



4 Look back at major events of Kuwait



7 Medical evacuations begin from Syrian rebel bastion



11 Saudi chess PR gambit checked by controversies



14 US basketball star rebounds from arrest with Iraqi team



Saudi king, Turkish premier discuss status of Jerusalem

UAE diplomat: Arabs won't be led by Turkey • Erdogan calls Assad a terrorist

Under-30 expat ban on hold; MPs slam abuses by policemen

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Minister of Social Affairs and Labor Hind Al-Sabeeh said the ministry has delayed the implementation of a decision to ban the recruitment of expatriates who are under 30 years of age. The decision was supposed to go into effect on Jan 1, but the minister said it was decided to delay it for further considerations and in order to study objections by some ministries and government departments. Meanwhile, opposition MP Adel Al-Damkhi said yesterday that

Continued on Page 11

RIYADH/DUBAI/TUNIS: Saudi King Salman and Turkey's premier yesterday discussed boosting ties and the status of Jerusalem, in a first high-level meeting since the US controversially recognized the city as Israel's capital. Firm US ally Riyadh and NATO member Ankara have both slammed President Donald Trump's Dec 6 decision to upend decades of careful policy by Washington. But the Saudis only sent a low-level representative to a conference of Muslim nations on the issue hosted by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, amid signs of strains in their relations.

The Saudi SPA agency said King Salman received Prime Minister Binali Yildirim in Riyadh and discussed "means of boosting bilateral ties and developments in the region," without providing details. Yildirim's office in Ankara said the status of Jerusalem and supporting the Palestinians were discussed at the meeting. "The importance of the status of Jerusalem was emphasized and that the whole Islamic world should act with unity to protect the rights of our Palestinian brothers," the office said citing Yildirim. He also said that they

discussed bilateral relations with Saudi Arabia, "one of the most important countries in the Gulf and the Middle East".

Ties between the sides soured following the 2013 ousting of the Muslim Brotherhood president Mohamed Morsi in Egypt, but warmed after King Salman's accession to the throne eighteen months later. However, analysts say there are signs ties are being tested again as Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has shaken up the kingdom and amassed power. Turkish officials have avoided public criticism of Saudi Arabia but pro-government press have stepped up attacks on the kingdom, especially over its strong alliance with Trump.

Erdogan last week also lashed out at the powerful foreign minister of Saudi's chief regional ally the UAE after he retweeted a social media post critical of the early 20th century Ottoman governor of Madinah. But a senior UAE diplomat said yesterday the Arab world would not be led by Turkey, the Gulf state's first comment on Ankara since the

Continued on Page 11



RIYADH: Saudi King Salman (right) welcomes Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim yesterday. — AFP

PAINTBALL KUWAIT

~~11 KD~~
5.750 KD
with **FREE 100 Paintball**

Not Valid with any other offer



Call Now For Reservation
2243 1101 - 9785 5551

Local



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. —KUNA



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

Amir, Crown Prince receive senior officials

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah at Bayan Palace yesterday. His Highness also received His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber

Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. Moreover, His Highness the Amir received First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince received His

Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak, Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad and Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. His Highness also received Minister of Finance Dr Nayef Falah Al-Hajraf and Information Minister Mohammad Nasser Al-Jabri. His

Highness later received Sheikh Fahd Jaber Al-Ali Al-Sabah who presented His Highness a copy of his PhD Thesis dubbed 'Experimental Study on Methods of Disputes Solving in the Middle East.' His Highness thanked Sheikh Fahd wishing him success. —KUNA



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Minister of Finance Dr Nayef Falah Al-Hajraf.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Information Minister Mohammad Nasser Al-Jabri.

Current winter weather 'abnormal': Saadoun

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Al-Fintas Astronomical Observatory Director Adel Al-Saadoun said the winter weather in December has been quite "abnormal" in Kuwait. "Yes, snow and cold weather in Syria and Lebanon are yet to arrive. I call this year's weather abnormal. We expected rain, but it didn't fall. So, we are not experiencing the same weather as last year - the winter last year was better," Saadoun said.

He predicted that "normal cold winter weather" conditions during this period have been delayed probably till the middle or end of January. According to Saadoun, the snow and cold weather conditions from Syria and

Lebanon are yet to make an impact. Saadoun forecast that the abnormal weather conditions will continue for the next four to five days.

"The lowest temperature will be five degrees Celsius and 18 degrees Celsius the maximum. Last year, in the same period, we had subzero temperatures," he said. According to Saadoun, the rain Kuwait expected last week did not arrive, although there were some sporadic showers in desert areas. "We do not know if rain will come by next week," noted Saadoun.

The official weather forecast posted on the website of the Meteorological Department of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation matches Saadoun's prediction. The maximum temperature over the next four days ranges between 25 C and 27 C degrees, while the minimum ranges between 7 C and 9 C degrees.



Adel Al-Saadoun

KFH partakes in Kuwait PR Award Exhibition

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) recently took part in the Kuwait Public Relations and Customer Service Award Exhibition that was organized by the Public Relations Society and inaugurated

by His Highness the Amir's representative; Deputy Minister of Amiri Diwan Sheikh Mohammad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah. This is KFH's third participation in the exhibition.

Speaking while visiting KFH booth at the exhibition, Sheikh Mohammad highly praised the significant role the bank plays in boosting national economy as well as its efforts in public relations and community service. Sheikh Mohammad also stressed that His Highness the Amir's kind patronage to the event is an honor to all participants and reflects his appreciation for the role of public relations in corporate operation and community service.



KUWAIT: Deputy Minister of Amiri Diwan Sheikh Mohammad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah (second from left) visits KFH's booth at the Public Relations and Customer Service Award Exhibition.

300 chefs in Horeca competition

KUWAIT: The 2018 Horeca Kuwait exhibition is set to feature a cooking competition that will be attended by sponsors and participants in addition to over 300 chefs competing over the three-day event.

The organizing committee said in a statement that the jury panel would also comprise of 12 international cooking experts selected from world cuisines, namely France, Germany, Italy, India, Japan and Kuwait. Participants will compete in 18 different competitions covering various culinary arts.

The committee added that the jury would include the head of the World Association of Chef Societies (WACS) chef Thomas Gugler, former Le Notre's head chef Samaan Hilal (the head of the largest culinary and restaurants advisory company in the region), famous TV cooking show presenter Chef Maroun Chedid, and the ambassador of the French Academy in the Middle East chef Charles Azar.

The committee also said that the Horeca cooking competitions had seen development in recent years, adding that the number of competitors and international jury members had increased, while new competitions in preparing tea and coffee, sponsored by Al-Hajri company, will take place on the second and third days of the exhibition. "The new competitions will include hotel housekeeping for

over 75 hotel and hospital housekeeping staff members," the statement added.

The 2018 Horeca Kuwait exhibition is due to be held under auspices of Minister of Commerce and Industry Khaled Al-Roudhan at Kuwait International Fair Grounds in Mishref (Hall 8) in the period of January 15-17, 2018. It is organized by Leaders Group in collaboration with Hospitality Services Company.



Iraqi PM hails Kuwait for hosting donor conference

BAGHDAD: Iraqi Prime Minister Haidar Al-Abadi has praised Kuwait's willingness to host a conference of global donors for the reconstruction of Iraq after the defeat of the so-called Islamic State group. In a press conference, Abadi said on Tuesday he was grateful to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for welcoming Kuwait's hosting of the event early in 2018.

Abadi blamed an "incorrect image in the minds of some on the security situation in Iraq" for

Baghdad's decision not to host the conference itself. The destruction inflicted by the group is worse in some areas than it is in others, he

said, hoping that the global assistance would extend to investments from businesses as well as state financial grants. —KUNA



BAGHDAD: Iraqi Prime Minister Haidar Al-Abadi during a press conference in Baghdad on Tuesday. — KUNA

Local

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: Bin Duaj fountain, which was established by charitable figure Abdulaziz Mohamed Al-Duaj in 1876, is considered the oldest and most iconic drinking fountain in the State of Kuwait. —KUNA

Ministry ready for power plants' maintenance

By Meshaal Al-Enezi and A Saleh

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Electricity and Water is working on securing the needs of power and water grids for summer 2018, said Assistant Undersecretary for Power Station and Water Desalination Eng Fahad Al-Oun. The concerned sector is carrying out maintenance and system developments, as well as repairs of power generation units, he added. The annual maintenance season in all power stations begins at the start of September and continues until May every year. The necessary maintenance work is done on steam, gas, distillation and other units in addition to joint maintenance, modernization and development to ensure the continuation of all power production at top efficiency in preparation for the summer season.

Joint oil wells

Talks are ongoing between Kuwait and Iraq in regards to the joint oil wells between the two countries in order to reach a final mechanism for the joint utilization of those wells. Sources said that there is an idea under study to establish a joint company between the two sides to supervise the production and distribution of shares that the joint company will decide. The production volume in those joint fields is within Kuwait's strategy to increase production to four million barrels per day by 2020.

Working hours

The Civil Service Commission (CSC)

issued a decision to add employees' commitment to working hours among the criteria based on which their annual performance evaluation is made. The commission said that an employee who is absent from work for more than 56 hours will be considered not in compliance with work.

House distribution

The Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW) said that distribution of South Khaitan area lands is complete, which has 1,448 land plots ready to be distributed for housing purposes. Meanwhile, the authority announced that it is giving the opportunity for people who wish to change their allocated area and want to be included in South Abdullah Al-Mubarak project which has 3,260 units. PAHW official spokesman Eng Ibrahim Al-Nashi said distribution of South Abdullah Al-Mubarak project is included in the distributions of the current fiscal year 2017/2018.

Speed up work

Informed sources at Ministry of Public Works said Minister Hussam Al-Roumi asked for changes in the new structure of the ministry which is to be approved soon. The most notable comments made by Roumi were in regards to transferring the management of airport projects to the minister's office directly in order to speed up work.

Transparency

Deputy Premier and State Minister for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh said the efficiency of the Central Agency for Public Tenders must be increased, and that transparency principle must be the foundation of its work to distance it from suspicions. Saleh, who received chairman and members of the agency on the occasion of their appointment to their new posts, said that any corruption-related suspicions must be confronted, in addition to conflict of interests, as this hinders the department's work.

man was arrested in possession of five bags of shabu (meth) and cash. He was sent to DCGD.

Threat

A female citizen accused her ex-husband of threatening to stab her in front of their daughter. The woman said that the man forced her to drop charges she pressed against him and decrease the alimony. When she tried to contact the police, he escaped, leaving his wallet behind. Investigations are underway.

Failed kidnap

A female citizen escaped from her boyfriend's attempt to kidnap her in a public park. The couple decided to meet to hand over some belongings. On entering the park, another man present asked her to go with him and tried to kidnap her. She managed to escape after screaming for help. An attempted kidnapping charge was lodged and the suspect is being sought.

Fraud

A citizen lodged a complaint against an Arab man who claimed to work for an aluminum company, and he gave him KD 2,000 as a deposit. When the citizen asked about the company at the commerce ministry, he discovered that it was not registered, and later found out that the Arab man has been jobless since March.

—Translated by Kuwait Times from Al-Rai

Man arrested for killing pregnant wife

KUWAIT: A man was arrested on charges of killing his pregnant wife in Taima. Police and paramedics rushed to a house in the area in response to an emergency call, and found the 22-year-old woman in a critical condition. The woman, who was pregnant, was rushed to the hospital where she was pronounced dead along with her unborn child. A man identified later as the woman's husband was found sitting inside his car outside the house, and he was placed under arrest then taken to the proper authorities to face charges.

Drugs

A man was arrested for disturbing families in a mall while under the influence of drugs. Police received several calls about a man behaving abnormally. The arrest was made after fierce resistance and drugs were found on him. He was sent to Drugs Control General Department (DCGC). In another case, a citizen swallowed a bag full of drugs, then ran on foot in an attempt to escape but was caught. He was taken to hospital under heavy guard to remove the bag he swallowed. Separately, an Egyptian

Kuwait Times

SUBSCRIBE OR RENEW

KD 25

PAINTBALL KUWAIT

* your subscription for one year for only kd 25 and get 4 free tickets to Paintball kuwait valued at kd37

* This campaign is limited to participants in Kuwait only. Ministries and their departments, companies and NGOs cannot enter the festival.
* Kuwait Times employees, spouses and their second-degree relatives also cannot participate.

Call now +965 248 33 199 - 248 333 58 Fax: +965 248 35 620 - 248 35 621
www.kuwaittimes.net

Local

Major events of the



WASHINGTON: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah shakes hands with US President Donald Trump during a joint press conference at the White House on September 7, 2017. —KUNA



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah welcomes Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan as he arrives to Kuwait on an official visit.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah (center) looks on as Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas (left) and Pope Tawadros II of Alexandria greet each other during a luncheon held in their honor during their visit to Kuwait.

KUWAIT: Kuwait witnessed major events that dominated the local scene throughout 2017. The following are major events that took place this year.

His Highness the Amir:

January 3: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Chairman of the Kuwait Red Crescent Society Dr Hilal Al-Sayer, who said Kuwait is the first country to send volunteers to Syria to help the Aleppo refugees.

January 9: Kuwait Cabinet decided to insert charity, voluntary and humanitarian work in school curriculum.

February 1: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad attended the 31st Janadriyah festival in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

February 7: Two Amiri decrees issued accepting the resignation of information Minister and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Sheikh Salman Al-Hmad Al-Sabah and appointing Sheikh Mohammad Al-Abdullah as Acting Minister of Information as well as Khaled Al-Roudhan as Acting Minister of State for Youth Affairs.

February 9: His Highness the Amir patronized the 'Thank You to the Coalition Countries' festival at Al-Shaheed Park marking the 56th Anniversary of Kuwait's Independence Day and the 26th Anniversary of the Liberation Day.

February 15: Iranian President Hassan Rouhani paid an official visit to Kuwait where he discussed relations between the two countries and latest regional developments.

February 20: His Highness the Amir visited Oman for official talks with Sultan Qaboos bin Saeed.

March 6: Marking Kuwait's University (KU) golden jubilee, KU granted His Highness the Amir the honorary doctorate for his major national, Islamic and international accomplishments at political, economic, social and humanitarian levels.

March 20: His Highness the Amir started an official three-day visit to Turkey in response to invitation by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, resulting in signing cooperation agreements between the two countries.

April 23: His Highness the Amir held talks with visiting Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

April 26: His Highness the Amir patronized and attended the opening ceremony of Al-Ahmedi Hospital.

May 7: Egyptian President AbdelFatah Al-Sisi visited the State of Kuwait.

May 9: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan paid a visit to the State of Kuwait.

May 9: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad laid the cornerstone of the new terminal at Kuwait International Airport, in the presence of President Erdogan.

May 15: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah patronized and attended the opening ceremony of 'Kuwait Capital for Arab Youth 2017,' and honored the winners of Kuwait Youth Excellence and Creativity Award, at Bayan Palace Theater.

May 21: His Highness the Amir delivered a speech before the Arab-Islamic-American Summit in the Saudi capital city of Riyadh.

May 31: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad received the visiting Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani.

June 6: His Highness the Amir held official talks with Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz during His Highness' visit to Jeddah.

June 7: His Highness the Amir held talks with the United Arab Emirates' leaders during his visit to Dubai.

June 7: His Highness the Amir met with Qatar's Amir Sheikh Tamim Al Thani in Doha.

July 23: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini, as part of diplomatic efforts aimed to resolve the Gulf crisis.

July 23: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah held talks with visiting Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

August 27: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on occasion of his visit to Kuwait.

September 1: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah paid an official visit to the United States.

September 7: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah delivered a speech during a joint news conference with US President Donald Trump at the White House.

October 15: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah paid a visit to Saudi Arabia.

October 22: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Sudanese President Omar Al-Bashir, on the occasion of his official visit to the country.

October 24: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah inaugurated the second session of the 15th legislative term.

October 30: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah signed a decree accepting the resignation of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah's Cabinet.

Sabah's Cabinet.

November 1: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah signed a decree re-appointing His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah as Prime Minister and instructed him to form a new cabinet.

November 12: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, on the occasion of his official visit to the country.

November 12: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah inaugurated the international conference on suffering of Palestinian children, with the presence of President Mahmoud Abbas.

November 14: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received His Highness the Crown Prince at the airport's Amiri terminal after having undergone successful medical checkups in the US.

November 20: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Iraqi President Fuad Masum, on the occasion of his official visit to the country.

November 29: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah patronized and attended the 17th Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Informatics Award.

December 5: His Highness the Amir opened the 38th Summit of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in Kuwait.

December 22: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah opens the 23 Gulf Cup football tournament at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium.

His Highness the Crown Prince:

July 16: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah paid a private visit to the United States.

October 29: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah headed to the US on a private visit.

His Highness the Prime Minister:

January 30: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah patronized and attended launch of His Highness the Amir-envisioned New Kuwait 2035.

June 21: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah held official talks with visiting Iraqi Prime Minister Haidar Al-Abadi.

September 13: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah met with visiting Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

October 9: The Cabinet agreed on dissolving the Municipal Council and forming an interim undertaker body to assume its duties.

October 30: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah submitted his resignation to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

December 7: His Highness the Prime Minister sponsored and attended the launch of Al-Zour Oil Complex projects.

National Assembly:

January 31: An interpellation of the Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Sheikh Salman Al-Sabah began at the National Assembly with the motion submitted by three MPs.

March 8: The National Assembly unanimously agreed to reform the country's juvenile justice system.

March 8: The National Assembly approved a bill to establish a financial portfolio within the Industrial Bank of Kuwait to buy small-sized development projects.

May 3: The Constitutional Court announced victory of Farraj Al-Arbeed in the 2016 National Assembly elections, revoking the membership of Marzouq Al-Khalifa.

May 10: The National Assembly began an interpellation motion submitted by MP Shuaib Al-Muwaizri to Minister of State for Housing Affairs Yasser Abul.

July 27: Kuwait's National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem delivered a speech at the emergency conference of the Inter-Parliament Union in the Moroccan capital, Rabat, on situation in East Jerusalem.

October 8: MPs Riyadh Al-Adsani and Abdulkarim

million to support humanitarian needs in Yemen during the conference of Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan 2017, held in Geneva.

April 30: Kuwait Consulate in Istanbul confirmed that a Kuwait citizen was shot dead in the Turkish city.

May 26: First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah met with Qatari Amir Sheikh Tamim Al Thani during a visit to Doha.

May 29: Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Science (KFAS) signed two agreements, worth \$6 million, with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to educate Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan.

June 2: The State of Kuwait won a non-permanent seat at the United Nations Security Council for two years as of January 2018.

June 12: Kuwait chaired the Executive Board of the World Food Program (WFP) for the current annual session, for the first time.

July 3: Kuwait and Serbia signed some memorandums of understanding in oil, energy and culture sectors in the Serbian capital.

July 5: Kuwait and the UK signed a memorandum of understanding to promote e-security, within the framework of the tenth meeting of joint Kuwaiti-British guidance committee.

July 8: Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received his British counterpart Boris Johnson.

July 10: Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah held a joint meeting with US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and British national security advisor Mark Sedwill, within the framework of their official visit to Kuwait.

July 20: Kuwait decided to reduce number of diplomats at the Iranian embassy in the country, shutting down its technical offices and freezing activities of the joint committees following the issuance of a verdict on the so-called 'Al-Abdali terror cell.'

July 27: Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah delivered a speech at the urgent session of the Arab League's ministerial level in Cairo, and called on the international community to put an end to Israeli practices in Jerusalem.

August 14: Kuwait's Foreign Ministry condemned a terror attack on a restaurant in Burkina Faso that killed some people, including two Kuwaitis - Dr Waleed Al-Ali and Fahad Al-Husseini - who were on duty to carry out some charitable acts.

August 17: Kuwait donated a sum of \$2.2 million to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), as part of its annual financial aid to support the Palestinian people.

September 7: The US and Kuwait inked agreements in the fields of economy, science and commerce, on the sidelines of His Highness the Amir's official visit to Washington.

September 8: Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and his US counterpart Rex Tillerson co-chaired the Second session of the Kuwaiti-US Strategic Dialogue.

September 14: Kuwait and Turkey signed six agreements in promoting cooperation in trade, security, transport and youth affairs, during His Highness the Premier's visit to Istanbul.

September 20: Representative of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, delivered Kuwait's speech before the 72nd session of UN General Assembly in New York.

November 9: The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) chose Kuwait to occupy the Arab seat at the institute's board of directors, on the sidelines of the 39th session of UNESCO general conference in Paris.

November 14: Kuwait and Turkey signed some agreements to promote cooperation in the areas of sports and direct investment, in addition to a cooperative protocol between Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research and its Turkish counterpart, within the framework of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's visit to Kuwait.

November 21: Kuwait donated \$1 million to victims of Hurricanes Irma and Maria, which hit the Caribbean Sea region back in September.

November 24: Kuwait donated about \$6.6 million for the expansion of the British Royal Air Force Museum.

December 9: Kuwait handed over a \$5 million donation to the UN Palestinian refugees agency (UNRWA).

Economic Agreements:

February 13: EQUATE Petrochemical and Maersk Line signed a partnership agreement to eliminate CO2 emissions in sea transport to protect and safeguard the environment.

March 6: The Communication and Information Technology Regulatory Authority (CITRA) and Huawei Company signed memorandum of understanding to develop Communication Industry in the country.



Then Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs and Acting Information Minister Sheikh Mohammad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah speaks during the debate of his grilling motion at the National Assembly on October 24, 2017.

Al-Kandari submitted a grilling motion against Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs and Acting Minister of Information Sheikh Mohammad Al-Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah.

October 14: Speaker of National Assembly Marzouq Al-Ghanem arrived in the Russian city of St. Petersburg to participate in the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Conference.

October 24: Ten lawmakers filed a no-confidence motion against Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs and Acting Information Minister Sheikh Mohammad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah.

December 3: The National Assembly approved a bill paving way for FIFA's lifting of international ban Kuwait football.

Foreign Policy:

January 24: The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) Regional Center opened in Kuwait at the Mishref Diplomatic Area.

January 25: Envoy of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah arrived in the Iranian capital, Tehran, on an official visit.

February 2: Kuwaiti embassy in Jordan handed a donation of \$2 million to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

March 20: Representing His Highness the Amir, Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs and Acting Information Minister Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah Al-Sabah announced Kuwait's pledge of \$5 million for a fresh fund for the protection of heritage in conflict zones during conference in Paris.

April 25: Kuwait announced the allocation of \$100

Local

State of Kuwait in 2017



KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and his cabinet pose for a group photo during the launch of the New Kuwait 2035 national development strategy on January 30, 2017. —KUNA

July 18: Public Authority for Industry won an excellence award in the field of geographic information systems (GIS).

August 28: Kuwait and Honduras signed an agreement to promote bilateral economic and technical cooperation.

September 6: Kuwait's Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Anas Al-Saleh delivered a speech at the first US-Kuwait economic forum in Washington.

November 4: Kuwait's Petrochemical Industries Co (PIC) signed a contract to carry out engineering and design works for a planned polypropylene plant in Canada.

Energy:

January 26: Kuwait Petrochemical Industries Company (PIC) signed a contract for studying architectural designs of the third olefins project and second aromatics venture worth \$34 million.

February 8: Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) collaborated with Gulf Spic General Trading and Contracting Company (GS) to build facilities for the treatment of liquid sulfur in Al-Ahmadi port refinery, with production a capacity of 1,000 tons per day.

May 24: KNPC signed a \$6.25 billion loan agreement with seven export credit agencies for financing the clean fuel project.

July 6: Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) controlled a leak of a crude oil pipeline in the northern Al-Ratqa oilfield, without any reports of injuries or interruption to its operations.

July 20: KOC controlled a limited fire at a gas pipeline at Burgan oil field, south of Kuwait.

September 6: Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) and US Chemical Company (DOW) signed a memorandum of understanding in mutual petrochemical industry and investment in the US.

September 18: KNPC and Kuwait Petroleum International signed a \$4.2 million contract for obtaining oils.

Defense and Interior Affairs:

April 19: Kuwait National Guard signed a cooperation protocol with Jordan's armed forces to boost security cooperation and technical training.

May 18: Interior Ministry's coast guard forces foiled an attempt by some Iraqis aimed to violate the country's territorial waters.

July 19: Ministry of Interior appealed to public to cooperate with security personnel and providing any information on the fugitives convicted of belonging to the so-called 'Al-Abadli terror cell.'

August 12: Ministry of Interior arrested 12 people convicted in the so-called 'Al-Abadli terror cell' in several areas across the country.

August 13: Ministry of Interior arrested one person convicted in the so-called 'Al-Abadli terror cell.'

August 19: Ministry of Interior arrested another person convicted in the final verdict of the so-called 'Al-Abadli terror cell.'

September 12: The first-ever Desert Observer exercise, led by Kuwaiti land forces, kicked off. The US army, and Kuwait's air forces, Ministry of Interior and National Guard took part in the drill.

November 2: At least five Kuwaiti citizens were killed and 13 others injured during a road accident while visiting the southern Iraqi city of Karbala.

November 18: The French government conferred The National Order of the Legion Honor on deputy chief of Kuwait National Guards Hashem Al-Refaie for his contributions to military field and cementing relations between the two countries.

November 20: Kuwait's Interior Ministry announced it foiled an attempt to smuggle narcotics, worth \$1 million, into the country.

November 27: The Court of Appeals sentenced some defendants in prison for entering the National Assembly.

December 5: The Ministry of Interior arrested seven people who attempted to smuggle 110 kilograms of Hashish.

Kuwait Fire Services Directorate (KFSD):

May 24: A big fire broke out at a 2,000-square meter petrochemical warehouse in Al-Rai district.

June 23: Firefighters contained a huge fire that broke out at a building under construction belonging to Kuwait Credit Bank in South Surra district.

June 30: Firefighters controlled a fire that erupted in two buildings under construction in Sharq district in Al-Asimah Governorate.

July 6: A fire broke out at an expansion project of the Avenues Mall in Al-Rai that led to material losses.

July 11: Seven people were injured in an explosion caused by a gas leakage at a confectionery shop belonging to Mishref Co-Operative Society.

July 28: A fire broke out at a paper factory in Al-Ahmadi area that led to the injury of six firefighters and material losses.

August 21: A blaze broke out at some shops in Al-Rai, wounding three firefighters during extinguishing the fire.

October 16: A fire broke out in a residential building in Salmiya, killing five people and wounding four others.

November 12: An earthquake measuring between 4-5 degrees on the Richter scale hit the country and was felt by many residents.

Transportation:

January 9: Fourteen flights heading to Kuwait Airport were redirected to Dammam, Doha and Manama airports after visibility dropped below 100 meters.

January 31: The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) signed contract with general

July 12: Kuwait's Directorate General of Civil Aviation and its Hungarian counterpart signed an agreement to promote bilateral cooperation in the areas of air transport and trade exchange.

July 21: Kuwait Airways received (Al-Wafra) aircraft of the long-range twin-engine jets, the Boeing 777 300ER.

August 30: Kuwait Airways and the Aviation Lease and Finance Company (ALAFCO) signed a deal to sell and re-lease four 777-300ER aircrafts for 12 years.

November 8: Kuwait Ports Authority signed a contract with the international consultancy office (RINA) estimated at \$1.6 million to develop the authority's actions.

Education:

March 21: A Kuwait University team won first place at the 10th Arab Open Robotics Championship held in Qatar.

March 22: Minister of Higher Education Dr Mohammad Al-Fares opened an Academy for Gifted boys in Kuwait and Arab world.

June 8: The Higher Institute for Communications and Navigation of the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) won ISO 9001 certificate.

June 13: The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) offered Salah Al-Najem, a Kuwaiti professor at Kuwait University, its e-learning award.

October 24: Higher Education Ministry signed a cooperation agreement with UAE's Zayed University to exchange scholarships.

November 19: Ministry of Education signed a memo of cooperation with Saudi National Center for Assessment.

Science:

January 9: Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research's (KISR) Shawqi Halih obtained a patent to reduce the flow of water to oil and gas wells.

January 15: A Gulf popular heritage festival opened in Sabah Al-Ahmad village, drawing a large turnout.

June 28: Kuwait won a two-year membership in the executive council of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO (IOC-UNESCO) during the 29th Session in Geneva.

October 6: World Health Organization (WHO) rated Kuwait as the top Arab country in terms of the quality of sanitation, drinking water and hygiene.

October 30: Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research signed a contract with the World Bank on environment risks.

November 5: Dr Ali Al-Dosari, at Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research, won Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation (AHSF)'s Arab Researchers Award.

November 29: Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research signed a contract with Doha's anti-doping laboratory on food security, environmental pollutants and the promotion of cooperation and scientific research.



Firefighters tackle a blaze at garages in Sharq in June 30, 2017.



Emergency teams inspect an oil spill near a power plant.

Environment Public Authority (EPA):

May 8: EPA announced that harmful bacteria led to the killing of fish.

August 14: Concerned bodies controlled oil spills monitored at the territorial waters that polluted shores between Al-Khiran and Ras Al-Zour.

August 27: EPA and Ministry of Defense signed a memo to promote cooperation in the areas of navigation, scientific and technical training.

September 18: EPA observed an oil leak of an unknown source in the northern area of Ras Al-Zour plant.

trade and contracting company for implementing the automated baggage check system at Kuwait International Airport.

March 12: Kuwait Airways received fifth aircraft of the family of long-range twin-engine jets, the Boeing 777-300ER.

June 11: The Kuwait Airways and ALAFCO Aviation Lease and Finance Company signed an initial agreement for the selling and re-leasing of four Boeing 777-300ER.

July 1: Kuwait Airways received an aircraft of the long-range twin-engine jets, the Boeing 777 300ER.

Embassy of the People's Republic of China

The Embassy of the Peoples Republic of China to Kuwait is seeking applications from qualified individuals to join staff in the Embassy

Important Criteria:

- Proficiency in Computer work.
- Proficiency in Arabic, English Languages (conversation, writing)
- Working experience in embassies is preferred

For application process please send your updated C.V. to: raedshang@gmail.com



North Korea defectors exposed to radiation?

Cambodia sends maids to Hong Kong after scandals

Page 9

Page 8



BETHLEHEM: Palestinian protesters clash with Israeli forces following a protest against the US' decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel yesterday at the entrance of Bethlehem. —AFP

Israel to name station after Trump

French magazine pulled after saying Israel 'not real country'

JERUSALEM: Israel is to name a planned new railway station close to Judaism's hallowed Western Wall in annexed east Jerusalem after US President Donald Trump, the transport minister has said. Trump has been lauded by the Jewish state—and sparked international condemnation—by breaking with years of US policy to recognize the holy city as Israel's capital. Minister Israel Katz approved a plan on Tuesday to extend a high-speed rail line under construction between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem into the Jewish Quarter of the Old City and build a station next to the Western Wall, a statement said.

The station close to the holiest site where Jews are permitted to pray will be called "Donald John Trump", the minister ordered, in tribute to his "historic and courageous decision" on Jerusalem. Trump's controversial shift on the holy city has sparked angry protests by Palestinians and was rejected in a non-binding UN General Assembly resolution. Israel seized the eastern part of Jerusalem—including the Western Wall in the Six-Day War of 1967 and later annexed it in a move not recognized by the international community.

Israelis see the whole city as their indivisible capital,

while the Palestinians view the east as the capital of their future state. The Western Wall, the last remnant of the second Jewish temple, is at the foot of the Haram Al-Sharif compound housing the Al-Aqsa mosque and the golden-topped Dome of the Rock, the third holiest site in Islam. The new railway line is scheduled to start linking Tel Aviv and Jerusalem in 2018, cutting the journey time to less than 30 minutes. The ministry puts the cost of the 56 kilometer line, which will also serve the town of Modiin and Ben Gurion airport, at around seven billion shekels (\$2 billion, 1.7 billion euros).



Transport minister approves rail plan

it said that Israel was "not a real country". "Youpi, j'ai compris!" (I've Understood!) which sells around 60,000 copies each month aimed at five- to eight-year-olds, was withdrawn by publishers Bayard after protests from Jewish groups. The magazine's January issue carries a map of the world with the following legend: "We call these 197 countries states, like France, Germany or Algeria. There are other ones but not everyone agrees they are real countries (for example the State of Israel and North Korea)."

Bayard said there had been an error. "We recognize our mistake, it was not well put, and obviously we do not want to contest the existence of the state of Israel," its managing director Pascal Ruffenach said. He said they were withdrawing the issue "voluntarily and in good faith because it is

important to contribute to the spirit of calm," said. Francis Kalifat, the head of the French Council of Jewish Institutions (Crif), had earlier demanded that the magazine be pulled. He said he had been tipped off by readers about this "historical untruth being feed to young children aged between five and eight. I immediately wrote to the editor and the head of Bayard to protest about this flagrant error and to demand they rectify it," he said. Crif has also demanded that the magazine run a correction in its next issue "as well as an article explaining what Israel is and how it came into existence." Ruffenach, however, refused to be drawn.

"Our December issue explained the major religions to children. Our publications follow the learning cycle for children of around six years of age. We will see how we can do better next time," he added. Israel was founded in 1948 after a vote at the United Nations on the partition of Palestine. But US President Donald Trump's controversial decision to recognize Jerusalem as its capital has triggered Palestinian protests and was rejected by a UN General Assembly resolution. Israelis see the whole of the city as their undivided capital, while the Palestinians view the east as the capital of their future state. —Agencies

Delhi 'godman' may have enslaved and trafficked women

MUMBAI: A self-proclaimed "godman" may have trafficked and enslaved dozens of women including minors at several retreats in Delhi and across the country, officials said Tuesday, in the latest case of an Indian spiritual leader accused of sexual abuse. Women and young girls were found in locked rooms at several ashrams, or spiritual communities, across Delhi, said Ajay Verma, a lawyer appointed by the Delhi High Court to prepare a preliminary report.

"Of the more than 100 women we found, we perceived several to be minors," he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. "Rooms at these premises were locked from the outside, and we had to break the locks to gain access," he said. Calls to the main ashram seeking comment were not returned. Members from the state-run Child Welfare Committee and the Delhi Commission for Women (DCW) freed scores of minors and women last week from several ashrams in Delhi run by Virendra Dev Dikshit, who is missing, Verma said. Inspections of Dikshit's other properties are underway, he said. The case is the latest in a series involving self-styled spiritual leaders in India who have been accused of sexually abusing followers. Earlier this year, another self-proclaimed godman claiming more than 1 million followers was convicted of raping two women followers under rape laws that were recently tightened. —Reuters

Granny escapes death sentence

SHAH ALAM: An Australian grandmother who said she was tricked into carrying drugs into Malaysia after falling for an online romance scam was yesterday cleared of trafficking, a crime punishable by death. Maria Elvira Pinto Exposto wept and hugged her son after being found not guilty of smuggling crystal methamphetamine, a rare outcome in a country where hundreds of people have been sentenced to death for drugs offences in recent years. "I'm happy now that I'm free," said the 54-year-old, as she was ushered out of the courtroom after the verdict.

But prosecutors have indicated they want to appeal the acquittal, her lawyer said, meaning Exposto won't be able to go back home yet and there is still a chance she could be sentenced to death. She was arrested in December 2014 while in transit at Kuala Lumpur airport with 1.1 kilos (2.4 pounds) of the drug stitched into the compartment of a backpack she was carrying. The mother of four argued she did not know about the hidden stash of "ice". She said she had been fooled into carrying the bag after travelling to China to see someone she met online called "Captain Daniel Smith", who had

claimed to be a US serviceman.

Anyone caught with at least 50 grams of crystal meth is considered a trafficker in Muslim-majority Malaysia, and death by hanging is mandatory in the case of a conviction. However handing down his verdict at the High Court in Shah Alam, outside Kuala Lumpur, Judge Ghazali Cha accepted the defence's argument that Exposto did not know the bag contained drugs and acquitted her. "I agree with the defence lawyer that the accused did not have knowledge about the drugs," he said. "I believe that at that time her (Exposto) feelings of love towards 'Captain Daniel Smith' overcame everything, including her own husband, her family and her future."

Hundreds on death row

Exposto's lawyer Muhammad Shafee Abdullah welcomed the verdict but said he was surprised at prosecutors' intention to appeal as the judge had sided firmly with the defense. Prosecutors have 14 days to lodge the challenge. After engaging in a long online romance, Exposto had travelled to Shanghai to see "Smith". But she did not succeed in meeting her supposed love interest while there and ended up being given a bag by a stranger, who asked her to take it to Melbourne.

When she arrived at Kuala Lumpur International Airport to change flights, she mistakenly went through immigration



SHAH ALAM, Malaysia: Maria Elvira Pinto Exposto reacts after she was cleared of drug trafficking charges at Shah Alam High Court in Shah Alam, outside Kuala Lumpur yesterday. —AFP

as she was unfamiliar with the airport. She voluntarily offered her bags for customs inspection and the drugs were discovered. There are at least 900 people on death row in Malaysia, officials have said, but executions have been rare in recent years. Malaysian lawmakers voted last year to amend legislation so that capital punishment is no longer mandatory in drug-trafficking cases.

But the changes have not yet come into force as they must be passed by the

upper house, meaning that in the case of a conviction in Exposto's case, the judge would have had to impose the death penalty. Two Australians were hanged in Malaysia in 1986 for heroin trafficking—the first Westerners to be executed in the country—in a case that strained relations. In 2013 Dominic Bird, a former truck driver from Perth, was acquitted of drug trafficking charges after he was allegedly caught with 167 grams of crystal methamphetamine. —AFP

International

DR Congo steps up arrests of South Sudan refugees to weed out rebels

Congolese authorities tighten the border

ABA: The Congolese army has stepped up arrests of South Sudanese refugees and tightened the border in a bid to block rebels from seeking sanctuary in its country, officials say. As hundreds fled into the Democratic Republic of Congo last week, after President Salva Kiir's government army dislodged Riek Machar's rebel SPLA-IO from its headquarters in southwestern Lasu, some 18 suspected rebels were taken into detention.

