



WOMAN HELD FOR FILMING MAID'S FALL FROM WINDOW

EMPLOYER HAD HIRED RUNAWAY MAID FROM ILLEGAL OFFICE



Min 20°
Max 31°



AJMI RETURNS TO KUWAIT

KUWAIT: Saad Al-Ajmi, former spokesman of the opposition Popular Action Movement, returned home to Kuwait late on Thursday. Ajmi, who was deported to Saudi Arabia after his citizenship was revoked, returned through the Nuwaiseeb border outlet after two years in exile. An elated Ajmi thanked HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem, HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah and Interior Minister Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah.



Saad Al-Ajmi hugs his children upon his return home late on Thursday.

— Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Opposition lawmakers hailed his return. MPs Mubarak Al-Hajraf, Mohammad Hayef, Mohammad Al-Dallal, Al-Humaidi Al-Subaei, Nasser

Al-Dousary, Riyadh Al-Adasani, Abdullah Fahhad, Mohammad Al-Huwailah, Majed Al-Mutairi, Thamer Al-Suwait, Abdulwahab Al-Babtain, Nayef Al-Merdas, Jamaan Al-Harbash and Adel Al-Damkhi welcomed Ajmi back and thanked all those who contributed to his return.

By Hanan Al-Saadoun and Agencies

KUWAIT: Police have detained a woman for filming her Ethiopian maid falling from the seventh floor in an apparent suicide attempt without trying to rescue her, media and a rights group said yesterday. The Kuwaiti woman filmed her maid land on a metal awning and survive, then posted the incident on social media. The criminal investigation police referred the employer to the prosecution over failing to help the victim. The Kuwait Society for Human Rights yesterday called on the authorities to investigate the case and refer it to court.

Investigations yesterday revealed that the maid was reported missing by her original employer in 2014, and that her latest employer hired her from an illegal domestic helpers' recruitment office. Police are currently looking for people running the illegal office, a security source said. Meanwhile, a delegation from the Ethiopian embassy visited the maid at Mubarak Hospital to check on her condition.

According to attorney Nouf Al-Ruwaih, videoing

the incident itself is not a crime, but he said the employer could be charged with negligence and failure to offer help. Investigations are currently ongoing to determine whether the case is a suicide attempt, an accident that happened while the maid was working, or a case of attempted homicide and libel. "The law says that any person who fails to help someone else who poses a grave danger to himself or his possessions will be punished with a maximum three months in jail and/or a fine," Ruwaih said.

The 12-second video shows the maid hanging outside the building, with one hand tightly gripping the window frame, as she begs for help in an apparent last-minute change of mind. The woman holding the camera is heard telling the hanging maid: "Oh crazy, come back." The terrified maid is seen screaming "hold me, hold me", just before her hand slips and she falls down to hit the awning, which appears to soften the impact. The employer made no reaction as she continued filming. Later, paramedics rescued the maid and rushed her to hospital where she was found to have suffered nose and ear bleeding and a broken arm.



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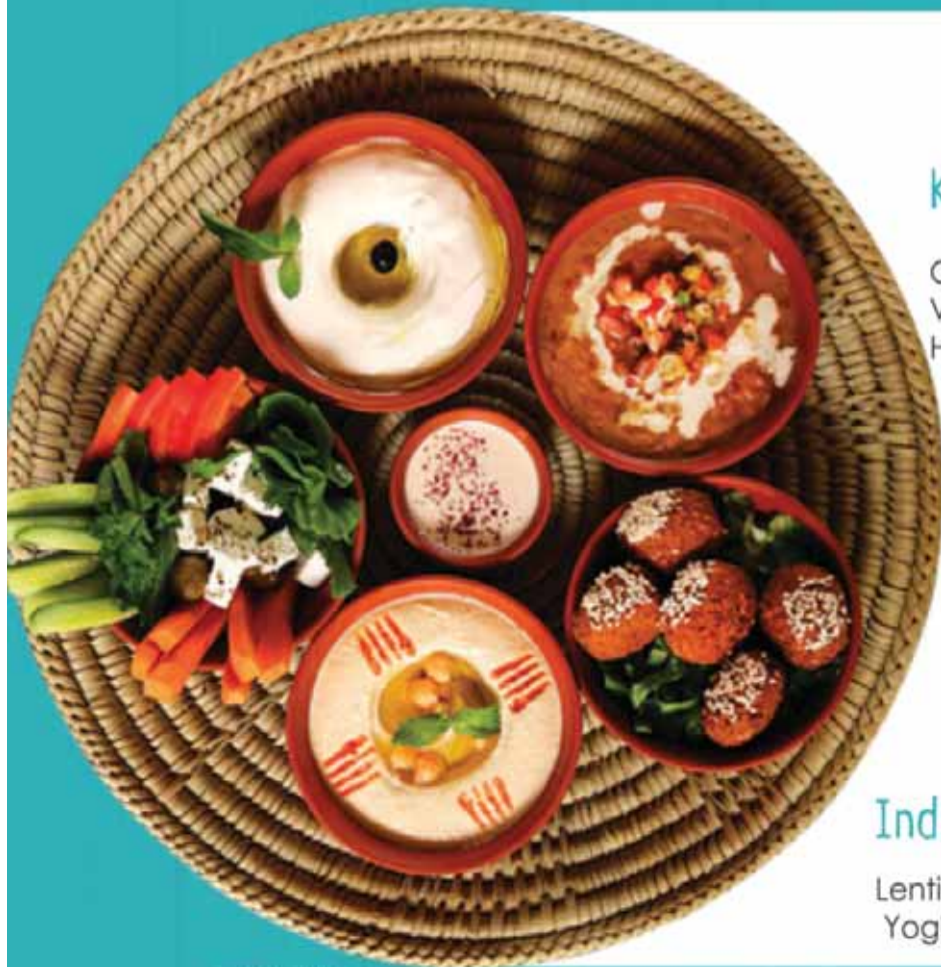
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FRANCE EXPRESSES GREAT APPRECIATION FOR KUWAIT'S GENEROUS SUPPORT FOR CULTURE

PARIS: France on Thursday gave lavish praise to Kuwait's role in supporting cultural development down through the decades and on several levels and particularly on this occasion by helping refurbish the library in the Arab World Institute (IMA) in the French capital.

The inauguration ceremony for the new library was co-hosted by Kuwaiti Minister for Cabinet Affairs and Acting Information Minister Sheikh Mohammad Mubarak Al-Sabah and by French Prime Minister Bernard Cazeneuve. The inauguration was also overseen by IMA President Jack Lang and the Institute's Director-General Mojob Al-Zahrani. Kuwait's ambassador to Paris, Sami Mohammad Al-Suleiman also attended with members of the various Kuwaiti missions in Paris.

Cazeneuve stated that it was "thanks to the generosity of the State of Kuwait" the IMA library was refitted and underwent an ambitious refurbishment "I want to tell you how much the investment of your country in the achievement of this library attests also to the quality of our bilateral relations and to the strength of the ties that have been forged over the years," the French Prime Minister told Sheikh Mohammad.

Cazeneuve added that Kuwait's actions in the culture domain would help build bridges between peoples and cultures at a time when some are seeking to erect barriers between nations and populations.

Long tradition

French officials, including Cazeneuve and also IMA President Lang recalled the long tradition of generosity and support that Kuwait has demonstrated in many areas, including in the recent drive to protect cultural heritage and artefacts in conflict zones, several of them in the Middle East.

"I want here to thank the Amir of Kuwait for his commitment made during the donor conference for endangered cultural heritage last March 20 in Paris, boosting by \$5 million the funds in the International Alliance to protect cultural heritage in conflict zones," Cazeneuve said.

In addition to this donation, Kuwait also provided Euros 2.0 for the library project at IMA and has consistently supported this entity. In recent comments, IMA President Jack Lang cited Kuwait as one of the reliable and erstwhile supporters of the Institute, saying "Kuwait always comes with its payments and is always there for IMA."

Kuwait has in the past provided millions of Euros in support for both the IMA itself and individual projects like the renovation of the museum, and now for the library project. Initially speaking in French, Sheikh Mohammad expressed great satisfaction that the library project had been successfully completed and would open to the public on March 31.

"This great event is worthy of the interest that the French government and the Arab World Institute is according to it today in Paris," he said. "We are proud that the Arab World Institute Library in Paris is being honored by this cultural and intellectual celebration because of the great importance it holds at a time when the Arab world is witnessing previously unseen political, cultural and intellectual changes or technical, digital evolutions come one after the other and are imposing themselves in different sectors of modern life," the Kuwaiti official remarked. He said IMA and its library had "an undeniable role" in the Franco-Arab cultural mission set out by IMA.

This "symbolizes the historical ties that bind our two nations, our two languages and our two civilisations with all of their richness, their diversity and their mutual desire to perpetuate dialogue between them so that justice, tolerance and peace can reign," he affirmed.

For this reason, Sheikh Mohammad said, "Kuwait wants to play a preponderant role in the Arab World Institute in order to spread Arab culture in all its neutrality and cultural objectivity, which is something the Arab world and its interlocutors in the world very badly need."

He further added that the State of Kuwait, in line with recommendations from His Highness the Amir, Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, is working for "the spread of culture in the entire world" as demonstrated by its undertaking to build the most modern cultural centers and in making financial contributions in the most important and influential cultural centers on an international level. He said that Kuwait, which was Islamic Cultural Capital in 2016, sought to promote the blossoming of culture but also to encourage "the fusion of modern and pioneer Islamic culture with other cultures of the world."



PARIS: Kuwaiti Minister for Cabinet Affairs and Acting Information Minister Sheikh Mohammad Mubarak Al-Sabah speaks during the ceremony. —KUNA

Unfailing support

Meanwhile, IMA President Jack Lang reiterated his great gratitude for Kuwait's unfailing support for the Arab World Institute and its projects. "Kuwait is a country that is especially dear to us," he said in his comments at the inauguration. "The links between France and this country are links that are deep, age-old, close and lasting and have been expressed at many different times, some happy, some terrible" he indicated.

He recalled the "terrible" period of the 1990 invasion of Kuwait by Iraq and noted: "I was part of the government at that time and we were totally in solidarity with Kuwait in the face of the aggression of which it was a victim." Lang said that the cultural ties between IMA and Kuwait were multiplying, and Kuwait was now a country that is "springing up, intellec-

tually and creative," and he lauded Kuwait's hosting of the Islamic Culture Year, which he said was successful Kuwait undertook the creation of events as well as welcoming visiting creations.

He again thanked Kuwait for its support for culture, worldwide. "The President of the Republic and the Prime Minister were very touched by the commitment of The Amir of Kuwait when the international foundation for safekeeping of cultural heritage in conflict zones was established on March 20. He praised the "material and moral" contribution to this cause and Kuwait's prominent stance. He also highlighted the various other areas in which Kuwait has contributed both financially and in other ways, notably now with the completion of the IMA library project. —KUNA

UNHCR PRAISES KUWAIT'S GLOBAL HUMANITARIAN EFFORTS



GENEVA: Ambassador Jamal Al-Ghnaim with United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi. —KUNA

GENEVA: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi has praised cooperation between the UNHCR and the State of Kuwait for addressing global humanitarian crises. Grandi was speaking after emerging from a meeting with the State of Kuwait Permanent Delegate at the UN and International Organizations in Geneva, Ambassador Jamal Al-Ghnaim.

The UNHCR commissioner said his discussions with the senior Kuwaiti envoy dealt with preparations for the donors' conference for Syria, due in Brussels in April, as well as arrangements for another convention for Yemen, scheduled in Geneva in late April. Meanwhile, Ambassador Ghnaim said that his talks with Grandi dealt with outcome of the latter's visit to Kuwait, last month, which was part of coordination between Kuwait and the international agency. He underscored significance of the forthcoming convention for states pledging aid for the Syrians noting the State of Kuwait's keenness on tackling the Syrian humanitarian file and alleviating the refugees and immigrants' hardships. A UNHCR delegation would visit Kuwait, soon, as part of coordination on joint humanitarian programs. —KUNA

In my view

EU CHALLENGES

By Labeed Abdal

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The German chancellor's advisor and the Austrian foreign affairs minister recently urged European countries to unite against hardships following calls made to states that have faced some challenges. This ought to be viewed as a package presented by the EU that was originally founded to overcome problems with which Europe started the 20th century, with a major focus on economic structures.

Bureaucracy, security, refugees and young nationalist movements such as neo-Nazis are major concerns nowadays in Europe. The founders have no hopes that the new US administration would change its attitude, especially after the UK left the union and France and Holland are expected to follow it. They cannot be sure about the continuation of the same approaches, especially after recent statements about adjusting the costs the US suffered because of Europe, the Arabian Gulf, Japan and South Korea.

The new administration has made many domestic and foreign promises that will remain subject to the availability of financial resources to pay off a huge debt worth trillions of dollars and rebuild infrastructure. Through the new president's tweets and statements, one can easily detect many recalculations and reconsiderations being made concerning how to handle areas that have been liberated from dictatorships, such as Iraq and Afghanistan, and help them build an effective and suitable democracy model that could act as a resource, making revenues to serve US public debt. However, the new administration intends to make overseas resources serve domestic concerns and not the other way round.

FORMER KUWAITI FM BLAMES RACISM, FOREIGN INTERVENTION FOR MIDEAST CRISES

BUDAPEST: Racism, intolerance, and foreign intervention in the Middle East have led to countless wars, conflicts, and crises that will have grave repercussions on world affairs, said former Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah.

Problems in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Libya, the failed Mideast peace process, civil wars in the region, as well as the presence of the so-called Islamic States (IS) are products of a world that failed to manage resources and resolve disputes peacefully, Sheikh Dr Mohammad Al-Sabah said while delivering a lecture organized by Antall Jozsef Knowledge Center (AJKC) in Budapest, Hungary. During the lecture on the GCC views of regional struggles in the Middle East, Sheikh Dr Mohammad Al-Sabah stressed that countries in the region and the international community failed to address challenges adequately, leading to a state of pandemonium and chaos.

Sectarian strife in the Middle East is also one of the major issues that needs to be dealt with swiftly or the fear-mongers will win, said Sheikh Dr Mohammad Al-Sabah. He added that the increasing involvement of countries such as Russia, Turkey, and Iran in the affairs of the region was a direct result of the unclear visions reflected by countries in the Middle East.

Far-right movements

On ties between Iran and the GCC countries, Sheikh Dr Mohammad Al-Sabah said that relations were based on mutual respect for the interests of both sides, noting that Tehran and the GCC member states should



BUDAPEST: Former Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Dr Mohammad Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah delivers a lecture organized by Antall Jozsef Knowledge Center (AJKC). —KUNA

focus on matters that would bring both parties together. The former Kuwaiti Foreign Minister touched on the recent surge of extreme nationalism and far-right movements in Europe and the US, saying it was a direct result from the huge flow of immigrants from Mideast conflicts zones and North Africa. He said that extreme national sentiments in Europe and America did not generate from a void, affirming that foreign meddling in Mideast affairs have led to the creation of the refugee crisis.

Sheikh Dr Mohammad Al-Sabah also mentioned the 60-years-plus Middle East crisis between Israel and Palestine, saying that the international community's indiffer-

ence towards the issue and the Israeli continuous unjust treatment of Palestinians will not end this conflict.

Israeli settlements must end and Tel Aviv must cease its brutal policies against Palestinians, signing a peace deal that will ensure the creation of two countries in the region, said Sheikh Dr Mohammad Al-Sabah. On the Brexit and the election of Donald Trump as US President, Sheikh Dr Mohammad Al-Sabah said that the British pullout from the EU and Trump's election created fear for the future of the world. He hoped that despite the current status quo, world countries would join forces together to find solutions to global threats and problems. —KUNA

KUWAIT PARTAKES IN IPU CONFERENCE IN DHAKA

KUWAIT: A Kuwaiti parliamentary delegation, headed by the caucus undersecretary MP Rakan Al-Nisf, travelled to Dhaka, the Bangladeshi capital, yesterday to partake in the 136th Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) conference due there on April 1-5. The scheduled convention addresses a host of topics such as equality among members of the human kind and welfare for all nations of the globe. The delegation takes part in sidelines coordination meetings with Gulf, Arab, Islamic and Asian groups. Moreover, the Kuwaiti lawmakers will participate in meetings of the IPU permanent and committees and sub-committees, tackling issues such as non-intervention in States' domestic affairs, bolstering global cooperation for realizing sustainable development and parliaments' role in enhancing juveniles' well-being. The delegation includes the caucus secretary, Dr Odah Al-Ruwaiee, the treasurer MP Dr Walid Al-Tabtabaei, members of the executive committee MPs Omar Al-Tabtabaei and Yousef Al-Fadhlah as well as the National Assembly Secretary General, Allam Al-Kanderi. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Members of the Kuwaiti parliamentary delegation pose for a group photo before leaving to partake in the 136th Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) conference in Dhaka, Bangladesh. —KUNA

AMIR INVITES INDIA PM MODI TO VISIT KUWAIT

TWO AGENCIES TO RUN 6 INDIAN EMBASSY OUTSOURCING CENTERS

By Sajeev K Peter

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah has extended an official invitation to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to visit Kuwait. The invitation has been delivered to the prime minister and a date of his visit will be finalized soon, said Indian Ambassador Sunil Jain during a press conference at the Indian embassy here on Thursday.

"Both countries will finalize a mutually-convenient date for the visit of Indian prime minister," the ambassador said. India's National Security Advisor Ajit Doval had visited Kuwait two weeks ago and had held high-level discussions in Kuwait.

This will be the first visit by an Indian prime minister to Kuwait after former Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi visited Kuwait 35 years ago in 1981. His highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah visited India in 2013.

"A joint India-Kuwait ministerial meeting will be held in September in Kuwait. India's Minister of State for External Affairs MJ Akbar will lead the Indian side while Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Anas Al-Saleh will lead the Kuwaiti side at the meeting. Prior to the ministerial meeting, separate joint working groups on petroleum and health will also meet to strengthen the India-Kuwait bilateral ties," the ambassador informed.

As part of Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) Distinguished Visitors Program, former Prime Minister Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, has been invited to visit India. The date of his visit will be announced soon, the ambassador said. The two countries are also discussing on finalizing a visa waiver program for diplomatic and special passport holders of both countries, he added.

Outsourcing centers

The Indian embassy's consular services have improved over the years, he said. In order to meet the increasing

demands of the Indian community, passport, visa and attestation services will be outsourced to two new agencies. The two agencies will open six embassy outsourcing centers across Kuwait, the ambassador said. CKGS, the current outsourcing company, operates only three centers, one each in Abbsaiya, Kuwait City and Fahaheel. The embassy will outsource attestation services also to the new outsourcing companies in order to ease the long queues at the embassy, the ambassador added. The embassy has issued 96,000 passports and 14,000 visas from Kuwait last year. The embassy also attested 95,000 documents in 2016.

India's ministry of civil aviation has approved in principle the request of two India-based private airlines Indigo Airways and Go Air to launch their services to Kuwait providing a great relief to the air connectivity problem being faced by the Indian expats in Kuwait, the ambassador said. Air India and Kuwait Airways are also working towards a code-sharing program which will help ease the travel problems, he added.

MAN DEAD, SEVERAL INJURED IN MULTIPLE ACCIDENTS

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: A citizen died in a car accident reported on Sixth Ring Road yesterday. Jahra firemen headed to the scene accompanied by paramedics in response to an emergency call reporting the accident. Upon arrival, they found two persons apparently injured outside of their vehicles, but discovered upon examination that one of them had already succumbed to his injuries while the other was still alive, albeit in a critical condition. The injured man was rushed to the hospital while the dead body was taken to the coroner.

Separately, a three-vehicle collision on Salmi road left two Asian national severely injured yesterday. Jahra firemen had to cut open the wrecked vehicles and help the victims out before they were transported to hospital.

Meanwhile, firemen freed a citizen from her car which flipped over on Taiwan street near Anujafa beach. The woman was involved in a car accident, and her car turned over as a result, and she became trapped inside. She was taken to Mubarak Hospital for treatment. Police launched an investigation to find out what happened.



KUWAIT: The scene of one of the accidents reported yesterday.

In other news, a fire broke out in a Qurain area house yesterday, prompting local firemen to respond. Upon arriving to the scene, a rescue team was formed to evacuate the building while another team battled the blaze that had started in the basement. The fire was put out, and no injuries were reported.

IRAQ, KUWAIT LOBBYING FOR DONOR CONFERENCE

BAGHDAD: Iraqi government spokesman Saad Al-Hadithi announced Thursday that his country and Kuwait are lobbying for an international donor conference to finance the reconstruction of Iraq. "The conference, expected to be hosted by Kuwait, will pool financial resources from international donors to help the Iraqi government to rehabilitate the areas recently liberated from terrorist groups, Hadithi said.

"The joint efforts by Iraq and Kuwait are well underway to ensure effective participation in, and substantive results of, the event," he said, noting that the list of participants and date of the event have yet to be specified.

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider Al-Abadi asked Kuwait to join the efforts to set the stage for the conference, capitalizing on the Arab and international consensus on Kuwait's experience in organizing such events, the spokesman added. The material damage resulting from the hostilities in the northern and western parts of Iraq are estimated at \$35 billion, according to local reports. — KUNA

NEW AID CAMPAIGN TO SYRIAN REFUGEES IN TURKEY

ANKARA: Kuwaiti volunteers have launched a fresh humanitarian campaign aiming at alleviating the suffering of Syrian refugees in Turkey. The program, provided by an International Islamic Charity Organization (IICO) team of volunteers, included the distribution of food parcels to 200 Syrian refugee

families, cleaning utensils to another 200 families and shopping coupons to 300 families at a refugee camp in Turkey's southern Sanliurfa City, the team leader Nasser Al-Bassam said.

The Kuwaiti aid team visited Syrian families at Al-Karama camp in Sanliurfa and called on sick refugees

in the city, he added. The program also involved humanitarian aid to 100 orphans, in addition to psychological help to 400 Syrian refugee children, Bassam pointed out.

Earlier yesterday, Kuwait Zakat House distributed aid to Syrian refugees in the Turkish city of Kilis. The Zakat House team delivered financial aid and other essential items to patients and others injured in the Syrian war, during a visit to several hospitals in the city, head of the team Abdulrahman Al-Turkeet said.

The team also visited poor families in neighboring areas on the Turkish-Syrian borders. Zakat House had launched several campaigns to aid Syrian since the war broke out in 2011, said Turkeet. The campaigns target those inside Syria and also in neighboring countries. The aid items include food, medical equipment, clothes and financial aid to provide proper education for Syrian children. — KUNA



Crime

Report

DRUG DEALERS ARRESTED

KUWAIT: Mubarak Al-Kabeer detectives arrested three Bangladeshis in Adan for drug trafficking. The trio were caught with possession of 157 Tramadol tablets. Detectives had received tips about the suspects' activities, so an undercover agent was assigned to make a deal with them. One of the suspects was put under arrest red-handed while receiving the money from the undercover agent, and his accomplices were also detained in his residence where the ambush took place. Police also discovered that one of the suspects is already wanted to serve a two-year jail sentence over a previous drug abuse charge. The suspects were sent to the Drugs Control General Department for further legal action.

Blackmail

A woman reported to police that a man blackmailed her and threatened to upload her private pictures online unless she 'fulfills his wishes.' The woman said that she fell victim to the man's scheming after he promised to marry her; after which she allowed him to take cell-phone pictures of her. After that, he started asking her for immoral things, but she refused and broke up with him after realizing he was never going to marry her. At that point, the man started blackmailing her with the photos he had taken earlier, she told police. Hawalli detectives went to the man's residence, and he confessed under questioning and said that he was ready to apologize to the woman, But she refused to drop the charges, after which he was sent to concerned authorities for further action.

Principal, student fight

Jahra police responded to an emergency call from a girls' school reporting a fight between the principal and a student. Police found out that the girl did not obey the principal's orders, after which a verbal exchange ensued and threats were made. Policemen solved the problem in school to avoid taking those involved to the police station. A security source said the student apologized to her principal, who accepted her apology.

Physical assault

A Kuwaiti man faces charges after beating up his building's janitor in Fintas. In his statement to police, the Egyptian 'haris' said that he was collecting rents when one tenant beat him up following an argument about his late payment. The man received treatment at Adan Hospital before he filed a case with local police. — Translated from the Arabic press

FAO KEEN ON BACKING KUWAIT'S FOOD PRODUCTION SECTOR

ROME: The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Director-General Jose Graziano da Silva affirmed the organization's keenness on supporting Kuwait's successful policies in reviving food and agricultural products sectors. This came during a meeting between FAO chief and Director-General of the Public Authority of Agriculture Affairs and Fish Resources of Kuwait Faisal Al-Hassawi on Thursday on the sidelines of an international event to stop destructive beetle wiping out palms in the Near East.

Hassawi is in Rome to attend the three-day meeting to debate and define an international action plan to stop the spread of the Red Palm Weevil, a pest that attacks date and coconut-producing palms and ornamental palms. Da Silva also stressed that organization is eager to back Kuwait's experiments in the areas of benefiting from sewage and water resources optimally. He also expressed his appreciation to Hassawi's efforts aiming to activate and develop the deep-rooted and growing relationships between Kuwait and FAO

to enhance security food in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Meanwhile, Hassawi thanked FAO Director-General for organizing the event, underlining that the Red Palm Weevil problem is currently affecting the entire Near East region.

"Its solution requires coordination and collaboration among countries and between farmers, scientists, government officials and the private sector," he said. He also confirmed the country's participation at a joint event organized by FAO with the League of Arab States at the upcoming FAO Conference to address water scarcity in the region, where Kuwait will share its experience in water treatment facilities. He reviewed progress made in bilateral cooperation programs between Kuwait and FAO. The meeting discussed how to benefit from FAO's potentials and experiments in improving criteria of quality of Kuwait's farms products. The two sides agreed on considering several common initiatives and continuing plans and programs to meet needs of Kuwait. — KUNA

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International

SATURDAY, APRIL 1, 2017

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PARACHINAR: Pakistani mourners gather as they shout slogans during a protest following a powerful bomb explosion at a market in Parachinar, the capital of the Kurram tribal district yesterday. —AFP

BOMB NEAR PAKISTAN MOSQUE KILLS 22

ISLAMIST MILITANT GROUP TTP CLAIMS RESPONSIBILITY

PARACHINAR: A bomb apparently targeting a mosque in Pakistan's northwestern city of Parachinar killed at least 22 people yesterday and wounded dozens in an attack claimed by the Pakistani Taliban. The explosion in a remote area bordering Afghanistan came as people gathered for Friday prayers near the women's entrance of a Shiite mosque in the central bazaar, the latest in a series of attacks across Sunni-majority Pakistan this year.

The local political agent, Ikramullah Khan, said the death toll had reached 22, with 70 wounded. Sajid Hussain, a parliamentarian from Parachinar, said gunfire preceded the blast, which he described as a suicide attack. The city is located in an area with a large Shia population. "The attack took place in a busy area and a women's mosque

appears to be the target," he said. The banned Islamist militant group Tehrik-i-Taleban Pakistan (TTP), often referred to as the Pakistani Taliban, said the blast was part of its operation Ghazi, named after a radical Islamist leader killed by Pakistani security forces in 2007.

Following a string of earlier incidents this year, the latest attack adds to fears of an increase in sectarian violence in Pakistan, a nuclear-armed state of some 200 million people. Last month, more than 80 people were killed and dozens wounded in an attack on a crowded Sufi shrine in southern Pakistan that was claimed by Islamic State. In January, at least 21 people were killed when an explosion hit a vegetable market in Parachinar, capital of the Kurram tribal region,

where Pakistani security forces have battled militant groups for years. That attack was claimed by the TTP and a branch of another militant group, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi Al Alami.

Authorities said a military rescue helicopter had been sent to the scene to help evacuate the injured. Mumtaz Hussain, a doctor at the Agency Headquarters Hospital in the region, said five bodies, including a woman and two children, and more than three dozen wounded had been brought to the hospital and an appeal for blood donors had been made. "Patients are being brought to us in private cars and ambulances and we have received over three dozen patients so far," Hussain said. The attacks have shattered hopes that Pakistan may have come through the

militant violence that has scarred its recent history and increased pressure on Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's government to show it was improving security.

Sharif condemned yesterday's attack and said the government would keep up efforts to "eliminate the menace of terrorism". In a statement, he said: "The network of terrorists has already been broken and it is our national duty to continue the war until the complete annihilation of the scourge of terrorism from our soil." In the wake of last month's attack in southern Sindh province, security forces launched a major crackdown across Pakistan, killing or detaining hundreds of suspected militants and closing off the border with Afghanistan for several days. —Reuters

INDONESIA ARRESTS MUSLIM LEADER FOR TREASON

THOUSANDS PROTEST AGAINST CHRISTIAN GOVERNOR



JAKARTA: Indonesian Muslims take part in a protest to demand Jakarta's Christian governor be jailed for allegedly blaspheming Islam yesterday. —AFP

JAKARTA: Indonesian police arrested five people, including a Muslim leader, for suspected treason yesterday, signaling a clampdown on hardline Islamist groups that have agitated against Jakarta's Christian governor ahead of a mid-April election in the capital. The arrests came just before thousands of Muslims gathered to demand the sacking of Governor Basuki "Ahok" Tjahaja Purnama, who is on trial for blasphemy over accusations he insulted the Islamic holy book, the Quran.

Yesterday's rally was the latest in a series that have tested religious and ethnic tolerance in Indonesia, a secular nation with the world's largest Muslim population. Vice President Jusuf Kalla called on the protesters to respect the legal process and said they would not be allowed to dictate the agenda. "No matter how much pressure there is, we will not follow it. The government is firm against this kind of pressure," Kalla said in an interview with Reuters, referring to the rallies. "Wait for the court's final decision (on Purnama)," he said. Purnama, who is running against a Muslim candidate in the April 19 election, is backed by President Joko Widodo's ruling party.

The sudden rise of fringe, hardline Muslim groups during the election campaign has raised questions about whether they are being used as political pawns and destabilizing Indonesia. The race to lead Jakarta is widely seen as a proxy battle for the presidency, which will likely be contested by Widodo and retired general Prabowo Subianto, who is backing Purnama's rival for the governorship of the capital. Police have moved to contain mass anti-Purnama protests led by hardline groups like the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) by detaining organizers and blocking Islamist propaganda online.

The movement's most prominent leader, Habib Rizieq, was in January named a suspect amid allegations that he insulted the secular state ideology. He faces up to four years in prison if found guilty. Yesterday, Jakarta police spokesman Argo Yuwono said that five people had been arrested, including Muhammad Al Khaththath, a leader of the Islamic People's Forum (FUI), another hardline group that organized yesterday's rally. "We are charging them with conspiring to commit treason," Yuwono told broadcaster TVOne. "There were several findings, including a plan to occupy the Indonesian parliament."

Thousands of protesters, clad in white and carrying anti-Purnama signs, gathered at Jakarta's grand mosque as police and military personnel blocked off roads leading to the presidential palace. An estimated 20,000 people from various groups were expected to attend, police said this week, far fewer than the numbers seen at previous rallies. Purnama, Jakarta's first ethnic Chinese Christian governor, remains popular for his efforts to cut red tape and ease the city's chronic traffic congestion and flooding. However, he faces a tight race with rival Anies Baswedan, a former education minister. —Reuters

GHOSTS OF MOSUL STALK IRAQ'S FLEEING CHILDREN

HASAN SHAM CAMP: The children proudly wield donated plastic water bottles like freshly dug nuggets of treasure, smiling despite the fear and death and destruction they have faced in their ruined city. With the impetuosity that only children can muster, they forget for a moment the hell they've endured in Mosul. "We had a big house, but Daesh bombed and burned it," says 10-year-old Nora, her undersized frame draped in a hand-me-down dress with a black, Peter Pan collar.

'They destroyed us'

She is among thousands of children whose young lives have been torn apart by a vast military operation to recapture Iraq's second city of Mosul from the Islamic State group, known locally by the Arabic acronym "Daesh". She sits in a tent with other displaced children at a

refugee camp 30 kilometers east of Mosul, quietly scrawling a pencil drawing of a bright pink heart. That's far enough to finally silence the constant thud of shelling and the crack of rifle fire that they've heard for weeks. The facilities are fine but basic: a few linoleum tables, plastic chairs, crayons, pencils and paper. The tent exteriors are daubed with bright murals of fields of flowers, technicolour handprints and SpongeBob SquarePants. A small astro-turf volleyball court fades in the clear March sunshine.

Invisible scars

For Maulid Warfa, a local official with the United Nation's children's fund UNICEF, this "Child Friendly Space" has a crucial function. "Here is where children feel like children again," she says. Iraqi authorities say more than 200,000 peo-

ple have fled west Mosul since an operation to oust IS from their former stronghold began last month after security forces had earlier captured eastern neighborhoods. The battle has taken a deadly toll on civilians, sparking calls for greater efforts to protect them.

When in the tent or in the play area, Nora and her friends could almost be mistaken for happy, carefree children anywhere. But those fleeing Mosul have their tells: fatigue darkening the eyes, hollow cheeks, shadows cast a little too thinly. "It's because of Daesh that we are here," says nine-year-old Abdulrahman, sitting next to Nora at the black table strewn with crayon sketches. "There," he says of Mosul, "there is fear." He talks against a soundtrack of children laughing and singing as they chase each other through the area. But each child here bears hidden scars. —AFP

HAMAS PONDERERS REVENGE AFTER COMMANDER KILLED

GAZA: After openly accusing Israel of assassinating a key military commander near his Gaza home, experts agree that Palestinian militant group Hamas will want to retaliate. The question is when and where? Israeli and Palestinian experts both said Hamas would seek to avenge the killing of Mazen Faqha, 38, but from a distance. A commander in Hamas's armed wing, Faqha was shot four times near his home on March 24 in what appears to have been a meticulously planned assassination. Hamas said the shooting, which was allegedly carried out with silencers, with the body found several hours later, bore the hallmark of Israeli intelligence agency Mossad.

Other possibilities exist—an inside job by Hamas rivals or Islamist extremists—but Israel is the obvious suspect. It accused Faqha of being the brain behind several deadly suicide bombings during the second intifada, or uprising, in the early 2000s. The Jewish state has remained silent but several Hamas figures have been assassinated by Israel in the past, including founder Sheikh Ahmed Yassin. By killing him in Hamas-run Gaza, where no Israelis are allowed to enter, Israel would be sending a clear message it can reach its enemy anywhere.

Hamas's potential responses are restricted by its wariness to spark a full confrontation from Gaza, with the impoverished enclave still not recovered from three wars since 2008. The Islamist group could seek to strike inside Israel itself or in the West Bank, occupied

by the Israel and separated geographically from Gaza by Israeli territory. Hamas has previously responded by firing rockets into Israel, but has chosen not to immediately this time, noted Mustafa Al-Saouaf, former editor-in-chief of the Hamas-linked Palestine newspaper. In the streets of Gaza, giant posters show Faqha with a masked fighter from Hamas's armed wing.

Videos on Palestinian social networks show Israeli ministers and officials in the crosshairs of guns. "We harvest what we sow," they read in Arabic and Hebrew. The movement has been careful not to spell out its intentions, with Yahya Sinwar, a military leader recently elected to head Hamas in Gaza, remaining silent. His appointment in February was interpreted by many analysts as indicating that the military wing was in the ascendancy over the political inside Hamas. The Islamist movement may be deliberately remaining quiet to cause "real anxiety in Israel" as they "do not understand what Hamas wants and can do", Saouaf said.

Rules of the game

Hamas can open "direct confrontations, return to suicide attacks or attempt to assassinate a political or military figure," Saouaf added. Hamza Abu Shanab, an expert on Palestinian movements, said the most likely response would come in the West Bank as it

was a "possible front" for confrontation. More than 400,000 Israeli settlers live in the West Bank, while Israelis have kept out of the Gaza Strip since 2005. Mukhaimer Abu Saada, a political analyst in Gaza, said Hamas was following the example of Lebanese militant movement Hezbollah, which when attacked by Israel says "they will decide when and how they want to respond". On the Israeli side, experts said they felt the "rules of the game" were changing. Intelligence specialist Yossi Melman said in the Maariv newspaper that if Israel was indeed behind the killing, it would "point to a change in approach".

