenced to 12 years in prison for corruption, the official Xinhua news agency said yesterday.

Ji Wenlin was a one-time ally of Zhou Yongkang, the country's once-powerful domestic security boss, who was felled by President Xi Jinping's anti-corruption campaign. Xi has warned that rampant corruption threatens the survival of the ruling Communist Party and has waged a campaign against graft in the past three years that has swept up scores

of senior officials in the party, the government, the military and state-owned companies.

Investigators began looking into Ji's activities as early as 2014, Xinhua said, adding that he used his position to seek benefits, including investments for several companies, illegally obtaining 20.4 million yuan (\$3.2 million) in assets and bribes.

Ji's official biography says he worked under Zhou when the latter was the party boss of the southwestern Sichuan province and the public security minister, among other posts. Zhou was

jailed for life last June. Several key Zhou allies have been ensnared in the anti-graft campaign, including Jiang Jiemin, the former top regulator of state-owned assets. In another report, Xinhua said the trial of a former senior official who had vigorously backed Xi's anti-graft campaign had begun.

Wang Min, the one-time Communist Party boss of Jinan city, about 300 km (185 miles) south of the capital, Beijing, is suspected of procuring property and other favours for companies, and of taking bribes. — Reuters



BANGKOK: Thai soldiers march while changing positions with fellow soldiers on a street in Bangkok. — AFP

THAI JUNTA CHIEF GIVES MILITARY BROAD NEW POLICE-LIKE POWERS

BANGKOK: Thailand's junta chief has given the military broad new police-like powers to arrest and detain criminal suspects, in an unannounced move that rights groups criticized yesterday as a recipe for human rights violations. The decree Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha issued late Tuesday night comes amid a wider crackdown on civil liberties. Authorities the same day charged a woman with sedition for posting a Facebook photo of herself holding a red plastic bowl that was deemed too politically charged.

The order, published in Thailand's Royal Gazette under the title "Suppression of wrongdoings that could threaten Thai economy and society," gives soldiers in the army, navy and air force who are ranked sub-lieutenant and higher the power to summon, arrest and detain suspects in a wide range of crimes for up to seven days. The soldiers can act against people suspected in 27 different types of crime, including extortion, human trafficking, robbery, fraud, forgery, defamation, debt collection, gambling, child protection, prostitution, loan sharking and tour guide services. It says the soldiers are appointed "crime prevention and suppression officers" and anyone ranked below sub-lieutenant can act as their assistants.

Prayuth, the former army chief, invoked the powers under a law he enacted after leading a May 2014 coup that gives him as junta chief near-absolute authority without any accountability. The law, known as Article 44, allows Prayuth to take any measures deemed necessary to promote public order and unity. Rights groups say Article 44 is essentially martial law in all but name. "There are people whose behavior and

wrongdoings are considered crimes. They threaten the country's economy and society," the order says. Deputy Prime Minister Prawit Wongsuwan was quoted by The Bangkok Post as saying that soldiers would also act as interrogators and were taking on the new role because there were not enough police to tackle crime.

Brad Adams, the Asia director of Human Rights Watch, called the move "a recipe for abuse, not greater peace and order." "By erasing the line between the military and the police, Prime Minister Prayuth has further reinforced his dictatorship and guaranteed more blatant human rights abuses, increased numbers of civilians being tried in military courts, and further impunity for soldiers to do whatever they want whenever they want," he said.

Since toppling an elected government in the 2014 coup, Prayuth has restricted freedom of speech, barred public protests and relentlessly pursued critics by detaining journalists, academics and other perceived dissidents at military bases for so-called "attitude adjustment."

The junta says criticism could destabilize the nation, which it says needs unity after almost a decade of sometimes violent political conflict.

On Tuesday, a 57-year-old woman in northern Thailand was arrested and charged with sedition for posting a photo of herself holding a red plastic bowl inscribed with a New Year's greeting from two former prime ministers, siblings Yingluck and Thaksin Shinawatra, according to Human Rights Watch. A military court in Chiang Mai released her on 100,000 baht (\$2,800) bail pending a military trial. — AP

US: CHINA WILL TALK ABOUT S KOREA MISSILE DEFENSE

WASHINGTON: A senior US diplomat said yesterday he hopes China will accept an offer for a technical briefing on a new missile defense system the United States wants to deploy in South Korea, a prospect Beijing sees as a threat to its national security. US Deputy Secretary of State Anthony Blinken said the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system was necessary for the United States to protect itself and regional allies from North Korean missile attacks.

"We realize China may not believe us and also proposed to go through the technology and specifications with them ... and prepared to explain to what the technology does and what it doesn't do and hopefully they will take us up on that proposal," Blinken told Washington's Brookings Institution. Blinken spoke ahead of a visit by Chinese President Xi Jinping to Washington for a nuclear security summit that will have concerns about North Korea high on the agenda.

The United States and South Korea agreed to begin talks on possible THAAD deployment last month after North Korea tested its fourth nuclear bomb on Jan. 6 and launched a long-range rocket on Feb. 7. China backed tough new sanctions on North Korea following the tests but has voiced opposition to THAAD as its radar has a range that would extend far beyond the Korean peninsula and into China.

Asked whether China would accept a US briefing on THAAD, Chinese Foreign

Ministry spokesman Hong Lei would not directly reply, repeating China did not view the matter "as simply a technical one."

"The THAAD system exceeds the normal defensive needs of the Korean peninsula, threatens China's reasonable national security interests and damages regional strategic stability," Hong told a news briefing in Beijing yesterday. South Korea's military said on Tuesday that North Korea test fired a short-range missile on its east coast in the latest of a string of launches that Pyongyang has characterized as a response to the sanctions.

US President Barack Obama will meet South Korean President Park Geun-hye and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Thursday to discuss North Korea's nuclear program, ahead of a bilateral meeting between Obama and Xi later that day. Blinken said THAAD deployment was a necessary step until Pyongyang's behavior changed. "None of these steps are directed against China but we have also been very clear that as long as this persists ... we will have to take steps," he said.

Obama's deputy national security adviser, Ben Rhodes, said China had stepped up pressure on North Korea, but this had to be shown to change Pyongyang's calculus. "We've had good support from China, but we clearly believe that there's more that will continue to have to be done, including on enforcing the sanctions we have put into place," Rhodes told reporters. — Reuters



KAJADO: A ranger of Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) shoots a lion after the feline ran away from the Amboseli National Park in Kajado yesterday. — AFP

ISLAMIC STATE THREAT RAISES STAKES FOR US...

Continued from Page 1

"The video footage is of concern," she said, adding, with regard to the Belgian case, that the United States does not "have any information that a broader plot exists."

But groups like the Islamic State have long shown their interest in obtaining nuclear material. "We've seen over the years that different terrorist organizations have ambitions related to acquiring nuclear materials," said Deputy National Security Advisor Ben Rhodes. "We've seen that in their public statements, we've seen that in some cases in their monitoring of nuclear facilities," he added. "That's why the summit process is so important, because different countries have different levels of security at their facilities or in terms of how they are handling nuclear materials."

Dirty bomb

Obama personally launched the first head of government-level nuclear security summit in Washington in 2010, after describing nuclear terrorism as the "most immediate and extreme threat to global security." Subsequent meetings in South Korea and the Netherlands have focused on securing stockpiles, reducing highly enriched uranium and separated plutonium, smuggling detection and cybersecurity.

Few believe IS could develop an atomic bomb, but many fear it could acquire uranium or plutonium and construct a "dirty bomb." Such a device would not trigger a nuclear explosion but would scatter radioactive material with potentially devastating physiological, medical and economic effects. Nuclear material can be found in small quantities at universities, hospitals and other facilities the world over, often not well secured.

Since the mid-1990s, almost 2,800 incidents of illicit

trafficking, "unauthorized possession" or loss of nuclear materials have been recorded in an International Atomic Energy Agency database. A US government audit late last year found that Obama's goal of improving the physical protection of more than 43 sensitive buildings and making 34 foreign reactors more "proliferation-resistant" had fallen short. The International Panel on Fissile Materials, an independent group of arms-control experts, estimated that the global stockpile of highly enriched uranium stood at around 1370 tonnes at the end of 2014. Most was held in Russia.

Lame duck?

More than fifty heads of state have been invited to attend the summit, but the absence of leaders from Russia, North Korea, Iran and Belarus virtually ensures gaps in the united front. Rhodes said Russia's decision not to attend at the highest level was a missed opportunity for Moscow, which itself faces significant threats of its own. Obama leaves office in less than a year, raising questions about whether the initiative will continue without his personal involvement. "World leaders face a stark choice at the final nuclear security summit later this month: Will they commit to continuous improvement, or will nuclear security efforts stall and potentially decline?" said experts at the respected Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at Harvard University.

"Their answer will shape the chances that terrorist groups, including the Islamic State, could get their hands on the materials they need to build a crude nuclear bomb." White House spokesman Josh Earnest said the administration hopes Obama's successor will take up the mantle. "I certainly hope that the incoming president would understand that safeguarding loose nuclear materials around the globe is a top national security priority of the United States," he said. — AFP

FROM SENEGAL TO LIBYA: AN AFRICAN STUDENT JOINS IS

POLITICIANS DEMAND CHECKS ON AID MONEY FROM GULF

ZIGUINCHOR: When Sadio Gassama decided to go into medicine, he started by giving free check-ups at his mosque in Senegal's poor southern region of Casamance. Now, the 25-year-old medical student says he is treating Islamic State fighters in Libya. Until recently, many thought the peaceful, tolerant Sufi brotherhoods in countries such as Senegal could prevent more conservative and radical versions of Islam from taking hold in poorer parts of West Africa, like Mali and Niger.

But security experts say Gassama's story shows how the penetration of hardline Islamic Salafism, coupled with Gulf money and militant propaganda, is aiding recruitment, even from stable and democratic Senegal. In particular, in their appeals to Africans, Islamic State propagandists are calling on doctors to make "hijrah", or pilgrimage, to their African stronghold of Sirte in Libya. Pictures posted on Gassama's Facebook page before he joined Islamic State show him hugging his young niece. Now, he is brandishing a machine gun, his name stitched on to his military uniform.

Friends and family say Gassama's decision to join thousands of militants in Libya in December during the fifth year of his medical studies was sudden and unexpected. His shocked father described him as a "humanist" motivated by a desire to help others. A former professor called him a "brilliant student, incapable of hurting anyone". But an interview with Gassama showed a darker side. Speaking from Sirte, he said he had been planning an attack in Dakar.

"Senegal is lucky. I was planning to commit an attack there in the name of the Islamic State before one of their contacts helped me go to Libya," he said last month via the internet. He could not be reached subsequently. Friends said he took trucks to Libya via Mali and Niger, accompanied by another Senegalese man and paying his way with his student grant. "I left Senegal a year after embracing the ideology of the Islamic State," Gassama said. "Joining ISIS in Libya was relatively easy and accessible. I wanted to contribute to the establishment of a caliphate in Libya." Asked what he was doing there, he replied: "I am a jihadist doctor." Islamic State propaganda and security sources confirm fighters from countries including Chad, Ghana, Senegal and Nigeria are already in Libya, where the group is consolidating its presence.

The number of sub-Saharan Africans is not known but they are thought to represent a minority of the 3,000-6,000 Islamic State fighters there, with most from North Africa and the Middle East. However, there are concerns more will travel there along the same desert routes migrants use to reach Europe, as Gassama did. "Libya is closer and easier to reach for some African fighters than Syria, and the political disarray there opens space for fighters to enter and operate," said Andrew Lebovich, a visiting fellow with the European Council on Foreign Relations who focuses on North Africa and the Sahel.

Gulf donations

Across Africa's arid Sahel region, Western diplomats note an increase in conservatism, alongside tens of mil-

lions of dollars a year in charity donations from Gulf states. In Niger, some religious leaders are calling for a "re-Islamisation" against the secularism imposed by former colonial power France. This is already underway in the capital, Niamey, where some women wear the full veil and pay higher fares to avoid sharing taxis with men. Gulf-financed bodies deny links to radical groups and say their money is for charity, but local sources say it can go astray. "Contributions are intended for the poor and to build mosques but are often diverted in the wrong direction," said Bakary Sambe, director of the Timbuktu Institute and a coordinator for the Observatory on Religious Radicalism and Conflicts in Africa.

This foreign money and the migration of Senegal's youth to the cities has undermined the country's Mouride brotherhood, an old-established Islamic Sufi order which preaches tolerance. In Gassama's home town of Ziguinchor, the mosque he attended in the HLM neighborhood is funded by a Kuwaiti NGO called Africa Muslims Agency. AMA director Almany Badji said it was one of more than 100 mosques it has financed in Casamance. The mosque Gassama attended at Dakar's Sheikh Anta Diop University also has Salafist leanings, Sambe said.

Gassama did not say who helped him join Islamic State more than a year ago, referring only to 'guidance' in Senegal. "Through meetings with local scholars it became clear that jihad was my Muslim duty," he said. His friends and family said the only change they noticed before he left was to a more Salafist dress code. "His pants were shorter and did not reach all the way to the floor," said his father, Boucar Gassama, a retired civil servant, surrounded by Gassama's siblings in the shady courtyard of his house. "But I could not know he had been radicalized."

Calls for reform

There is growing concern in West Africa about recruitment into Islamic State and other militant groups after attacks in Mali, Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast. Modou Faye, Gassama's professor, says students need more guidance in reading the Koran, which is often rote-learned at religious schools similar to one Gassama attended. Mauritania has closed several Quranic schools for security reasons, officials said. In Mali, where an Islamist insurgency is intensifying, some are calling for checks on mosques and NGOs.

"We must take stock of the potential risks of collusion between civil society and terrorists, better monitor places where radicalization occurs, keep tabs on all suspect individuals like radical preachers and trace their funds," former Prime Minister Moussa Mara said. But others say labeling peaceful Islamic groups as jihadists is risky. Depriving poor communities of services such as orphanages and free study trips to Saudi Arabia could provoke a backlash. "A politician who attempts to regulate this risks losing his electorate," said Moulaye Hassane, researcher at the Institute of Research and Human Sciences and Niger's former ambassador to Saudi Arabia. "I think they are afraid." — Reuters

KUWAIT AND KOREAN FIRMS SEAL \$2.9 BILLION...

Continued from Page 1

In another development, BP and Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) have signed a framework agreement to explore possible joint opportunities for investment and cooperation in future oil, gas, trading and petrochemicals ventures. Kuwait Petroleum Corporation CEO Nizar Mohammad Al-Adsani signed the agreement with visiting BP CEO Bob Dudley. The framework paves the way for both companies to jointly invest and cooperate in oil and gas projects in Kuwait and globally.

"BP's commitment to Kuwait dates back to our participation in the discovery of the giant Burgan oil field in the 1930s and we are there today extending the life of the field," Dudley said. "We look forward to working with

KPC to help the people of Kuwait realize the full potential of their nation's oil and gas resources and exploring new opportunities globally."

In addition to enhancing oil and gas recovery from Kuwait's existing resource base, the agreement also includes the intention to study opportunities for joint investment in future oil and gas exploration both inside Kuwait and globally. Other elements of the agreement cover possible future oil and gas trading deals including LNG trading and related ventures. Opportunities for cooperation and investment in midstream and petrochemical projects globally will also be considered under the agreement, including potentially deploying BP's proprietary paraxylene technology as part of KPC's petrochemicals projects. — Agencies

ASSEMBLY PANEL TO DISCUSS POWER RATES NEXT...

Continued from Page 1

Shaye said the bill is the government viewpoint and the committee will change the rates to keep consumption of up to 6,000 kilowatts unchanged, adding that the idea of the bill should be to rationalize consumption and not to collect funds. He said MPs will present a substitute proposal that includes major cuts to government proposed rates. Shaye expected the committee to complete studying the government bill on Sunday and is likely to hold a meeting on next Wednesday to approve the government-sponsored economic reforms.

It was not clear if the committee's planned cuts would also include apartments. In the Assembly session yesterday, the Assembly debated in a secret session two investigation reports about Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA), the first about its offices in London and elsewhere and the second about an Audit Bureau report on KIA controversial sale of real estate abroad. Following the debate, Speaker Marzouk Al-Ghanem said the Assembly decided to refer the two

reports to the government by a slim majority of 21 out of 41 members present.

The recommendations attached to the two reports call to refer top officials at KIA to the Public Prosecution for a possible legal action. Finance Minister Anas Al-Saleh, who demanded the two reports be discussed in a closed session, said he saw no aggression on public funds in the two reports. He added the government will study the report, and if it finds any violation, it will form a neutral probe committee. The probe in KIA offices abroad was launched after accusations of violations and mismanagement.

The Assembly yesterday refused to approve amendments to the key tender law and instead returned the report to the Financial and Economic Affairs Committee to review the law once again to include all required amendments. MPs particularly objected to a provision in the law giving the right to listed contracting firms to bid in contracts worth above KD 20 million. They insisted that all companies, including foreign firms, should be allowed to bid. The committee was given two months to study the amendments.

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Issues

THEIN SEIN: QUIET
JUNTA INSIDER WHO
OPENED MYANMAR

By Phyo Hein Kyaw, Kelly Macnamara

When he became Myanmar's leader five years ago Thein Sein was dismissed as a junta stooge-but as he prepares to hand power to Aung San Suu Kyi's government, the taciturn ex-general can also claim credit for steering a peaceful political transition that has stunned the world. President Thein Sein, who spent almost half a century climbing the military's ranks, will make way on Wednesday for Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy and her proxy president Htin Kyaw.

They will form the Southeast Asian nation's first elected civilian government in generations, marking an extraordinary new chapter for a society suffocated for decades by military rule. Bespectacled, balding and unobtrusive, Thein Sein's quasi-civilian regime presided over sweeping reforms that pushed further than many in the country of 51 million people had dared to dream possible. But the 70-year-old's record is far from pristine in a nation where the military maintains significant political and economic power and grievances run deep.

Historic elections last year were the first chance in decades for Myanmar's long-suffering population to choose their own rulers-and Suu Kyi's party won in a landslide. Yet Myanmar's people remain cautious. "People hoped for more changes, but they (the army) just changed their uniforms," said Yi Yi, a 59-year-old legal advocate in Yangon.

Unlikely reformer

Seen as absolutely loyal to junta senior general Than Shwe, little dramatic change was expected from Thein Sein when he was named president in March 2011. Independent analyst Richard Horsey said he was "a little bit grey" to begin with and many just assumed he was a yes man for the former strongman. "I think people were very surprised when that wasn't necessarily the case," he said. As reformers and hardliners tussled for position in his government, senior figures approached Thein Sein and urged real change, convincing him "to come off the fence," Horsey added.

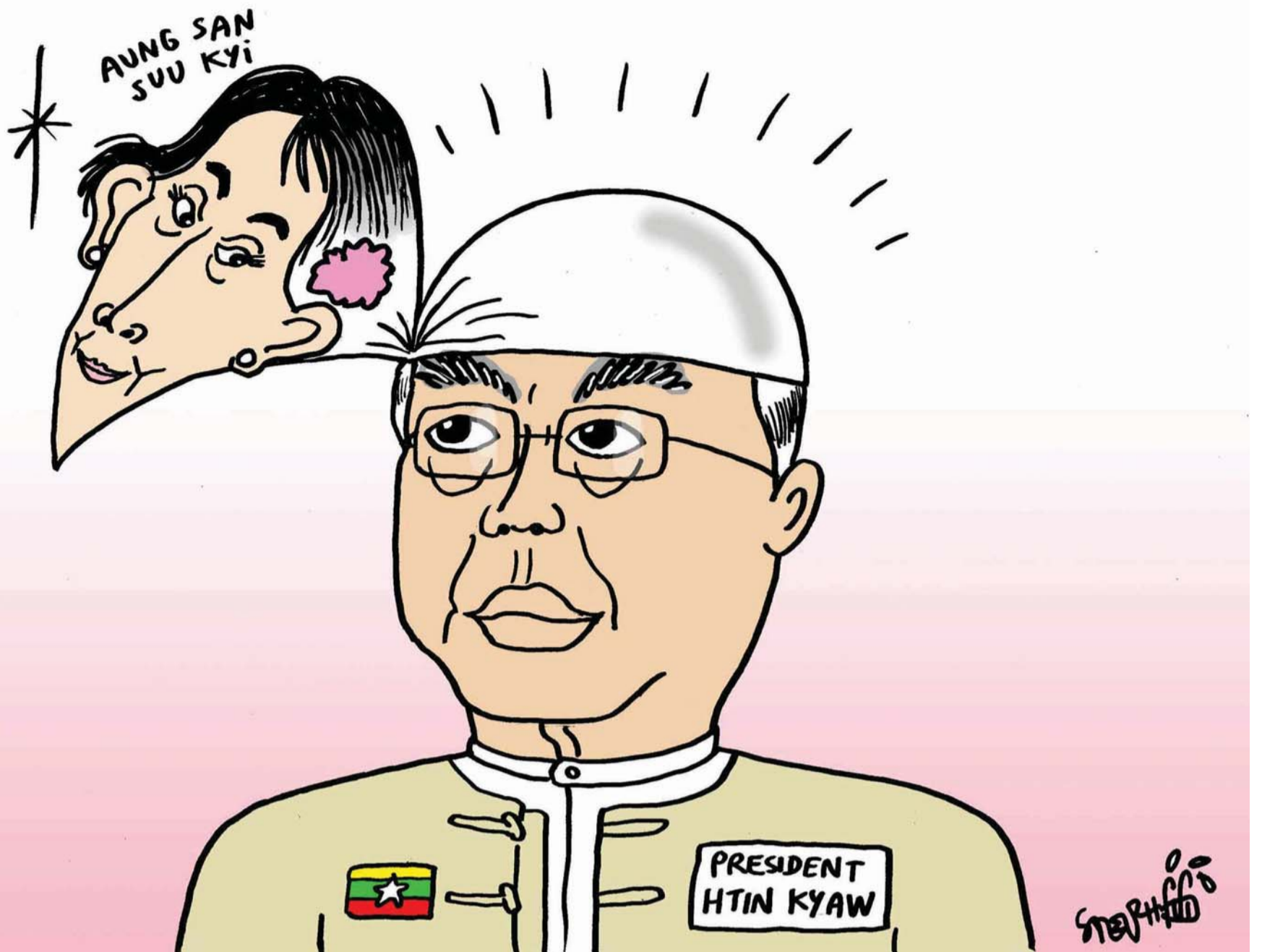
Within months Thein Sein broke with the old military approach, holding his first meeting with Suu Kyi and abruptly suspending a multi-billion dollar Chinese-backed dam in northern Kachin state-a rare push back against the influential neighbor. His government freed hundreds of political prisoners, lifted stifling censorship, and launched a dialogue with multiple armed ethnic groups who have spent years fighting for greater autonomy.

Reforms were rewarded with the lifting of most Western sanctions, sparking a flood of foreign investment to the poor nation. The secretive men in green have never publicly revealed the exact motivation for the dramatic changes. But observers say the junta recognized the country's beleaguered position compared to its neighbors, its over-reliance on China and the military's precipitous fall in the estimations of Myanmar's people after several mass uprisings.

Old habits

A son of farmers, born in a small village in the southern Irrawaddy Delta, Thein Sein attended a prestigious military academy and eventually climbed to the top echelons of the junta. Thein Sein never fully stepped outside the military that moulded him. He emerged as a crucial force behind Myanmar's roadmap for "disciplined democracy" and a constitution that gifts the army a quarter of parliament's seats and control over three key security ministries. The charter also blocks Suu Kyi from the presidency because her sons are British. There have been other pointers that Thein Sein's administration was unwilling to abandon the repressive, acquisitive instincts of the junta years. Scores of protesters have been arrested under his watch, while those in power have been accused of overseeing a rise in Buddhist nationalism.

Many close to the military have been the first in line to rake in benefits from reforms. In its last days in power the outgoing government has been accused of rushing through opaque business deals. His legacy may be imperfect, but Thein Sein will be remembered for a central role in the country's gradual emergence from its dark dictatorial past. The onus is now on Suu Kyi and her government, which has inherited big issues-including civil wars, religious tensions and eviscerated public services-as well as soaring expectations of change. "It's not just impatience among the people, I think the country needs results pretty fast otherwise things could unravel," Khin Zaw Win, a political analyst said. —AFP



DEBT DEMON LOOMS AGAIN OVER AFRICA

By Antonio Rodriguez

The spectre of high debt is raising its head again in Africa, analysts say, as sub-Saharan nations that borrowed cheaply on global markets are now squeezed by a commodities crash. The return of debt troubles in Africa has caught some by surprise, they say, 20 years after a global campaign was mounted to offer debt relief to the world's most impoverished nations. "It is clearly a source of concern. People did not see it coming," said Julien Marcilly, chief economist at French group Coface, which offers worldwide insurance to protect firms from the risk of clients defaulting. An IMF-World Bank program launched in 1996 has to date approved \$76 billion (68 billion euros) in external debt relief for 36 of the world's heavily indebted poor nations, of which 30 are in Africa. For some of those countries, however, debt levels are rising again to worrying levels. Relieved of their debt burdens by the international program, countries enjoyed the budgetary freedom to boost economic growth, which was further propelled by soaring commodity prices.

"Over the past few years, sub-Saharan African sovereigns have enjoyed unusually favorable financing conditions," Standard & Poor's said in a recent report. Many of them issued bonds for the first time to raise money on financial markets as borrowing costs slumped to record lows in mid-2014, the

New York-based credit rating agency said.

"The tide has turned," it warned, however, predicting that most of these countries would have to spend more and more over the next three years to service their debt. Many of those sub-Saharan countries will face a difficult choice between cutting spending or being obliged to pay higher debt and interest payments in the future, Standard & Poor's said. And this time, a large part of the debt is held by private creditors, rather than institutions such as the IMF or World Bank. "The depreciation of local currencies, often related to the recent commodity price decline, has inflated foreign currency debt for several sub-Saharan African sovereigns," Standard & Poor's added.

'Debt trap'

A study by the French Treasury said the IMF-World Bank initiative had slashed the average external public debt of the 30 African countries from the equivalent of 119 percent of annual economic output to just 33 percent between 2000 and 2014. Yet some are now sliding deeper into debt at a "very sustained pace," the Treasury said. Of the 30 African countries that had previously secured international debt relief, 13 have pushed up their debt levels by the equivalent of 10 percentage points of annual gross domestic product (GDP) in the past five years, it said. The Republic of Congo led the list, with its

external debt rising by 25 percentage points as a proportion of annual GDP, followed by Niger, up 23 percentage points, and Malawi, up 19 percentage points. There is no short-term risk of a new debt crisis for the great majority of African countries, the French Treasury said.

But "a small number of them have seen a period of very sustained debt growth," it said, warning that they could soon return close to the levels of external debt that reigned before the global debt relief initiative. Seven countries faced the risk of elevated debt levels at the end of 2015, the Treasury said: Burundi; Cameroon; Central African Republic; Chad; Ghana; Mauritania; and Sao Tome and Principe. "We must ensure we do not fall again into the debt trap," African Development Bank president Akinwumi Adesina warned at a conference of business leaders in Abidjan this month.

Despite a recent rise in debt levels, African countries remain less indebted than many advanced economies. "The total public debt of Africa amounted to 38 percent of continental GDP in 2014 compared with 111 percent for OECD nations," said Carlos Lopes, executive secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Africa. "Debt levels will deteriorate in countries with a weak level of budgetary discipline and those that have borrowed excessively," Lopes said. He urged countries to strengthen debt management capacity and to report on how they are using their borrowed funds. —AFP

THE RACE AGAINST TIME THAT BELGIUM LOST

By Alastair Macdonald

When Brussels police caught Salah Abdeslam, suspected sole survivor of November's suicide assault on Paris, they knew they were in a race against time to stop a new Islamic State attack. It was the afternoon of Friday, March 18, and one of Prime Minister Charles Michel's cabinet ministers tweeted "We got him!" after Europe's most wanted man was seized at a house in the capital's Molenbeek neighborhood. But Michel was worried, according to a government official who was present at the time. The premier raced to his crisis command centre from a European summit nearby. Security forces had orders to increase vigilance but lacked intelligence to justify a citywide lockdown such as Michel imposed after the Paris attacks. "Our first thought was that ... this will set off a ferocious response," the aide told Reuters, speaking on condition that he not be named. Those fears were well founded. The suicide bombings of Brussels airport and a metro train that killed 28 bystanders laid bare the inability of the Belgian authorities to counter Islamic State militants, no matter how high the level of alert. Missed connections, leads not followed and suspects let slip have exposed deficiencies in security services. They have also shown how Europe's Syrian-trained Islamist cells can react with deadly speed to events such as Abdeslam's arrest. "It was a race against time," said Vincent Gilles, head of Belgium's main police trade union SLPF. But with the intelligence service understaffed - by some estimates by about half the level for other rich European states - it was a race the authorities could not win.

Year on alert

Belgium is, for its size, the biggest European supplier of foreign fighters in Syria. Islamic State has appealed to an alienated generation descended from mostly Moroccan immigrants of the 1960s. Belgian authorities stepped up their searches for activists after January 2015. That month, days after the bloodshed at Paris magazine Charlie Hebdo, Belgian police foiled a plot in the town of Verviers that revealed an Islamic State campaign to send some of the 300 or more young Belgians who have fought in Syria back to Europe to strike on their native soil. In Verviers, police killed two men who returned from Syria with Abdelhamid

Abaoud. Killed in a shootout in Paris days after the attacks there, he emerged as "the spider in the web" in the words of a Belgian minister, of an extensive network. Yet though Belgian authorities questioned numerous contacts of Abaoud, notably from his old Molenbeek neighborhood, the trail went cold. Among those interrogated and released were Salah Abdeslam and his brother Brahim. In the first half of 2015, Belgian courts convicted dozens of radical preachers and their followers for recruiting for Syria. But new cells were forming elsewhere. Last summer, the Abdeslams, petty drug dealers who ran a Molenbeek bar, put together what Salah has since told interrogators was a logistical plan to prepare for the attacks on Paris. Salah drove across Europe more than once and appears to have transported quantities of guns, explosives and people. It was with shock, after 130 people died on a Friday evening in the French capital and trails led back to Brussels, that Michel's government realized it had an urgent problem. He locked down transport and public spaces for days as he was near "100 percent certain" of a threat. At the centre of those fears was Salah Abdeslam, whose brother had blown himself up at a Paris cafe. Abdeslam had slipped back across the Belgian border ahead of a French drag-

net. The morning after Paris, he went to ground in Brussels.

New resources, too late

Michel pledged cash and legal reforms to beef up a security system that officials accepted was understaffed. An intelligence service of about 700 staff for a country of 11 million struggled to cope, as did a police force that is about 20 percent below full strength. Police and security services have also struggled with a lack of communication and coordination across a multiplicity of departments that cross Belgium's Dutch-French language divide.

Two of Tuesday's suicide bombers - Najim Laachraoui and Khalid El Bakraoui - were on counter-terrorism watchlists. The former was a suspected bombmaker for the Paris attacks; the latter rented a safe house for the Paris cell and the flat where police picked up Abdeslam's trail. Bakraoui's brother Brahim, was a convicted armed robber in breach of his parole who was expelled last July from Turkey. Ankara warned Belgium he had been caught trying to reach Syria. In December, police in the town of Mechelen had a tip about a family sheltering Abdeslam. The tip included the address where he was eventually apprehended. But officials acknowledge the tip was never passed on

to Brussels colleagues.

The revelation has led to criticism - strongly denied - that Mechelen's town hall might prefer to suppress a tip to avoid irritating local Muslims, a key electoral constituency. In their four-month search for Abdeslam, police pulled in dozens of people, holding 10 by last month. Dozens of homes were raided to no avail. Police reject suggestions it was chance that led them to a house in the Brussels borough of Forest on March 15. Four officers were wounded in a shootout before one gunman was killed. The apartment, rented under a false name by Khalid El Bakraoui, the Brussels metro bomber, yielded a fingerprint belonging to Salah Abdeslam. Police homed in on a cellphone he was using, leading to his capture three days later.

Three days of fear

Over the three and half days following that arrest, the government considered locking down Brussels but decided against it because they had no clear clues that an attack was in the offing, the government official said. When the bombers struck at the morning rush hour on Tuesday, the authorities tried to move fast. A taxi driver who took the bombers to the airport led police to the apartment where he had picked them up. That produced a evidence including chemicals and another bomb. One report said the bombers left it behind after a confused taxi dispatcher sent a smaller cab than they ordered. It also produced a witness who, investigators say, has since identified a third man seen on airport cameras with the two bombers.

Police have been rolling up contacts and acquaintances of those identified, including another suspected plotter in Paris. Michel's government is also cracking down on fake documents which seem to have allowed the likes of Laachraoui and Abaoud, to slip across Europe from Syria. The government has sought new legal powers over, and in cooperation with, Internet and telecoms firms to track suspects. But officials caution that it could take years to fill the gaps in the security structures of a country that is host to the European Union and NATO. So it was with a note of resignation that Belgium's leaders reacted to the worst bloodshed in their country since World War Two: Michel declared simply: "What we feared, has happened." —Reuters



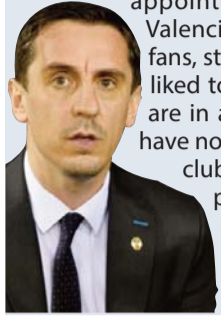
Picture shows a makeshift memorial for the victims of last week's suicide bombing. A total of 32 people were killed in Belgium's worst-ever attacks. —AFP

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GARY NEVILLE SACKED AS VALENCIA COACH

VALENCIA: Gary Neville has been sacked as coach of Valencia after just over four months in charge, the struggling Spanish club confirmed yesterday. "Valencia Football Club have today parted company with Gary Neville as Head Coach," Valencia said in a statement published in English on their website. "After careful consideration, the Club have decided to make a change with the best interests of the Valencia CF moving forward this season. We thank Gary for his work at Valencia and wish him the best in the future."

Pako Ayestaran, previously an assistant coach at the Mestalla, has been appointed as Neville's replacement until the end of the season, Valencia added. "I would like to thank Valencia Football Club, the fans, staff and the players," Neville said in a statement. "I would have liked to have continued the work I started but understand that we are in a results business and in the 28 games (W10, D7, L11) they have not been to my standards or to those which are required by this club." Neville, who had been combining the job with his role as part of the England coaching team, leaves with Valencia languishing in 14th place in La Liga, six points clear of the relegation zone with eight games remaining.—AFP



AUSTRALIA'S STARC BACK FOR UPCOMING SERIES

SYDNEY: Left-arm fast bowler Mitchell Starc was included yesterday in Australia's one-day international tri-series squad to face the West Indies and South Africa in the Caribbean in June, while bit-hitting Travis Head also earned a call-up.

Starc, 26, has been out of action since fracturing his foot in last November's historic day-night Test in Adelaide against New Zealand and undergoing ankle surgery. But he has now regained fitness and leads an impressive pace attack which also features Josh Hazlewood, Nathan Coulter-Nile and John Hastings.

"Mitchell has progressed very well in his rehab and the medical staff are confident he will be fit to play in this series," chairman of selectors Rod Marsh said. "It is extremely pleasing to have a bowler of his calibre back in the side." Test off-spinner Nathan Lyon, overlooked for the World T20, has been given another chance to shine in the limited-overs format after being included alongside leg-spinner Adam Zampa.—AFP

GOETZE FUMING OVER PUNDIT'S CRITICISM

BERLIN: Despite his goal-scoring performance in Germany's thumping win over Italy, Mario Goetze was left fuming by stinging criticism over his fitness and form from an ex-international on live television. The 23-year-old Goetze scored Germany's second goal against Italy in Munich on Tuesday to brush off a frustrating injury-riddled season on the bench at Bayern Munich, where he has only made four league starts under Pep Guardiola this season.

His goal in Munich capped an impressive all-round display in the 4-1 win as die Mannschaft bounced back from throwing away a two-goal lead in Saturday's 3-2 defeat to England. But Goetze was left fuming when German TV pundit Mehmet Scholl said Goetze needs "a helping hand to nudge him along" and "must work much, much harder" on his fitness after five months out with a groin strain. "He said that? How did he come to that conclusion? Does he come to (Bayern's) training? Or did he just say that?" fumed Goetze. "If he sees it that way, I will take it to heart. I believe that I train enough." Scholl's comments that Goetze needs a 'helping hand' is a thinly-veiled reference to reports that Liverpool are set to swoop to reunite the disgruntled — AFP



ALSAM CROWNED LOCAL HANDICAPPED CHAMPIONS

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: ALSAM mentally challenged basketball team was crowned champions after beating Al-Itihad 23-13 in the final match Tuesday evening during the second local handicapped championship. Al-Taawon finished in third place after defeating Shuhada 23-19.