It is the first time Congolese authorities have detained a significant number of South Sudanese and may signal a change in Kinshasa's policy towards the neighboring country, riven by a devastating four-year power struggle. "As of now 15 have been released. They were arrested because they had returned to South Sudan without authorization. Three who remain in custody are suspected of being rebels and investigations are ongoing," said Alexis Kabambi, who heads the National Commission for Refugees (CNR) in the Congolese town of ABA.



Rebels seek sanctuary in DR Congo

erupted in Lasu, siblings Grace Gaba and Joseph Moro rushed back to their village to help an elderly family member across the border and to fetch some of the family's livestock. But when they tried to re-enter the DRC, Moro was arrested. "I haven't heard from him since," said Gaba, insisting her brother wasn't a soldier. Gaba and her brother didn't obtain the required permission for their trip to South Sudan, which may have drawn suspicion when they tried to re-enter the DRC. "This back and forth isn't appreciated by the security services," said Kabambi. "When you return to the other side, you are suspect. You are going there for what, to communicate with those people on the other side?"

Extradition back to S Sudan

Officials in the DRC suspect a close link between the refugee community and the opposition fighters. "We know that the women and children are here in the camp while the husbands are part of the rebellion," a police officer said at a recent community gathering in ABA's refugee settlement. The officer called upon ex-combatants to report themselves to the army "for their own protection."

But young men who are sympathetic to the rebellion back home don't trust Congolese authorities. "I don't know their position, that's why I'm at risk. If I'm arrested, they could torture me and hand me over to the South Sudanese government," said one rebel currently seeking refugee status in ABA. The young man plans to install his family in the refugee settlement and then return to South Sudan to resume his role in the SPLA-IO. Elsewhere in the DRC, in Goma, some 400 mostly former SPLA-IO rebels have been living confined to a camp since fleeing with Machar in 2016. They live not quite as prisoners and not quite refugees, accepting restriction of their move-



ABA, DR Congo: A group of South Sudanese refugees flee from recent fighting in Lasu in South Sudan rest after crossing the border into the Democratic Republic of Congo. —AFP

ment in exchange for food and protection from a UN peacekeeping mission.

Fragile ceasefire

The SPLA-IO inked a ceasefire deal with the South Sudanese government last week but the truce is already floundering as both sides accuse each other of multiple breaches of the accord. According to international law, third party countries are obliged to disarm and intern ex-

combatants until a ceasefire comes into force or until they genuinely renounce military activities, at which point they qualify for asylum. But procedures described by Congolese authorities appear to run counter to these provisions. "Once you've borne arms, you fled and you came here, you are considered a soldier," said Kabambi. "The Congolese armed forces then cooperate with the government of South Sudan to see how these people can be extradited to their country."—AFP

Syria Eastern Ghouta, under siege since 2013

BEIRUT: Syria's ruined rebel holdout region of Eastern Ghouta, from where urgent UN-demanded medical evacuations started yesterday, has been under siege for four years, suffering attacks and malnutrition. Here is a summary of what has happened in the area, home to around 400,000 people:

Battle for Damascus

Free Syrian Army (FSA) rebels launch an attack on the capital from its suburb of Ghouta in July 2012, more than a year after the start of an uprising against the regime. After a week of fighting, the army asserts control of most of Damascus, but parts of its suburbs fall into rebel hands. Fighting flares again at the end of 2012 as the rebels set up base in Eastern Ghouta. The area becomes the target of regular bombings and artillery strikes; markets, schools and hospitals are hit. From 2013 Eastern Ghouta is totally under government siege.

Sarin gas

In August 2013, hundreds of people including several children are killed in a chemical attack on Eastern Ghouta and another rebel bastion near Damascus, Moadamiyet Al-Sham. The opposition blames President Bashar al-Assad's regime, which denies involvement. Washington also squarely accuses the Syrian government of responsibility, saying more than 1,400 people, including 426 children, were killed. US and French retaliatory strikes are averted only after a September 14 US-Russia agreement that Syria's chemical weapons arsenal will be destroyed. A UN report concludes days later that the use of sarin gas had been proved "unequivocally and objectively".

Malnutrition

In November 2016, UN humanitarian operations chief Stephen O'Brien says nearly one million Syrians are under



GHOUTA: Syrian children play at the courtyard of a school turned into a shelter for people displaced by the war, in the rebel-controlled town of Hamouria, in the eastern Ghouta region. —AFP

siege, including in Eastern Ghouta, in a "deliberate tactic of cruelty". Following the release of shocking images of severely malnourished children in Eastern Ghouta, the United Nations in October 2017 condemns "the deliberate starvation of civilians as a method of warfare".

The following month, UNICEF says childhood malnutrition levels in the region are the highest recorded in Syria since the war began. A survey in November showed that 11.9 percent of children under five were suffering from acute malnutrition, compared with 2.1 percent in a similar survey in January, it says. Once an important producer of food, Ghouta has been ravaged, with buildings and roads in ruin and costs soaring. While some food is still grown locally, or smuggled in, humanitarian access to the region has been lim-

ited despite regular appeals from aid agencies. The United Nations says in late November that 500 people, including children with complex medical issues, need urgent evacuation from Eastern Ghouta. At least 16 people have died while waiting for evacuations to begin, UN humanitarian taskforce for Syria chief Jan Egeland says on December 21.

'De-escalation zone' bombed

Eastern Ghouta is in May 2017 identified as one of four "de-escalation" zones, but the government maintains its blockade and renews bombardment in mid-November. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitoring group says that 211 civilians, including 49 children, are killed in the bombings.—AFP

Syria prisoner release deal breaks deadlock

GENEVA: Months of deadlock over medical evacuations from Syria's biggest remaining siege broke late on Tuesday when a deal between Damascus and a rebel faction allowed the Red Crescent to evacuate a handful of critically ill patients. Four patients were evacuated from eastern Ghouta, where almost 400,000 people have been under siege by President Bashar Al-Assad's forces since 2013, the Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS) said in a statement. The evacuees were taken to hospitals in Damascus. The enclave, a densely populated pocket of satellite towns and farms, is the only major rebel stronghold near the capital Damascus. The military has steadily defeated pockets of armed rebellion in western Syria over the past year, with the help of Russian air power and Iranian-backed militias.

The Jaish Al-Islam rebel group in Eastern Ghouta said it was releasing 29 detainees. In return, the government is allowing the evacuation of 29 of the most critical cases. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said it had facilitated the deal, which came two months after the United Nations asked Assad's government to allow the urgent evacuation of the 29 patients. The operation was still in a very early phase, it said. "Happy that our negotiations reached this important goal. This is a signal of hope for the future Syria," Francesco Rocca, president of the International Federation of the Red Cross, wrote in a tweet.

The Syrian government did not immediately comment on the evacuation. A Jaish al-Islam political official in Ghouta said the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) mediated between Damascus and the rebels for the swap. "We worked to get them out through the Red Crescent, and we are working on evacuating the rest of the nearly 500 cases out," said Yasser Delwan. But there was no indication of whether more evacuations would be allowed, he added. The United Nations has pleaded for the government to allow evacuation of around 500 patients, including children with cancer, and has said there was no excuse for not permitting their evacuation to go ahead.

Although Eastern Ghouta is officially a "de-escalation zone" under Russian-led ceasefire deals for rebel territory, fighting there has continued. The population, including 130,000 children, is suffering the worst malnutrition seen in the almost seven-year war, the UN has said. Residents and aid workers said the government has tightened the siege in recent months in what they called a deliberate use of starvation as a weapon of war, a charge the government denies. On Sunday, Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said Turkey was working with Russia, Assad's ally, on the evacuations. Ankara has backed some rebel factions in the Syrian war.

The number of people needing urgent evacuation has shrunk because they keep dying while waiting for help, the UN has said. It has a priority list of 494 patients, while SAMS put the number of critical cases at 641, and said 17 had already died. The remainder of the 29 patients included in the deal would be evacuated over the coming days, said SAMS, a nonprofit that supports hospitals mostly in opposition areas. "The list includes 18 children and 4 women suffering from heart disease, cancer, kidney failure, and blood diseases, in addition to cases requiring advanced surgery that are not available in the besieged area," it said.—Reuters

Jerusalem embassy move a 'sovereign' decision: Guatemala

GUATEMALA CITY: Guatemala on Tuesday said its decision to follow the US in moving its embassy in Israel to Jerusalem was a "sovereign" matter that should not affect ties with other countries. "These are Guatemala's foreign policy and sovereign decisions," Foreign Minister Sandra Jovel told a news conference. "In any case, we are open to being able to converse with countries that see it as such, but I don't believe it will create any sort of problem with other countries," she said.

Guatemalan President Jimmy Morales announced that he was ordering his country's embassy to move from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, despite a UN vote last week condemning US President Donald Trump's decision to unilaterally view the holy city as Israel's capital. The announcement made Guatemala the first country to follow the

United States in saying it was moving its embassy. Israel claims all of Jerusalem as its capital, while Palestinians, consider east Jerusalem as the occupied capital of their future state. A UN General Assembly vote on Thursday resoundingly rejected any attempt to unilaterally define Jerusalem's status. A total of 128 nations voted to maintain the international consensus that Jerusalem's status can only be decided through peace negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians.

Move won't happen 'tomorrow'

The United States and Israel mustered seven other countries to their side to vote no to the UN resolution. The other nations were Guatemala, Honduras, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Palau and Togo. The Palestinian foreign ministry has called Guatemala's decision "shameful and illegal." Jovel told the news conference she had so far received no telephone calls "from any ambassador in relation to this issue."

She added: "What we are doing is returning our embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, where we had it for many years." However, the foreign minister said she did not know how long it would take before Guatemala's embassy was in Jerusalem. "I don't have a time estimate for this move, but I'm not saying it will happen tomorrow." She also discounted the possibility of Arab countries exacting economic



HERZLIYA: Guatemalan flag hang outside the building housing the offices of the Central American Embassy, in the Israeli city of Herzliya, near Tel Aviv. — AFP

consequences on Guatemala for its decision—something that had happened in the past, to reverse a similar move.

A former president of Guatemala, Ramiro de Leon Carpio, who was in power 1993-1996, had made a decision to move the embassy to Jerusalem, but backtracked

when Muslim-majority countries shut off access to Guatemalan goods. Guatemala is today much more reliant on the United States, which is giving \$750 million to it and neighboring El Salvador and Honduras to crack down on the crime and poverty that is stirring migration to the US.—AFP

International

North Korean defectors may have been 'exposed to radiation': South

US sanctions N Korean missile experts

SEOUL: At least four defectors from North Korea have shown signs of radiation exposure, the South Korean government said yesterday, although researchers could not confirm if they were related to Pyongyang's nuclear weapons program. The four are among 30 former residents of Kilju county, an area in North Korea that includes the nuclear test site Punggye-ri, who have been examined by the South Korean government since October, a month after the North conducted its sixth and most powerful nuclear test, Unification Ministry spokesman Baik Tae-hyun told a news briefing.

They were exposed to radiation between May 2009 and January 2013, and all defected to the South before the most recent test, a researcher at the Korea Atomic Energy Research Institute, which carried out the examinations, told reporters. North Korea has conducted six nuclear bomb tests since 2006, all in tunnels deep beneath the mountains of Punggye-ri, in defiance of UN Security Council resolutions and international condemnation.

The researcher cautioned that there were a number of ways people may be exposed to radiation, and that none of the defectors who lived had lived in Punggye-ri itself showed specific symptoms. A series of small earthquakes in the wake of the last test - which the North claimed to be of a hydrogen bomb - prompted suspicions that it may have damaged the mountainous location in the northwest tip of the country. Experts warned that further tests in the area could risk radioactive pollution. After the Sept 3 nuclear test, China's Nuclear Safety Administration said it had begun emergency monitoring for radiation along its border with North Korea.

And in early December, a state-run newspaper in China's Jilin province, which borders North Korea and Russia, published a page of "common sense" advice on how readers can protect themselves from a nuclear weapons attack or explosion. Cartoon illustrations of ways to dispel radioactive contamination were also provided, such as using water to wash off shoes and using cotton buds to clean ears, as well as a picture of a vomiting child to show how medical help can be sought to speed the

expulsion of radiation through stomach pumping and induced urination.

US sanctions

In another development, United States has announced sanctions on two North Korean officials behind their country's ballistic missile program on Tuesday, while Russia reiterated an offer to mediate to ease tensions between Washington and Pyongyang. The new US steps were the latest in a campaign aimed at forcing North Korea - which has defied years of multi-lateral and bilateral sanctions - to abandon a weapons program aimed at developing nuclear-tipped missiles capable of hitting the United States.

The US Treasury named the officials as Kim Jong Sik and Ri Pyong Chol. It said Kim was reportedly a key figure in North Korea's efforts to switch its missile program from liquid to solid fuel, while Ri was reported to be a key official in its inter-continental ballistic missile (ICBM) development. "Treasury is targeting leaders of North Korea's ballistic missile programs, as part of our maximum pressure campaign to isolate (North Korea) and achieve a fully denuclearized Korean Peninsula," Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said in a statement.

The largely symbolic steps block any property or interests the two might have within US jurisdiction and prohibit any dealings by US citizens with them. The move followed new United Nations sanctions announced last Friday in response to North Korea's Nov 29 test of an ICBM that Pyongyang said put all of the US mainland within range of its nuclear weapons. Those sanctions sought to further limit North Korea's access to refined petroleum products and crude oil and its earnings from workers abroad.

North Korea declared the UN steps to be an act of war and tantamount to a complete economic blockade. The standoff between the United States and North Korea has raised fears of a new conflict on the Korean peninsula, which has remained in a technical state of war since the 1950-53 Korean War ended in an armistice, not a peace treaty. Washington has said that all options, including military ones,

Russia offers to mediate as Korea tension escalates



North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un addressed the 5th Conference of the Workers' Party of Korea Cell Chairpersons.—AFP

are on the table in dealing with North Korea. It says it prefers a diplomatic solution, but that North Korea has given no indication it is willing to discuss denuclearization.

Kremlin offer

On Tuesday, the Kremlin, which has long called for the two sides to hold negotiations, said it was ready to act as a mediator if the United States and North Korea were willing for it to play such a role. "Russia's readiness to clear the way for de-escalation is obvious," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters. Asked to comment on the offer, a spokesman for the US State Department, Justin Higgins, said the United States "has the ability to communicate with North Korea through a variety of diplomatic channels," and added: "We want the North Korean regime

to understand that there is a different path that it can choose, however it is up to North Korea to change course and return to credible negotiations."

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, who made a similar offer on Monday, told US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson in a phone call on Tuesday that "Washington's aggressive rhetoric" and beefing up of its military presence in the region had heightened tensions and was unacceptable. Russia's foreign ministry said. It said Lavrov underscored the need for "the fastest move to the negotiating process from the language of sanctions." Another State Department spokesman, Michael Cavey, said Washington remained open to talks, but the onus was on North Korea "to take sincere and meaningful actions toward denuclearization and refrain from further provocations." —Agencies

News in brief

Pregnant elephant 'poisoned'

BANDA ACEH: A pregnant elephant has been found dead in a palm oil plantation on Indonesia's Sumatra island, in what authorities suspect was a deliberate poisoning, an official said yesterday. The animal's body was found near the remote Seuneubok Bayu village in Aceh on December 22, after authorities received a tip off from locals, Aceh conservation centre head Sapto Aji Prabowo said. "The 25-year-old elephant had been dead for around 10 days when we got there," he said. "From the autopsy, we saw that its digestive organs turned black which the doctor said was a general indication of poisoning." The Sumatran elephant was carrying 13-month old male foetus and was at least six months short of giving birth. Locals have told authorities that several days before the carcass was discovered farmers had complained an elephant ate their fertilizer. Sumatran elephant are critically endangered and a protected species, but rampant deforestation for plantations has reduced their natural habitat and brought them into conflict with humans.

660 fishermen missing

NEW DELHI: More than 660 fishermen remain missing one month after a deadly cyclone battered India's south coast and parts of neighboring Sri Lanka, Indian authorities said yesterday. Cyclone Ockhi has already left a confirmed death toll of more than 250 people from its rampage that started on November 29 in Sri Lanka, where 27 of the dead were reported. Winds of up to 130 kilometers per hour uprooted trees and damaged electricity and telephone infrastructure as well as tens of thousands of homes. India's Defense Minister Nirmala Sitharaman told parliament that 661 fishermen were still missing but did not say whether they were presumed dead. Four hundred were from Tamil Nadu state and another 261 from Kerala. She said the military and other services had rescued about 845 people up to December 20. Hundreds of fishermen in mostly rudimentary boats were caught in the deadly cyclone that emerged in the Bay of Bengal and swept over Sri Lanka and south India before entering the Arabian Sea.

Woman froze to death

TOKYO: A Japanese couple has been arrested after allegedly imprisoning their daughter for more than 15 years before she froze to death aged 33 this month, local media reported yesterday. Osaka residents Yasutaka Kakimoto, 55, and his wife Yukari, 53, admitted to locking their daughter Airi in a small room from the age of around 16 or 17, Kyodo News said. An autopsy showed Airi had frozen to death and was extremely malnourished, weighing about 19 kilograms. The parents told police they confined their daughter because she was mentally ill and acted violently, national broadcaster NHK said, adding that the room had an intercom that the family used to communicate. They reportedly fed their daughter about once a day. The parents also kept more than 10 surveillance cameras around their house in a possible attempt to hide their secret, according to newspaper the Yomiuri Shimbum. After reporting her death to police, the couple were initially charged with illegally disposing of a body but police were also considering other charges including confinement, Kyodo said.

5 uplifting stories

LONDON: From Kung Fu nuns teaching Indian women self defense to freewheeling female students in Pakistan, here are five good news stories you might have missed in 2017 amid headlines of bloodshed, natural disasters and sexual harassment allegations.

Kung Fu nuns

If you think all that nuns do is sit and pray, think again. The Kung Fu nuns - women from an age-old Buddhist sect based mainly in Nepal and India - use martial arts to teach women how to fend off sex attackers. "The heroes of the Himalayas" also hike and cycle through the mountains to raise awareness among local communities on issues ranging from pollution to human trafficking. "We walk the talk. If we act, people will think if: 'If nuns can act, why can't we?'"

A 'Haven of Peace'

Protected by marshes and inaccessible by foot, an ethnically mixed town in war-torn South Sudan has been dubbed a "haven of peace" by its 40,000 resi-

dents. While fighting in the rest of the country has created Africa's largest refugee crisis, Ganyiel's residents have been living together in relative peace, rowing through the surrounding swamps in their tree-carved boats. "Just two months ago, 2,700 Dinka arrived here, fleeing food insecurity and conflict. They are welcome. The war is political. It's not between us people."

Bicycles in Pakistan

A bike sharing start-up on a Pakistani university campus has brought more than convenience for the students: the sight of freewheeling women has been helping to challenge gender stereotypes in the conservative society. Female students, reluctant to share cars with their male colleagues, now make up more than half of the cycling scheme's customers, pedalling across the nearly 1,000 acres of campus to attend classes.

Unlikely friendships

A new drive in Italy to match child migrants and refugees with residents who volunteer to support them has resulted in unexpected friendships. A 16-year-old Bangladeshi boy or a 17-year old from Gambia may share no common language with guardians who could be their grandparents, yet the project has helped the young refugees find someone who cares



PARIS: Photo taken by the banks of the Canal Saint Martin, in Paris, shows tents of homeless people, mostly migrants or refugees.—AFP

for them in a place they now call home.

Colombia's neighborhood

With no money and no husbands to support them, a group of women displaced by Colombia's civil war has turned dreams into reality by building their own homes. Despite death threats, arson and

even a murder, they learned how to make bricks and mix cement, and the City of Women that they built is run entirely by women who are now fighting for other rights like bus routes or a school for their children. "We fought tooth and nail to build our homes. Men can't come here and say this is mine. It's ours." —Reuters

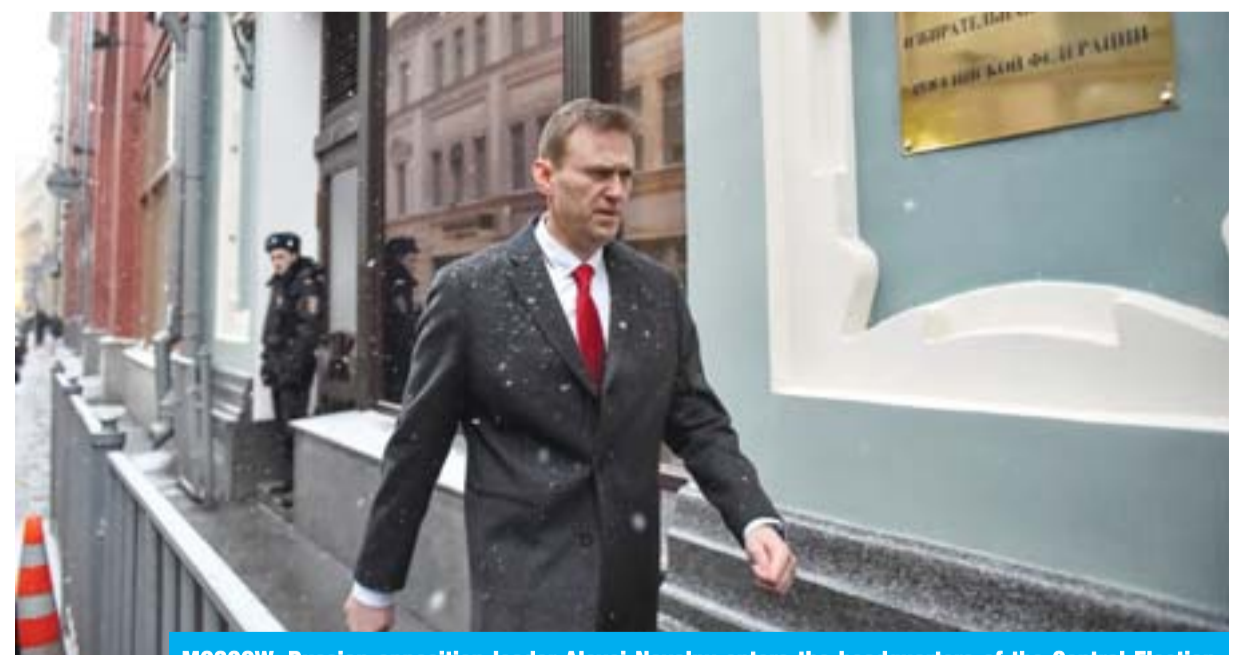
Putin's critic Navalny calls election boycott rallies across Russia

MOSCOW: Opposition leader Alexei Navalny announced yesterday a series of rallies across Russia in January to press home his call for a boycott of next year's presidential election, a move likely to draw a sharp response from the Kremlin and police. Navalny unveiled his plan hours after President Vladimir Putin, who polls suggest is a shoo-in for re-election, registered his candidacy at the central election commission ahead of the March 18 vote. The commission ruled on Monday that Navalny was not eligible to run against Putin due to a suspended prison sentence.

A furious Navalny, who says the sentence was part of a fabricated case designed to thwart his political ambitions, responded by calling for an election boycott. That prompted the Kremlin to demand an investigation to determine whether his statement broke the law. Yesterday, Navalny upped the ante, saying he and his supporters would organize nationwide rallies on Jan 28 in 85 towns and cities, including Moscow and St Petersburg, to support his call for an election boycott. "We refuse to call the reappointment of Putin an election," Navalny said in a statement on his website. "We are not going to vote and will convince everyone around us not to vote. We are going to campaign (for a boycott) with all our might."

Turnout

A boycott could pose a problem for the Kremlin which is keen to ensure a high turnout in the election to help confer legitimacy on Putin's expected victory amid some signs of apathy among voters. Under Russian law, the time and place of rallies must be agreed with the authorities



MOSCOW: Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny enters the headquarters of the Central Election Commission in Moscow.—AFP

who have often declined to authorize them in the past, citing conflicting events or security concerns. When the opposition has gone ahead anyway, the police have broken up rallies by force and detained attendees.

Polls show that Putin, who has led Russia for 18 years as either president or prime minister, is on course to comfortably win another six-year term, allowing him to rule until 2024, when he'll turn 72. The former KGB officer is running as an independent, a move seen as a way of strengthening his image as a "father of the nation" rather than as a party political figure. The ruling United Russia party, which he once led and which controls three quarters of seats in the

lower house of parliament, has said it will support him, as will Just Russia, a pro-government centre-left group.

Allies laud Putin for restoring national pride and expanding Moscow's global clout with interventions in Syria and Ukraine. But Navalny says Putin has been in power too long and that his support is artificially maintained by a biased state media and an unfair system which excludes genuine opponents. Navalny has made a name for himself by successfully leveraging social media and conducting high profile corruption investigations into senior officials. He has also organized some of the biggest anti-government protests in years. —Reuters

International

Japan says ties at risk if South Korea messes with 'comfort women' deal

Refrain from calling women 'sex slaves': Secret deal

SEOUL: Japan said yesterday any attempt by South Korea to revise a 2015 deal meant to have resolved a row over "comfort women" forced to work in Japan's wartime brothels would make relations "unmanageable" after Seoul said the agreement had failed. The two US allies, which share a bitter history including Japanese colonization, are key to international efforts to rein in North Korea's nuclear and missile programs that it pursues in defiance of UN Security Council resolutions. South Korean Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha apologized for the controversial deal yesterday, as a panel investigating the negotiations leading up to the agreement unveiled its results.

The investigation concluded that the dispute over the comfort women, a Japanese euphemism for the thousands of girls and women, many of them Korean, forced to work in wartime brothels, could not be "fundamentally resolved" because the victims' demand for legal compensation had not been met. South Korea wants Japan to take legal responsibility and provide due compensation. Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono said the 2015 settlement, which includes a 1 billion yen (\$8.8 million) fund to help the victims, resulted from "legitimate negotiations", warning any amendment may complicate relations.

"If (South Korea) tries to revise the agreement that is already being implemented, that would make Japan's ties with South Korea unmanageable and it would be unacceptable," Kono said in a statement. Kang apologized for "giving wounds of the heart to the victims, their families, civil society that support them and all other people because the agreement failed to sufficiently reflect a victim-oriented

approach, which is the universal standard in resolving human rights issues". Under the deal, endorsed by South Korean President Moon Jae-in's predecessor and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Japan apologized to former comfort women and provided the fund to help them.

They agreed the issue would be "irreversibly resolved" if both fulfilled their obligations. Tokyo says the matter of compensation for the women was settled under a 1965 treaty. It says that in 2015, it agreed to provide the funds to help them heal "psychological wounds". The South Korean

government will review the result of the investigation and translate it into policy after consulting victims and civic groups that support them, Kang said.

The comfort women issue has been a regular cause for contention between Japan and neighbors China and North and South Korea since the war. Japan colonized the Korean peninsula between 1910 and 1945 and occupied parts of China before and after the war. "(The Moon government) has said it will seek a two-track policy by separately dealing with the comfort women issue and the relationship in the face of North Korea's threats, but Japan may not agree with that", Lee Sung-hwan, a professor of Japanese studies in Keimyung University in South Korea, told Reuters.

Japan wants South Korea to remove statues near the Japanese embassy in Seoul and the Japanese consulate in Busan city commemorating Korean comfort women. Seoul says the memorials were erected by civic groups and therefore out of its reach. According to the investigation, however, the sides struck a separate, secret deal in which South Korea promised to persuade the groups to relocate

Efforts to rein in N Korean nuclear programs at risk



SEOUL: People sit around a statue of a 'comfort woman' (center) during an installation of empty chairs at a performance event, commemorating the death of eight former sex slaves this year. —AFP

the statues, provide no support for their overseas statue-raising campaign and refrain from calling the women "sex slaves" on the world stage.

In 2014, the UN Human Rights Committee requested Tokyo to clarify the "comfort women" euphemism, with an independent expert on the panel calling for it to be replaced with "enforced sex slaves". "Such an issue of universal value and historical awareness as that of comfort

women cannot be resolved through short-term diplomatic negotiations and a political bargain," said Oh Tai-kyu, a former journalist who led the investigation. Andrew Horvat, a visiting professor at Josai International University in Japan, said that the pact was flawed from the beginning because it failed to produce real reconciliation. "The agreement was not reconciliation, but an agreement not to talk about it anymore", Horvat said. —Reuters

Rising humidity can worsen 'impact' of high temperatures

MUMBAI: High humidity will magnify the effects of rising heat from South America to India, affecting people's ability to work and even survive, unless greenhouse gas emissions are substantially cut in coming decades, according to US researchers. Heat remains underestimated as a threat by governments, aid agencies and individuals, and muggy heat is even more oppressive than the "dry" kind, because it stops people from sweating which takes away excess heat.

A study from the Earth Institute at Columbia University found areas along the coast and others that experience humid-weather patterns will be most affected by higher temperatures unless governments curb greenhouse gas emissions that can raise temperatures and put in place measures to tackle the heat.

The areas likely to be affected include the Amazon, southeastern United States, western and central Africa, parts of the Middle East, northern India and eastern China. Current and projected "wet bulb" temperatures - which reflect the combined effects of heat and humidity - found that by the 2070s, high wet-bulb readings that now occur maybe once a year could prevail 100-250 days of the year in some parts. "The conditions we're talking about basically never occur now - people in most places have never experienced them," said lead author Ethan Coffel at Columbia's Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory.

"Failure to adopt both mitigation and adaptation measures is likely to result in suffering, economic damage, and increased heat-related mortality." Rising temperatures may make low-latitude developing nations in the Asian subcontinent, the Middle East, Africa and South America



PUNJAB: Smoke is emitted from the chimney of brick kiln in the Indian city of Jalandhar. The Punjab state government and pollution control board have decided to shut brick kilns in the northern Indian state of Punjab over the winter season amid concerns over smog. — AFP

practically uninhabitable during the summer months, another report earlier this year noted. With muggy heat, the air is already heavy with moisture, so sweat stops evaporating, halting a process to cool the body. If there is no air conditioning, organs strain and can start to fail.

This can lead to lethargy, sickness and, in the worst conditions, death, according to the new study. The study projects parts of the Middle East and northern India may

hit 35 wet-bulb degrees Celsius by late century - equal to the skin's temperature, and the theoretical limit at which people will die within hours without artificial cooling. "It's not just about the heat ... it's about how many people are poor, how many are old, who has to go outside to work, who has air conditioning," said Alex de Sherbinin at Columbia's Center for International Earth Science Information Network. —Reuters

News in brief

Shabaab Islamists killed

NAIROBI: The United States carried out an air strike on Christmas Eve against the Shabaab Islamist group that left 13 dead, according to a statement released yesterday. "In coordination with the Federal Government of Somalia, US forces conducted an airstrike against Al-Shabaab militants on the morning of Dec 24, 2017, in southern Somalia, killing 13 terrorists," read the statement from the US Africa Command (AFRICOM). The United States has stepped up its operations in Somalia in recent weeks, with frequent strikes against Shabaab and a separate self-proclaimed branch of the Islamic State in the Horn of Africa nation. Three weeks ago the US said it had killed eight Shabaab militants, while an air strike in November reportedly left more than 100 jihadists dead. The Al-Qaeda-linked Shabaab has been fighting to overthrow successive internationally backed governments in Mogadishu since 2007 and frequently deploys car and truck bombs against military, government and civilian targets.

Rare terrorism trial

DAKAR: The trial of 31 people accused of terrorism offences in Senegal was postponed yesterday, setting back a case that has forced the country to confront a security problem plaguing its neighbors. The suspects, among them an imam and three women, are accused of criminal conspiracy related to financing a terror group, money laundering, acts of terrorism and funding terrorism. On the first day of proceedings Malik Lamotte, the presiding judge, delayed the next hearing to February 14 to allow the defense more time to prepare its case. The heavily-guarded Dakar court trial is believed to be the first collective prosecution of suspects accused of terror-related activities in the majority-Muslim country, which is seen as a pillar of democracy and stability in the region. Senegal has so far escaped the Al-Qaeda-linked jihadist insurgency that has destabilized neighboring Mali, and seen attacks on other west African nations including Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast.

Diplomat kicked out

BRASILIA: Brazil on Tuesday ordered the top diplomat at Venezuela's embassy, Gerardo Delgado, to leave the country, in retaliation for Caracas booting out the Brazilian ambassador. "Brazil has decided to declare the Venezuelan charge d'affaires persona non grata," a Brazilian foreign ministry spokesman said. "In practice, this means he will have to leave the country. It is a swift measure," he said. Venezuela announced on Saturday that Brazil's ambassador to Caracas, Ruy Pereira, was no longer welcome as it viewed the Brazilian government as illegitimate. Caracas is opposed to conservative Brazilian President Michel Temer, who replaced impeached leftist president Dilma Rousseff last year. Temer's rise resulted in Venezuela-Brazil diplomatic ties being briefly frozen. Venezuela on Saturday also ordered the Canadian charge d'affaires in Caracas to leave, prompting Ottawa on Monday to say Venezuela's ambassador and charge d'affaires must leave their posts.

Croat woman jailed

SARAJEVO: A Bosnian court yesterday sentenced a Croat female former soldier to 14 years in jail for crimes including torture, the heaviest sentence handed down against a woman for atrocities committed during Bosnia's 1990s conflict. Azra Basic, 58, was extradited to Bosnia in late 2016 by the United States where she emigrated after the 1992-1995 war. She was arrested in 2011 on a Bosnian warrant and her trial opened in January. Basic was found guilty of war crimes against ethnic Serb civilians detained by Croat forces in April 1992 in the region of the northern town of Derventa. Sentencing her, judge Sead Djikic stressed the "defendant's particular cruelty" in committing the crimes. Described by some witnesses as the "mistress of life and death" during the war that claimed nearly 100,000 lives, Basic was found guilty notably of killing a detainee.

Cambodia sends maids to HK to plug gap after abuse scandals

PHNOM PENH: Cambodia sent its first batch of maids to work in Hong Kong yesterday as the Asian financial hub scrambles to meet growing demand for domestic helpers after a series of abuse scandals. Hong Kong is home to more than 300,000 foreign maids, mostly from the Philippines and Indonesia. But high-profile cases of abuse and forced labor have seized global headlines in recent years and threatened to stem the tide of migrant helpers.

Hong Kong has turned to Cambodia, one of Asia's poorest countries where the average monthly wage is around \$100, to offset a potential maid shortage. The city's population is rapidly ageing and demand for domestic helpers is predicted to soar among those wealthy enough to afford them. Under the pilot project, six agencies were authorized in August to recruit Cambodian domestic workers to work in Hong Kong.

Fourteen women who have received basic training in Cantonese among other skills flew to Hong Kong yesterday. Seik Malay, 30 said she made the painful decision to leave her nine-year-old daughter behind in Cambodia to earn \$550 a month on a



PHNOM PENH: A Cambodian maid waves as she leaves with others for Hong Kong from Phnom Penh International Airport yesterday. —AFP

two-year contract in Hong Kong. "With that salary, I will be able to support my family," she said, adding that she was not worried about the potential for mistreatment at the hands of Hong Kong employers.

Ngoy Rith, deputy chief of Cambodia's labor department, who is travelling to Hong Kong with the maids, downplayed concerns about exploitation despite a recent slew of cases of abuse. "We have already prepared everything to handle those concerns," he told reporters before departure. He said each Cambodian maid

would be allowed to use a smartphone to contact their relatives or officials if they needed help. Cambodia expects to send about 1,000 maids to Hong Kong next year. A 2016 report by the Justice Centre found that one in six foreign maids in Hong Kong are subject to "forced labor".

Rights groups say unscrupulous employment agencies plunge helpers into debt and withhold their passports, while local restrictions such as requiring maids to live with their employers, often in tiny rooms, make it difficult to escape abuse. —AFP

Pakistan grieves Benazir Bhutto, 10 years after assassination

KARACHI: Thousands of mourners visited the shrine of former Pakistani prime minister Benazir Bhutto yesterday as the country marked 10 years since her assassination, with her killers yet to face justice. An estimated 20,000 people gathered at the shrine in Garhi Khuda Baksh in the Bhutto family stronghold of Sindh province, television images showed. They came to pay their respects to the charismatic politician, who was the first woman to lead a Muslim country and a darling of the West. "I feel we have become orphans after her martyrdom," mourner Allah Varayo, 45 said by telephone from the shrine. Others waved flags in the black, red and green of Bhutto's Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) as well as photographs of the slain leader.

"I could see more vigor among the people, who have come in larger numbers than the previous years," said Ahsan Junejo, a resident of the Bhutto's home town Larkana near the shrine. Bhutto, a two-time prime minister, was contesting a third election when she was assassinated in a gun and suicide attack at a rally in Rawalpindi on December 27, 2007. Her death plunged Pakistan into political uncertainty and shocked the world. Former president and military ruler Pervez Musharraf is alleged to have been part of a broad conspiracy to have Bhutto, his political rival, killed before elections.

He has been charged with the murder but has denied the allegation, and remains in self-imposed exile in Dubai. Earlier this year a Pakistani court declared him a "fugitive" in the case. "Murderer, murderer, Musharraf, murderer!" Bhutto's son Bilawal, chairman of the PPP, chanted along with the crowd at the shrine yesterday, an unusual expression of mass defiance against the military. Musharraf's government blamed the assassination on Pakistani Taliban chief Bahtullah Mehsud, who denied any involvement. —AFP

Analysis

Kuwait Times
Established 1961
The First Daily in The Arabian Gulf

THE LEADING INDEPENDENT
DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF
ESTABLISHED 1961

Founder and Publisher
YOUSUF S. AL-ALYAN

Editor-in-Chief
ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-ALYAN

EDITORIAL : 24833199-24833358-24833432
ADVERTISING : 24835616/7
FAX : 24835620/1
CIRCULATION : 24833199 Extn. 163
ACCOUNTS : 24835619
COMMERCIAL : 24835618

P.O. Box 1301 Safat, 13014 Kuwait.
E MAIL: info@kuwaittimes.net
Website: www.kuwaittimes.net

New York removes misleading nuclear fallout shelter signs

New York City has quietly begun removing some of the corroding yellow nuclear fallout shelter signs that were appended to thousands of buildings in the 1960s, saying many are misleading Cold War relics that no longer denote functional shelters. The small metal signs are a remnant of the anxieties over the nuclear arms race between the United States and the former Soviet Union, which prompted US President John F. Kennedy to create the shelter program in 1961 in cities across the nation. The signs, with their simple design of three joined triangles inside a circle, became an emblem of the era.