"If it indeed has succeeded in assassinating Hamas commanders or experts without leaving a trace of its fingerprints—be that in Gaza or abroad—that means Israel has decided to adopt a more offensive stance." By keeping silent instead of claiming assassinations as it has in the past, Israel is "leaving it to Hamas to exercise restraint", the leftwing Haaretz said. Little information about the investigation has seeped out. Unusually, Hamas temporarily closed the only crossing point for people from Gaza into Israel, in an apparent attempt to prevent the assassins escaping. Gaza's attorney general has banned reporting about the case, but security sources said around 10 people had been arrested or interrogated in connection with the murder. —AFP

IRANIAN WOMEN PLAYERS SNOOKERED FOR 'UN-ISLAMIC' ACTS

TEHRAN: Iran has banned some of its women players from billiard sports competitions for a year for violating the Islamic codes of conduct at a tournament in China, sporting authorities announced. The Disciplinary Committee of Bowling, Billiard and Boxing Federation did not reveal the nature of the alleged offences, saying it would name the transgressors later.

"Women sent to China Open (billiard) competitions will be banned from all domestic and foreign competitions for one year for violating the Islamic code," it said late Thursday, according to the ISNA and Tasnim news agencies. The category of billiard sports includes billiards, pool and snooker. Since the 1979 revolution, Iran has required women to wear the Islamic headscarf in public.

The Islamic code also forbids women touching,

dancing or singing with men outside their families. Women are only allowed to show their face, hands and feet in public and are supposed to wear only modest colors. Over the years, however, women have pushed back the boundaries of the law, with many wearing loose, brightly colored headscarves far back on their heads. T-shirts and jeans are banned for women attending billiard sport competitions, according to the website of the Iranian federation, which could not immediately be reached for comment.

Most pool-billiard clubs in Iran are male only but some offer women-only hours. Top Iranian female players now regularly compete in national and international games. In October, Akram Mohammadi became the first Iranian woman ever to win a medal in a major billiard competition, taking bronze at the Asian championships in the United Arab Emirates.

She told the state-run Iran Online website after her victory that the World Pool-Billiard Association had not tried to restrict the wearing of headscarves at international competitions, unlike some other sports.

The reported ban comes less than two months after the Iranian chess federation announced possible disciplinary action against an Iranian brother and sister for violating Islamic and political rules. Dorsa Derakhshani, who holds the title of International Master, has been living in Spain for more than two years, and playing without the hijab headscarf in chess games. She could face a ban from the federation, fines, prison or lashes if she returns to Iran. Her teenage brother Borna was threatened with disciplinary action for competing against an opponent from Iran's arch-foe Israel, which is forbidden by Tehran. —AFP

SCOTLAND MAKES A REQUEST FOR AN INDEPENDENCE VOTE

EDINBURGH: The Scottish government yesterday formally asked British Prime Minister Theresa May for a second referendum on independence, deepening a crisis sparked by the Brexit vote. "I am... writing to begin early discussions between our governments to agree an Order under section 30 of the Scotland Act 1998 that would enable a referendum to be legislated for by the Scottish Parliament," First Minister Nicola Sturgeon wrote in a letter to May. Sturgeon, leader of the ruling Scottish National Party (SNP), said: "The people of Scotland must have the right to choose our own future-in short, to exercise our right of self determination." The Scottish Parliament voted by 69 votes to 59 on Tuesday for another referendum, but it cannot hold a legally-binding vote without London's approval.

Scotland rejected independence by 55 percent in 2014, but voted by 62 percent to remain in the European Union in 2016 sparking another constitutional crisis as it was outvoted by England and Wales. May has insisted "now is not the time" for another referendum, but she now faces a battle on two fronts as she seeks to negotiate a good deal from Brexit and tame nationalist sentiment in Scotland. Opinion polls show support for independence is broadly unchanged from 2014, but May's firm stance against discussing a vote now is widely regarded as a gamble as Scots could react unfavourably to London ignoring the will of the Edinburgh parliament.

Sturgeon has already indicated she will take unspecified "steps" for holding a referendum in case her request for one is ignored. "There appears to be no rational reason for you to stand in the way of the will of the Scottish parliament and I hope you will not do so," she wrote in the letter. Sturgeon's predecessor Alex Salmond frequently threatened to hold a non-binding "consultative referendum" in 2012, before London relented and approved the legally binding poll in 2014. The Spanish region of Catalonia's separatist government held a non-binding referendum in 2014, but the 80 percent vote for self-determination was called into question amid reports of a boycott by unionists.

The SNP wants to prevent Scotland being "dragged out of the EU against its will", but a survey by NatCen Social Research on Thursday found Scottish people have broadly the same opinions on the European Union as the rest of Britain. Professor John Curtice, senior research fellow at NatCen, said: "For the most part voters on both sides of the border want much the same outcome-free trade, immigration control and retention of much of the consumer and environmental regulation currently afforded by the EU. "This means that on immigration in particular voters in Scotland seem to be more in tune with the stance taken by the UK government than that adopted by the Scottish government," he said. —AFP



BRUSSELS: NATO foreign ministers meet at the NATO headquarters in Brussels yesterday. —AFP

GERMANY BALKS AT TILLERSON DEMAND FOR MORE EUROPEAN NATO SPENDING EUROPEANS WORRIED ABOUT TRUMP COMMITMENT

BRUSSELS: Germany said yesterday that NATO's agreed target spend of two percent of members' yearly economic output was neither "reachable nor desirable", countering Washington's demands that European partners comply and quickly. The United States provides nearly 70 percent of NATO's budget and is demanding that all allies make clear progress towards the agreed target this year. Only four European NATO members - Estonia, Greece, Poland and Britain - have done so.

"Two percent would mean military expenses of some 70 billion euros. I don't know any German politician who would claim that is reachable nor desirable," Germany's Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel said at the first NATO meeting attended by US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson. Tillerson, however, reiterated Washington's demands and said the US will push that agenda when NATO leaders meet on May 25 for the first top-level summit of the alliance. US President Donald Trump will attend that meeting.

"Our goal should be to agree at the May Leaders meeting that by the end of the year all Allies will have either met the pledge guidelines or will have developed plans that clearly articulate how...the pledge will be fulfilled," Tillerson said. "Allies must demonstrate by their actions that they share US governments commitment." In Berlin, German government spokesman, Steffen Seibert, said the government was committed to increasing defense spending and would continue to do so "because we know it is necessary and makes sense to further strengthen our armed forces".

Members have until 2024 to comply with the spending target. Tillerson did however offer assurances of Washington's commitment to NATO, softening Trump's stance. Trump has criticized NATO as "obsolete" and suggested Washington's security guarantees for European allies could be conditional on them spending more on their own defense. He has also said he wants NATO to do more to fight terrorism. "The United States is committed to ensuring NATO has the capabilities to support our collective defense," Tillerson said at the meeting in Brussels. "We will uphold the agreements we have made to defend our allies."

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said ties between European NATO members and the United States were "rock solid". He said the ministers would discuss "fair burden sharing to keep the trans-atlantic bond strong" and "stepping up NATO efforts to project stability and fight terrorism". Stoltenberg confirmed ministers would discuss national defense spending plans yesterday as the bloc seeks to respond to the new, harsher tone from across the Atlantic, which has galvanized European NATO allies.

Though Washington has also offered reassurances, Tillerson's initial decision to skip his first meeting with NATO foreign ministers reopened questions about the Trump administration's commitment to the alliance. The meeting was later rescheduled and Tillerson was attending, though has not scheduled meetings with individual countries as is customary by the secretary of state during such a meeting. —Reuters

FLYING FINNISH PM SAVES MONEY ON AIR FARES

HELSINKI: While celebrities like John Travolta and Tom Cruise are known for piloting their own planes, few world leaders fly themselves on state business, but Finland's Prime Minister Juha Sipila is one. A keen aviator and committed to austerity-and saving taxpayers' money- Sipila occasionally pilots a private jet on his official travels-and foots the bill himself to boot. Since taking office in May 2015, the money-conscious former businessman has flown himself on 19 official trips in Finland and abroad, the prime minister's office said.

Last year Sipila, 55, flew over 5,000 kilometers from Finland to the Mongolian capital Ulan Bator for an Asia-Europe meeting, and some 1,400 kilometers to meet fellow EU leaders in Bratislava. The softly-spoken engineer earned millions as an IT entrepreneur before entering politics to become Finland's prime minister in 2015. He has vowed to "fix Finland" and put the euro-zone member's economy back on track-and he appears to

practise what he preaches. He doesn't own the planes he flies, but rather rents them at his own expense.

For the Ulan Bator trip he was at the controls of a Cessna 525 business jet, which seats between six and seven passengers. His office said it did not know the cost of the flights paid for privately by Sipila, but the Finnish weekly Suomen Kuvalehti estimated the expense at "hundreds of thousands of euros". There is a related health issue: before taking office Sipila suffered from two sudden pulmonary embolisms, in 2013 and 2014. This led Finnish media to speculate about the safety concerns raised by having the prime minister pilot a plane on official visits, often with his aides onboard.

Toilet seat ride

Sipila has reportedly fully recovered, and officials say they are not worried. "We have thought this through

and come to the conclusion that from a safety viewpoint we don't see any reason to restrict it," the head of the government's security detail, Jari Ylitalo said. "If you look at it statistically, flying is safer than driving a car. His licences are valid, he's an experienced pilot and the flying equipment is in good condition," he added.

The prime minister, known for his modesty, doesn't always take to the cockpit himself. When thorny coalition negotiations dragged on late one night in November 2015, Sipila missed the last commercial flight to his hometown Oulu in northern Finland. After a deal was finally forged in the early hours, Sipila didn't order a private flight to be organized for him. Instead, he boarded an ambulance flight about to take off and gave the last available passenger seat to his wife Minna-Maaria. The prime minister himself sat on the small plane's toilet seat for the duration of the one-hour flight, Finland's largest daily Helsingin Sanomat reported. — AFP

COMMUTER TRAIN TRACKS FRANCE'S POLITICAL DIVIDE

FAR-RIGHT NATIONAL FRONT GAINS SUPPORT

PARIS: A 90-minute train ride from the Gare de Lyon station in Paris traces a political gulf between big-city voters and the rest, a divide that has shaken up Britain and the United States and has an outside chance of doing the same in France's upcoming vote. The further you go, the greater the support for the anti-immigrant, anti-Europe National Front (FN), judging by interviews with people living on the RER D commuter line and results from the most recent election, a regional poll in 2015.

At the Gare de Lyon, 32-year-old stage production manager Victor Leclere likes his multicultural neighborhood in the heart of the capital. With the presidential election just weeks away, he fears the popularity of the FN. "We're used to living all together," he said as he boarded a train, a former Socialist voter now undecided. "I think it's worrying, the image portrayed by the National Front, as if France wasn't the multicultural country it already is." Villeneuve-Saint-Georges is just 19 minutes from Paris but with concrete blocks and highways a world away from the stone buildings and avenues of the centre of the capital.

Lucien Ngando, 30, an IT support technician of Congolese descent, said he could well back Le Pen this time. He was angry with what he described as media bias favoring centrist Emmanuel Macron, whom pollsters see winning a presidential run-off vote in May against FN leader Marine Le Pen. "She's been demonized, ostracized, but I don't think the FN is a bad party, we should give them a chance to change things in France," he said on the RER D platform. Ngando voted for Socialist Francois Hollande in 2012. He said Le Pen and left-wing firebrand Jean-Luc Melenchon spent more time campaigning outside the capital than the other frontrunners, Macron and conservative Francois Fillon, and understood suburban dwellers better.

Winners and losers

Opinion polls predict Le Pen may possibly win the first round of the presidential election on April 23 but will lose the second round on May 7 against either of her main rivals. The chances of a shock like the Brexit vote in Britain or Donald Trump's victory in the United States depend on people living beyond the main cities, all of which showed relatively low FN votes in 2015 with numbers climbing further out. In Paris, the FN won nearly 10 percent of the vote in the regional election's first round, while in Villeneuve-Saint-Georges, a suburb of 32,000 it was almost 29 percent. Second round figures showed a similar pattern. Not all voters interviewed in Villeneuve-Saint-Georges said they would back Le Pen, but distance from politicians and disgust with a campaign dominated by scandals was keenly felt in a place where unemployment is more than 50 percent above the national average.

"Politicians never come here. We see them on TV, in Paris of course, because it's not like the suburbs, but in Villeneuve-Saint-Georges? No... We count for nothing," said 43-year-old stay-at-home mother of eight Isabelle Cauchard. Just under 30 percent of voters live in city centres while over a third live in suburbs like Villeneuve-Saint-Georges, one in four in rural areas and under



PARIS: Independent centrist presidential candidate Emmanuel Macron delivers a speech during a meeting with young people of Paris suburbs, in Saint Denis, outside Paris. — AP

one in 10 in medium-sized towns, the INSEE statistics office says. Within 10 km of Paris, the FN attracted 14 percent of votes on average in the regional election, while it got almost 30 percent in a radius of 20-30 km and 39 percent in the 70-80 km range, a study by Ifop pollsters showed.

"It's a divide between the winners and losers of globalization ... In the outskirts, the depressed former industrial bastions, rural enclaves, people feel left on the side of the road, isolated," Ifop's Jerome Fourquet said. "Marine Le Pen has understood this very well." Wallerand de Saint Just, FN head for the broader Paris region, has noticed the difference during the campaign. "There are a lot of street markets in Paris where they're not giving us a nice welcome at all," he said. "But in rural towns they welcome us with open arms." In the picturesque town of Malesherbes, 75 km from Paris, 33-year-old Olivia Berthaut is tempted to back Le Pen for president, seeing her as the only candidate who cares about small-town voters. The FN got more than 42 percent of the vote in the regional election's first round in Malesherbes, a town of about 6,000 set amid fields and forests at the end of one branch of the RER D. Berthaut, is a job seeker who moved there for cheaper living costs. She has previously voted for mainstream right candidates but now says the only other option is an empty envelope in the ballot box. — Reuters

ISRAEL APPROVES NEW SETTLEMENT

PALESTINIAN AND UN FUME

JERUSALEM: The Palestinians and the United Nations yesterday condemned the Israeli cabinet's approval of the first officially sanctioned new settlement in the occupied West Bank in more than 25 years. The security cabinet gave its unanimous backing to the new settlement late on Thursday as what is widely seen as the most right-wing government in Israeli history presses ahead with settlement expansion in defiance of international concern.

Senior Palestinian official Hanan Ashrawi said the move showed the government was pushing ahead with "their systematic policies of settler colonialism, apartheid and ethnic cleansing, showing a total and blatant disregard for Palestinian human rights." "Israel is more committed to appeasing its illegal settler population than to abiding by the requirements for stability and a just peace," she said. A spokesman for UN chief Antonio Guterres, expressed "disappointment and alarm" at the announcement.

"The secretary general has consistently stressed that there is no Plan B for Israelis and Palestinians to live together in peace and security. He condemns all unilateral actions that, like the present one, threaten peace and undermine the two-state solution," Stephane Dujarric said in a statement. The new settlement will be constructed north of the former wildcat Jewish outpost known as Amona, which was razed in February in accordance with an Israeli High Court order. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had promised to build a new settlement for its residents after their eviction. "I promised to create a new community and we are going to respect that commitment and create it today," he said ahead of Thursday's security cabinet meeting.

Oded Revivi, chief foreign envoy for the umbrella body representing settlers, welcomed the decision. "We will be monitoring the government very closely to see that these plans come to fruition, enabling a new era of building," he said in a statement. Agriculture minister Uri Ariel also welcomed the announcement, saying it would allow the "development of Judea and Samaria," the phrase right-wing Israelis use for the West Bank. It will be the first entirely new settlement that an Israeli government has approved since 1991, the anti-settlement NGO Peace Now said. In recent years, construction had focused instead on expanding existing settlements.

'Held captive by settlers'

Peace Now said its location deep in the West Bank was "strategic for the fragmentation of the West Bank," which Palestinians see as the bulk of their future state. "Netanyahu is held captive by the settlers, and chooses his political survival over the interest of the state of Israel," the NGO said, adding it was pushing Israelis and Palestinians closer to "apartheid." The international community regards all Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories as illegal and a major obstacle to Middle East peace. Israel draws a distinction between those it sanctions and those it does not so-called outposts. — AFP

INDIA SEEKS DIVINE INTERVENTION TO DETER SPITTERS

NEW DELHI: India has sought divine intervention to rid its government buildings of the scourge of spitting-wall tiles imprinted with the images of gods. Officials in Uttar Pradesh state have installed tiles with images of Hindu gods and goddesses in "vulnerable" corners of government buildings where reddish brown sprays from chewing tobacco mixtures are a common sight. Few public spaces are spared from spitting in India.

Those chewing the hugely popular handmade paan mixtures of tobacco and areca nut are serial offenders, leaving a pungent stain on any surface coated with the residue. In Shahjahanpur district, roughly 225 kilometers from the capital Lucknow, officials fed up with the mess have turned to the gods for inspiration.

"We got CCTV cameras installed, and also deployed staff to check spitting, but it was of no use," district official TK Shibu told The Press Trust

of India. "So as an experiment, we are trialling these tiles of gods and goddesses." The move comes shortly after the state's new leader Yogi Adityanath, a firebrand Hindu priest, announced a ban on chewing tobacco in government premises after encountering a spit-stained office in Lucknow last week. Similar efforts have been rolled out, with mixed success, to deter public urination in India, with the images of gods often seen on walls and corners across its cities. —AFP

HIGH-TECH WAR KIT CAN'T PREVENT CIVILIAN DEATHS

WASHINGTON: Despite using state-of-the-art weaponry, the US-led coalition fighting the Islamic State group in Iraq appears unable to avoid civilian casualties as it battles the jihadists in close urban combat. The coalition is backing Iraqi forces in the battle to push out IS from west Mosul, a maze of narrow and densely populated lanes in which residents must hunker down in a bid to avoid bombs and bullets. The commander of the US-led forces admitted this week that they "probably had a role" in casualties caused by an explosion on March 17, which local sources said left dozens of non-combatants dead.

But the US military has also repeatedly denounced what they call the jihadists' use of civilians as human shields—and now accuses them of trying to provoke the coalition into making deadly blunders. The anti-IS forces have the most up-to-date technology for warfare, enabling GPS and laser-guided bombs, video surveillance by drone and online interception of jihadist activity.

Yet their opponents are "smuggling civilians so we won't see them and trying to bait the coalition to attack," said US Colonel Joe Scrocca, a spokesman for the Baghdad-based coalition, on Thursday. He said they had for the first time on Wednesday caught jihadists on video who "forced civilians into a building, killing one who resisted, and then used this building against the CTS (Iraqi counter-terrorist forces)."

Fears for civilians

Since the west Mosul offensive began in mid-February more than 300 civilians have been killed, according to the United Nations—although it is not clear how many deaths are attributable to each side. Some 200,000 people have fled the area over the same period, and the Pope, the UN and Amnesty International have all called in recent days for greater efforts to protect citizens. London-based NGO Airwars, which monitors civilian casualties of international airstrikes, said victims of coalition bombs in Iraq and Syria increased in March to a level comparable with "some of the worst periods of Russian activity in Syria."

The rise to power of US President Donald Trump, who promised to "bomb the shit" out of the IS group, has fed suspicions that the new administration is giving a freer rein to its military—if necessary, by accepting more collateral damage. But US Lieutenant General Stephen Townsend, who leads the coalition, said there had been only "relatively minor adjustments" to the rules of engagement since he came into command last August, and that these did not factor in the March 17 strike.

Speaking to reporters on Tuesday in a phone briefing from Iraq, he insisted that "our care, our caution, our applications of the rule of force... our tolerance for human casualties, none of that has changed." Townsend described the fighting as "the most significant urban combat to take place since World War II." "It is the toughest and most brutal close-quarters combat that I have experienced in my 34 years of service." Along with civilian casualties, Iraqi troops have suffered significant losses, with nearly 300 men killed since the west Mosul pushback began over a month ago.

US military officials say they have boosted precautions to avoid civilian victims. "We don't need to use a 500-hundred-pound bomb which is going to destroy a building if we can use a Hellfire missile which is just going to blow out a room and kill some fighters," said Scrocca. A US defense official told reporters this week that they always try to have video images of the targets that Iraqi forces ask them to strike. "We have to be able to positively identify the valid military target (and) positively identify the combatant," as well assess the potential collateral damage of a strike, the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity. But in some circumstances, the decision to strike must be taken in seconds. —AFP



SEOUL: Ousted South Korean President Park Geun-hye (center), leaves the prosecutors' office in a car as she is transferred to a detention house yesterday in Seoul, South Korea. —AFP

S KOREA'S PARK IN CUSTODY AFTER COURT ORDERS ARREST

DISGRACED PARK DOWNSIZED FROM BLUE HOUSE TO SOLITARY CELL

SEOUL: For a person whose life always seemed to revolve around South Korea's huge presidential palace, the next several months will be lived on a much smaller scale. Park Geun-hye entered the Seoul Detention Center in a black sedan before dawn yesterday after a court approved her arrest on corruption allegations. The ousted president registered her name and ID number, went through a simple health checkup, and gave up her personal belongings, including hairpins that held up her signature bun. She then changed into light-green prison clothes and was locked in a solitary cell, according to a detention center official who didn't want to be named, citing office rules.

Park's cell has a television, a toilet, a sink, a table and a mattress. She will be asked to rise at 6 am and go to sleep at 8 pm. She will have to eat at her cell and also wash her own plate, the official said. A typical solitary cell at the detention center is 6.56 square meters. "She will go through the same routines as other inmates," the detention center official said. Park is expected to spend several months in the detention center while court proceedings are taking place.

She has lived in the presidential Blue House twice, first as the daughter of military strongman Park Chung-hee, who moved into the palace in 1963, two years after he staged a coup and took control of the country. Park left the Blue House following the assassination of her father in 1979. But, following a meteoric political career, she returned after winning the presidency in December 2012, thanks to overwhelming support from older voters who remembered her father as a hero who rescued the nation from poverty, despite his brutal record of civilian oppression. Park's term was to have ended in February 2018, but the Constitutional Court removed her from office on March 10 over the corruption scandal.

Occupying the slopes of a downtown Seoul mountain, the Blue House is large compound where hundreds of people work in several buildings, including a blue-roofed, 8,476-square meter (10,137 square yard) hall where the main presidential office is. When she used the office, Park needed to walk about 15 meters (16 yards) just to get to her desk from the door. She is the second former president to be held at the Seoul Detention Center, which keeps criminal suspects in custody before conviction. Roh Tae-woo, who was president from 1988 to 1993, was locked there after a 1995 arrest for bribery. He was convicted and sentenced to prison but was pardoned in 1997.

Its current detainees include other key figures in the corruption scandal that toppled Park, including her longtime friend, Choi Soon-sil, who is suspected of colluding with Park to extort money and favors from companies and secretly interfering with state affairs. Billionaire Samsung heir Lee Jae-yong was detained there after being arrested for allegedly using tens of millions of dollars in corporate funds to bribe Park and Choi in exchange for business favors.

Park's former culture minister, Cho Yoonsun, and her ex-chief of staff, Kim Ki-choon, are also being held at the detention center following their arrests over suspicions that they blacklisted thousands of artists deemed as unfriendly to Park to deny them state support. The current Seoul Detention Center opened in Euiwang city in 1987. It replaced a facility originally built as a prison in Seoul in 1908. During Japan's colonial rule over the Korean Peninsula, the prison was notorious as a torture center for Korean independence activists. After colonial rule ended at the close of World War II, South Korea used the facility as a prison and later as a detention center. —AP

N KOREAN MURDER SUSPECTS GO HOME WITH VICTIM'S BODY MALAYSIA FORCED TO SWAP

KUALA LUMPUR: Three North Koreans wanted for questioning over the murder of the estranged half-brother of their country's leader returned home yesterday along with the body of victim Kim Jong Nam after Malaysia agreed a swap deal with the reclusive state. Malaysian police investigating what US and South Korean officials say was an assassination carried out by North Korean agents took statements from the three before they were allowed to leave the country. "We have obtained whatever we want from them...They have assisted us and they have been allowed to leave," police chief Khalid Abu Bakar told a news conference in the capital, Kuala Lumpur, saying there were no grounds to hold the men.

Kim Jong Nam, the elder half-brother of the North's young, unpredictable leader Kim Jong Un, was killed at Kuala Lumpur's airport on Feb 13 in

a bizarre assassination using VX nerve agent, a chemical so lethal the UN has listed it as a weapon of mass destruction.

China's Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang said the remains of a North Korean citizen killed in Malaysia were returned to the North via Beijing along with "relevant" North Korean citizens. Malaysian authorities released Kim's body on Thursday in a deal that secured the release of nine Malaysian citizens held in Pyongyang after a drawn out diplomatic spat.

Malaysian police had named eight North Koreans they wanted to question in the case, including the three given safe passage to leave. Television footage obtained by Reuters from Japanese media showed Hyon Kwang Song, the second secretary at the North Korean embassy in Kuala Lumpur, and Kim Uk Il, a North Korean

state airline employee on the flight from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing.

The police chief confirmed they were accompanied by compatriot Ri Ji U, also known as James, who had been hiding with them at the North Korean embassy in Kuala Lumpur.

Malaysian prosecutors have charged two women - an Indonesian and a Vietnamese - with killing Kim Jong Nam, but South Korean and US officials had regarded them as pawns in an operation carried out by North Korean agents. Kim Jong Nam, who had been living in exile in the Chinese territory of Macau for several years, survived an attempt on his life in 2012, according to South Korean lawmakers. They say Kim Jong Un had issued a "standing order" for the assassination in order to consolidate his own power after the 2011 death of the father of both. —Reuters



LISMORE: A handout photo shows flooding in a small town just north of Bowen in Queensland after the area was hit by cyclone Debbie. —AFP

AUSTRALIANS CLING TO ROOFS AS FLOODWATERS SWAMP TOWNS

ONE DEAD, 20,000 PEOPLE TOLD TO EVACUATE

SYDNEY: Flooding rivers swamped towns along Australia's east coast yesterday forcing tens of thousands of people to be evacuated as fast-flowing waters cut roads and destroyed bridges after the remnants of a powerful cyclone swept through the region. The disaster zone from ex-Cyclone Debbie stretched 1,000 kms from Queensland state's tropical resort islands and Gold Coast tourist strip to the farmlands of New South Wales state, with more than 100,000 homes reportedly without power.

Six large rivers had hit major flood levels and were still rising, said the Bureau of Meteorology. Flood sirens sounded before dawn at Lismore when the Wilsons River surged over the town's levee. By daybreak the centre of the town of 25,000 people in the Northern Rivers region of NSW was underwater. Throughout the day several towns suffered the same fate and were submerged under floodwaters.

Stranded residents climbed onto roofs of flooded homes to await rescuing, but fast-moving water and high winds hindered emergency crews reaching some people.

Farmers moved livestock to higher ground, while others sandbagged property, desperately trying to stop floodwaters. NSW police said they had recovered the body of a woman from floodwaters yesterday, the first reported death since Cyclone Debbie hit on Tuesday. Authorities had feared that people may have died overnight as floodwaters rose swiftly in the dark.

"We've seen a lot of flood rescues here this morning," Lismore State Emergency Service Deputy Controller Amanda Vidler said while floodwaters lapped her feet in the hard-hit town. She told Reuters of one rescue where she plucked a man from rushing water on the town's main street. "We put him in an inflatable and we got him out of there...yeah, we all got wet," she said. Cyclone Debbie, a category four storm, one short of the most powerful level five, pounded Queensland state on Tuesday, smashing tourist resorts, bringing down power lines and shutting down coal mines, has become a huge rain depression.

Debbie will hit Australia's A\$1.7 trillion (\$1.3 trillion) economy, with economists estimating it

will slow growth to under 2 percent in the first quarter. In the Bowen Basin, the world's single largest source of coal used to make steel, Glencore said its mines were not damaged by the storm but restarting production depended on railways reopening. Rail operator Aurizon reopened one of its four railway lines and three were still closed. BHP, was still assessing the extent of any disruption to shipments.

Queensland's top insurers, Suncorp Group Ltd and RACQ, said it was too early to put a dollar figure on the damage. Lismore mayor Isaac Smith said it was the worst flood in at least three decades. "When I was a young fellow I have seen a couple of these but I don't quite remember them like this," he said. Since Wednesday night, the NSW State Emergency Service has fielded 1,400 calls, made 300 flood rescues and given more than 20,000 people immediate evacuation orders. "There's not a lot we can do about it, you can't change mother nature's mind, you just do your thing, wait till it goes down and clean it up," said Lennon Bartlett as he paddled his dad's rowboat down a street in Lismore. —Reuters

AUSTRALIA TIGHTENS AIRPORT SECURITY, SCREENS LAPTOPS

SYDNEY: Australia said yesterday it will increase security checks for flights from some Middle East airports, but stopped short of implementing the laptop ban introduced by the United States and Britain. Britain and the US banned laptops and tablet computers in cabins on flights from some countries in the Middle East and North Africa earlier this month, citing fears of possible attacks. "Explosive detection screening will be conducted for randomly selected passengers and their baggage. Checks may also include targeted screening of electronic devices," Transport Minister Darren Chester said in a statement.

"Our changes are in line with the UK, which recently announced that people travelling from Doha, Abu Dhabi and Dubai will be subject to random explosive trace detection screening. "There is no ban on the carriage of electronic devices on flights to Australia at this stage." The airlines affected are Qantas Airways, Etihad Airways, Emirates, and Qatar Airways. The increase security checks will hit passengers flying direct to Australia from Doha, Abu Dhabi and Dubai. Chester said there was "no specific threat to Australia". "In response to national security advice the federal government has made precautionary changes and instructed airlines to implement new protocols from next week."

US officials said their measure was intended to thwart possible attacks on airliners with small explosive devices hidden in consumer electronics. Alexandre de Juniac, director general of the International Air Transport Association, said Wednesday the American and British bans were not sustainable. "Even in the short term, it is difficult to understand their effectiveness. And the commercial distortions they create are severe," he said in a speech in Canada. The US ban affects nine airlines from eight countries-Turkey, Morocco, Jordan, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. The British ban targets flights out of Egypt, Turkey, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and Lebanon. —AFP

SATURDAY, APRIL 1, 2017

FOREIGNERS IN JAPAN FACE DISCRIMINATION

TOKYO: Almost 40 percent of foreign residents who sought housing in Japan had applications turned down and almost a quarter were denied jobs in the past five years, a survey showed yesterday, highlighting discrimination in a largely homogeneous society. The findings from the

Justice Ministry survey come as the number of foreign workers and residents in Japan hit record highs as the country prepares to host the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

However, immigration remains a touchy subject in a land where conservatives prize cultural

homogeneity and foreigners make up less than two percent of the population. Language skills weren't the problem, the survey suggested, with about 95 percent of those who were denied jobs and more than 90 percent of those who were denied housing saying they spoke Japanese con-

versationally, professionally or fluently. "The landlord said I couldn't live in the flat because of my nationality," said a Korean respondent in her fifties quoted in the report. "I was born and raised in Japan and Japanese is the only language I know. —Reuters

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SACKING TRIGGERS CIVIL WAR IN S AFRICA RULING ANC

JOHANNESBURG: The sacking of South Africa's respected finance minister in a cabinet purge pitched the ruling ANC party into chaos yesterday, creating one of its biggest tests since leading the fight against apartheid. The country's Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa launched an unprecedented verbal attack on President Jacob Zuma, whose midnight reshuffle sent the rand currency plunging and triggered accusations that he was promoting graft.

Zuma's axing of finance minister Pravin Gordhan also unleashed a wave of opposition in the African National Congress, which came to power under Nelson Mandela in the euphoric 1994 elections but has suffered declining support. Gordhan was widely seen as a competent manager of one of the world's most important emerging economies. Ramaphosa went public with his anger, openly attacking his boss. "I told him that I would not agree with him," Ramaphosa told reporters. "There are quite a number of other

colleagues and comrades who are unhappy about this situation, particularly the removal of the minister of finance who was serving the country with absolute distinction".

Gordhan was reportedly sacked because of an alleged intelligence report on meetings he held in London earlier this week. "For him to be removed for this type of reasoning is to me unacceptable," Ramaphosa said. Gordhan held a press conference yesterday, saying he heard of his sacking via television and dismissing the intelligence report "as absolute nonsense." "We hope more and more South Africans would make it clear that our country is not for sale," he added.

Divided party

Zuma made 20 new government appointments in the reshuffle. "I'm very uncomfortable because areas where ministers do not perform have not been touched," Gwede Mantashe, the influential ANC secretary general, said. "We can't be happy (with the deci-

sion to sack Gordhan) because we think that the finance minister was a hard worker." Gordhan had been at loggerheads with Zuma for months, receiving support from several ministers and major foreign investors, as well as many ordinary South Africans and veterans of the anti-apartheid struggle.

He campaigned for budget discipline and against corruption, but Zuma's allies have accused Gordhan of thwarting the president's desire to enact radical policies to tackle racial inequality. Mantashe told 702 radio that Zuma was aware that many in the ANC were "unhappy" about the purge, in which Gordhan was replaced by home affairs minister Malusi Gigaba.

"The president came with a list. (He) said 'you can comment if you want to comment, but this is my decision,'" Mantashe said. The ANC, which was banned under white-minority rule, has lost popularity due to corruption allegations, record unemployment and slow economic growth.

'Midnight massacre'

The president is accused of being in the sway of the wealthy Gupta business family, allegedly granting them influence over government appointments, contracts and state-owned businesses.

John Steenhuisen, chief whip of the main opposition Democratic Alliance party, described the reshuffle as a "midnight massacre". "Zuma has got what he wanted, a Gupta ally in control (of the treasury)," he said. "Bad news for our country, bad news for the economy but mostly bad news for the nine million unemployed South Africans." The president said that the changes were "to bring about radical socio-economic transformation."

The rand was down more than seven percent for the week, after days of speculation that Zuma was about to move against Gordhan. Zuma is due to step down as head of the ANC in December, ahead of the 2019 general election. — AFP

VENEZUELA ALLEGES 'COUP'

INTERNATIONAL POWERS RAISE ALARM

CARACAS: International powers voiced alarm yesterday at the Venezuelan Supreme Court's move to seize power from the opposition-led legislature, in what was widely branded as amounting to a coup. The court's move tightened socialist President Nicolas Maduro's grip on power after more than a year in which he was locked in a political struggle with the center-right opposition. Critics said it was an authoritarian turn for the South American oil producing giant, where an economic crisis has caused food shortages, riots and an epidemic of violent crime.

The crisis has raised concerns about stability in Venezuela, which has undergone three attempted military coups since 1992. The US State Department called the court's move "a serious setback for democracy." Regional powers Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Peru, Chile and others also warned it was a threat to democracy in Venezuela. Guatemala also denounced the court's action. But leftist-led Bolivia defended Maduro. Brazil's foreign ministry said it was "a clear break with constitutional order."

But the hardest line came from the secretary general of the Organization of American States (OAS), Luis Almagro, who echoed Maduro's opponents' claims of an internal "coup d'etat." Maduro has yet to comment publicly about the outcry. Protesting lawmakers scuffled with riot police outside the court. Opposition groups called for wider street protests on Saturday. In a tweet, jailed opposition leader Leopoldo Lopez called on people to take to the streets in order to "reject dictatorship and rescue democracy."

Lawmakers passed over

The judges' move strips Maduro's opponents in the National Assembly legislature of what little grip they had over a key pillar of government. The high court (TSJ) has consistently backed the leftist president in his power struggle with the legislature. It had on Tuesday also stripped parliamentary immunity from lawmakers in the assembly. "The unconstitutional decisions by the TSJ to strip



CARACAS: Venezuelan National Guards officers try to detain a young woman during a protest outside of the Supreme Court in Caracas, Venezuela yesterday. — AP

parliamentary immunity from the members of the National Assembly and assume the legislative function are the latest actions taken by the authoritarian regime to subvert the constitutional order in Venezuela and eliminate all semblance of democracy," Almagro's statement said. He said he "denounces the self-inflicted coup d'etat perpetrated by the Venezuelan regime against the National Assembly, the last branch of government to be legitimized by the will of the people of Venezuela," the OAS statement said.

Army urged to act

The court based its latest decision on an earlier ruling that the opposition majority was in contempt of court. "As long as the National Assembly's contempt of court and invalidity persist, parliamentary powers shall be exercised directly by (the Supreme Court's) constitutional chamber or by the body it designates to safeguard the rule of law," it said late Wednesday night. The speaker of the National Assembly, Julio Borges, urged the army, which has thus far supported Maduro, to take a stand. "The Venezuelan armed forces cannot remain silent as the constitution is breached,"

he said, appealing to soldiers who are also suffering through what he called the "chaos" of the economic crisis. With the public support of the military and control of most state institutions, Maduro has been resisting opposition calls for early elections.