Abdallah Al-Haddan won first place in the epee fencing competition, followed by Faisal Al-Kandary in second and Atel Al-Dousary in third. Meanwhile in the junior category, Fahad Al-Bastaki came first, defeating Suleiman Al-Tamimi and Sanad Al-Bouloushi.

Al-Haddad continued his winning streak by taking first place in the flores fencing while

Mousa Al-Ajmi was second and Faisal Al-Kandari third. Meanwhile the junior category for the same weapon category saw Suleiman Al-Tamimi crowned champion while Sanad Al-Beloushi and Abdallah Al-Duraie came in second and third respectively. The bocce games saw Mohammad Al-Mutairi crowned champion in the BC1 category, defeating Shareefa Muhareb while Fahad Al-Babtain ended in third place while the BC2 category was won by Emad Al-Najdi with Shireen Al-Shaheen second and Hani Hussein third. Ayesha Al-Hashash won the BC3 category followed by Athari Al-Muthairi. In the NC4 Amani Isamil was first, Mashaal Al-Ajmi second and Tahani Ismail third.

Kuwait Handicapped Sports Club Honorary

President Al-Sheikha Sheikh Al-Abdallah Al-Sabah lauded the high technical level of the second championship, and the fantastic skills of athletes in the three competitions. She said that these tournaments have a role in improving the players' levels in all departments. She called upon fans to go to the club and encourage athletes in the upcoming tournaments.

Meanwhile, Chairman of the Board of KHSC Shafi Al-Hajiri said the tournament is the best way to prepare athletes for foreign championships the club plans to attend. Al-Hajiri appreciated the role of Information Minister, State Minister for Youth Affairs Salman Sabah Al-Salem Al-Humoud Al-Sabah and PSA Director Genreal Sheikh Ahmad Al-Mansour for their support.





KUWAIT TRAP TEAM WINS GOLD AT ARAB SHOOTING CHAMPIONSHIP

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait's double trap team won the gold medal, while Hamad Al-Afasi won the individual double trap competition during the 12th Arab Shooting Championship being held in

Cairo. Egypt's minister of youth and sports Eng Khalid Abdelaziz opened the championship earlier in the week.

President of the Arab and Kuwait Shooting Federations Eng Duaij Khalaf Al-Otaibi, President of Egypt Olympic Committee Hisham Hatab, President of

the African and Egypt Shooting Federations Maj General Hazimi Hosni and other guests attended the ceremony, along with shooters and ambassadors of the participating countries. Maj Gen Hazim Hosni said 422 shooters from 17 Arab countries are participat-

ing in the championship that will continue until April 4th. He wished them great success and a pleasant stay in Egypt.

Meanwhile, Egypt's Minister of Youth and Sports lauded the Arab shooting and its President Eng Duaij,

Khalaf Al-Otaibi, as well as the significant development it made across the Arab world. He also lauded the supporting role of Kuwait in Arab shooting. He also thanked the Arab Shooting Federation and Egypt's Federation for Organizing the championship in Egypt.

TOP-RANKED DJOKOVIC STRUGGLES TO REACH MIAMI OPEN QUARTERS

MIAMI: World number one Novak Djokovic was struggling to play his best, but held firm when pressed to the brink Tuesday and battled into the ATP and WTA Miami Open quarter-finals. The two-time defending champion outdueled Austrian 14th seed Dominic Thiem 6-3, 6-4, stretching his Miami win streak to 13 matches to book a last-eight date Wednesday against Czech seventh seed Tomas Berdych.

"Straight set win but far from easy. It was a tough match," Djokovic said. "I kept my serves. But I made a lot of double faults and he had me under a lot of pressure." Djokovic, a five-time Miami winner overall, rescued 13 of 14 break points, four of them in the last game of the first set and four more in a dramatic 14-minute final game before hitting a forehand winner on his fourth match-point opportunity.

"I had some luck in that last game where he missed a couple of easy forehands to get the break back and get into the match," Djokovic said. "I stayed tough when it was most needed. The important moments I tried to make him play, make him run." Djokovic won his 11th Grand Slam title two months ago at the Australian Open and has also lifted Doha and Indian Wells trophies this year while Thiem captured titles last month at Acapulco and Buenos Aires.

The 28-year-old Serbian made eight double faults and 29 unforced errors against only two aces and eight winners. "The second serve was not working that well. That was due to the pressure he was imposing. I just didn't have the rhythm," Djokovic said. "Generally I don't get to face that many break points. I'll try not to get myself in those positions as much."

'Felt great'

Berdych outlasted French 10th seed Richard Gasquet 6-4, 3-6, 7-5, but has won only two of 24 meetings with Djokovic, having lost their past nine matches since a 2013 Rome quarter-final victory. They are the only top-10 men still playing except for Japanese sixth seed Kei Nishikori, who downed Spanish 17th seed Roberto Bautista Agut 6-2, 6-4. "I played really well," Nishikori said. "I felt

great out there."

Up next for Nishikori, who won his fourth consecutive Memphis crown last month, is French 16th seed Gael Monfils, who rallied past Bulgarian 26th seed Grigor Dimitrov 6-7 (5/7), 6-3, 6-3. "He is playing really well," Nishikori said. "He is a fun player to play against and we will have a good match." Nishikori won their only prior meeting in 2014 on Halle grass.

"Kei is a good player, very consistent, and he has a win over me," Monfils said. "It will be a great match." Only one of the world's top 12 women, second-ranked Angelique Kerber, is still playing after Romanian fifth seed Simona Halep was ousted 4-6, 6-3, 6-2 by 19th-ranked Swiss Timea Bacsinszky.

"To beat someone who fights as hard as she does, it's something amazing," Bacsinszky said. "I'm happy with it." The 2015 French Open semi-finalist will play for a berth in the final against Russian 15th seed Svetlana Kuznetsova, the 30-year-old two-time Grand Slam winner who ousted top-ranked defending champion Serena Williams in the third round. Kuznetsova, the 2006 Miami champion, beat Russian 30th seed Ekaterina Makarova 6-7 (3/7), 6-4, 6-3. "Just kept fighting," Kuznetsova said. "I was feeling low in energy but I tried to hang in there."

Kyrgios to face Raonic

Australian 24th seed Nick Kyrgios, the youngest top-30 ATP player at age 20, reached the quarter-finals with a 7-6 (7/3), 6-3 victory over Russia's 51st-ranked Andrey Kuznetsov. The Aussie never trailed in the tie-breaker and took the only break of the second set when Kuznetsov double faulted away the fourth game.

Kyrgios, off to a career-best 13-3 start that includes his first ATP title last month at Marseille, next plays Canadian 12th seed Milos Raonic, who ripped Bosnian Damir Dzumhur 6-0, 6-3. Raonic owns a 2-1 rivalry edge but this will be their first match outside the Grand Slams. He won in 2014 at the French Open and Wimbledon but lost to Kyrgios last year at Wimbledon. —AFP



MONTREAL: Goaltender Mike Condon #39 of the Montreal Canadiens makes a pad save while teammate Nathan Beaulieu #28 defends against Kyle Quincey #27 of the Detroit Red Wings during the NHL game at the Bell Centre. — AFP

RED WINGS ON THE BUBBLE TO EXTEND POSTSEASON STREAK

DETROIT: Riley Sheahan was not born the last time the Detroit Red Wings failed to make the playoffs in 1990. In fact, the 24-year-old forward is one of nine players on the Red Wings' roster that wasn't alive back then. Sheahan, and his teammates, young and old, desperately hope to fare well enough in the final five games of the regular season to avoid the dubious distinction of being a part of a streak-busting team.

"We've talked a few times about not wanting to be on that roster that doesn't make the playoffs," Sheahan said. Detroit took a step back in its quest to extend the franchise's postseason streak to 25 on Tuesday night, losing a third-period lead in a 4-3 setback at Montreal.

The Red Wings are a point behind the Boston Bruins for the third and final guaranteed spot from the Atlantic Division. Detroit is tied with Philadelphia for the second wild card in the Eastern Conference, but the Flyers have two more games to earn up to four more points. The Red Wings' run is the tied for the fourth longest in NHL history, one shy of St. Louis' streak from 1980 to 2004. It is longer than the combined active streaks Pittsburgh (nine), Chicago (seven) and the New York Rangers (five) had entering the season.

The San Antonio Spurs have clinched a spot in a 19th straight postseason, the longest active streak in the NBA. New England and Green Bay have the best active playoff streaks in the NFL at seven years each. In baseball, the St. Louis Cardinals have been in the postseason the previous five years for the longest current run.

Buffalo Sabres coach Dan Bylsma, who is from Michigan, has watched the Red Wings' run closely. He was playing hockey for Bowling Green as it began and he coached Pittsburgh against the Red Wings in the 2009 Stanley Cup Finals when they was a win away from winning it all for a fifth time during the streak.

On the verge

"It seems like they've been a contending team my whole life," Bylsma said Monday night. "It's hard to wrap my head around it to provide context, knowing the second-longest streak in the league is going on 10 years." Red Wings general manager Ken Holland, who has led the front office since 1997 and been a part of the organization for 33 seasons, said the storied franchise has maintained the streak even after it had to retool during the salary cap because of one key reason. "We've had a lot of great players," Holland said.

Steve Yzerman was arguably in the prime of his Hall of Fame career when the streak started in 1991, and future Hall of Famer Sergei Fedorov was a rookie, beginning his 13-season run with

the franchise. Hall of Famer Nicklas Lidstrom, one of the top defenseman in league history, started his 20-season run with the team a season later. Four years after retirement, he can reflect on the streak much more than he did as a player.

"When you look at other teams over that span, a lot of them have been going through rebuilding processes and have a chance to start over so to speak," Lidstrom wrote in an e-mail earlier this week. "But the Wings have been able to find new talent and still make the playoffs every year." One of those new talents has been

19-year-old rookie Dylan Larkin, the team's only All-Star this season. Growing up in Michigan, he has no idea what it's like to see the Red Wings end their year when the regular season ends.

"I think everyone is aware of the streak and everyone in the league knows about it, so there's no hiding from it," Larkin said. "But it's not going to help us right now. We've got to earn it. It would be nice to be part of the streak. In my first year, I've realized how tough it is to earn a spot and it's going to be a dog fight until the end." — AP

KOREAN SLUGGER BYUNG HO SETTLES INTO A MAJORS LIFE

FORT MYERS: Byung Ho Park sat at his locker in the Minnesota Twins' spring training clubhouse, sipping a cup of iced coffee, oiling a first baseman's glove and interacting with teammates. He's relaxed. There's no hint of anxiety, which would be natural considering the challenge he faces.

Instead, the Korean slugger is excited about making the transition from his native homeland to the major leagues. His goal is to make noise with his bat while quietly going about his business off the field and getting acclimated to life more than 7,500 miles from Seoul. He likes the warm Florida weather that greeted him at his first big league camp this spring. He hasn't given much thought to how cold it can get in Minnesota in the middle of winter, though that reality is coming.

The Twins hired a full-time translator to help the two-time Korean Baseball Organization MVP deal with a language barrier that Park is diligently working to overcome. The 29-year-old's English is far from perfect - but he is making strides communicating with teammates, coaches and manager Paul Molitor and felt comfortable enough to conduct his first interview in English without translator JD Kim. Hand gestures had to be used at times to communicate with Park, who sometimes had to be paraphrased but was able to express himself well with short responses.

"I'm very excited," Park told The Associated Press, a smile spreading across his face. "Everybody's nice. Teammates, coaches make time to help me." The infielder/designated hitter is not a typical rookie. Park turns 30 on July 10 and comes to the majors after spending nine seasons in the KBO, most of the past five with the Nexen Heroes. He hit 105 home runs

in his final two years, including a career-best 53 with a league-record 146 RBIs in 2015. He also posted personal highs in games (140), at bats (528), runs (129), hits (181), doubles (35), batting average (.343) and slugging percentage (.714). Minnesota, hoping to add some power to the middle of the lineup, envisions Park as a DH and backup first baseman behind Joe Mauer. The Twins paid Nexen \$12.83 million for negotiating rights and signed the slugger to a four-year, \$12 million contract in December. "He's fit in really well. He's had a good camp," Molitor said. "We're seeing a guy who's been around. He's played a lot of baseball, and the confidence he had as a Korean player, we've seen it begin to transfer over here. Every day is kind of a learning experience for him right now."

On and off the field

Park's wife, Ji Yoon Yi, and son, Seung Ri Park, will move to the U.S. after the regular season begins. But outside of acknowledging those plans, the slugger - a national hero and instantly recognizable back home in South Korea - is reluctant to talk much about what he likes to do when he leaves the ball park. "My family will come to Minnesota," Park began before politely cutting the answer short. "I want privacy. Understand? ... Sorry."

Park is joining the majors a year after former Nexen teammate Jung Ho Kang made his big league debut for the Pittsburgh Pirates, hitting .287 with 15 homers and 58 RBIs. While the two of them remain close, Park said he hasn't relied on Kang - still recovering from a knee injury suffered while turning a double play against the Chicago Cubs last September - to be a mentor. —AP



MIAMI: Novak Djokovic, of Serbia, returns to Dominic Thiem during their match at the Miami Open tennis tournament. — AP



ICC WORLD TWENTY20

CLASH OF TITANS: KOHLI VS GAYLE IN T20 SEMIS



MUMBAI: India's Virat Kohli plays a shot during a training session at The Wankhede Cricket Stadium. —AP

MUMBAI: Chris Gayle is determined to grab the World Twenty20 limelight back from in-form Virat Kohli when the West Indies and India clash in a mouthwatering semi-final in Mumbai today. The destructive opener smashed an unbeaten century, which included 11 sixes, in the West Indies' opening win against England but has only batted once since, making just four.

Kohli has been the star of the tournament so far, expertly guiding India through the group stages with a half-century against Pakistan and 82 not out in a crunch win over Australia. With the flat wicket at Mumbai's Wankhede Stadium a dream for batsmen, the last-four showdown between the hosts and 2012 champions is set to be a battle of the big-hitters.

"I am looking to show what Chris Gayle is," Gayle warned ominously on Tuesday. "I have only batted twice but this (semi-final) is a perfect opportunity to actually start the tournament and try and pick up where I left off, get a big one for the team and put them in a winning position," he added. The 36-year-old described Kohli, who is the top run-scorer left in the tournament with 184, as a "world beater" but insisted neither he nor the West Indies were concerned about individual players.

"Chris Gayle will always be positive. It does not matter which bowler is bowling against Chris Gayle," he said. "Chris Gayle would attack. That's the nature of T20 cricket. And that's the nature of Chris Gayle. 'No names, just cricket ball, beat it as hard as possible,'" Gayle added. India's coach Ravi Shastri said his bowlers were aware of the danger posed by Gayle but were determined to tame him. "Bring it on. All our bowlers will target him," said Shastri in his eve-of-match press conference.

The hard yards

The former Indian allrounder meanwhile said that Kohli was on his way to proving himself as one of the greats of the game after a lull in form. "You have to give him the credit for really believing that he can be right up there with the best and for putting in the hard yards because let me tell you know one trains harder than Virat," said Shastri. "Credit must be given to him for putting in that much of hard work and believing in his own ability."

India are looking to take another step on their quest to become the first team to win the World T20 twice, after their triumph in the inaugural 2007 edition, and the first on home soil. They are also bidding to give inspirational 34-year-old captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni—who is thought to be close to announcing his retirement—the chance to out on a high.

India were stunned by New Zealand in their first match but picked up three straight wins to qualify second from Group Two. By contrast, the Windies won their opening three games to top Group One before being shocked by minnows Afghanistan. Gayle believes India have the momentum but warned that "anything was possible".

"India are the favorites. It is always going to be difficult to beat them here. But the West Indies are ready for an upset," he said. The Windies preparations were dealt a blow with the announcement that Andre Fletcher, whose unbeaten 84 fired his team to victory over Sri Lanka, had been ruled out the rest of the tournament with a hamstring injury. Fletcher has been replaced by Lendl Simmons, who gets a second chance to take part having been originally named in the squad but having to withdraw on the eve of the tournament with a bad back. — AFP



MUMBAI: West Indies' cricketer Chris Gayle bats during a practice session ahead of their ICC Twenty20 2016 Cricket World Cup semi-final match against India. —AP

CAPTAIN AFRIDI ISSUES VIDEO APOLOGY FOR T20 FAILURES

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's under-fire captain Shahid Afridi yesterday issued a video message to supporters apologizing for his team's early exit from the World Twenty20, but remained silent on his future following calls for him to retire.

Afridi, nicknamed "Boom Boom" for his fierce hitting, has suffered a drop in form over the past two years and he was unable to steer Pakistan through the group stages of the tournament in India. The 36-year-old has been expected to make an announcement on his future this week, but instead he took to Facebook and Twitter to issue a one-minute apology to the cricket-mad country.

Pointing to the star on his Pakistan jersey, he said: "For this star, and these colors, when I come to a ground, I carry the weight of my people's hopes with me. 'Today, I, Shahid Afridi, apologize to the whole nation for not being able to fulfill the hopes of myself and my team.' The 2009 champions have been widely criticized by fans for a lackluster performance at the World T20 with just one victory, against underperforming Bangladesh, and big losses to India, New Zealand and Australia.

Like Afridi, head coach Waqar Younis is also under intense scrutiny and he offered to resign while offering his own apology at a press conference on Tuesday. Afridi's video met with a mostly positive response by fans posting on his Facebook page.

"Great cricketer Boom boom Afridi... I am Indian... but I like Afridi as sportsman... come on guys support them be with your team," said user Narayan Kawade. Afridi has been a fan favorite since he burst on the scene in 1996, striking a 37-ball century against Sri Lanka in only his second match to set a world record that was unbeaten for 17 years. He became known as a bowling all-rounder in the second half of his career and was instrumental in Pakistan's early successes in Twenty20, including their 2009 victory. — AFP



MOHALI: Pakistan's captain Shahid Afridi walks from the field after being dismissed during the World T20 cricket tournament match between Australia and Pakistan at The Punjab Cricket Stadium Association Stadium. — AFP



MOHALI: This file photograph taken on March 27, 2016, shows India's Yuvraj Singh as he grimaces in pain during the World T20 cricket tournament match between India and Australia at The Punjab Cricket Stadium Association Stadium. — AFP

INJURED YUVRAJ REPLACED WITH BATSMAN PANDEY

MUMBAI: World Twenty20 hosts India will be missing Yuvraj Singh for the rest of the tournament after the all-rounder was ruled out with an ankle injury and replaced by middle order batsman Manish Pandey yesterday. Yuvraj, who played a crucial role in India's triumph in the inaugural edition of the tournament in 2007, twisted his ankle while batting during Sunday's six-wicket victory over Australia that secured India's place in the last four. "It will have an impact, because he has had his moments," India team director Ravi Shastri said of Yuvraj, who also won the player of the tournament award in the team's 2011 50-overs World Cup success at home. "I thought his three overs were brilliant in the last game, that put the check and brakes on the scoring and allowed us to come back into the contest. 'Unfortunately, it is an injury that happened during the

game, when he was taking off and did his ankle a bit and I believe it is a minor tear. We will miss him."

Pandey, 26, will fancy his chances of playing when India take on 2012 champions West Indies in the second semi-final at the Wankhede Stadium on Thursday, although Ajinkya Rahane will also stake his claim for a place in the starting side. Pandey, the first batsman from his country to smash a century in the Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 competition, has played only four one-day internationals and a couple of T20 internationals. "We have not decided yet, Manish has just joined the party yesterday," Shastri said, adding that they will also have to consider Yuvraj's bowling duties. "We will take a look at everything in the nets and then see what will be out best options for tomorrow." — Reuters

LANNING LEADS AUSSIES INTO WOMEN T20 FINAL

NEW DELHI: Captain Meg Lanning's aggressive half century helped holders Australia reach their fourth consecutive women's World Twenty20 final yesterday after beating traditional rivals England by five runs in the first semi-final.

Put in to bat on a hot sunny afternoon in New Delhi, Australia posted a competitive 132 for six after Lanning's 50-ball 55 before their bowlers then restricted England to 127 for seven. Openers Alyssa Healy and Elyse Villani laid a decent platform for Lanning to build on as England bowlers found it hard to contain the steady flow of boundaries.

Healy (25) and Villani (19) played useful cameos but their departure slowed the Aussie charge at the Feroz Shah Kotla stadium. Lanning then took control, starting off cautiously and then changing gear to give the England bowlers a hard time. Lanning, who led Australia to World T20 glory in 2014, registered her eighth T20 fifty as she hit six boundaries.

England tried to claw their way back into the game with some sharp fielding, including two run-outs from direct hits in the outfield. Natalie Sciver had Alex Blackwell trudging back to the dugout after hitting the stumps from deep midwicket, while another direct hit from long-on saw the back of Lanning.

England's reply got off to a healthy start as skipper Charlotte Edwards and Tammy Beaumont put on a 67-run opening stand. Australia however kept their cool, and made the breakthrough when leg-spinner Kristen Beams took the prized wicket of Edwards (31).

Beaumont (32) hung around for a while before falling to medium-pacer Megan Schutt in the 14th over as the wheels started to come off the England chase. Wicketkeeper-

batswoman Sarah Taylor did try to inject life into the chase but her departure for 21 was a major blow to England's chances of repeating their 2009 title-winning performance. Down the order, Katherine Brunt did hit a boundary and a six to raise some hopes but Schutt got her cleaned up to shut the doors on England. Australia will meet the winner of the second semi-final between West Indies and New Zealand in the title showdown in Kolkata on Sunday. — AFP



NEW DELHI: England's wicket keeper Sarah Taylor watches Australia's Meg Lanning (R) play a shot during the World T20 women cricket tournament semi-final match between Australia and England at Feroz Shah Kotla cricket ground. — AFP

WOMEN SEEK WORLD T20 BOOST IN EQUALITY BATTLE

NEW DELHI: From poor pay to lack of training grounds and media coverage, and even sexual harassment, women cricketers have long faced inequality in a multi-billion dollar sport dominated by men. Australia beat England in the Women's World Twenty20 semi-finals in Delhi yesterday, and New Zealand play the West Indies in Mumbai today.

With both semi-finals and Sunday's final in Kolkata immediately preceding the men's equivalents at the same grounds, players are hoping that success in the tournament—and in front of a global TV audience—can inch them further towards parity.

"We are hoping to win and hoping that will kick start more interest in the women's team. So watch this space," said New Zealand captain Suzie Bates who has racked up 171 runs at the tournament in cricket-mad India. "It's about changing people's attitudes and getting the message across," the veteran of World T20s said of the struggles facing the women.

Cricketers say the sport has come a long way since the 1970s when women started playing professionally, and they have fought hard to have access to decent grounds on which to practise, funds for equipment and qualified coaches. The International Cricket Council's 2005 order for men's and women's national governing bodies to merge was hailed by many in the sport as a chance for the women to flourish.

But in India they were left to languish, with the all-powerful Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) reluctant to promote or develop their game or organize frequent international tours, according to Indian sports journalist Neeru Bhatia. "It was really pathetic at one point," Bhatia, The Week magazine's correspondent, said, adding the BCCI started making amends, including introducing contracts, after a recent change in leadership. In New Zealand and neighboring Australia, Bates said she has noticed a shift in attitudes in recent years towards "what the men get the women get too".

Sexual harassment

For the first time at this tournament, for example, the White Ferns have single rooms, rather than sharing with teammates to save costs. But their request for business-class seats was refused for their 17-hour flight from New Zealand to Dubai, a luxury given to the men. In Sri Lanka, the team are trying to put a sexual harassment scandal behind them that skipper Shashikala Siriwardena conceded had damaged their international image.

Sri Lankan cricket sacked three officials last year following allegations that women from the national team were being asked to perform sexual favours to keep their places. "Step by step, they (the cricket board) have solved it. It's a good start for women's cricket," Siriwardena said. "Lots of officials are new after those problems we had in the last two years. Other countries were asking about it. It was damaging for our image."

In Pakistan, women reportedly raised similar allegations about selectors from a city club two years ago, prompting an investigation by the national cricket board. For many, playing professional cricket is tough financially, compared to the men who can earn six figures signing up for glitzy tournaments such as the Indian Premier League. Bates tells of women being forced to choose between their jobs and cricket with New Zealand paying a NZ\$12,000 (8,000 US dollars) annual retainer for its top players.

'Difficult to stomach'

She said she was appalled by the Indian tennis chief's comments this month that women players owed their success to men, which ignited a furious gender row in the sport. "I found that difficult to stomach, as I think many women would," she said, saying women would shine brighter if they were given the same opportunities as men.

But she points to the huge success of the recent inaugural Big Bash T20 league, played in Australia prior to the men's tournament of the same name, as evidence of progress. The lucrative competition, featuring the world's top players, attracted solid television audiences and match attendances. And a similar Women's Cricket Super League is set to take off in England later this year. "I think women's cricket is definitely building and I think it's come so long (far) in such a short amount of time," Australian pace bowler Holly Ferling said. Bangladesh captain Jahanara Alam said TV coverage of her side's matches would boost public support and perhaps attract much-needed sponsors in her impoverished country, whose male players, in comparison, are feted like rock stars. "Even though, we have a good side we are not getting the kind of support we deserve. We are not complaining but it's not enough," Alam said. "(But) I'm sure the day will come, it's not very far, when we will be treated equally." — AFP

FIRST AFRICA CUP QUALIFIERS MOROCCO PRAISED BY COACH

JOHANNESBURG: New Morocco coach Herve Renard hailed his team yesterday after they became the first qualifiers for the 2017 Africa Cup of Nations in Gabon. The 47-year-old who guided Zambia and the Ivory Coast to the most prized African football trophy was speaking after a 2-0 home win over Cape Verde sealed first place in Group F.

"I was amazed by the determination they displayed," he said after a second-half brace from Youssef El Arabi secured victory in Marrakech. "It is important that we maintain in future games the same mindset that was shown when we beat the No 1-ranked African team twice within four days. "What we achieved was con-

siderable, but we must remain calm and begin preparing for the finals," he told reporters.

Renard replaced Badou Zaki as coach of underperforming Morocco a month ago and made a winning debut last Saturday with a 1-0 success in Cape Verde. The coach, who believes wearing a white shirt on match days brings luck, sprang to prominence in 2012 when he steered Zambia to Africa Cup glory.

Pre-tournament no-hopers, the Chipolopolo (Copper Bullets) beat Didier Drogba-captained Ivory Coast on penalties in a Libreville final after 120 goalless minutes. Perennial underachievers Ivory Coast were next to benefit from Renard,

winning the 2015 final against Ghana in Equatorial Guinea on penalties after another goalless decider.

Perfect record

Morocco have set the Frenchman, once a garbage collector and night-time cleaning contractor in Paris, the stiff targets of reaching the 2017 Cup of Nations semi-finals and qualifying for the 2018 World Cup. The Atlas Lions went into back-to-back qualifiers against Cape Verde trailing on goal difference, but now have an unassailable six-point advantage.

They meet third-place Libya away in June and host minnows Sao Tome e Principe in September, and will finish top

on head-to-head records even if they lose both games. A more probable scenario, however, is two Moroccan victories and a perfect 2017 qualifying record that only Group K leaders Senegal could match.

Moroccan stars include El Arabi, scorer of 10 La Liga goals for Granada this season, and Bayern Munich centre-back Mehdi Benatia. Renard chose nine players based in France and five in Spain for his first squad. Moroccans with clubs in Germany, Italy, Netherlands, England and Belgium also made the cut. Two locals, goalkeeper Abdelali M'Hamdi of Renaissance Berkane and defender Mohamed Oulhaj of Raja Casablanca, also got the nod.

While El Arabi scored all three goals in Praia and Marrakech to raise his qualifying total to four, one less than leader Fiston Abdul Razak of Burundi, Benatia missed the Cape Verde games. Morocco won the Africa Cup for the first time 40 years ago in Ethiopia, finishing one point ahead of Guinea in the lone tournament decided by a mini-league. The closest they came to matching that feat was in 2004 when a Zaki-coached team finished runners-up to hosts Tunisia. In six subsequent Cup of Nations, they made four first-round exits, failed to qualify once and were disqualified in 2015 after a late, Ebola virus-linked withdrawal as hosts. — AFP



CORDOBA: Argentina's Lionel Messi celebrates after scoring against Bolivia during their Russia 2018 FIFA World Cup South American Qualifiers' football match. —AFP

MESSI BRINGS UP HIS 50 AS ARGENTINA DOWN BOLIVIA

CORDOBA: Lionel Messi scored his 50th international goal as Argentina defeated Bolivia 2-0 to advance their 2018 World Cup qualification campaign on Tuesday. Barcelona superstar Messi emphatically netted a 30th-minute penalty at the Estadio Mario Kempes in Cordoba as Argentina wrapped up their third consecutive qualifying victory.

Messi's spot-kick followed defender Gabriel Mercado putting Argentina ahead after 20 minutes with his second goal in as many games. The victory cements Argentina's place in the automatic qualification berths of South America's round-robin competition with 11 points from six games. Messi's penalty makes him only the second player in Argentinian history to reach a half century of goals for the two-time World Cup winners.

The 28-year-old striker is now closing in on legendary scorer Gabriel Batistuta's record of 56 goals set between 1991 and 2002. Messi now also needs only one more goal to reach 500 goals for club and country-raising the prospect that he could achieve that milestone with Barcelona this

weekend when the Spanish giants take on Real Madrid in the Clasico.

Messi, meanwhile, was satisfied with yet another Argentina win, which suggests their troubled start to qualifying—which began with a shock 2-0 home defeat to Ecuador—is firmly in the rear view mirror. "Beating Bolivia and Chile is what we wanted," said Messi, referring to last week's hard-fought win over the Chileans in Santiago. "We've come from a low position in the standings to a high one but there is still a long way to go," Messi added.

Messi, meanwhile, said Argentina's game had been hampered by the poor condition of the surface at the Mario Kempes stadium, which has hosted rock concerts recently. "We tried to play our game but the surface didn't help, although that's not an excuse," he said. Argentina coach Gerardo Martino—who had faced calls to quit after last year's Copa America defeat—said his team would embark on their remaining qualifiers with confidence. "A third straight victory gives us tranquility. We are in a good position now," Martino said. —AFP



ASUNCION: Miranda of Brazil, left, fights for the ball with Dario Lezcano of Paraguay, during a World Cup qualifying match. — AP

ALVES RESCUES BRAZIL IN PARAGUAY THRILLER

ASUNCION: Barcelona star Dani Alves scored deep into injury time as Brazil came from behind to draw 2-2 with Paraguay in a pulsating 2018 World Cup qualification battle here Tuesday. Brazil—desperate to bounce back after a demoralizing 2-2 draw with Uruguay on Friday when they squandered a two-goal lead—appeared to be heading to defeat after Dario Lezcano and Edgar Benitez put Paraguay 2-0 up.

But Ricardo Oliveira gave Brazil hope with a right-footed strike to make it 2-1 on 79 minutes and, sensing opportunity, the visitors swarmed forward in search of an equalizer. Two minutes into stoppage time, Chelsea forward Willian advanced down the right flank and fed Alves, who darted into the penalty area purposefully.

Paraguay's defense stood off fatally and the Brazilian fullback curled his shot beyond the fingertips of veteran goalkeeper Justo Villar. Brazil might even have snatched a remarkable victory after the late equalizer. Once again Alves was involved, thumping a dipping shot goalwards which Villar could only parry away. Filipe Luis followed up but was just unable to direct the ball into the net for Brazil in a nerve-jangling scramble inside the six-yard box with just seconds left. Brazil now stands in sixth place in the standings with nine points from six games, just behind fifth-placed Colombia and fourth place Chile, who have 10 points. Argentina are in third place with 11 points, two behind leaders Uruguay and Ecuador. — AFP

CHINA, SYRIA ADVANCE IN WORLD CUP QUALIFYING

HONG KONG: China joined Asian heavyweights Australia and Japan in the next round of World Cup qualifying after stunning Qatar 2-0 in their last Group C match in Xi'an on Tuesday. China were helped in their cause by the Philippines' 3-2 upset of North Korea in Manila. North Korea appeared to be heading for victory and into the next round when they led 2-1, but conceded two goals in the final six minutes to crash out of contention.

China have only qualified for the World Cup once, in 2002, but President Xi Jinping is spearheading a drive to turn the giant Asian country into a footballing power. Their chances of reaching Russia 2018 took an upturn in the 57th minute, when midfielder Huang Bowen buried a shot from outside the penalty box into the corner after a goalmouth scramble.

This was followed by a close-range strike in the 88th minute by Wu Lei, who had come close twice before. Qatar, who will host the 2022 World Cup, were lackluster and showed little threat despite their perfect record in their other qualifying games. China brought greater organization and energy, boosted by a raucous home crowd in the ancient capital of Xi'an.

"My luck was good, it was a team effort," Huang told state broadcaster CCTV, before adding: "Chinese football is gradually improving." Qualification for the next phase was a major turn-around for China, who sacked French coach Alain Perrin after a disappointing 0-0 draw with Hong Kong in November left their campaign hanging by a thread.

Earlier, veteran striker Tim Cahill scored twice as Australia eased past Harry Redknapp's Jordan 5-1, while Borussia Dortmund's Shinji Kagawa also netted a double in Japan's 5-0 win over Syria. In Sydney, Cahill, now 36 and playing for China's Hangzhou Greentown, struck twice in the first half against Jordan to stretch his record Australian tally to 47 goals in 89 games.

Australia's other scorers were home-based midfielder Aaron Mooy, Celtic's Tom Rogic and QPR youngster Massimo Luongo, while Bayer Leverkusen's Robbie Kruse added three assists. Redknapp, in only his second game with Jordan after being hired to steer them into the next phase, said Asian Cup-holders Australia were a "different class." "They had a bit too much quality and they looked a lot fitter than us, they were sharper... there was a big gulf in class tonight," he told reporters.

Late flurry

Meanwhile, war-torn Syria made it through as one of the best second-placed teams despite the



SHAANXI PROVINCE: In this Tuesday, March 29, 2016 photo, China's Wu Lei, left, fights for the ball against Qatar's Abdulaziz Hatem, right during a soccer match at the 2018 World Cup Preliminary Qualification Round 2. — AP

late flurry of goals which consigned them to a 5-0 defeat in Saitama. A freak own goal from Hamdi Al Masri after 17 minutes put Japan in front, before Kagawa's double alongside late strikes from Keisuke Honda and Genki Haraguchi gave the score line gloss.

Japan ended the second round of qualifiers with 27 goals scored and none conceded from their eight games, but Honda warned the Blue Samurais would face tougher challenges ahead. "It was a goal to go through qualifying with no goals against so that was satisfying," AC Milan's Honda told Japan's NHK Television. "But there are still some things we need to work on. We got caught on the counter several times and stronger opponents will make us pay, so we

need to be wary of that." South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Uzbekistan, UAE, Iraq and Thailand are also through to the next phase. UAE held Saudi Arabia 1-1 in Group A to finish second thanks to a 52nd minute equalizer from Omar Abdulrahman after Taisir Al-Jassim had put the visitors ahead in Abu Dhabi. The draw helped the Emiratis join the Saudis, who topped the group, in the next round.

Iran, who played at the World Cup in Brazil, beat Oman 2-0 in Tehran thanks to a Sardar Azmoun brace, while Uzbekistan advanced from Group H after Sardor Rashidov gave them a 1-0 win over Bahrain. Iraq qualified after beating Vietnam 1-0 in Group F, with Mohannad Abdullaheem netting in first-half injury time. — AFP

US BACK ON TRACK IN QUALIFYING WITH 4-0 WIN OVER GUATEMALA

COLUMBUS: American soccer fans fretted for four days: If the United States lost to Guatemala once again, the US would have little chance to qualify for the 2018 World Cup. Their worries quickly vanished Tuesday night. Clint Dempsey scored 12 minutes in, Geoff Cameron, Graham Zusi and Jozy Altidore added goals and the US routed Guatemala 4-0 to get back on track. "I thought we showed a lot of heart," Dempsey said. "We showed a lot of character by dealing with a pressure situation."

Following a dismal 2-0 loss at Guatemala City on Friday night in which Jurgen Klinsmann deployed several players out of their most comfortable positions, the US coach made five lineup changes and shifted two others into their more usual spots. The Americans responded and improved to 27-0-2 at home in qualifying since 2001, including 7-0-2 at Mapfre Stadium.