While some New Yorkers may barely notice them today, to others they can be an uneasy reminder that the threat may have altered and diminished, but it has not vanished. Although the Cold War era has long ended, North Korea continues working to develop nuclear-tipped missiles capable of hitting the United States amid bellicose rhetoric from Washington and Pyongyang. A nuclear explosion is now seen as even less likely than during the Cold War. But should catastrophe ever strike, the signs, which still linger in their thousands, would be best ignored, city officials and disaster preparedness experts say.

In the aftermath of a nearby nuclear explosion, any survivors counting on the signs to lead them to safety from radioactive fallout after needlessly dashing outside would likely find themselves rattling locked doors or perhaps breaking into what is now a building's laundry room or bike-storage area. Maintenance of the shelter system, which once entailed federal funding to stock shelters with food and water, ended decades ago.

The removal of some of the signs from public school buildings, which has not previously been reported, is intended to partly reduce this potential confusion, according to the city's Department of Education. Michael Aciman, a department spokesman, confirmed that any designated fallout shelters created in the city's schools are no longer active and said that the department is aiming to finish unscrewing the signs from school walls by roughly Jan 1.

Although some of the tens of thousands of fallout shelter signs placed around the city by the federal government's Office of Civil Defense have vanished as old buildings have been renovated or demolished, city officials say this is the first coordinated effort to remove them. The Office of Civil Defense was eventually abolished in the 1970s, subsumed into the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Aciman declined to say whether, given the signs are technically federal property, the U.S. government was consulted.

But FEMA said it did not mind anyway. "FEMA does not have a position regarding the signs," Jenny Burke, a FEMA spokeswoman, wrote in an email on Tuesday. Although the agency does not maintain lists of the old shelter locations, she added, "as a part of an ongoing planning effort, the agency is conducting research to retrieve Office of Civil Defense records". The city's removal appeared somewhat haphazard: on one Brooklyn street, a sign on a school photographed by Reuters this month was subsequently removed, while a second school a few blocks away still had its sign attached, albeit with a screw missing.

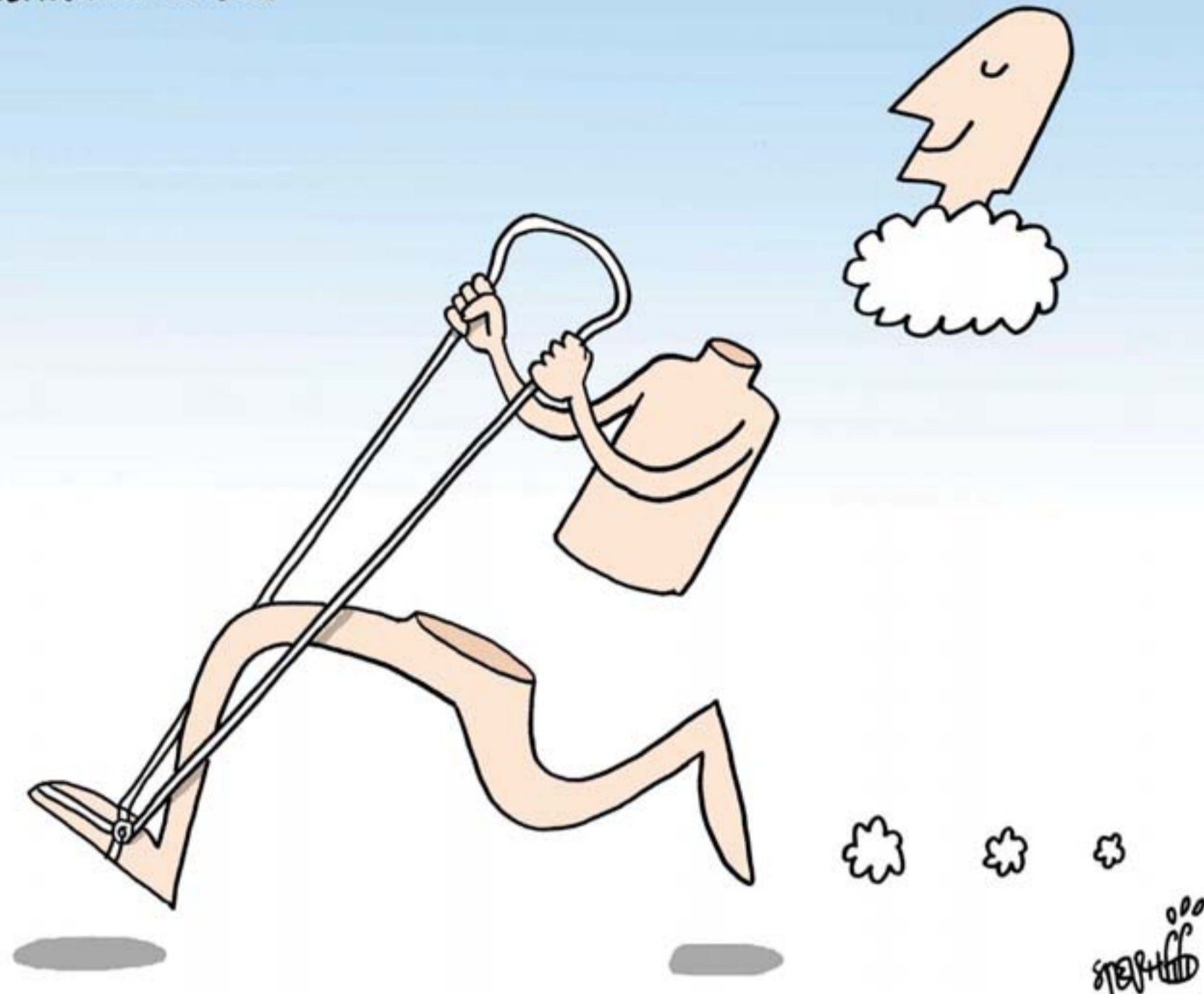
As a history buff, Jeff Schlegelmilch is fond enough of the signs that he stuck a replica on his office door at Columbia University's National Center for Disaster Preparedness, where he is deputy director. "I love seeing the signs, but, as a disaster planner, they have to come down," he said. "At best, they are ignored, at worst, they're misleading and are going to cost people's lives." The consensus now, from the federal government downward, was that designated shelters were an outmoded concept, and updated contingency plans have been widely adopted since Al-Qaeda's attack on the United States on Sept. 11, 2001, Schlegelmilch said.

Were a nuclear explosion ever to happen, those far enough from the blast center to survive would do well to head to the lower interiors of any standard residential or commercial building, ideally a windowless basement, to shelter from radioactive particles outside, which can burn skin and cause serious illness and death. Cars, on the other hand, "are terrible", Schlegelmilch said. The particles sail right through a vehicle's thin exterior.

NYC Emergency Management, the agency that runs the city's disaster preparations, was not involved in the decision but staff there welcomed the signs' removal. Nancy Silvestri, the agency's press secretary, said even once the signs are gone from schools, many would remain on apartment buildings and other structures. City officials are uncertain who has jurisdiction over those, she said.

Eliot Calhoun, the agency's Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, and Explosives Planner, sees the signs as unhelpfully muddying the waters. He has spent years endlessly finessing a message, designed to flash as an alert on cellphones, that he hopes he will never have to send. In the nerve center of the agency's Brooklyn headquarters, he called up onto a screen its current form: "Nuclear explosion reported. Shelter in basement/center of building, close windows/doors." "Every single time I look at it I change it a little bit," he said. "When you only have 90 characters and you're trying to save lives you can really think too much about it." —Reuters

Cartoon for the Soul



The silver lining of disasters in Fiji?

When Cyclone Winston pummeled through Fiji last year, the largest storm recorded in the southern hemisphere, Sofia Talei's taro and cassava crops were destroyed, leaving her livelihood as a farmer uncertain. "I was so desperate. All the effort we put into it was destroyed after a few hours," Talei, 33, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. But after the storm came an unexpected surprise: a wealth of financial literacy, business, and agricultural training, which led to Talei this year becoming the first female president of the main fruit and vegetable market in the Fijian capital Suva.

Women's rights campaigners say disasters can present an opportunity for countries to not only rebuild infrastructure, but also tackle gender inequality, such as helping more women get into work and finding ways to address gender violence. "Through the leadership training, it's empowering us women to stand up and fight for women's rights," said Talei, a mother of three, standing proudly by her market stall, where she now sells coconuts and fast-growing crops like chillies, eggplants and cabbage which are better suited to unpredictable climates.

For stubborn gender stereotypes in small Pacific islands like Fiji mean women have fewer rights, such as access to services like banking, formal jobs, or even a chance to work, said Aleta Miller from UN Women in Fiji, which provides training for market stall vendors like Talei. Such gender inequality has also led to high rates of violence against women. Two in every three women in the Pacific will experience violence - twice the global average - according to UN Women.

When disaster strikes - which is becoming more frequent and intense due to climate change - women's vulnerabilities are even more exposed, said researcher Virginie Le Masson from London-based think tank Overseas Development Institute (ODI). Some women and girls are forced to sell sex to survive, and some are raped due to the lack of shelter after disasters such as cyclones, earthquakes or floods.

"What drives this violence? Fundamentally, it's harmful social norms: deeply-held attitudes, beliefs, values and behaviors within society about the role of men and women," said Miller, on the sidelines of a conference run by civil rights group CIVICUS in Suva earlier this month. "Women hold the same values, in some cases. A woman may agree with a man that he has the right to keep her in the house and to make her report to him where ever she goes," she said.



Lives of women improved

The team also cited numerous failures by police to properly investigate the murder and preserve the integrity of the crime scene. Less than two hours after the attack, senior police officer Khurram Shahzad hosed down the scene. He was one of the two officers convicted this year. The second officer, then-Rawalpindi police chief Saud Aziz, also refused multiple times to allow an autopsy of Bhutto's body to go ahead.

Police told the UN commission that they collected just 23 pieces of evidence from the scene, "in a case where one would normally have expected thousands", according to the report. But the UN team hinted at something beyond police incompetence, saying the official investigation was likely stifled by the security establishment. However it stopped short of naming suspects in the plot to kill Bhutto, saying that responsibility lay with the Pakistani courts.

'Change What's Wrong'

When disaster strikes - which is becoming more frequent and intense due to climate change - women's vulnerabilities are even more exposed, said researcher Virginie Le Masson from London-based think tank Overseas Development Institute (ODI). Some women and girls are forced to sell sex to survive, and some are raped due to the lack of shelter after disasters such as cyclones, earthquakes or floods.

"It's a combination of existing inequality and violence against women and girls, and the failure of protective systems after a disaster," said Le Masson. "But climate change is not the reason why women have been discriminated against for the last centuries." Le Masson said disasters can present an opportunity for women. "This is an opportunity to change what is wrong. (After a disaster) we need everyone in the community to contribute to rebuild the economy and that's an opportunity for women to take part," she said.

Only 40 percent of Fijian women have formal work, compared to 80 percent of men, according to the International Women's Development Agency. UN Women's Miller said providing skills training for women before and after a disaster is one way to help challenge engrained gender stereotypes.

"It's more than money and profit, it's also about her agency (and) having more of a voice," said Miller. "We have many women telling us, 'I never saw myself as a business woman. This is who I am and this is my future,'" she said. —Reuters

Who killed Benazir Bhutto? The theories behind the murder

Ten years after former Pakistani prime minister Benazir Bhutto, the first woman to lead a Muslim nation, was killed in Rawalpindi the unanswered questions about her assassination still fuel conspiracy theories. Earlier this year two police officers were found guilty of "mishandling the crime scene". They are the only people ever to be convicted in the December 27, 2007 assassination, the most definitive accounts of which claim an assassin shot Bhutto in the neck and then blew himself up, killing 24 people. But there is no confirmation of who organized the killing or why. Here are the leading theories about who killed Bhutto:

The Pakistani state's theory

Then-president Pervez Musharraf's government blamed the assassination on Pakistani Taliban chief Baitullah Mehsud, who denied any involvement. He was killed in a US drone attack in 2009. Bhutto had been a fierce opponent of Islamic extremists in the country. She was threatened by Al-Qaeda, the Taleban, local jihadist groups and potentially by elements in the Pakistani establishment.

But investigators largely focused on lower-level operatives, paying little attention to the hierarchy in the planning, financing and execution of the assassination. Musharraf himself is alleged to have been part of a broad conspiracy to have Bhutto, his political rival, killed before elections. In 2013 a Pakistani court formally charged him with the killing in an unprecedented move against an ex-army chief. Musharraf fled Pakistan in 2016 and has remained in self-imposed exile ever since. He was declared a fugitive in the case earlier this year.

The UN's theory

At the request of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP)

government that came to power soon after Bhutto's murder, a three-member UN team was dispatched to investigate the killing. In its 70-page report released in 2010, the UN held Musharraf's administration responsible for failing to provide Bhutto with the necessary security. "Bhutto's assassination could have been prevented if adequate security measures had been taken," it said.

The team also cited numerous failures by police to properly investigate the murder and preserve the integrity of the crime scene. Less than two hours after the attack, senior police officer Khurram Shahzad hosed down the scene. He was one of the two officers convicted this year. The second officer, then-Rawalpindi police chief Saud Aziz, also refused multiple times to allow an autopsy of Bhutto's body to go ahead.

Police told the UN commission that they collected just 23 pieces of evidence from the scene, "in a case where one would normally have expected thousands", according to the report. But the UN team hinted at something beyond police incompetence, saying the official investigation was likely stifled by the security establishment. However it stopped short of naming suspects in the plot to kill Bhutto, saying that responsibility lay with the Pakistani courts.



The conspiracy theories

Following Bhutto's death, the PPP came to power and her widower Asif Ali Zardari was elected president. But he failed to make headway unravelling the mysteries behind the murder, drawing fresh allegations of conspiracy. Speculation was further fuelled after Zardari's senior aide Bilal Sheikh was killed by a suicide bomber in Karachi in 2013. Sheikh had been in charge of Bhutto's security when she returned to Karachi from exile in October 2007. Bomb attacks targeted her convoy, killing around 140 people.

However, Chilean diplomat Hernando Munoz, who led the UN investigation, said it was ridiculous to imagine Bhutto's widower had been involved in her death. Al-Qaeda wanted her dead, he has argued, while the Pakistani Taleban carried out the attack - possibly with the support of rogue intelligence agents - and local police arranged a cover-up which he was convinced "came from higher up". He has further argued that Bhutto's own security failed her and those who encouraged her to return to Pakistan did not provide her with protection.

Other speculation pointed towards Bhutto's trusted bodyguard Khalid Shahensha, with video clips showing him making strange gestures at the podium from which Bhutto addressed the rally moments before her death. Months after the assassination, Shahensha was mysteriously gunned down in Karachi. —AFP

News

Saudi chess PR gambit checked by controversies

DUBAI: Saudi Arabia brushed aside rulings from top clerics to host a big money chess tournament, but the gambit to improve the kingdom's image has been jolted by regional powerplays. The landmark event and its record \$2 million prize pot come as Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman looks to repackage his oil-rich nation as more welcoming - and moderate. But a refusal to give Israeli players visas, doubts whether Iranians and Qataris will come, and a no-show over Saudi Arabia's record on women's rights have all cast their shadows.

The King Salman Rapid and Blitz 2017 tournament opened on Monday, but just a day later Israel's chess federation said it was seeking compensation from the game's governing body FIDE over the rejection. Hints of a tentative political rapprochement between the ultra-conservative Sunni Muslim kingdom and the Jewish state had stirred hope that Israeli players might play. But the Saudis ultimately nixed their participation after Arab ire surged over US President Donald Trump's decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

The Israeli team was not the only one to find itself caught up in the broader chess game of Middle East politics. Players from Iran and Qatar - both locked in their own regional rivalries with Riyadh - were also a major doubt. As reports swirled that the Iranian and Qatari delegations were not granted visas, World Chess Federation FIDE insisted they could show up - even if they chose not to in the end. "Groundbreaking special arrangements have been made to issue visas upon arrival for over 200 persons, including the players of Iran and Qatar," FIDE said Sunday. "The fact that play-

ers from Iran and Qatar may decide not to participate, after consulting with their own authorities, is clearly their own individual decision," the statement added.

Beyond politics, the decision to hold the tournament in Riyadh drew criticism from some female players over Saudi Arabia's tight regulations on women. FIDE claimed success when it got the authorities to loosen up their traditional demands for full-body abayas with a "historic" dress code: high-necked white blouses. But that was not enough to convince double champion Anna Muzychuk from Ukraine, who dropped out of the tournament despite the record-busting financial incentives. "I am going to lose two World Champion titles - one by one," she wrote on Facebook. "Just because I decided not to go to Saudi Arabia. Not to play by someone's rules, not to wear abaya, not to be accompanied getting outside."

While the chess tournament might have been dented by the controversies, it has still drawn the game's biggest names, including world number one Magnus Carlsen. Saudi Arabia may be a chess backwater, but in the energy-rich Gulf region, using sporting showcases to build international prestige is a tried and trusted play. Riyadh handed FIDE a "\$1.5 million" cheque to host the event, analyst James Dorsey of the S Rajaratnam School of International Studies wrote in an op-ed for the Huffington Post. "Saudi Arabia joined the likes of Qatar and the United Arab Emirates in using sports to polish its troubled international image," he said.

Dorsey pointed out the move came despite the kingdom's current grand mufti less than two years back saying "Islam forbids chess as a form of gambling and a waste of time". Other edicts in the past have gone even further, with two religious fatwas saying chess "distracts people away from the remembrance of Allah" and that playing for money was "prohibited". Those objections appear to have been deemed outdated, as the reform push under Prince Mohammed - which includes lifting bans on cinemas and women drivers - takes precedent.

For people in the kingdom, chess may still remain a



RIYADH: Norwegian chess player Magnus Carlsen (right) attends the King Salman World Rapid and Blitz Championships on Tuesday. — AFP

very niche pursuit. The best rated Saudi Ahmed Al-Ghamdi only ranks number 13,355 among the world's active players. But the landmark tournament seems to have stirred some interest. When the state sports authority shared a live feed of opening matches on

YouTube it was filled with comments by curious Saudis. "They say chess is forbidden," one posted. "No, it's not forbidden," retorted another. "How about nobody talks about religion, okay?" a third responded exasperatedly. — AFP

Iran police take softer line on Islamic codes

TEHRAN: Iranian police are taking a softer approach to breaches of Islamic rules, opting for education over punishment, Tehran's police chief said yesterday. "According to a decision of the commander of the police force, those who do not observe Islamic codes will no longer be taken to detention centers nor judicial files opened on them," Brigadier General Hossein Rahimi said in a speech in the Iranian capital. "We offer courses and 7,913 people have been educated in these classes so far," he

said, adding that there were more than 100 counseling centers in Tehran province.

Rahimi, who was appointed in August, did not elaborate on which Islamic codes were in question or when the new guidelines were introduced. It marks a stark shift from his predecessor, General Hossein Sajedinia, who announced in April 2016 that there were 7,000 undercover morality police reporting on things like "bad hijab" - a blanket term usually referring to un-Islamic dress by women.

Figures are rarely given, but Tehran's traffic police said in late 2015 they had dealt with 40,000 cases of bad hijab in cars, where women often let their headscarves drop around their necks. These cases generally led to fines and temporary impounding of the vehicle, the spokesman said at the time. Mandatory headscarves have been key symbol

of Iran's Islamic rule since the revolution of 1979, fiercely defended by hardliners but ever harder to enforce, particularly in wealthier areas where loose and colorful scarves have become the norm.

President Hassan Rouhani, who came to power in 2013 promising a more moderate stance, has said it is not the job of police to enforce religious rules. "It is not the police's duty to enforce Islam. No police officer can say I did something because God or the Prophet (PBUH) have said so... Many religious issues are a matter of personal faith," he told a police conference in 2015. Although his comments attracted criticism from conservative clerics and supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, there has been a generally softer approach on the streets, with far fewer reports of morality police accosting women. — AFP

Saudi king, Turkish...

Continued from Page 1

quarrel broke out last week over the retweet that Erdogan called an insult. Anwar Gargash, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Emirates, said there was a need for Arab countries to rally around the "Arab axis" of Saudi Arabia and Egypt. "The sectarian and partisan view is not an acceptable alternative, and the Arab world will not be led by Tehran or Ankara," he wrote on his official Twitter page.

Last week, Turkey summoned the charge d'affaires at the UAE embassy in Ankara, after UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al-Nahayan shared a tweet that accused Turkish troops of looting the holy city of Madinah a century ago. Erdogan himself lashed out: "Some impertinent man sinks low and goes as far as accusing our ancestors of thievery ... What spoiled this man? He was spoiled by oil, by the money he has," the Turkish leader said at an awards ceremony.

Turkey's state-run Anadolu newspaper reported on Saturday that Turkey planned to rename the street where the UAE embassy is located in Ankara after Fakhreddin Pasha, the commander of the Ottoman Turkish troops at Madinah in 1916. Madinah, the holiest site in Islam after Makkah, is now in Saudi Arabia. The UAE sees itself as a bulwark against political forms of Islam, and views Erdogan's Islamist-rooted ruling AK party as a supporter of groups like the Muslim Brotherhood, which it opposes.

Meanwhile, Erdogan yesterday called

Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad a terrorist and said it was impossible for Syrian peace efforts to continue with him. Syria's foreign ministry quickly responded by accusing Erdogan of himself supporting terrorist groups fighting Assad in Syria's civil war. Turkey has demanded the removal of Assad from power and backed rebels fighting to overthrow him, but it has toned down its demands since it started working with Assad's allies Russia and Iran for a political resolution.

"Assad is definitely a terrorist who has carried out state terrorism," Erdogan told a televised news conference with his Tunisian counterpart Beji Caid Essebsi in Tunis. "It is impossible to continue with Assad. How can we embrace the future with a Syrian president who has killed close to a million of his citizens?" he said, in some of his harshest comments for weeks.

Though Turkey has long demanded Assad's removal, it is now more focused in Syria on the threat from Islamist militants and Kurdish fighters it considers allies of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), who it says have formed a "terror corridor" on its southern border. Turkey says the Syrian Kurdish YPG militia, which Ankara views as an extension of the outlawed PKK which has fought an insurgency in southeast Turkey since the 1980s, cannot be invited to Syrian peace talks in the Kazakh capital Astana.

The YPG is the main element in a force that Washington has assisted with training, weapons, air support and help from ground advisers in the battle against Islamic State. That U.S. support has angered Ankara, a NATO ally of Washington. Despite its differences with Russia and Iran, Turkey has worked with the two powers in the search for a political solution in Syria. — Agencies

Under-30 expat ban on hold...

Continued from Page 1

a debate on the jailing of two sitting lawmakers who enjoy parliamentary immunity has been set for Jan 9.

The announcement came after opposition lawmakers threatened to grill the prime minister if the issue was not debated. He said the government should come prepared and should submit the legal justification for jailing the two MPs while they still enjoy immunity.

MPs Jamaan Al-Harbash and Waleed Al-Tabtabaei were among 67 opposition activists sentenced by the appeals court to various jail terms for storming the National Assembly building during a protest in 2011. Opposition lawmakers are demanding why the two MPs have been arrested and sent to

jail although the ruling is not final and will be looked by the court of cassation.

Member of the Assembly's human rights panel MP Abdullah Fahhad said he visited the jailed MPs and activists in the case and expressed deep regret for the jailing of the activists while "MPs who took bribes are free in the Assembly". Fahhad was referring to the issue that the activists were protesting against - a highly-publicized corruption case involving 13 current and former MPs who were accused of accepting millions of dinars in bribes for casting votes in the Assembly.

During the protests, activists entered the Assembly building and 70 of them were taken to court. The lower court acquitted them, while the appeals court convicted them. Fahhad said that he learned that police abused five of the activists in jail and complained to the interior minister, who promised to investigate the claims. Opposition MP Mohammad Hayef strongly lashed at some senior officers in the interior ministry "who

are abusing both Kuwaitis and expatriates", demanding it was high time to sack them.

Assembly speaker Marzouk Al-Ghanem said that it was agreed with the MPs to allocate two hours in the session of Jan 9-10 to debate the case of the jailed lawmakers. During the debate, opposition MP Shuaib Al-Muwaizri clashed with pro-government MP Salah Khorshid when the latter objected to the raising of the issue, demanding that all MPs should respect court verdicts.

Also during the Assembly session, which was cut short because of a lack of quorum, MP Adnan Abdulsamad called on the government to treat Sunnis and Shiites equally with regards to issuing licenses for building mosques. Abdulsamad said that it is "illogical" that there are only 50 mosques for Shiites against as many as 1,800 mosques for Sunnis, and called for fair treatment. State Minister for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh assured the lawmaker that the government treats all citizens equally without discrimination.



Premier Brands

To see your ad here, call: **+965 248 35 616 / 617**
 E MAIL: info@kuwaittimes.net
 ads@kuwaittimes.net
 Website: www.kuwaittimes.net

2017 / 12 / 31 إلى 2017 / 12 / 04 فترة العرض من 2017 / 2313

Explosive OFFERS

SYH-1707A
Quartz Heater



9 دينار
Price
KD .500

- 2500W
- 3 Power Settings
- 4 Faces Heating

SYH-1306B
Quartz Heater



8 دينار
Price
KD .000

- 1800 Watts
- Fan Function

SYH-1207J
Quartz Heater



11 دينار
Price
KD .000

- 2400 Watts

SYH-1207KM
Quartz Heater



13 دينار
Price
KD .750

- 2400 Watts
- 50-60 Hz

SYH-1703
Quartz Heater



19 دينار
Price
KD .500

- 2000 Watts
- 3 Face Heating
- Wooden Body

best 1809 809

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

Shop Online: www.best.com.kw Free Delivery

Sports

Wild Oats finishes Sydney-Hobart in record time, faces likely protest

Comanche finish just minutes behind Wild Oats

SYDNEY: Supermaxi Wild Oats XI finished the grueling Sydney to Hobart race in record time late yesterday, but confirmation of its ninth line honours win could be delayed by a protest from second-placed LDV Comanche.

Wild Oats completed the 628-nautical mile (1,163-kilometre) bluewater classic in a time of 1 day, 8hrs, 48min and 50sec, well inside the previous record set last year. The 100-footers had been in a fierce battle down Australia's east coast to the finish line at Hobart's Constitution Dock yesterday, swapping the lead several times. But the epic contest might not be over, with Comanche expected to lodge a protest against Wild Oats following a near-collision exiting Sydney Heads on Tuesday in which the latter boat appeared to tack too close to her rival. The protest must be lodged within six hours and an international jury will assess the evidence. With Comanche finishing just minutes behind Wild Oats, a possible punishment such as a time penalty could determine which yacht is crowned the winner. The 103-strong fleet, whittled down to 100 after three yachts retired, benefited from ideal wind conditions after a spectacular start from Sydney Harbour on Tuesday. The four supermaxis taking part, which include Black Jack and InfoTrack, were the favourites to take the line honours title. The favourable weather had raised expectations the 2016 record time of 1 day 13hr 31min 20sec, set by Perpetual Loyal (renamed InfoTrack this year), would be easily broken.



But the epic contest might not be over

"It's something quite extraordinary when you find that the race record in these days is beaten by five hours, as it was last year," Cruising Yacht Club of Australia commodore John Markos told reporters earlier yesterday. "We were all pretty staggered that the race (record) was so comprehensively beaten, and to find that the very next year that you've got the potential to beat it by several more hours is really extraordinary." The fast-paced race slowed significantly as the big boats entered the notoriously sluggish Derwent River in Hobart, with thousands waiting for the leaders as the sun set over the southern island city.

CELEBRATIONS

This was the strongest line-up of supermaxis to contest the Sydney to Hobart, with all four having won line honours in previous races. There were jubilant scenes for Wild Oats and her supporters after her arrival in Hobart, despite uncertainty over the final outcome. The Mark Richards-skippered vessel had earlier closed the gap on Comanche helmed by Jim Cooney, even as she sailed "bare-headed"-mainsail-only-for some time after damaging the topsail, which is suited to the conditions. Currently in third place was Black Jack, followed by InfoTrack, with Hong Kong businessman Karl Kwok's 80-footer Beau Geste fifth.

In the race for the Tattersall Cup (overall winner) — the handicap honour for the vessel that performs best according to size—Matt Allen's new TP52 Ichi Ban was leading the charge ahead of Wizard. —AFP



SYDNEY: This handout photo from Rolex taken and released yesterday shows Australian Supermaxi yacht Wild Oats XI heading to Hobart during the Sydney to Hobart yacht race.—AFP

Norway's Svindal targets third win at Bormio

BORMIO: Norway's Aksel Lund Svindal will be looking to keep his winning momentum in the men's World Cup downhill in Bormio after speeding to victories in the last two races this season. The speed specialist is leading the World Cup downhill standings after three races with wins at Beaver Creek, Colorado and Val Gardena in the Italian Dolomites, after opening with a third place at Lake Louise in Canada. And the 34-year-old will be hoping to pick up where he left off in the Italian Alpine resort of Bormio where he won last time the race was hosted. Bormio is returning to the men's calendar this season with downhill and combined races scheduled for today and tomorrow.

The venue has not hosted World Cup racing since the 2013-14 season because of a dispute with the company operating the ski lifts with nearby Santa Caterina Valfurva hosting events instead. The difficult and spectacular

Stelvio piste is famous for its physical and technical challenge and is traditionally loved by Italians who have had good results on the Stelvio and will be looking for the first podium this season.

Svindal clocked the ninth fastest time of 1min 58.2sec in the opening training run on Wednesday with the second run scheduled for Thursday depending on weather conditions with heavy snow forecast. Italian Peter Fill dominated early training ahead of compatriot Christof Innerhofer and Austrian Matthias Mayer. Another Italian Dominik Paris, winner in 2012, will also be seeking his first win of the season, with Swiss reigning world champion Beat Feuz eyeing his second win after the season-opener at Lake Louise.

Svindal—the 2010 Olympic downhill silver medalist—won in Bormio four years ago. This season he is laying the groundwork for a return to Olympic success in PyeongChang from February 9 to 25. His Vancouver podium was one of three he won including the Super-G gold but despite heading to Sochi four years later as a favorite to win multiple medals he failed to return with a single. Hampered by knee injuries in the past few years and a torn Achilles tendon in 2014 he has been making his way back from knee surgery since January. —AFP

Brunel replaces sacked Noves as France coach

PARIS: Guy Noves was sacked yesterday as France coach after two torrid years at the helm with former Italy boss Jacques Brunel named as his successor. French rugby federation president Bernard Laporte announced.

Brunel, 63, joins the national set-up from Top 14 side Bordeaux-Begles just five weeks before France face Ireland in their Six Nations opener. His contract stretches to the 2019 World Cup in Japan, Laporte told a press conference at a Paris hotel, and he will be assisted in a break from tradition before each game by "a pool of five or six" Top 14 coaches.

Laporte hailed Brunel for his passion "of man and rugby". "That's his major strength. He is able to assume this responsibility which is not an easy one. He has broad shoulders and experience," said the French rugby chief.

Noves, also 63, suffers the ignominy of becoming the first Les Bleus manager in history to be axed. He has paid the price for the worst record of any France coach with a meagre seven wins from 22 matches (21 Tests), alongside 14 defeats and a humiliating home draw with 2019 World Cup hosts Japan.

Under his watch France lost six consecutive games between June and November this year. "We couldn't continue heading towards the wall. We had to return to the table to find new solutions, because a France team that is not winning means a federation and a sport is dying," Laporte commented.

Brunel was once ex France boss Laporte's



PARIS: French Rugby Federation (FFR) President Bernard Laporte gestures as he gives a press conference yesterday in Paris. Guy Noves was sacked as France coach after two torrid years.—AFP

right-hand man as forwards coach from 2001-2007. He took Perpignan to the French league title in 2009 and spent five years in charge of Italy between 2011 and 2016 before switching to Bordeaux.

Brunel will officially begin the task of rebuilding the national side next week, Laporte said, after his final match as Bordeaux coach against Stade Francais on Saturday. Explaining the new system of assistants Laporte said: "We want to put in place a monitoring group for internationals of coaches who have players called up, because clubs and the France team can no longer exist apart." "There will be technical meetings, ask-

ing what are we doing with France? How are we playing? We no longer want a situation where on one side we have the management, on the other the clubs, and in the middle the players." Noves was appointed by Laporte's predecessor Pierre Camou after the debacle of France's 62-13 drubbing by New Zealand in the quarter-finals of the 2015 World Cup. He appeared an obvious choice, boasting an impressive domestic track record with 10 French titles and four European Cup triumphs during his time with Toulouse.

His assistants, Yannick Bru (forwards coach) and Jean-Frederic Dubois (backs), were also relieved of their duties. —AFP

Chess champion ready for praise, blame over Saudi boycott

LVIV: Ukrainian chess champion Anna Muzychuk is ready for both praise and blame for boycotting this week's world speed chess championship in Saudi Arabia — something which means she will lose two world titles and pass up substantial earnings.

The 27-year-old Muzychuk is refusing to defend her titles in rapid and blitz chess in Riyadh in protest at the host country's record on women's rights. Rules governing women's status meant she would have been made to feel "a secondary creature", she said in a Facebook post.

Muzychuk, speaking to Reuters in her home town of Lviv, said she made the decision knowing she would relinquish both her titles and earnings from taking part. Her younger sister Mariya, a former women's world chess champion, would also stay away from Riyadh.

"As to whether it was right or wrong, there will certainly be people who will support me and people who will condemn me," Muzychuk said. "But I took this decision and I am responsible for it."

Saudi Arabia ended a ban on women driving in September but the conservative kingdom's male guardianship system requires women to have a male relative's approval for decisions on issues like education, employment, marriage and travel plans.

More than 200 players from 70 countries are participating in the World Rapid and Blitz Chess Championships, which bear the name of King Salman bin Abdulaziz. In what the World Chess Federation (FIDE) called an "historic agreement", Saudi Arabia relaxed its dress code for the tournament, which has a total prize pot of \$2 million.

This meant women would not need to wear the hijab or abaya the loose-fitting, full-length robes that women are typically expected to wear. Instead, inside the venue, women could wear dark formal trouser suits and high-necked white blouses. But these changes did not go far enough for Muzychuk. "I have refused to go," she said. "It was certainly quite difficult to take such a decision because I am a current world champion in these chess disciplines — rapid chess and blitz. So if I do not participate in this tournament, I will lose both titles."

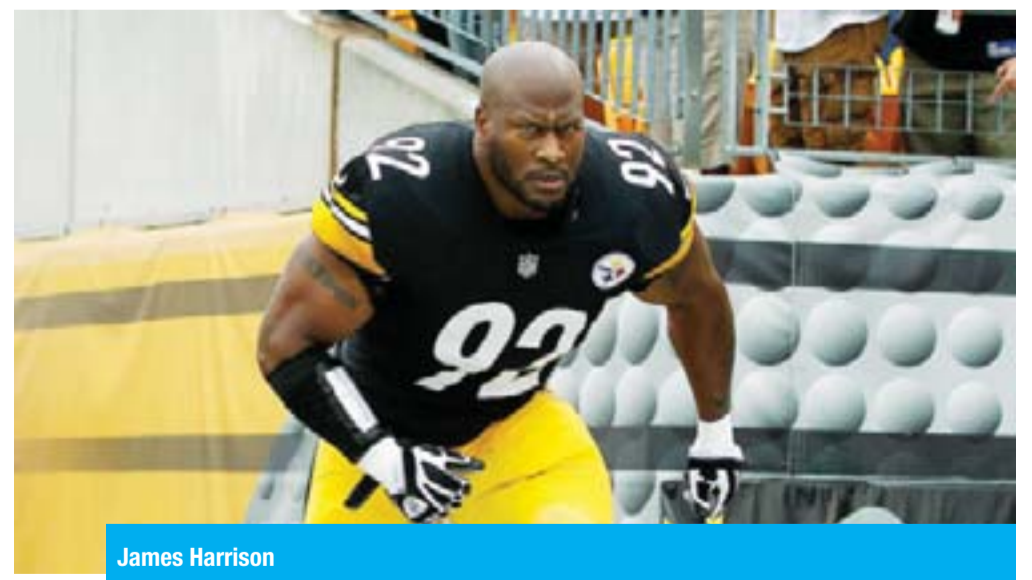
More controversy has dogged the tournament as seven Israelis have been denied visas to participate, a FIDE vice president said. It would have marked the first time Saudi Arabia had publicly hosted Israelis as the Gulf state does not recognize Israel and there are no formal ties between them. — Reuters

Ex-Steeler linebacker Harrison signs new deal with Patriots

NEW YORK: Former Pittsburgh Steelers linebacker James Harrison signed a one-year deal Tuesday with the New England Patriots that could see him face his former team in the NFL playoffs. Harrison, the Steelers' all-time leader with 80.5 quarterback sacks, went unclaimed on waivers after being released Saturday by Pittsburgh. He made a free agent visit to the Patriots on Tuesday and signed with them.

The 39-year-old linebacker posted a photo on Instagram with new teammate Tom Brady, a 40-year-old quarterback and five-time Super Bowl champion, and the caption: "Finally... A teammate that's older than me! @tombrady." Harrison, whose contract terms were not released, can play Sunday in the Patriots' regular-season finale against the New York Jets and the upcoming playoffs.

The Patriots and Steelers are both 12-3 and have first-round byes in the American Conference playoffs. Should they each win at home in the second round, they would play for a berth in the Super Bowl. New England edged Pittsburgh 27-24 earlier this month in a regu-



James Harrison

lar-season contest that gave the Patriots a tie-breaker edge, meaning they will have a home-field edge throughout the American Conference playoffs by beating the Jets.