Contempt of court

The court said the National Assembly leadership was in contempt for swearing in three lawmakers who were banned over alleged electoral fraud. The opposition Democratic Unity Roundtable (MUD) condemns the fraud charges as a trumped-up bid to curb its power after it won a landslide in legislative elections in December 2015 with a promise to oust Maduro. The court has overturned every law passed by the opposition-led legislature. "To legally overtake the functions of a branch of government is a coup," said Latin America specialist Christopher Sabatini of Columbia University in New York. The court's expansion of its own powers came as part of a ruling on an oil law. It enables the government to launch joint ventures with private oil companies without legislative approval. — AFP

EX-TRUMP ADVISOR OFFERS TESTIMONY FOR IMMUNITY

WASHINGTON: Michael Flynn has "a story to tell," his lawyer said yesterday, amid reports that the ousted US national security advisor has offered to testify in exchange for immunity about potential ties between Donald Trump's presidential campaign and Russia. Flynn proposed his deal to the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the House and Senate intelligence committees, The Wall Street Journal reported late Thursday.

A close advisor of Trump's 2016 campaign, Flynn was forced to step down just weeks into the security job last month. His resignation came after it emerged that he made misleading statements about talks he held with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak during the presidential transition concerning Washington's sanctions on Moscow. Trump himself appeared to offer legal advice on the issue, tweeting: "Mike Flynn should ask for immunity in that this is a witch hunt (excuse for big election loss), by media & Dems, of historic proportion!"

The Journal said it wasn't clear what exactly Flynn had offered to discuss. But it quoted one unnamed official as saying the retired army general's bid for immunity suggested potential "legal jeopardy" for him. Robert Kelner, a lawyer for Flynn, said in a statement tweeted late Thursday that "General Flynn certainly has a story to tell, and he very much wants to tell it, should the circumstances permit." "Out of respect for the committees, we will not comment right now on the details of discussions between counsel for General Flynn and the House and Senate intelligence committees, other than to confirm that those discussions have taken place," the lawyer added.

The New York Times quoted a congressional official as saying investigators are wary of cutting a deal with Flynn until they are further along in their probe and have a better idea of what information Flynn might offer. The Times also quoted an expert as urging caution over Flynn's offer of testimony. "At this early stage, I wouldn't read anything into this request beyond smart lawyering," Mark Zaid, a Washington lawyer specializing in national security cases, was quoting as saying by the Times.

'Politically charged'

"In such a politically charged, high-profile national security case, I couldn't imagine not first asking for immunity," he added. "I would suspect both Congress and the FBI will first generate additional evidence from smaller players before deciding to immunize General Flynn," Zaid said, according to the Times. At least four investigations are under way into allegations that Moscow tried to swing November's presidential election in Trump's favor, as questions swirl about whether some in the Republican's inner circle colluded with Russia.

The FBI, in an extraordinary admission, confirmed publicly this month that it was probing the possibility of such collusion. A former US military intelligence chief, Flynn was generously paid to attend a gala of Russia's RT television in late 2015, where he sat with President Vladimir Putin, raising suspicions about his ties with Moscow. — AFP

Kuwait Times 55th Anniversary

BUSINESS

SATURDAY, APRIL 1, 2017

Shares lock in bumper Q1, greenback eyes best week

Credit Suisse target of major tax fraud probe

Solar energy, saltwater power vegetable farms in the desert



Indian crackdown on cow slaughter puts meat industry on edge



WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump speaks during a meeting with US manufacturers in the Roosevelt Room of the White House yesterday. —AFP

TRUMP TO NAME, SHAME TRADE 'CHEATS'

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump was to launch an investigation yesterday to root out unfair trade practices around the world, threatening to target countries that contribute to America's substantial trade deficit. In a symbolic move, Trump was to sign an executive order tasking staff to pinpoint countries and goods responsible for America's nearly \$50 billion a month trade deficit. Much of that deficit data is already publicly available and well known, but Trump's initiative doubles down on his tough trade rhetoric and is being taken as a protectionist warning shot across the world.

Top administration officials described the order as a step toward converting "America first" campaign promises into action. Throughout his presidential campaign, Trump vowed to put America's trading relationship with the world on a more advantageous basis. Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross said the order would result in analysts going "country by country, and product by product," reporting back to Trump within 90 days.

They will look, he said, for evidence of

"cheating," inappropriate behavior, trade deals that have not lived up to their promise, lax enforcement, currency misalignment and troublesome World Trade Organization constraints. "It will form the basis for decision making by the administration," he said.

The order comes a week before Trump meets Chinese President Xi Jinping and is likely to be seen as a warning shot across Beijing's bow. "Needless to say the number one source of the deficit is China," Ross said, before listing more than a dozen other "countries that will potentially be involved". The others were: Canada, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, South Korea, Switzerland, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam.

However, Ross said the presence of a deficit does not necessarily mean that retaliatory or remedial action would be taken. "It's a little bit hard to say that someone is an evildoer if they are providing a product we can't," he said. "In some cases, it will simply be that they are better at making the product or can do it far cheaper than we can. This is not meant to say that everybody on this little list is an evildoer."

Trade reset

In a second executive order to be signed yesterday, Trump was to order the government to better recover trade duties on products that are subsidized by foreign governments or dumped on the US market. The proposals being considered by US customs officials could impose more substantial bonding requirements at the border or examine products' risk more stringently. Listing various problem areas, Navarro said: "This is a big deal. It's steel, chemicals, agricultural products, machinery - it's the whole gambit."

Head of the World Trade Organization Roberto Azevedo said there was a need for clarity on US trade policy, to see how public declarations translate into policy. "It is difficult to predict and speculate about what US trade policy will be. It's a very important country, one which the whole world has its eyes on." In a sign of brewing unease, Germany yesterday protested over planned US punitive anti-dumping duties on steel plate products from companies in that country and half a dozen others. German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel charged the step breached global trade rules and unfairly disadvantaged suppli-

ers in Germany, as well as in Austria, Belgium, France, Italy, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. Italy also voiced alarm, amid fears that products like Vespa scooters could be hit by punitive duties. "Trump declares war on the Vespa" said a headline in national daily *Il Messaggero*, reflecting the tone of most of the media coverage on an issue that dominated front pages and topped news bulletins.

The European products are vulnerable to potential measures because of a transatlantic dispute over Europe's ban on beef produced with the aid of hormones that pre-dates Trump coming to power. Along with mopeds, the symbolic Italian products that could have punitive duties slapped on them reportedly include tomatoes, salami and Parma ham, and San Pellegrino mineral water, now owned by Switzerland's Nestle.

Navarro insisted the new measures would fall within rules at the World Trade Organization, where some might see the United States erecting a technical barrier to trade. "There is no issue here," he said. "We've been collecting these duties - we just haven't been doing it very well. The WTO is silent on the issue of incompetence." — AFP



TOKYO: A passerby walks in front of a stock indicator at the window of a security company yesterday. — AFP

SHARES LOCK IN BUMPER Q1, GREENBACK EYES BEST WEEK

OIL LICKS WOUNDS AFTER NEAR 7% QUARTERLY FALL

LONDON: World stocks dipped yesterday as investors locked in some of the more than 6 percent gain that has given them their best start to a year since 2012, while the dollar inched towards what could be its strongest week of 2017 so far. Asian and European shares saw profit-taking as traders squared up for the quarter, though there was plenty still going on, not least in South Africa where the sacking of its respected finance minister sent the rand tumbling again.

Wall Street was expected to open lower having recently lost some of the swagger that had seen it set multiple all-time highs and a tidy 5.8 percent quarterly gain. The dollar was on the rise though after US growth data, talk of as many as three more Federal Reserve rate hikes this year and the best Chinese manufacturing data in nearly five years, though even that couldn't prevent commodity markets wilting.

Oil was back under \$53 a barrel, metals were down 1 percent and Europe's Basic Resources index, where big miners are listed, fell 1.7 percent to leave London's FTSE and the pan-European STOXX 600 index down 0.5-0.6 percent. The latter was still on track for a 5 percent rise between January and March for a third straight quarterly gain, though emerging markets have been even bigger winners. MSCI's EM stocks index is up 12.5 percent on a dollar-adjusted basis.

Against a basket of the world's other major currencies the dollar was up 0.1 percent and close to a 1 percent weekly gain that would be its best in an otherwise lackluster year. Over the quarter the greenback has fallen 1.7 percent, its worst showing in a year, on doubts that U.S. President Donald

Trump was not prioritizing - and did not have the necessary power to push through Congress - the economic reforms that had driven the dollar to 14-year highs at the start of the year.

"We are relatively optimistic on global growth but we think the cyclical trade has rotated away from the Trump trade and near-term US fiscal stimulus," said Schroders' multi-asset Portfolio Manager Angus Sippe. "We are now more optimistic on the euro zone," he said, adding he was also marginally short the dollar. The euro held its own at just under \$1.07 as data showed inflation in the euro zone had slowed in March by far more than the economists had expected, driven down mostly by a deceleration of energy price rises.

Meanwhile the European Union laid out its Brexit negotiating terms, saying if Britain wanted to start trade deal talks this year it would first have to pay ten billions of euros and give residency rights to the 3 million EU citizens living in the UK. There were tentative signs too that the euro zone's weakest members would be hit the hardest by an imminent scaling back of the European Central Bank's asset purchase program.

The yield, an indication of borrowing costs, on bonds of southern euro zone states including Portugal and Italy headed higher in the final day of trading before the ECB cuts its monthly debt purchases to 60 billion euros from 80 billion. Top ECB policymaker Benoit Coeure emphasized the bank would tread carefully with any further policy changes.

Gold Standard

In Asia, MSCI's broadest index of Asia-Pacific shares outside Japan retreated 0.55 percent after its 12.5 per-

cent charge over the quarter. Hong Kong shares fell 0.6 percent, but were still headed for a 9.8 percent quarterly jump and China's CSI 300 index added 0.4 percent, putting it on track for a 4.3 percent quarterly rise. "Asia saw some pretty healthy profit-taking after a few sessions of solid gains," said James Woods, global investment analyst at Rivkin Securities in Sydney.

Next week promises to be an interesting start to the second quarter. Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping will meet in Florida and the US president has set the tone for a tense few days by tweeting that Washington could no longer tolerate massive trade deficits and job losses. He was to also sign executive orders yesterday aimed at identifying abuses that are causing the deficits and clamping down on non-payment of anti-dumping and anti-subsidy duties on imports, his top trade officials said.

China's Vice Foreign Minister Zheng Zuguang said yesterday that it does not have a policy to devalue its currency to promote exports, and neither does it seek a trade surplus with the United States. "The dialogue emanating from that is going to help set the tone of the relationship between the US and China and these days it goes beyond trade. There is a lot to discuss geopolitically, not least North Korea," said PIMCO portfolio manager Yacov Aronopolin.

In commodities, Brent oil and US crude dipped to \$52.91 a barrel and \$50.35 a barrel, having zipped higher on Thursday after Kuwait backed an extension of OPEC production cuts. Oil was heading for a 6.8 percent loss for the quarter, though. In contrast gold which was at \$1,241.81 has gained nearly 8 percent since the start of the year. — Reuters

US CONSUMER SPENDING SLOWS, INFLATION RISING

WASHINGTON: US consumer spending barely rose in February amid delays in the payment of income tax refunds, but the biggest annual increase in inflation in nearly five years supported expectations of further interest rate hikes this year. The slowdown in consumer spending reported by the Commerce Department on Friday is, however, likely to be temporary with consumer confidence at a more than 16-year high and a tightening labor market pushing up wage growth.

"Given the weather-related weakness in utilities spending as well as some delays in tax refunds for low- and middle-income earners in February, we expect consumer spending to strengthen in the quarters ahead," said Eugenio Aleman, a senior economist at Wells Fargo Securities in Charlotte, North Carolina. The Commerce Department said consumer spending, which accounts for more than two-thirds of US economic activity, edged up 0.1 percent. That was the smallest gain since August and followed an unrevised 0.2 percent rise in January.

Economists had expected a 0.2 percent increase. The government delayed the issuing of tax refunds this year as part of efforts to combat fraud. Spending last month was held back by a 0.1 percent dip in purchases of big-ticket items like automobiles. While unseasonably warm weather lowered households' heating bills, it restricted spending growth last month. — Reuters

CHINA FACTORY ACTIVITY EXPANDS FURTHER IN MAR

BEIJING: Chinese factory activity accelerated in March, official data showed yesterday, the latest sign of improving momentum in the world's second-largest economy but analysts warned of headwinds later down the line. The figures are the most recent to suggest that a years-long growth slowdown, which has had knock-on effects globally, could be easing, although there are also concerns about the outlook for world trade caused by US President Donald Trump's protectionist leanings.

The official purchasing managers' index (PMI), which gauges conditions at factories and mines, edged up to 51.8, slightly beating the 51.7 forecast in a Bloomberg News survey and up from the previous month's 51.6. A figure above 50 indicates growth while anything below points to contraction. "The manufacturing sector continued to maintain a steady trend," National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) analyst Zhao Qinghe said in a note, adding that a pickup in production and in demand drove the results. "High-tech manufacturing continued rapid expansion."

The results suggest that China's economy "continued to perform well in March," said Julian Evans-Pritchard of Capital Economics in a note, adding that the data show labor-market conditions have also improved. But he noted that the strength "probably won't last" as a looming property-market correction and a tightening of monetary policy will squeeze industrial activity later in the year.

Analysts with ANZ noted the positive results were boosted in part by a rally in commodity prices that is "reaching (its) limit" and predicted a softening of producer price growth. "The return of investment-driven growth is not welcome from the policymakers' point of view," they added. Yesterday's reading follows data showing a surge in imports last month while economic growth came in slightly better than expected at the end of 2016.



QINGDAO, China: Sparks fly as a welder works in a subsidiary of China Offshore Oil Engineering Co Ltd in eastern China's Shandong province yesterday. — AP

VESPA WARS: ITALY FEARS STING OF US TRADE BARRIERS

ROME: Italy yesterday voiced alarm over Donald Trump's plans to target imports responsible for the US trade deficit, amid fears products like Vespa scooters could be hit by punitive duties. "Trump declares war on the Vespa" said a headline in national daily *Il Messaggero*, reflecting the tone of most of the media coverage on an issue that dominated front pages and topped news bulletins.

The alarm followed reports that scooters and motorcycles feature on a 'blacklist' of 90 European products earmarked for the imposition of 100 percent duties as Trump prepares to launch an offensive against "trade cheats". The US president was due Friday to issue two executive orders instructing staff to pinpoint goods and countries responsible for the near \$50-billion deficit and to recommend action.

Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross said officials would be looking for evidence of

"cheating", inappropriate behaviour, trade deals that have not lived up to their promise, lax enforcement, currency misalignment and troublesome World Trade Organization (WTO) constraints.

The European products are vulnerable to potential measures because of a transatlantic dispute over Europe's ban on beef produced with the aid of hormones that pre-dates Trump coming to power.

Along with mopeds, the symbolic Italian products that could have punitive duties slapped on them reportedly include tomatoes in every form, salami and Parma ham, and San Pellegrino mineral water, now owned by Switzerland's Nestle. Italian Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni Friday voiced concern over the shift in US trade policy towards a more protectionist stance. Gentiloni said a meeting of Group of Seven leaders in Sicily at the end of May had to "take a clear posi-



ROME: This file photo taken on Dec 9, 2013 shows red Vespas parked in a street. — AFP

tion on an issue about which there can be no ambiguity. "We have to reiterate our confidence in the open economies and societies on which we have built decades of prosperity," he said. "We have to restate our backing for free markets and free trade, the most powerful engines of economic growth in his-

tory." Italy's exports to the United States in 2016 were worth 37 billion, just over ten percent of the European Union (including Britain) total of 362 billion.

However, the products reportedly targeted only make up a small part of the total: for example, the mopeds and motorbikes potentially affected accounted for 182 million of exports in 2016, compared with four billion euros for cars. Although reports of the blacklist hit shares in Vespa manufacturer Piaggio, the company stressed that US sales represented less than five percent of its total turnover, and that it could export from its factories in Vietnam if the duties are imposed.

That would, however, raise fears for jobs at the company's Italian production centers and any ban on food products could be very damaging to producers of upmarket niche products like San Daniele hams. — AFP

MR, MRS, MX, MISC? HSBC INTRODUCES GENDER NEUTRAL TITLES

LONDON: Banking giant HSBC announced yesterday that it is introducing a range of gender neutral titles for transgender customers and others who do not identify as male or female. The process for people wishing to change their gender on their bank account has also been simplified, the bank said in a statement on Transgender Day of Visibility. Instead of using the conventional honorifics Mr, Mrs or Ms, customers can choose from 10 gender neutral titles - Mx, Ind, M, Mre, Msr, Myr, Pr, Sai, Ser and Misc.

"Gender neutral titles allow people who don't identify as a particular gender, or who don't want to be identified by gender, to choose the title that works for them," the bank said in a statement. The titles, available to its high street customers in Britain, will be applied across their account including bank cards and correspondence. Training is to be given to all UK branch and contact center staff. Customers who are transitioning can now change their gender on their account by taking a passport, driving license or birth certificate that supports the change of gender into a branch.

Stuart Barette, trans lead of HSBC's UK Pride Network, which advised on the new services, recalled how he was "terrified" the day he went into his branch in order to change his name and gender. — Reuters

MCDONALD'S TO USE FRESH BEEF ON SOME US BURGERS

NEW YORK: McDonald's announced Thursday it will shift to fresh beef in its new made-to-order Quarter Pounder hamburgers in most US restaurants as it seeks to beef up sales in its home market. The fast-food chain by mid-2018 will move away from frozen beef on the popular hamburger, which will be cooked at the time of order, the company said in a news release. The change, which does not affect the Big Mac and other beef products, follows a trial run in about 400 restaurants in Texas and Oklahoma that was well received.

"We received overwhelmingly positive feedback from customers and employees and we're proud to have been part of a test that is creating a watershed moment for McDonald's," Dallas/Fort Worth franchisee Joe Jasper said in a statement. In a short video, McDonald's chief executive Steve Easterbrook said the company also was testing other customer-friendly changes such as home delivery, curbside check-in and mobile order and pay.

Easterbrook was installed as chief executive in 2015 to boost flagging sales. Changes have included the rollout of all-day breakfast in the US market, moving to cage-free eggs, and removing artificial preservatives from several menu items. Easterbrook has focused on improving nuts-and-bolts operations, but Thursday's announcement is the latest menu tweak after rivals like Wendy's already touted their fresh beef burgers. — AFP

CREDIT SUISSE TARGET OF MAJOR TAX FRAUD PROBE

DUTCH ACT AFTER TIP-OFF

AMSTERDAM/ZURICH: Swiss bank Credit Suisse has been dragged into yet more tax evasion and money laundering investigations, after a tip-off to Dutch prosecutors about tens of thousands of suspect accounts triggered raids in five countries. Coordinated raids began on Thursday in the Netherlands, Britain, Germany, France and Australia, the Dutch office for financial crimes prose-

ing to evade tax," Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs said in a statement. Neither the Dutch nor the British disclosed the name of the bank involved. However, Credit Suisse, Switzerland's second-biggest bank, said local authorities had visited its offices in Amsterdam, London and Paris "concerning client tax matters" and it was cooperating.

The Dutch FIOD seized administra-

agency that coordinates cross-border prosecutions. Eurojust issued a press release saying that the investigation had begun in 2016, and representatives from countries involved - Switzerland not among them - had held three preparatory meetings to share information before Thursday's raids began. Prosecutors "analyzed a huge amount of data," Eurojust said, looking for "individuals and groups suspected of tax fraud and money laundering". The investigation uncovered "undeclared assets hidden within offshore accounts and policies...(worth) millions of euros." Credit Suisse shares fell 1.3 percent, while the wider European banking sector index was flat.

Old Wounds

For Zurich-based Credit Suisse, the case reopens the thorny issue of tax evasion which has dogged Swiss banks for years after the world's wealthy used the country's strict bank secrecy laws to hide cash from the taxman. Credit Suisse has paid more than 2 billion Swiss francs (\$2 billion) since 2011 in the United States, Germany and Italy to settle allegations it helped clients dodge taxes. It has pushed clients in Europe, Latin America and Asia to participate in government programs facilitating the declaration of untaxed assets.

The bank said in December this process had been completed for Europe. Switzerland is also among the countries signed up to a global tax sharing initiative spearheaded by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Under the OECD's Automatic Exchange of Information (AEI), banks pass on information to local tax agencies, which in turn share it with foreign counterparts. Switzerland began collecting data at the start of the year and will exchange information from 2018. The Dutch FIOD said the coordinated raids were prompted by a tip-off about 55,000 suspect accounts of a Swiss bank, and it had passed information to the other countries about the accounts. — Reuters



BASEL: This file photo taken on June 13, 2016 shows a branch of Swiss banking giant Credit Suisse. — AFP

cution (FIOD) said on Friday, with two arrests confirmed so far.

The Dutch are "investigating dozens of people who are suspected of tax fraud and money laundering", the prosecutors said, adding that suspects had deposited money in a Swiss bank without disclosing that to authorities. British tax authorities said they had also opened a criminal investigation into suspected tax evasion and money laundering by "a global financial institution" and would be focusing initially on "senior employees", along with an unspecified number of customers.

"The international reach of this investigation sends a clear message that there is no hiding place for those seek-

ing to evade tax," Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs said in a statement. Neither the Dutch nor the British disclosed the name of the bank involved. However, Credit Suisse, Switzerland's second-biggest bank, said local authorities had visited its offices in Amsterdam, London and Paris "concerning client tax matters" and it was cooperating.

The Dutch FIOD seized administrative records as well as the contents of bank accounts, real estate, jewellery, a luxury car, expensive paintings and a gold bar from houses in four Dutch towns and cities.

The FIOD tweeted a photo of some of the seized assets. The people arrested, one in The Hague and one in the town of Hoofddorp, were not identified. The actions angered Switzerland's Office of the Attorney General, which said it was "disconcerted" by the way Dutch authorities had handled the matter and would demand an explanation. FIOD spokeswoman Wietske Vissers referred questions about investigations in the other countries to their national police and to Eurojust, the European Union

NIGERIA MOVES ON FOREX TO BOOST ECONOMY

LAGOS: Nigeria's central bank has made moves to strengthen the naira currency to boost domestic manufacturing and lift the economy out of recession caused by the slump in global oil prices. But analysts said the measures do not go far enough and foreign investment would only return to Africa's most populous nation once the market determines the currency's true value. The naira has lost value against the US dollar, as Nigeria saw revenues from international oil sales dwindle because of the worldwide slump in crude prices.

Stalled investment has led to a shortage of foreign currency, making it harder for local businesses to source enough dollars to pay for imported raw materials and machinery. It has also caused a yawning gap between the official rate and that on the illegal, but tolerated, black market. The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) currently sells dollars in the country's multiple forex markets at 315 to 375 naira, allowing dealers to make a small profit on customer transactions.

This week it directed commercial banks to

sell at 360 compared with the previous rate of 375, to forex users wanting to pay overseas school fees, medical bills and other "invisibles". "We believe that what has been driving the parallel market rate, apart from speculation, has been some of the invisibles," bank spokesman Isaac Okorafor told AFP.

'Not healthy'

Nigeria's President Muhammadu Buhari has stated he does not want the market to determine the value of the naira and argued devaluation would "kill" the currency. Since mid-February, the CBN has been pumping dollars into the market to strengthen the naira and bridge the gap between official and black market rates. Official data show some \$2.5 billion have been sold to end users, causing the local currency to rally to 380 on the open market as of Thursday, compared with a previous dollar high of around 520.

Monetary policy in recent months has been aimed at encouraging local production of what has previously been imported at huge cost. In June 2015, the CBN prohibited 41

items, including tooth picks and luxury jets, from the official forex window. Okorafor maintained the policy had "rejuvenated domestic production", providing "an opportunity to change the economy's structure, resuscitate local manufacturing" and create jobs.

The head of the Manufacturers' Association of Nigeria, Frank Jacobs, said any move to strengthen the naira was "a positive development", as not all members sourced forex officially. "Some manufacturers, especially the small-scale firms and those affected by the ban of the 41 items, source their dollars from the bureaux de change and the black market," he added. "Lowering the rates will definitely help them and the economy."

Financial analysts, industry operators and the International Monetary Fund, however, said the bank needed to go further and harmonize all of Nigeria's forex market rates. Bismarck Rewane, of the Financial Derivatives consultancy in Lagos, added: "A situation where the central bank is the sole supplier of forex is not healthy. It is creating an air of uncertainty for investors. The CBN is artificial-

ly funding the market to punish speculators and hoarders." Of particular concern was the use of foreign reserves to shore up the naira, he said. "We are using up in six weeks what we ought to use for six months. This is not sustainable," he said, urging the CBN "to move towards a market-driven" forex market. That would give greater certainty for currently wary investors, he added.

Precarious situation

The director-general of the Lagos Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Muda Yusuf, said businesses had greeted the bank's move this week with "relief". "Gradually investors confidence is returning to the economy," he said. But he also expressed concern about whether the policy was sustainable. "How far can the CBN go in making dollars readily available to industries and importers?" OPEC member Nigeria relies on crude oil sales for 90 percent of its foreign exchange earnings and 70 percent of government revenue, making it particularly vulnerable to global shocks. — AFP

SOLAR ENERGY, SALTWATER POWER VEGETABLE FARMS IN THE DESERT

'NEED FOR MORE INTEGRATED APPROACH'

ROME: With scorching summer temperatures and little rainfall, the barren scrublands around the port of Aqaba in Jordan, one of the world's most arid countries, might seem ill suited to cultivating cucumbers. Yet a Norwegian company is setting up a solar-powered, 20 hectare facility that promises to grow a variety of vegetables without wasting a drop of fresh water. "We take what we have enough of - sunlight, carbon dioxide, seawater and desert - to produce what we need more of - food water and energy," said Joakim Hauge, chief executive of the Sahara Forest Project (SFP).

Harnessing abundant resources to generate scarce ones will be key to feeding a growing global population, set to reach 9 billion by 2050, without damaging the environment or accelerating climate change, he said. Food production must rise by about 60 percent by 2050 to generate enough for everyone to eat, according to the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).

Agriculture already accounts for 70 percent of global freshwater use, while the food sector is responsible for more than 20 percent of planet-warming emissions and 30 percent of world energy consumption. "We can no longer make solutions that come at the expense of other sectors," said Hauge. "There is a need for a more integrated approach". The Aqaba complex, set to open in the summer, evaporates saltwater piped from the nearby Red Sea to cool greenhouses, creating conditions for crops to grow all year round. Sea water is also desalinated to generate salt and fresh water for irrigation, while vapor from greenhouses is used to humidify surrounding patches of parched land so plants can grow.

Agriculture of Tomorrow

SFP said a pilot project in the Gulf

state of Qatar generated cucumber yields comparable to those of European farms. Plans are underway to expand operations to Tunisia. But FAO experts said high costs involved limited the potential of such projects to ramp up food production on a global scale. "You need a lot of energy and a lot of money so...the question may arise whether the same resources could be put to better use," said FAO natural resources officer Alessandro Flammini.

To be financially viable, production must focus on high-value crops, like cucumbers and tomatoes, which poor countries might find cheaper to import, said Flammini, who analyzed the Qatar pilot for a 2014 FAO report. "It's an interesting concept for fulfilling local needs and especially in terms of food independence and to meet the demand of a niche market," he said.

The Aqaba complex had a \$3.7 million budget and received financial support from Norway, the European Union and other investors, according to SFP. Hauge said besides producing food, the complex, which will include a laboratory and research facilities, would produce side benefits by greening arid areas and creating jobs. "We believe that this is part of the agriculture of tomorrow," the biologist-turned-entrepreneur told the Thomson Reuters Foundation by phone.

From Australia to Somalia

Several other companies are employing similar technologies in other arid corners of the world. In 2016, UK-based agribusiness Sundrop Farms Holding Ltd opened a vast greenhouse for tomato farming in the Australian outback near Port Augusta, 300 km north of Adelaide.

The facility runs on energy mostly produced by a 115 m solar tower that draws sunlight from 23,000 mirrors surrounding it. "Traditional agriculture is wasteful in terms of water and fossil

fuels. In addition, unprotected crops are at the mercy of the elements, causing gaps in supply, quality issues and price spikes," Sundrop's CEO Philipp Saumweber said in an email. The company has signed a 10-year contract to supply Australian supermarket chain Coles with truss tomatoes and received investments of about \$100 million from private equity firm KKR & Co, according to a 2014 statement. "While the capital expenditure required to build our farms is slightly more expensive due to its cutting-edge nature, we reap the benefits of this initial investment in the long run through savings of fossil inputs," said Saumweber.

Around seven thousand miles away, in sunbaked and drought-hit Somaliland, another British-based venture, Seawater Greenhouse, is setting up a pilot facility aimed at making high-tech greenhouse production more affordable. "We have eliminated using fans," said British inventor Charlie Paton, a former business partner of Saumweber, who pioneered the use of solar energy and salt water for irrigation in the 1990s.

"We designed (the greenhouse) to be cool by exploiting the prevailing wind. So it's a wind-cooled greenhouse," he said in a phone interview.

The one-hectare complex, which received funding from the British government, cost about \$100,000, he said, adding he expected it to produce around 30 tonnes of tomatoes a year and 16 litres of drinking water a day for irrigation and livestock.

Paton said he hoped the greenhouse, which employs mostly local staff, would serve as a hub for expansion across the Horn of Africa. "The region gets a lot of humanitarian aid and that's arguably detrimental because if you give free food to people you put farmers out of business," he said. "It has more chances of success if people can make money out of it." —Reuters



PRETORIA: Former South African Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan raises his fist as he addresses a group of supporters outside the South African National Treasury yesterday. — AFP

GORDHAN: S AFRICA'S POPULAR FORMER FINANCE MINISTER

JOHANNESBURG: Pravin Gordhan, who was sacked late Thursday, is liked and admired by many ordinary South Africans - an unusual achievement for any finance minister. He held onto the purse strings for longer than many analysts expected after he was parachuted into the job in 2015 to calm markets when a little-known lawmaker lasted just four days in the post. But Zuma's desire to appoint a loyalist to the treasury ultimately cost Gordhan his portfolio, which he had also held from 2009 to 2014.

Softly-spoken and measured in public, but tough behind the scenes, 67-year-old Gordhan earned an international reputation for fiscal prudence and for taking a firm stand against corruption. Gordhan's name alone stabilized the markets which had been gripped by panic after Des Van Rooyen's surprise appointment in 2015. The local rand currency gradually recovered as Gordhan stressed his intention to rein in spending, tackle graft and reduce the budget deficit.

But his sacking may now persuade investors and voters that South Africa is heading towards fiscal and political instability. Over the last year-and-a-half, Gordhan fought a public tussle with President Jacob Zuma for control over the public coffers. Gordhan last year faced fraud charges that were criticised as a move to oust him by Zuma's associates. The charges were dropped at the last minute, exposing deep tensions in the ruling ANC party as several ministers came out in Gordhan's support. Born in the port city of Durban in 1949, Gordhan's political life began as a pharmacy student at the University of Durban-Westville, an Indians-only institution established during white-minority rule. — AFP

PANAMA LAW FIRM SHADOW OF ITS FORMER SELF

PANAMA CITY: Panama has a new tourist attraction: the building hosting the offices of the Mossack Fonseca law firm at the heart of the Panama Papers scandal. That is why, workers there say, the sign announcing the firm has been taken down from where it used to be outside the dark-tinted edifice in Panama City's modern banking district. Too many tourists were stopping to take selfies in front of it. Despite the fallout and sudden notoriety from the Panama Papers revelations, and the detention of its two partners on money laundering charges linked to a vast Brazilian bribery case, Mossack Fonseca is continuing its four-decade-old business.

The firm's staff has been decimated, however. Before the scandal, the firm employed 600 people across the world. A year later, that has been cut by two-thirds. These papers linked some of the world's most powerful leaders, including Russian President Vladimir Putin, former British prime minister David Cameron and others to unreported offshore companies. Panamanian prosecutors are

investigating the Panama Papers, although no one has been convicted yet.

"There was no money laundering. Only establishing companies within the limits of the law," the lawyer representing Mossack Fonseca, Marlene Guerra, told AFP. "While we are talking about what happened, the rest of the companies in Panama and in the world are continuing as before. We consider this to be selective justice," she said.

Clients flee

According to Guerra, 70 percent of Mossack Fonseca's wealthy clients have left for the United States. With the lucrative Panama Canal, Latin America's highest growth of over five percent in 2015, and a dollarized economy based on services that accounts for 83 percent of gross domestic product, the country is keen to minimize the reputational damage from Panama Papers. "Panama Papers didn't tell us anything we didn't already know," the finance minister, Ricardo Zubieta, said recently. "Not a single

dollar" invested in the offshore companies "are in Panama - they are in banks in Britain, Miami, New York," he said.

Many in Panama are indignant that the scandal was branded with their country's name. Some see a plot to damage the image of Panama for the benefit of US or European jurisdictions. "We are seeing a new world order emerging, in which Panama remains conveniently overshadowed," said Francisco Bustamante, an economist who worked at the Inter-American Development Bank. "Aside from whether there is an international plot or not, what is pertinent is how the country will tackle these scandals," he said.

Tax haven blacklists

After Panama Papers exploded on the scene, France was one of the first to react by putting Panama on its blacklist of tax havens. The European Union has now also provisionally designated the country for its own list and is gathering information about whether to make that definitive. The Panamanian govern-

ment has responded by trying to show its financial sector has become more transparent. Late last year it signed a commitment to uphold OECD standards on automatically sharing tax information from 2018. "Panama is meeting the highest international standards in terms of fiscal transparency," Vice President Isabel de Saint Malo recently told AFP. "We hope that that will be acknowledged by our partners and friendly countries."

Nevertheless, the revelations of a year ago continue to undermine Panama's reputation, as analysts such as noted by Carlos Guevara Mann of Florida State University. "In the country they don't take themselves seriously on the international scene, especially the inability of its judicial bodies to properly investigate and judge these and other cases of similar gravity," Guevara Mann said. For all that, in a restaurant near the now unadorned law firm, a waiter lamented the fall of Mossack Fonseca. "They used to fill this place up. Now we're empty," he said, indicating the forlorn inside of the eatery. — AFP

INFLATION STUMBLES FROM ECB TARGET

BRUSSELS: Eurozone inflation fell sharply in March to below the European Central Bank's target, pouring fresh doubts on the ECB's success in battling to boost consumer prices in Europe. The EU's Eurostat statistics agency said the rise in consumer prices slowed in March to 1.5 percent, marking a big drop from the 2.0 percent reached in February, the ECB's target. The figure for the 19-country single currency zone was also slower than 1.8 percent forecast by analysts surveyed by Factset, a data company.

Economists in powerful Germany had said two percent inflation in February meant that the ECB had done its job and could pull back from a controversial stimulus program. But ECB head Mario Draghi argued against stopping the policy of low rates and pumping cash into the economy, unconvinced that higher inflation was here to stay. Beating low inflation was "a gradual process," Draghi said earlier this month, angering anti-inflation Germany, the eurozone's most powerful member. Germany weighed heavily in the lower figure for March after German inflation tumbled this month to 1.5 percent from 2.2 percent. "March's sharp slowdown in euro-zone inflation was partly driven by temporary factors that will reverse in April, but the big picture is that inflation is now on a downward trend," said Jack Allen, European Economist at Capital Economics. "There is little sign that declining unemployment is putting much upward pressure on wages and prices," he added.

A key concern for economists was insistently low core inflation, which excludes volatile elements such as energy and food, that slipped back to 0.7 percent from 0.9 percent. "The marked retreat in eurozone consumer price inflation in March facilitates the ECB sticking to its current monetary policy path," said economist Howard Archer of IHS Markit. "A sustainable firming in underlying eurozone inflation pressures has yet to be established," he said. — AFP

GERMAN JOBLESSNESS HITS NEW RECORD LOW

FRANKFURT: Unemployment in Germany hit a new record low in March, official data showed yesterday, as Europe's largest economy continues to defy economic uncertainty with a strong performance. The out-of-work figure fell to 5.8 percent this month, the Federal Labour Agency said, beating analysts' forecasts. A 0.1-percentage point fall from the level it had held since January placed it at a new all-time low since German reunification in 1990. "The number of unemployed sank significantly as spring begins to breathe life into the economy," said the agency's chief Detlef Scheel in a statement. "Growth in employment is holding steady and demand from companies for new employees remains high."