"Columbus has bailed us out on several occasions," US captain Michael Bradley said. Cameron doubled the lead in the 35th and Zusi, added to the roster on Sunday, made it 3-0 just 18 seconds into the second half. Jozy Altidore capped the scoring in the 89th. "The attitude tonight was outstanding," Klinsmann said. "We were in sync with the wonderful crowd that pushed them from the first second. There was wonderful energy."

'Showed our pride'

Trinidad and Tobago (3-0-1) won 6-0 at home against St Vincent and the Grenadines and leads Group C with 10 points, three ahead of the U.S. (2-1-1). Guatemala (2-2) has six points, and St Vincent (0-4) has been eliminated. Seeking its eighth straight World Cup berth, the US travels to St Vincent on Sept. 2, then finishes the round four days later against Trinidad at Jacksonville, Florida.

"We showed our pride," Dempsey said. "You've got to do that if you want to make it to the World Cup. You've got to show that you want it, and we showed that we wanted it." Dempsey scored his 49th international goal, eight behind Landon Donovan's American record, after Cameron looped a pass just inside the center circle to just inside the penalty area. A streaking

Gyasi Zardes, flanked by Moises Hernandez and Rafael Morales, used the side of his head to knock the ball down. Dempsey ran onto the ball after two bounces and first-timed a 14-yard right-footed shot past goalkeeper Paulo Motta.

Dempsey has six goals in 10 games against Guatemala and a US-record 14 in World Cup qualifying, one more than Donovan. Cameron doubled the lead after Bobby Wood was fouled by Cristian Jimenez, Bradley took the free kick, and Cameron got in front of Carlos Castillo for an 8-yard header, his fourth international goal.

At the start of the second half, Yedlin played the ball to Zardes, who allowed it to bounce off him. Zusi ran in and got off a quick shot for his fourth US goal, his first since October 2013 in a qualifier at Panama. A giveaway by Rodrigo Saravia of the hometown Columbus Crew led to Dempsey feeding Altidore for his 34th US goal.

Klinsmann shifted Cameron to central defense from right back and moved DeAndre

Yedlin to right back from midfield. Defender Steve Birnbaum, midfielders Kyle Beckerman and Zusi, and Zardes were inserted into the lineup along with goalkeeper Brad Guzan, who had been scheduled to rotate with Tim Howard. Dropped were the central defense pairing of Omar Gonzalez and Michael Orozco, and midfielders Mix Diskerud and Alejandro Bedoya, who has a sore ankle. "Every team needs leadership from its veteran players," Klinsmann said.

Midfielder Christian Pulisic, also added to the roster Sunday, made his national team debut in the 81st minute. At 17 years, 193 days, Pulisic became the youngest American in a qualifier. By appearing in the game, Pulisic became ineligible to play for Croatia, the nation of his grandfather. "It's exactly what I expected; very, very physical," he said. "It was a good game. It gives me confidence. I'm going to try and stay grounded and keep doing what I'm doing and become the best player I can." — AP



OHIO: United States players celebrate a goal against Guatemala during the second half of a World Cup qualifying soccer match. —AP

ENGLAND'S SOFT DEFENSE A CONCERN FOR EURO 2016

LONDON: The debate about Wayne Rooney's place in the England team will rumble on for the next 10 weeks, right through to the start of the European Championship in France. But that's not the only serious dilemma England manager Roy Hodgson will be wrestling with as he plots an unlikely end to the country's 50-year drought at major soccer tournaments.

Central defense used to be England's strong suit. Only 10 years ago, Sven-Goran Eriksson was in the enviable position of taking Rio Ferdinand, Jamie Carragher, John Terry and Sol Campbell - four greats of the Premier League - as his center-back options to the 2006 World Cup. Now, there's just a soft center in England's defense. And it's threatening to hamper the blossoming of Hodgson's new breed.

Since England exited the group stage of the World Cup in Brazil in 2014, the team has played 14 games and Hodgson has played a different back four each time. For the last six matches, culminating in the 2-1 loss to the Netherlands on Tuesday, he has had a different central defense.

Defenses, especially the center backs, develop as a unit and a lack of consistency of selection can't help. Indeed, it highlights the concerns he has in that area. While Chris Smalling now appears a sure starter after a solid season at Manchester United, Hodgson has to choose between John Stones, Gary Cahill and - as an outsider - Phil Jagielka as the other center back.

Stones is the future, the 21-year-old heir apparent to Ferdinand with his calmness in possession, vision, deceptive pace and reading of the game. But after starting the season superbly with Everton - proving why Chelsea made three attempts to sign him last offseason - Stones' errors have piled up and he has even been dropped by his club.

Microcosm of season

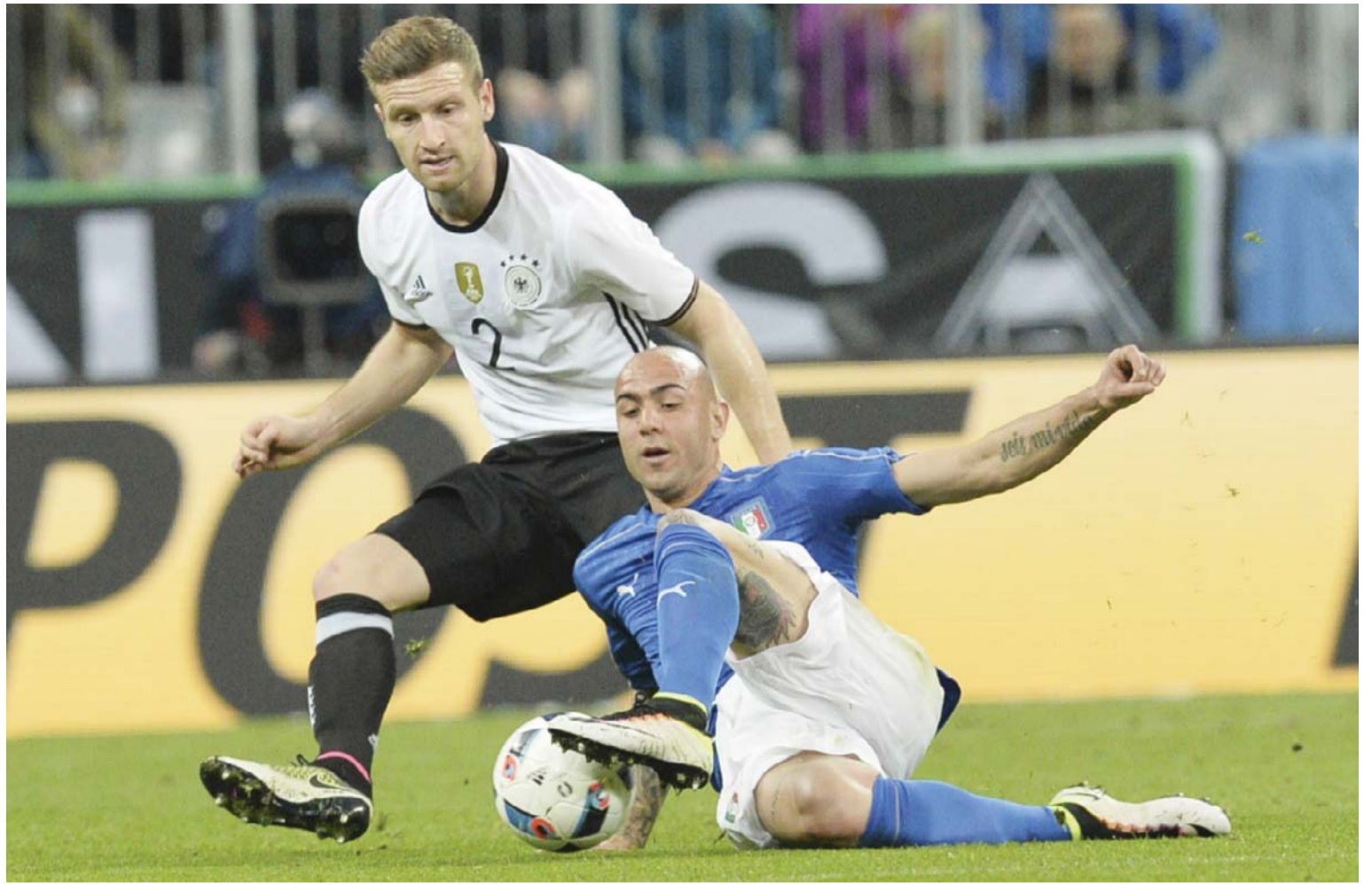
The game against the Netherlands was a microcosm of Stones' season. One minute looking so assured and at ease on the ball,

the next taking too long over a clearance or slipping over to set in motion a chain of events that led to the Dutch equalizer by Vincent Janssen. By the end, Stones' game appeared ragged.

"I don't think I'll think about selecting him or not selecting him on the fact he slipped over on that occasion," Hodgson said, before going on to praise Stones' "assurance" and "comfort" in possession.

England's captain for the night, James Milner, is also impressed by Stones, who has been linked with a summer move to Manchester City despite his dip in form. "He's put himself on a pedestal and people are interested in him," Milner said. "Obviously he had the transfer thing early in the season and when you are playing well, you are up there to be shot down. He's a top-class player." Cahill would be the other, safer option alongside Smalling - it was England's most common partnership in Euro 2016 qualifying - but he has only regained his place in the Chelsea team since a serious injury to Kurt Zouma in early February. And Cahill has found himself exposed by top-class forwards in recent years, including Luis Suarez at the 2014 World Cup. With Terry no longer an option, England lacks leaders and a dominating force at center back. Having the defensively minded Eric Dier as an out-and-out holding midfielder should give England more protection in France but it's an area that opponents will look to exploit. And it doesn't get easier elsewhere in defense. Hodgson is still seemingly unsure whether to go with Nathaniel Clyne or Kyle Walker at right back, and has chosen Ryan Bertrand, Kieran Gibbs and Danny Rose at left back in recent games while still talking positively about Luke Shaw, who could yet return from a broken leg in time for Euro 2016.

In Dele Alli, Harry Kane, Jamie Vardy and returning captain Wayne Rooney, new-look England's options in attack suddenly look healthy for France. Hodgson must now get his defense in shape if England is to be a genuine contender. —AP



MUNICH: Germany's Shkodran Mustafi, left, and Italy's Simone Zaza challenge for the ball during a friendly soccer match between Germany and Italy at the Allianz Arena. —AP

GERMANY WINS 4-1, BEATS ITALY, FOR 1ST TIME IN OVER 20 YEARS

MUNICH: Mario Goetze scored on his international comeback to help Germany beat Italy for the first time in more than 20 years, a 4-1 drubbing in their friendly on Tuesday. Goetze, who had only played 53 minutes for Bayern Munich since a groin injury sustained against Ireland on Oct. 8, headed Germany's second goal before the break after Toni Kroos opened the scoring.

Goetze was also involved in the third before the hour-mark, setting Julian Draxler free to cross for Jonas Hector's first international goal. "I'm so happy. For me it was simply important to be able to play again after such a long injury, simply to be able to do what's fun for me. Then to score as well," Goetze said.

Mesut Ozil made it 4-0 in the 75th with a penalty conceded by Italy goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon. Substitute Stephan El Shaarawy scored Italy's consolation goal in the 83rd with a strike from distance. It was Germany's first win over Italy at the eighth attempt since a 2-0 victory on June 21, 1995. "We did it well. All the players fulfilled their duties well, played with a lot of discipline," Germany coach Joachim Loew said.

Following the 3-2 defeat to England in Berlin on Saturday - Germany's second consecutive loss after losing to France in November - Loew opted for a back-three of Mats Hummels, Antonio Rudiger and Shkodran Mustafi, with Hector and Sebastian Rudy supporting on either flank.

"We trained with the formation a little bit yesterday," Kroos said. "We wanted to come out of a more compact defense. This was a game that we wanted to win, in which we perhaps wanted to make up for something." Thomas Mueller captained the side for the first time on his 70th appearance. Regular captain Bastian Schweinsteiger suffered a partial ligament tear in his knee in training last week and faces a race against time to be fit for the European Championship.

Disappointing Azzurri

Italy rarely threatened reserve goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen though he looked jittery on the rare occasions he was called into action. Ter Stegen was filling in for Manuel Neuer, who had complained of a stomach bug a day after his 30th birthday celebrations on Sunday. Just as he did against England, Kroos broke the deadlock by slotting a precise effort inside the post, his 24th-minute strike giving Buffon little chance.

With the fans sending a Mexican wave around the stadium, Mueller crossed for Goetze to direct the ball inside the right post, leaving Buffon rooted to the spot. "It's always worth supporting Mario Goetze because he can do things that others can't," Loew had said in the buildup. Goetze said Loew's confidence had given him a huge boost.

Riccardo Montolivo went close after the break as Italy emerged with new intent but any hopes of a comeback were dashed in the 59th, when Goetze set Draxler free and the Wolfsburg playmaker pulled the ball back for Hector to score on his 12th appearance. Simone Zaza shot over in response but then Buffon brought down Rudy and Ozil ended the contest.

"It's no fun to lose this way. That's the first thing. But we said we wanted to be better and to measure the gap between us and Germany. Some players paid the price for the physical effort against Spain," Italy coach Antonio Conte said, referring to last Thursday's 1-1 draw in Udine, Italy with the European champions. "Germany are world champions. I think they deserved it today, without a doubt," Conte said. "When they got their chances they used them. We had a few chances but we were inexperienced."

Conte said there was no need for panic or for wholesale changes ahead of Euro 2016. "I can't accuse the guys of anything. They tried everything, gave everything... I don't know what I can change six weeks before naming the squad," said Conte, who is stepping down after the tournament. Leonardo Bonucci was

stretched off after Hector's goal and Conte said the Juventus defender had a "muscle problem." Loew names his initial squad for Euro 2016 on May 17. Security was tight ahead of the game with around 800 police officers on duty. Sniffer dogs checked around the stadium for explosives, bags were searched and body-

checks were conducted. The defeat to England was Germany's first since the 2-0 loss to France in Paris on Nov. 13, when attacks outside the stadium and across the city killed 130 people. The game against the Netherlands in Hannover four days later was called off due to the threat of an attack. —AP



PARIS: France's Ngolo Kante, right, celebrates his goal with France's Andre-Pierre Gignac, during the international friendly soccer match between France and Russia. —AP

KANTE SPARKS IMPRESSIVE FRANCE IN FRIENDLY VICTORY

PARIS: N'Golo Kante celebrated his birthday with a goal on his first international start to set France up for a 4-2 friendly win against Russia on an emotional return to the Stade de France on Tuesday. Kante opened the scoring just eight minutes into his full debut for Les Bleus and Andre-Pierre Gignac doubled the lead before Alexander Kokorin headed in for Russia in the second half.

Dimitri Payet then demonstrated how important he can be to the French side with a stunning free-kick just after the hour mark, and Kingsley Coman netted in equally spectacular fashion after Yuri Zhirkov added another goal for the Russians in an entertaining contest.

Despite the goals conceded, it was a very encouraging win for the Euro 2016 hosts on the night international football came back to the Stade de France just over four months on from the terror attacks that took place just outside the ground and elsewhere in Paris.

"There were lots of good things. Not everything was perfect but this is a team that likes to get forward. The players link up well and we have lots of pace," said France coach Didier Deschamps, whose side had recorded a 3-2 victory in the Netherlands on Friday. "They are only friendly matches but we need to win them. It's good for confidence, for our serenity, but the truth will come in June."

Tight security

With November's events still fresh in the memory, security was extremely tight for a game played in front of a crowd of around 65,000, including French president Francois Hollande, at the stadium that will host the European Championship final in July. And fortunately this time the football took center stage as Deschamps' team displayed why they must be considered among the favorites to win the title on home soil.

Leicester City sensation Kante had made

his France debut from the bench against the Netherlands and was handed a first start here as Deschamps made six changes to his line-up. On his 25th birthday, he needed barely eight minutes to get his first international goal, arriving late in the penalty box and coolly finishing past Igor Akinfeev at the end of an excellent move that featured Paul Pogba, Gignac and Antoine Griezmann.

The second goal arrived nine minutes before half-time, with Gignac now playing his club football in Mexico-putting forward his case for a berth in the France squad as he met Griezmann's free-kick from the left with a fine diving header at the near post.

Payet free-kick

A strong Russia side made up largely of players from leading clubs CSKA Moscow and Zenit St Petersburg were disappointing in the first half but they got a goal back 11 minutes into the second period when Kokorin escaped his marker to head in an Alan Dzagoev free-kick.

Just before that, France had seen substitute Jeremy Mathieu hobble off only eight minutes after his introduction, but two other replacements had a far more positive impact on the game. West Ham United star Payet, like Kante one of the players of the season in the English Premier League, curled in a brilliant free-kick only moments after coming off the bench.

Bayern Munich's teenage winger Coman, also on from the bench, had won the free-kick that led to that goal and he got his name on the scoresheet with a stunning finish from a tight angle after rounding substitute goalkeeper Yuri Lodgynin.

In between those two strikes, Zhirkov netted from an Oleg Shatov cutback but the goals conceded were a rare black mark on a positive night for France in their final match before Deschamps names his 23-man squad for the Euros in May. —AFP

VARDY HOPES GOAL SPREE HELPS LEICESTER TITLE BID

LONDON: Jamie Vardy believes his goal-scoring exploits with England will provide the ideal confidence boost as he returns to the task of firing Leicester to the Premier League title. After terrorizing Premier League defenders throughout a remarkable breakthrough season, Vardy transferred his talents to the international stage with his first two goals for England against Germany and the Netherlands.

The 29-year-old striker's impressive displays likely cemented his place in Roy Hodgson's squad for Euro 2016 and Vardy can now turn his attention to the final weeks of Leicester's astonishing bid to win their first top-flight title.

Claudio Ranieri's team are five points clear of second placed Tottenham with seven games remaining and, with his confidence sky-high, Vardy, who has 21 goals for club and country this term, can't wait to take on Southampton at the King Power Stadium on Sunday.

"I feel brilliant personally. The goals can only be good for my confidence," Vardy said. "Going back to training this week off the back of scoring two goals, hopefully I'll be scoring at the weekend." Vardy's influential cameo and impudent flicked finish in England's 3-2 friendly win over Germany added to the former non-league player's incredible rise to prominence, but he is determined not to let the increased attention distract him.

"I've not seen the goal that many times to be honest with you. I don't really look at my goals after I've scored," Vardy said. "The missus messaged me to say it was all over Twitter but I like to stay relaxed if possible." Vardy admitted he was frustrated that his close-range opener in Tuesday's friendly against the Netherlands didn't prove the

springboard to victory as the Dutch hit back to win 2-1 at Wembley. But he remains convinced Hodgson's men are capable of a good run at the European Championships in France.

Reality check

"We had a massive high at the weekend (against Germany) and losing without putting in the same tempo is very disappointing," he said. "But there are still positive things for us to take from the international week. 'Hopefully we will work on that to put it into action at the Euros.'"

While Vardy's place in the squad looks assured, he still has to elbow his way past Harry Kane, Wayne Rooney, Danny Welbeck and Daniel Sturridge for a coveted spot in the starting line-up against Russia in the Euro opener on June 11. "There's massive competition and that is only good for us. It means everyone is going to be trying that extra two or three percent, which is always important in games," Vardy added.

James Milner, who captained England on Tuesday in the absence of the injured Wayne Rooney, told his team-mates their defeat to the Netherlands, who failed to qualify for the Euros, should serve as a warning they still have much work to do before they can make an impact in France.

"We will have learnt a lot as a group moving forward. It shows the consistency needed if we are going to do well in the tournament," Milner said. "We didn't play with the same intensity we did the other day. We had most of the ball and we didn't move it quick enough. 'It's a reality check. We have shown we can beat anyone with the result against Germany. But we need to be more consistent and do it game in and game out.' —AFP

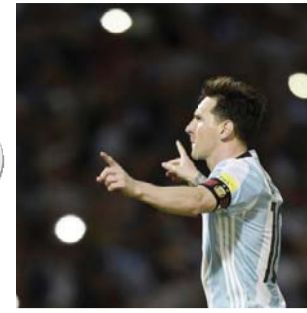


LONDON: England's Jamie Vardy, center, celebrates scoring his side's first goal during the international friendly soccer match between The Netherlands and England at Wembley stadium. —AP

Sports

Messi brings up his 50 as Argentina down Bolivia

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England's defense a concern for Euro

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THURSDAY, MARCH 31, 2016

CLASH OF TITANS: KOHLI V GAYLE IN T20 SEMIS

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NEW DELHI: England's Jason Roy (L) plays a shot past New Zealand's wicketkeeper Luke Ronchi during the World T20 cricket tournament semi-final match between England and New Zealand at The Feroz Shah Kotla Cricket Ground. — AFP

ROY STEERS ENGLAND INTO WORLD T20 FINAL

NEW DELHI: Opener Jason Roy's 78 helped England sail into cricket's World Twenty20 final with a crushing seven-wicket win over New Zealand in the last four in New Delhi yesterday. Chasing 154 for victory, England rode on a brisk 82-run partnership between Roy and Alex Hales to canter home in 17.1 overs after the bowlers had restricted a much-fancied New Zealand to 153 for eight.

Roy rose to the occasion, smashing four boundaries in the very first over against Corey Anderson to set the tone for what turned out to be a perfect chase for the 2010 champions. New Zealand's bowlers, who shone in the team's unbeaten run to the semis, were at the receiving end of some brutal hitting that kept the packed house at Feroz Shah Kotla entertained.

The introduction of spin after six overs of powerplay did little to improve the situation but Mitchell Santner gave the Kiwis their first breakthrough when he got Hales (20) out. Leg-spinner Ish Sodhi also tried to bring some drama back into the game after picking the wickets of Roy and Eoin Morgan (0) to leave himself on a hat-trick, but England made sure they stayed on course.

Jos Buttler (32), who denied Sodhi his hat-trick, and a composed Joe Root (27) then drove England to their second World T20 final, with Buttler hitting a four and two sixes against Sodhi to finish things off in style. Earlier, England's bowlers responded well to their captain's decision to field first to restrict New Zealand after a poor start.

New Zealand lost opener Martin Guptill early but Kane Williamson and Colin Munro counter-attacked with a 74-run partnership to lay a solid foundation before the Kiwis faltered late on. Munro (46) and Williamson (32) proved too hot to handle for England's pacers as the duo took a special liking to Liam Plunkett and Stokes in the opening stages, both of whom came back well in their second spells.

Left-hander Munro smacked Plunkett for three straight boundaries in the sixth over of the innings to set the pace and his reverse-hit for a six against Adil Rashid brought the house down. But Morgan then juggled his bowlers around and off-spinner Moeen Ali's introduction in the 11th over soon saw the back of Williamson.

Plunkett did well in his second spell to deny the dangerous Munro, whose 32-ball knock included seven boundaries and a six. He was denied his fifty when a wild slice went straight into the safe hands of Ali at third man. England's fielders continued to pounce their catches and Morgan dived beautifully at extra cover to get rid of Ross Taylor off Chris Jordan.

The wickets quickly tumbled and New Zealand's run-rate, which had started impressively, plummeted. Stokes was going for a hat-trick near the end after sending back Luke Ronchi for three and the hard-hitting Anderson for 28. The impressive all-rounder ended with figures of 3-26 as New Zealand lost five wickets for 35 runs in the final 30 deliveries of their innings. — AFP

SCOREBOARD

NEW DELHI: Scoreboard of the World Twenty20 semi-final match between England and New Zealand at New Delhi's Feroz Shah Kotla stadium yesterday:

New Zealand:		Bowling:	
M. Guptill c Buttler b Willey	15	Wiley 2-0-17-1, Jordan 4-0-24-1, Plunkett 4-0-38-1, Rashid 4-0-33-0, Stokes 4-0-26-3, Ali 2-0-10-1	
K. Williamson c and b Ali	32		
C. Munro c Ali b Plunkett	46		
C. Anderson c Jordan b Stokes	28		
R. Taylor c Morgan b Jordan	6		
L. Ronchi c Willey b Stokes	3		
G. Elliott not out	4		
M. Santner c Jordan b Stokes	7		
M. McClenaghan run out	1		
Extras (b1, lb4, w6)	11		
Total (for 8 wickets, 20 overs)	153		
Did not bat: A. Milne, I. Sodhi			
Fall of wickets: 1-17 (Guptill), 2-91 (Williamson), 3-107 (Munro), 4-134 (Taylor), 5-139 (Ronchi), 6-139 (Anderson), 7-150 (Santner), 8-153 (McClenaghan)			
		England:	
		J. Roy b Sodhi	78
		A. Hales c Munro b Santner	20
		J. Root not out	27
		E. Morgan lbw Sodhi	0
		J. Buttler not out	32
		Extras (lb 1, w1)	2
		Total (for 3 wickets, 17.1 overs)	159
		Did not bat: B. Stokes, M. Ali, C. Jordan, A. Rashid, D. Willey, L. Plunkett	
		Fall of wickets: 1-82 (Hales), 2-110 (Roy), 3-110 (Morgan)	
		Bowling: Anderson 1-0-16-0, Milne 3-0-27-0, McClenaghan 3-0-24-0, Santner 3.1-0-28-1, Sodhi 4-0-42-2, Elliott 3-0-21-0	
		England won by seven wickets.	

WARRIORS MOVE CLOSER TO SEASON WINS RECORD

OAKLAND: Stephen Curry knocked down six 3-pointers on the way to 26 points, and the Golden State Warriors beat the Washington Wizards 102-94 on Tuesday night to stay on pace for the all-time wins record. Klay Thompson followed back-to-back 40-point games with 16 as Golden State (67-7) stayed a game ahead of the 1995-96 Chicago Bulls' pace during their 72-10 season.

The Warriors must go 6-2 over their final eight games for the record. Draymond Green had 15 points, 16 rebounds and nine assists to just miss back-to-back triple-doubles in the Warriors' 54th straight regular-season home win and 36th consecutive this season. Bradley Beal scored 17 for the Wizards, who lost their fourth straight to Golden State.

ROCKETS 106, CAVALIERS 100

James Harden scored 27 points and Houston rallied from a 20-point deficit to beat Cleveland, which rested LeBron James. Harden scored 18 points in the fourth quarter and Houston outscored Cleveland 35-16 in the period. Dwight Howard's free throw with 2:13 left put Houston ahead 95-94. Harden's 3-pointer made it 98-94 before Kyrie Irving hit a 3-pointer with 1:30 left,

making it a one-point game.

Both teams missed shots on their next possession, but Trevor Ariza's 3-pointer from the corner with 17 seconds left gave Houston a 101-97 lead. Irving scored 31 points for Cleveland, which fell to 1-3 this season and 4-13 over the last two when James doesn't play.

BULLS 98, PACERS 96

Jimmy Butler made a tiebreaking jumper with 3.7 seconds left, and Chicago beat Indiana to snap a four-game losing streak. Nikola Mirotic scored 28 points as Chicago (37-37) got back to .500 and pulled within two games of Indiana for the eighth and final playoff spot in the Eastern Conference. Mirotic made seven 3-pointers, his final one tying it at 96 with 2:19 remaining.

The Pacers missed five shots in the final 2 minutes that would have given them the lead before the Bulls rebounded Pau Gasol's miss with 20 seconds remaining and got the ball to Butler for his 17-footer from the right wing. CJ Miles missed a 3-pointer that would have won it as time expired. Paul George had 20 points and nine rebounds for the Pacers, while Ian Mahinmi had 18 points and seven boards. Butler finished with 14 points, and Gasol added 10 points and 11 rebounds.

PISTONS 88, THUNDER 82

Marcus Morris scored 24 points, and Detroit took advantage of Kevin Durant's absence in a victory over Oklahoma City. The Thunder rested Durant and Serge Ibaka, and Oklahoma City was held to only nine points in the third period en route to its lowest-scoring game of the season. The Thunder rallied from a 15-point deficit, closing the gap to just one in the fourth, but Detroit was able to hold on late for another victory in its push for a playoff spot. The Thunder had their eight-game winning streak snapped. Russell Westbrook led Oklahoma City with 24 points on 8-of-28 shooting. Andre Drummond had 13 points and 15 rebounds for the Pistons, and Tobias Harris added 17 points.

HORNETS 100, 76ERS 85

Nicolas Batum had 19 points, 12 rebounds and 12 assists for his second triple-double of the season, leading Charlotte over Philadelphia. Cody Zeller added 18 points and 11 boards for Charlotte, which set a franchise record for wins in a month with its 13th victory in March. The Hornets, who entered the game in sixth place in the Eastern Conference,

also inched closer to clinching their first playoff spot in two years and just second postseason berth in the last 13 years. Charlotte hasn't won a playoff series, though, since 2002. The teams both have off until Friday, when they will play again in Charlotte for the fourth and final meeting of the season. Short-handed Philadelphia, which dressed just 10 players, lost its 10th straight game and 23rd in the last 24. Robert Covington had 18 points.

MAGIC 139, NETS 105

Aaron Gordon had 20 points and Elfrid Payton had 11 points and 12 assists as the Magic scored a season high in defeating Brooklyn. Victor Oladipo and Evan Fournier had their moments and backup center Dewayne Dedmon, playing in place of injured Nikola Vucevic, scored 15 points. The Magic had eight players in double figures, including backups Andrew Nicholson with 24 and Jason Smith with 14. The Nets were led by reserve forward Thomas Robinson, who scored 18 points, after being inserted into the starting lineup in place of Thaddeus Young. Brook Lopez scored just five points in the first half and did not play in the second half. — AP



OAKLAND: JJ Hickson Golden State Warriors' Stephen Curry (30) scores past Washington Wizards' Ramon Sessions, right, Marcus Thornton (15) and JJ Hickson, left, during the second half of an NBA basketball game. — AP

Kuwait Times BUSINESS

THURSDAY, MARCH 31, 2016

Low oil prices challenge liquidity conditions of GCC banks: Moody's Page 25

Ooredoo Kuwait to purchase 99% of FASTtelco's shares Page 26



NBK increases its capital by 6.5%

GLOBAL REPORTS KD16.4 MILLION REVENUES IN 2015

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KUWAIT: KIPCO's Vice Chairman (Executive) Faisal Al-Ayyar speaks at the annual Shafafiyah (transparency) Investors' Forum yesterday.

KIPCO ON TRACK TO DOUBLE ITS PROFIT BY 2018

'WE WILL MOVE FORWARD CONFIDENTLY DESPITE 2016'S DIFFICULT CONDITIONS'



KIPCO's Vice Chairman (Executive) Faisal Al-Ayyar (right).

KUWAIT: At its annual Investors' Forum, KIPCO - the Kuwait Projects Company - said that while 2016's difficult trading conditions are expected to result in revenue growth in the high single digits for KIPCO, the company remains on track to double its 2014 profits by 2018. This is driven by the continued growth of the company's core businesses, which are forecast to generally deliver revenue growth in the two digits in 2016.

At the company's annual Shafafiyah (transparency) Investors' Forum, KIPCO presented a review of 2015 and its outlook for 2016 to 2018 to an audience of shareholders, financial analysts and institutional investors.

The forum followed the company's General Assembly meeting where KIPCO's shareholders approved a cash dividend of 25 per cent (25 fils per share). As part of its review, KIPCO said that it has maintained its

exemplary track record and that 2015 was its twenty-fourth consecutive year of profitability. It also highlighted the company's strengthened funding profile after raising \$500 million under KIPCO's Euro Medium Term Note (EMTN) Program and extending the average debt maturity to 3.6 years. This will result in an annual interest saving of \$20 million from 2017 onwards.

KIPCO's net profit in 2015 increased 15 per cent to KD 53.03 million (\$175 million), compared to KD 46.1 million (\$152 million) in 2014. The company's total revenue from continuing operations increased 4 per cent in 2015 to stand at KD 621 million (\$2.1 billion), compared to the KD 598 million (\$2 billion) reported in 2014.

Also as part of its 2015 review, KIPCO said that Burgan Bank - one of the company's largest revenue makers - continues to grow robustly. As a result of efficient capital man-



KUWAIT: KIPCO shareholders, financial analysts and institutional investors attend the company's annual Shafafiyah Investors' Forum yesterday.

agement under Basel III, the bank's capital adequacy is expected to be at around 16.5 percent by the end of March 2016. During 2015, the bank received an A+ rating from Fitch and opened a representative office in the UAE.

For OSN, the pay-tv company secured a \$400 million syndicated loan, reflecting investor confidence in its business model. The company's subscriber base and revenue increased 2.6 and 2.5 times respectively from 2010 to 2015, and 2015 also saw the payment of \$100 million in dividends to OSN's shareholders.

A mega real estate development was announced in 2015 and construction will begin in 2016 on prime land in the area of Daiya, at the heart of Kuwait City. The project, which will cost close to \$2.5 billion when completed, will have a leasable area of around 400,000 sq.m. and comprise

mostly of residential units, alongside restaurants, health clubs, clinics, retail units and a hotel.

For SADAFCO, the dairy company has increased its total shareholder return by 2.3 times over the past five years, standing at over 20 per cent in return on equity in 2015. This success is driven by the company's leading market position, large distribution network and strong operational performance.

In its outlook for 2016, KIPCO said it expects that its portfolio of core companies - which includes Burgan Bank, OSN, Gulf Insurance Group, United Real Estate and KAMCO - will continue to deliver revenue growth over the next year, generally in the double digits.

KIPCO's Vice Chairman (Executive), Faisal Al-Ayyar said: "Over the past two years, we have seen a consistent double digit finan-

cial growth trend for KIPCO's core businesses. In last year's Shafafiyah Investors' Forum, we promised to double our 2014 profit by 2018, and our companies are on track to deliver this. Revenue for Burgan Bank increased 12 percent in 2015, while that of both OSN and Gulf Insurance Group was up 11 percent, and United Real Estate raised its revenue by 17 percent. These results are a strong indication that our core companies will continue to deliver growth in the double digits."

Commenting on the outlook for 2016, Al-Ayyar said: "We enter this year with the expectation that it will continue to bring difficult trading conditions. While KIPCO is moving forward confidently along the track of doubling its 2014 profit by 2018, we expect these global market circumstances to result in revenue growth in the high single digit for KIPCO in 2016."

OECD: WEAK GLOBAL ECONOMY TO THREATEN GOVT FINANCES

WASHINGTON: Sluggish global growth threatens to keep governments around the world from being able to pay pensions and bondholders, the chief economist of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development said yesterday. The OECD, representing mostly advanced economies, has lowered its forecast for worldwide economic growth to 3 percent this year from the 3.3 percent it estimated in November. When growth is weak, governments collect less revenue and struggle to pay pensioners and meet all their debt payments. "These kinds of numbers mean we are not going to make good on these commitments," Catherine Mann, the group's chief economist, told reporters.

She said that to jump-start growth, countries need continued stimulus from central banks, government spending and tax policies that encourage expansion and economic reforms, such as making regulations more consistent from country to country. Since the financial crisis, the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and OECD have repeatedly overestimated the strength of the global economic recovery. Mann suggested that the economy no longer works the way most economists were taught: Low unemployment in the United States and other countries has not triggered strong pay growth, for example. Low interest rates have not encouraged businesses to invest. And easy-money policies by the world's central banks have not ignited inflation.

"The relationships are broken," she said. Mann asked her team to consider the new economic realities when it issued its lower economic growth forecast in February. She said she is confident the OECD won't have to downgrade its estimates when it releases its next forecast in June.—AP



JAKARTA: Motorists travel on their way to downtown Jakarta yesterday. Indonesia's economy has lagged for some time as demand, especially from China, for key commodity exports has waned.—AFP

BOEING TO CUT 4,000 JOBS IN COMMERCIAL AIRPLANES DIVISION

NEW YORK: US aerospace giant Boeing will trim about 4,000 jobs in its commercial airplanes division as it seeks to cut costs and boost productivity, a company spokesman told AFP yesterday. Staffing reductions through mid-year, including hundreds of executives and managers, will be done through attrition and voluntary layoffs, leaving open jobs unfilled, spokesman Doug Alder said in an email.

"We'll only use involuntary layoffs as a last resort," he said. The payroll reduction is part of a streamlining announced last month that includes non-labor cost savings and supply-chain savings, he noted. At the end of February, Boeing's commercial airplanes division had 82,310 employees. The Chicago-based company, which includes defense and space divisions, among others, employed 159,250 people.