Harrison could have the chance to ruin the championship dreams of the team that released him after 14 seasons in Pittsburgh, including two Super Bowl championship campaigns. To make room for Harrison on the roster, the Patriots released linebacker Trevor Reilly. The Steelers released Harrison to make room for right tackle Marcus Gilbert, who was returning from suspension. Injuries

had hit the Patriots at linebacker while Harrison had seen his role diminish with the Steelers as defensive scheme changes put a greater emphasis on pass coverage for outside linebackers and rookie TJ Watt emerged as a top talent. Harrison was the 2008 NFL Defensive Player of the Year and a five-time Pro Bowl selection. He has 82.5 sacks, eight interceptions and 570 tackles in 191 career NFL games with the Steelers and Cincinnati Bengals. The Patriots now have the NFL's oldest offensive player in Brady and oldest defender in Harrison. —AFP

Sports

Centurion Cook, Broad defy critics as England hit back

England claims last seven wickets for 67 runs

MELBOURNE: Alastair Cook hit a long-awaited century and Stuart Broad snapped up four wickets as England's much-maligned old guard finally enjoyed a day to remember in the Ashes series yesterday.

At 3-0 down after three Tests, the Ashes urn is already lost to Australia but Cook and Broad showed their careers are not over yet after critics had questioned their place in the England team. In scorching heat in Melbourne, England bowled out the Australians for 327, with 113-Test paceman Broad capturing four wickets for 51 runs in his best bowling performance in more than a year. Cook then ended a 10-innings stretch without a half-century, the longest drought of his 151-Test career, to claim his 32nd Test ton. At the close, England were 192 for two and trailing by 135 runs with Cook, playing in an English-record 34th consecutive Ashes Test, unbeaten on 104 and skipper Joe Root providing support on 49 in a 112-run partnership.

Cook had a huge and symbolic let-off on 66 when rival skipper Steve Smith put down a two-handed chance after a couple of grabs at the ball in the slips off Mitchell Marsh. But apart from the drop, it was more like the former captain's signature batting after just 83 runs in his previous six innings of the series.

The Australians claimed two wickets with Josh Hazlewood trapping James Vince leg before wicket for 17 and Mark Stoneman out to a blinding one-handed return catch by spinner Nathan Lyon for 15.

Australia, already without the injured Mitchell Starc, had enforcer Pat Cummins on and off the field with a stomach complaint and down on pace and trademark bounce.

SMITH VIGIL ENDS

England earlier ended Steve Smith's incredible three-year unbeaten run in Melbourne as they bowled out the hosts for



MELBOURNE: England's batsman Alastair Cook (C) pulls a ball away on the way to scoring his century against Australia on the second day of the fourth Ashes cricket Test match at the MCG in Melbourne yesterday. — AFP

327 just after lunch, claiming the last seven wickets for 67 runs. Debutant Tom Curran celebrated his first Test wicket as Smith chopped a short, wide delivery on to his stumps on 76, early on the second day.

Smith had not been dismissed in a Melbourne Test match since Boxing Day 2014, and was on track for his third century of the series on a bat-friendly MCG pitch. In the last three Boxing Day Tests, Smith scored 192 against India, 134 not out against the West Indies and an unbeaten 165 last year against Pakistan.

With his dismissal, Smith has now scored 502 runs in the Ashes series at a stunning average of 125.50. It was an overdue slice of luck for Curran, who had David Warner

caught on 99 only to have the dismissal overturned for an overstepping no-ball on Tuesday's opening day. Warner went on to score 103.

England got more return for bowling wide of the stumps when Mitchell Marsh also dragged on a Chris Woakes delivery for nine after his 181 in the third Test in Perth. His elder brother, Shaun, lost a leg before wicket review on 61 off 148 balls to Stuart Broad.

Tim Paine became the third batsman to chop on to his stumps in the session for 24 off James Anderson, while Jackson Bird fell lbw to Broad for four. Cummins was snapped up at slip off Broad for four, before Lyon was lbw to Anderson for a duck to end the Australian innings. — AFP



SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at stumps on the second day in the fourth Test between Australia and England yesterday in Melbourne, Australia.

Australia 1st innings		Bowling: J. Anderson 29-11-61-3; S. Broad 28-10-51-4; C. Woakes 22-4-72-2; M. Ali 12-0-57-0; T. Curran 21-5-65-1(nb-1); D. Malan 7-1-20-0.	
C. Bancroft lbw b Woakes	26		
D. Warner c Bairstow b Anderson	103		
U. Khawaja c Bairstow b Broad	17		
S. Smith b Curran	76		
S. Marsh lbw b Broad	61		
M. Marsh b Woakes	9		
T. Paine b Anderson	24		
P. Cummins c Cook b Broad	4		
J. Bird lbw b Broad	4		
J. Hazlewood not out	1		
N. Lyon lbw b Anderson	0		
Extras (lb-1 nb-1)	2		
Total (all out, 119 overs)	327		
Fall of wickets: 1-122 C. Bancroft, 2-135 D. Warner, 3-160 U. Khawaja, 4-260 S. Smith, 5-278 M. Marsh, 6-314 S. Marsh, 7-318 T. Paine, 8-325 J. Bird, 9-326 P. Cummins, 10-327 N. Lyon			

England 1st innings (Overnight: 192-2)	
A. Cook not out	104
M. Stoneman c&pb Lyon	15
J. Vince lbw b Hazlewood	17
J. Root not out	49
Extras (b-4 nb-3)	7
Total (for 2 wickets, 57 overs)	192
Fall of wickets: 1-35 M. Stoneman, 2-80 J. Vince	
To bat: D. Malan, J. Bairstow, M. Ali, C. Woakes, T. Curran, S. Broad, J. Anderson	
Bowling: J. Hazlewood 12-2-39-1; J. Bird 12-2-38-0(nb-3); N. Lyon 17-2-44-1; P. Cummins 11-0-39-0; M. Marsh 4-0-17-0; S. Smith 1-0-11-0.	

India aim for history on S Africa tour

MUMBAI: India will define their place in cricket history over the next 18 months with tours of South Africa, Australia and England putting them to the test, the team's coach said yesterday. The world's number one ranked Test side have become invincible at home since losing a one-day and T20 series to South Africa in 2015. In a landmark tour of South Africa next month they are looking for a record 10th straight Test series win. They are currently level with Australia on nine straight series wins.

Shastri and captain Virat Kohli said the side are ready for the challenge, which will be followed by tours of England and Australia and then the World Cup. Shastri stressed the importance of building the same squad around Kohli since the last tour of South Africa in 2013.

"That experience will stand them in good stead, that's for sure, because the conditions will be testing," he said. "This one and a half years will define this Indian cricket team, and the whole team is aware of that."

"All I can say is that this will be a better cricket team after those 18 months," Kohli said the team is stronger than the last tour to South Africa when the Proteas won the two-match Test series 1-0.

"The bowling has come a long way, the batting has come a long way, all the guys are much more experienced now, but the hunger remains the same. We still want to go back and try to do what



MUMBAI: Indian cricket team captain Virat Kohli (R) speaks as coach Ravi Shastri looks on during a news conference ahead of the team's departure for South Africa in Mumbai yesterday. — AFP

we couldn't do the last time."

NO WEDDING HANGOVER

The captain and star batsmen said India have been "relentless" in their performances against Sri Lanka, New Zealand, Bangladesh and England over the past year. "We don't care if we draw or are one game up or one game down, our intensity remains the same and that is because of the fitness levels going up," Kohli also insisted that his wedding to Bollywood star Anushka Sharma this month had not diverted him from the mission ahead and that he is "mentally prepared".

nine wickets fell for 46 runs in 15.4 overs. South Africa needed just 68 minutes and 14.1 overs on Wednesday to take Zimbabwe's remaining six first-innings wickets after they resumed on 30 for four.

Nightwatchman Kyle Jarvis was the top scorer for Zimbabwe, making 23. Morkel, who took the first three wickets under floodlights on Tuesday, again made the first breakthroughs.

With his seventh ball of the morning, Morkel bowled left-hander Ryan Burl for 16, beating the batsman for pace with a ball angled in from around the wicket. Four balls later he had Sikandar Raza caught behind after softening him up with a vicious bouncer, which Raza fended off the splice of his bat just short of gully. Faced with almost an hour to bat before tea, Zimbabwe showed greater resistance in their second innings but Morkel remained a threat. Masakadza, who was out first ball to the tall fast bowler in the first innings, was hit on the elbow when the ball lifted off a good length and beat his forward defensive stroke. Chamu Chibhabha and Craig Ervine saw their team through to tea but the fight soon evaporated.

South Africa were again without wicketkeeper Quinton de Kock, who suffered a low grade hamstring strain while batting on Monday. De Kock was ruled out of the rest of the match, with captain AB de Villiers keeping wicket.

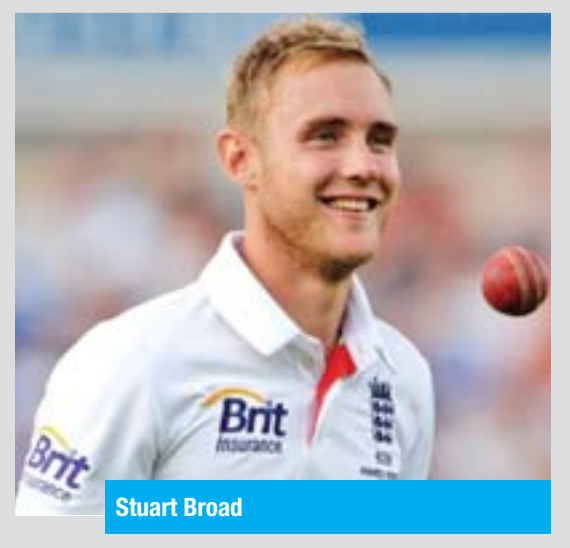
De Villiers held three catches behind the stumps, taking his total of wicketkeeper dismissals to 101 in 26 of his 107 Test matches. He has also held 104 catches as a fielder in his other 81 appearances. De Kock is expected to be fit for the first Test against India, starting in Cape Town on January 5. — AFP

No hard feelings: Broad forgives critics as wickets return

MELBOURNE: Stuart Broad said he didn't hold a grudge against critics who called for him to be dropped after he ended a poor run of form with four wickets in the fourth Ashes Test yesterday. The 113-Test Nottinghamshire seamer had been under fire from detractors-including former England captain Michael Vaughan-after his career-worst 0-142 as England relinquished the Ashes in Perth. Broad admitted he was too defensive in Perth, where he was more concerned about conceding runs than taking wickets, and said just a subtle mental adjustment had put him back on track.

"I think every time you step on to the field you're pretty much playing for your career, that's the pressure of international cricket," Broad said, after taking four wickets for 51 to help dismiss Australia for 327 in their first innings in Melbourne. "You never know how things will go, you just need to focus on making sure that your mindset's right, your work ethic's right to make sure you're doing everything to be at your best. "To be honest I've had one of those weeks where you get your tin hat on and duck down and don't really see much, so I've been very unaware about things being written and things being said." He added: "I've gone to the place that you have to go to as a sportsman sometimes where you find something within yourself and you get support from people around you and you build yourself back up again." "I think you can get yourself in a bit of dark place if you really read everything."

But Broad also said he "deserved" criticism and held no animosity towards those, including Vaughan, who said he should be dropped. "Things happen and can change really quickly in sport and I've always had this appreciation that people are just doing their jobs," he said. "You've got to say your opinion, you've got to be critical at times and I deserve criticism after the Perth Test defeat for sure. "I am not going to hold any grudges or get too disappointed if people slag me off because at the end of the day in 15 years' time I might be doing the same, not six months," he quipped.—AFP



Stuart Broad

South Africa thrash Zimbabwe in two days

PORT ELIZABETH: South Africa crushed Zimbabwe by an innings and 120 runs inside two days in their one-off day-night Test at St George's Park yesterday.

Forced to follow on after being bowled out for 68 in their first innings, Zimbabwe were shot out for 121 runs in their second innings. The match ended before the scheduled dinner break on the second day.

Fast bowler Morne Morkel was the destroyer in the first innings, taking five for 21, but medium-pacer Andile Phehlukwayo and left-arm spinner Keshav Maharaj engineered the second-innings collapse.

Phehlukwayo took three for 13 and Maharaj claimed five for 59, with stand-in captain AB de Villiers seemingly using his front-line fast bowlers sparingly so they could take advantage of the helpful conditions under floodlights. In the end they weren't needed.

Zimbabwe put up a fight at the start of their second innings, reaching 54 before they lost their first wicket, although opening batsman Hamilton Masakadza was forced to retire hurt after being struck on the right elbow by a ball from Morkel.

The total reached 75 for one before the innings imploded, with four wickets falling in 14 balls. The last

Hamstring injury pulls up De Kock

PORT ELIZABETH: South Africa wicketkeeper Quinton de Kock will not be able to do any fielding in the test against Zimbabwe and is an injury concern for the start of the series against India next week after scans yesterday revealed he had strained his right hamstring. De Kock pulled the muscle while batting on the opening day of the day-night test at St George's Park and after being assessed was told to rest in a bid to be ready for the three-test series against India, that starts on Jan 5, officials said.

De Kock suffered the injury running between the crease in his brief innings and did not come out to take his place behind the stumps later on Tuesday when Zimbabwe were put into bat after South Africa declared their first innings on 309-9. Instead, AB de Villiers did wicket keeping duty, having already being pressed into the captaincy when Faf du Plessis pulled out before the start of the test because of a bout of flu.

Fast bowler Dale Steyn's return after a year out with injury was also postponed because of a viral infection. South Africa is meeting Zimbabwe in a one-off test ahead of tours by India and Australia in the next three months. South Africa, seeking to topple India as the top ranked test side, will be hoping De Kock, Du Plessis and Steyn will all be fit again next week ahead of the opening test at Newlands in Cape Town. — Reuters

Sports

Suns hold off Grizzlies for second time with a 99-97 win

Mirotic comes off the bench to power Bulls over Bucks

MEMPHIS: Tyson Chandler slammed home an alley-oop dunk off a Dragan Bender inbound feed with four-tenths of a second left, and the Phoenix Suns held off the Memphis Grizzlies for the second time in six days with a 99-97 win on Tuesday night. Memphis tied the score at 97 when Jarell Martin slammed home a Tyreke Evans miss with six-tenths of a second left and the teams seems headed to overtime. With the subsequent inbound play moved to midcourt, Bender threw the ball just over the far side of the rim, where Chandler was waiting to slam it down. Devin Booker had 32 points in his return to the lineup for the Suns, who beat the Grizzlies 97-95 on Dec. 21 when Evans missed a 3-pointer at the buzzer. TJ Warren finished with 17 points for Phoenix, which gave coach Jay Triano his 100th NBA win. Evans had 25 points and Marc Gasol scored 18 for Memphis, which lost for the 20th time in 24 games.

MAVERICKS 98, RAPTORS 93

J.J. Barea scored a team-high 20 points to lead Dallas past Toronto. Dirk Nowitzki (18 points), Harrison Barnes (16 points, 10 rebounds) and Maxi Kleber (15 points) also were the big producers for Dallas, which earned just their third win in 11 games. Kyle Lowry led the Raptors with 23 points, Jonas Valanciunas finished with 17 points and 11 rebounds, and Serge Ibaka had 11 points and 12 rebounds. Toronto lost for just the second time in 14 games.

SPURS 109, NETS 97

Kawhi Leonard scored a season-high 21 points while seeing the court for a season-most 26 minutes as Antonio defeated Brooklyn. LaMarcus Aldridge finished with 20 points and nine rebounds, and Pau Gasol nabbed his third double-double in a row with 15 points and a game-high 12 rebounds for the Spurs. Tony Parker scored 14 points, and Patty Mills and Ginobili tallied 11 each for San Antonio. Caris LeVert hit on 8 of 11 shots and led Brooklyn with 18 points. Allen Crabbe contributed 15, Rondae Hollis-Jefferson hit for 13 points and Spencer Dinwiddie and Jarrett Allen had 12 points apiece for the Nets.

PISTONS 107, PACERS 83

Tobias Harris scored 26 of his 30 points in the first half, and Detroit won for the fifth time in six games, thumping Indiana. Andre Drummond supplied 21 points and 18 rebounds for the Pistons, who never trailed. Ish Smith added 12 points, and Reggie Bullock chipped in 11. Pistons point guard Reggie Jackson sprained his right ankle during the third quarter. Jackson had eight points and a season-high 13 assists prior to the injury. Victor Oladipo, who came into the game averaging 25.3

points, scored a season-low 13 points for Indiana. Bojan Bogdanovic, Myles Turner and Domantas Sabonis added 10 points apiece for the Pacers.

BULLS 115, BUCKS 106

Nikola Mirotic scored 24 points off the bench, and Kris Dunn finished with 20 as Chicago snapped a two-game losing streak. Dunn bounced back from a 1-for-12 showing his last time out against the Boston Celtics. He hit 9 of 17 shots Tuesday and added 12 assists. The Bulls shot 43.7 percent from the floor and made 10 3-pointers. Milwaukee got 28 points from Giannis Antetokounmpo and 22 from Eric Bledsoe. The Bucks committed a season-high 20 turnovers that the Bulls turned into 24 points.

HEAT 107, MAGIC 89

Josh Richardson scored 14 of his 20 points in the fourth quarter to lead Miami past Orlando. Wayne Ellington scored 18 points off the bench, including 12 in the fourth, for the Heat, who got starting center Hassan Whiteside back from a 13-game knee-injury absence. Whiteside produced seven points and eight rebounds in 18 minutes. Evan Fournier returned after missing eight games due to an injured right ankle and scored 14 points in 30 minutes for the Magic, who have lost nine games in a row. Orlando's Elfrid Payton had 19 points, eight rebounds and six assists.

NUGGETS 107, JAZZ 83

Jamal Murray scored 22 points and grabbed eight rebounds, Trey Lyles added 16 points and eight rebounds against his former team, and Denver beat Utah. Nikola Jokic had 13 points, seven rebounds and five assists before being ejected early in the fourth quarter, but the Nuggets closed it out to win their third straight. Derrick Favors led Utah with 20 points. Jonas Jerebko scored 13 and rookie Donovan Mitchell had 13 points and six assists. The Jazz lost for the ninth time in 11 games.

CLIPPERS 122, KINGS 95

Montrezl Harrell scored 22 points and Lou Williams added 21 as Los Angeles' bench helped power a victory over Sacramento. The Clippers' bench outscored the Kings' reserves 72-43. Los Angeles rookie Jamil Wilson started and scored a career-high 17 points, 14 of which came in the first quarter. DeAndre Jordan added 13 points and 15 rebounds as the Clippers won for the third time in their past four games. Willie Cauley-Stein had 17 points and seven rebounds for the Kings. Buddy Hield and Malachi Richardson each added 10 points for Sacramento. — Reuters



PHOENIX: Marc Gasol #33 of the Memphis Grizzlies shoots the ball during the game against the Phoenix Suns on Tuesday at Talking Stick Resort Arena in Phoenix, Arizona. — AFP

NBA results/standings

Detroit 107, Indiana 83; Dallas 98, Toronto 93; Miami 107, Orlando 89; Chicago 115, Milwaukee 106; San Antonio 109, Brooklyn 97; Denver 107, Utah 83; Phoenix 99, Memphis 97; Los Angeles Clippers 122, Sacramento 95.

Eastern Conference					Western Conference				
	W	L	PCT	GB					
Boston	27	10	73.0	-	Golden State	27	7	79.4	-
Toronto	23	9	71.9	1.5	Houston	25	7	78.1	1
Cleveland	24	10	70.6	1.5	San Antonio	24	11	68.6	3.5
Detroit	19	14	57.6	6	Minnesota	21	13	61.8	6
Washington	19	15	55.9	6.5	Oklahoma City	19	15	55.9	8
Indiana	19	15	55.9	6.5	Denver	18	15	54.5	8.5
Milwaukee	17	15	53.1	7	Portland	17	16	51.5	9.5
Miami	18	16	52.9	7.5	New Orleans	17	16	51.5	9.5
New York	17	16	51.5	8	Utah	15	19	44.1	12
Philadelphia	15	18	45.5	10	LA Clippers	14	19	42.4	12.5
Brooklyn	12	21	36.4	13	Phoenix	13	23	36.1	15
Charlotte	12	21	36.4	13	LA Lakers	11	21	34.4	15
Chicago	11	22	33.3	14	Sacramento	11	22	33.3	15.5
Orlando	11	24	31.4	15	Memphis	10	24	29.4	17
Atlanta	8	25	24.2	17	Dallas	10	25	28.6	17.5

Celtic in great shape for Old Firm derby: Rodgers

GLASGOW: Celtic manager Brendan Rodgers says his side are in great shape after they warmed up for Saturday's Old Firm derby with a comfortable 2-0 defeat of Dundee at Dens Park. The Hoops moved 11 points clear at the top of the Scottish Premiership thanks to first-half strikes from James Forrest and Leigh Griffiths, with nearest challengers Aberdeen not scheduled to play Partick Thistle until Wednesday.

The Scottish champions have now won three in a row since their record-breaking unbeaten run was halted by Hearts while managing to keep clean sheets in three successive league games for the first time this season. Rodgers says his side are looking strong as they prepare to host rivals Rangers at Celtic Park on Saturday. "I think we're looking pretty good," said the Celtic boss. "We're looking fit, strong and focused, which is important—especially at this time of the year when there are so many games."

"We're ticking them off and we take each performance as it comes. This was an excellent performance. I thought, "This was the type of game that you need to have a hunger to go and win in the midst of a very busy schedule." Rodgers said the second half of the match had been a test for his team after they recently drew 2-2 with Hibernian even though they had been 2-0 up. "I thought our two goals were outstanding in terms of how we work, how we play and move the ball, and they were perhaps unfortunate not to get one or two more goals."

"It could have been more comfortable but it was very good defensively and attacking-wise I was really pleased. "We will recover now. It was a very important three points for us and we'll get ready for what will be a really good game at the weekend." Rivals Rangers are the visitors in the final game before the Scottish Premiership's three-week winter break begins. And Rodgers says victory would see Celtic end a remarkable year-in which they won the league and Scottish Cup as well as retaining the League Cup—on a high. "What is great about these players of mine is the consistency of their motivation," the former Liverpool manager said. "We talk about hunger all the time and that relentless mentality. We had an off day at Hearts and a couple of things went against us but the reaction to that over the last three games has been very, very good. "We've got one more game to go to finish an incredible year for us but we need to recover well now." —AFP



BAGHDAD: Baghdad's Oil Club guard DeMario Mayfield attends a team training session ahead of their match against Iraq's Airline Club, in Baghdad on December 7, 2017. — AFP

US basketball star rebounds with Iraq team

BAGHDAD: DeMario Mayfield feared his basketball career was over when he was arrested on suspicion of planning a robbery, but the former US college star is now bouncing back - in war-torn Iraq. Originally from Georgia in America's deep south, the 6 foot 5 inch player is the latest banner addition to Iraq's national team after taking citizenship following a 2015 club move to Baghdad. "I will forever be grateful for the opportunity that I have had presented to me," Mayfield, 26, told AFP. "It has been nothing but love since the day I arrived."

Mayfield's prospects looked grim back in 2013 when the onetime University of North Carolina and University of Georgia star was arrested in his home state for conspiracy to commit armed robbery. "Right then and there I thought it was the end," he said. "But then I realized I just had to trust myself and dig myself out of the hole."

In the end he pleaded guilty to the lesser offence of possessing a firearm and served 10 months on a work-release program - before eventually being given another chance by Angelo State in Texas. But after finishing there he got no interest from clubs in the US or Europe until an offer from an unlikely source - Baghdad's Oil Club - came along. "I had friends in this league before I came. They persuaded me to come here. We did a lot of talking before coming," Mayfield said.

Iraq was not the easiest sell. The Middle East country has been wracked by violence and bloodshed since the

US-led invasion of 2003. While the capital Baghdad can often be quiet it is still frequently the target of suicide bombings and the team that brought him to Iraq insist they have no regrets. "He has very good skills... with good leadership on the court," said Oil Club coach Khalil Yehya. Last year "we were the champions, and he got the award for best professional player in the championship". And starring in the Iraqi league was only the start. Mayfield's performances drew the attention of the country's struggling national team as it sets its eyes on qualifying for the World Cup in 2019.

"We asked the Iraqi government to give DeMario a passport so that he could join Iraq's team," said national basketball federation secretary Khaled Najm. Complete with his new Iraqi citizenship, Mayfield has already been making an impact - dominating as his unfancied side beat neighboring rivals Iran in a qualifying game last month. "I'm basically an Iraqi, an American Iraqi," he said.

While he has enjoyed undoubted success in Iraq, life in Baghdad can still have its drawbacks. Mayfield lives in a hotel room and has had to leave his family - including his young son - back in the States because of security concerns. The language is also an issue, even though he says he has learnt the basic basketball terms in Arabic to help him out on the court. He has a favorite cafe where he goes to eat pastries and drink tea and has friends to hang out with. In the streets he gets recognized by fans of his adopted homeland - reminding him just how far he has come in the past few years. "My journey with the Iraqi team has been something special," he said. "It's been one heck of a ride, but I'm enjoying it." — AFP

Wolves extend lead despite draw

LONDON: Wolverhampton Wanderers extended their lead at the top of the English Championship to eight points despite a draw with Millwall as Cardiff crashed to defeat at home. Nuno Espirito Santo's league leaders were forced to settle for a point at The Den as Millwall defender Jake Cooper headed home a second-half equaliser in a pulsating 2-2 draw.

Lee Gregory had put the home side ahead in the first half but Diogo Jota levelled and Romain Saiss then handed the visitors the lead after 56 minutes. Despite the slip-up in the early kick-off, Wolves still increased their unbeaten run to 10 games and the point proved to be valuable due to Cardiff's 4-2 defeat at home to Fulham.

Tim Ream and Floyd Ayite put the Cottagers 2-0 up after 56 minutes before a stunning strike from Kenneth Zohore reduced the deficit at the Cardiff City Stadium.

Ryan Sessegnon made it 3-1 in the 78th minute and Stefan Johansen capped the victory after Callum Paterson's header in added time briefly gave the Bluebirds hope. Bristol City moved above Cardiff on goal difference and into the automatic promotion places after a 2-0 win against Reading at Ashton Gate.

Substitute Jamie Paterson curled in a stunning effort in the 68th minute before being replaced by Lloyd Kelly, who sealed the points in added time to extend City's unbeaten run to seven games in all competitions. Birmingham remain rooted at the foot of the table, three points adrift of safety, after a 2-0 defeat at home to Norwich.

Tony Pulis watched on from the stands as Middlesbrough beat second-bottom Bolton 2-0 in the first game since Garry Monk's departure.

Former West Brom chief Pulis was appointed as Boro's new boss earlier on Boxing Day but the match was overseen by caretaker manager Craig Liddle. Sheffield United claimed their first win in seven games while Sunderland remain in the relegation zone following a 3-0 defeat at Bramall Lane.

Leeds came from behind to beat Burton 2-1 and extend their winning run to four games. Sheffield Wednesday began life without Carlos Carvalhal with a 3-0 victory at Nottingham Forest.

QPR midfielder Josh Scowen was sent off in a 0-0 stalemate at Ipswich while Barnsley played out a goalless draw against Preston and Hull and Derby shared the points in a 0-0 draw.

In the late game, Brentford edged Aston Villa 2-1 in torrential rain at Griffin Park. Villa substitute Josh Onamah cancelled out Romaine Sawyers' opener for Brentford before the break before Lasse Vibe's effort early in the second half proved to be the winner. Brentford have lost only two of their last 16 league matches while Villa's winless run was extended to five. — AFP

Sports

Chelsea still has plenty to achieve, says coach Conte

Conte wants to strengthen his squad in January

LONDON: Antonio Conte insists the battle for a top four finish is providing Chelsea with all the motivation they need, even if Premier League leaders Manchester City are out of reach. Conte's side recovered from the disappointment of a pre-Christmas draw at Everton by beating Brighton 2-0 on Tuesday to move within a point of second-placed Manchester United. With City on a record-breaking run of victories, Blues boss Conte admits there appears to be little chance of closing the gap. But the Italian insisted last season's champions are still motivated. "I think in this league there is a great motivation for all. To try, I repeat, to stay there and to fight until the end," he said. "I don't know if it will win the title. It depends upon Manchester City. They are doing something extraordinary to win every game and draw only once up to now. That means you're having a fantastic run."

"Otherwise, Chelsea, United, Tottenham, Arsenal and Liverpool would be staying there to fight. We fight for a place in the Champions League next season. "There are four places for six top teams. Last season, Manchester United and Arsenal finished fifth and sixth, no? "There is this great motivation for me, for the players, and we want to try and improve. "Our start wasn't easy this season, for many reasons. But we want to work and improve. There are many competitions. "It's important to face every competition and be very proud to play every game."

Alvaro Morata headed Chelsea ahead immediately after half-time and Marcos Alonso added the second on the hour at Stamford Bridge. "Today it was positive to score for

Alvaro," said Conte. "He's our No9. Against Everton, he didn't play. "Also Alonso, to score five goals up to now, for a wing-back, is a great achievement. "But it's important to continue. Not to stop scoring. We need this alternative from our strikers."

VIDAL LINK

Conte wants to strengthen his squad in January and expressed his admiration for Bayern Munich midfielder Arturo Vidal after being questioned about reports linking the Chile midfielder with a move to Chelsea. "I must be honest, it's not right to talk about a player of another team," he said. "Especially if you try to link this player with us. Arturo is a fantastic player, I have a great respect for Arturo, and we spent many years in Juventus together. I'd always want him with me."

Brighton manager Chris Hughton also responded to reports claiming Albion have agreed a fee for Celtic striker Moussa Dembele. "I've heard reports. As manager of this football club, I'm quite sure I'd know. There's been no contact between the two clubs," he said. Albion remain close to mid-table our a solid run following last season's promotion and Hughton added: "I want them to feel proud of where we are and what we've achieved so far, but frustrated because we could have done better. "Would we have been happy at the start of the season to be in the position we are in now? The answer would be yes. But we could have done better. "If anything, in the second half of the season, it won't get any easier. It will get harder, if anything." —AFP



LONDON: File photo shows Chelsea's Italian head coach Antonio Conte gestures during the English League Cup quarter-final football match between Chelsea and Bournemouth at Stamford Bridge Stadium, in southwest London. — AFP

“ I think in this league there is a great motivation ”

Kuwait and UAE meet tday

KUWAIT: Kuwait and the UAE football teams will meet at Jaber International Stadium today at the end of Group A competitions of the 23rd Gulf Cup. The match is important for both teams, as the emirates seeks winning or at the very least to secure the semi-final qualification, while Kuwaitis are looking for their first winning to satisfy their fans. The UAE team beat Oman in the first round of their group with a 1-0, drew with Saudi Arabia in the second round, while Kuwait lost in the first and second rounds respectively against Saudi Arabia and Oman.

Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates have won 19 times in the Arabian Gulf Cup and Kuwait had won 10 times while UAE won seven times. They tied two times. On other hand, Saudi Arabia and Oman will meet also at Jaber International Stadium today in the final round of Group A competitions of the 23rd Arabian Gulf Cup in a crucial match to qualify for the semi-finals. Oman will play today with only one chance to reach the semi-finals, while Saudi Arabia needs one point to qualify. The two teams met 13 times in the history of the Arabian Gulf Cup, where Saudi Arabia won 12 times, while Oman won once in the Gulf Cup final. — KUNA

Murray takes it slow after injury woes

LONDON: Andy Murray says his injury-ravaged season has forced him to take a cautious approach to what he can achieve when he returns to action. Murray has been sidelined since July when he was beaten by Sam Querrey in the Wimbledon quarter-finals.

That loss was caused largely by Murray's problems with a hip injury and he missed the US Open as a result of his fitness struggles. The three-time major winner plans to make his comeback at the Brisbane tournament which starts on New Year's Eve.

But despite also surrendering his world number one ranking during a frustrating year, Murray insists he won't be motivated solely by thoughts of Grand Slam glory once he gets back on court. Instead, the Scot wants to first prove he is finally fit and start to enjoy his tennis again.

"When I was fit and healthy last year (2016) you think about winning all the major events, getting to No

1 and winning every competition that you are in and that is what really drives you," Murray told Sky Sports. "When you miss four or five months and there has been a bit of uncertainty about my hip or stuff. I missed the US Open and almost missed Wimbledon as well. "The goals change and I remember now how much I just loved playing tennis — it isn't about winning every match that I play in the future or winning more slams.

"I want to get back to playing tennis, I want to be fit and healthy and that is what is driving me just now. "I am hoping next year I can get back to that and if I do then I have an opportunity to compete for the biggest tournaments in the world and I still believe that."

Murray's ranking has slumped outside the top 10 for the first time in a decade, but the 30-year-old is confident he can still make an impact in the Grand Slams once he gets back into the groove.

"The major competitions are the ones that drive me more than the ranking. I want to compete. It was tough for me basically limping out of Wimbledon at the end," Murray said. "I want to be competing hard and trying to win the Australian Open in January. That is ultimately what I want to be doing but first and foremost I need to get healthy. "I was pretty unhealthy for most of this year and I am getting there but it is a slow process." —AFP

Arsenal face tough test from resurgent Crystal Palace

LONDON: Arsene Wenger knows Arsenal cannot afford a repeat of their last trip to Selhurst Park when they face Crystal Palace today. The Gunners have benefitted from extra rest compared to their rivals in the battle for a top four place and face the Eagles six days after the pulsating 3-3 draw with Liverpool that marked the start of the holiday fixtures. But in the meantime, they have seen Liverpool, Tottenham and Chelsea all win to intensify the battle for a Champions League spot.

That means Wenger's side face Palace knowing they risk losing ground if they fail to claim three points. That was a task that proved beyond them when they faced the Eagles last April and turned in one of their worst displays of the season when they fell to a 3-0 defeat. Then, Palace were involved in a desperate battle to avoid relegation and they overwhelmed an Arsenal side that fell short in their efforts to finish in the top four, failing to qualify for the Champions League for the first time under Wenger.

This time around, the gap to fourth placed Liverpool is four points, while victory will move them level on points with Tottenham in fifth. The season will produce many more twists and turns, but heading into the second half of the campaign, it would be a major blow if there were signs of Wenger's side losing ground, particularly while the futures of Alexis Sanchez and Mesut Ozil remain up in the air. Whether those two players stay beyond the end of the season when their current contracts expire remains to be seen, but Wenger has offered clues that Jack Wilshere will be handed a new deal.

The England midfielder has forced his way back into Wenger's line-up after another injury-scarred start to the campaign and impressed in the meeting with Liverpool. "He is better now than in the last two or three years. It's positive, overall he is in very good shape," said Wenger. The Frenchman knows his side must improve on the first half defensive display that almost cost them against Liverpool.

Palace have hardly been prolific scorers but Wilfried Zaha has been showing the kind of form that has seen the Ivory Coast international once again linked with a move away, with Manchester City and Tottenham reported interested. Palace striker Christian Benteke is available to return after missing the trip to Swansea while he served a one-match suspension. —AFP

Klopp refuses to be star struck leading Liverpool

LIVERPOOL: Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp insists he is not interested in the individual goal tallies of his attacking players because they will all get opportunities to find the net. Two goals from Roberto Firmino and one each from Philippe Coutinho, Trent Alexander-Arnold and Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain helped Liverpool to an emphatic 5-0 win over Swansea City at Anfield. The victory ensured Liverpool remain in the thick of the battle for the Champions League places in fourth spot - five points behind second-placed Manchester United. Brazilian duo Coutinho and Firmino were both particularly influential in the Boxing Day win at Anfield.

However, Klopp preferred to extol the virtues of the collective efforts of his players rather than single out individuals. Klopp said: "I am happy for all the boys when they score but I couldn't say how many he has, or how many he has, I don't care. "That is not in my interest. If we play like we play in our good moments then the boys will be in good situations. They will all score."

"Sadio Mane didn't play here but he will score if we play like this, if we bring the different players in the different moments in the different situations. "When you see the result is 5-0 that it was an easy game but it wasn't an easy game. It was really hard work, I've no problem with that. "I'm really happy with what we learned from the game. It is a perfect result for us, nobody injured I don't think. Important three points, five goals, clean sheet so it's all good."

'LOT OF GAMES TO COME'

Klopp withdrew Firmino in the 68th minute and the German explained that he did so with one eye on a hectic period of games over the festive period even though Firmino, who has scored six in his last seven games, wanted to remain on the pitch. "You could see he wasn't the happiest in the stadium when I took him off but at least I have to stay reasonable or serious because there are a lot of games to come," Klopp said.

"I appreciate Roberto's effort and performance always and I am happy that he scored twice but I could not say how many he has scored so far in the season. "I feel he is always involved and always in and around the dangerous situations for the opponents. In the first half



LONDON: File photo shows Liverpool's German manager Jurgen Klopp instructs Liverpool's English midfielder Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain during the English Premier League football match between Arsenal and Liverpool at the Emirates Stadium in London on December 22, 2017. — AFP

he was right full back, he was left full back, he was everywhere. At the end he scored two goals so that's nice, very nice." Klopp also revealed that captain Jordan Henderson and left-back Alberto Moreno, both absent from the win over Swansea through injury, will miss forthcoming fixtures against Leicester City and Burnley. Swansea caretaker manager Leon Brittan, who expects to be in charge for their next game with

Watford as no managerial appointment is imminent, felt his players were guilty of making fundamental errors at Anfield. "The second half after conceding a goal all belief and confidence drained from the players," he said. "We made a lot of errors, basic mistakes, and you do it against a team of Liverpool's quality you get punished. We are bottom of the league and confidence is low. It's unacceptable." —AFP

Live		
Matches on TV (Local Timings)		
ARABIAN GULF CUP 2017		
Kuwait v United Arab Emirates		18:30
Kuwait TV Sport Plus MBC Pro Sports 1 HD KTV Sport HD Dubai Sports 1 HD		
Saudi Arabia v Oman		
Kuwait TV Sport Plus MBC Pro Sports 1 HD KTV Sport HD Dubai Sports 1 HD		18:30
ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE		
Crystal Palace v Arsenal		23:00
beIN SPORTS HD 2		

12 Wild Oats finishes Sydney-Hobart in record time, faces likely protest



14 US basketball star rebounds with Iraq team



15 Chelsea still has plenty to achieve, says coach Conte



Mutko resigns as WCup committee chief

‘We expect by May 30 to meet all obligations the government gave FIFA’

MOSCOW: Russian Deputy Prime Minister Vitaly Mutko, who was banned for life from the Olympic Games this month over doping, said yesterday that he is stepping down as chairman of the 2018 World Cup organising committee. “(Organising committee director Alexei Sorokin will be the chairman,” Mutko was quoted by Russian agencies as saying, two days after suspending his role as president of the Russian Football Union. “He is the head of the organising committee starting today,” he said. Sorokin, 45, had served as the executive director of the Russian Football Union between 2008 and 2010 and has overseen Russia’s World Cup bid since 2009.