In seasonally-adjusted figures, the number of people registered as out of work fell by 30,000 in March. — AFP



MOSCOW: A picture taken on Tuesday shows a general view of a building of Federal State Statistics Service (ROSSTAT). — AFP

RUSSIA SEES GROWTH AS ECONOMY STABILIZING

FIRST EXPANSION IN TWO YEARS

MOSCOW: Russia's economy expanded for the first time in two years in the fourth quarter of 2016, data from the state statistics service showed yesterday, as it slowly recovers from a crippling crisis. The country recorded 0.3 percent growth in gross domestic product year-on-year, Rosstat said, as Moscow pulls itself out of a two-year economic crisis triggered by tumbling oil prices and Western sanctions over Ukraine. Russia's GDP last experienced growth in the fourth quarter of 2014, when it expanded by 0.2 percent.

Rosstat said that Russia's GDP had contracted 0.2 percent overall last year, after having shrank 2.8 percent in 2015. The Russian government expects 0.6 percent growth this year, while economy minister Maxim Oreshkin has said that growth could even reach two percent. William Jackson, Senior Emerging Markets Economist at Capital Economics, said that the return to positive growth had been "driven by stronger inventory investment and a shallower fall in consumer spending." Jackson forecast that

Russia's GDP growth would reach 1.5 percent this year and 2.3 percent in 2018, figures higher than most analysts expect.

Slow stabilization

Last week Russia's central bank cut its key rate for the first time in six months amid falling inflation and said it was considering further cuts. A number of key indicators have improved recently, especially inflation, which is now approaching the central bank's four-percent target for this year. The bank said Friday that low inflation and a return to GDP growth had seen real wages increase. It also noted that investments in the first quarter of 2017 have grown "one-to-three percent" year-on-year in light of the "expected recovery of demand" and a "decrease in macroeconomic uncertainty," among other factors.

Standard and Poor's agency this month raised its outlook for Russia's credit rating to "positive" from "stable", citing improving growth prospects and a lower risk of large capital outflows. The agency said it expected Russia to resume positive

growth this year, "averaging about 1.7 percent in 2017-2020". It said that the "relatively low oil prices, structural impediments and sanctions" will however continue to hinder a rebound in GDP, which it expects will increase by 1.5 percent this year. S&P said it considered that the Russian banking sector remained fragile but that it saw "some early signs of stabilization."

Analysts from the Analytical Credit Rating Agency (ACRA), Russia's own rating agency launched in 2015, meanwhile said this week they expected Russia's GDP to cap at "1.0-1.5 percent over the next five years." Russia's economy has appeared to stabilize over the last few months after a recession that has diminished people's purchasing power and pushed large segments of the population into poverty. The ruble - battered by falling oil prices and Western sanctions in 2014 and 2015 - has risen dramatically in recent months and last month strengthened to fewer than 60 rubles to the euro for the first time since June 2015 as oil prices recovered. — AFP

INDIAN ABATTOIRS END STRIKE ON ASSURANCES

NEW DELHI: Abattoirs in India called off a four-day strike after the most populous state of Uttar Pradesh, ruled by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's party, gave assurances that mainly Muslim-run, unlicensed slaughter houses would not be shut down or attacked. Separately, in Modi's western home state of Gujarat, lawmakers of his ruling party stiffened the punishment for cow slaughter to life imprisonment, the toughest such measure aimed at protecting cows, widely considered holy by Hindus. Earlier, the maximum punishment had been a seven-year jail term.

State elections are due by year-end in Gujarat, where 1,000 people, mostly Muslims, were killed in 2002 after a wave of Hindu-Muslim riots when Modi was chief minister. A Supreme Court investigation found no case against Modi, who denied wrongdoing. Shril demands by rightwing Hindu groups to stop the slaughter of cows threaten to

stoke a fresh wave of communal tension, as Muslims, who make up 14 percent of India's 1.3 billion people, dominate the meat trade.

After the appointment of Hindu hardliner Yogi Adityanath as chief minister of Uttar Pradesh following a landslide election victory for Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party, slaughterhouses and meat shops suffered attacks by Hindu vigilante groups. "We have decided to call off the strike after a meeting with the chief minister, who assured us that the state government will renew the licenses of slaughter houses," Chaudhary Aley Ummar Qureshi, a general secretary of the Muslim All India Jamiatul Quresh, told Reuters from Lucknow, the state capital.

Traders will resume selling meat after the end on Wednesday of the nine-day Hindu festival of Navratra, during which participants fast and abstain from meat, Qureshi said. "The government also



LUCKNOW: A cook prepares chicken kebab yesterday at Tunday Kabab, a 105-year-old kebab institution that has had to pull its top-selling spiced buffalo meat fare item from the menu because of the shortage of meat. — AP

assured us of protection from any arbitrary or unlawful crackdown," Qureshi said. The state government would not discriminate on religious grounds, said health minister Siddharth Nath Singh,

who attended the traders' meeting with Adityanath. "Anyone creating trouble in the name of religion, from now on, will not be tolerated," he told a TV network soon after. — Reuters

COW CRACKDOWN PUTS MEAT INDUSTRY ON EDGE

INDIA IS WORLD'S LARGEST BUFFALO MEAT EXPORTER

MEERUT, India: Not a buffalo in sight as businessman Haji Shadab paced the silent abattoir, his meat shipments indefinitely on hold as India reels from a crisis threatening its reputation as the world's largest buffalo meat exporter. A zealous campaign to protect cows - considered sacred by Hindus - by a new rightwing government in Uttar Pradesh state has sent India's \$4.8 billion buffalo meat industry into a tailspin as slaughterhouses have closed and exports stalled.

Hindu hardliners have long accused abattoirs - largely run by Muslims - of covering up the slaughter of cows and passing off the meat as buffalo, which are not revered as holy. In Uttar Pradesh, those radical Hindus have a new hero: Yogi Adityanath, a firebrand priest who took office in March promising tougher penalties for cow slaughter and a crackdown on illegal slaughterhouses.

Just days after he was sworn in, three Muslim-run butcher shops in Hathras were torched - a bad omen for India's largest meat-producing state, home to more than half its abattoirs. Police then began shutting butcheries, some of which had been operating for decades, for alleged violations of local laws, grinding Uttar Pradesh's entire buffalo meat industry to a halt. Outraged butchers launched a statewide strike Monday, while for exporters like Shadab - who ships around 70 tonnes of buffalo meat a day to Asia and the Middle East - his supply of livestock dried up.

"We are not taking fresh orders from clients while the situation here is unclear," Shadab told AFP at his Meerut slaughterhouse, which employed 1,500 staff before he sent them home until further notice. "But in the long term, buyers will certainly move to other countries if we can't deliver."

Crippling impact

The crippling buffalo shortage is being felt economy-wide in Uttar Pradesh, a state of 200 million where more than one in 10 are directly involved in meat and related businesses like leatherwork and transportation, industry figures show. In Lucknow, restaurants which have been selling buffalo kebabs for more than a century have pulled the signature dish from the menu, unable to source the meat. "You can see for yourself what impact this is having. We've hardly got any customers," Yahaya Rizwan told AFP at his deserted eatery Mubeen's.

Even the city zoo has resorted to feeding lions and tigers white meat to counter the buffalo shortage, said zoo director Anupam Gupta. Cow slaughter is illegal in Uttar Pradesh and many other states, with some enforcing life sentences. But it is Hindu vigilantes, emboldened by the government clamp



MEERUT, India: In this photograph taken on March 25, 2017, Haji Shadab, the managing director of an abattoir, looks on inside the empty abattoir. — AFP

down, that have businesses most on edge. Farmers, wary of "cow protection" squads forcefully inspecting trucks for signs of the holy animal, were unwilling to make their usual deliveries, business owners told AFP. "They are a little scared," said DB Sabharwal from the Indian meat association.

Rumors of cow slaughter can spark murderous reprisals in the religiously divided state, where nearly one in five is Muslim. Authorities insist the shutdowns are motivated by regulation, not religion, claiming only businesses without licenses will be targeted. But in a butcher's alley in Meerut, dozens of Muslim meat vendors proudly displayed their trading permits outside their shuttered shops. "Everything was fine before Yogi came to power," said butcher Riyaz Babu Qureshi. "We've never faced this situation before. It's terrible."

Climate of fear

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling party appointed Adityanath after winning Uttar Pradesh in a landslide, handing the reins of India's most important state to an ideologue known for his inflammatory rhetoric against Muslims. Modi has sought to keep his party's Hindu nationalism at arm's length since taking power in 2014, but the slaughterhouse crackdown has raised doubts about his proclaimed commitment to economic growth and job creation. "This is totally anti-business. It will dent India's image globally," Shadab said. — AFP

CRACKDOWN ON SLAUGHTERHOUSES HURTS POOR MOST

MUMBAI: A crackdown on unlicensed abattoirs across India has raised concerns that it is part of a broader effort to shutter informal businesses, hurting poor and vulnerable communities dependent on them. The northern state of Uttar Pradesh ordered the closure of abattoirs operating without licenses this month. Several more states have followed suit, including Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh.

There are only 72 licensed abattoirs across the country, with hundreds more operating without government permission. Authorities say they are acting in the interest of public health, hygiene and safety. But analysts say the crackdown targets Muslims, who dominate the meat industry, as well as small meat traders and street vendors who are part of India's vast informal economy that is not taxed or monitored by the government. "Increasingly, informality is being seen as suspect," said Nikita Sud, an associate professor of development studies at the University of Oxford.

"From street vendors being displaced to slum dwellers who are evicted, to unlicensed slaughterhouses being shut down, it is part of a larger narrative of targeting certain kinds of informality and illegality that invariably affect the poorest, the minorities and other vulnerable communities," she said. There are millions of workers in India's informal economy - a shadow economy worth at least a quarter of the annual gross domestic product, according to the World Bank.

It includes daily wage earners, domestic workers, construction workers, leather tanners and those dependent on abattoirs. Despite a law to protect street vendors and a move to provide welfare benefits to informal workers, most have few rights or protections, even though they provide cheap products and services for millions of people.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has taken steps to regulate more of the economy in order to widen the tax base and generate more revenue for development projects to spur growth. But these policies have hurt society's most vulnerable, say campaign groups. The government's decision in November to withdraw high-value rupee bills from circulation to crack down on corruption and counterfeit currency hurt rural women and informal workers particularly hard, as most of them are outside the banking system.

The western state of Maharashtra recently passed a law requiring street hawkers to have lived in the state for 15 years before they can apply for a license, a move seen as targeting poor migrants. "Our cities are becoming increasingly hostile towards the poor," said Arbind Singh at the National Association of Street Vendors of India. "This (abattoir) crackdown not only targets small shop owners, but also buyers who are poor and cannot afford big shops. Our vision for our cities has no room for the poor, the vulnerable." — Reuters

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SATURDAY, APRIL 1, 2017

**A band apart:
Special-needs
musicians aim
for world stage**

SEE PAGE 22

Three year old Luca gets excited as a butterfly lands on his head at the Natural History Museum in London, Thursday. Hundreds of tropical butterflies were released to launch the Natural History Museum's Sensational Butterflies exhibition, started for the public yesterday. — AP



In this, photo, a member of the FREE Players Drum Corps rehearses a routine with fellow percussionists in Old Bethpage, NY. — AP photos



Members of the FREE Players Drum Corps rehearse a routine in Old Bethpage, NY.



Stephen Malerba, a member of the FREE Players Drum Corps, plays on a trap set during a rehearsal.

A band apart: Special-needs musicians aim for world stage

They've performed at Disney World in Florida and marched in New York's City's Columbus Day Parade. Now the FREE Players Drum Corps is setting its sights on a trip to the 2018 world championships in Indianapolis. But what sets this group of flag wavers, rifle twirlers, drummers and other musicians apart is that it is composed entirely of adults with intellectual and physical disabilities. The 65-member corps, based in the Long Island suburbs, was founded in 2010 by a music specialist at Family Residences and Essential Enterprises Inc., a New York organization that serves 4,000 people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, mental illnesses or traumatic brain injuries - and that gives the corps its name.

Today it includes a drum line, color guard, and an ensemble of guitars, keyboards and other instruments. A brass and woodwind section is being added this year. Band members have mild to moderate disabilities, including some on the autism spectrum. Some are vision-impaired. Others perform in wheelchairs. "This group is like my family," said 33-year-old drummer and corps member Michael Brennan, who has Down syndrome and a seizure disorder. "I feel very honored and proud because I finally can open up and tell people, that I'm me, I'm unique. When I'm playing my snare drum, they see how much success I'm getting."

At a recent rehearsal, a cue from band founder Brian Calhoun sent drums thundering through a small gymnasium in Old Bethpage. Snare and bass drummers marched into several formations. A day earlier it had been the color guard's turn to practice, spinning brightly colored pink flags, while others in formation maneuvered faux rifles. A former drummer in a rock band, Calhoun started with just five students learning the rudiments of drumming on rubber pads.

Made sense

"I'm kind of a flashy player, and they really liked the stick tricks," he said of his first recruits, who were receptive and enthusiastic learners. "They were picking up on difficult things." Five members turned to 15 within a year. A year or two later, an expanding number of drummers was supplemented by a color guard. By 2013, the corps received an invitation to play at Disney World. A year later, it performed an exhibition before more than 10,000 people at a Winter Guard International event in Dayton, Ohio. "The response was unbelievable," Calhoun said. The exposure helped bring in sponsorship deals with drum companies and the acquisition of official uniforms, he said. After the FREE Players performed a 2015 exhibition in Allentown, Pennsylvania, the band received an invitation to perform an exhibition at the Drum Corps International world championships in 2018 in Indianapolis.

"They were received so warmly by the audience that it just made sense," said Drum Corps International CEO Dan Acheson. "The one aspect that makes it special is just the joy they display when they perform." The trip to Indianapolis will cost the band \$65,000, in part because it needs to bring along support and medical staff, including nurses, something a typical drum corps doesn't have to worry about, Calhoun said. A Go-Fund Me fund-raiser is underway to raise money for the trip.

Kathleen Brennan gushed when speaking about the changes she has seen in her son Michael since he joined the drum corps several years ago. "He has tremendous confidence and has blossomed extremely well," she said. "They get it with these kids. The impact on my son's life has been amazing." Calhoun said his troupe of "differently abled" adults ranging from their 20s to their 50s has changed his life, too.

He said he sometimes wipes away tears after hearing the crowds cheer at performances. "They're just like everybody else, that's the biggest thing. They're extremely passionate. They're the most honest, caring passionate musicians I've ever had the privilege to teach in my entire life," he said. "They take their instruments home and they practice day in and day out and they always strive to push themselves as far as they can possibly go." — AP



A member of the FREE Players Drum Corps practices her technique before a rehearsal.



Members of the FREE Players Drum Corps practice their technique before a rehearsal.



Members of the FREE Players Drum Corps prepare for a rehearsal.



Katie McGuire, a member of the FREE Players Drum Corps waits for practice to begin in Old Bethpage.

'Political' song puts Nigerian musician in dock

Sadiq Zazzabi is a talented R&B singer in northern Nigeria, popular among Hausa speakers across the country and beyond for his songs about love, social issues and politics. But for several weeks he has been caught up in a bitter rivalry between two of the region's most powerful political figures, one of whom is tipped for a tilt at the presidency. On the face of it, Zazzabi, 38, fell foul of the powerful censorship board that approves films, music and literature for decency in the conservative, Muslim-majority region.

He was taken to court in the city of Kano on a two-count charge of releasing a song the prosecutor described as "containing immorality by featuring seductive dance(s) by women". Zazzabi, however, maintains he was charged because the song, "Maza bayan ka" (All Men Behind You), expresses open support for former state governor Rabiu Kwankwaso and criticises the incumbent Umar Ganduje. "My arrest is political," he told reporters after a court appearance earlier this month. "I was arrested for my political support for Kwankwaso."

Ganduje's government has dismissed the claim that it ordered his arrest. Kwankwaso was Kano state governor from 1999 to 2003 and 2011 to 2015, with Ganduje as his deputy. In between, he served as defense minister in former president Olusegun Obasanjo's federal government. Kwankwaso, now a senator, and Ganduje now stand out as Kano state politics' top rivals, both long on ambition and jockeying for power. Kwankwaso, who lost a bid to be the All Progressive Congress' (APC) party candidate for president against Muhammadu Buhari two years ago, is also being tipped for a fresh shot at the country's top post in 2019.

Widespread support

R&B star Zazzabi has long been known as a staunch Kwankwaso supporter. By claiming a politically motivated arrest, he was widely seen as pointing the finger at Ganduje. The head of the Kano censors board, Ismail Afakallahu, called the claim "cheap blackmail". But Zazzabi's view appears to be gaining traction. Huge crowds of supporters, including filmmakers and other musicians, have flocked to court in a show of solidarity with the singer. Many were dressed in white kaftans and red hats-the trademark uniform of the "Kwankwaso" (pro-Kwankwaso) political movement.

During one appearance, the judge ordered them out of the courtroom to allow him to read his ruling but they refused to budge. Zazzabi's controversial song played constantly outside from car stereos and posters of the former governor were prominent, much like at a political rally. Proceedings were then abandoned and the singer was granted bail.

Power base

Kano's censorship board was set up in 2002 to regulate the city's booming film and music industry popular among Hausa speakers in the north and across west Africa. Approval is mandatory before release to ensure films, music and literature conform to Islamic law that runs parallel to the federal and state justice systems in 12 northern states. Physical contact between men and women in films is prohibited, as is singing and dancing by women, and any lewd display of amorous affection. Filmmakers have fallen foul of the censors, as have singers, whose songs tackle social issues such as forbidden love and political discontent. Last year, Dahiru Daukaka, a popular singer in the northeastern city of Yola, was kidnapped days after releasing a scathing anti-graft song against the ruling party. He was released unhurt. Zazzabi's predicament appears to be along similar lines but observers suggested it may backfire on Ganduje, since the musician's arrest has piqued interest in what the song might contain. —AFP



In this April 25, 2016 file photo, singer Amy Grant poses for a portrait at her home in Nashville. — AP

Grant, Ingram to receive stars on Music City Walk of Fame

Christian music singer Amy Grant and Nashville philanthropist Martha R Ingram will be honored with stars on the Music City Walk of Fame next month in Tennessee. The Nashville Convention & Visitors Corp. made the announcement Thursday. The ceremony will be at 1 pm April 27 in Walk of Fame Park. The new stars will bring the total on the Walk of Fame to 76.

Inductees are recognized for significant contributions to preserving Nashville's musical heritage and for their contributions through music or other industry collaboration. The Walk of Fame was created in 2006 on Nashville's Music Mile, which connects downtown to Music Row. The inductees are represented by permanent sidewalk medallions displayed in a star and guitar design. — AP

Art houses program protest as '1984' heads back to theaters

On Tuesday, it will be "1984" again in movie theaters across the country. About 190 art-house theaters have banded together to show the 1984 big-screen adaptation of George Orwell's dystopian masterpiece as a pointed comment on the presidency of Donald Trump, whose "alternative facts" administration has already sent "1984" back up the bestseller lists. "It's what's in the air. People want to do something," says Dylan Skolnick, an organizer of the event and co-director of the Cinema Arts Centre in Huntington, New York. "This started with a conversation about: 'We need to do something. Well, what do we do? We show movies.' So the obvious answer was: We should show a movie."

Cinemas around the country are increasingly programming with political protest in mind, playing movies that have newfound resonance for those who disagree with the policies of the Republican president. In May, some 60 theaters are planning to screen films from the predominantly Muslim nations targeted by Trump's proposed travel ban. That initiative has been dubbed the Seventh Art Stand and billed as "an act of cinematic solidarity against Islamophobia." Cinemas, particularly independent ones, are places to gather and connect, and they are finding under Trump a renewed sense of mission that goes beyond the usual arguments for the big-screen experience over streaming.

Political demagogue

"To really genuinely connect with other people - which seems to be a consistent theme our country is struggling with - it's all about being in a corporal public sphere together, and doing that in and around art," says Courtney Sheehan, executive director of Seattle's Northwest Film Forum and an organizer of the Seventh Art Stand. "We're not just an ancillary component of social change conversation. This is ground zero for action." A Trump effect has already been partially seen in the recent box-office success of Jordan Peele's horror hit "Get Out" and Raoul Peck's James Baldwin documentary "I Am Not Your Negro" - movies that offer straight talk on racial issues that might be lacking in Washington. On the small screen, Turner Classic Movies more cheekily programmed Elia Kazan's "A Face in the Crowd," with Andy Griffith as a populist radio personality who rises to political demagogue, to air on Inauguration Day.

"1984," the second movie version starring John Hurt and Richard Burton, will play in 175 cities and 44 states, as well as a few internationally in Canada, England and Sweden. The event has been organized under the name United States of Cinema; its website lists the participating theaters. April 4th was selected because that's when Orwell's Winston Smith begins his forbidden diary as a rebellion against his oppressive government. "It's just a work that has a lot of resonance with what's going on. It hits a lot of crucial notes," says Skolnick. "Orwell wrote about and the film talks about the essential thing of being able to say two plus two equals four, even if the government says, 'No, two plus two equals five.'



This image released by Cohen Media group shows Shahab Hosseini, left, and Taraneh Alidoosti in a scene from 'The Salesman.' — AP

Participating theaters

A similar motivation fueled Richard Abramowitz, founder and president of the indie film distributor Abramorama. He and Sheehan began discussing organizing something at the Sundance Film Festival in January and their plan has attracted the support of Steve Buscemi, Jonathan Demme, Woody Harrelson and more. Other companies have joined, as well; the online video hub Vimeo will show shorts focused on refugee stories. Since first announcing the Seventh Art Stand two weeks ago, Sheehan says participating theaters have doubled from 30 to about 60. The most, she says, are in Indiana. Theaters have a long list of films from which to choose from Iran, Syria, Sudan, Yemen, Libya and Somalia.

(The most recent version of the travel ban has thus far been blocked by the courts.) Most notable is Iranian filmmaker Asghar Farhadi's Oscar-winning "The Salesman." The celebrated filmmaker boycotted February's Academy Awards, where he won his second Oscar, because of the travel ban. Abramowitz calls the movie theater "a safe space now," where people can experience other cultures "that are being more threatened now than before." "We recognize that there are far more people that are welcoming in this country than not. And we wanted to try to create spaces all over the country where people could recognize this," says Abramowitz. "We thought maybe this would be a good way to engage the community rather than sit around and fume." — AP



An employee poses with an artwork by British artist Chris Levine entitled 'Lightness of Being' with an estimated price of 50,000-70,000 GBP (58,000-82,000 EUR: 62,000-88,000 USD) during a photocall ahead of the 'The Making Of Modern Britain' sale at Sotheby's in London, yesterday. — AFP.

80 YEARS ON, PICASSO'S ANTI-WAR GUERNICA STILL RESONATES

Close to 80 years ago, Picasso painted Guernica in a Paris attic, a haunting work of art that has become a universal howl against the ravages of war, from 1937 Spain to 2017 Syria. The canvas mixes stark images of agonizing humans and animals to depict the horror of the bombing of the small Basque town of Guernica on April 26, 1937 during Spain's civil war. Luis Ortiz Alfau, a 100-year-old Spaniard, was there that day "to pick up the dead and the injured," he told AFP. "Around 4:00 pm, three planes started arriving every 15 minutes, they were German and Italian planes," said the former soldier on the Republican side. "They dropped explosive bombs, then incendiary bombs, and the town started to burn."

plating the painting for the first time in the Reina Sofia, which saw 3.6 million visitors last year. Nearby, Sonia Seco Cacaso had taken her kindergarten class to see Guernica. "When there is a problem, you have to resolve it and not through war," she told them.

'All we love will die'

Black, white and grey, the oil painting was Picasso's response to a commission by Spain's embattled republic for the upcoming World Exhibition in Paris. When it opened on May 25, 1937, Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union competed with gigantic pavilions. Inside Spain's more modest pavilion, Guernica loomed large and was greeted with mixed reviews.

In his memoirs, Jorge Semprun, a Spanish writer who later served as culture minister, remembered that British art critic Anthony Blunt disapproved. "Picasso belongs to the past," he was quoted as having said. French poet Michel Leiris, though, wrote that the painting was Picasso's "letter of mourning: all we love will die," just as World War II loomed, as did the defeat of the Republicans in Spain's civil war.

Life of exile

In 1939, Franco took power for a 36-year-long dictatorship. Years later, he maintained that "the poor marxists" set fire to Guernica. The canvas itself started a "life of exile," said Peiro. From 1937, it was exhibited in Europe and the US to raise money for Spanish refugees. Then in 1939, Picasso entrusted his masterpiece to New York's Museum of Modern Art, where it stayed more than 40 years. The painter gave the museum clear instructions—the canvas belonged to the Spanish people and would only be given back "when they have recovered the freedoms that were taken away from them." Finally in 1981, the painting arrived in Spain, which was transitioning to democracy after the death of Franco.

It was first put up for show in an annex of the Prado Museum, behind explosion- and bullet-proof glass to protect it from possible harm in a country still struggling to deal with its very recent, dark past, wrote Semprun. Now at the Reina Sofia, it has become the star attraction. For Jose Lebrero, the artistic director of the Picasso Museum in his native southern city of Malaga, "it's one of the last major historical paintings—in the line of Courbet or Delacroix—that allows us to remember a very difficult historical event." It is a canvas that is particularly poignant "in the strange and worrying political situation we are going through," he added. — AFP

War in Syria

To mark the 80th anniversary of one of the most famous paintings in the world, studied by generations of schoolchildren, Madrid's Reina Sofia Museum, where it now hangs, will hold a major exhibition from April 4. "Guernica's importance in the collective unconscious is such that I define it as a spiritual work of art, with a constant vocation of promoting peace," Bernard Ruiz-Picasso, the Spanish artist's grandson, told AFP. Rosario Peiro, head of collections at the museum, said Syrians had used images of the painting in their protests. They "were trying to say: 'enough with this war in Syria.'"

At the United Nations last year, French Ambassador Francois Delattre compared the destruction in the Syrian city of Aleppo to Guernica. "Aleppo is to Syria what Guernica was to the Spanish war, a human tragedy, a black hole destroying all we believe in," he said.

'Screaming out'

The Spanish Civil War kicked off nine months before the attack on Guernica when army generals staged a coup against a fledgling left-wing republic. Led by General Francisco Franco, the nationalist camp had the support of Nazi Germany and fascist Italy. The attack, which is estimated to have left 150 to 300 dead, was the Nazis' first attempt at terror bombing civilians—a tactic they would go on to use in World War II. Two days later, Pablo Picasso, who had lived in France since 1904, saw the first photo reports of the tragedy. On May 1, he started his own Guernica. On a large canvas more than seven meters (23 feet) wide, he painted deformed figures of women and children writhing in a burning city.

A broken sword in hand, a dismembered fighter lies with wide open eyes, an impassive bull, a wounded dove and an agonizing horse nearby. "It seems the faces are screaming out," said Takahiro Yoshino, a 20-year-old Japanese tourist contem-

GRAFFITI VANDALS DAMAGE KENTRIDGE ROME FRIEZE

A giant frieze depicting the history of Rome on the walls lining the River Tiber has been damaged by graffiti writers, to the dismay of its creator, William Kentridge. The South African artist said he was at a loss to understand why Rome authorities had not removed graffiti as soon it appeared along the bottom of the 550-metre (1,800-feet)-long mural he created out of the dirt caking an embankment of the famous river. The work, an idiosyncratic take on the Eternal City's defining moments, was inaugurated in April 2016 and has proved a popular free attraction for visitors to the Italian capital.

But its visual impact has been compromised by the appearance of a steadily-growing amount of graffiti in the spaces between some of the images - most of them 'tags', the personalized signatures of the writer. "Some graffiti artists do great work. I'm less interested in those who simply leave their initials on the wall," Kentridge told Italian daily La Repubblica. "I know there are many people in Rome to whom this work is dear... out of respect for them, I hope the city authorities will clean up the graffiti," he said.

The message appeared to have been heard. Deputy mayor Luca Bergamo on

Friday ordered a team from the city's refuse department to start erasing the graffiti, denouncing the authors of it as "stupid." Entitled "Triumphs and Laments", Kentridge's 10-metre (33-foot) tall mural was created by washing the dirt off the wall around the images in a technique known as reverse stenciling.

The artist expects it to gradually disappear as pollution and weeds combine to return the cleaned bits of wall to their previous state, a process that he had envisaged taking four to five years. The frieze provides a non-chronological depiction of Rome's history from pre-historic times up to the Dolce Vita era of the 1960s and the contemporary migrant crisis - which is referenced in a depiction of a Roman slave galley. In an interview with AFP last year, Kentridge described it as a meditation on the flawed nature of memory with both heroic and shameful episodes from the city's history on show. The mural is located on the right bank of the Tiber in the Trastevere district of Rome, close to St Peter's basilica and across the water from the historic center of the Italian capital. — AFP



A general view shows the 'Triumphs and Laments' fresco which was completed along the banks of Rome's Tiber river less than a year ago by South African artist William Kentridge, yesterday in Rome. — AFP



A man looks at Spanish artist Pablo Picasso's painting, 'Guernica' at Reina Sofia museum in Madrid. — AFP



Five year old George holds an orange to feed the Owl butterflies at the Natural History Museum in London, Thursday, March 30, 2017. Hundreds of tropical butterflies were released to launch the Natural History Museum's Sensational Butterflies exhibition, started for the public yesterday. — AP



Zoey Speer, of Temecula, Calif, clamors among rocks and blooming desert shrubs in Borrego Springs, Calif.



Retired California state park ranger Jim Long, of San Clemente, Calif, takes pictures among blooming desert shrubs in Borrego Springs, Calif. — AP photos

Wildflowers, dormant for years, bloom across California

Rain-fed wildflowers have been sprouting from California's desert sands after lying dormant for years - producing a spectacular display unofficially called a "super bloom" that has drawn record crowds and traffic jams to tiny towns like Borrego Springs. An estimated 150,000 people in the past month have converged on this town of about 3,500 in the desert about 85 miles (135 kilometers) northeast of San Diego.

Wildflowers are springing up across California thanks to a wet winter. But a "super bloom" is a term referring to a mass amount of desert plants blooming at one time. In California, that occurs maybe once in a decade in any given area. The natural show in the desert outside Borrego Springs is expected to roll along through May, with different species blooming at different elevations and in different areas. — AP



Visitors walk among the poppy bloom at Antelope Valley California Poppy Reserve in Lancaster, Calif.



Visitors walk among the poppy bloom at Antelope Valley California Poppy Reserve in Lancaster, Calif.



Red and white umbrellas on the beach outside of the Faena Hotel in Miami Beach, Fla.



A mammoth skeleton sculpture by artist Damien Hurst is displayed at the Faena Hotel in Miami Beach, Fla.



A pillowcase embroidered with a fedora and feather, often worn by hotelier Alan Faena, is on a bed in an oceanfront room in the Faena Hotel in Miami Beach, Fla.

Neglected strip of Miami Beach gets glamorous makeover

The beachfront Faena Hotel has a lobby lavish enough to greet a pharaoh, with blinding sunlight bouncing off oversized gilded columns. In the distance, a golden sculpture of a mammoth's skeleton is framed by palm trees, the aqua blue sky and gleaming Atlantic Ocean. The hotel is the centerpiece of Faena District, a once-neglected strip of Miami Beach where decaying structures and empty lots have given way to opulent hotels, condos and a performing arts center. The \$1 billion project, which began in 2013, was developed by Argentine hotel magnate Alan Faena in partnership with billionaire Len Blavatnik. The cluster of buildings is located 2 miles north of South Beach, on a narrow strip of land between a waterway and the ocean.

The 169-room Faena Hotel maintains the Art Deco structure of the original Saxony Hotel, built on the site in 1947, but Faena's over-the-top renovation combines Belle Epoque splendor with tropical flair. Faena hired everyone from a Hollywood director to a Mexican shaman to contribute to the hotel's ambience. Elements include tiger sculptures, golden palm tree lamps and red roses.

Faena assigned the hotel's interior decor to Baz Luhrmann, director of "Moulin Rouge" and "The Great Gatsby," and costume designer Catherine Martin. "For me, this is like cinema. Here I come to offer my heart and tell my story," said Faena, a former fashion designer, in an interview from his trailer studio. He tapped the Argentine painter Juan Gatti to fill the hotel with mosaics of marine life and exuberant murals with flamingos, peacocks and tigers. The artwork is intended to depict the impressions of the first explorers to reach Florida.

Less expensive

And he wanted the spa to be a Latin American experience, so he recruited a Mexican shaman for rituals, and imported indigenous ingredients from the Amazon for treatments. "The architecture, design, art, culture it all allows me to have this place to raise people up, so that people come here and feel somehow happier," Faena said. Rooms start at \$745. Less

expensive lodging is offered nearby at Casa Faena, a Spanish beach guesthouse with 50 rooms, tall ceilings, skylights and stained glass windows. The name Claridge can be seen in the casa's facade, preserving the name of the site's original hotel, which had fallen in disrepair.

"I like places that are forgotten because you can listen to them and listen to what they have to tell you," Faena says. It's not the first time abandoned sites have inspired Faena. He started his partnership with Blavatnik developing an abandoned pier in Buenos Aires and turning old mills and ware-



Photo shows gilded columns line the lobby adorned with murals by Argentinian painter Juan Gatti, known as the Cathedral, in the Faena Hotel in Miami Beach, Fla. — AP photos



An oceanfront room in a two-bedroom suite with the signature red and teal blue color scheme is shown in the Faena Hotel in Miami Beach, Fla.



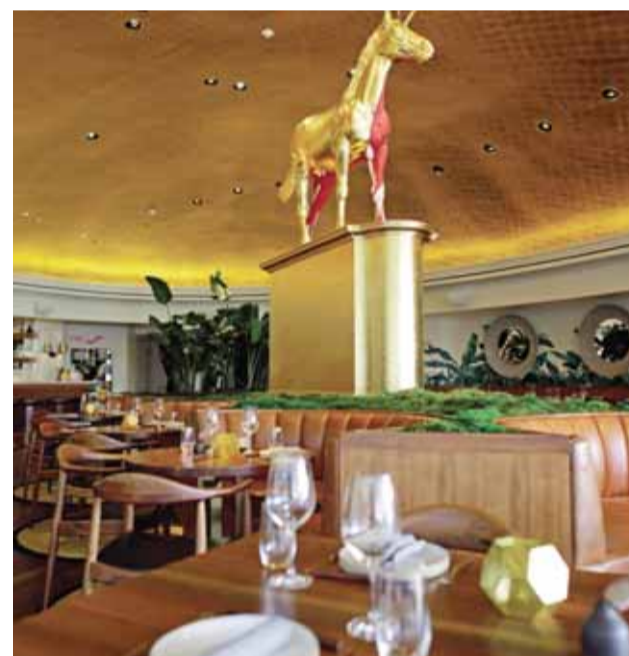
A mural identifies buildings in the Faena District on Collins Ave in the Mid-Beach neighborhood of Miami Beach, Fla.

houses into skyscrapers and luxury hotels and apartments. In Argentina's Puerto Madero, away from the historic center, the construction straddled seven city blocks and has become a cultural hub in the capital city.

'C'est Rouge'

In Miami Beach, Faena Forum, the events venue, opened in time for the prestigious Art Basel last November. The white building is a 43,000-square-foot structure of an asymmetrical cube embracing a cylinder, inspired by Rome's Pantheon. The center features a dome with an oculus and an amphitheater of pink marble expected to house concerts and seminars. Charles Bohl, head of University of Miami's graduate program in real estate development and urbanism, says he'd like to see more done to make the area pedestrian-friendly. But Bohl said the district contributes greatly to developing arts and culture in Miami Beach, which attracts most of the 15 million tourists Miami sees every year. "The developers brought a vision that has created a unique environment," Bohl said. "It's one of the places everyone wants to hold events in." It has attracted celebrity visitors such as Madonna, Leonardo DiCaprio and Ariana Grande.

On a recent evening, visitors lined up outside restaurants while others sipped martinis and wine on a deck cooled by the ocean breeze. At the hotel theater, the cabaret-style show "C'est Rouge" drew an audience of couples and friends, some dressed in shimmering cocktail gowns. They watched acrobats and trapeze artists, followed by musicians doing numbers like Gloria Estefan's "Conga" and the Spanish version of "Love Me With All of Your Heart." One spectator, Alexandria Corral, an event planner, brought two friends from out of town to celebrate her 25th birthday. "Of everything else I've seen, this would be the fanciest place. It tops everything else that Miami Beach has to offer," she said. — AP



A unicorn sculpture by artist Damien Hirst is displayed in the Pao by Paul Qui restaurant in the Faena Hotel in Miami Beach, Fla.



A bathroom in an oceanfront two-bedroom suite is shown in the Faena Hotel in Miami Beach, Fla.