Shares in Dow member Boeing dipped 0.3 percent to 130.50 in morning trade. Boeing, facing stiff competition from European aircraft maker Airbus, is in the process of

transitioning aircraft production, such as the 737, its best-selling jet, as it introduces the new 737 MAX and its long-range 777 to the new 777X. Boeing had a record 762 commercial aircraft deliveries in 2015, topping Airbus, but its rival had a substantial edge in net orders last year, at 1,080 versus 768 for Boeing.

As of March 22, Boeing had 107 net airplane orders this year amid a robust air travel industry that is seeing strong demand for planes. The job cuts reflect the company's positioning even as orders roll in, another Boeing spokesman said. "It's all part of year-over-year growth in productivity and driving costs down. That sort of effort never stops. Just because we're building more doesn't mean we shouldn't always become more productive," spokesman Bernard Choi told AFP. In January, Boeing forecast deliveries would decline this year for the first time since 2010, to between 740 and 745. It also predicted flat to slightly lower 2016 revenues and core earnings per share.—AFP

NBK INCREASES ITS CAPITAL BY 6.5%

BANK TO MAINTAIN HEALTHY CAPITALIZATION ON BASEL 3 RULES

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait's (NBK) board of directors has agreed to increase the bank's capital through a 6.5 percent rights issue. The bank will issue 343.96 million shares at 400 fils per share. The issuance price includes an issuance premium of 300 fils per share on top of the par value of 100 fils per share.

Following the capital increase, NBK's issued and paid-in capital will reach KD 563.57 million distributed over 5,635.66 million shares. The capital increase will take place following final approvals of all regulatory authorities. The rights issue will be offered to the shareholders registered in the bank's records one day prior to the date of calling the capital increase.

Earlier, NBK received all necessary approvals from regulatory authorities as well as its general assembly to increase the bank's authorized capital to KD 600 million. This step is in line with the bank's

plans to maintain healthy capitalization ratios following the implementation of Basel 3 and the regulations of the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) in this regard. Also, this increase will allow the bank to continue capturing growth opportunities, especially in Kuwait as the government's capital spending plan remains intact and as NBK continues to be the market leader in the project finance segment.

It is worth mentioning that in 2015, NBK issued \$ 700 million in additional Tier 1 securities and KD 125 million in Tier 2 subordinated bonds. The bank's capital adequacy ratio stood at 16.8 percent as of end-December 2015, comfortably above regulatory requirements.

NBK continues to enjoy collectively the highest ratings among all banks in the Middle East from the three international rating agencies Moody's, Fitch Ratings and Standard and Poor's. The Bank's ratings are



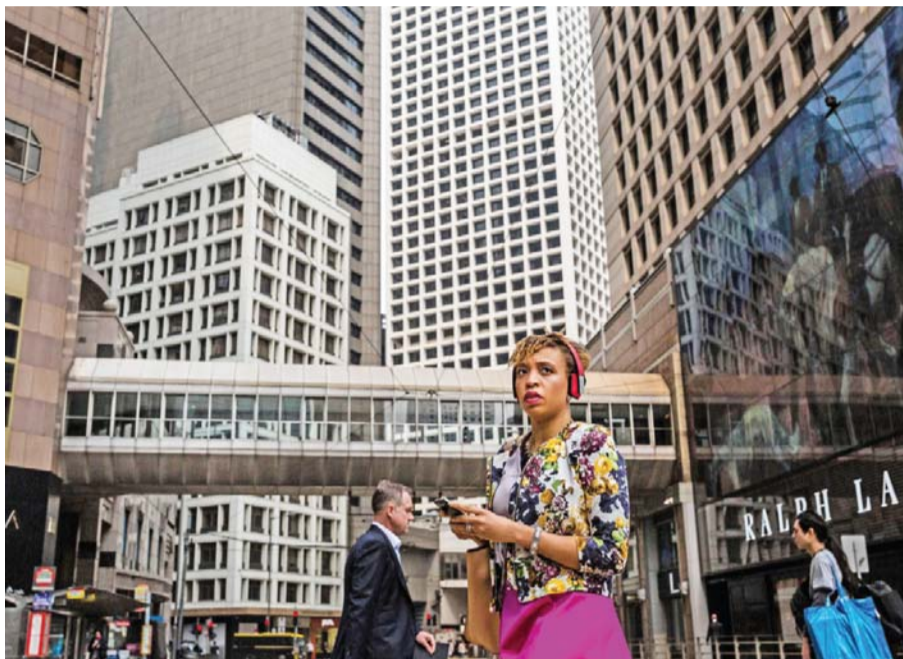
supported by its high capitalization, prudent lending policies, and its disciplined approach to risk management, in addition to its highly recognized and very stable management team. NBK was also named among Global Finance's list of the 50 safest banks in the world for the tenth consecutive time. NBK enjoys the widest banking

presence with a local and international network reaching 4 continents. NBK's international presence spans many of the world's leading financial centers including New York, Europe, GCC, Middle East, Singapore as well as China (Shanghai).

NBK was founded in 1952 as the first indigenous bank and the first joint stock

company in Kuwait and the Gulf Region. NBK reported profits of \$ 929.7 million (KD 282.2 million) for 2015 which was among the highest in the Arab region. NBK's total assets were \$77.8 billion (KD 23.6 billion) at the end of 2015, while shareholder equity stood at \$ 8.6 billion (KD 2.6 billion).

NBK is the largest financial institution in Kuwait with effective market dominance in the commercial banking market and has been consistently awarded the highest credit rating of all banks in the region from Moody's, Standard & Poor's, and Fitch Ratings. NBK also stands out in terms of its local and international network, which includes branches, subsidiaries and representative offices in China, Geneva, London, Paris, New York, and Singapore alongside its regional presence in Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Turkey, and the UAE.



HONG KONG: Pedestrians cross a road in the Central district of Hong Kong yesterday. —AFP

ARAMCO CEO SAYS NO PROJECTS CANCELLED, KHURAI READY IN 2018

AL-AHSA: Saudi Aramco was continuing to work on both its upstream and downstream projects without any cancellations, with its Khurais scheme expected to come online in 2018, the chief executive of the state-owned oil giant said yesterday.

Global oil majors and Saudi Arabia have been paring back investments to cope with the continuing lower oil price environment. The kingdom is the world's largest exporter of crude oil. "Until now, our projects are continuing in downstream, upstream, there are no projects that have been cancelled from our programs," Amin Nasser told reporters

on the sidelines of a finance event.

Asked if there will be any delay in exploration activities, Nasser said: "Exploration activities are continuing. We have one rig in the Red Sea in the shallow water." He added work on the clean fuels project in Ras Tanura is ongoing, while the completion of the Khurais oil field expansion would be in 2018. Aramco revived bidding for the cleaner fuels project at its biggest oil refinery, sources familiar with the plan told Reuters last month, following speculation that lower oil prices would force the project's cancellation. — Reuters

BUNDESBANK CONCERNED ABOUT NEGATIVE INTEREST RATES

FRANKFURT: The German central bank, or Bundesbank, is worried that private savers may soon face negative interest rates on their bank accounts, board member Andreas Dombret warned in a magazine interview yesterday.

"The banks and savings banks I speak to want to do everything to avoid that," Dombret told Der Spiegel news magazine in its online edition. "But the longer the current interest rate environment lasts, the higher the possibility that they might pass on the negative rates" to customers, Dombret said. "As the supervisory authority, we don't tell the banks what to do. Every bank and savings bank must decide for itself." In a bid to push up chronically low inflation in the euro area, the European Central Bank slashed its main refinancing rate down to zero this month and lowered its deposit rate to minus 0.40 percent. The Bundesbank has made no secret of its opposition to the ECB's decision to bring its key rates down

so low for such a long period.

Bundesbank president Jens Weidmann said he was not convinced by the ECB's latest policy moves. With low interest rates offering little incentive to savers and weighing on banks' profitability, board member Dombret noted that "lots of banks have increased their fees to customers or are thinking about increasing them." This could be in the area of cash withdrawals, cheque card issue or other services, he said.

As savers look for alternative returns on their money, the Bundesbank board member suggested that low interest rates could eventually lead to the emergence of a real estate bubble.

"Real estate prices have risen sharply in metropolitan areas in recent years," he said. "That's why I have more reservations than in previous years," Dombret said, urging banks to "be very cautious and weigh up their real estate credit decisions very carefully." — AFP

JAPAN'S ABE AIMS TO DOUBLE TOURIST VISITS BY 2020

TOKYO: Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe set yesterday an ambitious target to double the number of foreign visitors and the amount of money they spend in the country by 2020 to breathe life into a flagging economy. Since taking office in late 2012, Abe's administration has relaxed visa requirements for several Asian countries, which has notably led to an influx of Chinese visitors. An ensuing boom in tourism has been one of the few bright spots of his structural reform agenda.

Abe is looking to reap further benefits from inbound tourism as Tokyo prepares to host the Olympics in 2020. Luring more tourists could also help ease concerns about consistently weak domestic consumption and Japan's declining population.

"Today we have decided a new vision for tourism," Abe said after a meeting with government ministers.

"Tourism is an important part of our economic growth strategy, of revitalising local economies and of our goal to raise gross domestic product to 600 trillion yen," Abe aims to attract 40 million visitors to Japan,

which would be about twice as much as the number of tourists who entered Japan last year, a statement showed.

In 2015, tourists spent 3.5 trillion yen (\$31.2 billion) in Japan, and Abe wants to more than double that amount to 8 trillion yen by 2020 by relaxing visa requirements further and improving flight access, the statement showed.

Abe will also try to promote more of the country's national treasures and public parks to guests from overseas.

The government is also targeting 60 million visitors and 15 trillion yen in tourist spending by 2030, the statement showed. The number of inbound tourists has been hitting record levels since the government began relaxing visa requirements.

The benefit was initially seen at department stores in Tokyo, where Chinese tourists bought electronics and clothes in bulk to re-sell in their home country. The boost to retail sales is now starting to spread to regional economies as more tourists visit temples and shrines in rural areas. — Reuters

INDIA'S TATA STEEL SEEKS BRITISH EXIT

THOUSANDS OF JOBS AT STAKE

LONDON/MUMBAI: India's Tata Steel is seeking to sell Britain's biggest steelmaking business, putting thousands of jobs at risk in an industry that once dominated Britain but has been brought low by falling prices, high costs and Chinese competition.

After a marathon board meeting in Mumbai, Tata said it would draw a line under its almost decade-long foray into Britain's steel industry, exiting the country entirely.

The move could have an impact on Britain's closely fought vote in three months over whether to stay in the European Union. Britain's traditionally anti-EU media have blamed Brussels for preventing London from taking greater steps to protect the industry, although supporters of membership say EU policy is not responsible for the industry's plight.

Tata, which employs about 15,000 people in Britain at sites including the giant Port Talbot plant in Wales, said its financial performance in Britain had deteriorated sharply in recent months and it wanted to exit as quickly as possible. The British government and the Welsh authorities said they were looking at all viable options to protect the steel industry, which has already shed thousands of jobs in just the last year. "We are, and have, and continue to look at all options, and I mean all options. But what we first want to achieve from Tata is this period of time to allow a proper sale process," Anna Soubry, a minister for business, told BBC radio.

She said she could not rule out the possibility of the government buying the plants until a new owner could be found. The sale ramps up pressure on Prime Minister David Cameron's right-leaning Conservative government, which has sought to cultivate closer ties with China.

Cameron's fate hangs in the balance when Britain votes on whether to stay in the EU in May, and his government has sought to avoid controversies during the runup to the vote. The Conservatives are resented in Britain's industrial heartlands for the demise of mining and manufacturing under former prime minister Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s. The government has said it is taking measures to help the steel sector but the fundamental problem remained the halving of steel prices in the past year, caused by overcapacity in China.

Once a driver of the economy through the 19th and 20th centuries, many of Britain's former steel towns have been decimated by the indus-



PORT TALBOT: A picture shows the Tata Steel steel plant at Port Talbot, South Wales yesterday. Indian steel giant Tata Steel yesterday put its British business up for sale, placing thousands of jobs at risk and striking a heavy blow to the crisis-hit steel industry. — AFP

try's decline since its peak in the 1970s. The leader of the opposition Labour party, Jeremy Corbyn, called on the government to take a public stake in the industry which he called "the cornerstone of our manufacturing sector".

Tata Steel bought Anglo-Dutch steelmaker Corus in 2007 and has since struggled to turn the giant around. Port Talbot, though far from its 1960s peak, still employs about 4,000 people, and Tata is one of the most significant private companies in Wales.

Unions welcomed the decision not to shutter the plants but called on Tata to be a "responsible seller" and on the government to play its role. "We don't just want more warm words. We want a detailed plan of action to find buyers and build confidence in potential investors in UK steel," Roy Rickhuss, general secretary of steelworkers' trade union Community, said. Steelmakers in Britain pay some of the highest energy costs and green taxes in the world and are also struggling to compete with record Chinese steel imports, which they say have been unfairly subsidised by Beijing.

TATA'S TROUBLES

Most steel companies, including top pro-

ducer ArcelorMittal, have been hit by plunging prices due to overcapacity in China, the world's biggest steel market, making Tata's task of finding a buyer all the more difficult. Tata Steel is the second-largest steel producer in Europe with a diversified presence across the continent. It has a crude steel production capacity of over 18 million tonnes per annum in Europe, but only 14 mtpa is operational.

Two of its three main European units, Port Talbot and Scunthorpe, are in Britain, with the remaining operations in the Netherlands. Its share price has halved in the past five years, a period in which it recorded asset impairment of more than \$2.88 billion related to the UK business.

The stock opened about 2 percent higher in Mumbai yesterday, as investors welcomed the decision to shed a burden on its Indian operation. For the year ending March 2015, the company took a write-down of a little over a billion dollars in its consolidated numbers. However, the tide seems to be turning for the India operations. Tata also said it was still in talks with investment firm Greybull Capital over the sale of its British long products unit, which makes steel for use in construction. — Reuters

CHINA OVERCAPACITY DARKENS ASIA'S GROWTH PROSPECTS: ADB

BEIJING: Huge industrial overcapacity in China will drag on both the country's and the region's growth this year, the Asian Development Bank said yesterday, cutting its forecast for the world's second-largest economy.

China's GDP growth is expected to slow to 6.5 percent in 2016, the ADB said in its flagship Asian Development Outlook, lowering its December forecast of 6.7 percent.

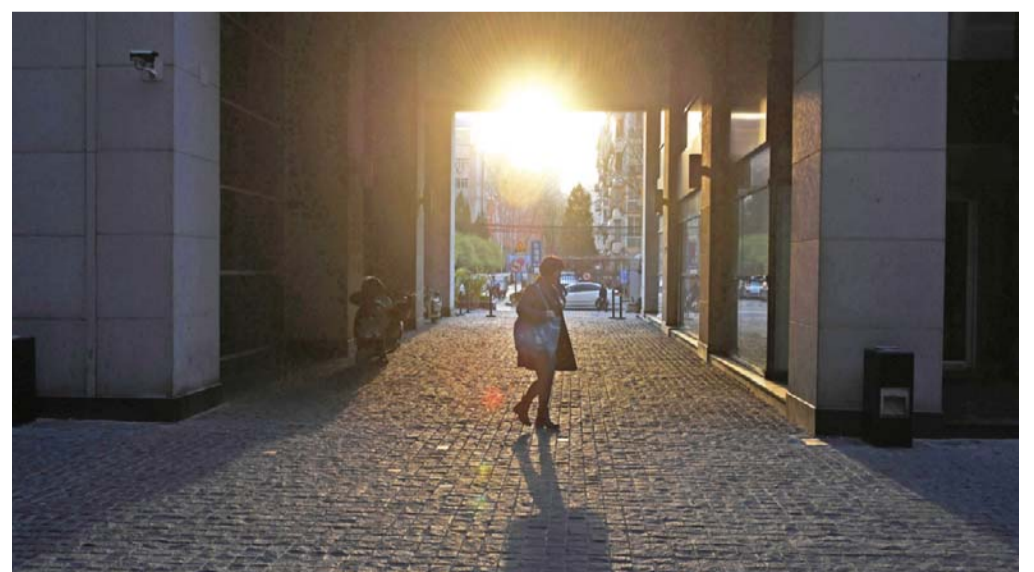
With China casting its shadow over the continent, the bank also reduced its prediction for Asia's growth to 5.7 percent, down from 6.0 percent and slower than last year's actual 5.9 percent expansion. China's "growth moderation and uneven global recovery are weighing down overall growth in Asia," said the ADB's chief economist Shang-Jin Wei.

The document comes at a time of global uncertainty about Beijing's ability to make much-needed cuts to its steel, coal, and cement sectors and manage a tough economic transition to a more consumer-led model.

China's economy grew at its slowest pace for a quarter-century last year, and concerns have been mounting it could soften further after Beijing set a 6.5-7 percent target for 2016. "Weak external demand and excess capacity in some sectors, on top of a shrinking labour force and rising wages, continue to induce a gradual decline in the PRC's growth rate," Wei said.

A "sharp slowdown" in Chinese real-estate investment will be a "drag" on the economy, the bank added, although it would be partly offset by consumption and green investment.

The ADB's China economics head Jurgen Conrad said the government "urgently needed" to accelerate cuts to excess capacity in real-estate and manufacturing, and cited high corporate debt as another challenge. "Supply-side reform is what



BEIJING: A woman walks through a residential complex in Beijing yesterday. Huge industrial overcapacity in China will drag on both the country's and the region's growth this year, the Asian Development Bank said yesterday, cutting its forecast for the world's second-largest economy. —AFP

China needs and what Asia needs," he said, adding that Beijing would not use "shock therapy" to make changes. Elsewhere across the continent the prospects were brighter, however, according to the Manila-based bank.

The ADB predicted growth in India, the fastest-expanding large economy in the world, would slow to 7.4 percent, from 7.6 percent in 2015, but would accelerate again to 7.8 percent in 2017. "India is growing faster now than China... and is likely to remain so in the near future," Wei said, saying structural reforms and improvements to labour market

regulations would help boost activity. Indonesia will lead Southeast Asia as Jakarta ploughs cash into infrastructure and encourages private investment, the ADB added, predicting GDP would grow 5.2 percent this year, up from 4.8 percent in 2015. China's heavy industries, many of them state-owned, have provided mass employment for tens of millions of people but are increasingly loss-making and debt-ridden. Shutting inefficient companies could cause further problems, the bank said, potentially leading to 3.6 million job losses and drying up tax revenues for local governments. —AFP



ALL-NEW BMW 7 SERIES TAKES DESIGN, ENGINEERING INNOVATION TO NEW LEVEL

KUWAIT: The new BMW 7 Series is an outstanding example of technical innovation of the highest level coupled with contemporary luxury. Created through the concept of 'Technological Poetry' one sees the perfect marriage between advanced technology and its interpretation into design. Dynamic proportions, precise lines and sculptured surfaces: The BMW 7 Series shows typical BMW design in its most elegant form. Be it in the forward-surfing front, the extended side view or powerful rear, the BMW 7 Series radiates its natural and authoritative presence from every angle.

"If you ever wanted quality craftsmanship at a supreme level then this is the car for you. Evidence of this is the Floating Design Mirror: The side mirrors appear to grow organically out of the window outline. Modern and elegant in their effect, the aerodynamics are also enhanced," said Yousef Al-Qatami, General Manager of Ali Alghanim & Sons Automotive. "Other examples of genuine detail refinements are the Sky Lounge, a panorama glass roof welcoming passengers to enjoy the day or star-filled night sky, as illuminated light patterns provide a luxurious interior light ambience in six colours," he added.

Active air stream kidney grille with vertical slats in Chrome, the high-precision and powerfully distinctive appearance of

the wheel design and the seamlessly incorporated Hofmeister kink makes this new model distinctive. Looking inside, high-quality materials such as chrome with interior trims in Poplar Grain Grey fine-wood finish and seats with upholstery such as exclusive 'Nappa' leather in Ivory White create a harmonious combination. Also displaying a high level of handcraft is the instrument panel decorated by a continuous seam.

Nothing beats the new BMW 7 Series for comfort and luxury. A host of new BMW ConnectedDrive driver assistance features include the intuitive Touch Command: a 7-inch tablet positioned in the rear of the vehicle, offers passengers a completely new experience in controlling multiple in-car functions. Through Touch Command, rear passengers are able to control in-car infotainment and comfort features, such as the new BMW 7 Series Vitality Program, which offers luxurious in-seat massage options. A unique Gesture Control function, which offers those inside the vehicle with the option to increase the volume of the radio only by gesturing at the screen, is also one of the new technology features.

Whichever seat you occupy in the BMW 7 Series, you feel the contemporary and future-orientated atmosphere of luxurious wellbeing. A virtuosic composition of material, light, shape, colour and innov-



ative technologies to accompany people who wish to move things - be it from the rear or from the driver's seat. The search

for pioneering innovations is the driving force for the BMW engineers. With functions such as BMW Gesture Control, BMW

Laserlight or Remote Control Parking, they are setting further future-orientated standards in the BMW 7 Series. In laser high beam mode, BMW Laserlight illuminates a range of up to 600 metres nearly twice as far as that of conventional headlights. With the use of this new headlight technology, BMW Laserlight improves safety with better night time visibility.

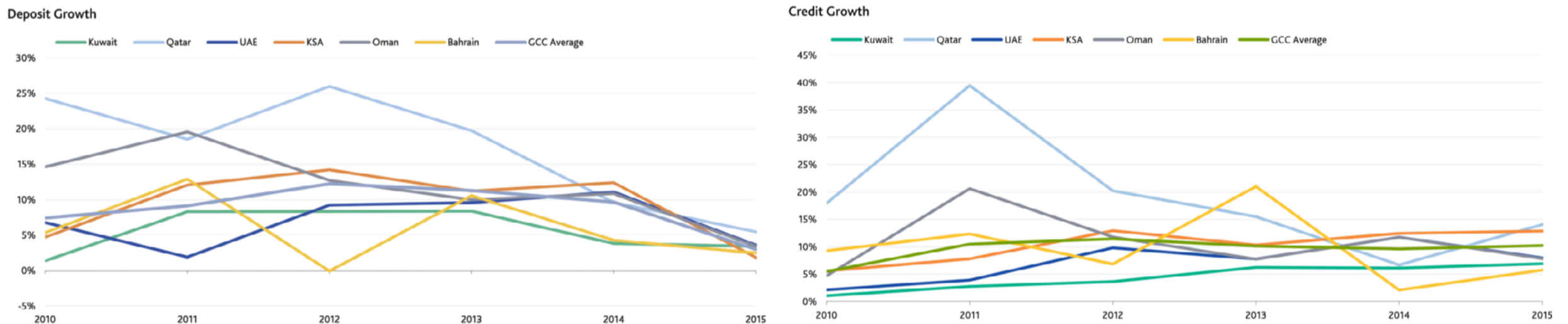
In addition, the BMW Touch Command is a tablet with 7" display that is integrated into the centre armrest in the rear for the first time. It is connected to the car's systems and offers comprehensive operation and setting options. Using the tablet, the rear seats and front passenger seat can be adjusted.

Air conditioning, ventilation and seat heating in the rear can also be operated, as well as the interior lighting with Ambient light, the blinds for the glass sunroof and the roller sunblinds. The entertainment functions can also be controlled. The portable BMW Touch Command can be conveniently charged from the Snap-in adapter.

"The all-new 7 Series has certainly raised the level of automobile engineering, innovation and design. The new model exemplifies the highest level of precision coupled with the ultimate in luxury and comfort. We have no doubt that it will surpass our customers' expectations," Al-Qatami concluded.

GCC BANKS - MOODY'S INVESTOR SERVICE REPORT

LOW OIL PRICES CHALLENGE LIQUIDITY CONDITIONS



KUWAIT: In this report, we survey the extent to which the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) banks have been affected by low oil prices and highlight relative vulnerabilities of individual banking systems. The pressures highlighted in this report, combined with those generated by the strong sovereign linkages in the region. Low Oil Price Challenge Banks' Resilience) were among the factors that underpinned our recent action to downgrade some banks in Oman and Bahrain while placing the ratings of 31 banks on review for downgrade in all six GCC countries.

Low oil prices have pressured operating conditions for banks across the GCC countries, with real non-oil economic growth halving to an average of around 3 percent over 2016 from around 6 percent in 2014.

Reduced oil revenues for regional governments have already led to a more challenging funding environment, with annual deposit growth slowing significantly, from around 10 percent during 2014 to around 3 percent during 2015 and we expect liquidity to remain tight over 2016. Also, while banks' asset quality performance and capital buffers have been broadly maintained so far, we note that pressure on loan growth and asset quality could increase if GCC governments become more fiscally selective and let the non-oil economy slow down further. As such, we will continue to monitor the broad economic performance of the individual systems and the key risk transmission channels for pressures, in particular government spending policies as well as investor and consumer confidence, liquidity, and asset quality (direct and indirect exposures).

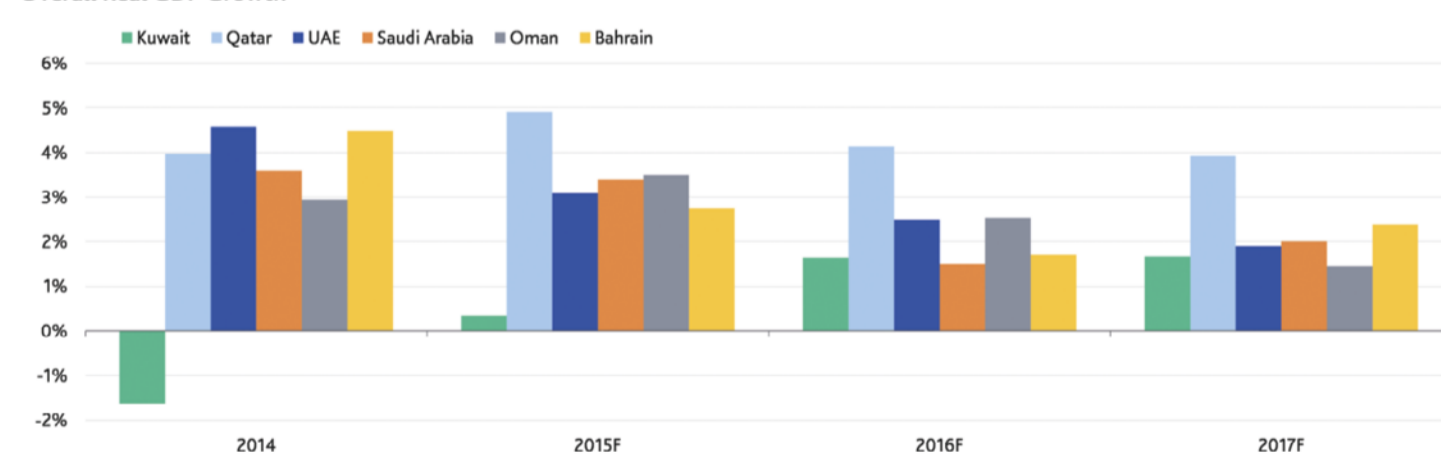
The widening gap between oil prices and fiscal break even oil prices across GCC governments has resulted in a significant increase in some of these governments' deficits, which has weakened their own creditworthiness, as highlighted by the recent rating actions taken on the government of major oil-exporting countries. In turn, these developments also highlight the reduced capacity (or possibly willingness) of these governments to support both the broad economy and the banks in times of stress, if needed. We will continue to assess for any changes in the GCC governments' capacity or willingness to provide such support.

FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Bahrain's banking system is under pressure, linked directly to the government's weakening

fiscal position and capacity to provide support to the fairly large Bahraini banking sector (230 percent of GDP). Public sector borrowings grew by around 15 percent in the first six months of 2015, which has helped sustain the domestic economy but poses risks for 2016, as it is unclear how the government will be able to maintain the current levels of spending. Over the same period, the level of government deposits declined by around 4 percent, reducing local liquidity for the banks from a relatively strong base. In this context, we expect loan performance to weaken in the second half of

Overall Real GDP Growth



2016, while capital should remain solid.

Oman's banking system also continues to remain vulnerable. We expect the operating environment to weaken further as indicated by declining business volumes, investment, liquidity and reduced consumer confidence. We expect these developments to impact Oman banks' funding, profitability and ultimately asset quality in 2016. At the same time, the government's fiscal pressures mean the capacity and willingness to support the banking system is declining as well. In Saudi Arabia, banks face the dual pressure of weakening operating conditions and fiscal pressures signaling a potential reduction of the government's capacity to provide support. While we expect new asset quality pressures, profitability and capital buffers are expected to remain resilient. Government borrowing will continue to increase, helping to sustain domestic credit growth. Lower overall deposit inflows, the growth rate of which declined to around 1 percent during 2015 from 12 percent during

2014, will commensurately reduce banking system liquidity. Although increases in sovereign borrowing are positive for the domestic banks' profitability, these trends may ultimately impact sovereign creditworthiness and, consequently, the deposit ratings of banks that currently benefit from government support.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) banking sector remains moderately exposed to a prolonged period of low oil prices. Despite challenges in operating conditions, the UAE's more diversified economy and the macro prudential initiatives in real estate and banking regula-

tion next 12 months from 15 percent levels previously. The resultant funding gap is already pressuring system liquidity and driving banks to compete for deposits and, at the same time, seek longer-term, but costlier, market funding.

Kuwait is expected to be the least affected system. Credit growth in the country has been consistently the lowest in the GCC since the global financial crisis, driven by very limited government spending and as such, leaving room for increases in 2016 that will be beneficial for the banks. Deposit growth too is expected to be stable given the limited public-

deposits ratios for these systems have been broadly stable at 98 percent and 77 percent, respectively, unlike some of the other GCC systems. Liquid asset buffers remain solid in the 30 percent-35 percent range for the two systems. Going forward, a key question will be whether these governments will take stronger measures to protect their own fiscal position and whether this could have an effect on the systems' deposit levels.

In Saudi Arabia, deposit growth has slowed more significantly to around 1 percent during 2015 from 12 percent for 2014. This slowdown is driven by modest declines in government deposits (overall government deposits fell by around 2 percent during 2015, while time and savings deposits fell by 5.7 percent), which is a reversal from the positive trend observed in prior years.

As a result, loan-to-deposit ratios have started to increase and the regulator has increased the limit for this metric to 90 percent from 85 percent to provide headroom for more lending. Liquid asset levels remain stable at around 32 percent of total assets for the system. We expect liquidity to tighten further as inflows from government continue to decrease.

Although overall deposit growth is down in Kuwait as well, it remains least affected by pressures from the low oil price as the decline has been fairly modest - to 3 percent in 2015 from around 4 percent in 2014. Also, unlike the other GCC systems where the level of government deposits has declined, in Kuwait it has actually increased by around 11 percent during 2015 to reach around 15 percent of total deposits, however, the increase was primarily driven by re-classification of deposits from a government related entity which was reported as market funds until 2014 but now customer deposits. Banking system indicators of loan-to-deposits and liquid assets to total assets are expected to remain broadly stable at their current levels of 85 percent and 30 percent, respectively, over 2016.

A key driver of the favorable conditions that have long supported GCC banks is the reallocation of high oil revenues into the broad domestic economy through direct public spending, which has helped soften the overall economic slowdown, with total real GDP declining only to 2 percent in 2015 from 3 percent in 2014 (see appendix 1 for more information on linkages between oil revenues and public spending).

GCC CENTRAL BANKS

Overall yearly deposit growth at banks in Oman and Bahrain has slowed to around 3 percent and 2 percent, respectively, but their governments have consciously kept their level of deposits in the system stable at around 32 percent and 11 percent, respectively, to help maintain liquidity. As a result, loans-to-



INFINITI AL-BABTAIN CONDUCTS INFINITI KUWAIT NATIONAL SALES COMPETITION

KUWAIT: Abdulmohsen Abdulaziz Al-Babtain Co (AABC), the authorised distributor of Infiniti in the State of Kuwait, conducted the 2015 Infiniti National Sales Competition.

The competition pitted the skills and knowledge of AABC's top three Infiniti Sales Ambassadors focussing on various sales skills that included product knowledge, general automotive information, sales processes and technology. The day's program commenced with a written examination, product walk-around presentation and a question and answer session that tested the contestants' knowledge of Infiniti brand, products and technology. First place was awarded to Yasser Abed who received a total cash prize valued at AED 3,000 presented from Nissan Gulf (NGF) and a token of appreciation. As the champion,

he will be competing on behalf of AABC in an attempt to win the prestigious regional contest trophy and a cash award up to AED 15,000 (Approximately \$4,080). The regional competitions will be held in the beautiful Soitel Dubai, the Palm Resort and Spa in early April.

The awarding ceremony was attended by a number of guests from the regional offices headed by Ms. Fatma Zenagui, Senior Dealer Process, Training & CRM Manager at Nissan Gulf and Mr. Rami Al-Salih, Assistant Sales & Marketing Manager at Nissan Gulf. Also present were members of Al Babtain top management headed by Mr. Abdulmohsen Abdulaziz Al Babtain - Al-Babtain Group Human Resources General Manager.

Commenting on the event, Abdulmohsen said "At Al-Babtain there is a deep commit-



ment to continuously enhancing the skills and knowledge of staff with the aim of delivering unparalleled service to our customers and prospects." He further added, "Such competitions are a chance for the staff to showcase their talents in a competitive environment and prove their hard work and dedication to the organisation and brand.

Our objective is not only to choose the undisputed champion, but endeavour to improve and advance skills of all the participating members and giving them motivation. Keeping knowledge and skills up to date enables our staff to deliver high quality service that meets the expectations of our customers and safeguards the reputation of our organization. Al-Babtain owes its success to quality customer service and a dedicated workforce."

OOREDOO KUWAIT TO PURCHASE 99% OF FASTTELCO'S SHARES

KUWAIT: Ooredoo Kuwait (National Mobile Telecommunications Co KSC) has entered into an agreement to purchase 99 percent of Internet Service Provider FASTtelco's shares for a total consideration of KD 11 million. The transaction is subject to the approval from the relevant regulatory and governmental authorities.

This transaction is an important step for both Ooredoo and FASTtelco as well as for the industry. It shows Ooredoo's strong commitment to deliver best in class services and enhance people's lives. It will allow both companies to offer full scope of fixed broadband and mobile services and open the doors to new revenue opportunities. Following this transaction, Ooredoo and FASTtelco will continue to co-exist as separate entities in the foreseeable future.

Ooredoo CEO Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdullah Al-Thani said: "This is a major milestone for Ooredoo showing strong

commitment to enhance people's lives. All stakeholders will benefit from this complementary transaction, especially our business and residential customers, who will have access to the full scope of our advanced mobile and fixed broadband services. We will invest to provide the best end-to-end customer experience across both companies and boost both Ooredoo's and FASTtelco's growth profiles."

FASTtelco CEO Talal Jassim Al-Bahar said: "This transaction is a testament to the outstanding employees that we have at FASTtelco, the strength of the business we have created and the advanced solutions and capabilities we have offered to the market. Going forward, we see Ooredoo as the best partner for FASTtelco and therefore are excited about the potential this transaction unlocks for both companies and their employees in the years to come."

INVESTORS TIPTOE BACK INTO EMERGING MARKETS AS STORM CLOUDS LINGER

LONDON: Emerging markets may well appear cheap again after years of attrition, but there's considerable trepidation about venturing back out to the developing world until the financial and political storms have finally lifted. Global investors have tiptoed back into emerging assets over the past six weeks at least partly on hopes that the gut-wrenching New Year shake-out may have been a final capitulation after three years of downdrafts and disappointments.

According to the Institute for International Finance, foreigners ploughed some \$36.8 billion back into emerging stocks and bonds in March - the highest inflow in nearly two years and well above monthly averages of the past four years. And yet these are baby steps. To put it in context, that portfolio pop compares with a total net capital outflow from emerging economies in 2015 of some \$730 billion.

For the coast to clear, three clouds have to evaporate. First is a lingering fear of higher US interest rates and dollar appreciation that squeezes hard-currency borrowers in emerging economies, stresses local currencies and forces credit to be far tighter than needed to buoy weakening economies.

The second is China's economic slowdown and its spillover effect on commodity prices and emerging markets at large. And third is a spike in political risks in many countries such as Brazil, Turkey and South Africa - pressures magnified by recessions and rising joblessness but which, in turn, compound the economic malaise and policy paralysis on the ground. Neither of the first two global issues have been resolved. The world markets fillip of the past month has been rooted in the US Federal Reserve's hesitation in adding to December's first interest rate rise in almost a decade and the resultant dollar recoil. But rekindled Fed hawkishness as the quarter ends puts a potential relapse on the dashboard - particularly if the rebound in emerging assets is little more than a re-balancing of portfolios from extreme aversion and if you believe that cycles of dollar appreciation historically last far longer than this.