“He will interact with FIFA. I will concentrate on work in the government,” Mutko said. “There is still a lot of work but I am absolutely sure that everything will be prepared in time. “We expect that on May 30 we will meet all the obligations that the government gave FIFA.” FIFA said in an emailed statement that it will work with Sorokin “with the aim to deliver an exceptional event in June and July”. “FIFA thanks Mutko for his invaluable contribution to the preparations for the competition so far,” it said.

Mutko on Monday announced that he plans to file a claim in the Court of Arbitration for Sport to contest his Olympic ban, and would suspend his duties in the RFU for the duration of the proceedings.

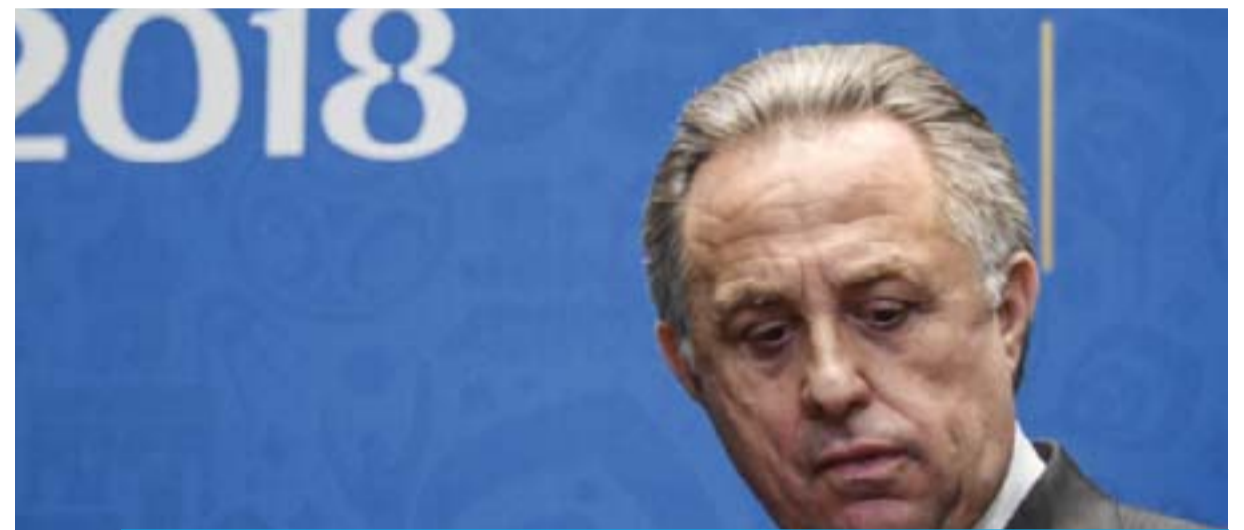
He added at the time that he would continue his role as chief coordinator of preparations for the World Cup Russia will host next summer until Russian leadership decides otherwise. His decision to step down came after a meeting of the Russian government’s coordination council for the World Cup preparations, which Mutko also chairs. Sorokin said the decision to give him Mutko’s role was “rather sudden” but assured that it would not disrupt preparations for the event looming just over six months from now.

The Russia-2018 organising committee said in a statement published by TASS agency that that “the change in leadership will have no consequences on the process of preparations for the world championship”.

Mutko would “continue to oversee the preparation by the regions... and coordinate building the necessary infrastructure in his role as the deputy prime minister,” the statement said.

Yesterday he said his claim has been filed in the CAS. The Lausanne-based court told AFP yesterday they have not received the appeal yet. Mutko was banned for life from the Olympic Games on December 5 after the International Olympic Committee said he was involved in a state-backed doping programme.

The 59-year-old had until this week retained his posts in Russia throughout the doping scandal, even receiving a promotion from sports minister. He maintains



MOSCOW: In this file photo taken on November 30, 2017 Russian deputy prime minister Vitaly Mutko, chairman of the 2018 FIFA World Cup Russia Local Organizing Committee, attending the team seminar in Moscow on the eve of the Final Draw for the 2018 FIFA World Cup. — AFP

that Russian athletes were clean at the 2014 Olympic Games. Mutko in March was barred from sitting on the FIFA Council, the world body’s ruling top table where

the Russian sports official had a seat since 2009. His participation was blocked because of potential conflicts of interest with his government role. — AFP

PAINTBALL KUWAIT

New Year Offer
50%
Extra Paintballs

Business

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 28, 2017

18 Long queues form across Nigeria petrol stations as shortage bites**19** 6 Nissan executives awarded N-SPEC certification this year**20** Hyundai shipbuilding stocks plunge on dismal forecast

HAMBURG: This file photo provides a general view of the Airbus A380 before the HSV team handed over the A380 to the Emirates airline on January 18, 2010 in Hamburg. Emirates has been a strong believer in the A380 and is easily the largest customer with total orders of 142 aircraft, of which it has taken just over 100.

Airbus ready to axe A380 superjumbo

A380 fate hinges on deal with Emirates

PARIS: Airbus is drawing up contingency plans to phase out production of the world's largest jetliner, the A380 superjumbo, if it fails to win a key order from Dubai's Emirates, three people familiar with the matter said. The moment of truth for the slow-selling airliner looms after just 10 years in service and leaves one of Europe's most visible international symbols hanging by a thread, despite a major airline investment in new cabins unveiled this month.

"If there is no Emirates deal, Airbus will start the process of ending A380 production," a person briefed on the plans said. A supplier added such a move was logical due to weak demand. Airbus and Emirates declined to comment. Airbus also declined to say how many people work on the project. Any shutdown is expected to be gradual, allowing Airbus to produce orders it has in hand, mainly from Emirates. It has enough orders to last until early next decade at current production rates, according to a Reuters analysis.

The A380 was developed at a cost of 11 billion euros to carry some 500 people and challenge the reign of the Boeing 747. But demand for these four-engined golems has fallen as airlines choose smaller twin-engine models, which are easier to fill and cheaper to maintain. Emirates, however, has been a strong believer in the A380 and is easily the largest customer with total orders of 142 aircraft, of which it has taken just over 100.

Talks between Airbus and Emirates over a new order for 36 superjumbos worth \$16 billion broke down at the Dubai Airshow last month. Negotiations are said to have resumed, but there are no visible signs that a deal is imminent. Although airlines such as British Airways have expressed interest in the A380, Airbus is reluctant to keep factories open without the certainty that a bulk Emirates order would provide. Emirates, for its part, wants a guarantee that Airbus will keep

production going for a decade to protect its investment. A decision to cancel would mark a rupture between Airbus and one of its largest



Loss-making A380 has lost out to new twin-engine jets

customers and tie Emirates' future growth to recent Boeing orders. European sources say that

reflects growing American influence in the Gulf under President Donald Trump, but US and UAE industry sources deny politics are involved. There are also potential hurdles to a deal over engine choices and after-sales support.

Yet if talks succeed, European sources say there is a glimmer of hope for the double-deck jet, which Airbus says will become more popular with airlines due to congestion. Singapore Airlines, which first introduced the A380 to passengers in 2007, showcased an \$850 million cabin re-design this month and expressed confidence in the model's future.

Airbus hopes to use an Emirates order to stabilize output and establish a safety net from which to attract A380 sales to other carriers, but has ruled out trying to do this the other way round, industry sources said. As of the end of November, Airbus

had won orders for 317 A380s and delivered 221, leaving 96 unfilled orders. But based on airlines' intentions or finances, 47 of those are unlikely to be delivered, according to industry sources, which halves the number of jets in play. Airbus needs to sell at least another 30 to keep lines open for 10 years and possibly more to justify the price concessions likely to be demanded by any new buyers.

To bridge the gap, Airbus plans to cut output to six a year beyond 2019, from 12 in 2018 and 8 in 2019, even if it means producing at a loss, Reuters recently reported.

Chief Operating Officer Fabrice Bregier confirmed this month Airbus was looking at cutting output to 6-7 a year. If Airbus does decide to wind down production, some believe Emirates will ask Airbus to deliver the remaining 41 it has on order and then keep most A380s in service as long as possible. Even so, some A380s are likely to be heading for scrap. — Reuters

British purchasing power set to stagnate in 2018: Study

LONDON: Britons' purchasing power, which took a hit this year against the backdrop of Brexit, looks set to stagnate in 2018, according to a new study released yesterday.

Following what was a "tough year for living standards" in 2017... the prospects for a "meaningful pay recovery" are "still out of sight", said Torsten Bell, head of the Resolution Foundation, a London-based think tank. Since Britain voted to leave the European Union in June 2016, a drop in sterling-making imported goods more expensive has pushed inflation up to more than 3.0 percent.

And while unemployment is currently at its lowest level since 1975, low productivity has prevented wages from keeping pace with inflation. The think tank noted that stagnant pay packets next year actually represented an improvement over 2017, when real wages fell.



LONDON: Shoppers look for bargains inside the Prada boutique at Selfridges department store during the Boxing Day sale in central London on Tuesday. — AFP

It suggested that the effect of the falling pound could ease off in the coming months, causing inflation to slow. But the study predicted that the squeeze on purchasing power was likely to worsen before it improved. For the moment, the

high rate of inflation in Britain still appears to be hitting post-Christmas retail sales. The number of people shopping on Boxing Day fell sharply compared to last year, according to retail performance analysts, Springboard. — AFP

Americans shop with greater gusto this season

NEW YORK: Americans shopped with greater gusto at malls and online this holiday season amid a strong labor market and cold winter weather, retail sales experts said yesterday. Shoppers in the world's biggest economy spent generously over the "Black Friday" weekend in late November that kicks off the US holiday shopping season, and buying picked up further in December, analysts said.

Retail experts won't have the final tally on the overall holiday season until January. That will include figures from the day-after-Christmas, "Boxing Day," which is usually one of the busiest shopping days of the year.

But early figures point to a good year overall. Mastercard SpendingPulse estimated sales growth for the season at 4.9 percent, the

strongest annual boost since 2011. "Overall, this year was a big win for retail," said Sarah Quinlan, senior vice president of market insights at Mastercard.

"The strong US economy was a contributing factor, but we also have to recognize that retailers who tried new strategies to engage holiday shoppers were the beneficiaries of this sales increase." IHS Markit pointed to strong macroeconomic factors such as a 17-year high in US consumer confidence in November and a 17-year low in unemployment that allowed consumers to open their wallets. Chilly weather in much of the country also supported sales of jackets and other winter apparel, said Chris Christopher, executive director at IHS Markit. "There was a significant ramp-up of holiday sales," said Christopher, who shifted his projection midway through December to 4.7 percent growth for the season from an earlier mark of 4.2 percent growth.

"Everything is pointing to a good holiday season." The passage of a massive tax cut bill by Republicans in Congress and pushed by President Donald Trump also likely lifted spending somewhat, although Christopher noted that "things were going strong before that." — AFP

Business

Long queues form across Nigeria petrol stations as shortage bites

Monster traffic jams clog up Nigeria this Christmas

LAGOS: Long queues formed at petrol stations across Nigeria yesterday, with motorists sometimes waiting up to 24 hours to fill up their tanks, as Africa's number one oil producer faces a crippling fuel shortage.

"I couldn't travel. I would have loved to travel to Osun State (north of Lagos) to spend time with my family (for Christmas), but I cancelled on that one," motorist Tope Alake told AFP as he waited at one of the few petrol stations still open in Lagos, Nigeria's economic capital.

"I am supposed to be at home now," said another driver, Alex Ogunisola. "I am supposed to take the kids to the beach. I am on queue and I am not even sure if I am going to see fuel today."

Monster traffic jams have clogged up Nigeria this Christmas, which had been hoping to enjoy a happier holiday season this year than in 2016, when the country was deep in economic recession.

Given the scale of the shortage, everyone involved is eager to lay the blame at somebody else's door. The distributors are pointing the finger at the Nigerian National Petroleum Company (NNPC), which does not have sufficient resources to meet the

demands of the country, with its population of 190 million people. Under orders from the government in Abuja, NNPC's chief Maitanki Baru unveiled a national plan on Monday to deliver an additional 300 million liters of petrol to "support the current consumption of 45 million liters per day"—much higher than the normal demand of 27-28 million liters per day due to the holiday period.

Baru also pointed out that the national refineries in Port Harcourt and Kaduna were producing 3.8 million liters of refined petrol per day, a paltry amount given that Nigeria is Africa's biggest exporter of crude (nearly two million barrels per day).

The NNPC chief also blamed black market vendors for purposely paralyzing petrol stations so as to push up parallel selling prices to 400 naira (0.93 euros per liter, \$1.11), compared with 145 naira normally. At the same time, consumers suspect the government of creating a chaotic situation in order to justify an increase in diesel and petrol prices

at the pump next year. The crisis is particularly serious in a country where the public electricity supply is weak and where businesses and private individuals rely on their diesel generator for lighting. —AFP



LAGOS: People queue with jerry cans outside of a petrol station in Lagos, southwest Nigeria. —AFP



Africa's No 1 oil producer faces crippling shortage

Vietnam's economy grows at fastest rate in a decade

HANOI: Vietnam's economy grew 6.81 percent this year—its strongest rate for a decade—thanks in part to surging exports, data showed yesterday. Full-year GDP growth was slightly above the government target of 6.7 percent and outstripped the 6.21 percent posted for 2016, the General Statistics Office (GSO) said. Growth was driven by the agriculture, seafood and forestry sectors, according to GSO head Nguyen Bich Lam.

"The efficient recovery of agricultural production and the development of the aqua sector are the main reasons for growth," he told reporters. Total exports were worth more than \$213 billion this year, a 21 percent jump from 2016, the GSO said. The impressive growth reflects "a strong rebound of the agriculture sector, rising global and domestic demand which helped to boost manufacturing and trade, and robust foreign investment inflows," Luong Hoang from Viet Capital Securities told AFP.

"I believe the strong growth momentum will continue next year and the government's target of 6.5 percent to 6.7 percent is very feasible." This year's growth—the highest since 2007 according to official statistics—emerged after a slow start to 2017.

But the economy expanded as the year wore on—a recovery which the World Bank has attributed to the agriculture sector and the cornerstone manufacturing industry. World Bank lead economist for Vietnam, Sebastian Eckardt, has said it would be hard to maintain the stellar performance.

"Growth this year is so high, so it's harder to carry forward next year," he told reporters earlier this month.

The World Bank estimates that medium-term growth could cool to 6.5 percent. Though Vietnam has recorded solid growth in recent years, boosted by the export of cheap goods like Samsung phones and Nike shoes, it has struggled to contain mounting public debts. In a bid to raise much-needed cash, the government has started to sell off shares in its prized state-owned enterprises, though the privatization process has been much slower than promised. —AFP

Armenia looks to solar energy to move out of Russia's shadow

YEREVAN: Landlocked and poor, Armenia has long relied on Russia for its energy needs, but the government is hoping to reduce that dependence by tapping a resource that is plentiful in the region: the sun. With few fossil fuel resources of its own and its sole nuclear power plant nearing the end of its working life, Armenia is banking on renewable energy to reduce its dependence on its former Soviet master, which accounts for nearly 83 percent of gas imports.

And with Armenia much sunnier than most of Europe—according to government figures, it receives 1,720 kilowatt hours per square meter of sunlight every year, compared to an average of 1,000 in Europe—solar energy looks to be the most promising.

"To ensure its energy security and independence, Armenia, like any other country, strives to diversify energy sources," the ex-Soviet republic's Deputy Energy Minister Hayk Harutyunyan told AFP.

Within four years, up to eight percent of the country's energy needs will be covered by renewables, according to the government's policy paper, "Energy Roadmap." The document estimates the country's potential capacity of solar energy production at up to 3,000 megawatts—enough to meet domestic demand and even make Armenia a net electricity exporter.

Harutyunyan said that a consortium of investors from 10 countries will soon start building a solar plant capable of producing 55 megawatts of electricity. One of the backers, the World Bank, has earmarked some \$60 million (51 million euros) for the project, as part of its initiative to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions.

So far, three solar power plants with capacity of one megawatt each have been built across the country and seven more will follow by the end of 2018. Next year, the headquarters of the Armenian cabinet of ministers will fully switch to solar energy, subsequently followed by all governmental buildings.

A pilot project was launched in March to install rooftop solar panels in remote villages across the country to provide households with electricity and hot water.

In late 2015, an Armenian tycoon with business interests in Russia, Samvel Karapetyan, bought out Armenia's indebted



YEREVAN: A man transporting hay passes a house with solar panels on its wall in the village of Lemamerdz, some 40 km of Yerevan. —AFP

electricity distribution company from a Kremlin-controlled holding, Inter RAO.

Karapetyan's Tashit Group is investing in solar projects and has already spent some \$500,000 (425,000 euros) in building a solar power plant in the mountainous tourist town of Tsaghkadzor. In addition to increasing the share of renewables, the Armenian government is seeking to reduce that of natural gas and oil by more than a third by 2020, compared with 2010 levels.

Russian dependence

Moscow tightened its grip on Armenia's economy and politics in 2006 by taking complete control over Armenia's power plants and distribution companies. Russia provides more than 80 percent of the natural gas used by the landlocked Caucasus nation and supplies all of the fuel for the country's sole nuclear power plant, the Metsamor. The European Union has repeatedly called on Armenia to shut down the aging Metsamor—which produces more than a third of the country's electricity—for security reasons.

But the Armenian government has decided to extend the plant's operations until its production capacities are fully

replaced by alternative energy in 2026.

"We have never had any illusion that the nuclear power plant could work forever. One day, we will have to stop it and we must be ready for this," said Harutyunyan. "That's why, during the last several years, Armenia has been stepping up efforts to develop all types of renewable energy—hydro, wind, and solar."

The extent of Russia's influence on the ex-Soviet republic became clear in 2013 when Yerevan made a surprise foreign policy U-turn and joined the Moscow-led Customs Union economic bloc, instead of signing a long-negotiated pact on political association and economic integration with the European Union. A member of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation—designed as Russia's counterweight to NATO—Armenia is also the Kremlin's closest military ally in the Caucasus region, which has historically been an arena of geopolitical rivalry between global powers.

For decades, Armenia has been locked in territorial conflict with Turkey-backed Azerbaijan over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region. And in the face of the perceived threat from its arch-foes in Ankara and Baku, Armenia has been forced into Moscow's orbit. —AFP

EXCHANGE RATES

Al-Muzaini Exchange Co.

ASIAN COUNTRIES	
Japanese Yen	2.673
Indian Rupees	4.726
Pakistani Rupees	2.759
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.977
Nepali Rupees	2.962
Singapore Dollar	227.030
Hongkong Dollar	38.727
Bangladesh Taka	3.635
Philippine Peso	6.054
Thai Baht	9.267

GCC COUNTRIES	
Saudi Riyal	80.787
Qatari Riyal	83.207
Omani Riyal	786.772
Bahraini Dinar	804.440
UAE Dirham	82.482

ARAB COUNTRIES	
Egyptian Pound - Cash	20.050
Egyptian Pound - Transfer	16.943
Yemen Riyal/for 1000	1.216
Tunisian Dinar	123.570
Jordanian Dinar	426.950
Lebanese Lira/for 1000	2.018
Syrian Lira	0.000
Morocco Dirham	32.836

EUROPEAN & AMERICAN COUNTRIES	
US Dollar Transfer	302.750

Euro	362.540
Sterling Pound	408.050
Canadian dollar	239.900
Turkish lira	80.200
Swiss Franc	309.240
Australian Dollar	236.750
US Dollar Buying	301.550

GOLD

20 Gram	260.520
10 Gram	133.180
5 Gram	67.430

Dollarco Exchange Co. Ltd

Rate for Transfer	Selling Rate
US Dollar	302.400
Canadian Dollar	238.495
Sterling Pound	405.860
Euro	360.445
Swiss Frank	300.810
Bahrain Dinar	802.595
UAE Dirhams	82.725
Qatari Riyals	83.545
Saudi Riyals	81.500
Jordanian Dinar	427.795
Egyptian Pound	17.077
Sri Lankan Rupees	1.979
Indian Rupees	4.724
Pakistani Rupees	2.740
Bangladesh Taka	3.668
Philippines Peso	6.060
Cyprus pound	17.995

Japanese Yen	3.665
Syrian Pound	1.590
Nepalese Rupees	2.958
Malaysian Ringgit	75.020
Chinese Yuan Renminbi	46.610
Thai Bhat	10.230
Turkish Lira	79.775

BAHRAIN EXCHANGE COMPANY WLL

CURRENCY	BUY	SELL
British Pound	0.398962	0.406462
Czech Korune	0.005938	0.015238
Danish Krone	0.044189	0.049189
Euro	0.353533	0.361033
Georgian Lari	0.134844	0.134844
Hungarian 0.00141	0.001331	
Norwegian Krone	0.032350	0.037550
Romanian Leu	0.064785	0.081635
Russian ruble	0.005199	0.005199
Slovakia	0.009023	0.019023
Swedish Krona	0.032259	0.037259
Swiss Franc	0.299286	0.310286

Australasia	America	
Australian Dollar	0.225183	0.237183
New Zealand Dollar	0.206462	0.215962

Canadian Dollar	0.232554	0.241554
US Dollars	0.298650	0.303070
US Dollars Mint	0.299150	0.303070

Asia		
Bangladesh Taka	0.003298	0.003882
Chinese Yuan	0.044615	0.048115
Hong Kong Dollar	0.036824	0.039574
Indian Rupee	0.004130	0.004771
Indonesian Rupiah	0.000018	0.000024
Japanese Yen	0.002587	0.002767
Korean Won	0.000271	0.000286
Malaysian Ringgit	0.070488	0.076488
Nepalese Rupee	0.003201	0.003191
Pakistan Rupee	0.002579	0.002869
Philippine Peso	0.005917	0.006217
Singapore Dollar	0.219957	0.229957
Sri Lankan Rupee	0.001697	0.002277
Taiwan	0.010036	0.010216
Thai Baht	0.008918	0.009468

Arab		
Bahraini Dinar	0.796269	0.804769
Egyptian Pound	0.014736	0.020454
Iranian Riyal	0.000084	0.000085
Iraqi Dinar	0.000186	0.000246
Jordanian Dinar	0.422401	0.431401
Kuwaiti Dinar	1.000000	1.000000
Lebanese Pound	0.000155	0.000255
Moroccan Dirhams	0.022130	0.046130
Omani Riyal	0.0780045	0.785725
Qatar Riyal	0.078863	0.083603
Saudi Riyal	0.079647	0.080947
Syrian Pound	0.001283	0.001503
Tunisian Dinar	0.117287	0.125287
Turkish Lira	0.074426	0.084726
UAE Dirhams	0.081002	0.082702
Yemeni Riyal	0.000984	0.001064

Business

6 Nissan executives awarded N-SPEC certification this year

Sales execs integrated into Nissan's global sales team

KUWAIT: Abdulmohsen Abdulaziz Al-Babtain Company (AABC), the sole authorized dealer of Nissan vehicles in the State of Kuwait, is proud to announce that six of its Nissan sales executives were awarded with the N-SPEC (Nissan Sales Program for Executives Certification) certification this year and have now been integrated into Nissan's exclusive certified global sales team.

The ceremony was attended by several senior management staff including, Laurent Pernet, General Manager Automotive at Abdulmohsen Abdulaziz Al-Babtain Company. Also present was Fatima Zenagui, Deputy General Manager of Nissan Gulf (NGF), Mohamed Fathy, Hussien Bahlevan, Wissam Farag, Mohamed Samir, Rami Othman and Rabie Shibli were commended for successfully completing their certification program courses and passing the assessment conducted by NGF Pernet expressed his pride in the certified salesmen and added "In today's competitive market, customer service has become more important than ever. At Al-Babtain, our aim is to surpass the expectations of our customers and that is why we constantly invest in our employees to meet customer expectations".

The Nissan N-SPEC certification is a globally recognized certification course for sales executives, based on the Nissan global sales training templates to upgrade the knowledge and skills of the sales executives and thereby increasing customer satisfaction.

Al-Babtain Group continues to invest in its



employees and their strategic growth through comprehensive training and development exercises. Utilizing the highly developed staff L&D center, the company is poised to introduce advanced skills building coaching sessions to further build its team's performance.

Al-Babtain Group was founded in 1948 to present a model of honesty, integrity and total

dedication and to gain bright reputation in Kuwait and the Middle East area.

Today Al-Babtain Group has licensing rights for some of the world's leading brands stretching the globe from the USA to the Far East. For more than 60 years Al-Babtain Group has experienced continued success, and large measure of this success came from the Group's advanced



flexible management style and long term vision. These astounding results were achieved due to a versatile strategic formula focusing on growth amongst its sphere of activities; including automotive, technology, investment, information, industrial and Finance.

The automotive sector is the main structure of the Al-Babtain Group's business, which owns

some of the best-selling and demanded brands in Kuwait, in addition to heavy equipment.

The Abdulmohsen Abdulaziz Al-Babtain Co and Trading and Contracting Company is proud to be the sole authorized dealer and distributor of many Japanese and European (French) vehicles in Kuwait such as Nissan, Renault, Citroen, Infiniti.

China imposes new restrictions on outbound investment

BEIJING: China has issued new rules increasing oversight of overseas acquisitions by its companies, as it seeks to reduce investment in assets ranging from golf courses and movie studios to football clubs.

The rules are the latest attempt to stem the tidal wave of capital that has flown out of the country in recent years, a trend which regulators fear could threaten financial stability at home.

The country in August announced rules to restrict investment overseas in some previously encouraged fields such as sports clubs, real estate and entertainment after a series of high-profile investments-at questionable valuations-by some of the country's biggest companies.

These included real estate and entertainment giant Dalian Wanda and airline operator HNA. The new regulations, issued by the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), require all outbound investments by Chinese firms and their overseas subsidiaries to be registered through a new online system.

While it cancels a previous requirement for Chinese investors to report plans for any acquisitions or bids over \$300 million, the new rules broaden supervision of foreign investments made by overseas subsidiaries

of Chinese companies. New applications should include detailed information about investors, the content and scale of the project and the amount of Chinese capital involved. There should also be an analysis of the impact of the project on the national interest and national security. Those projects that threaten either will not be approved.

Projects must also include a statement of authenticity. Fake investments are often used as a means to evade China's strict controls on transferring money out of the country, a problem that has bedevilled regulators. The new rules aim to "improve full supervision over overseas investment and promote sustained healthy development of overseas investment", according to the NDRC's website. They will "lower the uncertainty of outbound investment" for Chinese companies, chief economist of Industrial Bank Lu Zhengwei told AFP.

Under the new rules, companies can avoid investments unlikely to be approved by the government, Lu said.

The regulations require less reporting of information but expand the range of supervision, Ye Tan, chief economist at Huaxin Shares, told AFP. "It's a reform in system and procedure," Ye said. — AFP

Bank's customer to the payer. Salman explained that the Bank upgraded the Cardless Cash Withdrawal Service: one of the services available on CBK mobile app by adding Cardless Refund feature where the customer can automatically refund the transaction. Salman also confirmed that CBK mobile services go far beyond these services where the customer can now transfer funds outside Kuwait via the application and can also deactivate the card if lost and activate it instantly via CBK mobile.

Commercial Bank of Kuwait always endeavors to provide its customers with superior technology based services through its continued efforts to improve and upgrade its e-channels and introduce distinct services that help customers to easily conduct their banking transactions. Salman concluded his statement by inviting the Bank's customers to get further information on these features & services provided by commercial Bank of Kuwait to its customers by visiting the Bank's website www.cbk.com or by contacting the customer service which would respond to all customers' queries 24/7 and the customers can also follow up the latest offers and services posted on the bank's social media networks.



Hameed Salman

Commercial Bank adds new features to its mobile app

KUWAIT: Commercial Bank of Kuwait added a new suite of features and updates for CBK mobile app with a view to facilitate, develop and improve the service delivery channels and the virtual banking in particular to be more convenient for customers and live up to their expectations.

In this context, Hameed Salman, Assistant GM, Retail Banking Division at the Bank said the Bank has launched a new service that enables the customer to access CBK mobile app and authorize payments using Face ID for i-Phone X in addition to the Digital Passcode that allows the customer to easily access his account and conduct his banking transactions by setting 5 digits code as well as the "InstaPay" service that enables the customer to collect funds from any person holding local bank debit card through a link sent by the

NBK announces quarterly Al-Jawhara winner of KD 250,000

KUWAIT: Since 2012, National Bank of Kuwait has rewarded some of its most loyal customers with the Al-Jawhara weekly, monthly and quarterly prizes reaching up to KD 2,200,000!

NBK announced this quarter's lucky Al-Jawhara winner of KD 250,000 on Tuesday.

Ahmad Saud Al-Juwaied was announced the winner of the Al-Jawhara prize live on air during a draw that took place on FM 88.8 Nabth Al-Kuwait Radio Station at 1.30pm. The draw was held in the presence of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry repre-

sentatives as well as representatives from the National Bank of Kuwait.

So far this month, NBK has awarded four KD 5,000 weekly winners of the Al-Jawhara: Amnah Yousef Khuraiabet, Dina Fahad AlKhudhur, and Late Jasem Abdulla Boudai. Al-Jawhara weekly, monthly and quarterly draws are all conducted in the presence of Ministry for commerce representative and the winners names are all published. NBK believes in rewarding its most loyal customers through transparent prizes and promotions as part of its long term strategy to create lasting relationships with customers built on trust and confidence.

For every KD 50 deposited into an Al-Jawhara account, the account holder receives one chance in the draw. Al-Jawhara account holders are automatically entered into draws for the KD 5,000 weekly, KD 125,000 monthly and KD 250,000 quarterly grand prizes. Customers must have a minimum opening balance of KD 400.

Customers must have a minimum opening balance of KD 400 and a maximum of KD 500,000. If no withdrawal or transfers occur in the account during the required period, customers will get an additional 1 extra



chance for each KD 50 held in the account and double their chances of winning.

"I never dreamed I would win such an amazing prize but I'm delighted to bank with NBK and will continue doing my business with them," said Ahmad Saud Al-Juwaied.

The National Bank of Kuwait offers a variety of cash prizes and rewards as part of its long term focus on building lasting relationships with customers.

South Korea prosecutors seek 12 years jail for Samsung heir Lee

SEOUL: South Korean prosecutors sought a 12-year jail term yesterday for Samsung Electronics Vice Chairman Jay Y Lee, in a corruption case that led to the ouster of the nation's president earlier this year. They made their demand in the Seoul High Court which is hearing an appeal by Lee against a five-year jail term handed out to him in August by a lower court in the case that has gripped the country.

The 49-year-old billionaire heir to South Korea's Samsung Group was convicted by the lower court of bribing the country's former president Park Geun-hye. Besides Lee, who has been in detention since February, four former Samsung executives were also charged in the case. The lower court had ruled the bribe helped Lee strengthen his control of Samsung Electronics, the crown jewel in the country's biggest conglomerate and one of the world's top technology firms.

"The defendants say they are concerned about the future of Samsung Group. However, what they are really concerned about is Lee's loss of control and subsequent economic losses," special prosecutor Park Young-soo told a packed court of about 150 people. Lee, in a dark suit and white shirt without a tie at the appeals hearing, earlier yesterday denied the bribery charge and also denied recent



Samsung Electronics Vice Chairman Jay Y Lee (Right)

allegations by prosecutors that he had met Park one-on-one four times, instead of the previously disclosed three times.

The Seoul High Court is expected to rule on the appeal in late January. Whichever side loses could take the case to the Supreme Court, the final court of appeal in South Korea. The lower court had ruled in August that while Lee never asked for Park's help directly, the fact that a 2015 merger of two Samsung affiliates did help cement Lee's control over Samsung Electronics implied he was asking for the president's help to strengthen his control of the firm.

His lawyers have strongly challenged this logic since appeals hearings began in October. "The defendants have not once tried to solve issues by colluding with political power and gaining its help. The special prosecution has severely distorted the truth, and

that distortion is reflected in the jail term they sought," said Lee In-jae, Lee's lawyer, responding to the 12-year jail term demand.

Fallout

The scandal played a big part in the downfall of former president Park, who was dismissed in March after being impeached, and the case cast a critical eye over the ties between South Korea's chaebols - big family-owned corporate groups - and its political leaders. Faced with investor worries of a leadership vacuum as Lee remains detained, Samsung Electronics appointed a new generation of top managers at its three main businesses including semiconductors in October. Lee has been widely expected to follow in his father, Lee Kun-hee's, footsteps in the future. Lee Kun-hee, the chairman of the group, has been hospitalized since 2014. — Reuters

German firms optimistic for 2018, worker shortage main brake

BERLIN: More than half of Germany's industry associations have shrugged off worries about US protectionist policies and Brexit, and are more positive about their situation than they were a year ago, a survey showed yesterday. The main factor holding firms back in Europe's biggest economy is a shortage of skilled labor, the IW economic institute in Cologne said. Its poll

showed that 26 of 48 industry associations were more upbeat than they were at the end of 2016 and more than two-thirds expected firms in their sector to produce more next year than this.

"Despite the protectionist policies of US President Donald Trump and prospect of Brexit, investment in Germany rose this year and will strengthen further in 2018," said IW in a state-

ment. Only two sectors were pessimistic - the food industry, which is worried about tougher competition and higher costs, and sections of the cooperative banking sector which are suffering from low interest rates and margins. The IW said 24 of the 47 industry associations which gave investment estimates, expect higher spending levels from their member companies.

The main factor holding back firms is a shortage of skilled labor, a long-standing concern in Germany. "The production prospects in the German economy could be better if more skilled workers were available," said IW Director Michael Huether. — Reuters

Venezuela set caps on gasoline purchases

CARACAS: Venezuela on Tuesday set limits on gasoline sales in the country's west to undercut smuggling that it blames for short supplies in recent days.

Passenger cars were limited to a maximum

of 30 liters and trucks to 35, said a statement from the oil ministry, without specifying a time period for the limit.

Venezuela, which has the world's largest proven crude oil reserves, heavily subsidizes its gasoline prices, making smuggling to neighboring Colombia a big business.

The move was aimed at stopping people from the states of Barinas, Portuguesa, Apure, Lara and Cojedes, from filling up repeatedly to sell the fuel in Colombia, the statement said. Venezuela's government-led economy is in crisis and supplies of food and medicine have become alarmingly scarce. — AFP

Business

Hyundai shipbuilding stocks plunge on dismal forecast

Shipbuilder to issue new stocks to shore up finances

SEOUL: Shares in Hyundai Heavy Industries plunged by more than a quarter yesterday after the world's largest shipbuilder by sales announced a plan to issue new stocks in a bid to shore up its ailing finances.

The South Korean firm has struggled amid an industry-wide slump in recent years, as global demand slowed and competition from China intensified while overcapacity slashed prices.

Hyundai announced on Tuesday the plan to raise 1.3 trillion won (\$1.2 billion) by issuing new shares—a move that would dilute share values—and to list Hyundai Oilbank, its refining unit, on a local stock market next year. It also released on Tuesday a grim earnings forecast for this year, in which its sales would be more than halved to 15.3 trillion won from 39.3 trillion won in 2016, before falling further to 13.6 trillion won in 2018.

The forecast also flagged operating profit of 46.9 billion won for 2017 — a significant decrease from 1.6 trillion won a year ago—sparking concerns over its overall finances.

The news sent Hyundai shares plummeting 29 percent, close to the daily limit of 30 percent, to finish at 96,900 won in Seoul, while the share price of its subsidiary Hyundai Mipo Dockyard also fell by 16 percent. Hyundai Heavy Industries said the capital raised by the share increase and the initial public offering of the refinery unit would be used to cover operating costs as well as for research and development.

'Big Three' under pressure

South Korea's so-called "Big Three" shipbuilders including Hyundai, Daewoo and Samsung Heavy Industries were once hailed as a major driver of the

country's export-reliant economy—the world's 11th largest. But they have been forced to shed tens of thousands of jobs and sell assets in recent years as a slump in oil prices and global economic slowdown sapped demand for tankers and container ships.

Overcapacity, regional rivalry and the emergence of cheaper Chinese shipbuilders have also squeezed profit margins. Daewoo Shipbuilding & Marine narrowly avoided collapse this year by a \$2.6-billion lifeline from state-run lenders. Samsung Heavy also announced earlier this month a plan to raise about \$1.4 billion in a sale of new shares after flagging bigger-than-expected operating losses for this year and the next. Tuesday's annual earnings forecast by Hyundai suggests the firm racked up operating loss of at least 361 billion won in the fourth quarter, said Hwang Eo-Yeon, shipbuilding analyst at Seoul-based Shinhan Investment.

"The grim announcement by Hyundai, on top of the bad news from Samsung, will worsen investor sentiment over the industry for a while," Hwang said, slashing the outlook on Hyundai from "buy" to "neutral".

Yoo Seung-Woo, analyst at SK Securities, said the rising price of global steel sheets—a key component to build ships—further dealt a blow to the industry suffering from falling orders, describing shipbuilders' losses as "inevitable".