Faena Forum, left, and Faena House, right, are shown in the Mid-Beach neighborhood of Miami Beach, Fla.



In this file photo singer Alanis Morissette receives her achievement from the Canadian Music Hall of Fame during the 2015 Juno Awards in Hamilton, Ont. — AP photos



File photo shows Emmy Rossum attends the LA Premiere of "Keanu" held at ArcLight Cinerama Dome Theater in Los Angeles.

BURGLARS OF A FEATHER 'FLOCK' TOGETHER IN LOS ANGELES

The gang members start their days in the impoverished neighborhoods of South Los Angeles, but their real work begins in some of the city's wealthiest enclaves. Each day, the gang hand-picks teams of burglars, who ditch their usual attire for button-down shirts and hop into shiny luxury sedans to blend in as they search for prime targets: homes with no one inside and lots of jewelry and other valuables on hand. Celebrities including Nicki Minaj and Alanis Morissette are among the suspected recent victims of a crime trend known as "flocking," so named because gang members flock like birds to areas where residential burglaries provide the biggest payoff.

They knock on the front door and, if no one answers, break in. The burglars often do not know whose home they are targeting, making it inevitable in Los Angeles that they sometimes hit houses of the nation's best-known actors, singers and other entertainment figures, police said. Since January, other victims have included Dodgers outfielder Yasiel Puig and Lakers star Nick Young. Actress Emmy Rossum reported \$150,000 in jewelry taken last week from a safe in her home.

Being targeted

After news of the burglary broke Tuesday, the "Shameless" star tweeted, "Thank you to the LAPD. I fully support the police efforts and dedication." Morissette had about \$2 million in jewelry and valuables stolen from her Brentwood mansion. Young lost about \$500,000 in jewelry and other items during a

burglary at his Tarzana home, police said. So far, no arrests have been made in any of the celebrity cases. Although some of the recent break-ins have shared similarities, authorities do not believe a single group is responsible or that stars are being targeted. However, investigators suspect that most of the burglaries are being committed by members of the same street gang, the Rollin' 30s Harlem Crips.

Their day follows a regular routine. Gang leaders meet in the morning on their home turf and select crews of four or five people from a pool of about 100 gang members - male and female - who will do the burglaries that day, Los Angeles Police Detective William Dunn said. The crews rotate so the same people are not seen in same neighborhoods and become recognizable. "They are looking for homes where they think there's a lot of jewelry inside, BMWs, Mercedes, brand-new cars in the driveway," Dunn said. Once they identify a house that looks empty, they send one person to knock on the door, Dunn said.

Surveillance cameras

If no one responds, other gang members break through a side door or smash a window. If no alarm sounds, they head immediately to the master bedroom. In most cases, they are out of the homes within about three minutes and head back to South Los Angeles to pawn any stolen jewelry. "They don't take televisions or laptops or iPads," said Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department Sgt. Michael Maher, a member of the

agency's specialized burglary task force. "Typically it's a hunt for cash, jewelry and weapons." The teams take care to look for houses that appear free of surveillance cameras or other security systems. If someone answers the door, they will say they are at the wrong house and just walk away, police said.

Authorities will not discuss security measures at any of the houses that were hit, so it's unclear if those homes had alarms or fences. But, speaking generally, police said many people do not turn on their alarms and buy cheap safes that can be muscled out by determined burglars. Even if an alarm does go off, the noise sometimes just motivates the teams to work faster because they know they can be out of the house by the time the alarm company calls the homeowner, then contacts police, Dunn said.

Gang members arrested for "flocking" have told investigators their goal is to get about \$10,000 per day from the burglaries, Maher said. The money is used to support the gangs and create bail funds to free members who get arrested, Maher said. "These gangs have become more sophisticated, and flocking is a large portion of that," Maher said. "It is sort of evolving what was a street-level thug. We see high-level gang members driving extremely expensive vehicles, wearing very nice clothing committing residential burglaries." — AP



File photo shows singer Nicki Minaj arrives to attend the H&M's Fall-Winter 2017-2018 ready to wear fashion collection presented in Paris.



File photo shows Lakers guard Nick Young celebrates after scoring during the first half of an NBA basketball game against the Los Angeles Clippers in Los Angeles.



File photo shows Dodgers' Yasiel Puig waits to hit during a spring training baseball practice in Phoenix.



Models parade creations from the ChuMeng collection by Fu Suqin at China Fashion Week in Beijing yesterday. — AP/AFP photos

China Fashion Week



Models parade creations from the WhiteFog Collection by Yu Qian at China Fashion Week in Beijing.

FORD BOOSTS RESEARCH IN CANADA FOR CONNECTED CARS

OTTAWA: US auto maker Ford announced Thursday it will invest Can\$500 million (US\$376 million) in Canada to create 300 research and engineering jobs amid its drive to connect cars to the internet. The governments of Canada and Ontario province also pitched in with grants of Can\$102.4 million each. The monies will go to support a new Ottawa lab focused on infotainment, in-vehicle modems, gateway modules that allow various vehicle systems to communicate with each other, driver-assist features and autonomous vehicles.

Also Ford said it would increase staff at facilities in Windsor and Oakville, Ontario, developing new power train technologies, alternative fuels and lightweight materials for use in cars and trucks, as well as

technology to capture industrial emissions and convert them into fuels. The Oakville facility and another in Waterloo, Ontario, will work in parallel with labs in the US states of North Carolina and Florida. A further 100 jobs are being created in the United States.

According to The Wall Street Journal, the new employees being hired by Ford from Canadian firm BlackBerry, which recently outsourced manufacturing of its smartphones to focus on software development. Ford's "infotainment" system uses software developed by QNX, a BlackBerry subsidiary, it noted. The new hires more than double the size of Ford's mobile connectivity engineering team.

The global market for connected vehicles will exceed US\$131 billion by 2019, after growing 30 per-

cent annually, according to a study by Transparency Market Research that was cited by Ford. Ford plans to equip 20 million vehicles with integrated modems over the next five years. The second-largest US car company had previously announced it would spend Can\$700 million to refurbish its Windsor and Oakville assembly plants.

"The automotive industry is driving Ontario's economy," said Kathleen Wynne, premier of the province, which employs 100,000 workers in assembly and parts manufacturing. In the past five years, Ontario has produced more cars than any other province or US state in North America, or about 15 percent of total passenger vehicle production, according to Wynne. —AFP



BANGALORE: The Shell Technology Centre is seen as it is opened in the Indian city of Bangalore yesterday. — AFP photos

SHELL UNVEILS GIANT NEW HIGH-TECH RESEARCH LAB IN INDIA

SPRAWLING FACILITY IN TECH CAPITAL TO HOUSE 1,500 EXPERTS



BANGALORE: An employee of Shell company helps a visitor gives a tour of Shell refineries using Virtual Reality goggles after the inauguration of the Shell Technology Centre in Bangalore yesterday.

NEW DELHI: Oil giant Shell opened yesterday a high-tech research hub in southern India that is hoping to pioneer the green energy of the future, including ways to transform farm and city waste into clean fuel. The sprawling facility in the Indian tech capital Bangalore will house 1,500 experts under one roof as Shell expands its research and development operations in Asia. The 21-hectare hub will host labs and demonstration centers where new ideas can be pursued and tested, and pushes efforts to transform waste products into low-carbon fuels for transport.

"Innovation and technology are vital to providing more and cleaner energy solutions for a growing world population," Shell's projects and technology director Harry Brekelmans said in a statement. India has ambitious targets for clean energy use but still relies heavily on coal to produce power in the vast nation of 1.25 billion where blackouts are common and many still lack access to electricity. The Bangalore facility is the first of its kind for Shell outside the US and Europe. Researchers at the tech centers work collaboratively on finding cheap, new energy solutions and sources of power from tapping reserves deep beneath the sea to making natural gas more efficient.

The latest addition to the global network will see experts drawing on the brains of Bangalore's tech community known for its start-up culture and entrepreneurship. "India has an opportunity to make a significant contribution to the world's incremental energy needs in the years ahead," said India's minister for petroleum and natural gas, Dharmendra Pradhan, who was at the opening. Bangalore, often dubbed "India's Silicon Valley", is a global hub for Western tech companies and hosts a high concentration of IT firms and software developers. —AFP

OCULUS CO-FOUNDER PALMER LUCKEY GONE FROM FACEBOOK

SAN FRANCISCO: Facebook on Thursday confirmed that trouble-tainted Oculus cofounder Palmer Luckey has left the leading social network, which dived into virtual reality after buying the startup three years ago. "Palmer will be dearly missed," Facebook said in an email reply to an AFP inquiry. "His inventive spirit helped kickstart the modern VR revolution and build an industry. We're thankful for everything he did for Oculus and VR, and we wish him all the best."

Luckey's departure came not long after Facebook was hit with a big tab in a lawsuit over Oculus Rift virtual reality technology—and after he was criticized for covertly helping an online "troll" group that promoted memes in favor of Donald Trump during the US election. Open support for Trump in Silicon Valley was scarce during the election, and some developers vowed not to create software for Rift virtual reality gear because of Luckey's pro-Trump efforts. Luckey was noticeably absent from the stage at a major Oculus developers conference late last year.

Real world suit

A US jury ordered in February that Facebook and creators of Oculus Rift pay \$500 million to gaming software firm ZeniMax in a lawsuit that accused Luckey and his colleagues who developed Rift virtual reality gear of using source code illegally obtained from the gaming firm. The jury dismissed the charge that Oculus stole or misappropriated trade secrets but did find Oculus liable for copyright infringement and other violations. Luckey was ordered to pay \$50 million of the award and another former Oculus executive, Brendan Iribe, \$150 million.

ZeniMax had sought \$4 billion in damages in the case, in which Facebook chief Mark Zuckerberg testified to defend his company. Oculus said it planned to appeal the verdict and was "undeterred" in its efforts to bring virtual reality technology to consumers. "Our commitment to the long-term success of VR remains the same, and the entire team will continue the work they've done since day one—developing VR technology that will transform the way people interact and communicate," the Oculus statement said. Facebook acquired Oculus in 2014 for more than \$2 billion and last year began selling the Rift headsets as part of the social network's push into virtual reality. Facebook announced in January that it had recruited Hugo Barra—who recently quit a top position with Chinese smartphone maker Xiaomi—as its new head of virtual reality. —AFP



PHILADELPHIA: In this file photo, the Facebook logo is displayed on an iPad in Philadelphia. — AP

FBI DIRECTOR'S SECRET TWITTER ACCOUNT OUTED?

WASHINGTON: When FBI Director James Comey teased that he had joined the world of social media with secret Instagram and Twitter accounts, tech writer Ashley Feinberg took the dare. After four hours of FBI-level sleuthing, she was pretty sure she had the answer: On both he was using the name of US Protestant theologian Reinhold Niebuhr. Embarrassing: He had only one Twitter follower. All it took, Feinberg said on the Gizmodo website where she is a senior reporter, was for Comey to tell an audience of security professionals Wednesday night that he had very cautiously joined the social networking age to keep up with family.

"I care deeply about privacy, treasure it. I have an Instagram account with nine followers. Nobody is getting in. They're all immediate relatives, and one daughter's serious boyfriend," Comey let slip.

Feinberg's interest was piqued. "Who am I to say no to a challenge?" she wrote. She tracked down Comey's family members, eventually discovering his son Brien's Instagram account by way of a photo of him with an Instagram tag.

That led to a potential dead end: A protected account which she could not view. But when she asked to be invited by Brien Comey to view his account, Instagram popped up with offers to follow other accounts that included Brien's mother and a mysterious "Reinhold Niebuhr," who had just nine followers. And a Google check easily showed that Niebuhr was the subject of James Comey's 1982 university thesis.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation chief, who carries the mammoth political burden of investigating the Trump administration's suspected links to Russia as

both political parties eye him suspiciously, unsurprisingly also had a protected account. But from there to Twitter was easy. Feinberg found seven Niebuhrs there, but only one with secretive identity: @projectexile7. That was the name of a program to battle gun-related crime that Comey helped develop.

That account had no tweets in three years, and followed only 27 other accounts. But those were reporters who cover the FBI, and law enforcement-related accounts. And Donald Trump. And the one follower was a prominent expert in national security law and a friend of Comey's. Bingo. So much for secrecy. The FBI had no comment late Thursday, but the Twitter-verse was convinced. Hours after Feinberg's report, Comey had more than 8,000 followers. Pretty good for never tweeting. —AFP

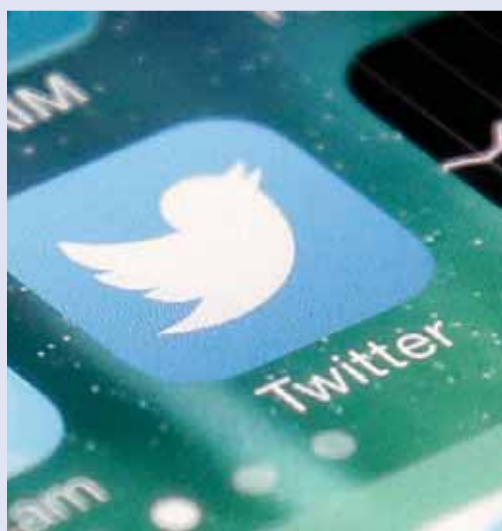
TWITTER EASES ON ITS 140-CHARACTER LIMIT

NEW YORK: Twitter has found more creative ways to ease its 140-character limit without officially raising it. Now, the company says that when you reply to someone - or to a group - usernames will no longer count toward those 140 characters. This will be especially helpful with group conversations, where replying to two, three or more users at a time could be especially difficult with the character constraints.

When users reply, the names of the people they are replying to will be on top of the text of the actual tweet, rather than a part of it. Last year, Twitter said it would stop counting photos, videos, quote tweets, polls and GIF animations toward the character limit. Twitter also said it would stop counting usernames, but the change did not go into effect until now.

Twitter, which has been struggling to attract new users, has been trying to appeal to both proponents and opponents by sticking to the current limit while allowing more freedom to express thoughts, or rants, through images and other media.

Twitter's character limit was created so that tweets could fit into a single text message, back in the heyday of SMS messaging. But now, most people use Twitter through its mobile app. There isn't the same technical constraint, just a desire on Twitter's part to stay true to its roots. Of course, there are ways to get around the limit, such as sending out multi-part tweets, or taking screenshots of text typed elsewhere. —AP



SAN JOSE: This file photo shows the icon for the Twitter app on an iPhone in San Jose, California. —AP



FLORIDA: SpaceX's Falcon 9 rocket lifts off from space launch complex 39A at Kennedy Space Center, Florida yesterday with an SES communications satellite. — AFP

SPACE X HAILS REVOLUTION AFTER RECYCLED ROCKET LAUNCH, LANDING

MIAMI: SpaceX chief Elon Musk hailed a "revolution in spaceflight" on Thursday after blasting off a recycled rocket for the first time, a feat that could dramatically lower the cost of space travel. Experts cheered the launch and landing of the previously used booster as a "historic" moment for spaceflight, particularly private industry, as companies like SpaceX and its competitors scramble to make space exploration cheaper and more efficient.

The slightly scuffed Falcon 9 rocket soared into the sky over Cape Canaveral, Florida at 6.27 pm (2227 GMT), on a mission to send a communications satellite for Luxembourg-based company SES into a distant orbit. Its tall, columnar portion known as the first stage, or booster, had already propelled the unmanned Dragon cargo ship to space in April 2016. About 10 minutes after launch, screams and applause erupted at SpaceX mission control in Hawthorne, California as the re-used rocket powered its engines and landed upright on a drone ship in the Atlantic Ocean marked with the words "Of Course I Still Love You."

The landing marked the ninth successful touchdown of a first stage rocket for SpaceX-six on ocean platforms, or drone ships, and three on land. It also marked

the first time a single rocket booster had ever been launched-and landed-twice. SpaceX, the California-based company headed by visionary entrepreneur Musk, has for 15 years been honing the technology of powering its boosters back to careful Earth landings on solid ground and in the water.

The goal of the entire effort, Musk has said, is to make rocket parts just as reusable as cars, planes or bicycles. He said it is also a crucial part of his plan to one day establish human colonies on Mars. "It is an amazing day, I think, for space (and) as whole for the space industry," Musk said in a video message after the launch. "It means you can fly and refly an orbital class booster which is the most expensive part of the rocket," he added. "This is going to be ultimately a huge revolution in spaceflight." Currently, millions of dollars' worth of rocket parts are jettisoned after each launch.

SpaceX officials have said that reusing hardware could slash costs-with each Falcon 9 launch costing over \$61 million-by about 30 percent. While the exact life of the re-used boosters is uncertain, Musk said they could be redeployed anywhere from 10 to 100 or even 1,000 times, depending on how much refurbishment is

needed. SpaceX competitor Blue Origin, run by Amazon.com founder Jeff Bezos, has also successfully landed its New Shepard booster after launch, by powering its engines to guide it down for a controlled, upright landing.

Flight-proven

Praise and congratulations for SpaceX poured in on Twitter. "Congratulations on another historic launch," the US space agency NASA wrote on Twitter. "Congrats, SpaceX," said the Defense Advances Research Projects agency (DARPA). "DARPA facilitated the first SpaceX launch, and now commercial space is coming into its own." As for the cost of Thursday's launch, Martin Halliwell, chief technology officer at SES, has declined to say publicly the exact amount.

However, he dismissed "naysayers" this week and stressed the historic nature of the launch on what he has described as a "flight-proven" rocket. "People said we were taking a huge risk. I always said, 'We're not.'" he told reporters after Thursday's launch. "We had access to information that gave us confidence," he said, adding he was "hugely excited" that SpaceX was opening "the door to a whole new era of spaceflight." — AFP

SATURDAY, APRIL 1, 2017

OSN MOVIES HD
ACTION

- 00:00 Never Back Down: No Surrender
- 01:45 King Arthur
- 04:00 Rivers Nine
- 06:00 Divergent
- 08:30 Hudson Hawk
- 10:15 King Arthur
- 12:30 Code Of Silence
- 14:15 Divergent
- 16:45 Survivor
- 18:30 Run All Night
- 20:30 The Transporter: Refueled
- 22:15 Wanted

ANIMAL PLANET HD

- 00:15 Snake Sheila
- 00:45 Bondi Vet
- 01:40 There's A Rhino In My House!
- 02:35 Tanked
- 03:25 Orangutan Island
- 03:50 Orangutan Island
- 04:15 Gator Boys
- 05:02 Snake Sheila
- 05:27 Snake Sheila
- 05:49 There's A Rhino In My House!
- 06:36 Gorilla School
- 07:00 Gorilla School
- 07:25 There's A Rhino In My House!
- 08:15 Rugged Justice
- 09:10 Restoration Wild
- 10:05 Gangland Killers
- 11:00 Life At Vet University
- 11:55 Bondi Vet
- 12:50 Snake Sheila
- 13:15 Snake Sheila
- 13:45 Snake Sheila
- 14:10 Snake Sheila
- 15:05 Snake Sheila
- 18:20 Village Vets
- 18:45 Village Vets
- 19:15 There's A Rhino In My House!
- 20:10 Restoration Wild
- 21:05 Pit Bulls & Parolees
- 22:00 Village Vets
- 22:25 Village Vets
- 22:55 Gator Boys
- 23:50 Gator Boys
- 00:00 Doctors
- 00:30 Doctors
- 01:00 Line Of Duty
- 02:00 Line Of Duty
- 03:05 Mum
- 03:35 Uncle
- 04:05 Doctors

BBC FIRST

- 04:35 Doctors
- 05:10 Father Brown
- 06:00 Doctors
- 06:30 Doctors
- 07:00 Doctors
- 07:30 Doctors
- 08:00 Doctors
- 08:30 Doctors
- 09:00 Doctors
- 09:30 Eastenders
- 10:00 Eastenders
- 10:35 The Job Lot
- 11:00 The Job Lot
- 11:30 Holby City
- 12:20 Casualty
- 13:10 Doctors
- 13:40 Doctors
- 14:10 The Musketeers
- 15:05 The Musketeers
- 16:00 The Musketeers
- 17:00 The Musketeers
- 18:00 Doctors
- 18:30 Eastenders
- 19:00 Father Brown
- 20:00 Last Tango In Halifax
- 21:00 Poldark
- 21:55 Doctor Who: The Husbands Of River Song
- 23:00 Line Of Duty
- 23:55 The Musketeers

crime & investigation network

- 00:00 50 Ways To Kill Your Lover
- 01:00 My Haunted House
- 02:00 Campus Killer: Santa Barbara

- 03:00 Monster In My Family
- 04:00 50 Ways To Kill Your Lover
- 05:00 My Haunted House
- 06:00 Murder In-Law
- 07:00 The First 48
- 08:00 Britain's Biggest Heists
- 09:00 Nightmare In Suburbia
- 10:00 Nightmare In Suburbia
- 11:00 Crimes That Shook Australia
- 12:00 Crimes That Shook Australia
- 13:00 Robbie Coltrane's Critical Evidence
- 14:00 Robbie Coltrane's Critical Evidence
- 15:00 I Killed My BFF
- 16:00 I Killed My BFF
- 17:00 Evil Up Close
- 18:00 Evil Up Close
- 19:00 Evil Up Close
- 20:00 The First 48
- 21:00 Homicide Hunter
- 22:00 They Took Our Child, We Got Her Back
- 23:00 Leah Remini: Scientology And The Aftermath

Discovery Family

- 00:30 What Could Possibly Go Wrong?
- 01:20 Battle Bots
- 02:10 Deception With Keith Barry
- 03:00 Destroyed In Seconds
- 03:25 Destroyed In Seconds
- 03:50 Ultimate Survival
- 04:40 How It's Made
- 05:05 How It's Made
- 05:30 Dirty Jobs
- 06:20 Mythbusters
- 07:00 Dick 'n' Dom Go Wild
- 07:25 Dick 'n' Dom Go Wild
- 07:50 Awesome Adventures
- 08:15 Awesome Adventures
- 08:40 Bondi Vet
- 09:30 Bondi Vet
- 10:20 Bondi Vet
- 11:10 Bondi Vet
- 12:00 Bondi Vet
- 12:50 Mythbusters
- 13:40 Mythbusters
- 14:30 Mythbusters
- 15:20 Mythbusters
- 16:10 Mythbusters
- 17:00 What Could Possibly Go Wrong?
- 17:50 What Could Possibly Go Wrong?

- 18:40 Battle Bots
- 19:30 Kids Do The Craziest Things
- 19:55 Kids Do The Craziest Things
- 20:20 Now That's Funny
- 21:10 Deception With Keith Barry
- 22:00 What Happened Next?
- 22:25 What Happened Next?
- 22:50 What Happened Next?
- 23:15 What Happened Next?
- 23:40 Kids Do The Craziest Things



- 00:00 Binny And The Ghost
- 00:15 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
- 00:25 Hank Zipzer
- 00:45 The Hive
- 01:40 Hank Zipzer
- 03:05 Binny And The Ghost
- 03:30 Binny And The Ghost
- 03:55 Hank Zipzer
- 04:15 The Hive
- 04:20 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
- 04:45 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
- 05:10 Hank Zipzer
- 05:35 Binny And The Ghost
- 06:00 Binny And The Ghost
- 06:25 Hank Zipzer
- 06:45 The Hive
- 06:50 The 7D
- 07:00 Jessie
- 07:25 Jessie
- 07:50 Eco Club
- 07:55 Austin & Ally
- 08:20 Rolling With The Ronks
- 08:45 The Zhuzhus
- 09:10 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug And Cat Noir
- 09:35 Elena Of Avalor
- 10:00 Stuck In The Middle
- 10:25 Disney The Lodge
- 10:50 Bunk'd
- 11:15 Disney Cookabout
- 11:40 Frenemies
- 13:10 Welcome To The Ronks
- 13:20 Best Friends Whenever
- 13:45 Best Friends Whenever
- 14:10 Best Friends Whenever
- 14:35 Best Friends Whenever
- 15:00 Best Friends Whenever

- 15:25 Jessie
- 15:50 Jessie
- 16:15 Austin & Ally
- 16:40 Austin & Ally
- 17:05 Descendants Wicked World
- 17:10 Elena Of Avalor
- 17:35 Stuck In The Middle
- 18:00 Disney The Lodge
- 18:25 The Emperor's New Groove
- 19:50 Welcome To The Ronks
- 20:00 Eco Club
- 20:05 Disney Cookabout
- 20:30 Bizaardvark
- 20:55 Bunk'd
- 21:20 Shake It Up
- 21:45 Disney The Lodge
- 22:10 Best Friends Whenever
- 22:35 Jessie
- 23:00 Kirby Buckets
- 23:25 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
- 23:50 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch

Disney Junior

- 00:00 Henry Hugglemonster
- 00:15 Calimero
- 00:30 Art Attack
- 00:55 Zou
- 01:05 Loopdidoo
- 01:20 Henry Hugglemonster
- 01:35 Calimero
- 01:50 Zou
- 02:05 Art Attack
- 02:30 The Hive
- 02:40 Loopdidoo
- 02:55 Henry Hugglemonster
- 05:00 Art Attack
- 05:30 Henry Hugglemonster
- 05:45 Loopdidoo
- 06:00 Zou
- 06:15 Calimero
- 06:30 Loopdidoo
- 06:45 Henry Hugglemonster
- 07:00 My Friends Tigger & Pooh
- 07:25 Mickey Mouse Clubhouse
- 07:50 Goldie & Bear
- 08:15 Miles From Tomorrow
- 08:40 Jake And The Never Land Pirates
- 09:10 Sofia The First
- 09:35 Doc McStuffins
- 10:00 The Lion Guard
- 10:30 The Lion Guard
- 10:55 The Lion Guard
- 11:25 The Lion Guard
- 11:50 The Lion Guard
- 12:15 The Lion Guard
- 12:45 The Lion Guard
- 13:10 The Lion Guard
- 13:40 The Lion Guard
- 14:05 The Lion Guard
- 14:35 The Lion Guard
- 15:00 The Lion Guard
- 15:30 Sofia The First
- 16:00 Goldie & Bear
- 16:25 PJ Masks
- 16:55 Doc McStuffins
- 17:20 Miles From Tomorrow
- 17:45 Jake And The Never Land Pirates
- 18:15 Sofia The First
- 18:45 PJ Masks
- 19:00 Doc McStuffins
- 19:25 Doc McStuffins
- 19:50 PJ Masks
- 20:05 Goldie & Bear
- 20:35 Mickey Mouse Clubhouse
- 21:00 Sheriff Callie's Wild West
- 21:30 Miles From Tomorrow
- 22:00 Jake And The Never Land Pirates
- 22:25 Jake And The Never Land Pirates
- 22:55 PJ Masks
- 23:20 Henry Hugglemonster
- 23:35 The Hive
- 23:45 Loopdidoo

Discovery Channel HD

- 00:20 Supertruckers
- 01:10 Wheeler Dealers
- 02:00 Diesel Brothers
- 02:50 Harley And The Davidsons
- 03:40 How Do They Do It?
- 04:05 How Do They Do It?
- 04:30 How Do They Do It?
- 05:00 How Do They Do It?
- 05:30 How Do They Do It?
- 06:00 Storage Hunters
- 06:25 Storage Hunters
- 06:50 Storage Hunters
- 07:15 Storage Hunters
- 07:40 Storage Hunters
- 08:05 How Do They Do It?

- 08:30 How Do They Do It?
- 08:55 How Do They Do It?
- 09:20 Gold Rush
- 10:35 Gold Rush
- 11:00 What On Earth?
- 11:50 Made By Destruction
- 12:15 Made By Destruction
- 12:40 Fast 'N' Loud
- 16:50 The Wheel: Survival Games
- 17:40 Running Wild With Bear Grylls
- 18:30 Impossible Engineering
- 19:20 Treasure Quest: Snake Island
- 20:10 Supertruckers
- 21:00 Castro: The World's Most Watched Man
- 21:50 Yukon Men
- 22:40 Alaskan Bush People
- 23:30 Gold Rush



- 06:00 Supa Strikas
- 06:25 Supa Strikas
- 06:50 Marvel Ultimate Spider-Man vs The Sinister 6
- 07:15 Right Now Kapow
- 07:40 Star vs The Forces Of Evil
- 08:10 K.C. Undercover
- 08:35 Milo Murphy's Law
- 09:00 Walk The Prank
- 09:25 Prankstars
- 09:50 Walk The Prank
- 10:20 Lab Rats
- 10:45 Walk The Prank
- 11:10 Mighty Med
- 11:35 Walk The Prank
- 12:00 Prankstars
- 12:30 Walk The Prank
- 12:55 Prankstars
- 13:20 Walk The Prank
- 13:45 Prankstars
- 14:10 Disney Mickey Mouse
- 14:15 Milo Murphy's Law
- 14:40 K.C. Undercover
- 15:05 Walk The Prank
- 15:30 Atomic Puppet
- 15:55 Lab Rats Elite Force
- 16:25 Right Now Kapow
- 16:50 K.C. Undercover
- 17:15 Future-Worm!
- 17:40 Star Wars Freemaker Adventures
- 18:05 Disney Mickey Mouse
- 18:10 Star Wars Rebels
- 18:35 Robin Hood
- 20:10 Star vs The Forces Of Evil
- 20:20 Kickin' It
- 20:45 Mighty Med
- 21:10 Star Wars Rebels
- 21:40 Disney Mickey Mouse
- 21:45 Marvel's Avengers Assemble
- 22:10 Marvel Ultimate Spider-Man vs The Sinister 6
- 22:35 Boyster
- 23:00 Programmes Start At 6:00am KSA

E! HD

- 00:05 Hollywood Medium With Tyler Henry
- 00:55 Hollywood Medium With Tyler Henry
- 01:50 E! News
- 02:50 Revenge Body With Khloe Kardashian
- 05:30 Celebrity Style Story
- 06:00 Hollywood Medium With Tyler Henry
- 06:55 E! News
- 07:10 Hollywood Medium With Tyler Henry
- 08:10 E! News
- 09:05 Botched
- 09:55 Botched
- 10:45 Revenge Body With Khloe Kardashian
- 13:15 E! News
- 13:45 Celebrity Style Story
- 14:15 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
- 17:05 Rob & Chyna
- 18:05 Rob & Chyna
- 19:00 E! News
- 20:00 So Cosmo
- 21:00 So Cosmo
- 22:00 So Cosmo
- 23:00 E! News
- 23:30 Celebrity Style Story



- 00:00 Ching's Amazing Asia
- 00:30 Ching's Amazing Asia
- 01:00 Reza, Spice Prince Of Thailand
- 01:30 Reza, Spice Prince Of Thailand
- 02:00 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
- 02:30 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives



KING ARTHUR ON OSN MOVIES ACTION HD

SATURDAY, APRIL 1, 2017

- 03:00 Man Fire Food
- 03:30 Man Fire Food
- 04:00 Chopped
- 05:00 Guy's Grocery Games
- 06:00 Roadtrip With G. Garvin
- 06:30 Roadtrip With G. Garvin
- 07:00 Chopped
- 08:00 Barefoot Contessa: Back To Basics
- 08:30 Barefoot Contessa: Back To Basics
- 09:00 The Pioneer Woman
- 09:30 The Pioneer Woman
- 10:00 Siba's Table
- 10:30 Siba's Table
- 11:00 Anna Olson: Bake
- 11:30 Anna Olson: Bake
- 12:00 Man Fire Food
- 12:30 Man Fire Food
- 13:00 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
- 13:30 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
- 14:00 Chopped
- 15:00 Barefoot Contessa: Back To Basics
- 15:30 Barefoot Contessa: Back To Basics
- 16:00 The Pioneer Woman
- 16:30 The Pioneer Woman
- 17:00 Siba's Table
- 17:30 Siba's Table
- 18:00 Anna Olson: Bake
- 18:30 Anna Olson: Bake
- 19:00 Man Fire Food
- 19:30 Man Fire Food
- 20:00 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
- 20:30 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
- 21:00 Restaurant Stakeout
- 22:00 Mystery Diners
- 22:30 Mystery Diners
- 23:00 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
- 23:30 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives



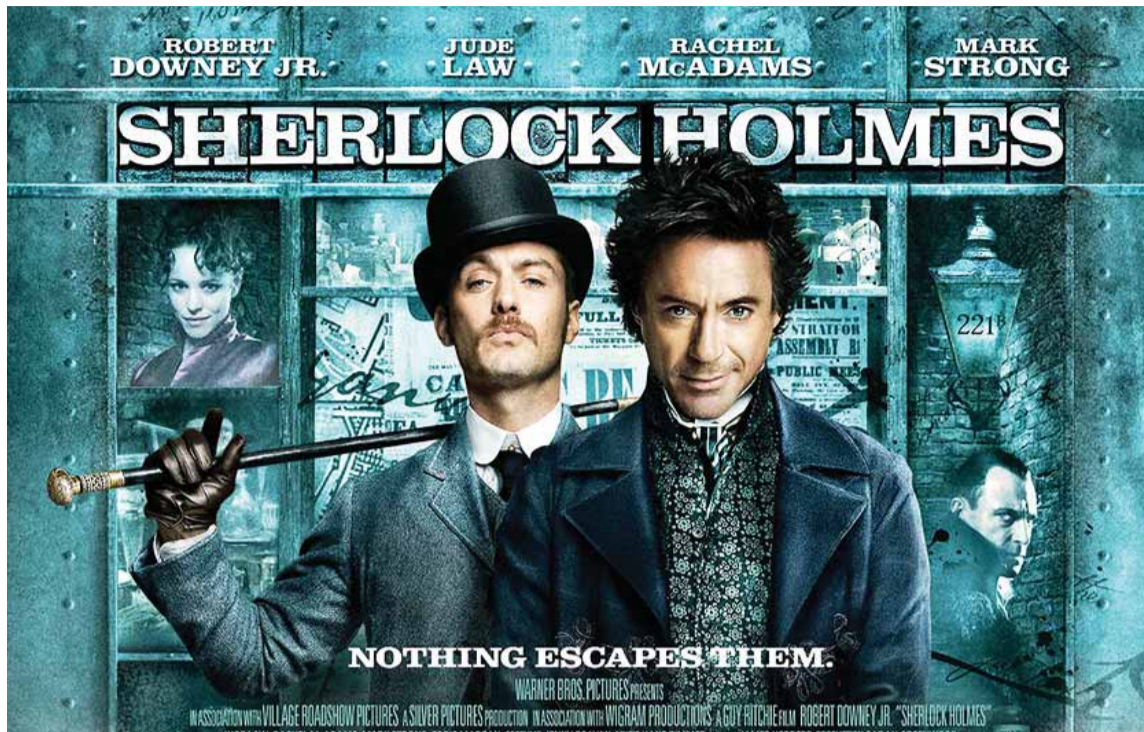
- 00:10 The Chase
- 01:00 Emmerdale
- 01:25 Emmerdale
- 03:25 Coronation Street
- 03:50 Coronation Street
- 05:30 Midsomer Murders
- 07:05 Murdoch Mysteries
- 08:00 Ant & Dec's Saturday Night Takeaway
- 09:20 Doc Martin
- 10:15 Doc Martin
- 11:10 The Queen's Worst Year
- 12:10 Don't Tell The Bride
- 13:10 Don't Tell The Bride
- 14:05 The Jonathan Ross Show
- 15:00 Ant & Dec's Saturday Night Takeaway
- 16:15 Grantchester Christmas Special
- 17:40 Murdoch Mysteries
- 18:35 Gino's Italian Escape
- 19:00 Don't Tell The Bride
- 20:00 Ant & Dec's Saturday Night Takeaway
- 21:15 The Queen's Worst Year
- 22:10 The Jonathan Ross Show
- 23:05 Coronation Street
- 23:30 Coronation Street
- 23:50 Coronation Street
- 00:00 World War II: Lost Films
- 01:00 Cities Of The Underworld
- 02:00 America's Book Of Secrets
- 02:50 Ancient Aliens
- 03:40 True Monsters
- 04:30 The Universe
- 05:20 World War II: Lost Films



- 06:10 The Universe
- 07:00 Cities Of The Underworld
- 08:00 America's Book Of Secrets
- 09:00 Ancient Aliens
- 10:00 The Universe
- 11:00 The Universe
- 12:00 World War II: Lost Films
- 13:00 Cities Of The Underworld
- 14:00 America's Book Of Secrets
- 15:00 Ancient Aliens
- 16:00 The Universe
- 17:00 The Universe
- 18:00 Pirate Treasure Of The Knights Templar



- 00:20 Inside Alcatraz: Legends Of The Rock
- 01:10 Ultimate Wheels
- 02:00 Lost In Transmission
- 02:50 Pawn Stars
- 03:15 Pawn Stars UK
- 03:40 Pawn Stars UK
- 04:05 Pawn Stars UK



SHERLOCK HOLMES ON OSN MOVIES HD

- 04:30 Pawn Stars UK
- 05:00 Inside Alcatraz: Legends Of The Rock
- 06:00 Storage Wars Miami
- 06:25 Storage Wars Miami
- 06:50 Pawn Stars Australia
- 07:15 Pawn Stars Australia
- 07:40 American Pickers
- 08:30 American Restoration
- 09:20 Ultimate Wheels
- 10:10 Leepu And Pitbull
- 11:00 Shipping Wars
- 11:25 Shipping Wars
- 11:50 Ice Road Truckers
- 12:40 Ax Men
- 13:30 Lost Worlds
- 14:20 Hunting Hitler
- 15:10 The Curse Of Oak Island
- 16:00 Storage Wars Miami
- 16:25 Storage Wars Miami
- 16:50 Counting Cars
- 17:15 Car Hunters
- 17:40 American Restoration
- 18:30 Ice Road Truckers
- 19:20 American Pickers
- 20:10 Forged In Fire
- 21:00 The Curse Of Oak Island
- 21:50 Hunting Hitler
- 22:40 Outlaw Chronicles: Hells Angels
- 23:30 Gold Hunters: Legend Of The Superstition...