JPMorgan strategists remain optimistic about emerging markets outperforming over the next three months - not least because funds are starved of income in developed economies. But they acknowledge that there's no outright improvement in the economic picture and that price moves are built solely on re-positioning.

"Given the almost five years of emerging markets equity and FX underperformance - and recent conversations with investors - it could take at least a few months before the average investor is again neutral," they told clients.

STAYING WELL AWAY

So the move may have some legs, but it's highly vulnerable if the global climate turns

inclement again. For a start, JPMorgan's rosier view hinges somewhat on the fading of 'China tail risk' involving messy yuan devaluation.

And while Beijing has been forceful on the issue, few investors can muster much conviction about China's markets. Christophe Donay, head of asset allocation at Swiss firm Pictet's Wealth Management unit, said that China may hold the line for now but that there was a high risk over the next three years of a 'Minsky moment' - a sudden collapse of asset prices due to credit and currency pressure named after economist Hyman Minsky.

"We are staying well away from emerging market assets because of that and hold very limited EM exposure," he said. With such skepticism about the international environment, the return to markets riven by a host of disparate but highly disruptive domestic political risks seems brave at least. Mired in a deep recession, Brazil's political strife has yet to reach a crescendo. Dilma Rousseff is struggling to save her presidency and fighting an impeachment process amid a widening graft investigation into state oil firm Petrobras.

While markets have rallied on the prospect of a new government, it could still take several more weeks or even months for a clear outcome. Turkey's economy and government too are under strain given the war in neighbouring Syria, the resultant refugee crisis, internal conflict with Kurdish separatists, a clampdown on local media and a diplomatic showdown with Russia. The struggling South African economy and its buckling infrastructure are compounded by pressure on President Jacob Zuma, his finance minister Pravin Gordhan and the ruling African National Congress amid a variety of accusations and probes about undue political interference and graft.

More authoritarian governments in China and Russia may seem less vulnerable than their democratic counterparts, but slowdown and recession heighten the political risks there, too. An oil hit and foreign sanctions continue to hamper overseas refinancing by Moscow and its major companies.

While the picture in Brazil may mask a brighter hue in Mexico or the slowdown in China hide the resilience in India, a still sizeable slice of the emerging universe remains in foment. China, Brazil, Russia, South Africa and Turkey together make up more than 42 percent of the market capitalization of MSCI's benchmark emerging market equities index.

Asset manager Blackrock's sovereign risk indices measuring the likelihood of defaults across the world contain a political risk sub-set called 'willingness to pay'. This remained the biggest negative for the countries recording the biggest overall index declines in 2015 - Brazil, Russia, Peru and Colombia. —Reuters

FED SEES GRADUAL PACE OF RATE HIKES: YELLEN

NEW YORK: Federal Reserve Chair Janet Yellen said yesterday that the Fed still envisions only a gradual pace of interest rate increases in light of global pressures that could affect the US economy. Yellen didn't specify a timetable for further hikes to follow the Fed's rate increase in December from record lows. She said risks to the United States appear limited but cautioned that that assessment is subject to "considerable uncertainty."

Speaking to the Economic Club of New York, Yellen said the central bank is monitoring a global economic slump, sharply lower oil prices and stock market turbulence, which she said have hurt some US consumers and key sectors such as manufacturing. Singling out China - the world's second-largest economy, after the United States - Yellen noted widespread uncertainty over how well Beijing will manage a delicate slowdown in coming years.

She said that because foreign economic growth seems to have further weakened this year, the Fed will "proceed cautiously" in raising rates. In light of her comments, most economists expect no hike at the Fed's next policy meeting - April 26-27 - despite remarks last week from other Fed officials that had raised the possibility of a rate increase then. "Despite a growing chorus of calls from even centrist-leaning officials to resume raising policy rates, Chair Yellen stuck to the dovish script of the March meeting statement," when the Fed expressed concerns about the global economy and kept rates unchanged, said Sal Guatieri, senior economist at BMO Capital Markets. Investors welcomed Yellen's message that the Fed would move slowly in raising rates. Major US stock indexes turned higher after she began her remarks, reversing an early loss, and bond yields dipped.

Yellen noted that the US job market and housing recovery have lifted the economy close to full health despite the risks that remain. She observed that the economy has benefited from low long-term US borrowing rates. Those rates have been held down by money flowing into US bonds from investors, who have scaled back their expectations for the number of Fed rate hikes this year from four to two at most.

The Fed chair said that while stock prices have rebounded to roughly where they were when 2016 began, "in other respects economic and financial conditions remain less favorable than they did" in December, when the Fed raised its key rate modestly after keeping it near zero since 2008, when the financial crisis erupted.

Yellen cautioned that the Fed's expectations for rates remain subject to revision to reflect any



NEW YORK: Federal Reserve Chair Janet Yellen addresses an Economic Club of New York luncheon, on Tuesday. — AFP

significant changes in the US or international economic outlook.

"I anticipate that the overall fallout for the US economy from global market developments since the start of the year will most likely be limited, although this assessment is subject to considerable uncertainty," she said. She said she still thought inflation will rise gradually over the next two to three years to the Fed's target of 2 percent annual increases in prices. Inflation has been running below this level for nearly four years. But Yellen warned that if oil prices began falling again, it could have "adverse spillover effects to the rest of the global economy."

Risk concerns

Such expressions of concern about risks, which were sprinkled throughout her speech, help explain why Yellen seems inclined to keep rates unchanged in the near future.

Responding to a question after her speech, Yellen said the Fed foresees US worker productivity, which has been historically low in recent years, eventually rising but says that assessment is "a source of huge uncertainty." Productivity - the average output produced per hour of work - is needed to boost living standards. When the Fed met two weeks ago, it signaled the likelihood of just two rate increases this year - half the number that Fed officials had envisioned in

December. As a result, most economists concluded that no rate increase would likely occur before June. But comments last week from several of the Fed's regional bank presidents had raised the possibility that the central bank would decide to raise rates in April. One of them, Dennis Lockhart of the Fed's Atlanta regional bank, said in a speech that he thought the strength of the most recent US economic data could justify a rate increase as early as April. The views expressed by Lockhart, who is regarded as a centrist in his approach to interest rates, was echoed by some other Fed regional bank presidents.

Whatever decision the Fed does make in April will hinge on its view of the economy's durability. In the past week, some reports have produced weaker-than-expected readings, including a sharp drop in orders for long-lasting manufactured goods and tepid consumer spending. Those reports have led some economists to downgrade their forecasts for growth in the current January-March quarter from a 2 percent annual rate to a lackluster 1 percent.

The consumer spending report also showed that the Fed's preferred inflation gauge is still signaling that inflation remains well below its target level. For the 12 months that ended in February, inflation rose just 1 percent. "Core" inflation, which excludes the volatile items of food and energy, increased 1.7 percent. — AP

METRO SHARES FLY OFF THE SHELF AS RETAIL GIANT SPLITS BUSINESSES

FRANKFURT: German retail giant Metro said yesterday it will spin off its businesses into two separately listed units, sending its shares sharply higher. "The management board of Metro is preparing the creation of two independent and sector-focused companies through a demerger of the group," Metro said in a statement.

Metro shares were the strongest performer on the mid-cap MDAX index of the Frankfurt stock exchange yesterday, shooting up 7.73 percent to 26.47 euros in a generally firmer market.

A wholesale and food specialist group would be created comprising the group's Metro, Makro and Real brands, as well as a consumer electronics products and services group centred around its Media and Saturn retail chains.

Since there is little operational overlap between the two businesses and limited synergy effects, management felt "very strongly that a split into two independent and focused businesses would be in the best interest of all stakeholders, as it would facilitate a significant opportunity for faster and more profitable growth," said supervisory board chief Juergen Steinemann.



DUESSELDORF: CEO of Metro Group, Olaf Koch, speaks in Duesseldorf, Germany yesterday. — AP

"Both entities would become individually stock-listed, with their own distinct profile, management and supervisory boards," Metro said.

The aim would be to give each of the companies and their respective management full control over their corporate strategies. "This will further increase customer focus, accelerate growth of the businesses, simplify structures and improve time-to-market and operational excel-

lence," it argued. Moreover, both entities would be able to independently pursue acquisition and partnership strategies, enabling them to define their own expansion strategies.

Metro said its management and supervisory boards "will make a decision on the contemplated demerger of Metro group after a period of intensive consultation and review."

Should the boards and shareholders be in favour, "implementation of the demerger is aimed for mid-2017," Metro said. "Over the past years, we have successfully revitalized our core businesses while significantly strengthening our group balance sheet," said chief executive Olaf Koch. "Both our wholesale and food specialist business as well as our consumer electronics business have continued to commercially improve, are on a steady successful path and are best-equipped for an independent future," Koch said. "Our shareholders would effectively own two well positioned market leaders, both of whom are increasingly focusing on their respective business areas and are generating more value for customers, employees and business partners." — AFP

SOUNDCLOUD EXPANDS WITH NEW PAID STREAMING PLAN



LOS ANGELES: In this March 22, 2016, photo, Eric Wahlforss, the co-founder and chief technology officer of Soundcloud, talks during an interview. —AP

LOS ANGELES: SoundCloud is entering paid music streaming, hoping to turn its huge community of cover singers, dubstep remixers and wannabe stars into a bigger source of revenue. Since its launch in 2007, the Berlin-based online music service has allowed pretty much any audio to be uploaded to its cloud - from Kanye West outtakes to teenagers singing over canned music. It has slowly introduced tools to earn revenue, introducing paid services for artists in 2008 and ad revenue sharing for invited musicians in 2014.

But after signing deals with major labels, including holdout Sony Music this month, SoundCloud is adding a subscription plan for consumers, giving them ad-free listening and a whole range of music from mainstream artists that had shunned the service because it only gave tracks away for free, including top acts like Taylor Swift.

SoundCloud, privately held and with tech investors like Union Square Ventures and Kleiner Perkins, will have a staggering 125 million tracks available when the paid

tier, SoundCloud Go, launches Tuesday. That's about four times other paid services. The fast-growing field of paid music subscription services is already crowded, led by companies like Spotify, with 30 million paying subscribers, and Apple, which jumped to 10 million after launching last year.

Massive variety

SoundCloud hopes to distinguish itself with its massive variety and huge audience of 175 million monthly listeners. "We're at the very early days of streaming," said Eric Wahlforss, the co-founder and chief technology officer, in an interview. "The pie is going to be very large over time."

SoundCloud Go will cost \$10 a month and offer ad-free offline playback on mobile devices. It'll also allow artists to choose whether to give away tracks for free or reserve them for paying customers - an option not allowed by Spotify, which depends on having quality free music to draw in prospective paying customers. Wahlforss said a key selling point for consumers is the many tracks on SoundCloud

you won't find elsewhere.

"You're going to be able to listen to a Rihanna next to an emerging artist, next to a DJ set, next to a mashup in the same playlist," said Wahlforss. "It's new for us, it's new for the world." For example, on SoundCloud you can find gems like a John Legend's cover of the Adele hit, "Rolling in the Deep." Or a 4-minute version of "30 Hours," a shortened take of one of the songs from Kanye West's latest album, "The Life of Pablo." The album version is exclusively streaming on competing music service Tidal.

SoundCloud's reputation for hosting music that is off the beaten path is what drew DJ Kaskadee to the platform. Without saying whether he'll put music behind the pay wall, Kaskadee's manager Stephanie LaFera said it has long been a place for the DJ to connect with fans looking to dig deeper than a standard release. "We feel like we're speaking to an audience that's already with us, fans that are open to experimentation, sub-genres and all the quirks that come with the world of electronic music," she said. —AP

APPLE STILL CLUELESS ON HOW FBI HACKED IPHONE WITHOUT HELP

COMPLICATES APPLE'S JOB REPAIRING SOFTWARE FLAWS

WASHINGTON: The FBI's announcement that it mysteriously hacked into an iPhone is a public setback for Apple Inc, as consumers learned that they can't keep the government out of even an encrypted device that US officials had claimed was impossible to crack. Apple, meanwhile, remains in the dark about how to restore the security of its flagship product.

The government said it was able to break into an iPhone used by a gunman in a mass shooting in California, but it didn't say how. That puzzled Apple software engineers - and outside experts - about how the FBI broke the digital locks on the phone without Apple's help. It also complicated Apple's job repairing flaws that jeopardize its software.

The Justice Department's announcement

continuously test passcodes in what's known as a brute-force attack until the right code is entered and the phone is unlocked.

It wasn't clear how the FBI dealt with a related Apple security feature that introduces increasing time delays between guesses. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because this person was not authorized to discuss the technique publicly. FBI Director James Comey has said with those features removed, the FBI could break into the phone in 26 minutes.

The FBI hacked into the iPhone used by gunman Syed Farook, who died with his wife in a gun battle with police after they killed 14 people in December in San Bernardino. The iPhone, issued to Farook by his employer, the county

ceptible to hackers. The aim is to ensure that American consumers stay as safe online as possible and prevent premature disclosures that might damage a US company or the economy.

Confidential discoveries

As far back as 2002, the Homeland Security Department ran a working group that included leading technology industry executives to advise the president on how to keep confidential discoveries by independent researchers that a company's software could be hacked until it was already fixed. Even now, the Commerce Department has been trying to fine-tune those rules. The next meeting of a conference on the subject is April 8 in Chicago and it's unclear how the FBI's behavior in the current case might influence the government's fragile relationship with technology companies or researchers.

The industry's rules are not legally binding, but the government's top intelligence agency said in 2014 that such vulnerabilities should be reported to companies and the Obama administration put forward an interagency process to do so.

"When federal agencies discover a new vulnerability in commercial and open source software - a so-called 'zero day' vulnerability because the developers of the vulnerable software have had zero days to fix it - it is in the national interest to responsibly disclose the vulnerability rather than to hold it for an investigative or intelligence purpose," the Office of the Director of National Intelligence said in a statement in April 2014. The statement recommended generally divulging such flaws to manufacturers "unless there is a clear national security or law enforcement need."

Last week a team from Johns Hopkins University said it had found a security bug in Apple's iMessage service that would allow hackers under certain circumstances to decrypt some text messages. The team reported its findings to Apple in November and published an academic paper after Apple fixed it.

"That's the way the research community handles the situation. And that's appropriate," said Susan Landau, professor of cybersecurity policy at Worcester Polytechnic Institute. She said it was acceptable for the government to find a way to unlock the phone but said it should reveal its method to Apple. Mobile phones are frequently used to improve cybersecurity, for example, as a place to send a backup code to access a website or authenticate a user.

The chief technologist at the Center for Democracy and Technology, Joseph Lorenzo Hall, said keeping details secret about a flaw affecting millions of iPhone users "is exactly opposite the disclosure practices of the security research community. The FBI and Apple have a common goal here: to keep people safe and secure. This is the FBI prioritizing an investigation over the interests of hundreds of millions of people worldwide." —AP



WASHINGTON: In this Feb 17, 2016 file photo, an iPhone is seen. —AP

that it was dropping a legal fight to compel Apple to help it access the phone also took away any obvious legal avenues Apple might have used to learn how the FBI did it. Magistrate Judge Sheri Pym on Tuesday vacated her Feb. 16 order, which compelled Apple to assist the FBI in hacking their phone. The Justice Department declined through a spokeswoman to comment Tuesday.

Clues emerge

A few clues have emerged. A senior law enforcement official told The Associated Press that the FBI managed to defeat an Apple security feature that threatened to delete the phone's contents if the FBI failed to enter the correct passcode combination after 10 tries. That allowed the government to repeatedly and con-

health department, was found in a vehicle the day after the shooting. The FBI is reviewing information from the iPhone, and it is unclear whether anything useful can be found.

Apple said that the legal case to force its cooperation "should never have been brought," and it promised to increase the security of its products. CEO Tim Cook has said the Cupertino-based company is constantly trying to improve security for its users. The company declined to comment more Tuesday.

The FBI's announcement - even without revealing precise details - that it had hacked the iPhone was at odds with the government's firm recommendations for nearly two decades that security researchers always work cooperatively and confidentially with software manufacturers before revealing that a product might be sus-



BEIJING: A woman uses her mobile smartphone near an advertisement for a Chinese news web portal. —AP

CHINA PROPOSES NEW WEB RULES THAT COULD ENHANCE CENSORSHIP

BEIJING: China is consolidating its ability to censor the Internet by drafting new rules requiring businesses that serve domestic Internet users to register their Web addresses inside the country, a move seen as targeting Chinese companies but that has raised concerns among foreign businesses.

In its most draconian interpretation, the proposed requirements could also further limit access within the Chinese network, analysts said. That appears to be the latest step by the ruling Communist Party to erect cyber barriers in the name of what some officials call "Internet sovereignty."

"This expands control over domestic Internet operators and contributes to the gradual buildup of the capability underpinning Internet sovereignty," said Rogier Creemers, an expert on Chinese media policy at the University of Oxford.

Under the draft regulations released this week by the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, any firm that provides services to Chinese users must register its domain, or Web address, with a Chinese provider. The rules are found in Article 37 of the ministry's proposed update to a set of decade-old Internet laws.

Flow of information

Analysts said the main targets appear to be Chinese Internet companies that store their content domestically but keep their Web address registered overseas with reputable, international firms for security purposes. Requiring them to shift their registration to a domestic provider under Chinese government control would allow censors to react more quickly in blocking access to certain sites, said Long Weilian, an IT consultant based in the southern Chinese city of Shenzhen who has blogged extensively on the issue.

"Before, they had to contact the server,

get the address, talk to the manager and then ask them to censor something," Long said. "If the domains are all domestic, they can directly stop traffic going to your domain with a command." Jacob Parker, vice president for China operations with the US-China Business Council, which lobbies the Chinese government on trade policy, said his group was concerned that the rules would block the free flow of information. "Any kind of restrictions would undermine China's broader economic development goals," Parker said.

Concerned that a borderless, US-led global Internet could weaken its political control, China's government has repeatedly issued cyber regulations that have drawn criticism from Western trade groups. Following pushback from the White House last year, China dropped a provision in a cybersecurity law that would require companies to keep Chinese user data at facilities in China, allowing the government access to personal information.

Questions remain about the new rules' true purpose and how strictly they would be enforced. The ministry is currently soliciting feedback on the proposed registration regulations, and Chinese laws are often softened during the revision process. Fang Xingdong, the director of a top Chinese technology think tank, said he believes Chinese leaders are seeking to enhance their control, but not to wall China off from the rest of the world.

"Under the current wording, all this is doing is integrating large Chinese Web service providers under a more rigorous supervision framework, while most small businesses won't be affected," said Fang, whose organization regularly submits opinions to the government on Internet issues. Any attempt to seal off the Chinese Internet "would hurt China as much as America," he said. —AP

APPLE VS THE FBI: WHAT HAPPENED?

SAN FRANCISCO: Apple's legal standoff with the FBI ended Monday, but experts say the issues behind it will come up again, as more tech companies take measures to guard their customers' messages, photos, business records and other files.

After weeks of heated debate, in which Apple had resisted the FBI's demand for help, authorities say they found their own way to get the data from an encrypted iPhone used by one of the San Bernardino mass shooters. If you're confused by all the back-and-forth in this high-stakes dispute, here's a simplified breakdown:

What was the fight about?

At the Justice Department's request, a federal judge ordered Apple Inc. last month to help the FBI unlock an encrypted iPhone used by Syed Farook, who along with his wife, Tashfeen Malik, killed 14 people in December. Specifically, the government wanted Apple to create software that would override an "auto-wipe" feature which is designed to kick in after anyone makes 10 wrong attempts at guessing the

iPhone's passcode. Once that feature is activated, it renders all the data on the phone permanently unreadable.

Apple said it could create the software the government wanted, but it argued vehemently that doing so would be a bad idea. CEO Tim Cook said the order would set a precedent for more government demands, both in the United States and around the world. Apple also said the software could be stolen by hackers and used against other iPhones.

Federal authorities insisted they were only asking for Apple's help in a single case, although prosecutors nationwide have said they wanted similar assistance in other cases where iPhones have been seized. While it's unclear if any useful information was stored on the iPhone, FBI Director James Comey said authorities owed it to the San Bernardino victims to leave no stone unturned in their investigation.

Why was it such a big deal?

The case crystallized some long-simmering frustrations and conflict between the tech industry and law enforcement authorities. Apple and other tech compa-

nies have been steadily increasing their use of encryption and other safeguards to protect their customers' data, following a wave of recent hacking attacks and revelations about government data-collection by the former National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden.

Law enforcement officials, including Comey, have complained that encryption and other data safeguards are helping dangerous people hide their activities, while interfering with the government's ability to investigate crimes.

In the San Bernardino case, Apple drew support from other leading tech companies, computer security experts and civil liberties groups. They filed court briefs arguing the government was going too far in trying to force a company to create software that threatened its own customers' security. Meanwhile, top officials in the Obama administration, including US Attorney General Loretta Lynch, denounced Apple's stance and accused the company of trying to rewrite the rules for government investigations.

What did the judge decide?

The judge didn't have to rule. Cook

had said he was prepared to take the case to the US Supreme Court. But last week, just one day before Magistrate Sheri Pym had planned to hold a hearing on the dispute, the Justice Department asked for a delay. Authorities said an unnamed "outside party" had come forward with a technical solution to unlocking the phone, which the FBI needed time to test out.

Then on Monday of this week, the government reported that it had successfully accessed the iPhone's files and no longer needed Apple's help. For that reason, the Justice Department asked the magistrate to withdraw the order she issued in February.

So who won?

Each side can claim a victory: Authorities say they achieved their goal of getting into the iPhone, while Apple successfully resisted a court order that it contends would be harmful to its customers. Even so, the FBI may have lost some credibility. After repeatedly insisting that only Apple had the means to help authorities unlock the phone, it turned out there was another way. —AP

OCULUS RIFT BEGINS SHIPPING; REVIEWS SUGGEST WAITING

LOS ANGELES: The first consumer-ready Oculus Rift virtual-reality headset was delivered to a real person over the weekend, and reviewers got their first taste. The initial feedback: It's a beautiful, wonderful device that immerses you, yet it still has a ways to go. Oculus founder Palmer Luckey hand-delivered the first Rift to software developer Ross Martin in Anchorage, Alaska, on Saturday, kicking off a new era in virtual reality by putting the most powerful VR device yet into a consumer's hands.

Martin, who had never tried VR before, spent a few hours on the Rift Monday morning. He watched a short movie, played a game and explored a virtual environment that included an up-close encounter with a Tyrannosaurus Rex.

"I couldn't stop saying, 'Wow,'" Martin, a 33-year-old Web developer, said in an interview. But he said that he felt a touch of nausea at times and that the resolution could be better. "If you're a gamer, this is right up your alley," he said. "You're going to be able to forgive that."

Oculus has said it's sending the Rift to its first Kickstarter backers first, followed by those who ordered one in January for \$600,

or at least \$1,500 with a high-end personal computer included. Oculus, which began crowd-funding through Kickstarter in August 2012, was acquired by Facebook for \$2 billion in 2014 and has shipped two developer versions so far.

Mixed reviews

Expectations for a consumer version have been high. There's a backlog of orders and if you order now, you can expect delivery in July. It's not clear, though, how many units Oculus made for the first round - and whether there will ultimately be much demand beyond gamers and hard-core technologists. Early reviews by journalists have been mixed.

Steven Tweedie of Business Insider was glowingly positive in his review of the Rift, relishing the greater presence he felt in both games and narrative stories. "Everything feels like it means more: there's a heightened connection to characters, both in games and short films, and the action carries weight," he wrote. But he noted its hefty price tag "is undoubtedly the biggest thing keeping more people from getting the chance to try virtual reality." —AP

HOW MUCH MARIJUANA IS OK WHILE DRIVING?

HONOLULU: Hawaii lawmakers are asking how much marijuana a driver can safely consume before getting behind the wheel of a car. It's an issue they want to tackle now that Hawaii is setting up medical marijuana dispensaries. So Rep Cindy Evans and 15 other lawmakers introduced a resolution asking the state Department of Health to study whether a person can safely drive while under the influence.

Marijuana is the illicit drug most frequently found in the blood of drivers who have been involved in accidents, including fatal ones, but the role marijuana plays in those accidents is often unclear because it can remain in the bloodstream for days and it's often combined with alcohol, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration says marijuana use impairs cognitive functions, lane tracking and other driving-related skills.

"I think that it's really important that we do this now,"

Evans said. "Hopefully this is the beginning of the discussion." For drunk driving, there's a nationally recognized level of impairment, which is a blood alcohol concentration of 0.08 grams per milliliter. But there's no federal rule or widespread consensus on what's an acceptable limit for driving under the influence of drugs.

Hawaii law bans people from driving under the influence of a drug that impairs their ability to drive, but there isn't a set threshold for how much marijuana - medically prescribed or not - is acceptable in the blood stream. Several states have passed laws specifying how much marijuana in the blood stream is acceptable while driving, but set different limits for how much THC - the main psychoactive ingredient of cannabis - in the blood would be considered driving under the influence of drugs. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, Colorado, Montana and Washington set the limit at 5 nanograms per milliliter of blood, while

Nevada and Ohio went with the lower 2 nanograms. Other states provide an exemption for medical marijuana patients.

The state Department of Health opposed the resolution, saying the department doesn't have the capacity to study the complicated question, especially because the resolution didn't include funding. The department's director, Virginia Pressler, said in written testimony that The National Institute on Drug Abuse has been studying this issue for many years and hasn't been able to establish a recommended level for driving. Despite the opposition, the House Committee on Transportation passed the resolution Monday, sending it to the Committee on Health to keep the discussion going. Committee Chairman Rep. Henry Aquino said. "It's here, so we just wanted to make sure that we have some sort of scientific, some sort of data-driven study to be done to address this," Aquino said.—AP



HONOLULU: Hawaii Rep Cindy Evans, Majority Floor Leader, talks about the need for information on how much marijuana a driver can safely consume before getting behind the wheel of a car. — AP

DON'T SCREEN ALL KIDS FOR DEVELOPMENTAL DELAYS, CANADIANS SAY

NEW YORK: Don't test children for developmental delays if they're not showing any signs of problems, a government-backed panel of Canadian experts advises. The recommendation from the Canadian Task Force on Preventive Health Care largely mirrors US recommendations regarding screenings for speech and language delays and autism spectrum disorders. The advice applies to children ages one to four who have no signs or symptoms of developmental delays, said Dr Brett Thombs, who is a member of the Task Force.

"If parents think their child is behind on some of their important milestones, this doesn't apply to those kids," said Thombs, who is affiliated with McGill University in Montreal. Developmental delays can include, for example, problems with motor skills, speech, language, thinking, social skills and activities of daily life.

The Task Force writes in CMAJ that when these delays persist, children are at higher risk of learning difficulties, behavioral problems and functional impairments later in life. For the new recommendation, the Task Force commissioned a review of existing evidence to see if the benefits of screening for developmental delays in all children ages one to four, regardless of whether they showed signs of problems, would outweigh the potential harms.

The screening tools are usually questionnaires that add up to a certain number of points, said Thombs. "Those points would determine if the physicians should act or be more concerned," he said. Overall two relevant randomized controlled studies were found, but the Task Force found that the screening tools did not ultimately improve health outcomes among children.

Instead, the screening tools had very high rates of false positives, said Thombs. Those false positives would lead to many children with normal development being referred for more testing, he added. Those referrals may take health resources away from children who would actually benefit from the services. "We don't recommend parents get their kids tested unless they have any specific concerns," said Thombs.

In February, the US Preventive Services Task Force said it did not find enough evidence to recommend universal autism spectrum disorder screening for toddlers between 18 and 30 months of age. Likewise, in 2015, the US Task Force said there's not enough evidence to recommend universal screening for speech and language delay and disorders in children under age five. "We're not suggesting parents and physicians don't keep ongoing surveillance," said Thombs. "If they have any concerns at all, they should have their physicians check it out." — AP

MOM DELAYS CANCER CARE TO PROTECT BABY SHE SAYS SAVED HER

'JUST TAKING ONE DAY AT A TIME'

TONAWANDA, New York: For Kim Vaillancourt, pregnant while staving off aggressive brain cancer, it comes down to this: "The baby saved me. Now it's my turn to save him." Vaillancourt was diagnosed with glioblastoma after going to the hospital for headaches and nausea that came on over Christmas. Were it not for concern for the boy she's carrying, she and her husband, Phil, said it was a life-saving trip she would not have made. They believe the unexpected pregnancy was heaven-sent. Now, to give the baby they've named Wyatt Eli the same chance he gave her, Kim is postponing the chemotherapy and radiation that are her best hope against the cancer but would threaten her developing child.

"She's going to do what she can to save the baby's life and give it the healthiest life possible," Phil Vaillancourt said. It had already been an eventful time in the Vaillancourt home in the Buffalo suburb of Tonawanda. The couple and their 11- and 12-year-old children had spent Dec 23 in Erie County Family Court for an adoption ceremony that made three sisters- ages 6, 7 and 10 - the couple had been fostering permanent members of their family.

Devastating diagnosis

With five kids on break from school, Kim wouldn't normally have made a fuss about feeling ill. "I would have just thought I had a headache and the flu and I would have laid in bed," the 36-year-old mother said. But she worried that being unable to keep food down was keeping the baby from getting the nourishment he needed and headed to the hospital to be checked.

Soon she would be rushed into surgery to remove two tumors that doctors said could have killed her. One had grown on the front of her brain. The other was dangerously close to her brain stem in the back. Holding hands on the couch in their suburban Buffalo living room, Kim and Phil lean on each other as they describe with calm acceptance the abrupt turn their life took between the joyful Dec 23 adoption and the devastating diagnosis on Dec 27. Glioblastoma, they learned, is characterized by fast-growing tumors known to reappear within eight to 12 weeks. With April 25 the target delivery date, Kim has been undergoing MRIs every two weeks to check for any signs of new activity.

"We're praying a lot and trusting God through these next few weeks to keep these scans clean," Phil Vaillancourt said. It's something the health-conscious Kim, with her focus on vitamins and nutrition, would never have imagined. She laughs while describing her longstanding practice of texting as far away from her body as her arms will allow to avoid cancer risks. She doesn't even want to take a chance with microwaves and has kept hers in the garage for the last 10 years.

"When we need it, we press it and close the door real fast, and we use it like once a year," she said. It's strange, she said, to now look for healing in chemicals and radiation. Unwilling to risk the baby's health, the plan is to begin treatment about two weeks after his birth, hoping all the while the tumors don't reappear before then. In the meantime, they will start interviewing nannies to help care for the newborn and the rest of the children, among them 7-year-old Josie, who was born without arms

and legs. Phil's leave from his maintenance job with the town of Tonawanda is coming to an end.

Aggressive treatment

"Just taking one day at a time," Phil said. "Even looking too far into the future, you just get caught up in what it can look like. Why even do that?" Though relatively rare, glioblastoma is the most common and aggressive form of brain cancer. It affects about 17,000 adults in the United States every year, but is uncommon during pregnancy, said Dr Robert Fenstermaker, chair of neurosurgery at Roswell Park Cancer Institute in Buffalo. Early in a pregnancy, a woman might be advised to end the pregnancy in favor of aggressive treatment, he said. Women further along have undergone chemotherapy but not without risk to the baby. "It's a tough cancer," said Fenstermaker, who has developed a vaccine therapy for glioblastoma that is now in clinical trials. The Vaillancourts have found strength from their big and close families and in the prayers that have flowed in as word of the family's fight has spread. "People have wrapped their hearts around this family," childhood friend Jenna Koch said, describing a GoFundMe campaign and a host of benefits and fundraisers planned over the next few weeks. With treatment, doctors say patients with the serious grade of glioblastoma afflicting Kim have a median survival rate of about 14 months. But the Vaillancourts are holding onto their Christian faith. "I hope to fight this off for years and years to come," Kim said. "I hope to be sitting here in 30 years saying how I beat this." Said Phil: "We definitely believe in miracles." — AP



NEW YORK: Kim and Phil Vaillancourt are interviewed at their home in Tonawanda. — AP photos



NEW YORK: Phil Vaillancourt holds photos of his wife, Kim and their children at their home in Tonawanda.

HOSPITAL CYBERATTACK HIGHLIGHTS HEALTH CARE VULNERABILITIES

NEW YORK: A cyberattack that paralyzed the hospital chain MedStar this week is serving as a fresh reminder of vulnerabilities that exist in systems that protect sensitive patient information. That attack came a month after a Los Angeles hospital paid hackers \$17,000 to regain control of its computer system and more than a year after intruders broke into a database containing the records of nearly 80 million people maintained by the health insurer Anthem. In Anthem's case, only a single password stood between hackers with a stolen employee ID and a chance to plunder the Blue Cross-Blue Shield carrier's database, according to a federal lawsuit filed by customers over the breach.

Cyber criminals also have staged high-profile attacks in recent years against the federal government, retail chains and the adultery website Ashley Madison, among many other targets. But security experts say health care companies make especially inviting targets for a number of reasons. The information they protect is more valuable on the black market than a credit card number stored by a retailer. Health care cybersecurity also can lag behind measures taken in other sectors like banking.

This can stem in part from a business emphasis on tight budgets and convenience over security. Health care companies also have to deal with an additional headache: Multiple entry points into a system, with security quality varying among clinics, labs, hospitals that may have access. Cybersecurity experts note that government guidelines for health care data protection also are light on details and standards. The federal law known as HIPAA tells health care companies when they can disclose a person's records and to whom. It also requires them to protect the information.

mandates for that protection, said Lee Kim, director of privacy and security for the nonprofit Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society. Intruders cracked Anthem's database sometime between the end of 2014 and the start of 2015 in a hack that is still under investigation. They gained access to Social Security numbers, birthdates and employment details for customers as far back as 2004, all key ingredients for stealing someone's identity.

Anthem, the nation's second-largest health insurer, has said that hackers staged a sophisticated attack that evaded multiple layers of security to reach its database. But a lawsuit filed last year by customers who say they were affected by the breach paints Anthem as a ripe target. It says the insurer allowed wide employee access to its database and didn't train employees how to handle "phishing" emails, which can bait a recipient into revealing a password.

Investigators have said they think hackers may have used a phishing scheme to compromise the credentials of several workers. A partially redacted complaint filed in the litigation also said the company failed to employ common defenses like encryption, which can

scramble data and make it useless.

"Stealing this much data takes time, and there were numerous steps along the way when any company following standard IT security practices would have foiled the hackers," the complaint states. An Anthem spokeswoman said the details in the federal lawsuit were merely allegations, and the company could not comment on pending litigation.

"At Anthem, securing our member, provider and client data is a top priority," spokeswoman Jill Becher said in an email. Hackers cracked Anthem's database by stealing the credentials of an employee whose job didn't require access to the database, according to the complaint, which was based in part on a security assessment Anthem commissioned after the breach. A failure to restrict access to sensitive information is one of the biggest security weaknesses hackers exploit, said Michael Zweiback, an attorney and former federal prosecutor. Allowing widespread access gives hackers many chances to try to trick a worker into divulging a password.

Restrict access

"This is something that happens in hospitals, it happens in Fortune 500

companies right now, every day," he said. Companies hesitate to restrict access because they want to make it easy for employees to move from network to network and do their jobs, Zweiback said. "When security becomes the emphasis, employees start to complain because maybe they don't get access as quickly," he said.

The lawsuit also states that Anthem only required a single password for those who wanted to get into its database from a remote location. Experts say two-factor authentication is the more common practice. This basically involves an employee entering a user name and password and then a separate password or identification number that can change. Only about 10 percent of health insurers use two-factor authentication and encryption to protect data, said Avivah Litan, a cybersecurity analyst for the information technology adviser Gartner. Litan works as a consultant in several sectors, including health care.

Anthem has said it normally encrypts data it exports, but that practice would not have helped because the hacker used high-level security credentials to get into its system. Experts say encryption can be tuned so that even authorized users can view only one person's account or a portion of a record at a time. Litan and other consultants say health care companies have begun to pay closer attention to it. But Litan hasn't seen the actual investment from these companies yet. "I'm sure Anthem has made some changes, but the other ones are waiting until they get budgets, and they won't get budgets until they get breached," she said. "That's just the way it works." Anthem has said in regulatory filings that it quickly fixed a security vulnerability it discovered after its breach and has continued to improve security since then.—AP



WASHINGTON: A woman walks out of the MedStar Georgetown University Hospital. — AP

AFTER CHINA VACCINE SCARE, HONG KONG TO LIMIT INOCULATIONS FOR NON-RESIDENT CHILDREN

HONG KONG: Hong Kong is to limit the number of non-resident children getting vaccinations at government clinics, after an illegal vaccine scandal in mainland China raised fears some families would come to the city for inoculations and put pressure on supplies. From April 1, Hong Kong's Maternal and Child Health Centres will only accept 120 new non-resident children a month. Non-resident children will only be able to book an appointment when there is spare capacity and will have to pay a higher fee. "The government's policy is to accord priority to local children," Hong Kong's Assistant Director of Health for Family and Elderly Health Services, Teresa Li, said in a statement.