Samsung earlier this month also blamed the recent price hike of steel sheets as a reason for falling profit margin. "Hyundai's latest announcement confirmed growing concerns that have been brewing among investors," Yoo said, adding it would be "unavoidable" for Hyundai to post operating losses throughout next year. —AFP



ULSAN, South Korea: This file photo shows a view of the Hyundai Heavy Industries shipyard in Ulsan. —AFP

CBK partners with AccorHotels to give outstanding offer

KUWAIT: In collaboration with the AccorHotels Series, The Commercial Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced an outstanding offer for its clients, namely CBK MasterCard holders, who would get three nights for the price of two only.

Notably, AccorHotels is one of the largest hotel series in the world including over one hundred hotels in the Middle East and Egypt such as Ibis Fairmont, Raffles, Novotel, Swissotel, Pullman and Sofitel.

The offer will be valid in all AccorHotels in the Middle East including those in Egypt, Kenya and Seychelles. Interested CBK clients will use their CBK MasterCard to book three nights for the price of two in any of the hotels. The offer will be valid up till March 31, 2018 and the last day for booking will be March 27, 2018.



Gulf Bank announces winners of Al-Danah daily draws

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank held its Al-Danah daily draws on 17 December 2017 announcing the names of its winners for the week of 17 December – 21 December 2017. The Al-Danah daily draws include draws every working day for two prizes of KD 1,000 per winner.

The winners are:

(Sunday 17/12): Ghadire Mutlaq Dughaim Al-Khalidi, Wedad Abdulrahman Alhashem

(Monday 18/12): Mohammad Abdulaziz Mehalhel Al-Yassen, Ali Adel Mohammad Al Matrook

(Tuesday 19/12): Yasmeen Mohammad Hussain Almousa, Sulaiman Fahed Alshafi Almahboob

(Wednesday 20/12): Khaled Saleem Sultan Al-Salem, Kazem Abdalla Malalla Hasan

(Thursday 21/12): Jawad Ali Almousa Almuhammad Ali, Mahmoud Youssef Albraheim

Gulf Bank's Al-Danah 2017 draw lineup includes daily draws (2 winners per working day and each receive KD1,000). Al-Danah's final draw for KD 1 million will be held on 11 January 2018 whereby the Al-Danah millionaire will be announced. Gulf Bank encourages you to increase your chances by depositing more into your Al-Danah account, immediately from any local bank, using the new ePay (Self-Pay) service, which is available on Gulf Bank's Online and Mobile Banking.

Five reasons why the Al-Danah account is the best:

- 1) Kuwait's single biggest yearly cash prize of KD 1 million and the largest international bank prize according to Guinness World Records
- 2) Kuwait's biggest quarterly cash prizes, up to KD500,000
- 3) Two winners of KD1,000 every working day
- 4) The most chances to win
- 5) Only Bank that transfers your chances to win from the previous year to the current year.

NBK Economic Report

Non-oil growth propels UAE's GDP growth

KUWAIT: The UAE economy continues to perform better than many of its Gulf peers, with relatively high levels of diversification benefitting its capacity to cope with lower oil prices, alongside continued political stability. We see GDP growth picking up from 2.2 percent in 2017 to around 2.6 percent and 3.4 percent in 2018 and 2019, respectively, well above the regional average.

Growth in the oil sector will remain capped in 2018 by the extension in OPEC production cuts and possibly stricter compliance with the agreement. The UAE has so far lagged its GCC peers in terms of compliance and has vowed to continue to cut oil output to meet its commitment. Crude output stood at 2.92 million b/d in October, a compliance level of 67 percent against a target of 2.87 million b/d under the agreement.

Oil sector activity is projected to gradually rise from 2019 onwards. Despite the output cuts, the UAE continues to invest in expanding its oil production capacity in anticipation of higher demand. ADNOC, the state-owned oil firm, recently extended concessions at the Upper Zakum offshore field, its biggest oil field, to expand its output capacity by around 350,000 b/d to 1 million b/d by the year 2024. This is projected to increase the UAE's overall production capacity from around 3.2 million b/d currently to 3.5 million b/d. Furthermore, in a bid to diversify further from pure crude production, ADNOC has pledged to invest around \$110 billion over the next five years in international downstream projects and to develop Abu Dhabi's unconventional gas infrastructure. It aims to start producing unconventional gas by 2030. ADNOC has also recently sold 10 percent of its fuel-retailing unit to help finance its expansion projects, raising around \$0.9 billion.

In neighboring Dubai, the Emirates National Oil Company (ENOC) is also eyeing a \$1.1 billion expansion of its refinery in Jebel Ali. The expansion is scheduled to be ready by the fourth quarter of 2019 and increase production from 140,000 b/d to 210,000 b/d.

Meanwhile, non-oil activity is on track to perform reasonably well in 2018 and 2019, thanks to further gains in the tourism and construction sectors, especially with the Expo 2020 event in Dubai drawing nearer. The latter should help offset the continued weakness in the real estate sector, where prices remain under pressure. We expect non-oil growth to rise from 3.3 percent in 2017 to 3.7 percent next year and 4.0 percent in 2019.

There are still a number of downside risks. A further dip in oil prices could lead to the government pursuing more aggressive fiscal consolidation. Furthermore, interest rates are likely to rise, potentially squeezing liquidity and dampening growth in investment spending. An escalation of the Qatar crisis may also affect growth. Qatar is not a major contributor to the UAE's trade and tourism sectors, but tensions could affect investor sentiment.

Growth in Dubai

Real GDP in Abu Dhabi fell 0.9 percent y/y in 2Q17, mainly on the back of a 1.9 percent y/y drop in oil output. Non-oil GDP was flat during the same period, weighed down by fiscal consolidation efforts. However, with consolidation set to ease and infrastructure projects gathering steam in 2H17, non-oil growth is expected to gradually improve into 2018. GDP growth in Dubai has so far fared better, at 3.2 percent y/y in 1Q17.

Dubai's important hospitality and construction sectors are performing well. The number of passengers passing through Dubai International Airport came in at a record high of 23 million in 3Q17. Construction activity continues to be supported by preparations for the Expo 2020 event. Over \$8 billion has been allocated to Expo-related projects, including for buildings, metro expansions, roads and bridges and Dubai has reportedly already invested up to half of that total amount so far. As of November 2017, the total level of awarded projects in Dubai was up 17 percent y/y at \$302 billion. Over 2018

Table 1: Key economic indicators

		2016	2017f	2018f	2019f
Nominal GDP	USD bn	349	383	407	435
Real GDP	% y/y	3.0	2.2	2.6	3.4
- Oil	% y/y	3.8	-0.3	0.2	1.2
- Non-oil	% y/y	2.7	3.3	3.7	4.0
Inflation	% y/y	1.6	2.5	4.0	3.0
Budget balance	% of GDP	-4.3	-3.4	-2.0	-1.8

Source: Official sources, NBK estimates

and 2019 an additional \$107 billion worth of projects are expected to be awarded.

Dubai's property prices

Following almost two years of falling prices amid tighter regulations, rising housing supply and risk aversion, residential property prices in Dubai appear to have largely stabilized in 2017. According to Asteco, the prices of both apartments and villas were unchanged in Q3, though still down by 4 percent y/y and 3 percent y/y, respectively. However, downward pressures on prices are projected to persist in the near-to-medium term due to higher housing supply and further shifts in demand toward the more affordable housing sector. The value of real estate transactions has continued to trend lower in 2017.

Inflation to trend upwards in 2018

After trending downwards for most of 2017, consumer price inflation is forecast to rise in 2018. Latest figures showed inflation edging up from 0.8 percent y/y in August to 1.1 percent y/y in September as inflation in the food and housing components both gained some traction. We see inflation climbing from 2.5 percent in 2017 to 4.0 percent in 2018 on the back of new taxes including the 5 percent VAT. The VAT, which is due to be levied from 1Q18, is expected to add some 2 percent to inflation for one year. Given the relatively decent growth outlook, we see inflation moderating only to around 3.0 percent in 2019, as the initial impact of the VAT wears off.

Fiscal balance

The fiscal balance will gradually improve, but stay in modest deficit at around 2 percent of GDP in 2018 and 2019. Oil revenues remain relatively weak and the pace of fiscal consolidation is easing, as Dubai's government gradually increases spending on construction projects in the run-up to Expo 2020. Nonetheless, fiscal adjustment and reform is proceeding, with the establishment of the Federal Tax Authority, subsidy cuts and the introduction of various fees and taxes. Efforts have also been made to rely more heavily on the private sector for implementation of some projects. October saw the introduction of an excise tax levied on tobacco, energy drinks (both 100 percent) and fizzy drinks (50 percent). It is expected to raise around \$2 billion (0.5 percent of GDP) in annual fiscal revenue and follows a similar move in Saudi Arabia in June. Furthermore, the UAE will be one of the first GCC nations to implement VAT. At 5 percent, the tax is expected to generate \$5 billion in revenues, or 1 percent of GDP.

To avoid relying solely on foreign reserves to finance the country's public deficit, Abu Dhabi issued \$5 billion in sovereign bonds in April 2016, its first issuance since 2009. But there has been no new sovereign debt issued since. The UAE is in the process of finalizing a federal debt law, which will allow the federal government to issue bonds as well. Supported by the relatively stable economic and political environment, yields on Dubai and Abu Dhabi five-year government debt have remained fairly low and steady over the past year, tracking US Treasuries. As of end-November, yields on Abu-Dhabi's bonds were little changed year-to-date at 2.54 percent, while yields on Dubai's debt were down 28 bps at 3.05 percent. (Chart 8.) Alongside Kuwait, the Abu Dhabi government enjoys the strongest long-term credit ratings in the GCC.

CA surplus

The current account surplus is projected to marginal-



Source: UAE Federal Competitiveness & Statistics Authority, NBK

ly expand in 2018 and 2019, on the back of more stable oil export receipts and as non-oil export growth gathers pace, thanks to a gradual improvement in external demand. We expect the current account surplus to rise from an estimated 3.4 percent of GDP in 2017 to 3.9 percent by 2019.

Loan growth remains weak

Loan growth has fallen to multi-year lows against a backdrop of moderate economic growth, interest rate hikes, higher risk aversion in the climate of lower oil prices and tighter lending rules. In October, lending growth stood at just 0.9 percent y/y, weighed down by ongoing weakness in private sector credit growth and a continued decline in lending to government-related entities. The central bank's latest credit sentiment survey (3Q) showed a continued tightening in lending standards, especially for small to medium enterprises, but also points to an improvement in credit growth in the near-to-medium term.

In contrast, deposit growth was a solid 6-7 percent y/y through 2017, as higher oil revenues have helped prop up government deposits. Consequently, broad money (M2) growth has eased slightly, but remains reasonable. Given the recent trends in credit and deposit growth, the loan-to-deposit ratio stood at 99 percent in October, versus 104.5 percent a year earlier. After injecting about \$9 billion into the banking system earlier this year to ease liquidity constraints, the central bank began withdrawing liquidity from the banking system in July, following improvements in deposit growth. Some \$6 billion (around 0.8 percent of gross bank assets) in excess liquidity was removed from the system between July and September.

Interbank rates continued to trend upwards in 2017, following three additional 25 bps hikes in the policy rate following hikes in the US federal fund rate. With the US policy rate scheduled to rise twice in both 2018 and in 2019 and UAE rates expected to follow suit, interbank rates are expected to climb higher still. Major UAE banks have gradually returned to modest levels of profitability in 2017. Indeed during the first nine months, net profits among major banks were up a solid 6.5 percent y/y, a major improvement compared to the 7.5 percent y/y decline witnessed a year earlier. The merger of First Gulf Bank and the National Bank of Abu Dhabi earlier in 2017 spurred talks of further mergers in the still-crowded banking industry. According to recent reports, two of the UAE's smallest banks, the Bank of Sharjah and Invest Bank, are currently in merger talks.

Business

World stocks rise as iPhone X woes ease

LONDON: World stocks edged higher yesterday as a strong rally in commodities buoyed expectations for a strong year for the global economy in 2018...

because of an attack on a crude pipeline in Libya, the surge in copper was particularly eye-catching as the metal is seen as a proxy for global growth.

The US dollar fell against a basket of currencies and slid against the euro yesterday in thin holiday trading, while a rally in commodity prices helped push the Canadian and Australian currencies to their highest levels in recent weeks.

sterling enjoyed a bounce amid the broad dollar decline, with the pound up 0.3 percent at \$1.341 at 1235 GMT. It had traded as high as \$1.3423 earlier yesterday, its highest since Dec. 15.

Oil prices surged to two and a half-year highs on Tuesday, boosted by news of an explosion on a Libyan crude pipeline as well as voluntary OPEC-led supply cuts.

That helped support demand for the currencies of commodity exporting countries, with the Canadian dollar touching C\$1.2628, close to its highest level since October.

The US dollar was also down 0.3 percent versus the euro at \$1.1897.

There are very few events to drive anything today, said Christin Tuxen, an FX strategist at Danske Bank, adding that the passage of the US government's landmark tax reform last week was not helping the dollar.

Tuxen said euro-US dollar trading in December had been driven by volatility in Euro/dollar cross-currency basis swaps, which widened significantly earlier this month as demand for dollars jumped.

Monetary policy convergence could weigh on the dollar next year, now that central banks other than the US Federal Reserve have either begun moving away from monetary stimulus, or started to raise interest rates, said Peter Chia, FX strategist for United Overseas Bank in Singapore.

Against this backdrop, Japanese policymakers may at least start dropping more hints about an eventual tightening of the Bank of Japan's monetary policy, Chia said, adding that the dollar could slip to 108 yen by the end of March.

I think that policymakers in Japan want to prepare markets way ahead for some policy change... The signaling process could be on a higher intensity next year, he said, adding that actual BOJ policy-tightening

might occur only in 2019. Asian shares climbed 0.3 percent to near a recent one-month high, though it was more of a mixed picture in European stock markets.

While mining and oil stocks strengthened, the pan-European STOXX 600 slipped 0.1 percent as European tech stocks tumbled on reports that demand for Apple's iPhone X may be weaker than expected.

The report, along with some recent brokerage calls on tepid iPhone X demand, made Apple shares sink 2.5 percent, their worst single-day percentage fall since Aug. 10.

Meanwhile, rising oil prices-US crude hit \$60 a barrel for the first time since mid-2015 - boosted currencies that trade in line with commodities prices.

The dollar eased against a basket of currencies and fell against the euro yesterday in thin holiday trading, while a rally in commodity prices helped push the Canadian and Australian dollars to their highest levels in two months.

Safe haven flows

Though world stocks were up on the day, there was still an undercurrent of nervousness in the market which saw some safe haven flows into high-rated euro zone government bonds, pushing their yields a touch lower.

The United States announced sanctions on two North Korean officials behind their country's ballistic missile program on Tuesday after the UN Security Council unanimously imposed new sanctions on North Korea last week.

Daily Kuwait Stock Exchange Report. Wednesday 27 December 2017. Index: Price index, Weighted Index, KSX 15. Trades: Security, High, Low, Volume, Value (KD), Trades, Last, Change. Includes various stock categories like Oil & Gas, Basic Materials, Consumer Goods, etc.

National Bank of Kuwait Financial Markets Daily Report. Global Stock Indices, MENA Stock Indices, Global Currencies Exchange Rate, MENA Currencies Exchange Rate, Global Interest Rates, Global Bond Yields, Commodities. Includes various market data and charts.

Technology

In Pakistan, questions raised over GE's faulty flagship power turbines

Problem was acute in the crucial summer months

ISLAMABAD/SINGAPORE: General Electric's flagship gas turbines ran into problems in Pakistan earlier this year, leading to delays and lengthy outages at three newly built power stations, according to several senior Pakistani officials and power executives. GE has said they were teething problems. But the questions over one of its most important products suggest another setback for the company in a year in which its shares have plunged and third-quarter results were called "horrible" by new Chief Executive John Flannery. GE is now undergoing major restructuring. There is no evidence that GE's 9HA-Class turbines have fundamental design flaws. But so far the Pakistani plants, which began running this year, are producing power at levels well below their capacity and the problem was acute in the crucial summer months, when temperatures in the country frequently exceed 40 degrees Celsius (104°F). Data from Pakistan's Central Power Purchasing Agency, seen by Reuters, showed the Bhikki, Haveli and Balloki plants jointly generated only a half of their current maximum capacity in August.

A month later all three plants showed improved output but remained well below capacity. Reuters was unable to review more recent data. "It had terrible consequences because we lost a lot of power which would have come to the grid during the peak summer," Yousaf Naseem Khokhar, the top civil servant in the Energy Ministry's power division, told Reuters. "It is now up to General Electric to rise to the challenge and to take care of these issues... before next summer starts," he said. In a statement sent to Reuters, GE said "every commercial HA site today is demonstrating exceptional performance levels for both output and efficiency". On the issues in Pakistan, GE said: "We've encountered and communicated openly about launch challenges and readily resolved issues during this time. It's important to note that challenges are common with power plants of this size and complexity during the commissioning and early operations phase." GE also said in a separate statement that the three plants are expected to deliver enough power to supply the equivalent of 7.3 million Pakistani homes over their 30-plus-year life cycle, and that will make a "meaningful difference in the everyday lives of the people of Pakistan."

The 9HA-class gas turbines, the GE power division's newest and most prestigious product, entered the Guinness World Records last year for efficiency, based on the amount of

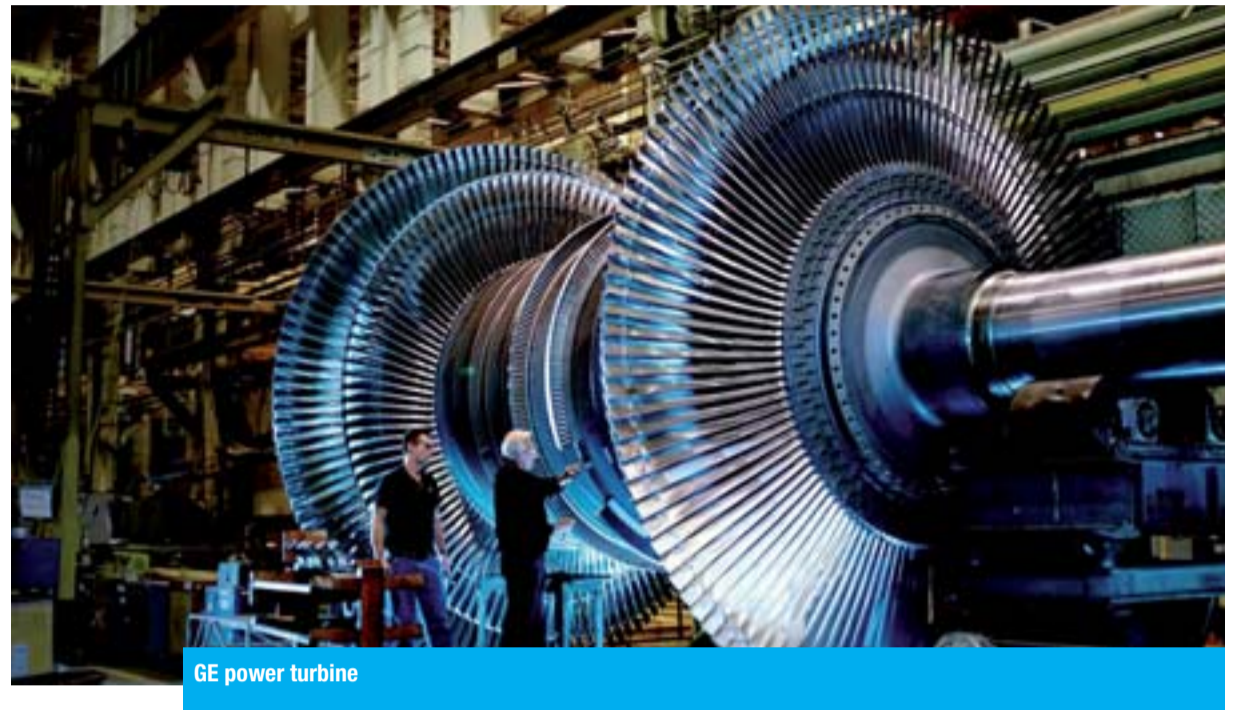
electricity generated from natural gas at the power plant in Bouchain, France, where it was first put into commercial operation in June last year. Both the 9HA and the 7HA turbines - the A stands for air-cooled - are in tough competition with similar products made by Germany's Siemens, Japan's Mitsubishi Hitachi Power Systems - a joint venture between Mitsubishi Heavy Industries and Hitachi - and Italy's state-controlled Ansaldo Energia. Flannery said in a GE investor presentation in November that "resolving initial launch issues" with HA class gas turbines would be a future priority.

Tough year

GE's shares have fallen more than 40 percent this year, and the 125-year-old company announced this month it was cutting 12,000 jobs in its power division, about a fifth of the workforce, to cut costs. Operating profit of the power division, once the strongest part of GE's operations, fell 51 percent in the third quarter against the year-ago period. Flannery said the division, which brought in 28 percent of GE's revenue last year, was "challenged" but could be turned around in one or two years. Pakistan, desperate for additional electricity to avoid crippling blackouts, teamed up with GE to build the power stations at Bhikki, Haveli and Balloki, all in the most populous province Punjab, at breakneck speed. GE won the contracts to supply Pakistan with six turbines for the three power plants in 2015,

based on the lowest priced deal per megawatt of capacity. The first problem was the deliveries were delayed by up to three months and missed some of the summer months this year, several Pakistani officials said. They said they were told the delays happened because a part of the turbine needed further testing. The plan was to fire up the turbines in simple cycle mode - delivering around 800 MW per power plant - in the spring of 2017 and then to upgrade to 1,200 MW combined cycle output after the summer. The delays infuriated Islamabad, because getting additional power during the summer was a crucial factor ahead of 2018 parliamentary elections. One of the two turbines at the Bhikki power plant was delayed by about a month. At the Balloki and Haveli plants, the turbines were delayed by about three months, two senior Pakistani officials aware of the situation said.

Then, in early May, a combustion seal leak was detected at one of the turbines at the Bhikki plant. To fix this, and to apply



GE power turbine

the same remedy to the five other turbines, GE airlifted all the units to France for repairs. Pakistan's Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, who was then the petroleum minister, told Reuters in July that GE spared no expense to fix the problems. "They found the problem, they took out the part, they went back to the vendor, they re-machined them, they came back - all on dedicated transport flights," Abbasi said.

Turbine damage

But that meant one Bhikki turbine was offline for about 40 days and the other for about 50 days. The other two plants had not begun operations at the time, but came online in July and August. In a third setback, one of the turbines at the Haveli plant was badly damaged during a power outage three weeks after it was inaugurated in July, the Pakistani officials said. At such times, batteries and a generator act as back-ups to ensure a pump continues to push lube oil into the turbine.

"Both didn't work," said one of the Pakistani officials, adding the diesel generator had no fuel. The turbine crashed, with damage estimated at \$33 million, and although it was refitted with a new rotor by GE, it is still to resume operations.

The power station is being built by China's SEPCOIII Electric Power Construction Corporation. SEPCOIII did not return queries for comment. "GE and SEPCOIII are working together to determine the cause behind the loss of functionality of the planned backup power system," GE said in a statement. A senior Pakistani official in Islamabad said the delays and outages had cast GE in a bad light. "Frankly speaking, they have lost a lot of credibility here in the government because of these plants," the official said.

In September, Pakistan awarded its most recent power contract to Siemens, after bidding by several companies, including GE. Stephen Tusa, an analyst at JPMorgan in New York, wrote in a recent note that although GE has assured investors that the Pakistan problems have been resolved, they could re-emerge in other plants around the world. "The risk is that if these issues are not remedied, GE has already 'sold' another around 30 units (around 10 plus of which are in operation), some of which are at higher output ratings," he wrote. "Remedies would have to be applied up the curve, something we view as a challenge, especially as senior management tries to cut costs aggressively. Stay tuned." —Reuters

Obama urges 'leaders' not to split society with online biases



LONDON: An undated handout picture issued by Kensington Palace courtesy of the Obama Foundation on December 17, 2017 shows Britain's Prince Harry (R) interviewing former US president Barack Obama (L) in Toronto, Canada as part of his guest editorship of BBC Radio 4's Today program. — AFP

LONDON: Former US president Barack Obama said the way people communicate via social media risked splintering society and leaders had to ensure the Internet did not cocoon users within their own biases. "All of us in leadership have to find ways in which we can recreate a common space on the Internet," Obama said in an interview conducted by Britain's Prince Harry, broadcast on BBC radio yesterday. "One of the dangers of the Internet is that people can have entirely different realities, they can be just cocooned in information that reinforces their current biases."

Obama has previously warned that social media platforms can lead people to make snap judgments about complex decisions although he has refrained from criticizing his successor Donald Trump who regularly uses Twitter. Obama said in the interview broadcast yesterday that social media should promote diverse views in a way that "doesn't lead to a Balkanisation of our society" and moving online communities offline helped people to see that many issues were not as simple as they might seem in a chatroom. "It's also by the way harder to be as obnoxious and cruel in person as people can be anonymously on the Internet," he said. "Meet in the pub... Meet at a place of worship. Meet in a neighborhood and get to know each other."

Obama spoke to Harry in an interview conducted by the prince as a guest editor for BBC radio's daily morning news show and focused on their shared interest in promoting causes. The interview took place in September. Harry was asked by the BBC whether he would invite the Obamas to his wedding next year with US actress Meghan Markle. "I don't know about that," Harry said. "We haven't put the invites or the guest list together. Who knows whether they are going to be invited or not. I wouldn't want to ruin that surprise." The Sun newspaper said on Tuesday that British government officials had urged Harry not to invite the Obamas to his wedding for fear of angering Trump. —Reuters

Russia loses contact with Angola satellite

MOSCOW: Russia has lost contact with Angola's first national telecoms satellite launched from the Baikonur space pad, a source in the space industry said yesterday. The incident involving the Russian-made Angosat-1 is a new embarrassment for the country's once proud space industry after Russia in November lost contact with a weather satellite after it was launched from a new cosmodrome in the country's Far East.

"Contact has temporarily been lost," the source told AFP, adding specialists were now looking into the matter. The source said officials had stopped receiving "telemetry data" but called it a "rather common situation" and expressed the hope that contact would be re-established. The reason for the loss of contact was not immediately clear.

Earlier yesterday the Russian space agency Roscosmos said that the satellite had been successfully launched and reached orbit. The Zenit-2SB rocket carrying Angosat to orbit was supplied by Ukrainian maker Yuzhmash, making the launch a rare joint project between the two countries since 2014, when Moscow annexed Ukraine's Crimea peninsula.

The Angosat project was agreed by Russia and Angola in 2009 and includes the satellite, its launch, and on-ground infrastructure in a suburb of the capital Luanda. The approximately \$280 million project has been financed with a credit from Russia's state banks. The satellite was designed for a 15-year mission to boost satellite communications, internet access and radio and TV service.

Around 50 Angolan aerospace engineers trained around the globe were meant to oversee the functioning of the satellite from a control centre built near Luanda. Russia initially wanted to use its new Angara rocket to



This handout picture provided by Russia's Roscosmos space agency and taken early yesterday shows a Zenit rocket carrying Angosat-1, the first national telecoms satellite for Angola, lifting off from the launch pad at the Russian-leased Baikonur cosmodrome. —AFP

launch the satellite but opted for the Zenit rocket. The launch was initially scheduled for the summer but had been pushed back several times due to delays.

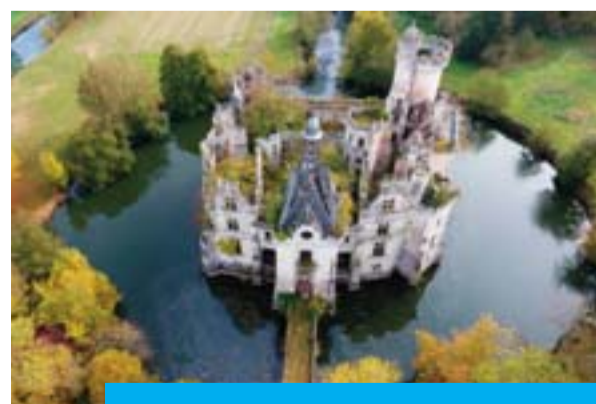
In late November Russia lost contact with its Meteor-M weather satellite after its launch from the new Vostochny cosmodrome in the Far East - only the second such launch from the new spaceport. Apart from the

Meteor weather satellite, the rocket carried 18 payloads from institutions and companies in Canada, the United States, Japan, Germany, Sweden and Norway. In October, Russia successfully launched from the northern cosmodrome of Plesetsk a European satellite dedicated to monitoring the Earth's atmosphere, the protective layer that shields the planet from the sun's radiation. —AFP

Crowdfunding saves tumbling down French chateau

POITIERS, France: It's a modern story of an ancient fairytale castle: a crowdfunding effort online has raised 1.6 million euros (\$1.9 million) to restore a chateau in western France. Around 25,000 people from 115 countries have become shareholders in the chateau de La Mothe-Chandeniers which has turrets, a moat and an elderly owner who had not maintained it.

The 19th-century building has fallen into disrepair with trees and vegetation sprouting out of its roof and windows, raising fears that it might be knocked down and redeveloped by property developers. Thanks to a joint effort by online fundraising site Dartagnans.fr and a local association Adopte un Chateau (Adopt a Chateau), sufficient money has been raised to buy and restore the structure. "It's a record in France and probably in Europe in terms of the amount raised and the number of contributors," the head of Dartagnans, Romain Delaume, told AFP on Tuesday. The website offered buyers the chance to become shareholders in the castle at the cost of 51 euros: 50 euros as a donation for the restoration work and one euro to buy a share in a joint company set up to manage the site. Organizers initially hoped for around 10,000 people, but thanks partly to reports in the French media the final number of donors came in at just under 19,000.



The ruined castle of La Mothe-Chandeniers, in Les Trois-Moutiers, central western France. —AFP photos



Many of them bought shareholdings for friends and family as presents, meaning that the total number of owners of the chateau will be around 25,000. Most of them are from France, but people from as far afield as Afghanistan, Burkina Faso and Peru now have a small slice of history in the French countryside near the wine-growing Loire valley. "Bravo for this initiative both collective and private," wrote the aristocratic speaker of France's parliament, Francois de Rugy, on Twitter. "France's historic buildings need a diverse range of ideas to be saved and developed."

The current chateau de La Mothe-Chandeniers dates back to the 19th century but the site has been home to a castle since at least the 13th century. It was pillaged after the French Revolution in 1789 and heavily damaged in a fire in 1932 before being

bought by its current owner, an 82-year-old local man, in 1982. A thorough survey will be undertaken in the next few weeks to check the scale of the damage to the structure and the site will then be secured pending the start of restoration work. Various ideas have been floated for the future from turning it into a "collaborative and creative laboratory", somewhere for artists to work, or a bed-and-breakfast holiday destination. Getting all the shareholders to agree might be a challenge. They will be invited for a visit "as soon as possible in 2018," said Delaume, and will be asked to take part in the restoration work. He also stressed that not all of the building can be returned to its former glory because a complete overhaul has been estimated to cost at least 3.0 million euros. Another round of fundraising in the future has not been excluded. —AFP

Health

S Korea dog meat campaigners accused of barking up wrong tree

Sparked mixed reactions, claims of Western hypocrisy



NAMYANGJU: Dogs look out from a cage at a dog farm during a rescue event, involving the closure of the farm organized by the Humane Society International (HSI). — AFP photos



NAMYANGJU: Member of the Humane Society International (HSI) interact with the dogs at a dog farm during the rescue event.

NAMYANGJU, South Korea: Barking at their rescuers, labradors, beagles and mongrels desperately scrambled out of rusty cages in South Korea: saved from the dinner plate by a deal with dog-meat farmer Kim Young-Hwan. In the face of falling demand, Kim agreed to close his establishment in exchange for compensation from US-based Humane Society International (HSI).

The dogs are bound for a new life in adoptive homes in the West. He is the 10th canine-meat farmer to accept such an offer in three years. The exact sums are confidential, but each deal requires hundreds of thousands of dollars once adoption costs are included. "This business is doomed... I wanted to quit before it's too late," Kim said.

The 56-year-old had 170 dogs at his farm in Namyangju, north of Seoul. "The price has plummeted in recent years," he told AFP. "I'm barely making ends meet these days. Plus I've been harassed by animal rights groups all the time. It's such a hassle." The push by animal rights activists, including many overseas groups, to outlaw dog meat consumption in the South has sparked mixed reactions and accusations of Western hypocrisy.

South Koreans are believed to consume about one million dogs a year as a summer-time delicacy, with the greasy red meat—which is invariably boiled for tenderness—believed to increase energy. The tradition has declined as the nation increasingly embraces the idea of dogs as pets instead of livestock, with eating them now something of a taboo among young South Koreans.

Nevertheless, activists have stepped up campaigns to ban dog consumption, with online petitions urging boycotts of the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics over the issue and protests in Seoul. Such lobbying has provoked angry debates over what many describe as cultural double standards. "I don't eat dogs, but I am disgusted by those who preach that only animals deemed cuddly enough or friendly enough by Westerners deserve to live," read one online comment. One fifth of the South's 50 million people own pets, mostly dogs and cats, said another netizen, but for many of the rest, dogs were "no more special than lambs or rabbits". Similar debates have emerged in other Asian nations where dogs are eaten. China's

most notorious dog meat festival in the south-western town of Yulin has drawn crowds despite international outrage, with sellers saying the criticism has actually encouraged more people to eat canines. Taiwan banned dog meat consumption in April to mixed reaction, with some deeming it unfair to single out certain

fewer—about 40 percent—believe the practice should be banned. It also found 65 percent support raising and slaughtering dogs in more humane conditions. There is currently no law on how to treat or slaughter canines in the meat trade in South Korea. But while farmers have urged Seoul to include dogs under livestock welfare regulations, animal rights groups oppose doing so, seeking complete abolition instead.

expensive initiatives—is broadcast live online. But Ahn Yong-Geun, a food and nutrition professor at ChungCheong University in Cheongju, questioned whether such organizations would condemn larger-scale beef or pork industries—which have lobbying power and broad public support — "in the same angry, aggressive fashion". "The activists won't get as much excitement from donors about a pig rescue project or a cow rescue project, although these animals have just as much capacity to suffer and love as dogs," said Ahn, a vocal critic of the push to ban dog meat.

Wendy Higgins, director of international media at HSI, said the group encouraged people to "reduce and replace meat in their diet" but admitted rescue campaigns for animals such as cattle or pigs were not common. Even so campaigns against cruelty in dog farming could "make people widen their circle of compassion for other animals in animal agriculture too", she added. For his part farmer Kim will not be raising any other animals for meat—he is banned from doing so under the deal with HSI. "The social atmosphere has changed," he said, adding: "Eating dog is seen as if it's a crime these days." — AFP



Activists stepped up campaigns to ban dog meat

species under what was mocked as the "cute animal protection law". Polls show South Korean public opinion is divided.

According to a survey this year 70 percent of South Koreans do not eat dogs, but far

Suffer and love

At Kim's rundown farm, dogs sat behind tarnished brown rusty bars, their bowls filled with soupy scraps. Housed in pairs, they spent up to a year in cages about two square meters and reeking of excrement before being sent to slaughterhouses. Senior HSI director Kelly O'Meara said no animals should endure such awful conditions, and dogs in particular had "a special place" for people as they are often pets. "That has certainly been the case in the West, but in Asia we see more and more people having dogs as companion animals too," she told AFP. Each such farm closure—one of HSI's most

CLINIC PAGE



Kuwait Times
248 33 199

Global Medical Center Welcomes Dr. Marzouq Al-Bader

Consultant vascular and general surgery

All general and specialized surgeries such as:

- All critical and non-critical arteries and veins surgeries
- All methods of treating varicose
- Special department for care of injured diabetic foot
- Carrying out delicate procedures such as removing the extra rib
- Treating excess perspiration
- AV connection for dialysis



Telephone: 187111

Global Medical Center, Bneid Al-Qar
Bour Saeed Street, Block-1, Building-128.

@globalmedcenter
www.globalmed-center.com

Dr. Fahad Al-Mukhaizeem
فهد علي المخيزيم
Consultant Pediatrician استشاري أطفال
M.B. Bch. FRCPC. FAAP. PEM

Al-Jabriya - Block 1A - St. 1 - Mazaya Building - 15th Floor - Clinic B - Tel.: 22269369 - Fax: 22269368

What's On

Future Eye Theatres' drama off to international theatre festival



As part of "Loka Kerala Sabha", Kerala Government and KSNNA (Kerala Sangeetha Nadaka Academy) is conducting an International Drama Festival for expatriates in which the renowned play of Future Eye Theatre 'USHNAMEGHALAYILE PENKUTTI' (Girl in Summer Zone) is selected. The drama festival will start from 1st Jan to 10th Jan 2018 at corporation town hall Kozhikode (Calicut), Kerala. This is the one and only play to be staged there from Kuwait which is scheduled on 6th Jan 2018. It has the credit of securing the best director award in the competition held for amateur dramas in 2014 conducted by Kerala Sangeetha Nadaka Academy. The play is written and directed by Shemej Kumar KK, Vice President of Future Eye Theatre Kuwait.

The press meets to announce the same was attended by Vattiyoorkkavu Krishnakumar (Gen. Secretary, Future Eye Theatre), Shemej Kumar KK (Vice President), Satheesh Varijakshnan (Advisory Board Member), Govind Santha (Program Coordinator), Sarath Nair (Treasurer), Ms Mini Satheesh and Remya Ratheesh (Lady Conveners). Apart from this play from Kuwait, many Award winning plays from Bahrain, Qatar, and zones of India like Chennai, Mumbai, Delhi and Kolkata are also being staged during the festival.

In Malabar (northern part of Kerala), a social taboo named 'Mysore Wedding' is still prevalent. This play is a lively discussion and depiction of the same the helplessness of women, the marginalized group of girls, dire poverty - all these lead the female population into the cycle that traps them. This festival derives its financial aid from World Kerala Sabha's upliftment plans for expatriates.