- 00:15 World's Best Beaches
- 01:05 Bangkok Airport
- 01:55 Confucius Was A Foodie
- 02:45 Chasing The Sun
- 03:10 Chasing The Sun
- 03:35 Cesar Millan: Viva Las Vegas!
- 04:25 The Food Files
- 05:20 Food Lover's Guide To The Planet
- 06:15 Charlie Luxton's Homes By The Med
- 07:10 Food Lover's Guide To The Planet
- 07:35 Street Food Around The World
- 08:05 Restoration Man
- 09:00 The Wine Show
- 09:55 Croatia's Finest
- 10:20 The Food Files
- 11:15 Lyndey Milan - Taste Of Australia
- 11:45 Dog Whisperer
- 12:40 Bangkok Airport
- 13:35 Confucius Was A Foodie
- 14:30 Chasing The Sun
- 15:25 Taste Of The Tropic: Taiwan
- 16:20 The Food Files
- 16:45 The Food Files
- 17:15 Access 360 World Heritage
- 18:10 Food Lover's Guide To The Planet
- 18:35 Food Lover's Guide To The Planet
- 19:05 Chasing The Sun
- 19:30 Taste Of The Tropic: Taiwan
- 20:25 The Food Files
- 20:55 The Food Files
- 21:20 Access 360 World Heritage
- 22:10 Food Lover's Guide To The Planet
- 22:35 Food Lover's Guide To The Planet
- 23:00 Bangkok Airport
- 23:50 Confucius Was A Foodie



- 00:10 Locked Up Abroad
- 01:00 Uncensored With Michael Ware
- 02:00 Hitler's Supergun
- 03:00 Nazi Sunken Sub
- 04:00 Locked Up Abroad
- 05:00 Air Crash Investigation
- 06:00 Megastructures
- 07:00 Mega Factories
- 08:00 Dog Whisperer
- 10:00 Science Of Stupid
- 11:00 Right Footed
- 12:00 Top Ten Natural Disasters
- 14:00 China's Ghost Army
- 15:00 Air Crash Investigation
- 16:00 Mega Factories
- 17:00 Megastructures
- 18:00 Ultimate Airport Dubai
- 19:00 Air Crash Investigation
- 20:00 Mega Factories
- 20:50 Megastructures
- 21:40 Ultimate Airport Dubai
- 22:30 Air Crash Investigation
- 23:20 Lawless Island



- 00:20 Crocs Of Katuma
- 01:10 Ultimate Animal Countdown
- 02:00 World's Deadliest Killers
- 02:50 Strangest Bird Alive
- 03:45 Nature's Greatest Talents
- 04:40 Survive The Wild
- 05:35 Safari Brothers
- 06:30 Monster Fish
- 07:25 Monster Fish
- 08:20 Unlikely Animal Friends
- 09:15 Snakes In The City
- 10:10 World's Weirdest
- 11:05 Dr. K's Exotic Animal ER
- 12:00 River Jaws: Monster Catfish
- 12:55 World's Deadliest Killers
- 13:50 World's Deadliest GPU
- 14:45 Nature's Greatest Talents
- 15:40 Survive The Wild
- 16:35 Savage Kingdom
- 17:30 Africa's Hunters
- 18:25 Wildebeeste: Born To Run
- 19:20 Nature's Greatest Talents
- 20:10 Survive The Wild
- 21:00 Savage Kingdom
- 21:50 Africa's Hunters
- 22:40 Wildebeeste: Born To Run
- 23:30 River Jaws: Monster Catfish



- 01:00 Finding Nemo
- 03:00 D3: The Mighty Ducks
- 05:00 Ice Age 3: Dawn Of The Dinosaurs
- 07:00 Brother Bear

- 09:00 Ice Age
- 11:00 Ice Age 3: Dawn Of The Dinosaurs
- 13:00 Cars
- 15:00 A Bug's Life
- 17:00 Monsterville: The Cabinet Of Souls
- 19:00 The Odd Life Of Timothy Green
- 21:00 The Haunted Mansion
- 23:00 A Bug's Life



- 00:15 God's Pocket
- 01:45 Changeling
- 04:15 Wildlike
- 06:00 The Blind Side
- 08:15 And Justice For All
- 10:15 Days Of Heaven
- 12:00 The Fold
- 13:45 Tracks
- 15:45 I'll Follow You Down
- 17:30 WarGames
- 19:30 Boyhood
- 22:15 Clouds Of Sils Maria



- 01:00 Robosapien: Rebooted
- 02:45 True Story Of Puss'n Boots
- 04:30 Yugo & Lala 2
- 06:00 Pirates Who Don't Do Anything
- 07:30 The Heart Of The Oak
- 09:00 Savva
- 10:45 Robosapien: Rebooted
- 12:30 The Heart Of The Oak
- 14:00 The Adventures Of Rocky And Bullwinkle
- 16:00 Savva
- 18:00 When Marnie Was There
- 20:00 Jock The Hero Dog
- 21:45 The Adventures Of Rocky And Bullwinkle
- 23:30 The Heart Of The Oak



- 01:30 The Legend Of Zorro
- 03:45 Sherlock Holmes
- 06:00 A Beautiful Mind
- 08:15 10 Things I Hate About You
- 09:55 The Legend Of Zorro
- 12:10 Sherlock Holmes
- 14:20 S.W.A.T.
- 16:15 Cradle 2 The Grave
- 18:00 Rise Of The Planet Of The Apes
- 19:45 Blood Diamond
- 22:15 Primal Fear



- 00:30 How Do They Do It?
- 00:55 Food Factory

- 01:20 The Unexplained Files
- 02:10 How The Earth Works
- 03:00 The Big Brain Theory
- 03:48 Mythbusters
- 04:36 How Do They Do It?
- 05:00 Food Factory
- 05:24 The Unexplained Files
- 06:12 How The Earth Works
- 07:00 How Do They Do It?
- 07:26 Food Factory
- 07:50 Food Factory
- 08:14 Food Factory
- 08:38 Food Factory
- 09:02 Food Factory
- 09:26 How Do They Do It?
- 09:50 How Do They Do It?
- 10:14 How Do They Do It?
- 10:38 How Do They Do It?
- 11:02 How Do They Do It?
- 11:26 How The Earth Works
- 12:14 How The Earth Works
- 13:02 How The Earth Works
- 13:50 How The Earth Works
- 14:38 How The Earth Works
- 15:26 Mythbusters
- 16:14 Mythbusters
- 17:02 Mythbusters
- 17:50 Mythbusters
- 18:40 Mythbusters
- 19:30 NASA's Unexplained Files
- 20:20 Sport Science
- 21:10 Strip The Cosmos
- 22:00 Food Factory USA
- 22:25 Food Factory USA
- 22:50 The Unexplained Files
- 23:40 The Big Brain Theory



- 00:20 The Day I Almost Died
- 01:10 The Undateables
- 02:00 Married By Mum And Dad
- 02:50 Monsters Inside Me
- 03:35 Outdaughters: Busby Quints
- 04:20 Toddlers & Tiaras
- 05:10 Toddlers & Tiaras
- 06:00 Kate Plus 8
- 06:50 Kate Plus 8
- 07:40 Kate Plus 8
- 08:30 Toddlers & Tiaras: Coach Wars
- 09:20 Too Ugly For Love?
- 10:10 Curvy Brides
- 10:35 Curvy Brides
- 11:00 Curvy Brides
- 11:25 Curvy Brides
- 11:50 Say Yes To The Dress: Bridesmaids
- 14:45 Little Miss Atlanta
- 15:35 My Big Fat Fabulous Life
- 17:40 Oprah: Where Are They Now?
- 18:30 Iyanla: Fix My Life
- 19:20 Toddlers & Tiaras: Coach Wars
- 20:10 Save My Style
- 20:35 Save My Style
- 21:00 Oprah: Where Are They Now?
- 21:50 Iyanla: Fix My Life
- 22:40 An Hour To Save Your Life
- 23:30 Botched Up Bodies
- 00:00 Bizarre Foods America
- 01:00 Mysteries At The Museum
- 02:00 Expedition Unknown
- 03:00 Building Alaska
- 04:00 Log Cabin Living
- 04:30 Log Cabin Living
- 05:00 Bizarre Foods America
- 06:00 Mysteries At The Museum
- 07:00 House Hunters International
- 07:30 House Hunters International



- 08:00 House Hunters International
- 08:30 House Hunters International
- 09:00 Could I Live There?
- 09:30 Could I Live There?
- 10:00 Hotel Impossible
- 11:00 Mysteries At The Castle
- 12:00 Log Cabin Living
- 12:30 Log Cabin Living
- 13:00 House Hunters International
- 16:00 Life's A Beach
- 16:30 Life's A Beach
- 17:00 Could I Live There?
- 17:30 Could I Live There?
- 18:00 Log Cabin Living
- 19:00 Stars In Their Cars
- 19:30 Stars In Their Cars
- 20:00 Celebrity Adventure Club
- 21:00 Ice Hotels... Not Impossible
- 22:00 Expedition Unknown
- 23:00 Jeni And Olly's Deep South Food Adventures

CBK INTRODUCES YA ZEEN TORATHNA AT AZDA SCHOOL



Within its sixth 'Ya Zeen Torathna' campaign activities, The Commercial Bank of Kuwait (CBK) recently visited Azda Bint Al-Hareth intermediate school for girls in Mubarak Al-Kabeer to brief the pupils about the campaign and enrich their knowledge about Kuwaiti heritage. CBK's assistant director for PR and Publicity, Amani Al-Wer'a said that the bank arranged a full program to visit various schools for the same reason.

PAKISTAN SPORTS ASSOCIATION KUWAIT ORGANIZES PAKISTAN DAY T20 CRICKET CUP

Pakistan Sports Association Kuwait organizes Pakistan Day T20 Cricket Cup 2017 on March 24, 2017 at Jaleeb Al Shuyoukh. T20 Cricket Cup match was played between Jinnah XI & Iqbal XI. Jinnah XI won the toss and elected to bat first and they scored 195 runs in allotted 20 overs, which were

achieved comprehensively by Quaid XI in 20th over. Don Manju was declared Man of the Match due to his outstanding all round performance of 43 runs & 1 wicket which led his team in victory by 4 wickets.

The match ended with a prize distribution ceremony. President of Pakistan Sports Association Kuwait Maqbool Ahmed, PSA Founder/Director General Muhammad Irfan Adil, Advisor M Irfan Shafiq, Executive member Shahbaz Ali and Fiaz Ahmed were among the guests. Many dignitaries and cricket lover watched the thrilling game. Jinnah XI captain Ijaz received the runner up trophy while Iqbal XI clinched the winner trophy, received by Captain Fazil. At this stage, PSA Founder/Director General Muhammad Irfan Adil highlighted the ideology of Pakistan Day.

Maqbool Ahmed President PSA said that Pakistan Sports Association Kuwait (PSA) is engaging the youth and community in positive and healthy sports activities. It is an avenue for camaraderie and to develop a sense of belonging among individuals in the shared pursuit of sport and to provide an outlet for advanced participation and competition in a particular sport. PSA is a non-political, non partisan and non-governmental organization, founded by Muhammad Irfan Adil on August 14, 2013.

Headed by Maqbool Ahmed and powered by Sports lovers,



PSA organizes sports events and festivals, among the community with collaboration of local sports authorities and will work together with local organizations and charities to enhance the standing and awareness of the benefits of sport and exercise. We will keep organizing such sports and healthy activities among youth and community. M Irfan Shafiq, PSA Advisor, thanked all the guests for witnessing the thrilling game of cricket. Certificates of participation were presented to all players and match officials by distinguished guests.





ORAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT CONDUCTS 8TH GULF ORAL HEALTH PROMOTION WEEK

Oral Health Department in conjunction with the Jahra School Oral health program conducted the GCC Eighth Gulf Oral Health promotion week under the patronage of Health Minister Dr Jamal Al-Harby. Health Ministry Assistant Undersecretary for Oral Health Affairs Dr Yousuf Al-Duwairi represented the minister on behalf of him.

President of Kuwait Disabled Sports Club Al-Sheikha Sheikha Al-Abdallah Al-Khalifa Al-Sabah was also present. The program organizer Dr Shaima Nathar said awareness and preventive programs are very important for preventing oral and dental diseases. She said the program this year was keen on intensifying its activities in the centers and schools in addition to clubs and malls to reach the largest possible number of society members.





BEENLEIGH: A group of workers paddle in a small boat to check on a flooded house in Beenleigh yesterday.—AFP

SHARKNADO: AUSTRALIA WARNS OF SNAKES, CROCS AND SHARKS IN FLOODS

ANIMALS LURK AT UNEXPECTED PLACES AFTER DEBBIE HIT

SYDNEY: Wading through flooded areas can be dangerous anywhere in the world, but in Australia the waters may contain snakes, crocodiles and sharks as well as rubbish and sewage. One of the striking images showing the impact of category four Cyclone Debbie which smashed through northeast Australia this week was a paramedic's photo of a large bull shark that washed up on a road near the town of Ayr. And sharks are not the only unusual sightings in floodwaters in Australia's tropical north.

Queensland state authorities warned that crocodiles and snakes could also be lurking around after Debbie hit. "Flooded waterways increase the possibilities of crocodiles and other animals, such as snakes turning up in unexpected places," the state's environment and heritage protection department said. "In most circumstances, crocodiles will be moving through, trying to get out of fast-flowing creeks and waterways to the quieter areas they prefer.

"Snakes are good swimmers and they too may turn up in unexpected places and may even find their way into people's properties." Paramedic Lisa Smith, who photographed the bull

shark, said she was stunned to find it lying near the Burdekin River. "At first I thought it was a dolphin, but then I thought 'nah, there wouldn't be any dolphins around here,'" Smith told Brisbane's Courier Mail.

"I thought there were just crocs in that river. This should definitely teach people to never walk in floodwaters as you never know what's in them." Snake catcher Anthony Bailey, from Yeppoon in central Queensland, offered on Facebook to remove the reptiles for free after the storm, and received a flood of responses. "We already had a brown (snake) at our back door. Good on you guys for offering free assistance during this time," one person replied.

Bailey said snakes were fond of slithering indoors in wet conditions. "They don't like sitting out in the rain, they come into houses or trees to escape the water and possibly looking for some warmth," he told the Rockhampton Morning Bulletin. Australia is home to 20 of the world's 25 most venomous snakes, including the entire top 10. Brown snakes, among the most venomous, are common in eastern Australia and can be as much as two meters long when fully grown. —AFP

WITH MICRO-CREDIT AND TRICYCLES, DISABLED WOMEN CONFRONT STIGMA IN BURKINA FASO

GARANGO, Burkina Faso: Sitting under the shade of a tree, a group of women drink traditional cocktail to escape the searing 40-degree-Celsius heat. Perched on a massive tricycle, one woman passes a wooden bowl full of beer to her neighbor, whose eyes are closed. The 30 women gathered in this town of central Burkina Faso are all blind, paralyzed or suffer from epilepsy. "I used to crawl on all fours, dragging myself on the ground to get to school," said Ela Bonkoungou, who since contracting meningitis at the age of five has been paralyzed in both legs.

Disabled people make up more than 10 percent of the population in Burkina Faso, and are more likely to live in poverty and struggle to find jobs, according to Light for the World, an international disability and development charity. Rights activists say the situation is even worse for disabled women, who face additional stigma, even from their families. But change is afoot. In 2010, a group of 70 disabled women started the town's first union for disabled women, with the help of a local community centre. The women meet several times a month at the Garango centre to discuss anything from jobs to their children's education. The union, with help from Light for the World, aims to facilitate

disabled people's access to education, jobs and health and social services - an approach developed by the World Health Organization, UNESCO and the International Labor Organization, and known as "community-based rehabilitation".

Gaining independence

In the centre's courtyard, wooden tables showcase basketwork, bright wrap skirts, bronze statuettes and vegetables such as tomatoes, onions and cucumbers. "We sell the items to visitors, which gives us money to pay for rice and millet at home," said Bonkoungou, the association's secretary, sitting proudly on a massive metal tricycle. Thanks to a local Catholic mission, she and other paralyzed women from the association have received free tricycles, which allow them to move freely on the region's sandy roads.

The tricycles normally cost 150,000 CFA francs (\$250) each, almost four times the average monthly income per capita as estimated by the World Bank. "But there are still domestic tasks we cannot do, like fetching water from the well," Bonkoungou added, with other women in the group nodding behind her. "As disabled women, we face more problems than men. Here in Garango, all

our husbands have taken a second able-bodied wife, to do what we can't."

To become more economically stable and independent, the women in the committee have created their own micro-credit system.

Each member pays 3,000 CFA francs (\$5) when joining the committee, plus an annual subscription of 1,000 CFA francs (\$1.50). The management committee designates the women most in need, who can benefit from a loan of up to 25,000 CFA francs (\$40), while all members receive training on running their own business. "As long as we are together, we can forget about our disability," said Bonkoungou.

Independent women

The disabled women hope the initiative can help them fight rampant stigma. According to Gaston Gansame, supervisor of the Garango centre, disabled women in Burkina Faso have to cope with prejudice on a daily basis. "Many Burkinabe think God created the women's disability," he said. "Some think the women aren't even able to procreate." Salamatou Banse, another woman affectionately nicknamed "the old lady" by the rest of the group, cheerfully waves her crutch. —Reuters

JAPAN WHALING FLEET RETURNS FROM ANTARCTIC HUNT WITH 333 WHALES

TOKYO: Japan's whaling fleet returned yesterday from its months-long Antarctic hunt in the name of scientific research with a take of more than 300 minke whales, a hunt that prompted complaints from Australia. The International Court of Justice ruled in 2014 that Japan should halt Antarctic whaling and Japan suspended its hunt for one season to re-tool its whaling program, including measures such as cutting the number of whales and species targeted. It resumed hunting in the 2015-2016 seasons.

The final ships of the five-vessel whaling fleet returned to the southwestern port of Shimonoseki, having achieved their goal of 333 minke whales, the Fisheries Agency said. "Since a majority of both the males and females taken were mature, this indicates that the species is reproducing healthily," it added in a statement. Japan intends to take nearly 4,000 whales over the next 12 years as part of its research program and has repeatedly said its ultimate goal is the resumption of commercial whaling.

Shimonoseki, a major whaling port, is in Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's electoral district. Japan, which has long maintained that most whale species are not endangered and that eating whale is part of its culture, began what it calls "scientific whaling" in 1987, a year after an international whaling moratorium took effect. The meat ends up on store shelves, even though most Japanese no longer eat it. Japan has shrugged off repeated international protests, including those from key ally the United States.

In January, Australia said it was "deeply disappointed" that Japan had continued its hunt, just days after Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull had discussed it with Abe. The Humane Society International (HSI), an animal protection organization, condemned the most recent hunt. "There is no robust scientific case for slaughtering whales," said Kitty Block, HSI executive vice president, in a statement ahead of the fleet's return. "Commercial whaling in this, or any other disguise, does not meet any pressing human needs and should be relegated to the annals of history." —Reuters



JAPAN: This undated file picture shows a mother whale and her calf being dragged on board a Japanese ship after being harpooned in Antarctic waters.—AFP

FROZEN TREATS AND SPRINKLERS KEEP BANGKOK ZOO ANIMALS COOL

BANGKOK: Malayan sun bears have been enjoying popsicles and cold yoghurt in a Thailand zoo that has been feeding its animals frozen treats and spraying them down with water to keep them cool in the summer heat. With temperatures soaring to highs of 42 Celsius, keepers at Dusit Zoo have been working to prevent animals becoming distressed, hosing down elephants and feeding chimpanzees sweet, cold treats made from fruits and syrup.

"These animals can be stressed out (if the weather is too hot)," said zookeeper Sompong Sawatnam. "They will walk around shaking their heads. Each day, we have different kinds of popsicles made by nutritionists, which will help cool them down." The zoo has also set up sprinklers and increased the amount of shade available for animals, while Thailand's Public Health Ministry has warned people to keep hydrated and remain inside to avoid heat stroke. —Reuters

TRUMP'S CLIMATE CHANGE ORDER THREATENS US DISASTER PREVENTION

TEPIC, Mexico: US President Donald Trump's executive order to sweep away Obama-era climate change regulations jeopardizes efforts across his country to build resilience to intensifying natural disasters, experts have warned. The executive order, signed on Tuesday, could make it harder to keep global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius, the lower limit governments have pledged to strive for in a UN accord, they said.

"These reversals are coming at a moment when the impacts of climate change are intensifying," said Heather Coleman, climate change policy manager at Oxfam America. "The president is playing politics with people's lives," she told journalists in a telephone briefing. Trump's order has drawn swift condemnation from a coalition of states and local governments, as well as green groups who say it threatens public health and have vowed to fight it in court. The main target of the executive order is the Clean Power Plan introduced by former US President Barack Obama, requiring states to slash carbon emissions from power plants. It is a key factor in the US's ability to meet its commitments under the UN climate change agreement reached by nearly 200 countries in Paris in 2015. Trump, a Republican, and several key members of his administration have doubts about climate change, but it remains unclear whether the president will pull the United States out of the Paris deal, in line with a campaign promise.

"If you don't want to call it climate change, that's fine - you can call it whatever you want, but the point is, we're dealing with this new reality and we have to address it head on," said Belinda Constant, mayor of Gretna, Louisiana, and co-chair of the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative. The frequency and severity of disasters is on the rise and costs are unprecedented, she said. Persistent disasters along the Mississippi River alone have cost over \$50 billion since 2011, draining the local economy, she added. The executive order would have a direct impact on resilience to disasters, she said, with both jobs and infrastructure at risk if requirements by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for states and local government to build climate risks into planning are eliminated, she said. —Reuters

FROM POOR EYESIGHT TO BAD TEETH, PANDAS' NEEDS GROW WITH AGE

DUJIANGYAN, China: Failing eyesight, poor digestion, bad teeth, limbs no longer so limber: With captive giant pandas living longer than ever, the list of their physical and even emotional needs is growing. China, the pandas' native home, is seeking to cater to those requirements with a special home for the old timers along with customized diets, exercise and other care aimed at improving their quality of life.

"Of course we spend more energy taking care of old pandas," said Xu Yalin, a panda keeper for 19 years at the China Conservation and Research Center for the Giant Panda Dujiangyan Base in the southwestern province of Sichuan. "Every day we need to interact with them closely and check their mental state," Xu said. "We also examine their feces, the shape of it and so on. We worry more about the old pandas than the juveniles." Pandas are considered old after they turn 20. The current longevity champion, Basi, recently turned 37 and lives in Fujian province in southeast China. Of the roughly 30 pandas at the base, Xu is responsible for three, all of them over 20 and starting to develop health issues from failing eyesight to poor digestion and teeth worn down by a lifetime of chomping bamboo. Those who can no longer handle coarse bamboo shoots get the more tender leaves instead. They eat, sleep and do little else, to the delight of the visitors.

One of Xu's charges, a 24-year-old female named Qiao Yuan, gets fruits and smooth corn porridge rather than the wowotou bread made of corn and sorghum that younger pandas receive.



GUANGDONG, China: In this file photo, one-month-old triplet panda cubs receive body checks at the Chimelong Safari Park in Guangzhou in south China's Guangdong province. —AP

"Another panda, who was rescued from the wild, does not eat bamboo because of his bad teeth, so every day we chop bamboo leaves and mix them with pieces of the corn and sorghum bread, with carrots and apples," Xu said.

"It's like a bamboo-flavored salad." Xu visits Qiao Yuan first thing each morning to ensure she spent a good night. While feeding her a snack of carrots and apples, she performs several

exercises aimed at checking Qiao Yuan's eyesight and teeth. She also has her stand up, to make her stretch her limbs. Dinner is at 4 p.m. - more bamboo and porridge, which Qiao Yuan eagerly slurps up. "Looking at Qiao Yuan's behavior at her age, you can't help but think about an old human being that has difficulty eating and walking," said Xu. "Taking care of an old panda is just like taking care of an old person." —AP

CLINIC
PAGE



Kuwait Times
THE LEADING INDEPENDENT DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF



Dr. Fahad Al-Mukhaizeem
فهد علي المخيزيم



Consultant Pediatrician استشاري أطفال
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KNCC PROGRAMME FROM THURSDAY TO WEDNESDAY (30/03/2017 TO 05/04/2017)

SHARQIA-1		SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE	3:45 PM	COLLIDE	10:15 PM
AKHER DEEK FE MASR -Arabic	1:15 PM	SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE	5:45 PM	COLLIDE	12:15 AM
DAYLIGHT'S END	3:30 PM	SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE	7:45 PM		
DAYLIGHT'S END	5:45 PM	SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE	9:45 PM	360°- 3	
AKHER DEEK FE MASR -Arabic	8:00 PM	COLLIDE	11:45 PM	NAAM SHABANA -Hindi	11:45 AM
AKHER DEEK FE MASR -Arabic	10:15 PM			NAAM SHABANA -Hindi	2:45 PM
DAYLIGHT'S END	12:30 AM	FANAR-5		NAAM SHABANA -Hindi	5:30 PM
		SAFRA 5 NJOOM	12:00 PM	NAAM SHABANA -Hindi	8:30 PM
SHARQIA-2		SAFRA 5 NJOOM	2:00 PM	NAAM SHABANA -Hindi	11:15 PM
SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE	1:00 PM	SAFRA 5 NJOOM	4:00 PM		
SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE	3:00 PM	SAFRA 5 NJOOM	6:00 PM	AL-KOUT.1	
SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE	5:00 PM	SAFRA 5 NJOOM	8:00 PM	SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE	12:00 PM
SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE	7:00 PM	SAFRA 5 NJOOM	10:00 PM	SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE	2:00 PM
SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE	9:00 PM	SAFRA 5 NJOOM	12:05 AM	SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE	4:00 PM
KONG: SKULL ISLAND	11:00 PM			SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE	6:00 PM
		MARINA-1		SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE	8:00 PM
SHARQIA-3		COLLIDE	1:15 PM	GET OUT	10:00 PM
GET OUT	12:30 PM	KONG: SKULL ISLAND	3:15 PM	GET OUT	12:15 AM
GET OUT	2:45 PM	COLLIDE	5:45 PM		
NAAM SHABANA -Hindi	5:00 PM	KONG: SKULL ISLAND	7:45 PM	AL-KOUT.2	
COLLIDE	7:45 PM	AKHER DEEK FE MASR -Arabic	10:15 PM	AKHER DEEK FE MASR -Arabic	11:45 AM
GET OUT	9:45 PM	COLLIDE	12:30 AM	KONG: SKULL ISLAND	2:15 PM
GET OUT	12:05 AM			AKHER DEEK FE MASR -Arabic	4:45 PM
		MARINA-2		KONG: SKULL ISLAND	7:00 PM
MUHALAB-1		GET OUT	12:45 PM	AKHER DEEK FE MASR -Arabic	9:30 PM
GET OUT	12:15 PM	GET OUT	3:00 PM	COLLIDE	11:45 PM
KONG: SKULL ISLAND	2:30 PM	GET OUT	5:15 PM		
GET OUT	5:00 PM	GET OUT	7:30 PM	AL-KOUT.3	
NAAM SHABANA -Hindi	7:15 PM	GET OUT	9:45 PM	SAFRA 5 NJOOM	12:30 PM
GET OUT	10:15 PM	GET OUT	12:05 AM	SAFRA 5 NJOOM	2:30 PM
GET OUT	12:30 AM			SAFRA 5 NJOOM	4:30 PM
		MARINA-3		SAFRA 5 NJOOM	6:30 PM
MUHALAB-2		SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE	12:00 PM	SAFRA 5 NJOOM	8:30 PM
SLEEPLESS	11:30 AM	SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE	2:00 PM	SAFRA 5 NJOOM	10:30 PM
NAAM SHABANA -Hindi	1:30 PM	SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE	4:00 PM	SAFRA 5 NJOOM	12:30 AM
GURU -Telugu	1:30 PM	SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE	6:00 PM		
NAAM SHABANA -Hindi	4:30 PM	Special Show "SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE"	6:00 PM	AL-KOUT.4	
GURU -Telugu	4:30 PM	SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE	8:00 PM	DAYLIGHT'S END	12:45 PM
KONG: SKULL ISLAND	7:30 PM	SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE	10:00 PM	DAYLIGHT'S END	3:00 PM
GURU -Telugu	7:30 PM	LIFE	12:05 AM	GET OUT	5:15 PM
KONG: SKULL ISLAND	10:30 PM			GET OUT	7:30 PM
SLEEPLESS	1:00 AM	AVENUES-1		DAYLIGHT'S END	9:45 PM
		SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE- Arabic	1:15 PM	DAYLIGHT'S END	12:05 AM
MUHALAB-3		SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE- Arabic	3:15 PM		
SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE	12:00 PM	SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE- Arabic	5:15 PM	BAIRAQ-1	
SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE	2:00 PM	COLLIDE	7:15 PM	SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE	1:00 PM
SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE	4:00 PM	COLLIDE	9:15 PM	SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE -3D	3:00 PM
SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE	6:00 PM	COLLIDE	11:15 PM	SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE	5:00 PM
SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE	8:00 PM	COLLIDE	1:15 AM	SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE -3D	7:00 PM
COLLIDE	10:00 PM			SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE	9:00 PM
COLLIDE	12:05 AM	AVENUES-2		SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE	11:00 PM
		KONG: SKULL ISLAND -3D-4DX	12:15 PM		
FANAR-1		KONG: SKULL ISLAND -3D-4DX	2:45 PM	BAIRAQ-2	
GET OUT	1:00 PM	POWER RANGERS-2D-4DX	5:15 PM	SAFRA 5 NJOOM	11:30 AM
GET OUT	3:15 PM	KONG: SKULL ISLAND -3D-4DX	7:45 PM	SAFRA 5 NJOOM	1:30 PM
LIFE	5:45 PM	KONG: SKULL ISLAND -3D-4DX	10:15 PM	SAFRA 5 NJOOM	3:30 PM
GET OUT	8:00 PM	KONG: SKULL ISLAND -3D-4DX	12:45 AM	KONG: SKULL ISLAND	5:30 PM
GET OUT	10:15 PM			SAFRA 5 NJOOM	8:00 PM
GET OUT	12:30 AM	AVENUES-3		SAFRA 5 NJOOM	10:00 PM
		SAFRA 5 NJOOM	12:15 PM	SAFRA 5 NJOOM	12:05 AM
FANAR-2		SAFRA 5 NJOOM	2:30 PM		
DAYLIGHT'S END	12:00 PM	SAFRA 5 NJOOM	4:45 PM	BAIRAQ-3	
KONG: SKULL ISLAND	2:15 PM	SAFRA 5 NJOOM	7:00 PM	SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE- Arabic	12:00 PM
POWER RANGERS	4:45 PM	SAFRA 5 NJOOM	9:15 PM	SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE- Arabic	2:00 PM
KONG: SKULL ISLAND	7:15 PM	SAFRA 5 NJOOM	11:30 PM	SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE- Arabic	4:00 PM
DAYLIGHT'S END	9:45 PM			AKHER DEEK FE MASR -Arabic	6:00 PM
DAYLIGHT'S END	12:05 AM	360°- 1		AKHER DEEK FE MASR -Arabic	8:45 PM
		GET OUT	12:30 PM	AKHER DEEK FE MASR -Arabic	11:15 PM
FANAR-3		GET OUT	2:45 PM		
NAAM SHABANA -Hindi	12:45 PM	GET OUT	5:00 PM	PLAZA	
NAAM SHABANA -Hindi	3:30 PM	GET OUT	7:15 PM	HONEY BEE2: CELEBRATIONS-Malayalam	3:45 PM
GURU -Telugu	3:30 PM	GET OUT	9:30 PM	DORA- Tamil	3:45 PM
FRINAAM SHABANA -Hindi	6:30 PM	GET OUT	11:45 PM	HONEY BEE2: CELEBRATIONS-Malayalam	6:45 PM
GURU -Telugu	6:30 PM			KAVAN -Tamil	9:30 PM
AKHER DEEK FE MASR -Arabic	9:30 PM	360°- 2		HONEY BEE2: CELEBRATIONS-Malayalam	9:30 PM
AKHER DEEK FE MASR -Arabic	11:45 PM	COLLIDE	11:45 AM		
		COLLIDE	2:15 PM	LAILA	
FANAR-4		COLLIDE	4:15 PM	SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE	4:15 PM
SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE	11:45 AM	COLLIDE	6:15 PM	SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE	6:15 PM
SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE	1:45 PM	COLLIDE	8:15 PM	AKHER DEEK FE MASR -Arabic	8:15 PM

SATURDAY, APRIL 1, 2017



DIAL 161 FOR AIRPORT INFORMATION

Arrival Flights on Saturday 1/4/2017

Airlines	Flt	Route	Time
KLM	413	Amsterdam/Dammam	00:25
JZR	267	Beirut	00:30
JZR	539	Cairo	00:40
THY	772	Istanbul	00:55
RJA	642	Amman	01:05
QTR	1086	Doha	01:15
SAI	441	Lahore	01:30
THY	764	Istanbul	01:50
DLH	635	Doha	01:55
MSC	511	Alexandria	02:00
PGT	858	Istanbul	02:00
ETH	620	Addis Ababa	02:05
GFA	211	Bahrain	02:30
UAE	853	Dubai	02:30
KAC	412	Bangkok	02:50
KAC	364	Colombo	06:05
KAC	384	Delhi	06:05
KAC	206	Islamabad	06:20
KAC	346	Ahmedabad	06:25
BAW	157	London	06:40
PAL	668	Manila/Dubai	07:00
FDB	5061	Dubai	07:15
KAC	204	Lahore	07:15
KAC	284	Dhaka	07:35
FDB	053	Dubai	07:50
KAC	302	Mumbai	08:20
UAE	855	Dubai	08:40
KAC	382	Delhi	08:45
ABY	125	Sharjah	09:05
ETD	301	Abu Dhabi	09:05
KAC	352	Kochi	09:10
QTR	1070	Doha	09:30
FDB	055	Dubai	09:40
SVA	512	Riyadh	10:00
AVV	653	Sohag	10:10
GFA	213	Bahrain	10:40
KAC	774	Riyadh	11:05
RBG	553	Alexandria	11:15
JZR	165	Dubai	11:30
FDK	801	Damascus	11:45
KAC	286	Dhaka	12:25
MSC	401	Alexandria	12:30
JZR	239	Amman	12:45
UAE	871	Dubai	12:50
MSR	610	Cairo	13:00
IAW	157	Al Najaf	13:25
JZR	779	Jeddah	13:35
KAC	564	Amman	13:40
KAC	788	Jeddah	13:45
KNE	231	Riyadh	13:55
KAC	672	Dubai	14:00
QTR	1078	Doha	14:10
FDB	059	Dubai	14:20
KAC	692	Muscat	14:30
GFA	221	Bahrain	14:40
KAC	542	Cairo	14:45
KNE	529	Jeddah	14:55
KAC	618	Doha	15:00
KNE	683	Madinah	15:05
ETD	303	Abu Dhabi	15:15
OMA	645	Muscat	15:35
UAE	857	Dubai	15:45
ABY	127	Sharjah	15:50
MSR	575	Sharm el-Sheikh	15:50
KAC	154	Istanbul	15:55
SAW	705	Damascus	16:00
SVA	504	Madinah	16:00
KNE	531	Jeddah	16:05
JZR	535	Cairo	16:10
QTR	1072	Doha	16:10
JZR	787	Riyadh	16:25
FDB	051	Dubai	16:25
KAC	662	Abu Dhabi	16:35
RJA	640	Amman	16:55
KAC	118	New York	17:00
SVA	510	Riyadh	17:15
GFA	215	Bahrain	17:30
JZR	777	Jeddah	17:45
JZR	325	Al Najaf	17:50
NIA	251	Alexandria	17:55
SVA	500	Jeddah	18:00
UAE	875	Dubai	18:00
FDB	063	Dubai	18:10
JZR	177	Dubai	18:20
MSR	620	Cairo	18:30
IRA	669	Mashhad	18:55
KAC	512	Mashhad	19:20
ABY	123	Sharjah	19:25
GFA	217	Bahrain	19:30