"We will closely monitor the utilization of services by (non-resident children) and may adjust the quota or withhold new case

bookings." Mainland Chinese authorities said this month a mother and daughter had illegally traded nearly \$90 million worth of vaccines and sold them on to hundreds of re-sellers around the country, prompting an outcry from parents and political leaders. The vaccines, which police said were made by licensed producers, were not kept refrigerated, meaning they could be ineffective.

Hong Kong would order additional vaccine supplies if needed, another spokeswoman there said. The Macau government said in a statement on Tuesday that only Macau residents were entitled to free vaccinations and government-procured routine vaccinations would not be given to visitors. Hong Kong, a free-wheeling financial hub and former British colony, returned to Chinese rule in 1997 with wide-ranging autonomy. — Reuters

GOVT PANEL BACKS DRUG FOR DELUSIONS IN PARKINSON'S PATIENTS

WASHINGTON: Federal health experts have endorsed an experimental drug intended to treat psychotic delusions and behaviors that often afflict patients with Parkinson's disease, the debilitating movement disorder. The panel of Food and Drug Administration advisers voted 12-2 Tuesday that the benefits of the drug from Acadia Pharmaceuticals outweigh the risks. That vote - considered a recommendation for approval - is non-binding, though the FDA often follows the advice of its panelists. San Diego-based Acadia Pharmaceuticals Inc. has asked the FDA to approve pimavanserin to treat hallucinations, delusions and irrational behavior associated with Parkinson's disease, a neurodegenerative disease that primarily causes tremors and other movement problems.

Approximately half of all Parkinson's patients suffer from the psychotic problems, according to the FDA. There are no FDA-approved drugs currently available for the condition. Parkinson's is the second-most common neurodegenerative disease in the US, after Alzheimer's. While

Acadia's drug had only modest benefits in most patients and was linked to serious safety issues, most panelists ultimately said it would fill an important need. "We all want the effect size to be larger but it's certainly convincing in the sense that it is here and meaningful," said Dr Tobias Gerhard of the Rutgers University, who voted in favor of the drug.

During a public hearing session at Tuesday's meeting, patients and doctors detailed harrowing stories of Parkinson's patients lashing out at family members due to paranoia and delusions. Medical experts still disagree on whether such problems are caused by the underlying Parkinson's disease itself or the drugs used to manage it. FDA scientists presented a complex, mixed review of pimavanserin's performance and whether its benefits outweighed significant, hard-to-define risks. On a questionnaire measuring hallucinations and other symptoms, patients taking the drug showed a 23 percent improvement over patients taking a fake pill.—AP

Under investigation
But it doesn't come with a lot of spe-



SEATTLE: A female orca leaps from the water while breaching in Puget Sound west of Seattle.



SEATTLE: File photo shows endangered orcas from the J pod swim in Puget Sound west of Seattle, as seen from a federal research vessel that has been tracking the whales. — AP photos

ENDANGERED PUGET SOUND ORCAS TO GET PERSONAL HEALTH RECORDS

SEATTLE: The killer whales that spend time in the inland waters of Washington state already are tagged and tracked, photographed and measured. Researchers follow them by drone and by sea, analyzing their waste and their exhaled breath. Now, experts want to add another layer to the exhaustive studies: individual health records for each endangered whale. The records would take existing research on the creatures and combine it in one place. The idea is to use them to monitor the orcas' health trends individually and as a population. It's similar to people having one medical record as they move from one doctor to the next or between specialists.

Eighty-four orcas typically appear in Puget Sound from spring to fall. "The goal is to really start getting a lot of data and pull them together in a way that permits easier analysis," said Joe Gaydos, a wildlife veterinarian at the University of California, Davis, and chief

scientist with the SeaDoc Society, which is part of the university's School of Veterinary Medicine. "Ultimately, the real benefit of any health record is to help make (management) decisions," he added.

For example, if an orca appears emaciated or is in bad shape during certain times of the year, wildlife managers can access the animal's health history to see what's going on and what they could do about it, he said. Understanding the factors that affect an orca's health will ultimately help pinpoint the key threats and how to reduce them, experts say. "It will be really powerful to rule out things that aren't important and focus in on what's really important," said Lynne Barre with NOAA Fisheries. She said that will help inform research and management decisions in the long run. The project aims to pull together data on behavior, reproductive success, skin diseases and other study areas to allow for integrated analysis, she said.

Initial database

Scientists have enough data that they can now connect the dots to get meaningful answers, said Brad Hanson, an NOAA Fisheries wildlife biologist. More than two dozen wildlife experts met in Seattle on Tuesday to develop plans for health records for the orcas. The meeting was sponsored by SeaDoc Society, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries and the National Marine Mammal Foundation. Many details are still being worked out, including who will maintain the data and how people will access it. But an initial database would be launched this summer using readily available information, such as sex, age, gender and other details, Gaydos said. Other information would be added next year.

Elsewhere, scientists have studied individual animals to monitor their health, including North Atlantic right whales. Using a

database of hundreds of thousands of photographs taken over decades, researchers at the New England Aquarium and others have studied the body and skin conditions of about 400 individual right whales to assess their health. Individual Puget Sound orcas are identified by unique black and white markings or variations in their fin shapes, and each whale is given a number and a name. The Center for Whale Research on San Juan Island keeps the federal government's annual census on the population.

The three families - the J, K, and L pods - are genetically and behaviorally distinct from other killer whales. They use unique calls to communicate with one another and eat salmon rather than marine mammals. Their numbers have fluctuated in recent decades as they have faced threats from pollution, lack of prey and disturbance from boats. They were listed as endangered in 2005. — AP

EVEN MEN NEED TO CUT BACK ON COFFEE BEFORE PREGNANCY

WASHINGTON: Women already know they need to cut back on coffee during pregnancy, if not sooner, to lower the risk of miscarriages. But a new study suggests the men in their lives need to limit caffeine too. Pregnant women who had more than two caffeinated drinks a day while trying to conceive had a 74 percent higher risk of miscarriage than their peers who drank less coffee, tea, soda and energy drinks, the study found. When their husbands and boyfriends had more than two caffeinated drinks a day during the baby-making phase, however, these pregnant women ended up with almost the same increased risk of miscarriage they would get from drinking coffee or soda themselves.

"We are not saying to stop drinking caffeinated beverages," said lead study author Germaine Buck Louis of the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development in Rockville, Maryland.

"Rather, our data suggest that men and women, should they continue to drink caffeinated beverages, might be advised to keep the amount to less than three daily drinks," Louis added by email. "We did not find drinking one to two daily caffeinated beverages to increase the risk of miscarriage." Scientists aren't sure how caffeine contributes to miscarriages, but it's possible it affects egg or sperm production, implantation of the fertilized egg, or the ability of the embryo to grow in the uterus.

To assess how lifestyle choices may influence miscarriage risk, Louis and colleagues followed 344 couples in Texas and Michigan through the first seven weeks of pregnancy. All of the couples recorded their daily use of cigarettes, caffeinated and alcoholic beverages, and multivitamins.

Daily multivitamins

Overall, 98 women, or 28 percent, experienced a miscarriage during the study, as reported in the journal Fertility and Sterility. Women 35 or older had nearly double the miscarriage risk of younger women, the study found. When women took daily multivitamins, their miscarriage risk was 55 percent lower than for their peers who didn't do this.

The study wasn't designed to prove that excessive caffeine consumption causes miscarriages, or that vitamins prevent pregnancy loss, the authors note. It's possible that women who cut back on caffeine did so because they were experiencing food aversions and vomiting - both signs of a healthy pregnancy - and this might explain some of the connection between miscarriages and caffeine, the researchers point out.

One surprise in the study is that researchers didn't find an increased miscarriage risk associated with smoking or alcohol, however. This doesn't mesh with previous research, noted Dr Jeffrey Goldberg, a reproductive health researcher at Cleveland Clinic in Ohio who wasn't involved in the study. "This study did not address the fact that both smoking and alcohol use can reduce pregnancy rates and increase the risk of adverse effects on fetal development," Goldberg said by email. Doctors currently advise couples trying to conceive to avoid delays, especially when they're over 35, and counsel women to limit caffeine and take multivitamins, Goldberg noted. Now, it seems men have something new to add to their to-do list. "We would now have to recommend that the male partners also reduce their caffeine intake," Goldberg said. — Reuters

PAINFUL UTERUS CONDITION MAY BOOST RISK FOR HEART DISEASE

'GIRLS AND WOMEN CAN BE TREATED THROUGH SURGERY'

Women with an excess growth of uterine lining tissue may also be at higher risk of coronary heart disease, according to a new study. The condition, called endometriosis, affects up to five million women in the US. Uterine tissue can grow on the ovaries, behind the uterus or on the bowels or bladder and can cause pain, infertility and very heavy periods. "Many girls and women do not realize that distressing menstrual cramps and pelvic pain can be due to endometriosis," said senior study author Stacey A. Missmer, director of Epidemiologic Research in Reproductive Medicine at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston.

"Girls and women can be treated through surgery that removes the endometriosis lesions or by hormonal medications including oral contraceptives," but there is no outright cure, Missmer told Reuters Health by email. The researchers used data on more than 116,000 women in the Nurses' Health Study II, which ran from 1989 to 2009 - including about 5,200 women with surgically confirmed endometriosis. Those with endometriosis were more likely than others to suffer a heart attack, to have coronary bypass or stent surgery, or to have angina, the chest pain that can be a sign of coronary artery disease. The increased risk for these conditions was highest for women up to age 40, who were about three times as likely to have any combination of the heart disease end points as those without endometriosis. The difference in heart disease risk shrank at older ages. As has been seen in the past, women who had their uterus or ovaries removed were also at higher risk for coronary artery disease end points than others, the authors reported in *Circulation: Cardiovascular Quality and Outcomes*.

Systemic chronic inflammation, heightened oxidative stress and higher cholesterol levels associated with endometriosis may explain the link between the condition and heart disease risk, Missmer said. "Additionally, endometriosis and coronary heart disease may share common genetic susceptibilities," she

said. "From our study, we can conclude that surgical and hormonal treatments following endometriosis diagnosis may impact the risk of cardiovascular disease, but they did not negate the risk entirely," Missmer said. "It is important for women with

endometriosis - even young women - to adopt heart-healthy lifestyle habits, be screened by their doctors for heart disease, and be familiar with symptoms because heart disease remains the primary cause of death in women." — Reuters

MANY IN US IGNORANT OF KEY FACTS ON ZIKA VIRUS

MIAMI: Many Americans are unclear on key facts about the mosquito-borne Zika virus, which has been linked to birth defects and is of particular concern to pregnant women, US researchers said Tuesday, warning of a race against time. The findings were contained in a nationally representative poll of 1,275 adults conducted by the Harvard University TH Chan School of Public Health in early March. The survey included 105 households in which a woman was pregnant or was considering becoming pregnant in the next year. In those households, nearly one in four (23 percent) were not aware of the association between Zika and the birth defect, microcephaly, in which infants are born with unusually small heads.

Thousands of children in Brazil have been born with the condition, sparking alarm about a virus that today remains poorly understood by global scientists. One in five of these households said they believed a vaccine exists to prevent Zika, even though one does not and experts say such a vaccine will take years to develop. More than four in 10 (42 percent) did not realize Zika virus can be sexually transmitted. Furthermore, one quarter mistakenly believed symptoms were likely to be apparent,

when in fact most of those who are infected show no signs of illness.

"We have a key window before the mosquito season gears up in communities within the United States mainland to correct misperceptions about Zika virus so that pregnant women and their partners may take appropriate measures to protect their families," said Gillian SteelFisher, director of the poll and research scientist at Harvard. Among the general public, misconceptions about Zika were also common, the poll found.

Four in 10 said they thought Zika could be a danger to future pregnancies, while the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says Zika is believed to be a threat only to current pregnancies. Significant misunderstandings about how Zika is transmitted were also found. "These misperceptions about Zika virus transmission could lead people to take unnecessary or inappropriate precautions, as we have seen in other kinds of outbreaks," warned SteelFisher. One in five (22 percent) did not know Zika could spread from a pregnant mother to her fetus, and more than a quarter (29 percent) were unaware it can be transmitted through blood transfusions. — AFP

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LULU FURTHER EXPANDS IN BAHRAIN; OPENS 6TH HYPERMARKET IN ZINJ

Middle East retail major LULU Group which is on a vast expansion mode underscored its commitment to Bahrain by opening its 6th Hypermarket in New Zinj's Galleria Mall.

The new Hypermarket which is also the 124th store of the Lulu Group globally, was officially inaugurated by Shaikh Khaled bin Abdulla Al Khalifa, Deputy Prime Minister of Bahrain in the presence of Bahraini Minister for Industry and Commerce Zayed Al-Zayani, Labour Minister Jamil Humaidan, British Ambassador Simon Martin CMG, US Ambassador William Roebuck, Indian

Ambassador Alok Kumar Sinha, Lulu Group Chairman Yusuffali M A, prominent businessman Mohammed Dadabhai, Lulu Group CEO Saifee Rupawala, Executive Director Ashraf Ali MA, Bahrain Regional Director Juzer Rupawala and other top officials.

Located next to the Al-Ahli Sports Club and adjacent to the US Embassy, the new hypermarket will serve residents of Salmuniya and Zinj and offers easy access to Tubli and Isa Town residents as well. As always Lulu hypermarket provides the widest range of quality and value-for-money products all under one roof. The outlet has also

introduced inaugural offers and deals for a range of products at attractive prices.

"The opening of the 124th Lulu Hypermarket in the Kingdom of Bahrain and the 6th in the country is a moment of great pride for the LULU Group," said Chairman Yusuffali M A after the inauguration. As announced earlier, this new hypermarket is part of our committed BD 100 million investment plan for Bahrain, commented Yusuffali. The group will open 2 more hypermarkets by the end of 2017 at Saar and Busaidi in Bahrain added Yusuffali.

"Our growth in Bahrain is powered by the

vision of the leadership, the business-friendly economic environment and the ability of our Bahraini employees to absorb and fit into the Lulu service model which puts customers above all.

We thank His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, Prince Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa, the Prime Minister and Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince and First Deputy Premier and the people of this great country for encouraging us in all our expansion strategies and efforts in Bahrain.

On providing training and employment

opportunity to the educated Bahraini youth, Yusuffali said "It is also our endeavor to nurture the local talent and a proof of this is our strong Bahraini work force that form the nucleus of our operations here in Bahrain. Currently Lulu provides best quality training to absorb them in various managerial and specialized sections to Bahrainis. There are more than 1200 Bahrainis who work with us not only here but in other GCC countries also and we will continue to support Governments' Bahrainization plan by giving employment to more Bahrainis in our new projects.

KUWAIT TOASTMASTERS' IMPRESSIVE SHOW IN AREA 14 CONTESTS

Members of Kuwait Toastmasters Club achieved heartening results at Area 14 (Division I) Annual Speech Contest 2016, held at American University of Kuwait on March 25, 2016. Prolific speakers from Kuwait Toastmasters and other four clubs of Area 14 participated in the contests in four categories, namely, Impromptu speaking known as

and inspirational stories and messages are conveyed.

Kuwait Toastmasters was represented by Toastmasters Santosh Kumar and Satish Kumar, both eminent speakers who have traveled a path of self-learning and learning through feedback from other members to improve their communication skills.

TM Satish Kumar, collected three

runner-up trophy in the International Speech category with his speech "Rehmatulla" that touched the hearts and soul of the audience. TM Satish Kumar and TM Santosh Kumar will now represent Kuwait Toastmasters Club at the Annual Division I Speech Contests to be held on May 6, 2016 at Australian College of Kuwait.

The victories by Toastmasters Santosh and Satish has added few more feathers to Kuwait Toastmasters' cap. In 2015, TM Deepak Bindal of the club represented Kuwait in humorous speech contest finals at the District Level (DTAC 2015) in Dubai, competing with the best of the humorous speakers from seven countries, bringing laurels to Kuwait.

When asked, TM Santosh said, "joining Toastmasters has helped me in organizing and expressing my thoughts better and has also aided me to improve my listening skills. The self-phased and feedback oriented training has helped me at the work place to communicate better during presentations and official interactions."

TM Satish, reflected back on his Toastmasters journey and said, "Toastmasters is a great self and team learning forum for developing communication and leadership skills very essential in the modern world. I am immensely helped by Toastmasters in being able to speak in an organized manner, putting across my view points in a crisp and concise way."

trophies, winning the Humorous speech contest with his speech "Laugh - the world will laugh with you", placed as first runner-up in the Table Topics contest and second runner-up in Evaluation contest.

TM Santosh Kumar won the first



Table Topics, Speech Evaluations in which speakers evaluate a target speaker and suggest improvements, Humorous speech where speakers take up a theme to entertain the audience and finally International Speech through which motivational



MMF LEADERS MEET INDIAN AMBASSADOR

The new office bearers of Malayali Media Forum Kuwait met Sunil Jain the Indian Ambassador to Kuwait on March 28, 2016 and discussed various topics faced by the expatriate Indian Community in Kuwait. Issues related to Indian Community School, problems faced by Nurses recruitment agencies, Reopening of canteen in Indian Embassy premises etc. were discussed.

In an emergency situation the Indian embassy will involve in Indian

Community School as part of the Indian community since it is residing over here, Sunil Jain said to MMF leaders in the meeting. But as per the school constitution, Indian embassy cannot involve in the community school daily business. He added, Indian Embassy will inform to the school director board to do the necessary amendment in the school constitution.

Regarding the MOH nurses recruitment concerns next month, MOH dele-

gates are visiting Kerala state, the Ambassador informed. He also stated that the functioning of canteen in the embassy premises positively will be considered.

The representative of MMF briefed about their function of Malayali Media Forum in Kuwait. Sam Pynumoodu, Ismail Payyoli, Nixon George, Thomas Mathew Kadavil and Regi Bhaskar were the attendees for the meeting. Indian embassy community welfare secretary KKTahel also witnessed the meeting.

APPEAL FOR INFORMATION ABOUT KUWAITI RESISTANCE FIGHTERS

To whom it may concern

This is an appeal on behalf of Marshal Byiers, a Scottish gentleman who lived in Kuwait during the 1980s. While here, he lived with his family in Fahaheel city, more specifically, in a building owned by Khalif Al-Fulaj.

Marshall worked for a company called EW Sable, and was trapped in Kuwait during the Iraqi invasion. He was held hostage by the Iraqi forces for a brief period of time. He was eventually put in contact with members of the Kuwait Resistance by Larry Banks at the British Embassy. While Mr Byiers never met the resistance fighters in person, they spoke over the phone and they provided him with food, cigarettes, and a small radio at great personal risk to them self. The men who knew him would likely be in their 50s now. His personal friend was a Kuwaiti gentle-

man names Sami Al Dabbous, who we're having trouble locating.

After the war, Marshall returned to Scotland. We are a group of filmmakers who are currently working on a documentary that narrates Marshall's story, and, after 26 years, we are flying him back to Kuwait for the first time, for what will probably be quite an emotional closure to his journey.

Marshall would really like to meet the person that helped him during the Iraqi occupation. Marshall is due to arrive to Kuwait on April 4-9. The documentary tells his story and we would like the opportunity to tell the story from the side of the man who helped him. If you or anybody else has any personal history with this story or anybody involved in it, please contact us at the following email Hamadaam@vcu.edu or phone number (965) 6668-0061.



(From left) Chuck Silva, Director, OSN Pinoy, Emad Morcos, SVP - OSN, Media Partners, Affiliate Channels and Digital, Gilberto Duavit, Jr, GMA, President and COO, Joseph Francia, GMA International, First Vice President and Willie Revillame, Host of GMA Pinoy TV's Wowowin.



OSN ADDS SIX NEW FILIPINO CHANNELS TO ITS PLATFORM

DUBAI: OSN, the leading pay-TV network in Middle East and North Africa (MENA), increases the breadth of content for OSN Pinoy subscribers with the roll out of six new channels taking the overall number of OSN Pinoy channels to 15. The channels offer the best shows, program and movies directly from the Philippines to the GCC's large and vibrant Filipino community.

The additional channels make OSN the pay-TV platform with the largest number of Filipino channels outside of the Philippines, and the only platform in the region with the biggest networks in one package.

The six new channels come from three of the biggest names in entertainment in the Philippines, ABS-CBN, Viva Entertainment and GMA Network. GMA offer three channels, further strengthening its presence in the MENA region by providing Filipinos wider access to their favourite Kapuso program on its flagship international channel, GMA Pinoy TV the Filipino lifestyle channel; GMA Life TV; and the international news channel, GMA News TV International.

Select Kapuso program are also available online through any internet-enabled device

via OSN Play. Offering unmatched variety, the three other channels include the ABS-CBN operated Lifestyle Network Channel; action film channel CineMo; plus Viva Entertainment's flagship movie channel Pinoy Box Office (PBO) which offers the best in Filipino blockbusters and classic films, will also be available to live stream on OSN Play.

Arnie Garcia, ABS-CBN Middle East Managing Director said: "We are pleased to offer two new channels, Lifestyle Network and CineMo, to cater to the varied TV entertainment needs of Filipinos in the region. The addition of these two new world-class channels strengthens the existing channel line-up of TFC on OSN giving viewers the widest choice of Filipino content in the region."

Gilberto R Duavit, Jr, GMA Network President and COO, said that through the renewed partnership, GMA program will become even more widely available across the MENA region. "We look forward to becoming more accessible to our kababayan in the Middle East. If you look at the other channels that we will be offered with, it is a very unique opportunity and position. OSN is the definitive destination for the Filipino community,

who get additional value through the exceptional bouquet of HD channels that we have on our network," he said.

Emad Morcos, Senior VP - Media Partners, Affiliate Channels and Digital, OSN, said: "The addition of the six new channels further strengthens the choice that we offer the Filipino community in the region, making OSN the best network for premium and exclusive content. This builds on the introduction of several new channels on OSN this year, adding to the diversity of world-class programming that we offer to our subscribers. We will endeavour to ensure our offering remains as extensive as possible which means pushing boundaries to deliver for all our customers."

The six new channels are:

CineMo (Channel 711)
CineMo features the best Filipino blockbuster action and comedy films while offering subscribers top-level Asian kung-fu movies that will keep viewers enthralled.

The channel showcases films of Pinoy action hero Fernando Poe, Jr. (FPJ) and comedy king Dolphy as well as movie hits of Robin Padilla, Bong Revilla, TVJ, Steven Seagal, Jean-

Claude Van Damme and Jackie Chan.

Lifestyle Network (Channel 712)

Owned and operated by ABS-CBN, Lifestyle Network offers both localised and international topics, covering a range of programming blocks that include home, food, travel and entertainment. Popular shows include F.A.S.H. (Fashion And Style Hub), Sabrina's Kitchen, Philippine Realty TV, and Chefscapades.

GMA Pinoy TV (Channel 713)

GMA Pinoy TV delivers an outstanding range of shows including Eat Bulaga, the longest running variety show in the Philippines. Viewers can also enjoy Wowowin, hosted by Willie Revillame, one of the most watched game shows from the Philippines, also Lip Sync Battle, the Filipino version of the worldwide TV hit, and 24 Oras the channel's flagship news programme.

GMA Life TV (Channel 714)

The second international channel of GMA Network, GMA Life TV, offers a premium mix of programming. The channel is home to a

diverse array of programme genres, from movies and sports, to news, reality, and lifestyle, delivered in English and Filipino.

GMA News TV (Channel 715)

The most awarded news organisation in the Philippines is also coming to OSN, providing customers with news program, public affairs shows including local and international entertainment, news, sports program and unrivalled entertainment.

PBO (live streaming channel on OSN Play)

PBO (Pinoy Box Office) offers the most extensive Filipino film library with blockbuster offerings. Produced by Viva Entertainment, PBO assures subscribers great movies and classics. It showcases a winning mix of indie flicks, as well as mini-series produced exclusively for the channel.

OSN subscribers can access all 15 OSN Pinoy channels including the six new channels and 42 Western channels by upgrading to the 'OSN Pinoy Plus Extra' package. Other OSN Pinoy packages are also available for customers to choose from. For more information, visit www.osn.com/en/packages.



AOU ADMISSION, REGISTRATION, EXAMINATION DEPT ORGANIZE WORKSHOP

Mona Al-Loughani, Director of the Admission and Registration Department at the Arab Open University (AOU) emphasized that AOU is keen on taking care of its students and providing them with all means and appropriate conditions for meeting their needs and requirements and enabling them to academically succeed, in turn, this would be beneficial to them and open the doors for finding excellent employment opportunities as well as pursuing their higher education studies.

This came in the first workshop for Admission, Registration and Examination Department, organized by the Academic Sector at the AOU Headquarters in Kuwait. All heads of Admission and Registration units of the eight AOU branches operating in a number of Arab countries participated in this workshop. Prof Marwan Al-Akaidi, Vice President for Academic Affairs, welcomed all and lauded all efforts that serve the public interest of the University and its students, stressing on the importance of the teamwork

in creating a suitable atmosphere among the different work sectors and the students. He also valued the University's achievement and its commitment to keep abreast of development and employ all capabilities and experiences that power it to compete and offer high quality services to its students.

Loughani said this workshop came to enhance the relationship of the Department of Admission, Registration and Examination at the AOU-HQ with all units of Admission and Registration at all AOU branches. It also aimed to exchange ideas and experiences in addition to discuss all matters related to the department, added Loughani. She said, "AOU takes care of its students as they are the core of the educational process". The workshop included various themes such as Bachelor's Degree Regulation, Equivalence, Student Behavior Regulation, Exams, Branch Transference and Academic Calendar. Loughani expressed her gratitude for all who contributed to make this workshop successful.

KU, HANYANG UNIVERSITY SIGN ACADEMIC EXCHANGE AGREEMENT



Kuwait University (KU) yesterday signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for academic exchange with South Korean Hanyang University, as part of efforts to boost cooperation between both universities. KU President Hussain Al-Ansari signed the MoU with Deputy President of Hanyang Dr. Yang Lee, in the presence of a number of KU officials. The MoU encompasses numerous initiatives, including joint academic conferences, lectures and workshops, the KU said in a press statement. The agreement would also facilitate academic exchange between both schools, the statement added. — KUNA



A delegation from Kuwait University's College of Administrative Sciences visited the Sabah Al-Salem University City project's site recently to inspect the new college building and the process of work there.

AMC

- 00:20 Parked
01:55 Desperately Seeking Susan
03:40 Monkey Shines: An Experiment In Fear
05:30 Race For The Yankee Zephyr
07:20 The Return Of Sabata
09:05 Mannequin
10:35 The Aviator
12:10 The Beautiful Country
14:10 Beauty Shop
15:55 Death Rides A Horse
17:50 One More Kiss
19:30 Saved!

ANIMAL PLANET HD

- 00:45 I Escaped Jaws 2
01:40 From WAGs To Riches
02:35 Tanked
03:25 Echo And The Elephants Of Amboseli
03:50 Echo And The Elephants Of Amboseli
04:15 Gator Boys
05:02 Treehouse Masters
05:49 From WAGs To Riches
06:36 Meet The Sloths
07:00 Meet The Sloths
07:25 America's Cutest Pets
08:15 From WAGs To Riches
09:10 Treehouse Masters
10:05 Tanked
11:00 America's Cutest Pets
11:55 Dr. Dee: Alaska Vet
12:50 From WAGs To Riches
13:45 Gator Boys
14:40 Treehouse Masters
15:35 Tanked
16:30 Echo And The Elephants Of Amboseli
17:00 Echo And The Elephants Of Amboseli
17:25 River Monsters (Best Of Series 1-5)
18:20 Gator Boys
19:15 Tanked
20:10 Into The Pride
21:05 Treehouse Masters
22:00 Gator Boys
22:55 Gator Boys
23:50 River Monsters (Best Of Series 1-5)

BBC FIRST

- 00:35 Prey
01:30 Happy Valley
02:25 Happy Valley
03:20 Casualty
04:20 Stella
05:10 Father Brown
06:00 Eastenders
06:30 Casualty
07:30 Stella
08:20 Call The Midwife
09:15 Doctor Who
10:05 Casualty
11:05 Father Brown
11:55 Stella
12:45 Call The Midwife
13:45 Doctor Who
14:35 Casualty
15:30 Stella
16:15 Call The Midwife
17:10 Doctor Who
18:00 Doctors
18:35 Doctors
19:05 Father Brown
20:00 Ripper Street
21:00 Ripper Street
21:55 Silent Witness
22:50 Father Brown
23:40 Doctors

Bloomberg TELEVISION

- 00:00 Charlie Rose
01:00 First Up With Angie Lau
02:00 First Up With Angie Lau
03:00 Trending Business
04:00 Trending Business
05:00 Asia Edge
06:00 Bloomberg West
07:00 Charlie Rose

- 14:30 Dialogue
15:00 News Update
15:15 China 24
16:00 News Update
16:15 Global Business
17:00 News Update
17:15 World InSight
18:00 Asia Today
18:30 Culture Express
19:00 News Update
19:30 The Heat
20:00 Africa Live
21:00 Global Business
21:30 Dialogue
22:00 News Update
22:15 China 24
23:00 News Update
23:15 World InSight

CNBC

- 00:00 Inside China
00:30 Managing Asia
01:00 U.S. Squawk Alley
01:30 Asia Squawk Box
04:00 Asia Street Signs
06:00 Fast Money: Half Time Report
07:00 Capital Connection
08:00 Squawk Box Europe
11:00 Europe Street Signs
12:00 Worldwide Exchange
13:00 U.S. Squawk Box
16:00 Squawk On The Street
18:00 U.S. Squawk Alley
19:00 Fast Money: Half Time Report
20:00 U.S. Power Lunch
22:00 From WAGs To Riches
23:00 U.S. Closing Bell Q

crime & investigation network

- 00:00 The Killer Speaks
01:00 Britain's Darkest Taboos
02:00 Evil Up Close
03:00 The First 48
04:00 The Killer Speaks
05:00 Gangsters: America's Most Evil
06:00 The FBI Files
07:00 The FBI Files
08:00 Homicide Hunter
09:00 Beyond Scared Straight
10:00 Private Crimes
10:30 Private Crimes
11:00 Crimes That Shook Britain
12:00 Nightmare In Suburbia
13:00 The First 48
14:00 Homicide Hunter
15:00 Private Crimes
15:30 Private Crimes
16:00 The FBI Files
17:00 Crimes That Shook Britain
18:00 Nightmare In Suburbia
19:00 The First 48
20:00 Homicide Hunter
21:00 Private Crimes
21:30 Private Crimes
22:00 Ms. Homicide
23:00 Killer Kids

Discovery CHANNEL HD

- 00:20 Fast N' Loud
01:10 Gold Rush
02:00 Diamond River Hunters
02:50 Alaska: Battle On The Bay
03:40 Extreme Collectors
04:05 The Liquidator
04:30 Garage Gold
05:00 How Do They Do It?
05:30 Chasing Classic Cars
06:00 Outback Truckers
06:50 Wheeler Dealers
07:40 Fast N' Loud
08:30 Extreme Collectors
08:55 The Liquidator
09:20 Garage Gold
09:45 How Do They Do It?
10:10 Chasing Classic Cars
10:35 Gold Rush
11:25 Diamond River Hunters
12:15 Alaska: Battle On The Bay
13:05 Extreme Collectors
13:30 The Liquidator
13:55 Garage Gold

- 14:55 Fatal Encounters
15:45 On The Case With Paula Zahn
16:35 Murder Shift
17:25 I Almost Got Away With It
18:15 The Will
19:05 Deadly Affairs
19:55 True Crime With Aphrodite Jones
20:45 California Investigator
21:10 Who On Earth Did I Marry?
21:35 Who On Earth Did I Marry?
22:00 Surviving Evil
22:50 Deadly Women
23:40 Who On Earth Did I Marry?