Future Eye Theatre is a very active drama troupe in Kuwait from 2009. They have always been unique by deviating from the conventional way of treating socio-political issues to banking on several academic scenarios. Samuel Beckett's 'WAITING FOR GODOT', Kafka's 'METAMORPHOSIS', Salvador Dali's painting 'THE PERSISTENCE OF MEMORY' and Badal Sarkar's 'BEYOND THE LAND OF HATTAMALA' are a few classics on which their plays are based on. Future Eye Theatre have won twice Kerala Sangeetha Nadaka Academy awards in best direction for Shemej Kumar KK and special jury award for Deepu Vellimon. They also participated in the micro-drama competition in Delhi and in the Radio Drama Festival conducted by Bahrain Keraleeya Samajam. In the month of April 2017, an innovative way of presenting a drama called "motion theatre" was done with their project 'BLACK GOLD'. The same drama has been submitted for 8th Theatre Olympics to be conducted in India by National School of Drama in 2018, and the selection process is undergoing.

The Palms Beach Hotel & Spa preparing for big New-Year holiday celebration

With the countdown for 2018, The Palms Beach Hotel & Spa extensive preparations are taking place for an amazing New Year dining and lodging bundle of special promotions. Experience the joy of this special occasion while accommodating in a luxurious Rooms & Suite, enjoying with the warm atmosphere of an exquisite dinner on candlelight with an assorted delicious open buffet reach menu at Palmerie restaurant, super buffet breakfast, one bottle of sparkling juice, season fresh fruit basket additional to a special freebie and late check-out up to 1800hrs.

Moreover, the Palms Beach Hotel & Spa's Restaurants whether it is Beach Tent, Tagine Moroccan Restaurant or Al-Muhalab sea food restaurant are well prepared for this occasion that you fancy, specially arranged a special live station at Beach tent which is formulated by the Hotel's executive chef. The Palms Beach Hotel & Spa offer its outside catering services with menus that cover all that you may need and all served & delivered fresh and tasty. The Palms Beach Hotel & Spa always aims to share with its guests and always strive to offer the best services to ensure maintaining memorable moments.



Kuwait Marriott Hotels appoints new director of sales & marketing

Kuwait Marriott Hotels are pleased to announce the appointment of Samer Gerges as the new Cluster Director of Sales and Marketing. Samer brings with him over 10 years of sales experience in the hospitality industry. His extensive experience enabled him to develop great leadership skills and the ability to form high-performing teams that deliver exceptional business results.

Samer Gerges is no stranger to Marriott Hotels, having held many positions within the company, including Cluster Sales Manager and Cluster Director of Sales at Marriott Hotels in Kuwait, where he was fully in charge of managing all proactive and reactive sales teams, and putting together strategies to drive more business and revenues.

Samer has dedicated his time to provide guidance to his team, establish great relationships with stakeholders and customers, and has supported the positioning of Marriott hotels in Kuwait, which has led to a tremendous increase in Revpar and yearly revenues. In his new role, Samer will oversee all sales, marketing and reservations activities while developing business strategies that drive more revenues, growth and exceed the business goals.

Throughout his career with Marriott, Samer has



received various Sales and Marketing accolades for his outstanding performance, including the Presidents Circle in 2013, Chairman's Circle in 2016 and he has also been awarded the Mustang Manager of Kuwait Marriott Hotels in 2012 and 2015. Commenting on Samer's appointment, Cluster General Manager Mr. George Aoun said, "On behalf of the management and associates of Kuwait Marriott Hotels, I would like to



congratulate Samer on his new promotion. Under his leadership, I am confident that Kuwait Marriott Hotels will bring new heights to market positioning and guest satisfaction.

Al Jahra Copthorne organizes annual vaccination campaign



Al Jahra Copthorne Hotel and Resort, organized the annual vaccination campaign against infectious respiratory infections and seasonal flu, in cooperation with "Prevention is the Aim" voluntarily team. The Prevention team led by Dr Messaed Ghanim Al-Enezi long with the Department of Preventive Health in Al-Jahra Health Region of the Ministry of Health and "Al-Essa Company for Services

and Home Care" organized a campaign of preventive vaccinations at Al Jahra Copthorne Hotel and Resort as well as an awareness campaign for guests and employees.

Blood pressure and blood sugar checking were conducted, as well as the distribution of health awareness leaflets on how to prevent infection, daily procedures to help prevent the spread of bacteria and answer to health

inquiries. Seasonal Influenza and Pneumococcal infections vaccine is the first and most important step to protect against flu-causing germs" said Dr Al-Enezi. He added that vaccinations were given to 120 employees and guests of the Copthorne Jahra Hotel as part of the ongoing cooperation with the hotel management to serve the community as a whole.

AIP meritorious awards 2017

Association of Indian Professionals (AIP), Kuwait is pleased to announce that the AIP would organize a mega event to honor meritorious Indian students tomorrow at 11:00 am at the auditorium of the Salmiya Indian Model School (SIMS), Kuwait. Awardees have been selected based on CBSE examinations results of class XII declared for the academic year 2016 - 2017 from all Indian Schools in Kuwait which are affiliated to CBSE system of education of India. This may be noted that AIP awards have become synonym of excellence and parents of meritorious students eagerly look forward to this event.

As you are aware, AIP is a non-profit, non-religious, non-political & non-governmental organization in Kuwait engaged in service of the Indian community through many ways. AIP awardees are presented with Gold, Silver and Bronze medallion each one with a certificate of merit. List of awardees is given below at the end of this press release.

AIP started Running (rolling) trophy for the Best Performing School in 2010 for class X & XII in order to recognize the efforts and contributions of the teaching staff of the School. Best Performing School is calculated on the basis of Weighted Average System. Details are given in the souvenir. However, we had to discontinue this award for class X due to introduction of the Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) system by CBSE which made class X Board examination optional. In lieu of that we started runners up trophy to the second Best Performing School of class XII. All Indians are cordially invited to attend. Prior confirmation of attendance will help us to make suitable arrangements accordingly. You may register through AIP website www.aipkuwait.com. All AIP awardees must report by 10:30 AM.

Meeting with PTDC chief



ALC Marketing Director Mujahid Iqbal met Managing Director of Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation Ch. Abdul Ghafoor. They discussed the development of tourism in the country and to issue a magazine 'Amazing Pakistan' to promote the touristic destinations of Pakistan.

Al Kout welcomes 2018 with unique celebrations

Souq Al Kout, part of the Al Kout project, Kuwait's largest waterfront retail and leisure destination, will be welcoming 2018 through live music performances and a series of exciting activities and events for both the youth and the family during three consecutive days from 29th to 31st December 2017.

For the 4th year running, Souq Al Kout stages an exceptional celebration to ring in the new year, this time through a musical journey titled "Rhapsody", which takes the audience on a nostalgic drive from past to present where they will enjoy the golden hits of both East and West from the 60's to present day being played by three live bands on December 31st from 2:00 p.m. until mid-

night, with the event ending with a spectacular fireworks show.

Three local musical bands will be participating in "Rhapsody", along with a cultural music show group, each with its own unique style. Two bands, Afterthought and Omar Afuni will present an array of English Golden Hits. The Kuwaiti group, Nujoum Kuwaitiya, will participate with an engaging musical show in Arabic, while the Suyouf Al-Sham Musical Group will present their unique show of Syrian folklore. Activities will be made available for the entire family, in addition to a unique offering of restaurants and coffee stalls, which will be participating for the first time in Souq Al Kout until midnight whereby the event will be concluded with an exceptional fireworks show.

Furthermore, a number of interactive activities will be held on the 29th and 30th of December, including numerous activities and competitions that would appeal to all members of the family, especially children, in addition to a number of arts and crafts activities, face painting, musical statues and pony rides.



On this occasion, Nermeen Bishady, Al Kout Marketing Manager, expressed Al Kout management's happiness at the huge success of the events of past years, while expecting this year's celebrations to witness a larger number of youth and

families of all age groups. She reiterated Al Kout's commitment to host highly entertaining, educational and enlightening cultural events that bring joy and mark special occasions, all in a unique waterfront setting.

TV



00:25 The Covenant
02:10 The Last Rescue
04:05 Star Wars: Episode 1 - The Phantom Menace



00:50 Untamed & Uncut
01:45 Treeshouse Masters
02:40 America's Cutest Pets



00:00 Eastenders
01:05 Stella
02:00 Poldark
03:00 The Durrells



00:00 Leah Remini: Scientology And The Aftermath
01:00 Escaping Polygamy: After The Escape



00:05 Workaholics
00:30 Broad City
00:55 Another Period

19:25 Impractical Jokers
19:50 Real Husbands Of Hollywood
20:12 Friends



00:05 How It's Made
00:30 How It's Made
00:55 How It's Made



00:50 Deadline: Crime With Tamron Hall
01:45 The Real Story With Maria Elena Salinas



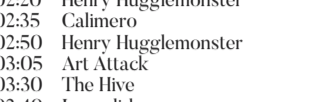
00:05 Disney Mickey Mouse
00:10 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch

00:05 Disney Mickey Mouse
00:10 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch

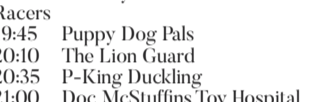
00:05 Workaholics
00:30 Broad City
00:55 Another Period



00:10 Unbungalivable
00:15 PJ Masks
00:40 Loopdidoo



00:00 Chopped
01:00 Bakers vs. Fakers
02:00 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives



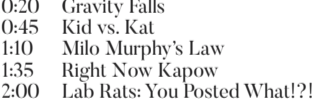
00:10 Chopping Block
01:00 Emmerdale
01:30 Emmerdale



00:20 Street Outlaws
01:05 Sean Conway: On The Edge
01:50 X-Ray Mega Airport



06:00 Disney II
06:25 Supa Strikas
06:50 Marvel's Spider-Man



00:20 Ultimate Wheels
02:00 Swamp Counting Cars
03:15 American Pickers

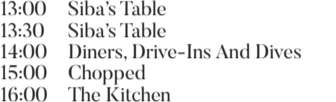


00:50 Revenge Body With Khloe Kardashian
01:50 Revenge Body With Khloe Kardashian

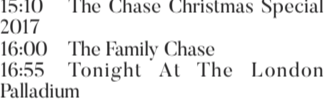
02:05 Carnival Eats
02:35 India's Mega Kitchen
03:30 Angelo's Outdoor Kitchen



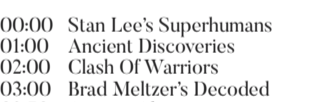
00:10 Dian Fossey: Secrets In The Mist
01:00 Titanic's Fatal Fire
02:00 Save The Titanic With Bob Ballard



00:20 World's Deadliest: Jaws & Sins
01:10 Monster Fish
02:00 Snow Leopard Of Afghanistan



00:20 World's Deadliest: Jaws & Sins
01:10 Monster Fish
02:00 Snow Leopard Of Afghanistan



00:12 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
00:36 Rabbids Invasion
01:00 Sanjay And Craig



00:12 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
00:36 Rabbids Invasion
01:00 Sanjay And Craig

02:05 Carnival Eats
02:35 India's Mega Kitchen
03:30 Angelo's Outdoor Kitchen



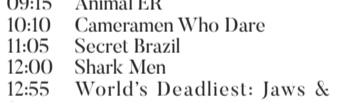
00:16 Shimmer And Shine
01:01 Max & Ruby
01:23 Ben & Holly's Little Kingdom



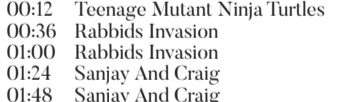
00:10 Dian Fossey: Secrets In The Mist
01:00 Titanic's Fatal Fire
02:00 Save The Titanic With Bob Ballard



00:20 World's Deadliest: Jaws & Sins
01:10 Monster Fish
02:00 Snow Leopard Of Afghanistan



00:12 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
00:36 Rabbids Invasion
01:00 Sanjay And Craig

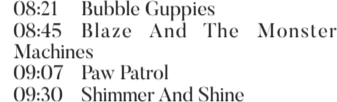


00:12 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
00:36 Rabbids Invasion
01:00 Sanjay And Craig

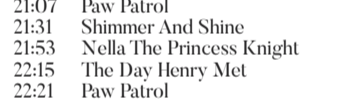
21:00 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
21:24 Sanjay And Craig
21:48 Rabbids Invasion



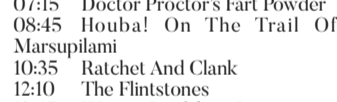
00:16 Shimmer And Shine
01:01 Max & Ruby
01:23 Ben & Holly's Little Kingdom



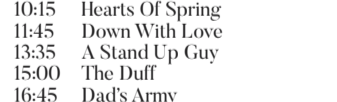
00:10 Dian Fossey: Secrets In The Mist
01:00 Titanic's Fatal Fire
02:00 Save The Titanic With Bob Ballard



00:20 World's Deadliest: Jaws & Sins
01:10 Monster Fish
02:00 Snow Leopard Of Afghanistan



00:12 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
00:36 Rabbids Invasion
01:00 Sanjay And Craig



00:12 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
00:36 Rabbids Invasion
01:00 Sanjay And Craig

17:40 Felix The Toy Rabbit And The Time Machine
19:10 Twisgon Ties The Knot



00:20 Sisters
00:30 Bram Stoker's Dracula
04:30 Pretty Woman



00:40 Mythbusters
01:30 How Do They Do It?
01:55 Food Factory USA



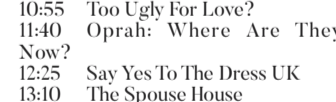
01:00 The Painted Veil
03:15 The Accidental Husband
04:45 Terri



00:00 Cedar Cove
03:00 The Fashion Fund
04:00 Project Runway All Stars



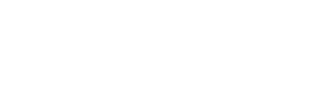
00:50 Doctor Proctor's Fart Powder
02:20 Houba! On The Trail Of Marsupialia



00:25 People Places Things
01:55 Turbo Kid
03:30 Spanglish



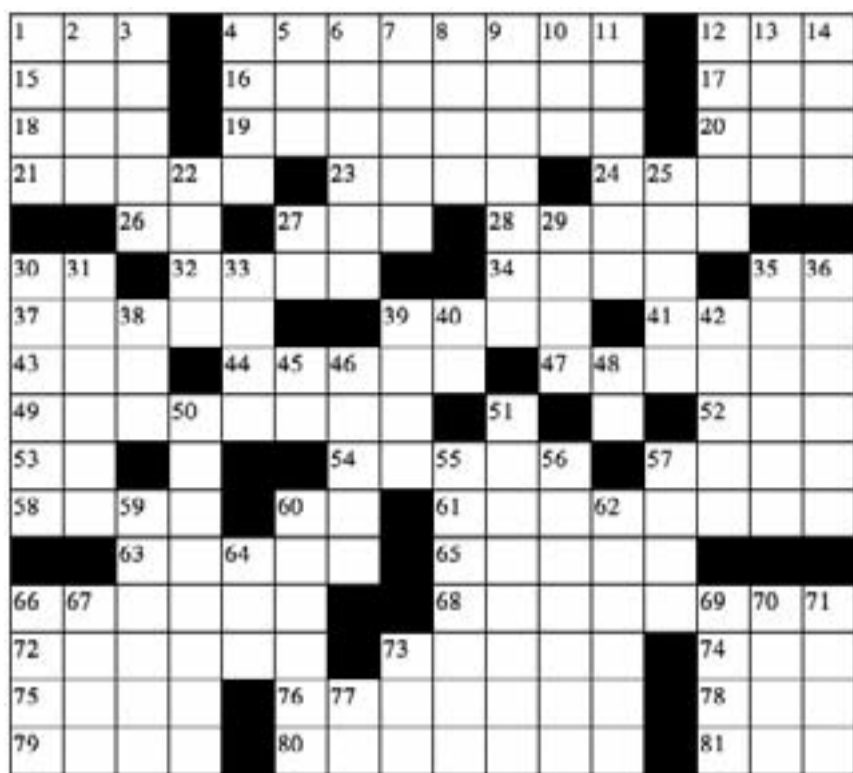
00:15 Rush
00:25 Me Before You
04:25 The Flying Scotsman



00:00 The Road Less Travelled
02:00 Mysteries At The Museum

Stars

CROSSWORD 1796



ACROSS

1. A mature blood cell that contains hemoglobin to carry oxygen to the bodily tissues.
4. The academic world.
12. An enclosed space.
15. A constellation in the southern hemisphere near Telescopium and Norma.
16. A railway having a single track.
17. A flat wing-shaped process or winglike part of an organism.
18. A sharp hand gesture (resembling a blow).
19. Infuse with spirit.
20. A coenzyme derived from the B vitamin nicotinic acid.
21. Small terrestrial lizard of warm regions of the Old World.
23. English pianist (1890-1965).
24. Lower in esteem.
26. A white soft metallic element that tarnishes readily.
28. A promontory in northern Morocco opposite the Rock of Gibraltar.
30. A soft silver-white ductile metallic element (liquid at normal temperatures).
32. Essential oil or perfume obtained from flowers.
34. A cord that is drawn through eyelets or around hooks in order to draw together two edges (as of a shoe or garment).
37. A small faint zodiacal constellation in the southern hemisphere.
41. Bulky grayish-brown eagle with a short wedge-shaped white tail.
43. United States musician (born in Japan) who married John Lennon and collaborated with him on recordings (born in 1933).
44. A river of southwestern Africa that rises in central Angola and flows east and then north (forming part of the border between Angola and Congo) and continuing northwest through Congo to empty into the Congo River on the border between Congo and Republic of the Congo.
47. The striking of one body against another.
49. Relating to the abomasum (the fourth compartment of the stomach of ruminants).
52. Something that bulges out or is protuberant or projects from a form.
53. A white metallic element that burns with a brilliant light.
54. Type genus of the family Lepididae.
58. The sixth month of the civil year.
61. Characterized by friendship and good will.
63. Intentional deception resulting in injury to another person.
65. Measuring instrument in which the echo of a pulse of microwave radiation is used to detect and locate distant objects.
66. In regular succession without gaps.
68. A wrongful interference with the possession of property (personal property as well as realty), or the action instituted to recover damages.
72. An African amulet.
74. A nucleic acid that transmits genetic information from DNA to the cytoplasm.
75. Any of various minerals consisting of hydrous silicates of aluminum or potassium etc. that crystallize in forms that allow perfect cleavage into very thin leaves.
76. A tricycle (usually propelled by pedalling).
78. A compartment in front of a motor vehicle where driver sits.
79. Lacking excess flesh.

80. A town in southern Turkey.
81. Title for a civil or military leader (especially in Turkey).

DOWN

1. A Hindu prince or king in India.
2. (informal) Exceptionally good.
3. A clique that seeks power usually through intrigue.
4. Type genus of the Amidae.
5. An argument opposed to a proposal.
6. (Babylonian) Father of the gods.
7. Treated or impregnated with a foreign substance.
8. (Greek mythology) Goddess of discord.
9. Dark sweet or semisweet dessert wine from Sicily.
10. Being one more than two.
11. Of or pertaining to or written in Altaic.
12. The capital and largest city of Yemen.
13. By bad luck.
14. (of a young animal) Abandoned by its mother and raised by hand.
22. A flat-bottomed volcanic crater that was formed by an explosion.
25. A short high tone produced as a signal or warning.
27. A soft silvery metallic element of the alkali earth group.
29. An island in Indonesia east of Java.
31. In the Arabian Nights a hero who tells of the fantastic adventures he had in his voyages.
33. The basic unit of money in Bangladesh.
35. Move out of a curled position.
36. A long wooden bench with a back.
38. A cry or noise made to express displeasure or contempt.
39. A large bundle bound for storage or transport.
40. The branch of computer science that deal with writing computer programs that can solve problems creatively.
42. The seventh month of the Moslem calendar.
45. A very poisonous metallic element that has three allotropic forms.
46. Food mixtures either arranged on a plate or tossed and served with a moist dressing.
48. A unit of information equal to one million (1,048,576) bytes.
50. (Irish) War goddess.
51. Medium-sized larch of Canada and northern United States including Alaska having a broad conic crown and rust-brown scaly bark.
55. An ancient country in Asia on the Caspian Sea.
56. With one side forward or to the front.
57. An association of people to promote the welfare of senior citizens.
59. The second largest continent.
60. Eurasian perennial bulbous herbs.
62. Melon having yellowish rind and whitish flesh.
64. A river in north central Switzerland that runs northeast into the Rhine.
67. A member of an Iroquoian people formerly living on the south shore of Lake Erie in northern Ohio and northwest Pennsylvania and western New York.
69. Type genus of the family Arctidae.
70. An unforeseen obstacle.
71. A island in the Netherlands Antilles that is the top of an extinct volcano.
73. An insecticide that is also toxic to animals and humans.
77. Half the width of an cm.

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

General good feelings and a sense of support and harmony make this a happy time. Those around you are impressed with your ability to make commonsense decisions regarding group matters when you already have so many responsibilities. You just naturally seem to know what others want. Putting your best foot forward and making a good impression take on greater importance as a new cycle gets under way in your life. Being in style and making a good appearance may count more than objects. Romance, the arts and life's other pleasures seem to take center stage. There is a good chance to understand those around you and to have a special time with someone you love. Relax; take on a listening attitude tonight.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Having the ability to sympathize and to understand others is an emotional quality that assumes a greater importance in your life now. Knowledge is not nearly as significant as wisdom. Accepting the past as just that, the past, or getting in touch with mystical and spiritual things are what has recently given you feelings of completeness. You understand what is not working in your life and you know just what to do next. You strive for cooperation, organization, authority and responsibility. It will take all of these things to get you where you know you must go. Just be sure that your vision is for the good of all and not just for yourself or your plans may backfire. There are good smells coming from your kitchen—someone you love is cooking for you.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Your expectation of success keeps you on your toes and challenges you to continue your road to achievement. This lucky day may find you presented with new opportunities. Your focus is strong and you accomplish much. You also are lucky in your friendships as your friends have high standards and may encourage the same from you. You feel free to seek advice as well as give advice when asked. Most people long to have the relationship you have with your friends. Your friends understand you and give you emotional nourishment. Take time to tend to whatever needs your outdoor animal friends have during the cold weather—pets, birds, etc. You appear most elegant in social situations this evening—a memorable time.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

You may find yourself in the limelight now, especially with those in authority or in relation to your work. It may be easy for you to enjoy your job or the responsibility it encompasses more than usual. Those around you may find your sense of humor amusing and a bit on the eccentric side at times. You may find new insights or breakthroughs in respect to your living situation or life circumstances. Others find your independence and unique qualities admirable. Whatever you have done this year to improve your style or health is working and you are happy to be the social achiever this evening. This is a great opportunity to network. Be cautious of those who promise more than they can deliver. Focus on clearing your energy as you leave a party.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

You are the ideal candidate to take charge of a project this day. Your creativity and originality are high. Now would be an excellent time to appraise your professional life and just where it is leading you. You may be a bit restless at this time. Likely, you will feel the desire to set out on your own, giving your creative side the space it desires—a little more patience. It takes a brave and confident person to follow through with business plans but you can do it if you start now to research and understand what is involved in the launching and maintaining of your own business. You may want to open up more to relatives; this is an ideal time for strong support emotionally. It may also be a wise move to take a business class at a community college near your home.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

New career developments lead to better opportunities in the workplace. In other words, you have graduated to be in line for new responsibilities. It is time to apply for a more challenging position within your company. Give yourself a little time to check out the different possibilities and consider expanding your abilities instead of changing what you do best. A transfer may be possible or perhaps further education for the next six months would be beneficial. This is the time to do your research. This afternoon you could have a visitor to your company that would give you several ideas without you saying a word. Listen; ask questions, research, etc. This evening you may think about your diet after all the holiday treats have been enjoyed.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

It could be valuable for you to make some plans regarding your packing for travel. Most of the time family and friends come to you, this year you will be able to visit family and friends. A little vacation is on the planning schedule. You love to ski and may have friends or family in a part of the country that has plenty of snow for your enjoyment. Feeling good in general and knowing that you enjoy your work makes this an exceptionally happy time. You may begin to realize the areas in your life that need some attention, as well as ways in which you can help others. You truly love to be helpful. This will take cooperation, organization, authority, discipline and responsibility on your part to accomplish what you must do to get where you must go.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

A little elbow grease and you are able to accomplish a lot. With several people out of the office today, you may be enthusiastic about a little housecleaning and moving furniture around that will help with the quality of care you can give your clients. A co-worker and you may decide to take the decorations down around the establishment. You and a family member may communicate about some past event that would be fun to enjoy again. Soon, your mind is busy with ideas on party planning for celebrating a new year. Friends inform you about fashion trends and shopping is on your mind. You and a friend have time later this afternoon to purchase what is needed for this party. Before you know it quite a few friends want to join your group. Yeah!



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

You just instinctively want to be powerful and in charge; pulling the strings, as it were, could lead to greater interest in investments, education and travel, etc. Your inner attitude has a lot to do with how you make and spend money. Now is a good time to think through any changes, adjustments, motivations or perhaps plans toward your goals. Some circumstances cause you to work late this afternoon. This may not make you very happy but because you are working late some surprise that is most pleasing makes you happy you got to stay a little late. There is a good opportunity to show off a talent or skill that the people in your office did not know you have. Tonight you help your friends and they help you. A new music performer has your attention.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

You are more visible at work and within organizations and groups. You may spend some time later today to focus on a new article of clothing for your professional appearance. At home after work is a good time to rest and relax, perhaps to read a romantic novel or take in a movie with a captivating theme. You should find ideas and thoughts projecting a greater meaning and form just now. You may be extremely eloquent or forceful in talking or communicating. People will have no problem in knowing exactly what you mean when you speak. You may find yourself looking for a little fun communication this afternoon or at least finding some kind of emotional release to enjoy. Enjoying the finer things in life eventually takes on a high priority.



Aquarius (January 20-February 18)

Now is a time when you may feel the need to get in touch with your spiritual side. This will have you looking for ways to broaden your horizons and to stretch to new possibilities. You may have the feeling that you are not doing the most with your talents; you search for new opportunities of expression; you will find success. Some of the areas where these energies can be expressed may be found through politics, religion or law. There is a big possibility that you will be traveling in your search, perhaps even internationally as well as domestically. Ambition, practicality and achievement are admirable, but they are means to an end—not ends in themselves—you look for ways to spend time with loved ones this evening.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

You have a good attitude and are mentally alert and in a problem-solving mood. You may spend some serious contemplative moments wondering if you can succeed in what you have set out to accomplish; don't. The world was not made in a day and you must not think you have failed if you cannot do everything in the time frame you have planned. Knowing that you have made progress is sufficient for now. When the day is over, you will be pleased with your productive and positive accomplishments. Working with your favorite hobby this evening will help you to relax with those you love. As you consider what to bring a host at a party, consider a recorded book or music. This person will tell you the type of music he or she likes if you are not sure.

Wordsearch Puzzle

Fish 1

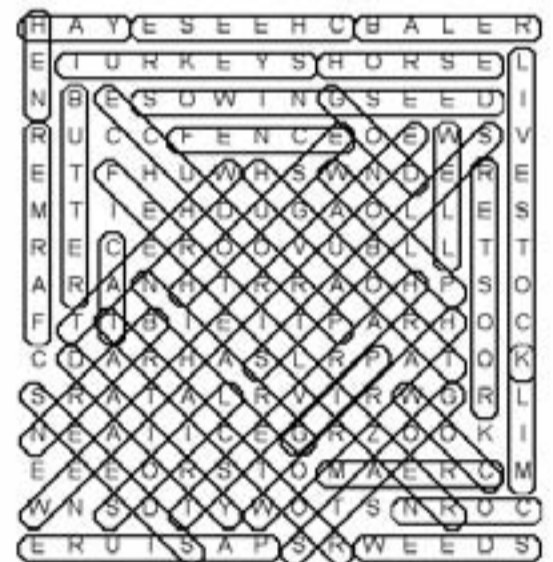
Find and circle all of the fish that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell a secret message - a Benjamin Franklin quotation.



- | | | | |
|--------------|-------------|-------------|-----------|
| BARRACUDA | DORADO | PARROTFISH | SMELT |
| BLUEFISH | DRUM | PERMIT | SNOOK |
| BONEFISH | GAR | POMPANO | STURGEON |
| BULLHEAD | GRAYLING | REDFISH | SUNFISH |
| CATFISH | GRUNT | ROOSTERFISH | SWORDFISH |
| CHUB | HALIBUT | SALMON | TILAPIA |
| COO | JEWFISH | SAND DAB | TRETAIL |
| CRAPPIE | MACKEREL | SAUGER | TUNA |
| CREVALLE | MUSKELLUNGE | SHARK | WAHOO |
| DOLLY VARDEN | PADDLEFISH | SHEEPSHEAD | WARMOUTH |

Yesterday's Solution

Farm



- | | | | |
|--------|------------|-----------|-------------|
| BALER | FARMER | HOUSE | SOWING SEED |
| BARN | FENCE | LIVESTOCK | STABLES |
| BUTTER | FERTILIZER | MILK | TRACTOR |
| CAT | GOATS | PASTURE | TROUGH |
| CHEESE | GRAIN | PIG | TURKEYS |
| CORN | HARROW | PLOW | WEATHERVANE |
| COW | HARVEST | PRODUCE | WEEDS |
| CREAM | HAY | ROOSTER | WELL |
| DAIRY | HEN | SEEDS | WHEAT |
| DOG | HORSE | SOIL | |

The hidden message is: CHICKENS

Yesterday's Solution



Daily SuDoku



Yesterday's Solution



A CLOSER LOOK AT CANCER

We offer a few basics on preventing, diagnosing and dealing with the disease

By SALLY DADISMAN
McClatchy-Tribune

Whether it's your grandfather who developed lung cancer after smoking for 50 years or your mother who found a lump in her breast, chances are you know someone who has battled, or is still battling, cancer. White House press secretary Tony Snow announced his colon cancer has returned days after Elizabeth Edwards, wife of White House hopeful John Edwards, declared her battle with breast cancer is not over. The National Cancer Institute describes the disease as one "in which abnormal cells divide without control." Those cells can spread to nearby tissue, the bloodstream and other parts of the body. According to the American Cancer Society, about 1.4 million new cancer cases will be diagnosed in 2007. Here, we provide some basic information about the survivability, risk factors, screenings, treatments and resources related to cancer.

CANCER Q&A

How common is cancer?

Almost one in every two men and one in every three women in the United States will get some type of cancer at some point in his or her lifetime, according to the ACS. While young people are still susceptible to cancer, 77 percent of cases occur in people 55 years or older. Also, the rates of cancer vary in different racial and ethnic groups.

How does someone get cancer?

According to the ACS, cancer is caused by damage to DNA. This damage could be passed on through genetics or caused by human behavior, like tanning or smoking. In regular cells, the body is able to repair damaged DNA, but that is not the case for cancer cells, which due to their doubling outlive normal cells.

Can it be prevented?

Some forms of cancer can be prevented. Activities such as alcohol consumption, smoking, increased exposure to sunlight and eating high-fat foods can all provide higher risk of cancer. According to the ACS, eating fruits and vegetables as well as getting screening tests are helpful preventative measures.

What are the symptoms?

There are specific symptoms accompanying each type of cancer, but there are more general ones as well. Unusual weight loss of 10 pounds or more, tiredness, fever and changes in skin tone can all be signs of cancer. Obviously those who have one or all of these symptoms do not necessarily have cancer, but they are important early warning signs.

Common cancers

According to the American Cancer Society, prostate and breast cancers top the list of sites of new cancer cases among men and women in the United States, based on 2006 estimates.

TOP 10 CANCER SITES FOR WOMEN

Cancer location	No. of cases	Percent
Breast	212,920	31%
Lung and bronchus	81,770	12%
Colon and rectum	75,810	11%
Uterine	41,200	6%
Non-Hodgkin lymphoma	28,190	4%
Melanoma of the skin	27,930	4%
Thyroid	22,590	3%
Ovary	20,180	3%
Bladder	16,730	2%
Pancreas	16,580	2%

TOP 10 CANCER SITES FOR MEN

Cancer location	No. of cases	Percent
Prostate	234,460	33%
Lung and bronchus	92,700	13%
Colon and rectum	72,800	10%
Bladder	44,690	6%
Melanoma of the skin	34,260	5%
Non-Hodgkin lymphoma	30,680	4%
Kidney and renal pelvis	24,650	3%
Oral	20,180	3%
Leukemia	20,000	3%
Pancreas	17,150	2%

SOURCE: AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY

RISK FACTORS

It's no surprise that smoking a pack a day puts you at higher risk for lung cancer or that lying on the beach for hours gives you a greater chance of developing melanoma. But there are natural and uncontrollable factors that can lead to cancer as well. According to the National Cancer Institute, the most common risk factors are:

- Growing older
- Tobacco
- Sunlight
- Ionizing radiation (X-rays, radioactive substances and other sources)
- Certain chemicals and other substances
- Some viruses and bacteria
- Certain hormones

- Family history of cancer
- Alcohol
- Poor diet, lack of physical activity or being overweight

PREVENTION

Perhaps the best way to keep cancer away is to catch it before it develops. Screenings such as mammograms, pap tests and other blood work can help prevent many common types of cancer.

WOMEN

■ **Breast:** A mammogram — an X-ray of the breast — can help catch breast cancer early. The NCI suggests women over 40 years old should have a mammogram once every one to two years. The ACS also urges women who have been diagnosed with cancer in one breast to have an MRI to ensure there is not a tumor in the other breast as well. The group's recent study published in the New England Journal of Medicine notes that more than 3 percent of new breast cancer cases have had one breast diagnosed, but cancer is also lurking in the other, which was undetectable through mammograms or physical testing. The Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation also recommends that women over 20 should do monthly breast self-exams and have clinical breast exams every three years. After age 40, clinical breast exams should be conducted annually.

■ **Cervix:** Called both pap tests and pap smears, these screenings can help prevent cervical cancer. By taking a sample of tissue around the cervix, the test can show whether cancer cells are present. The NCI says pap tests should occur every three years after a woman becomes sexually active or when she turns 21, whichever comes first.

MEN

■ **Prostate:** The cancer that affects men the most can be treated through a blood test and digital rectal examination, according to the ACS. All men should begin annual testing at age 50. Black men and those with a family history of the disease are considered at high risk and may begin testing early as 40 to 45 years old.

BOTH

■ **Colon and rectum:** There are a number of tests that can be done to prevent cancers in these areas of the body, including rectal exams and colonoscopies. The NCI advises people 50 and over to get screened.

TREATMENTS

Once cancer has been diagnosed, there are four main treatment options, according to the American Cancer Society: surgery, radiation, chemotherapy and biological therapies.

■ **Surgery:** Most cancer patients will undergo some surgery since it is the most effective way to eliminate cancer that hasn't spread yet to multiple parts of the body. There are less invasive options available in some cases, such as laser surgery. Surgery can be used as a preventative or diagnostic step, and also to remove or reduce tumors.

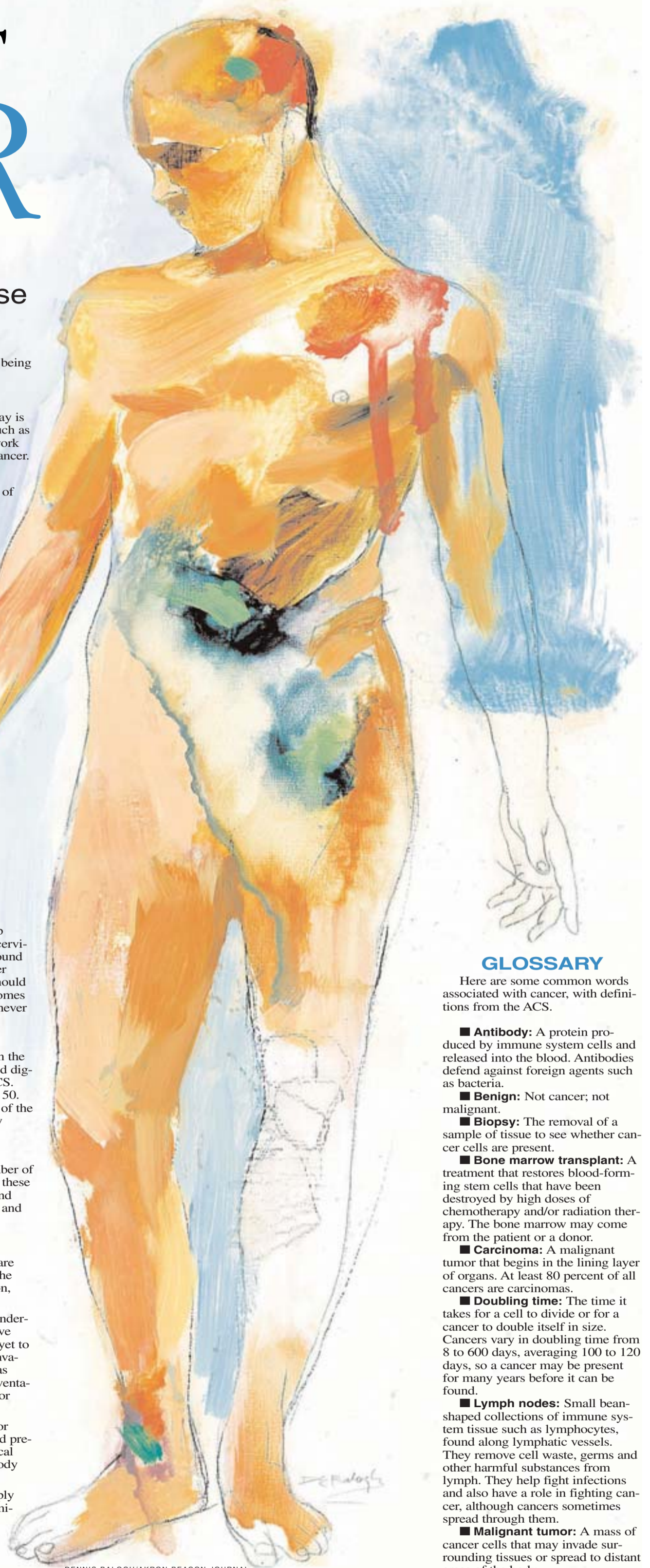
■ **Radiation:** Radiation uses waves or high-energy particles to kill cancer cells and prevent them from doubling. Radiation is a local treatment and only affects the part of the body being treated.