KAC	502	Beirut	19:30
KAC	674	Dubai	19:45
FDB	057	Dubai	19:50
KAC	104	London	19:50
KNE	381	Taif	19:55
KAC	166	Rome	19:55
MSR	618	Alexandria	20:05
OMA	647	Muscat	20:10
JZR	189	Dubai	20:15
QTR	1088	Doha	20:35
KAC	562	Amman	20:40
DLH	634	Frankfurt	20:45
FDB	5053	Dubai	20:50
KAC	616	Bahrain	20:50
KAC	786	Jeddah	21:15
ETD	307	Abu Dhabi	21:20
MEA	402	Beirut	21:20
ALK	229	Colombo	21:25
UAE	859	Dubai	21:40
GFA	219	Bahrain	21:45
KAC	676	Dubai	21:45
QTR	1082	Doha	22:00
KAC	174	Munich	22:00
JZR	125	Bahrain	22:05
KLM	415	Amsterdam	22:10
NIA	151	Cairo	22:10
ETD	309	Abu Dhabi	22:15
FDB	8053	Dubai	22:15
AIC	987	Chennai/Hyderabad	22:25
KNE	533	Jeddah	22:45
JZR	241	Amman	22:45
KAC	1544	Cairo	22:55
KAC	164	Paris	22:55
JAI	574	Mumbai	23:00
JZR	185	Dubai	23:15

Departure Flights on Saturday 1/4/2017

Airlines	Flt	Route	Time
AIC	976	Goa/Chennai	00:05
JAI	573	Mumbai	00:30
PIA	240	Sialkot	00:40
FDB	072	Dubai	00:40
BBC	044	Dhaka	01:30
KLM	413	Amsterdam	01:50
KAC	417	Manila	02:00
THY	773	Istanbul	02:25
SAI	442	Lahore	02:30
DLH	635	Frankfurt	02:55
MSC	512	Alexandria	03:05
ETH	621	Addis Ababa	03:05
PGT	859	Istanbul	03:35
KAC	103	London	03:40
UAE	854	Dubai	03:45
KKK	6505	Istanbul	03:55
OMA	644	Muscat	03:55
THY	765	Istanbul	04:00
MSR	613	Cairo	04:10
ETD	306	Abu Dhabi	04:10
QTR	1077	Doha	04:40
QTR	1087	Doha	05:50
FDB	070	Dubai	06:30
CLX	853	Hong Kong	06:50
THY	771	Istanbul	06:50
KAC	153	Istanbul	06:50
KAC	165	Rome	06:55
JZR	164	Dubai	06:55
RJA	643	Amman	07:05
JZR	238	Amman	07:10
GFA	212	Bahrain	07:15
KAC	541	Cairo	07:15
KAC	163	Paris	07:25
KAC	773	Riyadh	07:30
KAC	787	Jeddah	07:45
FDB	5062	Dubai	07:55
JZR	778	Jeddah	07:55
KAC	563	Amman	08:00
BAW	156	London	08:40
KAC	173	Munich	08:50
FDB	054	Dubai	08:55
KAC	691	Muscat	09:00
KAC	117	New York	09:00
KAC	671	Dubai	09:15
JZR	534	Cairo	09:15
KAC	101	London	09:35
ABY	126	Sharjah	09:45
UAE	856	Dubai	09:55
ETD	302	Abu Dhabi	10:10
KAC	411	Bangkok	10:30
FDB	056	Dubai	10:35
QTR	1071	Doha	10:40
SVA	513	Riyadh	11:00

AVV	654	Asyut	11:10
KAC	617	Doha	11:10
GFA	214	Bahrain	11:25
RBG	554	Alexandria	11:55
KAC	501	Beirut	11:55
VIZ	203	Baghdad	12:00
KAC	661	Abu Dhabi	12:05
JZR	776	Jeddah	12:05
FDK	802	Damascus	12:45
JZR	786	Riyadh	13:10
KAC	511	Mashhad	13:15
MSC	402	Alexandria	13:30
JZR	176	Dubai	13:45
MSR	611	Cairo	14:00
UAE	872	Dubai	14:15
IAW	158	Al Najaf	14:25
JZR	324	Al Najaf	14:25
KNE	382	Taif	14:50
KAC	673	Dubai	15:00
KAC	561	Amman	15:00
FDB	060	Dubai	15:10
KAC	785	Jeddah	15:15
PAL	669	Dubai/Manila	15:20
GFA	222	Bahrain	15:25
QTR	1079	Doha	15:40
JZR	188	Dubai	15:40
KNE	530	Jeddah	15:55
KAC	1543	Cairo	15:55
KNE	684	Madinah	16:00
ETD	304	Abu Dhabi	16:20
KAC	357	Kochi	16:20
ABY	128	Sharjah	16:30
OMA	646	Muscat	16:35
MSR	576	Sharm el-Sheikh	16:50
SAW	706	Damascus	16:55
KNE	532	Jeddah	16:55
SVA	505	Madinah	17:00
KAC	675	Dubai	17:00
JZR	266	Beirut	17:05
JZR	240	Amman	17:15
FDB	052	Dubai	17:25
KAC	615	Bahrain	17:35
QTR	1073	Doha	17:40
UAE	858	Dubai	17:45
JZR	538	Cairo	17:45
RJA	641	Amman	17:55
SVA	511	Riyadh	18:15
KAC	353	BLR	18:15
GFA	216	Bahrain	18:20
KAC	283	Dhaka	18:30
JZR	184	Dubai	18:40
NIA	252	Alexandria	18:55
JZR	554	Alexandria	18:55
FDB	064	Dubai	19:05
JZR	124	Bahrain	19:15
UAE	876	Dubai	19:30
SVA	501	Jeddah	19:30
MSR	621	Cairo	19:30
IRA	666	Esfahan	19:55
ABY	124	Sharjah	20:05
GFA	218	Bahrain	20:15
KAC	383	Delhi	20:30
FDB	058	Dubai	20:35
KAC	361	Colombo	20:35
KAC	775	Riyadh	20:45
KNE	232	Riyadh	20:55
MSR	607	Luxor	21:05
OMA	648	Muscat	21:10
KAC	205	Islamabad	21:25
KAC	345	Ahmedabad	21:30
QTR	1089	Doha	21:35
DLH	634	Doha	21:35
KAC	741	Dammam	21:45
DHX	171	Bahrain	21:50
FDB	5054	Dubai	21:50
KAC	351	Kochi	22:00
ETD	308	Abu Dhabi	22:15
MEA	403	Beirut	22:20
ALK	230	Colombo	22:25
GFA	220	Bahrain	22:30
KAC	301	Mumbai	22:45
KAC	381	Delhi	22:45
UAE	860	Dubai	22:55
ETD	310	Abu Dhabi	23:05
NIA	152	Cairo	23:10
FDB	8054	Dubai	23:15
QTR	1083	Doha	23:20
KLM	415	Dammam/Amsterdam	23:20
KNE	534	Jeddah	23:35

WORDSEARCH PUZZLE

Spring

Find and circle all of the words that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell a message about Spring.

T L E M W O N S S S A R G L A
 G C Y C L A M E N S A L I L P
 G N G R O W T H R L L L L R S
 O Y I I D L S A R A I E S N N
 L A L N K A I E B E R R O H E
 F M L O A N F E S G M I P W W
 E N A E E E S F I U L R R A L
 I O B Q R A L E O E C S A B E
 R S T U B E S C D D F O S W A
 I A F I G R N N G L I N R H V
 S E O N N R A E O N I L C C E
 E S S O I D E W W B I R S B S
 S I N X R G E E O A A R M E G
 A Y F L P R O R N M L W P E O
 E T E W S S P I L U T R S S R
 R E T S A E P L A N T I N G F

- | | | |
|------------|------------|-----------------|
| ALLERGIES | FROGS | RAIN |
| APRIL | GOLF | RENEWAL |
| BASEBALL | GRASS | ROBINS |
| BEEES | GREEN | SEASON |
| CROCUSES | GROWTH | SNOWMELT |
| CYCLAMENS | IRISES | SOFTBALL |
| DAFFODILS | LILIES | SPRING BREAK |
| DANDELIONS | MARCH | SPRING CLEANING |
| EASTER | MAY | TULIPS |
| EQUINOX | NEW LEAVES | WARMER |
| FLOWERS | PLANTING | WET |

Yesterday's Solution

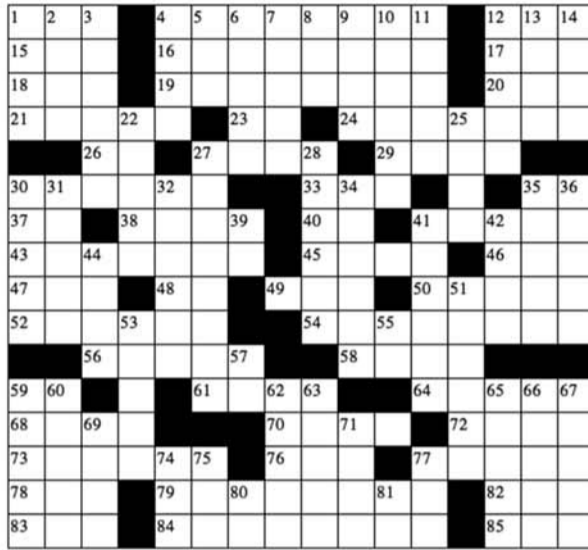
Sports

L W S E S S O R C A L O I F N N E
 F L R U I L U S L L L L O N B E V
 L E A N R N L L R L B O W L I N G
 O B N B N F A A A A T P Q H L S N
 G E A I T B I B B B U Y I S L K I
 T N D D F Y N A T R B T A I A H
 L G E N M E O L G E E G E U A T S
 L T A K L I L S H K C U U Q R I I
 A H A L C G N C N S C R Q S D N F
 B D O Q N I R T U A O I O C S G C
 E V T I D A R T O B B E R R A S Y
 S N X A F E N C I N G E C V E R C
 A O R G N I D R A O B E T A K S L
 B T W R E S T L I N G N I K S I
 S R W I A L A I A J R E C C O S N
 H O C K E Y S W I M M I N G I N G

- | | | | |
|------------|----------|---------------|------------|
| ARCHERY | CROQUET | JAI ALAI | SOCCER |
| BADMINTON | CYCLING | LACROSSE | SOFTBALL |
| BASEBALL | DARTS | POLO | SQUASH |
| BASKETBALL | FENCING | RACQUETBALL | SURFING |
| BILLIARDS | FISHING | RUGBY | SWIMMING |
| BOCCE | FOOTBALL | RUNNING | TENNIS |
| BOWLING | GOLF | SKATEBOARDING | VOLLEYBALL |
| BOXING | HANDBALL | SKATING | WRESTLING |
| CRICKET | HOCKEY | SKIING | |

The hidden sentence is: WINNERS NEVER QUIT AND QUITTERS NEVER WIN

CROSSWORD 1565



ACROSS

- A hormone produced by the anterior pituitary gland.
- A refuge from attack.
- A group of African language in the Niger-Congo group spoken from the Ivory Coast east to Nigeria.
- Having a toe or toes of a specified kind.
- Not used in all classifications.
- The fatty flesh of eel.
- American prizefighter who won the world heavyweight championship three times (born in 1942).
- Appear again.
- A flexible container with a single opening.
- (British) A form of football played with an oval ball.
- A polyvalent metallic element that resembles chromium and tungsten in its properties.
- Waterfall in Canada is the Horseshoe Falls.
- A trivalent metallic element of the rare earth group.
- Someone who works (or provides workers) during a strike.
- Respiratory disorder characterized by wheezing.
- (informal) Of the highest quality.
- A gonadotropic hormone that is secreted by the anterior pituitary.
- (nontechnical usage) A tiny piece of anything.
- A soft silvery metallic element of the alkali earth group.
- Showing or characterized by broad-mindedness.
- Evergreen trees and shrubs having oily one-seeded fruits.
- Characteristic of a mob.
- (Irish) Mother of the ancient Irish gods.
- A trivalent metallic element of the rare earth group.
- An early form of modern jazz (originating around 1940).
- The basic unit of money in Nigeria.
- Ground snakes.
- Flesh of very important usually small (to 18 in) fatty Atlantic fish.
- An artistic form of nonverbal communication.
- (Old Testament) Cain and Abel were the first children of Adam and Eve born after the Fall of Man.
- An intensely radioactive metallic element that occurs in minute amounts in uranium ores.
- Pulled or drawn tight.
- Yellow-fever mosquitos.
- A woman hired to suckle a child of someone else.
- The part of an organism that connects the head to the rest of the body.
- A republic in the Middle East in western Asia.
- Spread or daub over.
- The 26th letter of the Roman alphabet.
- A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.
- A nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (trade name Clinoril).
- Come into the possession of something concrete or abstract.
- A slight amount or degree of difference.
- Oldest known reptiles.
- An inflammatory disease of connective tissue with variable features including fever and weakness and fatigability and joint pains and skin lesions on the face or neck or arms.

DOWN

- Indicating the most important performer or role.
- An aromatic balsam.
- The vertical dimension of extension.
- Moving quickly and lightly.
- A unit of surface area equal to 100 square meters.
- Relating to or containing gas bubbles.
- A city in southern Finland.
- (informal) Informed about the latest trends.
- A sign of something about to happen.
- act between parties with a view to reconciling differences.
- English theoretical physicist who applied relativity theory to quantum mechanics and predicted the existence of antimatter and the positron (1902-1984).
- Cubes of meat marinated and cooked on a skewer usually with vegetables.
- Impairment resulting from long use.
- Primitive chlorophyll-containing mainly aquatic eukaryotic organisms lacking true stems and roots and leaves.
- German mystic and theosophist who founded modern theosophy.
- Mentally or physically infirm with age.
- Clouding of the natural lens of the eye.
- Small tree of dry open parts of southern Africa having erect angled branches suggesting candelabra.
- A Dardic language spoken in northern Kashmir.
- Of or related to or made of moreen.
- A high-crowned black cap (usually made of felt or sheepskin) worn by men in Turkey and Iran and the Caucasus.
- Love intensely.
- A clique that seeks power usually through intrigue.
- Angular distance above the horizon (especially of a celestial object).
- Giant shipworms.
- An independent ruler or chieftain (especially in Africa or Arabia).
- With no effort to conceal.
- An epic in Latin by Virgil.
- Russian country house.
- A white metallic element that burns with a brilliant light.
- (Akkadian) God of wisdom.
- Naked freshwater or marine or parasitic protozoa that form temporary pseudopods for feeding and locomotion.
- Open the zipper of.
- The time of life between the ages of 12 and 20.
- Sediment that has settled at the bottom of a liquid.
- An upright tripod for displaying something (usually an artist's canvas).
- Sports equipment that is worn on the feet to enable the wearer to glide along on wheels and to be propelled by the alternate actions of the legs.
- (Babylonian) God of storms and wind.
- The basic unit of money in Ghana.
- North American republic containing 50 states - 48 conterminous states in North America plus Alaska in northwest North America and the Hawaiian Islands in the Pacific Ocean.
- Small rounded bread either plain or sweet.
- South American wood sorrel cultivated for its edible tubers.
- A white soft metallic element that tarnishes readily.
- A public promotion of some product or service.

Yesterday's Solution

P A T H P A C K A G E S P A
 E R I E A D L U M I A H E L
 K E B A B D B E A T R I C E
 A C E R B A R R E N E A S E
 N A R T H E X I R T I S H
 E A R C L H D P
 S A R D I N E K I C K C E R
 A B A L A M A C A K U V I
 B I B R B C A M O E B I C
 A L I D A D E O S L I C E
 H A D A L D A G C A L C E D
 P A C E M A K O
 Y A C H T I N G R A G B A G
 A G E N E A I D E D G A B A
 M A R I A G N O S I A L E E
 A R E A M I A S M A L I D A

Daily SuDoku

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		3			6			9
	8				7	6	1	
	1		6		5	7		
		6	7		4		3	
	4	8	9					7
1			2			5		
2					3	4		

Yesterday's Solution

5	7	3	4	8	6	1	9	2
1	8	4	9	2	3	7	5	6
6	2	9	7	5	1	4	8	3
8	4	1	6	9	2	5	3	7
7	9	2	5	3	4	6	1	8
3	6	5	8	1	7	2	4	9
2	3	7	1	4	8	9	6	5
4	5	6	3	7	9	8	2	1
9	1	8	2	6	5	3	7	4

MLB'S NEW TREND: SAY 'NO' TO GROUND BALLS

NEW YORK: Josh Donaldson and Reggie Jackson stood off to the third base side of the batting cage, a pair of former American League MVPs discussing their craft in spring training. When the Blue Jays star hopped in to take his swings, Mr. October pulled out his phone to shoot video, a visual aid for his job as a special adviser to the Yankees. "Josh's swing, it's something new and different," the 70-year-old Jackson said. "I wanted him to interpret it for me." Donaldson is an early adopter to a growing big league trend — hitters fixated on producing fly balls. Or, as Donaldson put it recently on Twitter: "Just say NO.... to ground balls."

Donaldson put his career on the upswing by, well, swinging up, and he's not alone. Toronto teammate Jose Bautista achieved stardom by adding some loft, and Chicago Cubs slugger Kris Bryant has prioritized hitting the ball in the air his entire career. Detroit's JD Martinez and the Dodgers' Justin Turner have made millions since deciding to shoot for the sky. It doesn't take an aerospace degree to see why. On ground balls in 2016, big league hitters had a .239 average and .258 slugging percentage. On line drives and fly balls combined, they hit .411 with a .785 slugging percentage. For those that want to dig deeper, there's never been more to explore. Over the past two seasons, MLB.com posted data provided by Statcast, a tracking system that records the distance, speed and trajectory of batted balls. The numbers make one thing clear — it's good to hit the ball hard, but it's better to hit it hard and high. "I've done a lot of research," Donaldson said. "I'm confident in what I do and I believe in it."

'Swing down'

Before the 2013 season, Donaldson re-engineered his swing with the help of Bobby Tewksbary, a hitting instructor whose playing career topped out in the independent Can-Am Association. The 33-year-old works out of a facility in Nashua, New Hampshire, and has helped a number of major leaguers, including Chris Colabello, AJ Pollock and Matt Joyce. Tewksbary is on a mission to make hitters better by debunking the axiom against swinging up. He felt his own career was hindered by the hitting instruction he got as a young player — he was always told to "swing down" on the ball.

"Johnny Little League coach says to swing down, get on top, and hitters will literally swing down," he said. Tewksbary thinks the terminology does more harm than good — and he's not nearly the most famous dissenter of that baseball adage. In his book *The Science of Hitting*, Ted Williams bemoaned that hitters "always heard that the ideal swing is level or 'down.'" The Hall of Famer advocated a "slight upswing" because it "puts the bat flush in line with the path of the ball for a longer period." That is, if the ball is traveling down from the pitcher's hand to the catcher's glove, the best chance at solid contact is to swing the bat on the same plane — up toward the pitcher's release point.

"For years and years, people have disagreed with the greatest hitter of all-time," Tewksbary said. He's studied video of Williams, Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig and Joe DiMaggio, and Albert Pujols was "very influential" in helping him develop his hitting principles. None of those hitters swung like they were hunting for well-placed ground balls. Which isn't to say the answer is a full-blown upper cut. The adjustment for players like Donaldson is more subtle than just selling out for air balls. "I'm going up there to drive the ball, which means get the ball in the air," said hulking Phillies catcher Cameron Rupp, who hit 16 homers in 105 games last season. "I want to be on plane with the ball as early as I can and stay through it as long as I can," he added. "That creates backspin. That creates the ball getting in the air. That's kind of what I'm looking to do."

'Lift and launch'

For generations, hitters have been instructed to drive the knob of the bat toward the ball. Instead, Donaldson keeps his hands close to his back shoulder longer, letting his barrel first tip slightly toward the catcher. That allows him to get the bat on plane with the pitch sooner and swing through the ball on a slight upward trajectory. The science can get technical, and that's a concern when taking information from the lab to the diamond. "To start to get into angles and lift and launch, I mean, we've got some smart guys," Boston manager John Farrell said, "but they might not be going to Harvard." — AP



CHICAGO: In this Aug 31, 2016, file photo, Chicago Cubs' Kris Bryant follows through on a solo home run during the first inning of a baseball game against the Pittsburgh Pirates. —AP

INDIANS TRY TO FOLLOW CUBS IN ENDING THEIR TITLE CURSE

WASHINGTON: There's still a bit of hangover from last year's epic World Series as the 2017 Major League Baseball campaign opens Sunday with the champion Chicago Cubs back on the field. The seemingly cursed Cubs won their first crown since 1908, ending the longest title drought in American sports, by edging the Cleveland Indians 4-3 in the best-of-seven championship final.

The Cubs, who figure to contend again this year, open at St. Louis while the San Francisco Giants visit Arizona and the New York Yankees meet Tampa Bay in Sunday's other games. There were back-to-back Cubs titles in 1907 and 1908, but no National League club in 40 years has won back-to-back World Series crowns, a feat last managed by the New York Yankees from 1998-2000.

Yet history might give a clue for this year. The last team to end an epic "curse" was the Boston Red Sox, who snapped an 85-year drought in 2004. The next year, the Chicago White Sox ended an 87-year drought. So could there be another curse foiled this year? The Indians certainly hope so. The Tribe fell one win short of ending their drought in falling to Chicago, instead seeing it stretch to 68 years without a World Series crown, the longest active run of title frustration. They also lost the World Series in 1954, 1995 and 1997.

Cleveland kept the core of the squad that came within one game of the title and added slugger Edwin Encarnacion. The 34-year-old Dominican slugger, who drove in an American League-lead-

ing 127 runs last year for Toronto, signed a three-year deal in January for \$60 million. The Indians also welcome back outfielder Michael Bradley, out for most of 2016 after shoulder surgery, but now second baseman Jason Kipnis has a shoulder injury.

'It's a fine line'

Cleveland's starting pitchers remain the class of the AL with Corey Kluber, Carlos Carrasco, Danny Salazar, Trevor Bauer and Josh Tomlin all winning at least 11 games last year. The Tribe led the AL in strikeouts and were second with a 3.84 earned-run average and have such relievers as Andrew Miller, Most Valuable Player of last year's AL Championship Series, and closer Cody Allen.

"Our goal this year is to pitch them a lot without pitching them too much," Indians manager Terry Francona said. "It's a fine line." Three AL West division favorites have never won the World Series, the Texas Rangers after 56 seasons, the Houston Astros after 55 and Seattle after 40. "The division is going to be very competitive—every club has a case to be improved from last year," Rangers general manager Jon Daniels said.

The Rangers, who were within one strike of winning the 2011 World Series before falling, feature strong pitching with Japan's Yu Darvish, veteran Cole Hamels and left-hander Martin Perez. Boston lost slugger David Ortiz to retirement but infielders Dustin Pedroia and Xander Bogaerts give the Red Sox a chance to remain the AL's most prolific

scoring squad. But the Yankees, with Japanese pitcher Masahiro Tanaka, and Toronto, a solid batting lineup despite losing Encarnacion to Cleveland, could threaten the Red Sox.

Cubs, Dodgers eye NL title

In the National League, the Cubs will challenge again behind star right-handed pitchers Jake Arrieta and Kyle Hendricks and lefty Jon Lester plus a tough defense that backstopped a major-league best 103 wins and clutch hitting from NL Most Valuable Player Kris Bryant at third base and World Series Most Valuable Player Ben Zobrist at second base.

"It's hard. It's a gauntlet," Cubs manager Joe Maddon said of the quest to repeat. "There are so many things that can play a role." Injuries will be one factor. New talent will be another. After losing outfielder Dexter Fowler to St. Louis and closer Aroldis Chapman to the Yankees, the Cubs have added outfielder Jon Jay from San Diego and closer Wade Davis in a trade with Kansas City.

The Washington Nationals and New York Mets figure to fight for the NL East crown while the NL West favorites, and the Cubs biggest threat, looks to be the Los Angeles Dodgers. Ace left-handed pitcher Clayton Kershaw powers a Dodgers lineup that includes Japanese ace right-hander Kenta Maeda, a 16-game winner last season in his first North American campaign after eight seasons with the Hiroshima Toyo Carp, and relief ace Kenley Jansen. —AFP



BOSTON: Adam Cracknell #27 of the Dallas Stars takes a shot against Tuukka Rask #40 of the Boston Bruins during the second period at TD Garden. — AFP

RASK MAKES 27 SAVES AS BRUINS BEAT DALLAS 2-0

BOSTON: Tuukka Rask made 27 saves for his seventh shutout of the season and the Boston Bruins beat the Dallas Stars 2-0 on Thursday night. Boston won its third straight and stayed three points ahead of Tampa Bay for the second wild card in the Eastern Conference with one game in hand. Rask has won two straight since struggling for a stretch. He had allowed 18 goals during a four-game losing streak. Brad Marchand gave Boston a 1-0 lead when he jammed a shot past goalie Antti Niemi at 15:14 of the first period. Niemi had 22 saves and is winless in his last five appearances. Torey Krug added an insurance goal early in the second when he converted a perfect feed from David Pastrnak.

LIGHTNING 5, RED WINGS 3

Alex Killorn and Jonathan Drouin scored power-play goals 1:51 apart late in the second period of Tampa Bay's victory over Detroit. JT Brown, Andrej Sustr and Yann Gourde also scored for the Lightning. Andrei Vasilevskiy made 31 saves. Tampa Bay, which played without 38-goal scorer Nikita Kucherov due to illness, swept the five-game series with the Red Wings. Detroit got goals from Frans Nielsen, Danny DeKeyser and Mike Green. Petr Mrazek stopped 26 shots.

MAPLE LEAFS 3, PREDATORS 1

James van Riemsdyk and Auston Matthews each scored a power-play goal, and Frederik Andersen made 29 saves to help Toronto defeat Nashville. Connor Brown added an empty-net goal as the Maple Leafs started a three-game road trip by sweeping the season series with Nashville. They also won their second straight and fifth in six games to remain in third place in the Atlantic Division, one point ahead of Boston. Filip Forsberg scored his 30th of the season for Nashville. The Predators have lost two straight after a four-game winning streak. Nashville came in three points shy of clinching its third straight playoff berth under Peter Laviolette, who coached his 1,000th NHL game.

FLYERS 6, ISLANDERS 3

Wayne Simmonds got his 30th goal of the season as Philadelphia scored five times in a fight-filled first period on the way to a win over fading New York. Dale Weise, Radko Gudas, Jordan Weal, Sean Couturier and Valtteri Filppula also

scored for the Flyers, who won their third straight. Philadelphia is six points out of a playoff spot with five games remaining and needs to jump four teams. Cal Clutterbuck, Jason Chimera and Andrew Ladd had the goals for the Islanders, who lost their third in a row and seventh in the last 10 games. They fell into a tie with the Flyers at 82 points. New York has six games remaining.

OILERS 3, SHARKS 2

Patrick Maroon scored twice and Edmonton took over sole possession of second place in the Pacific Division by beating San Jose. Connor McDavid had a goal and Cam Talbot made 38 saves for the streaking Oilers, who have won four in a row and eight of nine to move within one point of first-place Anaheim. Jannik Hansen and Joe Pavelski scored for the struggling Sharks, who lost for the seventh time in eight games and dropped to third place in the Pacific.

HURRICANES 2, BLUE JACKETS 1, OT

Noah Hanifin scored 2:16 into overtime and Carolina rallied to beat Columbus. Jeff Skinner scored the tying goal with 4:20 left in regulation before setting up the winner for the surging Hurricanes. They have established a club record by earning at least one point in 13 straight games while climbing from last place in the Eastern Conference to the fringe of the playoff race. Cam Ward made 23 saves for the Hurricanes, four points behind Boston with six games remaining in the chase for the final postseason spot in the East. Tampa Bay is a point in front of Carolina. Jack Johnson scored and backup goalie Joonas Korpi made 29 saves for the Blue Jackets.

CANADIENS 6, PANTHERS 2

Paul Byron scored twice, Brendan Gallagher had a goal and three assists, and Montreal topped Florida to clinch a playoff spot. Tomas Plekanec, Max Pacioretty and Phillip Danault also scored for the Canadiens. Carey Price made 29 saves for his 36th win. The Canadiens will play in the post-season for the fourth time in the past five years, and eighth time in the last decade. Reilly Smith and Michael Matheson scored for the Panthers. Reto Berra, replacing injured goalies James Reimer (upper body) and Roberto Luongo (lower body), stopped 27 shots. — AP

GLOBAL TALENT SHINES IN US COLLEGE FINAL FOUR

WASHINGTON: International players have played key roles in helping three teams reach today's semi-finals of the US national college basketball tournament and could prove decisive in deciding the "Final Four" champion. While five-time winner North Carolina (31-7) boasts an all-American lineup, semi-final foe Oregon (33-5) and last-four rivals South Carolina (26-10) and Gonzaga (36-1) all have five players from beyond US borders gathering at Glendale, Arizona.

"I've coached a lot of foreign kids. And I understand their journey. That's what my family went through," said South Carolina coach Frank Martin, the son of Cuban political exiles and first American-born member of his family. "I respect the journey that they're on. I respect the fact they come here to figure out a way to make a better life so they can do better to help their families. And they go through difficult moments."

Martin said his international team would have no problem with a traditional champion visit to the White House despite US President Donald Trump's recent immigration crackdown. "We live in the United States of America. I'm not visiting an individual's home," Martin said. "We're visiting the top building that represents the great country that has given every single one of us an opportunity. That's the way I'd look at it." Gonzaga, a small-school perennial contender making a Final Four debut, features Polish 7-foot-1 center Przemek Karnowski, who averages 12.2 points, 5.8 rebounds, 1.9 assists and 1.0 blocked shots a game.

'Huge upside' for Hachimura

Gonzaga reserve forward Rui Hachimura, a 19-year-old freshman, is thought to be the first Japanese native in the tournament. "I want to show the Japanese people they can play in America," Hachimura told Fox Sports. "It's good for us." Hachimura, whose father is from the African nation of Benin and whose mother is from Japan, averages 2.6 points and 1.4 rebounds and has impressed Bulldogs coach Mark Few.

"Rui's got a huge upside. He's got probably as high an upside as anybody in our program," Few said. "He has really been battling the language barrier. And now he's getting a little more comfortable with that. "And then he's had to adapt just to the intensity and kind of the toughness of the game. But he's going to be a very, very good player. He's going to take a big jump."

Polish 7-foot-1 (2.16m) starting center Przemek Karnowski averages 12.2 points, 5.8 rebounds, 1.9 assists and 1.0 blocked shots a game. Other Gonzaga reserves includes French freshman forward Killian Tillie, Canadian junior guard Dustin Triano and Danish freshman center Jacob Larsen, who suffered a season-ending knee injury in October.

South Carolina is powered by US playmaker Sindarius Thornwell's 21.6 points and 7.2 rebounds a game. But two starters in every Gamecocks contest are Canadian senior guard Duane Notice—who has 10.2 points, 2.6 rebounds, 2.3 assists and 1.0 steals a game—and Gabonese sophomore forward Chris Silva, who averages 10.1 points, 5.9 rebounds and 1.3 blocks.

"I couldn't be prouder of Chris," Martin said. "I've been harder on him than anyone on our team, because we need him to be real good for our team to be as good as it can be. But he doesn't run away from it. He loves it. He's phenomenal." South Carolina also has Estonian freshman forward Maik Kotsar, who averages 5.9 points and 4.8 rebounds, plus reserve forwards Khadim Gueye of Senegal and Ran Tut of Australia.

Englishman will be key Duck

Oregon has a trio of Canadian standouts in forward Dillon Brooks, with a team-high average of 16.3 points plus 3.1 rebounds and 2.8 assists a game; forward Chris Boucher, averaging 11.8 points and 6.1 rebounds, and starting guard Dylan Ennis, who averages 10.7 points, 4.4 rebounds and 3.1 assists and Israeli forward Roman Sorkin coming off the bench. But the Ducks' key against North Carolina could be 21-year-old England forward Kavell Bigby-Williams, who averages 3.1 points and 2.8 rebounds but who also has taken on a bigger role since center Chris Boucher was lost to torn knee ligaments three weeks ago. — AFP

SATURDAY, APRIL 1, 2017

PAKISTAN'S LATIF TO CONTEST CHARGES

KARACHI: Pakistan batsman Khalid Latif will contest spot-fixing charges against him, his lawyer said yesterday, in an ongoing scandal which has tainted Pakistani cricket and threatened years of work to clean up the country's image. The 31-year-old is one of five players under investigation in the case, which surfaced during the Pakistan Super League (PSL) held in February-March this year.

Latif appeared before a tribunal in Lahore yesterday. His lawyer Badar Alam told media outside that they would contest the charges "because no one can be convicted on presumptions". Spot-fixing, an illegal betting practice, has been rife in Pakistan cricket in recent years. Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) officials have vowed zero tolerance in

the current case, saying they have solid evidence.

Fast bowler Mohammad Irfan, 34, became the first culprit to be punished when he confessed Wednesday to the only charge against him, of "not reporting an offer of fixing". He was banned for one year, including six months suspended. Latif and Sharjeel Khan-both openers for Pakistan's Twenty20 team-were provisionally suspended and expelled from the PSL in Dubai on February 10 on charges of meeting a suspicious man linked to an international betting syndicate.

Sharjeel faces five charges on counts relating to fixing and failure to report it. Latif faces the same charges with an additional sixth charge of attempting to lure other players to fixing. The charges

against them could result in a life ban. Sharjeel appeared before the tribunal last Friday and is also likely to contest the charges. Two other former Pakistan openers, Nasir Jamshed and Shahzaib Hasan, were also suspended in the case.

Jamshed, who allegedly played the link between the players and bookies, was arrested along with an unnamed man in Britain in February, but both were released on bail until April. A two member PCB legal team will go to Britain to question Jamshed next week. Pakistan cricket has been rocked by fixing scandals over the past several years. Former captain Salim Malik and Aatur Rehman were banned for life after an investigation in 2000. — AFP

KOHLI MOVES FROM LONG TO THE SHORT OF CRICKET

NEW DELHI: Little more than a week after an acrimonious test series win over Australia, India captain Virat Kohli may have to share the locker room with some Australians at the Royal Challengers Bangalore. India's cricket schedule switches quickly from the longest format to the shortest, with the Twenty20 Indian Premier League starting Wednesday when RCB takes on the defending champion Sunrisers Hyderabad in a rematch of the 2016 tournament decider.

Kohli, who missed the series-clinching test against Australia in Dharamsala because of a shoulder injury, is captain of the RCB team in the 10th edition of the IPL and his availability will be key to the team. He swept the record books when he smashed 973 runs in 16 matches with fluent hundreds and seven half centuries in the last edition of the IPL, but his individual success didn't quite get his team across the last hurdle as it was beaten by eight runs in the final.

His T20 season may be slower getting started this year, with Kohli hinted that it may take him few weeks to get fully recover from the injury after a grueling test schedule that involved 13 matches across four series. The Challengers have plenty of firepower without him, including West Indies great Chris Gayle and South Africa captain AB de Villiers. The Challengers were unsuccessful in their bidding for Ben Stokes, but managed to contract England fast bowler Tymal Mills. None of the Australians in the Kohli's Challengers squad - Travis Head, Shane Watson and Billy Stanlake - were involved in the test series. But David Warner is captain of the Sunrisers, and his team includes fellow Australians Ben Cutting and Moises Henriques and New Zealand captain Kane Richardson.

Key component

Warner had a poor run in the test series, but when it comes to shortest format the diminutive left-handed opener can match it with the best. Another left-hander Yuvraj Singh, who recently played for India in some one-day internationals against England, is another key component in the Sunriser's armory along with fast bowler Bhubaneswar Kumar, who was the leading wicket-taker last year with 23.