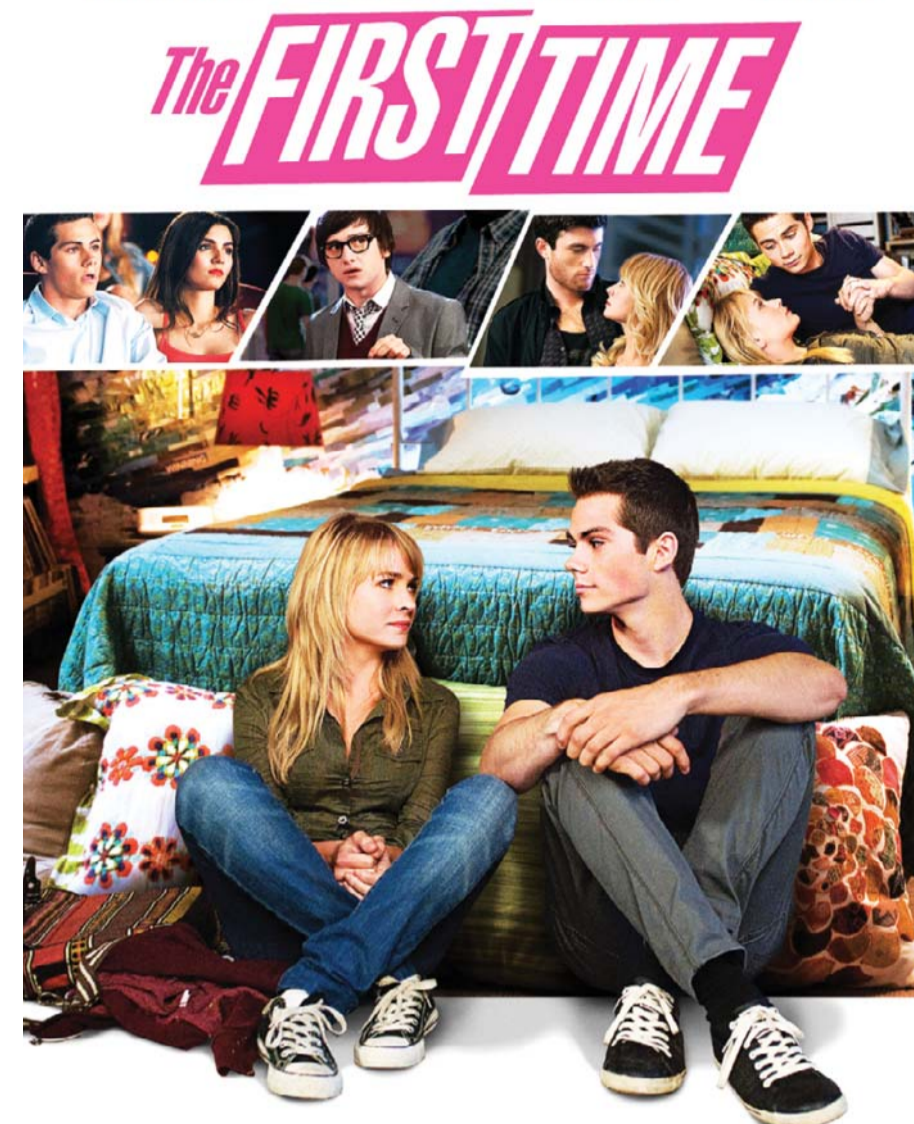
Discovery science

- 00:20 How It's Made
00:44 How It's Made
01:08 You Have Been Warned
01:55 Stephen Hawking's Grand Design
02:42 Sci-Fi Science
03:04 Sci-Fi Science
03:29 Penn & Teller Tell A Lie
04:16 You Have Been Warned
05:03 Stephen Hawking's Grand Design
05:50 Building The Biggest
06:37 How Do They Do It?
07:00 How Do They Do It?
07:23 Penn & Teller Tell A Lie
08:08 Sci-Fi Science
08:30 Sci-Fi Science
08:53 Building The Biggest
09:38 How It's Made
10:00 How It's Made
10:23 Mega Builders
11:08 Stephen Hawking's Grand Design
11:53 Building The Biggest
12:38 Penn & Teller Tell A Lie
13:23 How It's Made
13:46 How It's Made
14:10 Sci-Fi Science
14:32 Sci-Fi Science
14:57 Mega Builders
15:44 Stephen Hawking's Grand Design
16:31 Building The Biggest
17:18 Sci-Fi Science
17:40 Sci-Fi Science
18:05 Penn & Teller Tell A Lie
18:50 Food Factory
19:15 Food Factory
19:40 Stephen Hawking's Grand Design
20:25 How It's Made

Discovery world

- 00:30 Crashes That Changed Flying
01:20 Origins
01:40 Chasing Classic Cars
02:05 Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations
02:50 Tattoo Hunter
03:55 Disaster On K2
04:20 Extreme Engineering
05:05 Gunslingers
05:50 Modern Sniper
06:35 Origins
07:00 Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations
07:50 Bush Pilots
08:40 Extreme Engineering
09:30 Gunslingers
10:25 Origins
10:45 Chasing Classic Cars
11:10 Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations
12:00 Bush Pilots
12:50 Extreme Engineering
13:40 Gunslingers
14:30 Origins
14:55 Chasing Classic Cars
15:20 Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations
16:10 Bush Pilots
17:00 Extreme Engineering
17:50 Gunslingers
18:40 Origins
19:05 Chasing Classic Cars
19:30 Origins
19:55 Origins
20:20 Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations
21:10 Extreme Engineering
22:00 Origins

The FIRST TIME



THE FIRST TIME ON OSN MOVIES HD COMEDY

- 12:20 Miraculous Tales Of Flying
12:45 Fish Hooks
13:10 Austin & Ally
13:35 Austin & Ally
14:00 Liv And Maddie
14:25 Descendants Wicked World
14:30 Liv And Maddie
14:55 Dog With A Blog
15:20 Dog With A Blog
15:45 Miraculous Tales Of Flying
16:10 Violetta
17:00 The Next Step
17:25 Austin & Ally
17:50 Dog With A Blog
18:15 Mako Mermaids
18:40 Gravity Falls
19:05 Miraculous Tales Of Flying
19:30 Violetta
20:20 The Next Step
20:45 Good Luck Charlie
21:10 Good Luck Charlie
21:35 H2O
22:20 Binny And The Ghost
22:25 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
23:10 Hank Zipzer
23:35 Binny And The Ghost

Disney JUNIOR

- 00:05 Art Attack
00:30 Henry Hugglemonster
00:45 Calmerio
01:00 Zou
01:15 Loopdidoo
01:30 Art Attack
01:55 Henry Hugglemonster
02:05 Calmerio
02:20 Zou
02:30 Loopdidoo
02:45 Art Attack
03:10 Henry Hugglemonster
03:20 Calmerio
03:35 Zou
03:45 Loopdidoo
04:00 Art Attack
04:25 Henry Hugglemonster
04:35 Calmerio
04:50 Zou
05:00 Loopdidoo
05:15 Art Attack
05:35 Henry Hugglemonster
05:50 Calmerio
06:00 Zou
06:20 Loopdidoo
06:35 Art Attack
07:00 Calmerio
07:10 Zou
07:25 Loopdidoo
07:40 Mickey Mouse Clubhouse
08:05 Sofia The First
08:30 Goldie & Bear
08:45 Jake And The Never Land Pirates
09:10 Sheriff Callie's Wild West
09:35 Doc McStuffins
10:00 Sofia The First
10:30 The Lion Guard: Return Of The Roar
11:25 Winnie The Pooh: Springtime With Roo
12:45 Doc McStuffins
13:00 Sofia The First
13:25 Miles From Tomorrow
13:50 Jake And The Never Land Pirates
14:15 Sheriff Callie's Wild West
14:40 Mickey Mouse Clubhouse
15:10 Miles From Tomorrow
15:35 Jake And The Never Land Pirates
16:00 Sofia The First
16:25 Jungle Cubs
16:50 Aladdin
17:15 Gummi Bears
17:40 Goldie & Bear
18:05 Miles From Tomorrow
18:30 Sofia The First
18:55 Doc McStuffins
19:10 Jake And The Never Land Pirates
19:35 The Lion Guard: Return Of The Roar
20:30 Sofia The First
21:00 Winnie The Pooh: Springtime With Roo
22:20 Lilo And Stitch
22:50 Zou
23:05 Henry Hugglemonster
23:20 Calmerio
23:35 Zou
23:50 Loopdidoo

XD

- 06:00 Booster
06:10 Super Matrak
06:35 Super Matrak
07:00 Star vs The Forces Of Evil
07:25 K.C. Undercover
07:50 Supa Strikas
08:15 Annedroids
08:40 Lab Rats
09:10 Kirby Buckets
09:35 Guardians Of The Galaxy
10:00 Lab Rats: Bionic Island
10:25 Lab Rats: Bionic Island
10:50 K.C. Undercover
11:20 K.C. Undercover
11:45 Supa Strikas
12:10 Supa Strikas
12:35 Gamers Guide To Pretty Much Everything
13:00 Annedroids
13:30 Mighty Med
13:55 Mighty Med
14:20 Kickin' It
14:45 Kickin' It
15:10 Guardians Of The Galaxy
15:15 Rocket Monkeys
15:40 Guardians Of The Galaxy
16:30 Star vs The Forces Of Evil
16:55 Kirby Buckets
17:55 Gamers Guide To Pretty Much Everything
17:25 K.C. Undercover
17:50 Supa Strikas
18:15 Lab Rats
18:40 Mighty Med
19:10 Annedroids
19:35 Phineas And Ferb
20:00 Kirby Buckets
20:25 Gamers Guide To Pretty Much Everything
20:55 K.C. Undercover
21:20 Pickle And Peanut
21:45 Lab Rats
22:10 Mighty Med
22:40 Disney Mickey Mouse

EHD

- 00:00 Hollywood Medium With Tyler Henry
00:55 The Grace Helbig Show
01:25 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
02:20 E! News
03:15 Hollywood Cycle
04:10 The E! True Hollywood Story
05:05 E! Entertainment Special
06:00 Kourtney And Kim Take Miami
06:55 Kourtney And Kim Take Miami
07:50 Style Star
08:20 E! News
09:15 Giuliana & Bill
10:15 Giuliana & Bill
11:10 #RichKids Of Beverly Hills
12:05 E! News
13:05 House Of DVF
14:05 Fashion Bloggers
15:00 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
16:00 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
17:00 Giuliana & Bill
18:00 Fashion Police
19:00 WAGs
20:00 Christina Milian Turned Up
21:00 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
22:00 E! News

food network

- 00:00 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
00:30 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
01:00 Amazing Wedding Cakes
02:00 Mystery Diners
02:30 Mystery Diners
03:00 Man Fire Food
03:30 Man Fire Food
04:00 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
04:30 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
05:00 Iron Chef America
06:00 Chopped
07:00 Man Fire Food
07:50 Man Fire Food
08:00 Chopped
09:00 Barefoot Contessa: Back To Basics
09:30 Barefoot Contessa: Back To Basics
10:00 The Kitchen
11:00 The Pioneer Woman
11:30 The Pioneer Woman

- 02:00 Coronation Street
02:30 Big Star's Little Star
03:25 Tracy Ullman's Show
03:55 Raised By Wolves
04:20 The Doctor Blake Mysteries
05:15 Come Dine With Me Couples
06:10 Who's Doing The Dishes?
07:00 Eggheads
07:30 Tracey Ullman's Show
08:00 Raised By Wolves
08:25 The Doctor Blake Mysteries
09:20 Big Star's Little Star
10:15 The Chase
11:05 Eggheads
11:35 Come Dine With Me Couples
12:30 Who's Doing The Dishes?
13:25 Emmerdale
13:50 Eggheads
14:20 Coronation Street
14:45 Big Star's Little Star
15:35 Come Dine With Me Couples
16:30 Remember Me
17:25 Hiding
18:20 Emmerdale
18:45 Coach Trip
19:10 Coronation Street
19:35 Come Dine With Me Couples
20:30 Remember Me
21:25 Hiding
22:20 Coronation Street

NAT GEO people HD

- 00:10 Eat Street
00:35 Eat Street
01:00 David Rocco's Dolce India
01:25 David Rocco's Dolce India
01:50 Tales From The Bush Larder
02:15 Eat Street
02:40 Eat Street
03:05 Lyndey Milan - Taste Of Australia
03:30 Lyndey Milan - Taste Of Australia
03:55 A Marriage Of Flavours
04:20 Confucius Was A Foodie
05:10 Eat Street
05:25 Eat Street
06:00 The Best Job In The World
06:25 Wineroads
06:50 David Rocco's Dolce India
07:15 David Rocco's Dolce India
07:40 Tales From The Bush Larder
08:05 Eat Street
08:30 Eat Street
08:55 Lyndey Milan - Taste Of Australia
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12:40 David Rocco's Dolce India
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13:35 Tales From The Bush Larder
14:00 Eat Street
14:30 Eat Street
14:55 Lyndey Milan - Taste Of Australia
15:25 Lyndey Milan - Taste Of Australia
15:50 A Marriage Of Flavours
16:20 Confucius Was A Foodie
17:15 Eat Street
17:40 Eat Street
18:10 Ariana's Persian Kitchen
18:35 Ariana's Persian Kitchen
19:05 Lyndey Milan - Taste Of Australia
19:30 Lyndey Milan - Taste Of Australia

HISTORY HD

- 00:20 Aussie Pickers
01:10 Storage Wars: New York
01:35 Storage Wars: New York
02:00 Duck Dynasty
02:25 Duck Dynasty
02:50 American Pickers
03:40 Shipping Wars
04:05 Shipping Wars
04:30 Pawn Stars
05:00 The Curse Of Oak Island
06:00 Ice Road Truckers
06:50 Counting Cars
07:15 Counting Cars
07:40 Search For The Lost Giants
08:30 Storage Wars
08:55 Hoard Hunters
09:45 Lost In Transmission
10:35 American Pickers
11:25 The Curse Of Oak Island
12:15 Pawn Stars
12:40 Pawn Stars
13:05 Shipping Wars
13:30 Shipping Wars
13:55 Storage Wars
14:20 Storage Wars
14:45 Aussie Pickers
15:35 Storage Wars
16:00 American Pickers
16:50 Big Rig Bounty Hunters
17:15 Big Rig Bounty Hunters
17:40 Counting Cars
18:05 The Curse Of Oak Island
18:30 The Curse Of Oak Island
19:20 Duck Dynasty
19:45 Duck Dynasty
20:10 Pawn Stars
20:35 Pawn Stars

OSN FIRST HD

- 00:00 Community
00:30 Playing House
01:00 The Nightly Show With Larry Wilmore
01:30 Married
02:00 South Park
02:30 The League
03:00 Your Family Or Mine
03:30 The Goldbergs
04:00 Two And A Half Men
04:30 The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon
05:30 The Last Man On Earth
06:00 Mad Love
06:30 Community
07:00 Late Night With Seth Meyers
08:00 Two And A Half Men
08:30 Breaking In
09:00 Your Family Or Mine
09:30 The Grinder
10:00 Brooklyn Nine-Nine
10:30 Community
11:00 The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon
12:00 The Bernie Mac Show
13:00 Two And A Half Men
13:30 My Name Is Earl
14:30 Community
14:30 The Goldbergs
14:30 The Grinder
15:00 Brooklyn Nine-Nine
15:30 Playing House
16:00 The Nightly Show With Larry Wilmore
16:30 The Bernie Mac Show
17:00 Late Night With Seth Meyers
18:00 Your Family Or Mine
18:30 Living With Fran
19:00 Modern Family

OSN FIRST HD

- 00:00 Eat Street
00:35 Eat Street
01:00 David Rocco's Dolce India
01:25 David Rocco's Dolce India
01:50 Tales From The Bush Larder
02:15 Eat Street
02:40 Eat Street
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18:10 Ariana's Persian Kitchen
18:35 Ariana's Persian Kitchen
19:05 Lyndey Milan - Taste Of Australia
19:30 Lyndey Milan - Taste Of Australia

OSN MOVIES HD

- 00:00 Role Models
02:00 The First Time
04:00 The Trip To Italy
06:00 The Misadventures Of The Underhounds
08:00 Rush Hour 2
10:00 The Trip To Italy
12:00 Grudge Match
14:00 50 First Dates
16:00 Rush Hour 2
17:45 Mystery Men
20:00 Identity Thief
22:00 What We Do In The Shadows

OSN MOVIES HD

- 00:00 A Civil Action
02:00 The Savages
04:00 Great Expectations
06:30 What Dreams May Come
10:30 The Alamo
12:45 Won't Back Down
14:45 The Apostle
17:00 What Dreams May Come
19:00 At Any Price
21:00 Siberian Education
23:00 Dallas Buyers Club

- 19:30 I Hate My Teenage Daughter
20:00 The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon
21:00 Playing House
21:30 The Nightly Show With Larry Wilmore
22:00 Married
22:30 The Brink
23:00 The League
23:30 Late Night With Seth Meyers

OSN FIRST HD

- 00:00 Bates Motel
01:00 Quantico
02:00 Rosewood
03:00 Allegiance
04:00 Good Morning America
05:00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show
06:00 Covert Affairs
08:00 Heroes Reborn
09:00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show
10:00 Quantico
11:00 Covert Affairs
12:00 Coronation Street
12:30 Coronation Street
13:00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show
14:00 Live Good Morning America
16:00 Heroes Reborn
17:00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show
18:00 Heroes Reborn
19:00 The Voice
21:00 Castle
22:00 Supergirl
23:00 Better Call Saul

OSN MOVIES HD

- 00:00 Devil May Call
02:00 Jersey Shore Shark Attack
04:00 Age Of Dinosaurs
06:00 The League Of Extraordinary Gentlemen
08:00 Turbulence
10:00 The X Files
12:00 Justice League: Throne Of Atlantis
13:45 Fast & Furious 6
16:00 The League Of Extraordinary Gentlemen
18:00 Turbulence
19:45 The Bourne Legacy
22:00 300: Rise Of An Empire

OSN MOVIES HD

- 00:00 Role Models
02:00 The First Time
04:00 The Trip To Italy
06:00 The Misadventures Of The Underhounds
08:00 Rush Hour 2
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12:00 Grudge Match
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12:45 Won't Back Down
14:45 The Apostle
17:00 What Dreams May Come
19:00 At Any Price
21:00 Siberian Education
23:00 Dallas Buyers Club

OSN MOVIES HD

- 01:15 Project Almanac
03:15 Boychoir
05:00 Pompeii
07:00 Step Up All In
09:00 Boychoir
11:00 Life Of A King
13:00 Big Eyes
15:00 Paul Blart: Mall Cop 2
17:00 Odd Thomas
19:00 The Maze Runner
21:00 Tracers
23:00 Son Of A Gun

OSN SPORTS 1 HD

- 03:00 Premier League Darts
06:30 Top 14 Highlights
07:00 Golfing World
08:00 AFL Season Preview
09:00 Inside The PGA Tour
09:30 European Tour Weekly
10:00 Trans World Sport
11:00 Live AFL Premiership
14:00 NFL Full Time
14:30 The PGA Tour Champions Highlights
15:30 Golfing World
16:30 Inside The PGA Tour
17:00 European Tour Weekly
17:30 Live PGA Tour
20:30 Inside The PGA Tour
21:00 Live World Golf Championships

OSN SPORTS 2 HD

- 00:00 Trans World Sport
01:00 Super Rugby
03:00 PGA European Tour Highlights
04:00 The PGA Tour Champions Highlights
05:00 Super League
07:00 NRL Premiership
09:00 World Golf Championships
15:30 WWE Vintage
16:30 WWE Raw
19:00 WWE NXT
20:00 WWE Smackdown
22:00 Live Premier League Darts

OSN SPORTS 3 HD

- 00:00 NRL Full Time
00:30 Gillette World Sport
01:00 NRL Premiership
03:00 NRL Premiership
05:00 Inside The PGA Tour
05:30 European Tour Weekly
06:00 The World Sailing Show
06:30 NRL Full Time
07:00 Super Rugby
09:00 Premier League Darts
12:30 Gillette World Sport
13:00 Europro Tour
15:00 The Weber Cup
16:00 Super Rugby
18:00 AFL Premiership
20:30 Golfing World
21:30 Trans World Sport
22:30 Gillette World Sport
22:58 Live Super League



THE BOURNE LEGACY ON OSN MOVIES HD ACTION

- 08:00 Countdown
09:00 Countdown
09:30 On The Move
10:00 On The Move
11:00 The Pulse
12:00 Bloomberg Surveillance
13:00 Bloomberg Surveillance
14:00 Bloomberg Go
15:00 Bloomberg Go
16:00 Bloomberg Go
17:00 Bloomberg Markets
18:00 Bloomberg Markets: European Close
19:00 Bloomberg Markets
20:00 Bloomberg Markets
21:00 Bloomberg Markets
22:00 Bloomberg Markets
23:00 What'd You Miss?

- 14:20 Outback Truckers
15:10 Wheeler Dealers
16:00 Fast N' Loud
16:50 Chasing Classic Cars
17:15 How Do They Do It?
17:40 The Island With Bear Grylls
18:30 Men, Women, Wild
19:20 Dynamo: Revealed
20:10 The Liquidator
20:35 Garage Gold
21:00 The Island With Bear Grylls
21:50 Men, Women, Wild
22:40 So You Think You'd

ID INVESTIGATION DISCOVERY

- 00:05 Who On Earth Did I Marry?
00:30 The Haunted
01:20 Ghost Lab
02:10 Swamp Murders
03:00 True Nightmares
03:45 Who On Earth Did I Marry?
04:10 Who On Earth Did I Marry?
04:30 The Haunted
05:20 Fatal Encounters
06:10 On The Case With Paula Zahn
07:00 Dr. G: Medical Examiner On The Case With Paula Zahn
08:40 Fatal Encounters
09:30 Murder Shift
10:20 Deadly Affairs
11:10 True Crime With Aphrodite Jones
11:50 The Will
12:50 I Almost Got Away With It
13:40 California Investigator
14:05 Dr G: Medical Examiner

- 22:25 Origins
22:50 Gunslingers
23:40 Modern Sniper

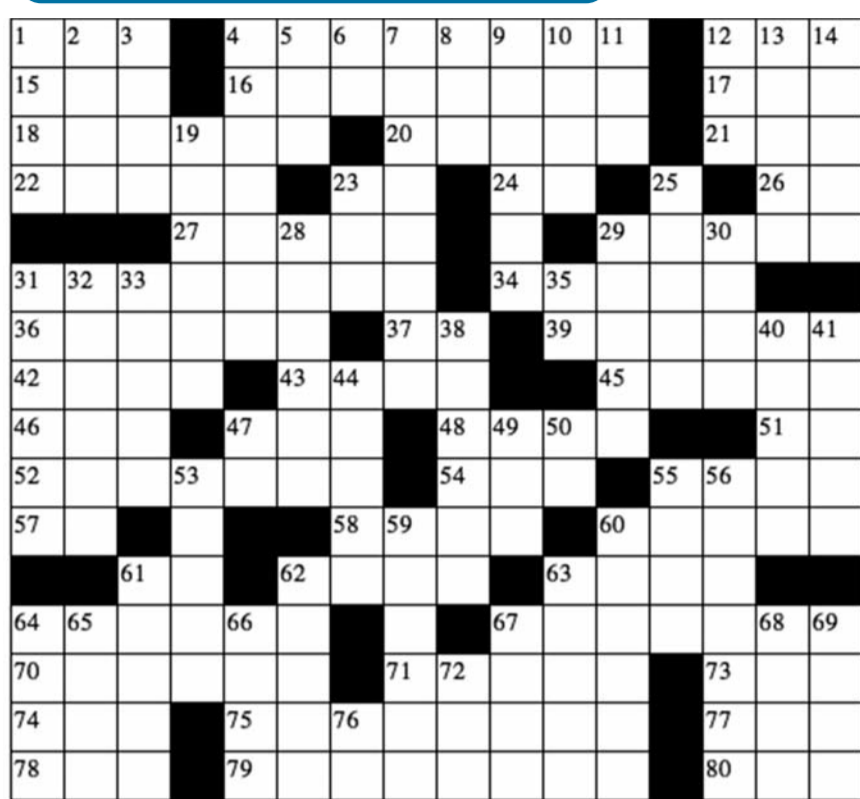
Disney CHANNEL

- 00:00 Violetta
01:40 The Hive
00:50 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
01:15 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
01:40 Hank Zipzer
02:05 Binny And The Ghost
02:30 Violetta
03:15 The Hive
03:20 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
03:45 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
04:10 Hank Zipzer
04:35 Binny And The Ghost
05:00 Violetta
05:45 The Hive
05:50 Mouk
06:00 Lolirock
06:25 Sofia The First
06:50 Gravity Falls
07:15 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug & Cat Noir
08:40 Jessie
09:30 Shake It Up
10:20 Shake It Up
11:10 That's So Raven
09:20 That's So Raven
09:45 Girl Meets World
10:10 Girl Meets World
10:35 Mulan 2
12:15 Cars Toons

CCTV NEWS

- 00:00 News Update
00:30 Dialogue
01:00 News Update
01:15 China 24
02:00 The Heat
02:30 News Update
03:00 Global Business
03:00 News Update
05:00 News Update
06:00 Dialogue
06:30 News Hour
08:00 Global Business
09:00 News Update
10:30 Sports Scene
11:00 Global Business
12:00 News Update
12:30 Culture Express
13:00 Africa Live
14:00 News Update

CROSSWORD 1212



ACROSS

- 1. The law enforcement agency in the Justice Department.
4. Filled or impregnated with perfume.
12. A device for creating a current of air by movement of a surface or surfaces.
15. A plant hormone promoting elongation of stems and roots.
16. A person who pleads for a cause or proposes an idea.
17. An agency of the United Nations affiliated with the World Bank.
18. A city in south central California in the San Joaquin Valley.
20. The posterior part of the mandible that is more or less vertical.
21. The Tibeto-Burman language spoken in the Dali region of Yunnan.
22. A member of the Siouan people formerly living in the Missouri river valley in NE Nebraska.
24. Destruction of heart tissue resulting from obstruction of the blood supply to the heart muscle.
26. A rare silvery (usually trivalent) metallic element.
27. Of or relating to a seizure or convulsion.
31. A native or inhabitant of Bahrain.
34. Relating to or accompanying birth.
36. A new embodiment of a familiar idea.
37. A unit of information equal to one million (1,048,576) bytes.
39. A town in northwestern New Mexico near the Arizona border.
42. Filled or abounding with fog or mist.
43. A French abbot.
45. Wild or domesticated South American cud-chewing animal related to camels but smaller and lacking a hump.
46. A constellation in the southern hemisphere near Telescopium and Norma.
48. The lean flesh of a fish similar to cod.
51. Minor or subordinate.
52. A bar of sand.
54. The sense organ for hearing and equilibrium.
57. Before noon.
58. Slanting diagonally across the grain of a fabric.
64. Minute blackish gregarious flies destructive to mushrooms and seedlings.
70. A military officer appointed from enlisted personnel.
71. An ordered reference standard.
73. Aircraft landing in bad weather in which the pilot is talked down by ground control using precision approach radar.
74. A flat wing-shaped process or wlike part of an organism.
75. A skeletal muscle arising from the tibia.
77. A member of a Mayan people of southwestern Guatemala.
78. United States liquid unit equal to 4 quarts or 3.785 liters.
79. The art of making and decorating pottery.
80. A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.

DOWN

- 1. Inventory accounting in which the oldest items (those first acquired) are assumed to be the first sold.
2. A commercial leavening agent containing yeast cells.
3. The United Nations agency concerned with atomic energy.
4. Hypothetical remedy for all ills or diseases.
5. The capital and largest city of Japan.
6. A motorized wheeled vehicle used for camping or other recreational activities.

- 7. The front limb (or homologous structure in other animals such as a flipper or wing).
8. Fiddler crabs.
9. Wealth regarded as an evil influence.
10. Small ornamental ladies' bag for small articles.
11. A potent estrogen used in medicine and in feed for livestock and poultry.
12. A trivial lie.
13. A condensed but memorable saying embodying some important fact of experience that is taken as true by many people.
14. Submerged aquatic plant having narrow leaves and small flowers.
19. (British informal) Ill-tempered or annoyed.
23. A decree that prohibits something.
25. Be going to.
28. The capital and largest city of Albania in the center of the country.
29. Showing deterioration from age.
30. Leaf or strip from a leaf of the talipot palm used in India for writing paper.
32. Evergreen Indian shrub with vivid yellow flowers whose bark is used in tanning.
33. The official of a synagogue who conducts the liturgical part of the service and sings or chants the prayers intended to be performed as solos.
35. A soft white precious univalent metallic element having the highest electrical and thermal conductivity of any metal.
38. Cut the head off.
40. Flat-topped or rounded inflorescence characteristic of the family Umbelliferae in which the individual flower stalks arise from about the same point.
41. A person to whom money is paid.
44. Found along western Atlantic coast.
47. The blood group whose red cells carry both the A and B antigens.
49. An associate degree in applied science.
50. A colorless element that is one of the six inert gasses.
53. English theoretical physicist who applied relativity theory to quantum mechanics and predicted the existence of antimatter and the positron (1902-1984).
55. Norwegian mathematician (1802-1829).
56. Preaching the gospel of Christ in the manner of the early church.
59. Deciduous round-headed Asiatic tree widely grown in mild climates as an ornamental for its heart-shaped leaves and fragrant yellow-green flowers followed by hanging clusters of fleshy orange-red berries.
60. Devoid of any feeling of awe or reverence.
61. Occurring at or forming an end or termination.
62. Tall perennial herb of tropical Asia with dark green leaves.
63. The dialect of Ancient Greek spoken in Thessaly and Boeotia and Aeolis.
65. Large genus of African trees bearing kola nuts.
66. A training program to prepare college students to be commissioned officers.
67. A landlocked republic in northwestern Africa.
68. Someone who works (or provides workers) during a strike.
69. God of love and erotic desire.
72. A rotating disk shaped to convert circular into linear motion.
76. A nonmetallic largely pentavalent heavy volatile corrosive dark brown liquid element belonging to the halogens.

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Try again for those goals of yours; a mentor or teacher is available to you today. Long-and short-term goals are attainable. Finances improve and you will be wise to put some of these improvements into funds for investing and saving. While in business group meetings today, you find much inspiration. Expect positive results concerning some recent work you have been doing; there are rewards. Travel and other contacts with faraway people and places will play a big role for you now and in the future. Such things bring love and gain in one way or another. Good things are happening in your life. New friends coming into your life now will encourage and empower you. Allow yourself to grow and change.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

There is a yearning for the stimulation of new ideas and ideals. Since you will not have yet reached your long-term goals this year, it might be fun to create some short-term goals. When you accomplish the short-term goals, the successes encourage you to move forward. When you have completed this workday you will feel good about your accomplishments. This afternoon's refreshment and some interesting conversation with a loved one brings about new and fun ideas for family outings. You encourage bonding and bring up a few fun memories. A few of you will enjoy camping, to learn some survival techniques or perhaps as a pathway to a new hobby. This is a good time to discuss the idea of the family volunteering in some charity that teaches.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Allow your creative side to blossom by categorizing your activities. The more you increase this creative side, the easier you will find problem-solving situations end. You have an exciting time ahead of you now as you discover ways in which to increase your sense of abundance and personal prosperity. Quick answers, great wit and a surplus of insights and solutions are at hand from which you can choose. This is a good time to write and communicate with real originality. Inventions and breakthroughs are possible. A domestic challenge can be ended later today and will free you for a more enjoyable home life. Your tact is improving. In learning more about your real self, you learn more about humanity. Enjoy some creative activity this evening.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Understanding and clarity are easy to come by just now. Any confusing issues can be cleared away. Your activity level is high and your expressiveness works in your favor. You can make your goals materialize through the sheer determination of your will. Reward yourself for progress rather than punish yourself for any imperfections. This afternoon, choose an activity that you consider fun and soothing, like going to an amusement park, bicycling, skating, etc. You may be able to help someone with a sensitive area by just being you. You answer what seems to be a silly question, but you will be setting an example. Communicating kindly and clearly is important to you, and you do it well. Your timing is perfect. You are most positive.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

Your mind is ready to attend to any situation that may occur today. Schedule more than enough time to get to and from your destination. Do everything you can to eliminate the unnecessary items on your to-do list so that you are not under such a tight time schedule. If you cannot adjust your work hours, so that you are not driving at stressful times, get a book on tape or some incentive recording and listen while you drive. If you are ready to grab those books and head for the nearest university, now is the time. If this is something you feel you need to do in order to widen your scope of knowledge, start making your plans. You could find out about applying for the May or June class. Your loved one shows you attention this evening.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Sometimes people may cut you off from speaking or make it difficult for you to express yourself. You could find that you lack some ability to move or communicate with others. A business class could be considered but get some good advice from the university or junior college before you sign-up for the class; an acting class may be all you need. Your ideas may need special tweaking. Most of the time, you reign as the most obvious one to go to when someone needs help with creative things. Today, you may want to do some meditation on your goals and gain a focus for you. There is also an interest in some spiritual development. This time can be the beginning phase of sublime spiritual development, to be sure. Tonight is perfect for soft and lovely things.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

Others value you for your unique qualities. There are new ways to view people and new ways of understanding the things that are occurring in your life now-behind the illusions. Co-workers enjoy teaming up with you because you listen and are helpful. You can take command of your life now and proceed with full speed ahead in any area you wish. In the workplace there is an opportunity to take a chance on a long shot-nothing ventured, nothing gained. This could be anything from inviting a new friend to lunch to asking for a raise. This afternoon you can enjoy some much deserved downtime. Be consistent in your message to young people this evening. This will help them to know what to expect from you and you will gain respect.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

This is your lucky day! Schedule that conference, give that party and plan for the future. Whatever you do today, your ability to make things run smoothly should produce excellent results. Teamwork and understanding are your best guarantee for peaceful negotiations at work and at home. Some idea running around in your head has an opportunity to actually be verbalized and perhaps viewed by others. You will be pleased at the response from higher-ups regarding your ideas. There is not only financial growth now, but also increased intimacy in your personal relationships. You will want to be showing your gratitude and appreciation for others who share your life. Young people have your attention this evening.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

Some unique and wonderful ideas are passed around among your peers and associates. Listen carefully-don't try to over-impress an innocent bystander. The financial aspects of a business deal lacks clarity-go back to the drawing board. You are particularly witty and can be wonderful company for someone after work. You enjoy relaxing with your friends. A surprise gift will come to you today from an admirer. Study the gift box and you will know the sender. This evening is an excellent time for rest and relaxation. Close associates are more positive and confirming of one another; this is encouraging. You may be feeling more like sharing some time with your lover or with close friends this evening; perhaps a party or event is in the making.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Eliminate the elements in your life that slow you and keep you from accomplishing your goals. You are to be congratulated for your ability to rise above difficult situations so use these talents in your everyday situation. Communal activities that take place now should be well-attended and successful. The need for emotional security is accentuated now, though you should not pressure a partner into doing things just to please you. Your creativity is strong, as usual. With your love of antiques, you could take a class in refinishing furniture. This or any creative hobby will help you to get a better focus on your emotional progress and will most certainly balance any frustrating energies. Perhaps a friend will join you in this class.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

Someone unexpected may test your ability to remain calm. This is a great opportunity to check out your patience. You may not appreciate this person's very different perspective but everyone has the right to an opinion. With patience you will have your turn to be expressive. Your own confidence is good and you accept other people's differences. Teaching through example may have you teaching the importance of looking for the good in all things-negative situations will dissipate. Other people tend to be lucky for you today. You may be able to enjoy and value your own life situation or feel especially kind toward a friend or loved one. Someone may compliment you on your belongings. Harmony with loved ones makes this a happy time.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Avoid burnout by scheduling time out for a little exercise each day, even if it means a couple of walks up and down stairs. Make it a point to tell only one joke or give one positive insight today, for your own enjoyment! You will help lighten the atmosphere and create a balance in your life for a good emotional health. You face tremendous responsibilities in your relationships with loved ones this afternoon and may find it difficult to express your own wants and desires. You should try to loosen up and enjoy your companions without being afraid to voice your true feelings. You are compassionate and giving to all around you. Your devotion and selflessness will reap unexpected rewards. Being appreciated and admired is a powerful need.

WORD SEARCH

Car Parts

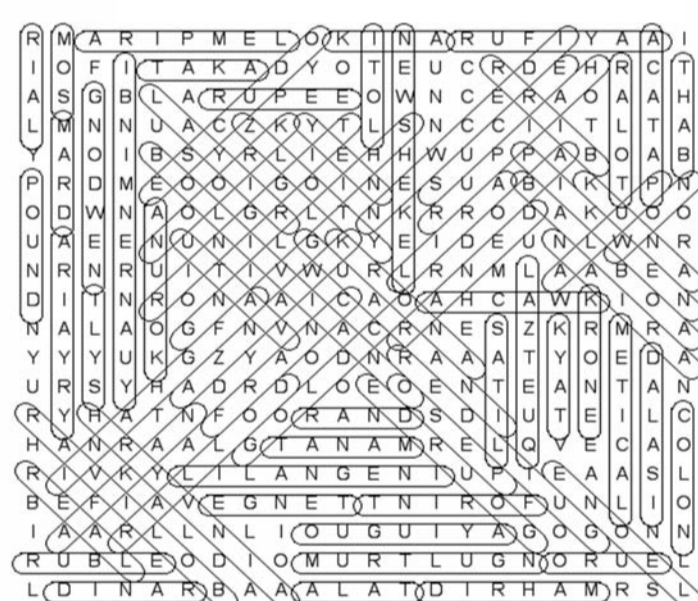
Find and circle all of the car parts that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell the name of an additional car part.



- AIR BAG, AIR CONDITIONER, ALTERNATOR, AXLE, BATTERY, BODY, BRAKE, BUMPER, CAR SEAT, CARBURETOR, CARRIER RACK, CHILD SEAT, CLUTCH, COOLING FAN, CRANKCASE, CRUISE CONTROL, DEFOGGER, DEFROSTER, DOOR, DRIVE LINE, DRIVESHAFT, ENGINE, FRAME, FUSE, GAS TANK, HEADLIGHT, HOOD, HORN, IGNITION, MUFFLER, POWER WINDOW, RADIO, REAR VIEW MIRROR, ROOF, SEAT BELT, STARTER, STEERING WHEEL, SUSPENSION, TAIL LIGHT, TIRES, TRANSMISSION, TRUNK, TURN SIGNAL, WHEEL RIM, WHEELS, WINDSHIELD

Yesterday Solution

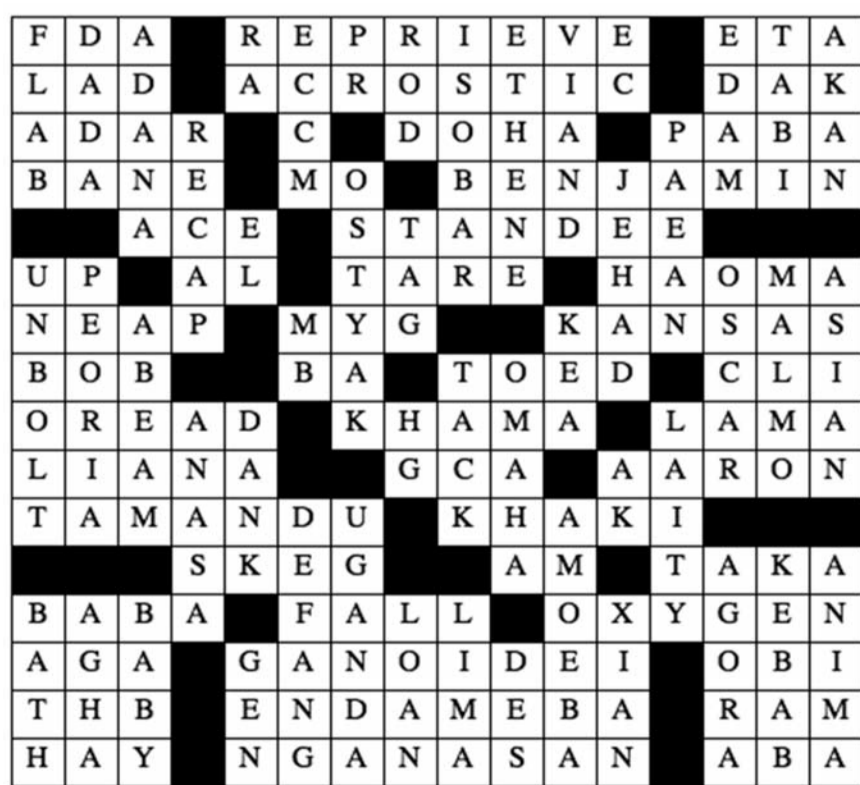
World Currencies



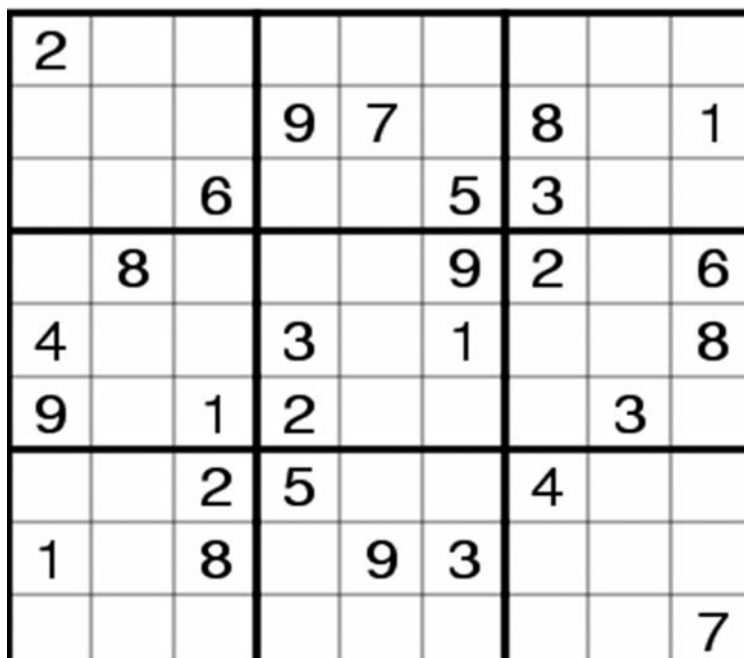
- AFGHANI, ARIARYRY, BAHT, BALBOA, BIRR, BOLIVAR, BOLIVIANO, COLON, DALASI, DENAR, DINAR, DIRHAM, DOLLAR, DRAM, ESCUDO, EURO, FORINT, FRANC, GOLD CORDOBA, GOURDE, GUARANI, GULDER, HRVNIJA, KINA, KORUNA, KRONA, KRONE, KROON, KUNA, KWACHA, KWANZA, KYAT, LEMPIRA, LEONE, LILANGENI, LIRA, LITAS, LOTI, MANAT, METICAL, NAIRA, NAKFA, NEW CEDI, NEW DONG, NEW KIP, RUPEE, NGULTRUM, DUGUIYA, PATAKA, PESO, POUND, PULA, QUETZAL, RAND, REAL, RIAL, RINGGIT, RYAL, RUBLE, YUAN RENMINBI, ZLOTY

The hidden sentence is: IF YOU CAN COUNT YOUR MONEY, YOU DON'T HAVE A BILLION DOLLARS

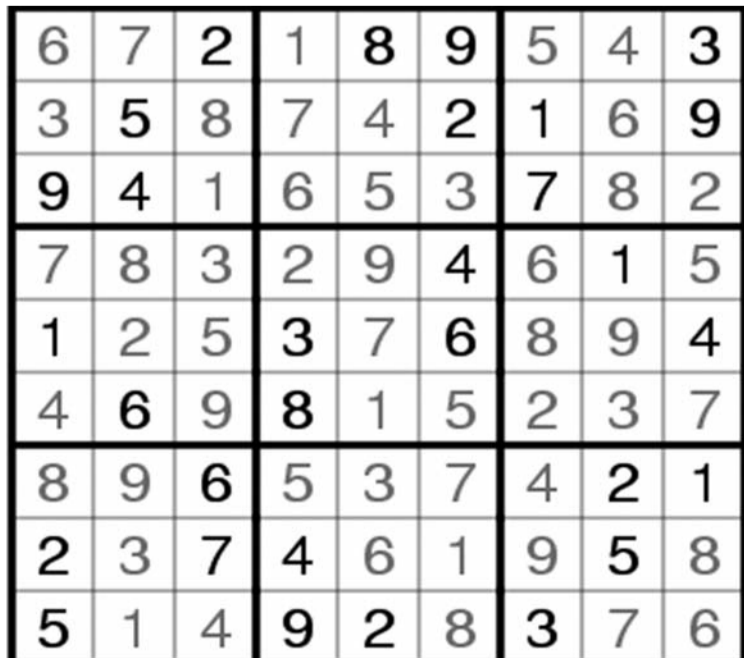
Yesterday's Solution



Daily SuDoku



Yesterday's Solution

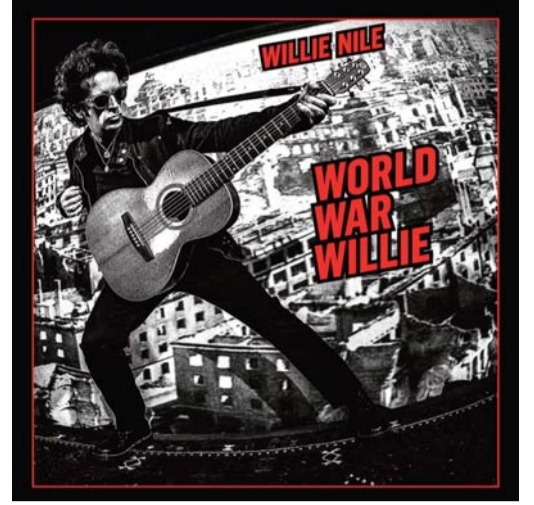


Cool rockin' granddaddy Willie Nile glorifies untamed aging

Willie Nile is loud and proud. While other rockers merely strut around leathered and weathered, Nile takes one giant leap for mankind: glorifying the aging process with the party-hearty song "Grandpa Rocks" (its featured character depicted in a Clash T-shirt and dirty combat boots). Soul mates, seekers - even seductive sociopaths - populate the storytelling in Nile's robust new album, "World War Willie," co-produced with Grammy winner Stewart

Lerman. As the journey begins, the 67-year-old firecracker and his rock-solid band reincarnate their early rebel in "Forever Wild" ("16 and crazy - we were ragged and free...") "Let's All Come Together" is an amped-up social anthem - think danceable Pete Seeger. Listeners can't resist hollering the stress-busting refrain in the track "Hell Yeah." In fact, there's quite a bit that's irresistible in this diverse album - including Nile's self-deprecating humor. Fans fist-pumping to

his new-golden-oldie song will hear this grandpa - who's apparently chugged the entire Fountain of Youth - playfully rolling in the Stone(s) Age. "Where's my cane?!" snarls the cool rockin' granddaddy. "Who are these people?!... 'Get offa my cloud!!!" -AP



Don Cheadle, right, the star, director and co-screenwriter of 'Miles Ahead,' poses with Frances Davis, ex-wife of legendary jazz trumpeter Miles Davis, at the premiere of the film at the Writers Guild Theatre in Beverly Hills, Calif.



Don Cheadle, left, the star, director and co-screenwriter of 'Miles Ahead,' poses with cast members Emayatzy Corinealdi, center, and Ewan McGregor at the premiere of the film at the Writers Guild Theatre. — AP photos

Review

Cheadle's 'Miles Ahead' stylishly evokes jazz legend

"Miles Ahead," an ambitious, experimental biopic about jazz legend Miles Davis, actually states its mission twice over the course of the movie. Basically: "If you're going to tell a story, come with some attitude. Don't make it all corny." The person saying it is Miles Davis, played by Don Cheadle, who also co-wrote and directed. In the context of the film, he's speaking to a fictional music writer named Dave Braden (Ewan McGregor), who has conned, charmed and strong-armed his way into Miles' orbit for a few days in hopes of writing a comeback story that would end the eccentric musician's half decade of dormancy.

While a little on the nose to be repeated, it's a good line, and an even better goal in the murky and generally unrewarding territory of the dreaded biopic - especially for someone as elusive, multifaceted and just downright giant as Miles Davis was. As Cheadle's Miles cheekily says to Dave in that whispered rasp, "I was born, I moved to New York, met some cats, made some music, did some dope, made some more music, then you showed up at my house." Knowing well how a tell-it-all approach can be duller than a Wikipedia page, Cheadle eschews the cradle to grave approach and instead focuses in on two moments - a crazy few days in

Davis' "Howard Hughes of jazz" phase and much earlier during the romantic beginnings and fraught endings of his relationship with the dancer Frances Taylor (Emayatzy Corinealdi).

The story jumps from the past to the present very suddenly, employing an interesting visual technique that links the two moments in time through a character, let's say, falling in the present and another continuing the motion in the past. It's a unique take on the fluidity and imprecision of memory, but, more precisely it's indicative of Cheadle's ambitions to make the film feel as unpredictable and freestyle as Miles' jazz. Cheadle as an actor is not afraid to show Miles Davis for all his contradictions - his genius, his charm, his ego and his mania. His bold, studied and fully lived-in portrayal has attitude to spare too.

Record company

The "present" part shows a hyper-active Davis, hopped up on painkillers and hobbling with a deteriorating hip trying to collect a payment from the record company that he's long since stopped producing for. It's sort of a kitchen sink approach to the escalating events story that takes Dave and Miles everywhere from a college dorm room to score some cocaine to a high-speed shoot out. It's

particularly odd then that this portion is duller than the more traditional portrait of the past. That section plays more like a languid, melancholy ballad as we peer into his courtship of Frances and the insanity, danger and obsessiveness that drove her away. Cheadle and Corinealdi's palpable chemistry is an undeniable force here, and is a striking contrast to the occasional awkwardness of many of Cheadle and McGregor's interactions in the present. In theory, it's probably meant to be another evocation of jazz stylings, but in execution, it feels more like dead air.

Cheadle has an interesting vision here and his ambitions pay off on a number of levels - especially in his performance - but it doesn't really come together as a coherent composition. Unlike in jazz, the disparate moments, sounds and styles struggle to coalesce in service of a whole that's bigger than its parts. "Miles Ahead," a Sony Pictures Classic release, is rated R by the Motion Picture Association of America for "strong language throughout, drug use, some sexuality/nudity and brief violence." Running time: 100 minutes. Two and a half stars out of four. — AP

Sydney embraces Kanye loving mural

An Australian artist behind a larger-than-life mural of American rap star Kanye West embracing himself has offered to paint over it for a sizable fee. The 20-foot (6.1-metres) painting dubbed 'Kanye Loves Kanye' features a black-suited image of the singer kissing another version of himself wearing a glittering pantsuit. Artist Scott Marsh said he decided to paint the image after a friend did a mural of a nude Kim Kardashian selfie at one end of the wall and he wanted to create an artistic "link".

He said he was inspired by the internet meme which followed the infamous red carpet photograph of Kanye embracing Kim Kardashian in which the rapper's head was superimposed on his wife's body. "It was pretty light-hearted," he told AFP of the mural made on March 19. "I suspect when you paint something big on a wall people tend to take notice of it." He said he was contacted by someone via email claiming to represent West, asking him to remove the image, although he was not convinced it was genuine. Marsh, who has been painting on the wall in the Sydney suburb of

Chippendale for several years, said he was open to whitewashing the mural for US\$100,000.

Whoever pays the fee will receive a one-off large print of the amorous embrace, in which the image is mostly whited out, an offer Marsh said was open to anyone but may appeal to the global superstar. "If you pay that I will also paint over the wall," he said. The mural on Wednesday drew a number of onlookers to the quiet lane, with 22-year-old Stephanie Brown saying she took a short detour to snap the image she said was "a reflection of society". Quintin Fawcett, a 20-year-old axe and saw maker visiting Australia from New Zealand, said he too was aware of the mural and thought "I might as well come and have a look". "It highlights how crazy people are for the cult of celebrity that I can paint a 20-foot mural in Chippendale and it's global news," said Marsh. — AFP

Oscar-winning actress Patty Duke dies at 69

Actress and singer Patty Duke, who won an Oscar at age 16 for her portrayal of deaf-blind political activist Helen Keller in "The Miracle Worker," died Tuesday. She was 69. Duke, whose real name was Anna Pearce, had developed sepsis from a ruptured intestine, her manager Mitchell Stubbs said in a statement. "This morning, our beloved wife, mother, grandmother, matriarch and the exquisite artist, humanitarian, and champion for mental health Anna Patty Duke Pearce closed her eyes, quieted her pain and ascended to a beautiful place," said her son, the actor and director Sean Astin.

Astin, who played hobbit Samwise Gamgee in Peter Jackson's "The Lord of the Rings" trilogy, said the family were celebrating the "infinite love and compassion she shared through her work and throughout her life." Duke, who lived in New York, shot to fame with a best supporting actress Academy Award for her role as Keller in Arthur Penn's 1962 biopic "The Miracle Worker." She built on her success by playing "identical cousins" in her own sitcom, "The Patty Duke Show," which ran for more than 100 episodes in the mid-1960s.

She went on to take film roles, including in Mark Robson's 1967 drama "Valley of the Dolls," embarked on a successful singing career and served as president of the Screen Actors Guild from 1985 to 1988. She won three Emmy Awards, including for the miniseries "Captains and Kings" and television movie "My Sweet Charlie," which both aired in the 1970s. In her 1987 autobiography, she revealed that she had been diagnosed with bipolar disorder, then known as manic depression, five years earlier, and she went on to become a vocal advocate for people with mental health issues.

'Brave humanitarian'

Duke apologized to fans earlier in March for having kept a low profile recently. "I have been absent, but not far, believe me. I love and miss you all. Hopefully back more soon and often," tweeted the star, who celebrated 30 years of marriage to her fourth husband, drill sergeant Mike Pearce, two weeks ago. "My mother's life touched tens of millions of people. Her groundbreaking portrayal of iconic American legend Helen Keller launched a career that would span six decades," said Astin.

"First on Broadway and then on the silver screen, Patty Duke's characteri-

zation of the extraordinary development of the blind-deaf child brought global attention to the plight of people living with those challenges." Astin said Duke had talked about setting up a "Patty Duke Mental Health Initiative" as she struggled with illness. Her death triggered an outpouring of tributes from Hollywood, led by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences which posted a picture of Duke as a grinning teen, proudly brandishing her Oscar.



This file photo taken on March 23, 2010 shows actress Patty Duke speaking during the Social Security Administration Reunites the cast of 'The Patty Duke Show' press conference. — AFP

West Wing star Marlee Matlin, who won a best actress Oscar for "Children of a Lesser God," described Duke as "brave, outspoken and humanitarian" while "Star Trek" and "TJ Hooker" actor William Shatner said she was "a wonderful friend." "21 Jump Street" actress Holly Robinson Peete, soap star Alyssa Milano, pro wrestler Jerry Lawler and US radio host Tammy Bruce all took to Twitter to offer their condolences. "She was so cool she had a disco dance named after her in my hood in 70s NYC," said legendary New York musician and producer Nile Rodgers. Flowers were being readied to be placed on Duke's Walk of Fame star on Hollywood Boulevard. — AFP



Awarded winners of the Saudi Film Festival pose for a group photo on March 28, 2016 at the Saudi Cultural Center in Dammam, some 400 km eastern of the capital Riyadh. Although public cinemas are not allowed in Saudi Arabia there is a growing interest in cinema and filmmaking, as reflected in the re-emergence of the Saudi Film Festival last year after a seven-year absence. — AFP photos



An awarded winner of the Saudi Film Festival walks with her award on the stage.

Country icon Merle Haggard cancels April concerts

Country icon Merle Haggard has canceled his April concert dates as he recovers from a recurring bout of double pneumonia. "I want to thank my fans for their prayers and well wishes. I hope to be back on the road in May, but I'm taking it one day at a time," the singer said in a statement from his publicist on Tuesday.

The 78-year-old singer of hits like "Okie From Muskogee," "Mama Tried" and "Workin'

Man Blues" had also cancelled dates in February and March. He had a battle with lung cancer in 2008 but still keeps up an ambitious touring schedule. — AP

File photo shows singer-songwriter Merle Haggard performs at the 2015 Big Barrel Country Music Festival in Dover, Del. — AP





(From left) Photo shows Khaled Al-Abdulghafour, Ramzan Al-Naimi, Creative Director of Jazeera Network, and Dr Mohammed Al-Kandari at Fototalks forum.



Photo shows Kuwaiti photographer Basma Al-Qartas.



(From left) Photo shows famous Kuwaiti singers Nabeel Shuail and Hmoud Al-Khudhor. — Photos by Khalid Al-Ali

Forum for photographers from across the GCC

Fototalks 2016: 'Inspiring, Educating and Entertaining'

By Athoob Al-Shuaibi

Their motto is "Inspire, Connect and Educate", but in fact, they do more than that. The photographers annual forum, Fototalks 2016, is bringing together again amateurs and professionals from Kuwait and the Gulf region in a free from formalities atmosphere to network and strengthen their relations. It turned the theater of the Gulf University (GUST) into a platform where they show off their photographic talents in addition to taking advantage of both technical expertise and talking about challenges and successes in their field.

The idea behind this event started five years ago by photographer Khaled Al-Abdulghafour. "I've never imagined that Fototalks would last for another year when I first started. However, when I saw 50 to 70 photographers came asking about when is the next one, I knew by then that it's going to become a greater responsibility for me to maintain a higher level each year of these four elements, inspiration, education, networking and entertainment," Al-Abdulghafour said.

Despite the technical faults that occurred during the seminars, the team overcame them smoothly. The event was characterized by the presenter, photographer Dr. Mohammed Ali Al-

Kandari, who was adept at melting the ice with the audience with his great sense of humor.

This year, the guest speakers were from Kuwait, Qatar, UAE, KSA, Oman and Bahrain. The first part of the event began with Ramzan Al-Nuaimi, the creative director at Al-Jazeera Network who talked about how to become your own brand. Secondly, photographer Basma Al-Qartas told us about her successful transition from being a school teacher for blind children to establishing her newborn photography business, followed by the photographers challenge when two photographers had only twenty minutes to take a picture and edit it. In this challenge, Fototalks surprised the audience when they invited one of the most famous singers in the Arab world, Nabeel Shuail, to pose as a model for this challenge. Another one, too was a live competition between two photographers in the food photography category.

Prior to the food photography challenge, the award winning Emirati photographer Khalid Al-Hammadi presented his exciting and risky experience in photographing the fog over the city of Abu Dhabi for the last three years. The photographer's work has been recently selected to be published in the National Geographic Magazine for travel.



(From left) Photo shows food photographers Abdulaziz Al-Duwaisan and Abdulaziz Al-Shayji during the discussion.

The Fototalk forum 2016 will continue until the third of April in morning and evening sessions. The event requires previous registration, free of charge, except the workshops. This event is organized by photolender.com with the

Kuwait Finance House as a strategic partner. This year's event is sponsored by LUMEN photography, Canon, Albumi.com, Love cafe, Joe's, and Choco Queen, hosted by the Gulf University of Science and Technology (GUST) and the



Photo shows Emirati photographer Khalid Al-Malki.

Professional Advancement & Continuing Education Centre (PACE).

Hikers overlook a bluff on the Kalaupapa Peninsula.



Flowers grow around an abandoned structure that was once part of a leper colony in Molokai in Kalaupapa.

Hawaii: Exploring the sea cliffs and sad stories of Molokai

A visit to the island of Molokai offers a window on a unique and tragic chapter of Hawaiian history. For about a century beginning in 1866, some 8,000 individuals afflicted with leprosy were quarantined to live out their lives on the remote Kalaupapa Peninsula on Molokai's northern shores. Their stories are told at Kalaupapa National Historical Park. About 100 people still live in the community, mostly government workers along with a few patients who chose to stay after the quarantine policy officially ended in 1969. Unless you're invited by a resident, you can only visit the park on a guided tour with a permit. There are several options for getting there. My wife Yukako and I booked a package with Makani Kai Charter Tours that included a flight from Honolulu to the main airport at Molokai, a bus tour of the park plus lunch, and a return flight from a tiny open-air airport inside the park.

We also planned a hike down Kalaupapa's steep sea cliffs before our park tour. We headed to the trailhead from Molokai's mountaintop airport, sharing a 15-minute taxi ride with two people who'd been on our flight. Our fellow passengers were heading to the cliffs for mule rides. We were told to

start ahead of the mules as the trail narrows in some spots and the mules make it tougher to navigate. (We planned our flight home from the park airport so we wouldn't have to hike back up.)

Colorful plants

At 1,664 feet up, the mountaintop offered an incredible view of the Kalaupapa Peninsula - though it would have been even more spectacular if there hadn't been storm clouds and vog (what locals call volcanic smog). As we began the roughly 3-mile hike, we were immersed in a loud chorus of tropical birds. We also caught a few glimpses of the ocean rumbling below at spots where the thick foliage thinned out. As we made our way down, I spotted huge spider webs above in the trees and Yukako found tiny flowers and moss-covered rocks. Colorful plants abounded along with guava, noni and Brazilian pepper trees heavy with red bundles of peppercorns. Farther along, a wild goat ignored us while quietly munching on the noni fruit, also known as Indian mulberry.

The uneven concrete and boulder steps began to jolt our knees so we took a break every few switchbacks. Needless to

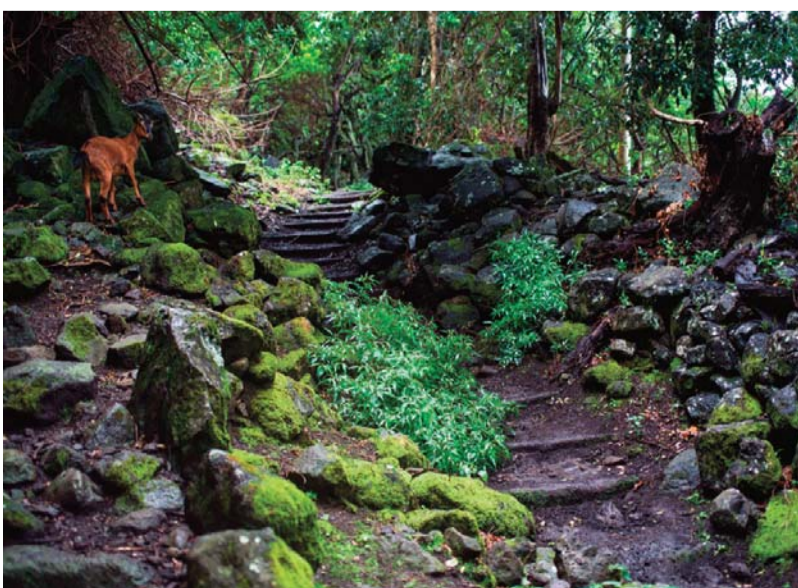
say, there's no cell service here, and hikers must bring their own snacks and water. As mules use the trail daily, mule droppings are found at every turn. That aside, the hike was peaceful with hardly anyone else on the trail. Storm clouds broke an hour into our hike. The rain was brief but heavy, turning the trail into a slippery mud bath. Footholds filled with water and water spilled in streams off the concrete steps. We'd packed raincoats but got soaked to the bone anyway. Yukako took a small stumble and I had a few close calls, ending up with muddy hands from catching myself on the rocks. We tried to dry ourselves off but with no sun and a strong breeze, we were chilled for the rest of the hike.

Ironwood trees

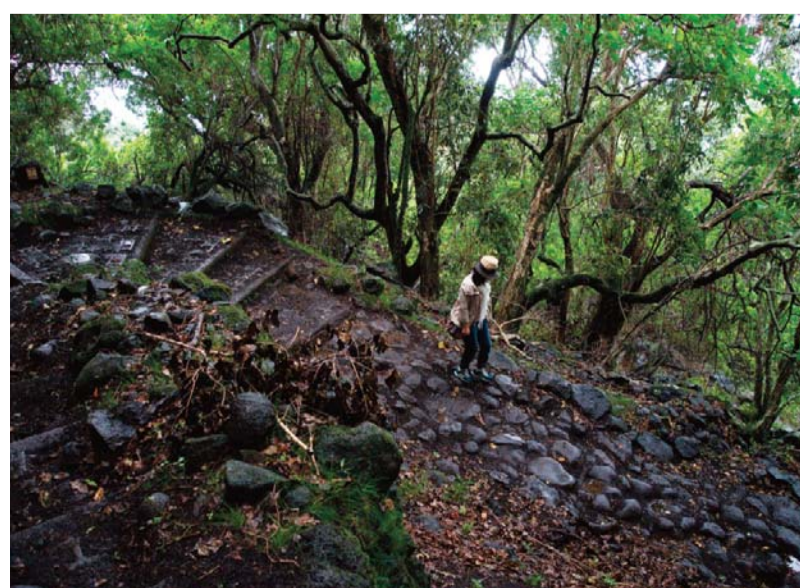
About three-fourths of the way down, the mules caught up with us, passing us on a wide switchback. Near the bottom, the trail opened up to a view of the stormy Pacific. Rough seas slammed onto shores lined with boulders, palm trees and ironwood trees. The hike took about two hours total, but would have gone faster if the rain hadn't slowed us down. We met our tour near the beachside mule corral, joining a few

other hikers, a group of retirees and the mule riders who'd passed us, including our fellow taxi passengers, who looked just as wet and worn as we did. An old yellow school bus transported us to the national park.

We visited structures built in the late 1800s by St Damien, the Belgian priest who devoted himself to the colony and was eventually canonized, and also saw the gravesite of St Marianne, the nun who cared for female patients of the colony and who also was made a saint. Our guide pointed out an ancient Hawaiian altar called a heiau, and we visited two turn-of-the-20th century churches still in use. Some of St Damien's remains are interred at St Philomena Church. Along the way there were deer, wild pigs and dozens of feral but friendly cats who were accustomed to being fed by the bus driver. We picnicked on a blustery field overlooking the peninsula's cold, rough waters before being taken to the airport for our flight out. It was sobering to consider that ships once anchored here to unload passengers who would never leave. — AP



A wild goat appears along the trail leading to Molokai's Kalaupapa Peninsula.



A hiker makes her way down a trail leading towards the Molokai's Kalaupapa Peninsula near Kualapuu, Hawaii.



A view of the trail leading to Molokai's Kalaupapa Peninsula in Kualapuu, Hawaii. — AP photos



Pierre Berge

Fashion mogul accuses designers of 'enslaving women' with Islamic styles

Former fashion mogul Pierre Berge lashed out yesterday at designers creating Islamic clothing and headscarves, accusing them of taking part in the "enslavement of women". The French businessman, partner of the late fashion legend Yves Saint Laurent, took aim at the wave of big fashion chains that have followed the Italian designers Dolce & Gabbana in catering specifically to the Muslim market. "I am scandalized," he told Europe 1 French radio.

"Creators should have nothing to do with Islamic fashion. Designers are there to make women more beautiful, to give them their freedom, not to collaborate with this dictatorship which imposes this abominable thing by which we hide women and make them live a hidden life." "Renounce the money and have some principles," he declared, lashing the new fashion for "modest" Muslim-friendly lines. His comments came as the French families minister, Laurence Rossignol, sparked outrage on social media as she compared women who followed this trend with "negroes who supported slavery".

Her office later told AFP she had not intended to cause offence but was referring to an abolitionist tract by the French

philosopher Montesquieu, "De l'esclavage des nEgres" ("On the Enslavement of Negroes"). Earlier this year Dolce & Gabbana became the first major western brand to openly aim at capturing a corner of the Islamic fashion market—estimated to be worth \$260 billion (230 billion euros) — with its Abaya range. It included 14 abayas or ankle-length dresses, which it matched with embroidered headscarves and hijabs.

'Burqinis'

The Swedish giant H&M followed their lead, using a veiled Muslim women in its advertising campaign, with the Japanese brand Uniqlo earlier this month announcing it would begin selling hijabs in its London stores. The British brand Marks & Spencer has also put its toe in the water, marketing full-body "burqini" swimming costumes in its online store. Last year Zara, Tommy Hilfiger, Oscar de la Renta and Mango all launched varying "modest" collections to coincide with the holy Muslim month of Ramadan, picking up on the success of a small DKNY line the previous year. But Berge, 85, who ran the Yves Saint Laurent fashion house for four decades, decried

their "opportunism".

"These creators who are taking part in the enslavement of women should ask themselves some questions," he added. "In one way they are complicit, and all this to make money. Principles should come before money," Berge argued. "In life you have to choose the side of freedom," he said. Rather than covering women up, "we must teach (Muslim) women to revolt, to take their clothes off, to learn to live like most of the women in the rest of the world." "It's absolutely inadmissible. It is not tolerable," he told the radio station.

Berge—who spends most of his time in Muslim-majority Morocco—said: "I am definitely not an Islamophobe. Women have a right to wear headscarves, but I do not see why we are going towards this religion, these practices and mores that are absolutely incompatible with our western freedoms." — AFP

CHINA FASHION WEEK



Models parade creations from the XINSHEN LINEN and Sun Lin Collection designed by Sun Lin at China Fashion Week in Beijing yesterday. — AP/AFP photos

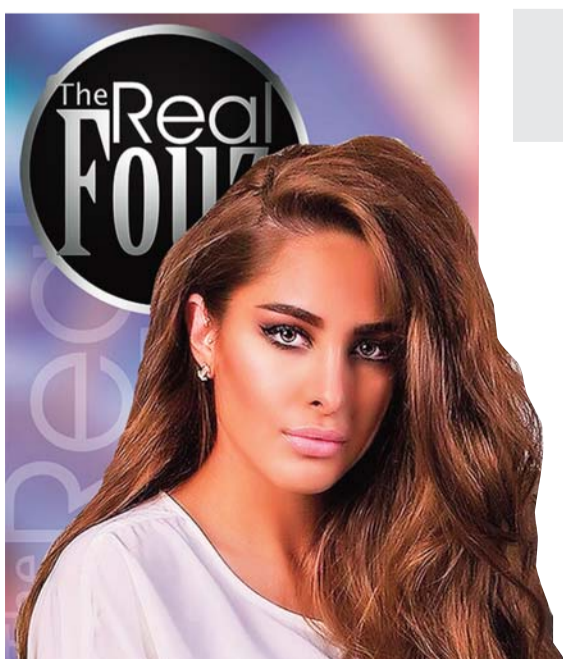
Models parade creations from the J Queen & Little Queen Xie Jiaqi Collection designed by Xie Jiaqi.

Features



Models parading creations from J BY HO & WOW-IN HaoJia Cross-border Collection designed by Hao Jia.

Models parading creations from Fei Gallery & Boutique Sun Xuefei Collection designed by Sun Xuefei.



Confidence is attractive

Gaining confidence has been a rather sensitive and essential issue that almost every girl deals with and some suffer from it. We live in a world now where everything is available, and the understanding of beauty has changed. In some aspects, it has changed to the better and in other aspects it has changed to the worse. Confidence is how you see yourself, whether it was physically, mentally or emotionally, and it's also how you carry yourself in a crowd.

Many women and young ladies compare themselves to others, which is a huge mistake because that's where the insecurities come in and play a huge damaging role. Sometimes people can get really nasty with each other and manipulative to put you down or make you feel bad about yourself, and only people who are weak and suffer from low-self-esteem would want people to feel as bad as they feel about themselves.

Building confidence takes a while, and only when you do good for others will you feel better about yourself, help-

ing others and making them happy in any way will make you feel better automatically. Keep in mind helping others can be as simple as cheering them up when they're down to as important as charity work and donating to the people in need.

Surround yourself with people who want to see you do better and who will also guide you whenever you're at crossroads, feeling that love and care from others will also build trust between you and the people who matter to you the most. The more you believe in yourself and push yourself to achieve your goals the more your confidence grows with you. You need to love yourself first in order to love others, there's nothing wrong with pampering yourself and not settling for anything less than what you deserve.

Of course being overconfident isn't an attractive characteristic, it will definitely cause you to lose opportunities in life such as a job offer or a career and so on, people who are overconfident tend to be more delusional or might come off as snobby to others. It also isn't healthy mentally

to think you are superior or deserve more than everyone else because sometimes when you set the bar really high, no one will be there to satisfy or support you.

The right amount of confidence is extremely attractive, it makes others want to meet you and hear your story and it also helps you believe in yourself to always do better, it also encourages you to solve any problems you encounter in your way, whether it was at work, at home or in a relationship. Confidence always comes from within first, then is boosted with what you achieve and who you help, however always be realistic and try to inspire others to be as giving, caring and considerate of others. It is always beautiful to see young girls and even older women support each other and just be satisfied with who they are and what they have, because if you think about it, there will always be better people, more beautiful, more successful and so on, but if you are confident and grateful then that shouldn't matter at all to you, and you should always wish the best for everyone around you.



File photo shows people show off their Easter finery as they walk down Fifth Avenue in New York during the annual Easter Parade and Easter Bonnet Festival. — AFP

In Montreal, a French-flavored festival on bicycles



This image provided shows bicyclists touring Montreal, Canada.— AP photos



This image provided shows bicyclists touring Montreal, Canada, as part of a bike festival that typically brings out 15,000 people for a night ride and 25,000 for the main event a few days later.

Montreal puts the sizzle on its status as a cycling and cultural beehive with a bike festival May 29-June 5. It's anchored by a bicycle tour of the city-island that rivals New York's Five Boro cycling extravaganza in size, adds a distinctive French twist and shows Americans how very far their dollar can go in Canada these days. Tour de l'île de Montréal is the iconic event for a bicycle-mad city that Joëlle Sevigny of Velo Québec, the province's bicycle association and festival organizer, calls "little Copenhagen in North America."

The festival is far from little. The Sunday tour on closed-off streets, June 5, typically draws 25,000 people, and follows a Friday night ride that brings together 15,000 in

good weather. The classic Sunday ride is 30 miles (50 kilometers), with an "express" option for fast cyclists to leave before the mob. Shorter hops are part of the mix, as is a 60-mile (100-kilometer) ride that ventures beyond streets closed to traffic. Tour la nuit, on the Friday night, takes cyclists 14 miles (23 kilometers) and invariably brings out plenty of bikers and spectators in goofy costumes with some wild homemade illumination on the bikes.

Tour de l'île de Montréal began in 1985 with 3,500 people and mushroomed as the cycling ethic took hold. Cycling is a year-round form of commuting and recreation despite the bitter winters in a province that is home to Route Verte, the vast bike network that made Québec the

world's top cycling destination, according to National Geographic. The Go Bike Montreal Festival opens May 29 with "metropolitan challenge" rides in the countryside. The main Sunday ride costs \$30.50 to \$41 Canadian dollars for an adult, depending when booked. The exchange rate, about even a few years ago, has tilted heavily in favor of the US dollar, meaning discounts of one-third or more for Americans in Canada in recent months. — AP

Philippines puts Marcos jewel images online to teach about graft

Philippine authorities are staging an online exhibition of jewelry owned by late dictator Ferdinand Marcos and his family to try to educate a new generation about the corruption of that era. The postings on Facebook and Twitter by the Presidential Commission on Good Government (PCGG) come as the family tries to extend its political comeback in elections in May. "The PCGG will be posting selected jewelry items to show and remind the present generation of the excesses and extravagance of the Marcoses in their two-decade dictatorship," the anti-corruption agency said on its website.

"The Virtual Jewelry Exhibit" began in mid-March with regular postings showcasing valuables recovered after the dictator was ousted by a military-backed popular uprising in 1986. Aside from pictures of the jewels uploaded regularly, there are postings explaining what they cost the country. A picture of a diamond tiara comes with the caption: "can fund... the treatment of 12,052 cases of tuberculosis."

The PCGG, which plans eventually to auction off the Marcos jewels, has previously said that international auction houses have appraised their total value at more than a billion pesos (\$21 million). Marcos and his jet-setting wife Imelda were accused of massively enriching themselves during their years in power while the country sank deeper into poverty. Imelda was known for her extravagance, amassing jewelry, art masterpieces and a huge collection of shoes. Although the family fled abroad during the 1986 revolt, they were allowed to return home after the former dictator died in exile in 1989. Since then the Marcoses have made a startling resurgence, with members not only evading criminal charges but winning election to prominent positions. Ferdinand Marcos Jr., previously elected to the powerful Senate, is now running for vice-president. Widow Imelda Marcos is seeking re-election to Congress and her eldest daughter Imee is running for another term as governor of the family bailiwick in the north. — AFP



This file photo shows an official from the Presidential Commission on Good Government (PCGG) holding a diamond-studded piece of jewelry seized by the Philippine government from former first lady Imelda Marcos, at the Central Bank headquarters in Manila. — AFP



Lebanese models dressed as Batman and Superman (right) play on the rooftop of a building during a photoshoot in the capital Beirut on March 23, 2016. — AFP