The Sunrisers have expanded recruitment beyond the traditional cricket nations, too, by contracting 18-year-old Afghanistan leg-spinner Rashid Khan. "IPL is the biggest (T20) league in the world, much bigger than playing associate cricket," Rashid said. "It feels unreal that I will be sharing the dressing room with the players I have grown up watching on television." The opening matches continue Friday with Rising Pune against Mumbai Indians and Saturday with Gujarat Lions taking on Kolkata Knight Riders and Kings XI Punjab in action for the first time against Rising Pune.

Kolkata Knight Riders, owned by Bollywood celebrity Shahrukh Khan, spent around \$9 million in the offseason trying to build another winning combination by drafting in New Zealand fast bowler Trent Boult, England all-rounder Chris Woakes and West Indian Darren Bravo. KKR retained captain Gautam Gambhir, Sunil Narine and Shakib Al Hasan and is a contender for the title.

Another ex-champion, Mumbai Indians, will be banking on the experience of Lasith Malinga, Harbhajan Singh, Kieron Pollard and newly inducted Mitchell Johnson to have another shot at the title. They have also bought young West Indian power hitter Nicholas Pooran and Sri Lankan Asela Gunaratne. Delhi Daredevils have lost key player J.P. Dumminy, the South Africa allrounder, but have bolstered their pace bowling stocks with the addition of Kagiso Rabada and Pat Cummins. — AP



PORT OF SPAIN: West Indies' Chadwick Walton (top) collides with Pakistan's Ahmed Shehzad as he secures his wicket from a runout attempt during the second of four-T20I-match between West Indies and Pakistan at the Queen's Park Oval. — AFP

SHADAB SHINES AGAIN AS PAKISTAN DENY WINDIES

PORT OF SPAIN: Shadab Khan gave another match-winning bowling performance and Hasan Ali held his nerve for Pakistan to sneak a three-run victory over the West Indies in the second T20 International on Thursday. Set a relatively modest target of 133 to level the series following a six-wicket defeat in the opening match in Barbados, the hosts were restricted to 129 for eight to suffer their fifth consecutive T20 loss to the visitors.

Pakistan now hold an unbeatable 2-0 lead ahead of the final two matches at the weekend back at the Queen's Park Oval in Trinidad. In the wake of an impressive senior international debut at Kensington Oval, Shadab snared four for 14 with his mesmerising mixture of leg-breaks and googlies to stymie the West Indies quest. His most important strike came on the last delivery of his four-over allotment when he had Marlon Samuels caught at the wicket for a top score of 44.

Samuels' imperious strokeplay, reminiscent of his two match-winning performances in World T20 finals, looked to be taking the home side to the target before he was undone by the confident 19-year-old. "Getting Samuels was important for us to have a chance of winning," said Shadab after collecting his second straight Man of the Match award. "This pitch had more bounce and encouragement than in Barbados so I am really looking forward to the final two matches."

From that point the balance was tilting in favor of Pakistan although West Indies captain Carlos Brathwaite, who had earlier taken three wickets on a sultry afternoon, battled to keep his team on course in partnership with fellow all-rounder Jason Holder. But it came down to fast-medium bowler Ali retaining his focus and concentration in the final over after being smashed for boundaries by Sunil Narine off the first two deliveries.

Disappointed Brathwaite

West Indies needed just six more runs to complete the victory but the bowler's excellent accuracy denied both Narine and Holder, who could only manage a single off the last ball when a boundary was needed to tie the scores and force a super over. Put in to bat after Brathwaite won the toss, Pakistan struggled to gain any sort of batting momentum against the twin spin threat of Narine and Samuel Badree.

Narine claimed three for 22 and Badree two for 14. Pakistan were indebted to the ninth-wicket pair of Wahab Riaz and Shadab as they put on 36 quickfire runs off the final four overs to bring a measure of respectability to the total after they were put in to bat on a dry, turgid surface. They were in trouble from the very first over when Kamran Akmal was bowled by Badree without a run on the board. — AFP

BULLS COMPLETE 4-0 CAVS SWEEP

CHICAGO: LeBron James says the reigning NBA champion Cleveland Cavaliers are "in a bad spot" after losing their third consecutive game, falling 99-93 Thursday at Chicago. The Bulls completed a 4-0 regular-season sweep of Cleveland, boosting their chances of reaching the playoffs and dropping the Cavaliers (47-27) behind Boston (48-27) at the top of the Eastern Conference.

"We're in a bad spot right now," James said. "Not disappointed with the effort. Just in a bad spot. Got to try to figure it out... we've got some work to do and we don't have a lot of time." The Bulls (36-39) moved within one game of Miami and Indiana for the last two playoff spots in the Eastern Conference with seven games remaining over the next two weeks. "We need them all," Chicago star Jimmy Butler said. "That's what we talk about. We've got to have these."

Nikola Mirotic, a Montenegrin-born Spaniard, scored 28 points and grabbed 10 rebounds for Chicago. "I just want to finish strong at the end of the season and help us get into the playoffs," Mirotic said. Butler added 25 points for the Bulls, who used defensive effort to close the third quarter on a crucial 11-3 run. "We got back in transition," Butler said. "It always helps to make shots but we guarded. That's how we've got to play. We've got to rely on our defense." James sparked Cleveland with 26 points, 10 rebounds and eight assists while Kyrie Irving added 20 for the Cavaliers, who were without forwards Kyle Korver and Richard Jefferson due to sore left knees. James passed Shaquille O'Neal for seventh on the NBA's all-time scoring list, ending the game with 28,599 career points, three more than "Shaq."

TRAIL BLAZERS 117, ROCKETS 107

Damian Lillard scored 31 points to lead six double-figure scorers in Portland's 117-107 home victory over Houston. The Trail Blazers (37-38) won their fifth consecutive game and moved 1 1/2 games ahead of Denver in the eighth and final Western Conference playoff spot. "We did a great job of executing down the stretch," Lillard said. "We trusted each other. We kept the ball moving. We showed poise. We had confidence and we did what we needed to get the win."

James Harden, who led Houston with 30 points, sank a 3-pointer late in the first quarter to give the Rockets an NBA record 1,078th 3-pointer this season, breaking the old one-season mark set last season by Golden State. Marcus Morris scored 28 points and grabbed 13 rebounds as Detroit snapped a five-game losing streak with a 90-89 home victory over the NBA-worst Brooklyn Nets (16-59). "We barely got this one," Morris said. "To finally just get one, hopefully it can lead to more." At 35-41, the Pistons are 2 1/2 games behind Miami and Indiana in the playoff hunt. "Anything we can do to get a win at this point is good and make one more little push," said Ish Smith, who had 21 points, six rebounds and five assists.

TIMBERWOLVES 119, LAKERS 104

Ricky Rubio had a career-high 33 points, 10 assists and five rebounds and Karl-Anthony Towns scored 32 points to lead the Minnesota Timberwolves past the Los Angeles Lakers. Rubio shot 4 of 5 on 3-pointers and Andrew Wiggins scored 27 points for the Timberwolves (30-44), who have now won more games than they did last season. Minnesota had 30 assists and only 11 turnovers. Jordan Clarkson scored 18 points and D'Angelo Russell had 14 points and seven assists for the Lakers (21-54), who have lost 17 of their last 19 games. Brandon Ingram



CHICAGO: Cleveland Cavaliers guard Kyrie Irving, left, drives to the basket against Chicago Bulls guard Rajon Rondo during the first half of an NBA basketball game. — AP

missed his third straight game with patellar tendinitis in his right knee.

CLIPPERS 124, SUNS 118

Blake Griffin scored 31 points, Chris Paul added 29 points and 10 assists and the Los Angeles Clippers held on to hand the Phoenix Suns their 10th loss in a row. Devin Booker returned to the Suns' lineup and scored 33 while playing in front of his former college coach, Kentucky's John Calipari, and matched his season high with nine assists, but fouled out with 4:45 to play. The Clippers (46-31), coming off a home win over Washington on Wednesday night, pulled within a game of Utah (46-29) for the No. 4 playoff spot in the Western Conference. Booker, three games removed from his 70-point outburst in Boston, missed Tuesday's game in Atlanta with a sore right ankle. Rookie Tyler Ulis, who also played for Calipari, had 16 points and matched his career best with 12 assists. Marquese Chriss scored 20 for the Suns and Jamal Crawford had 19 for the Clippers.

PISTONS 90, NETS 89

Marcus Morris had 28 points and 13 rebounds, and Ish Smith hit the go-ahead 3-pointer late in the fourth quarter, helping the Detroit Pistons beat the Brooklyn Nets. Smith, who finished with 21 points, six rebounds and five assists, gave the Pistons an 87-86 lead with 30 seconds left. Brook Lopez missed a 3-

pointer on the Nets' ensuing possession, and Detroit sealed it at the free-throw line. Sean Kilpatrick scored 15 and Rondae Hollis-Jefferson and Jeremy Lin each had 14 points

for the Nets. Lopez added 11 points and nine rebounds. Detroit, the No 10 seed in the Eastern Conference, kept its dwindling playoff hopes alive. — Agencies

NBA results/standings

Portland 117, Houston 107; LA Clippers 124, Phoenix 118; Chicago 99, Cleveland 93; Minnesota 119, LA Lakers 104; Detroit 90, Brooklyn 89.

Eastern Conference				Western Conference				
Atlantic Division				Northwest Division				
	W	L	PCT	GB				
Boston	48	27	.640	-	Utah	46	29	.613
Toronto	45	30	.600	3	Oklahoma City	43	31	.581
Philadelphia	28	47	.373	20	Portland	37	38	.493
NY Knicks	28	47	.373	20	Denver	35	39	.473
Brooklyn	16	59	.213	32	Minnesota	30	44	.405
Central Division				Pacific Division				
Cleveland	47	27	.635	-	Golden State	61	14	.813
Milwaukee	39	36	.520	8.5	LA Clippers	46	31	.597
Indiana	37	38	.493		Sacramento	29	46	.387
Chicago	36	39	.480		Phoenix	22	54	.289
Detroit	35	41	.461	13	LA Lakers	21	54	.280
Southeast Division				Southwest Division				
Washington	46	29	.613	-	San Antonio	57	17	.770
Atlanta	39	36	.520	7	Houston	51	24	.680
Miami	37	38	.493	9	Memphis	41	34	.547
Charlotte	34	41	.453	12	New Orleans	32	43	.427
					Dallas	31	43	.419

DIRECTOR BEHIND SEVILLA'S SUCCESS LEAVES THE CLUB

MADRID: One of the men behind Sevilla's recent success is leaving the club. Sports director Ramon Rodriguez Verdejo, known as Monchi, is ending his 17-year stint with Sevilla. "The decision to leave came mostly because of exhaustion," Monchi said. "I was exhausted lately. There was always a lot of pressure."

Monchi departs after revolutionizing the Spanish club and helping it reach 16 finals and win nine titles in Spain and Europe. His scouting system helped rescue the team from the brink of financial collapse and turned him into one of the most sought-after soccer directors in Europe. He has been linked to Italian club AS Roma, but dismissed having already signed a deal with another club.

"I haven't signed anything with anybody," Monchi said. "There is Roma, but there are other clubs as well." Monchi thanked Sevilla for going out of its way

to try to keep at the club. "It tried to convince me in every possible way," Monchi said. "The offer that I was made won't be matched by anybody else out there. I insist that it was a personal decision. There was nothing that could have convinced me." Sevilla president Jose Castro said the club will always keep the doors open for Monchi.

"We did the impossible to try to keep Monchi with us, including making an offer outside the market standards for Sevilla," Castro said. "But it was a decision that was more personal than professional." Monchi is believed to have helped Sevilla earn more than 200 million euros (\$215 million) in transfers with his method of finding cheap players with potential and re-selling them to bigger clubs.

Buy cheap, sale big

Among the players discovered by him are Dani

Alves, Ivan Rakitic, Julio Baptista, Sergio Ramos, Seydou Keita, Jesus Navas and Carlos Bacca. Alves, a regular with Brazil and currently with Juventus, is considered one of his most successful signings - being bought for 1 million euros (\$1.1 million) from a small Brazilian club and sold to Barcelona for 30 million euros (\$33 million).

Despite a limited budget compared to the powerhouses of European soccer, including local rivals Barcelona and Real Madrid, Monchi helped Sevilla win the last three Europa League titles. It also won two Copa del Reys, one Spanish Super Cup, one European Super Cup and two UEFA Cups. The team is contending for the Spanish league title for the first time in nearly a decade, sitting third in the standings behind Barcelona and Madrid. It made it to the last 16 in the Champions League, but a tearful Monchi watched as Sevilla was eliminated by Leicester. — AP

MONACO PRINCES PRIMED TO SNATCH PSG'S CROWN

PARIS: Monaco have a real chance to end two years of complete domestic dominance by Paris Saint Germain when they face the title holders in today's French League Cup final. Owned by billionaire Russian businessman Dmitry Rybolovlev, Monaco have banked on recruiting the cream of French youth whilst their Portuguese coach Leonardo Jardim has unleashed Europe's highest scorers on the pitch.

They have also earned a fortune selling on the likes of James Rodriguez, Anthony Martial and others to balance the books at a visibly burgeoning club. The latest starlet to emerge at Monaco is 18-year-old striker Kylian Mbappe, who will be firmly in the spotlight at Lyon's Stade Olympique this weekend. Chelsea are among Europe's big guns reportedly chasing him and their star striker Diego Costa last week called Mbappe "a phenomenon".

Underlining his fast-growing reputation, Barcelona's Gerard Pique picked out the youngster at half time of the France v Spain game on Tuesday, asking Mbappe for his shirt. Striker Radamel Falcao is also back on form, helping Monaco plunder 87 goals so far in the French league, which they lead with eight games to go and face Dortmund in the Champions League quarter-finals.

Surging confidence

In contrast to the surging confidence in Monaco, in Paris there is a feeling that Unai Emery will be shown the door in the summer after only a year in charge at PSG following the Champions League meltdown at Barcelona. Winger Javier Pastore said the players were behind their Spanish coach. "Another reason we want to win (the League Cup) is for him, he's worked hard and deserves something," Pastore said.

If they are to retain their crown they may do it without captain and central defender Thiago Silva - once known as "the Monster" - who is suffering a crisis of confidence at just the wrong time. "In recent big matches he looks afraid," former PSG defender Bruno N'Gotty said. In the past two years PSG, bankrolled by Qatari money, have won the domestic treble of league, cup and League Cup. But even that was not enough to save the job of former coach Laurent Blanc. — AFP



PARIS: This is a Sunday, Jan 29, 2017 file photo of PSG's Angel Di Maria, left, challenges for the ball with Monaco's Jesus Jemerson, during their League One soccer match, at the Parc des Princes stadium. — AP



NAPLES: A vendor shows toilet paper rolls with portraits of Juventus' Argentinian forward Gonzalo Higuain. — AFP

NAPOLI PREPARES HOSTILE RECEPTION FOR HIGUAIN

MILAN: Napoli fans will treat former favorite Gonzalo Higuain to a barrage of abuse when he returns to the San Paolo tomorrow with Serie A leaders Juventus. Higuain was worshipped in the balmy southern port city as the striker banged home a historic 36 goals last season as Napoli made the cut for the Champions League. But after a secret medical in Madrid, Juventus paid Napoli 90 million euros (\$96 million) for his services and the Argentine reportedly left the city without even saying goodbye.

The club's 60,000 fans are apparently preparing to blow a collective raspberry to greet Higuain as he comes onto the pitch. Another former favorite son of Naples, Paris Saint Germain star Edinson Cavani, told Football Italia this week he found the hostility breathtaking at his return there during a 2014 friendly.

"I could not explain the reason for such a strong hostility. Of course, I wasn't expecting flowers and applause but I remember climbing the stairs to go onto the pitch and I was excited. But it was like entering a cold shower," Cavani said. "I believe that Higuain will be upset to hear the whistles, but the

situation is different," added Cavani, whose departure from Napoli was far less acrimonious than Higuain's. "He's at Juventus, and that's a blow for Napoli, but he knows the difference and will be prepared."

With nine games to go, Juventus top Serie A with 73 points while Roma have 65 and Napoli 63 in the final Champions League qualifying place, before a six-point cushion to fourth placed Lazio. Neither Higuain nor Juventus are on particularly good form right now and also go into the game with an eye on their April 11 Champions League quarter-final clash with Barcelona. Before the international break they squeezed past Sampdoria 1-0 in a game that saw their coach Massimiliano Allegri kicking kit bags around in frustration despite the three points. The match is also notable for it being the 1001st official game for the 39-year-old Juventus stopper Gigi Buffon, who made his professional debut in 1995 as a 17-year-old in goal for Parma. Ahead of the Sunday showdown, second placed Roma could reduce the gap at the top to five points with a home win over 17th placed Empoli, while Lazio face a trip to Sassuolo. — AFP



Matches on TV
(Local Timings)

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

Liverpool v Everton	14:30
beIN SPORTS	
Burnley v Tottenham	17:99
beIN SPORTS	
Chelsea v Crystal Palace	17:00
beIN SPORTS	
Leicester City v Stoke City	17:00
beIN SPORTS	
Watford v Sunderland	17:00
beIN SPORTS	
Hull City v West Ham United	17:00
beIN SPORTS	
Man United v West Bromwich	17:00
beIN SPORTS	
Southampton v Bournemouth	19:30
beIN SPORTS	

SPANISH LEAGUE

Villarreal v SD Eibar	14:00
beIN SPORTS	
Osasuna v Athletic de Bilbao	17:15
beIN SPORTS	
Real Sociedad v CD Leganes	19:30
beIN SPORTS	
Malaga v Atletico de Madrid	21:45
beIN SPORTS HD 3	

ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE

Sassuolo v SS Lazio	19:00
beIN SPORTS	
AS Roma v Empoli	21:45
beIN SPORTS	

GERMAN BUNDESLIGA

SC Freiburg v Werder Bremen	16:30
beIN SPORTS	
Hamburger SV v FC Kohn	16:30
beIN SPORTS	
Bayern Munich v Augsburg	16:30
beIN SPORTS	
Schalke 04 v Dortmund	16:30
beIN SPORTS	
RB Leipzig v Darmstadt 98	16:30
beIN SPORTS	
Eintracht v Monchengladbach	19:30
beIN SPORTS	

FRENCH LEAGUE

Olympique de Marseille v Dijon	18:00
beIN SPORTS	
Bastia v Lille OSC	20:00
beIN SPORTS	

PREMIER LEAGUE TOP-FOUR RIVALS TURN FOR HOME

LONDON: Liverpool host derby foes Everton and Manchester City visit ailing Arsenal this weekend as the battle for Champions League qualification takes centre-stage in the Premier League following the international recess. With Chelsea 10 points clear at the top of the table and seemingly destined for the title, five major clubs are scrapping over the three remaining Champions League berths. Here's how they shape up:

2nd: Tottenham Hotspur (Played 28 Points 59)

Following an unsteady start to the season, Tottenham clicked into gear in mid-December and have only dropped points against Manchester City, Liverpool and Sunderland in their last 13 games. Their run in-features only two meetings with other members of the top six and both are at home: against north London rivals Arsenal and Manchester United, in what stands to be the last game played at White Hart Lane. But manager Mauricio Pochettino will hope 19-goal top scorer Harry Kane recovers from his ankle injury quickly.

Run-in: Burnley (away), Swansea City (a), Watford (home), Bournemouth (h), Leicester City (a), Crystal Palace (a), Arsenal (h), West Ham United (a), Manchester United (h), Hull City (a)

3rd: Manchester City (P28 Pts 57)

City's seven-game unbeaten run in the league faces successive tests in London over the next week as Pep Guardiola takes his erratically performing team to Arsenal and Chelsea. City have tightened up at the back, conceding only two goals in their last six games. But they are now having problems at the other end, as demonstrated in the recent 0-0 draw at home to Stoke City and 1-1 draw at Liverpool. "We always have chances to score," said midfielder Yaya Toure. "We missed them against Liverpool, but sometimes you have to accept that because we've been playing a lot of games."

Run-in: Arsenal (a), Chelsea (a), Hull City (h), Southampton (a), West Bromwich Albion (h), Manchester United (h), Middlesbrough (a), Crystal Palace (h), Leicester City (h), Watford (a)

4th: Liverpool (P29 Pts 56)

Liverpool have the kindest run-in of any team in the top six, but that may not neces-



LIVERPOOL: This is a Monday, Dec 19, 2016 file photo of Liverpool's Divock Origi, right, competes for the ball with Everton's Ross Barkley during the English Premier League soccer match between Everton and Liverpool at Goodison Park stadium. —AP

sarily be a good thing. Jurgen Klopp's men have thrived against their main rivals, avoiding defeat in the 10 head-to-heads against the other teams in the top six. But they have struggled to break down sides near the bottom of the table, losing to Burnley, Bournemouth, Swansea City, Hull City and Leicester City. But next up they face Everton, who have Champions League ambitions of their own after moving level on points with Arsenal, albeit having played two games more.

Run-in: Everton (h), Bournemouth (h), Stoke City (a), West Bromwich Albion (a), Crystal Palace (h), Watford (a), Southampton (h), West Ham United (a), Middlesbrough (h)

5th: Manchester United (P27 Pts 52)

United manager Jose Mourinho has complained long and loud about his club's packed fixture schedule and there is no let-up in sight. Unbeaten in 18 league outings, United must squeeze in 11 league games plus a two-legged Europa League quarter-final against Anderlecht, and injuries are starting to bite. Paul Pogba, Chris Smalling

and Phil Jones are currently sidelined, while top scorer Zlatan Ibrahimovic and Ander Herrera are suspended.

Run-in: West Bromwich Albion (h), Everton (h), Sunderland (a), Chelsea (h), Burnley (a), Manchester City (a), Swansea City (h), Arsenal (a), Tottenham Hotspur (a), Crystal Palace (h)

6th: Arsenal (P27 Pts 50)

Besieged by questions about his future, Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger faces a huge battle to steer his team into the Champions League for the 19th season running. Beaten four times in their last five games, Arsenal are at the lowest ebb of Wenger's 21-year tenure, with fans bitterly divided over whether or not the Frenchman should be allowed to stay. "Our season will now be decided by the next two months," Wenger conceded on Thursday.

Run-in: Manchester City (h), West Ham United (h), Crystal Palace (a), Middlesbrough (a), Sunderland (h), Leicester City (h), Tottenham Hotspur (a), Manchester United (h), Stoke City (a), Everton (h) —AFP

ONLY ONE TEAM WORTH PLAYING FOR: WENGER

LONDON: Arsene Wenger claims Alexis Sanchez will be happy to stay with Arsenal because his club are the only London team worth playing for. Sanchez is yet to sign a new deal with the Gunners amid suggestions he had demanded a transfer following a heated row with Wenger earlier this season. The Chile forward told South American media this week that he is happy in London and keen to see out his Arsenal contract, which expires next year. But, in the same interviews, Sanchez said he wants to play in a team with a "winning mentality", sparking speculation he covets a move across London to Premier League leaders Chelsea.

Despite Arsenal currently languishing 19 points behind Chelsea, Gunners boss Wenger doesn't believe his star wants to leave the Emirates Stadium because he already plays for the capital's biggest club. Asked how he interpreted what Sanchez had said, Wenger

replied: "In a very positive way. There's only one team in London, so he is happy. "It's true we have not extended his contract yet but I hope he will stay at the club. "I think you have to be cautious when people give interviews in their home countries because the interpretation is not always exactly what they wanted to say. "But I don't see anything negative (in Sanchez's comments). He said he wants to win the championship, that's what everybody wants and I can understand that completely." Sanchez has cut a frustrated figure in recent weeks as Arsenal's season has unravelled.

Both he and team-mate Mesut Ozil are reportedly holding out for parity with the Premier League's top earners. Asked about Arsenal losing stars like Robin van Persie, Samir Nasri and Cesc Fabregas in the past, Wenger said: "That is true that it happened before when we were in positions where we had to sell financially our best players. That's not the case anymore.

"They (Sanchez and Ozil) are not out of contract at the end of the season. I personally believe that both of them want to stay and I hope that the club will find an agreement." Wenger's future is also unresolved, with his current contract expiring at the end of the season, but the Frenchman called on his players to "be men" and not blame the uncertainty for their recent struggles. "It would be an easy excuse," he told Sky Sports News. "For me whether I stay three years or 10 years I have exactly the same commitment and the same desire to win the next game.

"I believe as well we are in the position where we do not have to find easy excuses. Our job is to perform-can you perform despite that? "My attachment to this club, at the moment it is as it is and I do not see any escape route to have less responsibilities because I might not be here. "We have to be men and focus on what matters and what is our job." —AFP

RODGERS' REVIVAL TO HIT TITLE PEAK

GLASGOW: Brendan Rodgers' career renaissance is set to climax this week as the Celtic manager prepares to celebrate the Scottish Premiership title. Rodgers has been rebuilding his reputation at the Glasgow giants after being sacked by Liverpool in October 2015. The Hoops are unbeaten domestically this season and Rodgers clinched the first trophy of his career when he led the Parkhead club to the Scottish League Cup last November.

Celtic are 25 points clear of Aberdeen with nine games remaining and will win the title with victory at Hearts tomorrow. The Hoops would also be crowned champions if the Dons lose to Dundee on Friday. It would be a first league title for Rodgers, with the 44-year-old finally set to finish on top after his Liverpool team narrowly missed out on the Premier League in the 2013-14 campaign. Steven Gerrard's infamous slip in a home defeat to Chelsea halted Liverpool's title charge and, after finishing sixth the next season, Rodgers was sacked during the following campaign.

After seven months out of the game, Rodgers was offered the chance to lead a revolution at Celtic following Ronny Deila's two-year reign at Parkhead, which ended without the Norwegian making any progress in European competition. However, former Swansea manager Rodgers guided the Hoops into the group stages of the Champions League at the first attempt and, with a Scottish Cup semi-final against Old Firm rivals Rangers looming next month, he is now within touching distance of a first Celtic treble since 2001.

New lease of life

Hoops captain Scott Brown, whose own career has been given a new lease of life since the arrival of Rodgers last year, says the Celtic players are desperate to deliver the title for their manager. "The manager has come in and it will be great for him to get his first league title wrapped up and hopefully we can do it for him on Sunday," he said. "Tynecastle is a hard place to go. It's a fantastic stadium with all the fans right on top of each other but at the end of the day we need to keep going, keep performing and keep winning for as long as we possibly can. "We've got a great squad, we need to use it well and I'm sure the gaffer will." Another player who has thrived thanks to Rodgers' tutelage is midfielder Stuart Armstrong.

The 25-year-old, whose career stalled under former manager Deila, has been in excellent form this season with his impressive displays earning him a first international cap for Scotland in their 1-0 win over Slovenia last weekend. "It has been a very good season and Brendan Rodgers has been great for me," Armstrong said. "He has come in and allowed me to play central midfield which has really developed my game so I'm in a good place at the moment and I just want to enjoy it." Elsewhere, Pedro Caixinha will take charge of Rangers for only the second time when his side host Motherwell today. The Ibrox club currently trail Aberdeen by eight points in the race for second spot and will travel to Pittodrie to take on the Dons next weekend. —AFP

CASILLAS 'KEPT MOUTH SHUT' ON REAL FALL FROM GRACE

MADRID: Former Real Madrid favorite Iker Casillas claimed in an interview published yesterday he kept quiet for the good of the club during tough times leading to his 2015 departure for Porto. Towards the end of his Real career Casillas, now 35, suffered many difficulties—he fell out of favor with coach Jose Mourinho during 2012/13, struggled for form and was even jeered by sections of the Santiago Bernabeu crowd.

"I kept my mouth shut about what was going on for the good of the club," said Casillas, whose popularity peaked after Spain's World Cup win in 2010. "You don't want to turn things into a circus at the first sign of difficulty," Casillas told Marca. "In time, I understood that some people resented me for the Mourinho affair," explained Casillas, who has played 167 times for Spain. "Staying at Real one year after another is not easy. Mental strength is key, you have to be able to take criticism at any moment." Casillas played 510 first team games over a 16 season stretch with Madrid before leaving for Porto. —AFP



SAINT-DENIS: France's midfielder Tiemoue Bakayoko (L) and France's forward Ousmane Dembele warm up ahead of the friendly football match France vs Spain on March 28, 2017 at the Stade de France stadium. —AFP

BUNDESLIGA'S RISING STARS COLLIDE IN RUHR DERBY

BERLIN: Borussia Dortmund's teenage stars Ousmane Dembele and Christian Pulisic will be in the spotlight in today's 150th Ruhr Valley at bitter Bundesliga rivals Schalke 04 in Germany's top derby. Both Dortmund and Schalke will be heavily stacked with the German league's top young talent at Gelsenkirchen's Veltins Arena.

"In the category of 18-22 year olds, we are at the front in Europe," boasted Borussia's CEO Hans-Joachim Watzke. Under coach Thomas Tuchel, Dortmund are nurturing the likes of Germany's 21-year-old defensive midfielder Julian Weigl. Teenager forwards Dembele, 19, and Pulisic, still just 18, have attracted interest from Europe's top clubs.

"Age doesn't play a role as far as our trainer is concerned," said Dembele. "It comes down to ambition, commitment and a fighting spirit," is how Schalke's captain, World Cup winner Benedikt Hoewedes, sums up the clash. Such is his desire to help Schalke that Hoewedes, 29, has delayed surgery on a groin injury until June. Dortmund striker Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang, the league's top scorer with 23 goals this season, loves scoring in the derby and has netted in four of the five games he has started against Schalke.

Aubameyang is locked in a battle with Bayern Munich's Robert Lewandowski and Cologne's Anthony Modeste to be the league's top scorer, and has scored nine goals in his last six games for Dortmund. Likewise, Schalke will rely on their talented youngsters defender Sead Kolasinac (23), play-maker Max Meyer (21) and defender Thilo Kehrer (20). "It's unbelievable how successful our youth academy is," said sports director Christian Heidel, with all three having rise through Schalke's ranks.

No love lost

In the last ten years, Schalke's academy has produced current Germany stars Hoewedes, Manuel Neuer, Mesut Ozil and Julian Draxler. The neighboring cities of Dortmund and Gelsenkirchen, the home of Schalke, are just 50 kilometers apart, and there is no love lost. Schalke, who are up to tenth last beat Dortmund in September 2014, but are desperate to cap a third straight league win by beating their old rivals.

Dortmund are third, a huge 16 points behind leaders Bayern Munich, and face Schalke at the start of a busy period with nine games to play in April including Champions League quarter-finals against Monaco. Bayern are home to Augsburg on Saturday with Carlo Ancelotti's side missing defender Javi Martinez with suspension. The Bavarian giants are unbeaten in their last 19 games in all competitions and are 13 points clear at the top of the table.

Like Dortmund, Bayern are embarking on a busy April schedule with nine games including home and away Champions League clashes against Real Madrid. Ancelotti is sure to rotate in Augsburg, as they face fourth-placed Hoffenheim away next Tuesday before hosting Borussia Dortmund, the only Bundesliga team to beat them this season a week on Saturday.

Second-placed RB Leipzig host bottom side Darmstadt on Saturday hoping to bounce back after straight defeats to strugglers Wolfsburg and Werder Bremen leave them with just seven points from their last seven games. Top-scorer Timo Werner is injured after tearing a thigh muscle on his Germany debut in the win over England. Guinea midfielder Naby Keita should feature despite having regained fitness after suffering a circulatory collapse a fortnight ago. —AFP

REVIVED LEICESTER FACE MAKE OR BREAK MONTH

LEICESTER: Leicester's clash with Stoke today marks the beginning of another potentially historic month for the champions as they target domestic survival and shock European glory. Eight games are ahead in a busy period for Craig Shakespeare's rejuvenated side, who continue to combine their fight against Premier League relegation with a quest for further surprises in the Champions League.

Stoke's visit to the King Power Stadium is followed by another key home game against Sunderland on Tuesday, with the Champions League quarter-final against Atletico Madrid

also looming. And Leicester winger Marc Albrighton believes his team, six points above the relegation zone, will enter the momentous period in good shape after the international break. "The lads were ready for a break and we know we've got a lot of games this coming month that are going to be massively important to how our season shapes up," said Albrighton. "I think the break going into that is fantastic and it'll allow all the lads to be ready. "It's going to shape our season and the sooner we can secure our safety the better. It's our main focus, especially this coming week. "We've got two home games and it could go a long

way in making sure we're safe, but also it could go the other way if we don't get the results we want."

Since the controversial sacking of Claudio Ranieri, Shakespeare has overseen four wins in his four games in charge by returning to the line-up that won the club the title last season, but Albrighton believes the whole Leicester squad will be called upon during April. "The team might change every now and again with so many games," he said. "There might be lads coming in that haven't played and we all need to be prepared for that, every single member of the squad. —AFP

Sports



Premier League top rivals turn for home

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KEY BISCAYNE: Roger Federer of Switzerland in action against Tomas Berdych of Czech Republic at Crandon Park Tennis Center. —AFP

FEDERER IN SEMIS, WOZNIACKI REACHES MIAMI FINAL

KEY BISCAYNE: Roger Federer's run at the Miami Open was one point from ending. Down 6-4 in a third-set tiebreaker to Tomas Berdych, the situation was officially dire. Yet even in that moment, Federer still felt some hope. "I had belief I could turn it around, even then," he said. Somehow, he was right, and his stellar start to 2017 continued. The fourth-seeded Federer fought off those two match points and beat the 10th-seeded Berdych 6-2, 3-6, 7-6 (6) in the quarterfinals on Thursday - avenging a third-set tiebreaker loss to Berdych at Key Biscayne seven years ago in a match he still thinks he should have won.

"I got incredibly lucky," Federer said. "Could have gone either way. Felt like maybe this one I should have lost." Federer feels right at home at Key Biscayne, and so does Caroline Wozniacki - with good reason, since she sometimes practices at the facility. The 12th-seeded Wozniacki, a part-time South Florida resident, made the women's final for the first time in 10 tries by topping second-seeded Karolina Pliskova 5-7, 6-1, 6-1. Wozniacki will play No. 10 Johanna Konta in today's championship match. Konta topped No. 11 Venus Williams 6-4, 7-5 in the second semifinal, one that ended just after midnight.

"This is one of the few tournaments where I've never made a finals," Wozniacki said. "I think my best result here was semifinals five years ago. It's always been a tournament where I

wouldn't say I struggle, but I've just not had the results I wanted." Federer improved to 17-1 this year and will face No. 12 Nick Kyrgios in the semifinals. Kyrgios defeated 16th-seeded Alexander Zverev 6-4, 6-7 (9), 6-3 in the last of the men's quarters, a match that lasted 2 1/2 hours. Kyrgios had 16 aces, no double faults and never faced a break point, though his 19-year-old opponent saved five match points before falling.

Grueling fight

Zverev fought off three match points in the second-set tiebreaker, and won the set when Kyrgios - who pulled off two between-the-legs shots on the same point in the first set - tried another that didn't work. "I don't know what I was thinking," Kyrgios said. He recovered and gets to face Federer, whom he called "the greatest of all time ... my favorite tennis player." Federer-Kyrgios is a rematch - sort of - from this year's quarterfinals at Indian Wells, a match where Kyrgios withdrew beforehand with an illness.

Rafael Nadal and Fabio Fognini are the other men's semifinalists, meaning there's still a chance for Federer-Nadal on Sunday for the men's crown. "I would love it," Federer said. Federer is now 4-0 in tiebreakers this year at Key Biscayne, none of the first three as pressure-packed as the one he needed in the

quarters. He was serving for the match at 5-3 in the third and got broken, had a match point in the next game and couldn't convert, then was down 6-4 in the breaker before winning the final four points. Berdych actually won 91 points to Federer's 89. He needed 92 - and after coming up with big shot after big shot in the final two sets, he wound up going out on a double-fault. "I just lost by one point. That's what happened. Very simple, very straightforward," Berdych said. "He was the one serving out the match, didn't make it. I had a match point, didn't make it. I had two, didn't make it. So what else to say?"

Like Federer, Wozniacki rallied, albeit with far less drama. She won 12 of the last 14 games. "I got a good start to the second set and that kind of got me fired up," Wozniacki said. This will be the second consecutive time two double-digit seeds make the women's final at Key Biscayne, after No. 13 Victoria Azarenka beat No. 15 Svetlana Kuznetsova a year ago. Konta was down 3-1 in the second set, and wound up breaking Williams five times - in a staggering 17 chances. Williams was bidding for her fourth Key Biscayne title, the last of which came 16 years ago. "I'm going to have a tough battle on my hands," said Konta, is assured of returning to the top 10 in the world rankings regardless of today's result. "Caroline, she makes you work for every single point." —AP