■ **Chemotherapy:** Often given by simply swallowing a pill or having an injection similar to the flu shot, chemotherapy has been used to treat cancer since the 1950s and is one of the oldest forms of treatment. Usually distributed through the veins, chemotherapy, unlike radiation, affects the whole body, not just the cancerous areas. Common side effects include hair loss, sickness, change in bone marrow and fatigue.

■ **Biological therapies:** Unlike other treatments, biological therapies don't treat the cancer directly, but instead try to help the weakened immune system. They work to block cancerous cells and strengthen healthy ones, and can also help treat side effects of other treatments, such as chemotherapy.

Treatment options can have different levels of effectiveness due to the patient's overall health and the stage of the cancer. Treatment can also vary depending on if the goal is to cure, treat symptoms or simply to control the spread of the cancer.

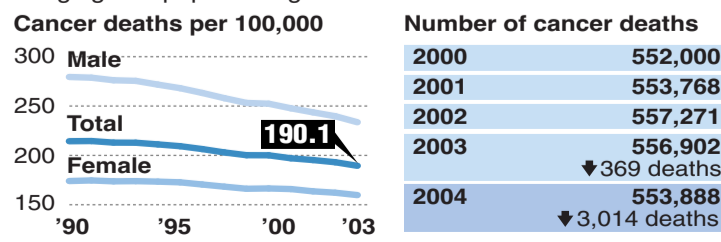
SOURCES: AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY, NATIONAL CANCER INSTITUTE



DENNIS BALOGH/AKRON BEACON JOURNAL

Cancer mortality rates

The cancer death rate in the United States has been dropping about 1 percent each year, but for the second straight year the number of cancer deaths declined enough to offset the effects of aging and population growth



GLOSSARY

Here are some common words associated with cancer, with definitions from the ACS.

■ **Antibody:** A protein produced by immune system cells and released into the blood. Antibodies defend against foreign agents such as bacteria.

■ **Benign:** Not cancer; not malignant.

■ **Biopsy:** The removal of a sample of tissue to see whether cancer cells are present.

■ **Bone marrow transplant:** A treatment that restores blood-forming stem cells that have been destroyed by high doses of chemotherapy and/or radiation therapy. The bone marrow may come from the patient or a donor.

■ **Carcinoma:** A malignant tumor that begins in the lining layer of organs. At least 80 percent of all cancers are carcinomas.

■ **Doubling time:** The time it takes for a cell to divide or for a cancer to double itself in size. Cancers vary in doubling time from 8 to 600 days, averaging 100 to 120 days, so a cancer may be present for many years before it can be found.

■ **Lymph nodes:** Small bean-shaped collections of immune system tissue such as lymphocytes, found along lymphatic vessels. They remove cell waste, germs and other harmful substances from lymph. They help fight infections and also have a role in fighting cancer, although cancers sometimes spread through them.

■ **Malignant tumor:** A mass of cancer cells that may invade surrounding tissues or spread to distant areas of the body.

■ **Oncology:** The branch of medicine concerned with the diagnosis and treatment of cancer.

■ **Red blood cells:** Blood cells that contain hemoglobin, the substance that carries oxygen to all of the cells of the body.

■ **Remission:** Complete or partial disappearance of the signs and symptoms of cancer in response to treatment; the period during which a disease is under control. A remission may not be a cure.

■ **White blood cells:** Help defend the body against infections. Certain cancer treatments such as chemotherapy can reduce the number of these cells and make a person more likely to get infections.



MYSTERY JETS HAVE HONEST FAMILY CRITICS

Mystery Jets singer Blaine Harrison loves playing their new music to his mum - because she'll tell him if the song is "rubbish". The 'Young Love' frontman writes the group's songs with his father, the group's guitarist Henry Harrison, and they always give the rest of their family a preview of their material before the public get to hear it because they know they'll get honest feedback. Henry said: "The family go through the agonizing process of having to listen to it before anyone else." Blaine added: "I love playing stuff to my mum, she has absolutely no problem telling me if she thinks it's absolute rubbish." Blaine's mum is much more a fan of the Macabees than Mystery Jets, and always urges her family to be more like their chart rivals. Blaine said: "She's like, 'Can't you make it more about those Maccabees songs...'" Henry added: "[She says] 'They write about big swimming pools, you are always writing about big subjects, can't you get down to earth?'" And the 'Telomere' hitmakers - which also include William Rees, Jack Flanagan, and Kapil Trivedi - have even sampled the family matriarch in the background of their songs. Henry said: "She's

featured on a couple of records doing the washing up in the background, on 'Little Bag of Hair' she's dropping plates, and you can hear her going, 'Do you know dinner's ready Blaine?'. Just a minute mum I'm singing.'" When they are writing together, Blaine loves the way his father will dive into a "stack of books" to come up with some references he wouldn't otherwise have known. He told BANG Showbiz: "Henry is the key of cross-referencing so I'll say I've got this bit of music I'm working on and it might be about this or stem from this feeling and he'll say give me a minute and he disappears into the library and comes back with a stack of books. 'I love that, that is so not a part of how my generation work, we've got Google, whereas Henry will have this stack of literature and we actually come up with results and long syllabic words that probably I'd never dream of being in my vocabulary so that's fantastic.'" Henry added: "We simplify and simplify, but a lot of the complex ideas underlie the tracks like 'Telomere'."

S Club 3's

comeback single was intended for the entire group to release

S Club 3's comeback single was intended for the entire group to release. Jo O'Meara, Bradley McIntosh and Tina Barrett have joined forces without the former members of S Club 7, which included Paul Cattermole, Jon Lee, Rachel Stevens and Hannah Spearitt, and the trio have revealed their latest single 'Family' was penned "a couple years ago" for the entire seven-piece group to sing after their 2015 reunion. Jo explained: "We actually recorded this song a couple years ago and it was originally meant for the seven of us after we'd done the tour. 'People weren't really ready at that particular time and then the song had just been sitting there. The fans had wanted something new for so long and they've been so good to us for so long and so loyal. 'I think sometimes when something has been really special and it was a reunion tour, it's best to leave it short and sweet.'" And since releasing the single the threesome have only received support from Hannah, who wished them "all the best" with their future singing careers over social media. Tina, 41, said: "She's such a sweetheart, she tweeted us to wish us all the best." Jo thinks it is a "good thing" a few of the 'Reach' hitmakers are re-grouping and returning to the entertainment business because she thinks they are "mature and tolerant" and will "appreciate" their career "more" than they did when they first broke into the industry with their debut single 'Bring It All Back' in 1999. Jo told The Sun Online: "We are definitely older - I think it's quite a good thing because we are more mature and tolerant. Also, we just appreciate it more." Tina added: "I think it's a good thing and it's great that everyone loves that era so much. I actually appreciate the music so much more now than I did then."



George Ezra's selfish song



George Ezra insists his single 'Don't Matter Now' was "selfish". The 24-year-old singer wrote the track about his battle with anxiety, and though he thinks it's "beautiful" the song has got people talking about their own problems, he wrote it to address his own feelings, rather than to make others feel better. Asked if he thinks it's important to write about the issues and get people talking, he said: "Not very, that wasn't really my aim. It's beautiful that people are now talking about it but it was more for myself, not to sound too selfish. It was a nice opportunity for me to address things I was feeling. 'I hadn't anticipated that people would pick up and be interested but I feel it's brilliant that they are.'" When he's performing, George loves nothing

more than having his fans sing his lyrics back at him. He said: "It feels very good, I love it. It's a lovely feeling for everyone involved in the room. 'I was at a show in Shepherd's Bush and it felt brilliant, if you are sharing things with people it's a nice feeling.'" Though the 'Budapest' hitmaker feels very grateful that his career has allowed him the opportunity to travel the world, he does get pangs to return home to his own bed so he can spend more time with his loved ones. Asked where he'd most like to go in the world, he said: "My own bed at the moment, we have been so lucky to visit a lot of places. I would love to spend more time in South Africa. But mostly home because I don't get to see my friends enough."



Charli XCX

loved watching Diplo get peed on by puppies

Charli XCX's favorite moment of filming her 'Boys' music video was seeing Diplo get peed on by puppies. The 'After the Afterparty' hitmaker got all of her male celebrity pals to feature in the fun-filled promo, including Joe Jonas, Bastille's Dan Smith and Mark Ronson, but it was the American DJ's scene, and getting to slap Charlie Puth in the face with a wet sponge, which stood out the most. The 25-year-old pop beauty admitted that while she enjoyed the experience, she felt "nearly dead" by the end of the extensive project, which travelled all around the world from Los Angeles and New York to Seoul in South Korea. Sharing some her "highlights of 2017" on Instagram, the 'Out of My Head' singer posted: "k angels, over the next few days I'm gonna post about my 2017 highlights... beginning with directing the music video for 'boys'. This was such a crazy headfuck experience but somehow we managed to pull it off. This shoot began in April and went all the way through to June, shooting in L.A., N.Y., Seoul, Tokyo, London and Coachella. I was nearly dead by the end of this process but everything was so worth it. Highlights for me we're hitting @charlieputh in the face with a sponge and watching @diplo be peed on by puppies. Thank u to everyone who made this possible. (sic) Meanwhile, Rita Ora is set to follow in the footsteps of pal Charli XCX by recruiting a star-studded cast for her new music video. The pop babes previewed a live version of their duet called 'Girls' at BBC Radio 1's Big Weekend in Hull earlier this year, and the 'Your Song' hitmaker has revealed her plans to get her fellow female musician friends to join forces for the girl power promo. Rita said recently: "I have a really cool song called 'Girls' that has all my girls in the industry that I'm friends with, that I love. 'And they're on the video, too. 'It's going to be all about females.'" It comes after Charli said she's eager to direct the video, after she enjoyed being in charge of the visuals for her song 'Boys'.



Tom Chaplin 'too old' for Keane

Tom Chaplin believes he is "too old" to reform Keane. The 38-year-old singer is best known for his time as the frontman of the 'Everybody's Changing' rockers from 1997 until their indefinite hiatus in 2013, and whilst the band have still not official split, Tom believes that now he's become a father to three-year-old Freya - whom he has with his wife Natalie - he has too many responsibilities to consider recording with Keane again. Speaking to The Sun newspaper, he said: "When you've got dogs crapping on the kitchen floor and a small child, you think, 'I wouldn't mind being able to sort my own diary'. It's a pragmatic, boring reason but a compelling one at this stage of life." It comes after the 'Somewhere Only We Know' hitmaker previously admitted he and former band mate Tim Rice-Oxley have a "complicated relationship" which would need to be repaired before a reunion could be discussed. He said: "Me and Tim have a really complicated relationship. We have great love and respect, but there are other elements in that relationship. I think in order to do something with Keane we would have to explore ways to make it a happy and positive experience again. And at the moment it doesn't feel for me it's the right thing to be doing." Tom saw his life spiral out of control in the mid-2000s due to his addictions to drink and drugs, and after picking himself back up again, he suffered a relapse two years ago. His decision to pursue a solo career and keep Keane in the past could be down to a fear he may relapse again, as he recently admitted he wanted to put his past behind him and set a "good example" for his daughter. He said: "Addiction is a passive-aggressive way of expressing myself. It can be a very sadomasochistic way of living life. But now I am a father, I can finally face things and it's a chance to be a good example. I wasn't available for Freya and I was incredibly sad about it. 'But I am on the other side of that now. I know there is a little part of me in her and I can't always protect her from everything. But I'm an open book and am happy to talk to my family about my past problems."

LORDE CANCELS ISRAEL SHOW

Lorde has cancelled her upcoming concert in Israel. The 21-year-old singer had been due to perform in Tel Aviv as part of her 'Melodrama' world tour on June 5 2018, but after she received "an overwhelming number of messages" asking her to cancel the show due to the ongoing cultural boycott of the country - which comes as a protest against the Israeli government's policies, occupation of Palestine, and treatment of the Palestinian people - she has agreed to call off the performance. According to Jerusalem Post journalist Amy Spiro, an official statement from the 'Green Light' singer - which was delivered to Israeli PR for the concert - reads: "Hey guys, so about this israel show - i've received an overwhelming number of messages & letters and have had a lot of discussions with people holding many views, and i think the right decision at this time is to cancel the show. i pride myself on being an informed young

citizen, and i had done a lot of reading and sought a lot of opinions before deciding to book a show in tel aviv, but i'm not too proud to admit i didn't make the right call on this one. (sic)" Lorde goes on to state that it is her "dream" to visit the city of Tel Aviv, and apologized to fans in Israel who have been left disappointed by her decision. She added: "tel aviv, it's been a dream of mine to visit this beautiful part of the world for many years, and i'm truly sorry to reverse my commitment to come play for you. i hope one day we can all dance. L x (sic)" It comes after the 'Royals' hitmaker previously told fans she was "considering all options" when it came to the proposed show. After one fan shared an open letter asking her to cancel the gig, Lorde responded on Twitter last week: "Noted! Been speaking w many people about this and considering all options. Thank u for educating me i am learning all the time too (sic)".



Lifestyle | Gossip



Susan Sarandon thinks clothing should not 'overpower' the wearer

Susan Sarandon thinks clothing should not "overpower" the wearer. The 71-year-old actress thinks the key to fashion is to feel "comfortable as well as beautiful", and she doesn't think putting on clothes should take over but should, in fact, "enhance" the person donning the garments. Speaking to Vogue.co.uk, the 'Thelma & Louise' movie legend - who has daughter Eva, 32, as well as sons Miles, 25, and Jack, 28 - said: "Be comfortable as well as beautiful. Don't let clothing overpower you, let it enhance." And the star has revealed her style icon is the late Doris Duke, and the character she portrayed in the 1988 movie 'Bull Durham'. She explained: "Doris Duke in 'Bernard and Doris', Annie Savoy in 'Bull Durham' - she was so inventive, outside the box but feminine and sexy in an unusual way." But Susan has revealed she has had her fair

share of fashion blunders over the years, as when she attended the 'Pretty Baby' premiere, she donned a "simple vintage dress" that was see-through and revealed her bare chest. Speaking about the embarrassing moment, she explained: "My first trip to Cannes was for the film. I wore a beautiful and simple vintage dress that became see-through once the paparazzi started shooting and of course I was bra-less." However, the 'Stepmom' star has no regrets and has advised youngsters to make mistakes "more quickly" in life and to enjoy their youthful beauty while they can. She said: "Make your mistakes more quickly and enjoy your beauty more." Other than the mishap Susan is "fine" with how her life has panned out. She added: "Other than that I really am fine with the way I've dealt with my life."



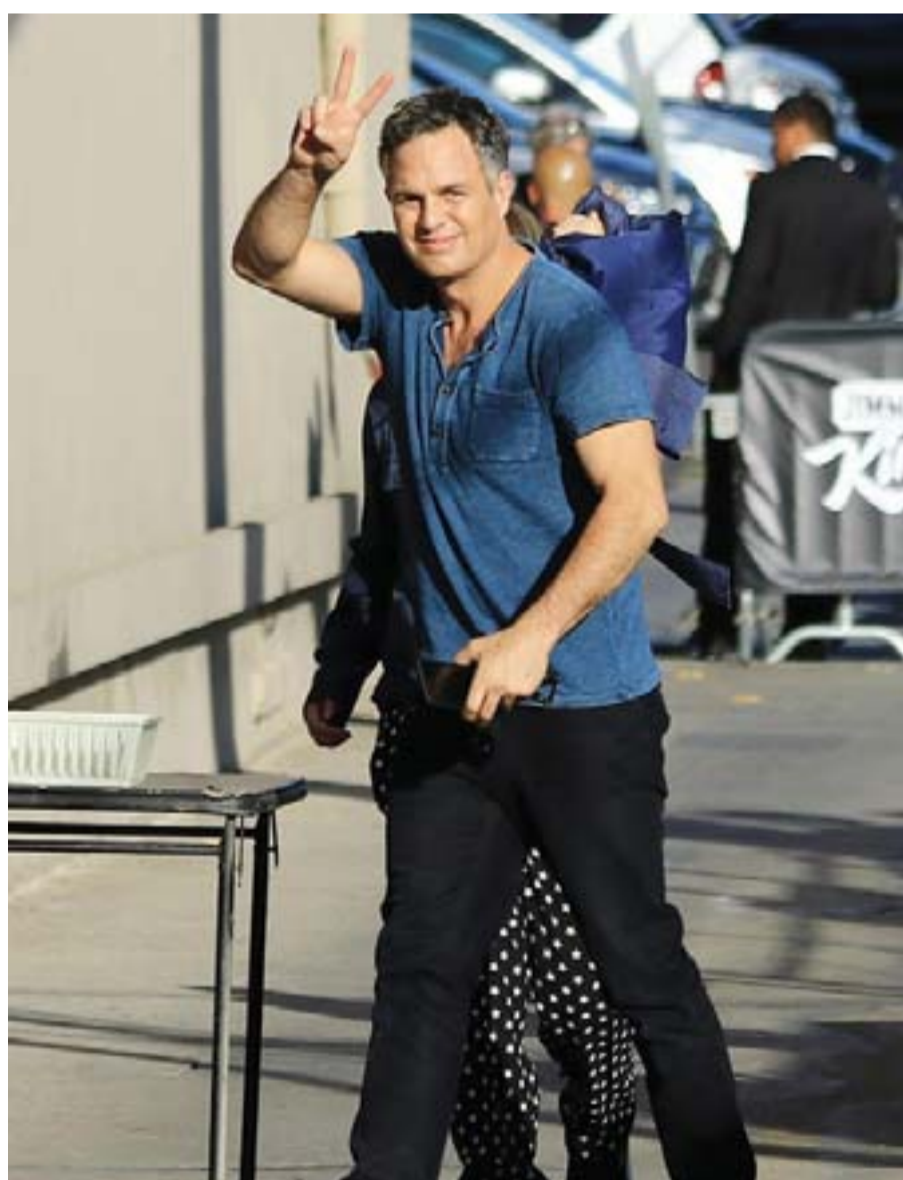
Paulson wants to play Cheetah in Wonder Woman

Cheetah in the film's sequel. The 'American Horror Story' actress has called up on the director of the movie, Patty Jenkins, to cast her as the female superhero's arch-enemy in the fifth instalment in the DC Extended Universe movies, alongside Gal Gadot in the titular role. When a fan tagged the 45-year-old filmmaker, and suggested: "Hey @PattyJenks, Giving that #WonderWoman's Rogues Gallery is small, will you use her most famous villain 'Cheetah' in the sequel? I also think that @MSarahPaulson or @CharlizeAfrica would be perfect for this character if you did use her. @WonderWomanFilm (sic)", Paulson wrote back: "Yes please @PattyJenks (sic)" In this year's movie Wonder Woman battled the Greek god of War in World War II. However, many fans are calling for Cheetah to return. Priscilla Rich, Deborah Domaine, Barbara Ann Minerva and Sebastian Ballesteros previously took on the role in various TV series based on the DC Comics. 'Wonder Woman 2' is due to be released in November, 2018. Meanwhile, comic book writer Geoff Johns previously promised there shall be little changes in the new movie because this year's celebrated the heroism of the female protagonist so well. He said: "'Wonder Woman' celebrated exactly who the character is, but looking at it, it's not like we should change everything to be about hope and optimism. There's nothing to change. That's what these characters are."

Rian Johnson: I couldn't second-guess myself with Star Wars: The Last Jedi

Rian Johnson was determined not to "second-guess" every decision he took while making 'Star Wars: The Last Jedi'. The 44-year-old director has revealed how he approached making the much-discussed new sci-fi movie, admitting he made a conscious effort not to overthink his work. He shared: "For me, although this arguably made it more risky and dangerous as oppose to less, for me the thing I felt I needed to avoid was making the movie from a place of fear, and fear of how fans would react to it. "Having been a 'Star Wars' fan myself for my entire life, I know from first-hand experience how every fan has a different set of expectations from a 'Star Wars' movie. "I also know that telling a story you're coming in with some dragon in the back of your head and some abstract notion of what people want and what they don't and making them happy by giving them that, you're going to

freeze up and second-guess every decision you make and you're going to make a crap movie. That's the one thing that would disappoint everybody." Rian's effort has seemingly divided fans and critics, but the director explained that he approached the project with a no-fear attitude. The moviemaker - whose previous hits include 'Looper' in 2012 - told Screen Daily: "The big thing for me to avoid was reacting out of fear of what people would think, and cutting yourself loose to take chances and go to the places that felt most interesting to me and felt vivid and alive and interesting that engaged these characters without fear."



MARK WAHLBERG HINTS AT DIRECTORIAL DEBUT

Mark Wahlberg has hinted he may make his directorial debut next year. The 46-year-old actor has had a glittering career as a Hollywood star, and although he has tried his hand at producing a number of projects, he has never sat in the director's chair on a movie set. However, that could all change in 2018 as the 'Deepwater Horizon' star has admitted he has a project in mind that he'd love to direct, which he believes could start filming as early as next year. Speaking to Collider during an interview in support of his new movie 'All the Money in the World' - which hit cinema screens on Christmas Day - he said: "It's either going to happen this time next year, or maybe five years from now, who knows? But maybe this time next year. I have one specific project that I'm thinking about. It takes place in Wisconsin. It's a true story." However, the directing job may not fall into Mark's hands after all, as he revealed he's already sent the script to his frequent collaborator Peter Berg, who he says is also keen to helm the mystery project. If Mark does make the transition into directing, it will come after a hugely successful acting career which saw him named as Hollywood's highest-paid actor earlier

this year. The star topped Forbes' list for 2017 after earning a whopping \$68 million, thanks to huge roles in 'Daddy's Home 2' and 'Transformers: The Last Knight'. Mark isn't in too much of a rush to head off into directing though, as the star previously said being a father to daughters Ella, 13, and Grace, seven, and sons Brendan, eight and Michael, 11 - who he has with his wife Rhea Durham - is his number one priority. When asked if being a spiritual person affected which roles he chose, he shared: "Absolutely. And also being a dad. And a husband. What I'm willing to do and not do. I never want to compromise my artistic integrity. But at the same time, with [playing a porn star in] 'Boogie Nights', I already did that. I'd be hard-pressed to do something in that world today ... "Sometimes you have no control [over a film's success]. Once you've done everything you can to create something, it goes out there and it either works or doesn't. At the end of the day I just know I did everything I could do to make it the best it would be. Then you gotta be able to move on. Let it go."



Michael B Jordan in a 'dark place' with Black Panther role

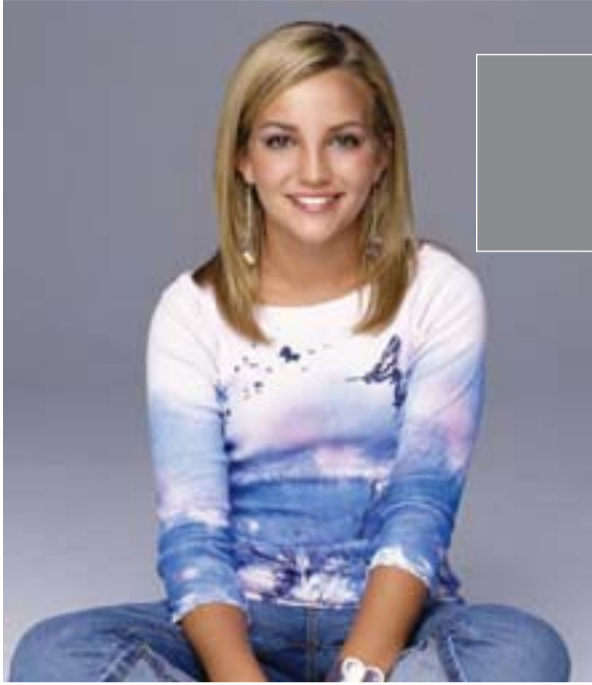
Michael B Jordan was taken to a "dark place" when he took on the role of Erik Killmonger in 'Black Panther'. The 30-year-old actor stars as the antagonist in the upcoming Marvel movie - which is set to hit cinema screens in February - and has said that whilst he had "a lot of fun on set" with his co-star Chadwick Boseman, who stars as the titular superhero, he admits the role was tough to prepare for. He said: "It took me to a dark place. Honestly, I can't really go through all I went through to get into it because I want to keep that close to me. But it stuck with me afterwards ... Chadwick's a very talented dude. There's a lot of physical moments and action sequences throughout this film that cause us to really challenge ourselves, and also fall deeper into character." The production - which was directed by Ryan Coogler - has been praised for its predominantly black cast including Forest Whitaker, Lupita Nyong'o, and Danai Gurira, and Michael believes "everybody" can relate to the film in some way. Speaking to Empire magazine, he said: "It's an all-black cast for the most part and it's set in Africa, but it's universal in so many ways to everybody around the world, so I feel like it's something that everybody can take something from." Michael's comments come after 34-year-old Lupita - who stars as Nakia in the movie - said she felt "challenged" by her role, and praised director Ryan for avoiding the "expected female-rival narrative" within the feature. She said: "Ryan made a point of avoiding the expected female-rival narrative. In this genre, where spandex is involved, oftentimes the women are pitted against each other. In our story, there are so many different women holding their own space. Women may be in competition with each other, sure, but that doesn't necessarily mean there's an absence of love or respect. Shuri [Letitia Wright] is the sister to the Black Panther [Chadwick Boseman] and the leader of technological pursuits and Nakia is someone who has a complicated history with the Black Panther and is a warrior in her own right. You see them work together, and you see a dynamic that is really encouraging. Making this film awakened me. I walked away from this experience feeling extremely supported and I felt challenged." — Bang Showbiz

Luke Evans had incredible chemistry with co-stars

Luke Evans, Rebecca Hall and Bella Heathcote had "incredible chemistry" in 'Professor Marston and the Wonder Women'. The movie examines the life of psychologist Dr William Marston [Evans] and his creation of the iconic DC Comic character back in 1941, along with his unconventional relationship with his wife, Elizabeth [Hall], and their lover Olive Byrne [Heathcote], and director Angela Robinson was very impressed with how well they worked together, especially as they hadn't met before landing their jobs. The filmmaker told BANG Showbiz: "They are amazing. They were so incredible and such a delight to work with and we didn't have a lot of time to shoot the movie. "We had about 25 days to shoot the whole thing which is not a lot. They came together and a lot of people had incredible chemistry in the movie. It's really really wonderful to watch. "The process was like me watching them fall in love with each other but they never met before doing the film. They had one table read

and then they just kind of dived in but they were incredible to work with." The movie came out not long after Patty Jenkins' successful 'Wonder Woman' movie - which starred Gal Gadot in the lead role - but the 46-year-old filmmaker insists it was just a "happy coincidence" that they were released so close together. She explained: "I've been working on this movie for about eight years so it took about four years to write during nights and weekends between jobs and another four years to be made so it's kind of just a coincidental convergence that it's coming out exactly on the heels of this huge phenomenon of the success of Patty Jenkins' 'Wonder Woman' movie. "But back last October when we were shooting it I didn't even know if we would have distribution. I didn't even know if anyone would see the film. So that part is a happy coincidence."





Jamie Lynn Spears is pregnant

The 26-year-old actress has taken to social media to publicly announce her and her husband, Jamie Watson, are due to have "another big milestone" in 2018 as they are expecting their first child together. Alongside a photograph of the former 'Zoey 101' star with her spouse and her nine-year-old daughter Maddie - who Jamie has with her former partner Casey Aldridge - which was posted on her Instagram account, she wrote: "Looks like we are starting off 2018 with another big milestone...sooo happy to announce that Maddie is FINALLY going to be a big sister (sic)." In the heartfelt post Jamie revealed 2017 has been a difficult year for her as her child nearly drowned in an ATV accident. She continued: "2017 was filled with

some of the biggest challenges of my life, as well as some of the biggest blessings (sic)." And over the last 12 months Jamie decided to "lay low" to focus on herself and her career. She added: "So I made a choice to lay low this year to focus on truly becoming my best self as a person and as an artist. (sic)." Jamie has teased she has been working on new music, which she "can't wait" to share with her fans. She said: "During that time, I continued working on my music and telling my story, which has created some of my most honest work and I CANT wait to share that with you all very soon.(sic)." Although 2017 has been filled with "challenges" and "blessings" for Jamie, she thinks the next year will see her achieve "many milestones both personally and professionally". She con-

cluded her post: "2018 is going to be filled with many milestones both personally and professionally. I appreciate each of you for your patience and support through it all. 2018 has a lot coming, so GET READY..... #12DaysofJLS (sic)." Jamie has also shared the post on her Twitter account. And Jamie's older sister Britney Spears has since taken to social to congratulate her sibling. The 36-year-old singer re-shared Jamie's tweet and wrote: "Maddie is going to be the best big sister!!! So happy for you @jamielynspears!!!! Love you all sooo much!!!(sic)."

Khloe Kardashian is 'six months' pregnant



The 33-year-old television personality confirmed earlier this month she is expecting her first child with her beau Tristan Thompson, but the star has recently revealed on social media she is in her second trimester of her pregnancy. One of the 'Keeping Up With the Kardashians' star's fans posed the question asking how far along Khloe is on Twitter. The social media user tweeted: "If you don't mind us asking, how many months are you? (sic)." And the 'Revenge Body' host had no qualms in dishing out the answer, as she replied: "I'll be 6 months next week. (sic)." The former 'Kocktails with Khloe' host has been swamped with well wishes from her fans, which proved too much for the reality star to take. In response to another fan's comment, she wrote: "Stop it! You are going to make me cry! Thank you. (sic)." Meanwhile, Khloe has admitted she has started to notice the changes to her body, and she has revealed her burgeoning baby bump looks "smaller" in the morning, although it "pops out more" in the evening. She said: "In the mornings my tummy seems smaller and later in the evening it pops out more. (sic)." And, fortunately, Khloe has had a "pleasant pregnancy" so far without any bouts of illness or morning sickness. Speaking previously about how Khloe is coping, a source said: "Khloe has not had any morning sickness or had any less than pleasant pregnancy symptoms." Khloe and her 26-year-old boyfriend set tongues wagging they were expecting a baby together in September this year, but it was only last week, Khloe publicly announced the exciting news. Alongside a photograph of her flaunting her burgeoning bump, with Tristan's hands wrapped around her stomach, which was shared on her Instagram account, she wrote: "My greatest dream realized! We are having a baby! I had been waiting and wondering but God had a plan all along. He knew what He was doing. I simply had to trust in Him and be patient. I still at times can't believe that our love created life! Tristan, thank you for loving me the way that you do! Thank you for treating me like a Queen! Thank you for making me feel beautiful at all stages!

Williams to play first competition since giving birth

Serena Williams is set to return to competitive tennis on Saturday - despite giving birth in September. The 36-year-old sporting icon is preparing to return to the courts at the Mubadala exhibition event in Abu Dhabi after giving birth to a baby girl named Alexis Olympia Ohanian on September 1. The American star - who also married Internet entrepreneur Alexis Ohanian earlier this year - plans to compete at the event ahead of defending her Australian Open title in Melbourne in January. Remarkably, Serena won the title last year while she was already two months pregnant. Australian Open tournament director Craig Tiley previously revealed Serena was intent on defending her crown Down Under. He shared: "She has got her visa, she has entered, she's practicing, and she probably just needs a bit more space for a bigger entourage. "There is no question she will be ready in our view." However, fans of the record-breaking star will be eager to see how she

balances her on-court demands with being a new mother. Serena has previously admitted to feeling stressed by the demands of raising her daughter. She recently reached out to her followers on social media for advice on how she can ease Alexis Olympia's suffering, because it is making her "stressed" and tearful. Serena wrote on Instagram: "Teething- aka the devil - is so hard. Poor Alexis Olympia has been so uncomfortable. She cried so much (she never cries) I had to hold her until she fell asleep ... "It's breaking my heart. I almost need my mom to come and hold me to sleep cause I'm so stressed. (sic)" The sports star also appealed for tips on remedies that might help her daughter. She revealed: "I've tried amber beads... cold towels... chew on mommies fingers... homeopathic water (lol on that one!) but nothing is working ... Help? Anyone?? (sic)"



MERRYGOLD EXPECTING A CHILD WITH GIRLFRIEND

The former JLS singer is expecting his first child with girlfriend Sarah Richards and though he's not sure what artwork he'll get to celebrate his love for the tot, he's definitely planning a statement piece. Asked if he'd get a tattoo for the baby, he said: "Oh definitely. I'm not sure yet. I don't know honestly. I just think being as were going to all over the place anyway as soon as baby's here, so it's probably going to be another spontaneous one, probably with my whole back or something." But the 29-year-old pop star insists it would be "creepy" to do something similar for his partner. Asked if he has one for Sarah, he exclusively told BANG Showbiz: "Have I got what, a tattoo. No. That's a bit creepy. She's says no, it's fine." Though the 'Beat Again' singer admitted he and Sarah didn't plan to have a baby together, he thinks their busy schedules

would have made it too difficult to find the right time anyway. He said: "No, not planned, but it was never going to be planned because of the lifestyle we lead. We're always both working, from tours to shows, I'm hardly ever here, both of us, and when we are here we want to spend time together. So it's like we cherish them moments, so it's nothing you can really plan. I don't think, within our circumstances." Aston has previously vowed to be a "hands-on" father and insists having a baby doesn't mean life has to change completely. Asked if he'll be a hands-on dad, he said: "A hundred per cent. I'm hoping to tour next year but I want Sarah and the baby to come with me. "Having a baby doesn't stop you doing anything."



Teigen got stuck on an 8-hour flight to nowhere, and live-tweeted the whole thing

Chrissy Teigen and John Legend spent eight hours on a flight from LAX to Tokyo which had to be turned around. The Sports Illustrated model - who is pregnant with the couple's second child - has been live-tweeting the disaster journey on her Twitter account for most of yesterday). Chrissy - who already has baby girl Luna with the 'All of Me' singer, who it is not known was on the plane with her parents or not - claimed the reason for the All Nippon Airways (ANA) aircraft heading back to Los Angeles was because of a passenger who boarded the wrong flight. Her first tweet read: "a flying first for me: 4 hours into an 11 hour flight and we are turning around because we have a passenger who isn't supposed to be on this plane. Why ... why do we all gotta go back. I do not know (sic)" According to several reports, flight 175 landed back at LAX at approximately 7.30pm. Police officer Adonis Cutchlow of the LAPD did not explain why the plane had to be sent back, but simply said: "All we know is that it was turned around." The 32-year-old beauty claimed the person did not have the right boarding pass to be on the plane, and demanded to know more from the police after she said she witnessed fellow passengers being questioned over the

"mystery person". She wrote: "They keep saying the person had a United ticket. We are on ANA. So basically the boarding pass scanner is just a beedoop machine that makes beedoop noises that register to nowhere ... Police were interviewing all the people seated around the mystery person once we got off the plane. Why would they do this! I MUST KNOW MORE ... (sic)" Chrissy and her husband were then moved to a room where she was able to relax and watch TV, but she joked that authorities likely put them there so she wouldn't "blow" the operation. She quipped: "I have been moved to a room with Bravo. Clearly the authorities are trying to keep me quiet so I don't BLOW THE LID OFF THIS 'SITCH" (sic)" After being made comfortable and eating some Ramen noodles, the couple were able to board a new plane to Tokyo. And the brunette beauty said she was feeling "forgiving", but had she been drinking, it could have gone very differently. Chrissy wrote: "Getting on another flight now oh bless ... Drinking Chrissy would be very mad. Sober Chrissy is forgiving and patient (sic)" Aston Merrygold is planning to get his "whole back" tattooed in tribute to his baby.

Rivera's son spent Christmas with his father

Naya Rivera's son spent Christmas with his father Ryan Dorsey. The former 'Glee' star and the 'Blood Father' actor are currently going through a divorce after Naya was arrested for misdemeanour domestic battery earlier this month, but the 34-year-old dad made sure to make a fuss of their two-year-old boy Josey over the festive period, despite the family's current predicament. Sharing a selfie of the pair posing in front of a giant snowman on Christmas Day on Instagram, Ryan wrote: "Happy Holidays (sic)" The 'Shameless' star said he's "thankful" for his little boy as he wished his followers all the best for the new year. Sharing a series of photographs in a video montage of the father and son posing by their Christmas tree, Ryan added: "#Winter17 Happy Holidays, Merry Christmas, & wishing you all a happier & healthier Happy New Year from them Dorsey dudes. I'm so thankful for this little dude, my main man, the sweetest boy I know. (sic)" Naya recently refiled for divorce from Ryan - two months after she withdrew her previous papers. The 30-year-old actress was arrested after she allegedly struck her estranged spouse over the head and in the mouth during a walk with Josey in West Virginia. Court papers obtained by TMZ.com stated that Naya made the move to submit legal documents to restart the termination of their marriage, citing "irreconcilable differences". The re-filing came just two months after Naya called off their divorce proceedings when the pair - who wed in 2014 - reconciled following their split in November 2016. According to the newly filed papers,

Naya is seeking joint custody of Josey, and also wants the court to block either of them from getting spousal support. Ryan previously posted a statement about the alleged domestic battery incident on his social media accounts, where he asked for "positivity and love" during this "difficult time". He wrote: "This is a difficult time for everyone in the family especially for Naya and I. This isn't some reality show, this is our life, and I ask that everyone especially the media please respect our privacy and treat us/this situation how you would want a loved one to be treated. Perhaps with kindness, respect, without judgment, and as negative a situation this is, with positivity and love. Thanks." After papers were filed in 2016, they released a joint statement in which they said they would continue to be "great co-parenting partners" for their son. The statement read: "After much consideration, we have made the decision to end our marriage. Our priority is and always will be our beautiful son that we share together. We will continue to be great co-parenting partners for him. We ask for respect and privacy for our family during this difficult time."





Colombian salsa dancers wait backstage prior to the "Salsodromo" parade in Cali, Colombia, on December 25, 2017, opening the 60th Cali Fair. More than 1,500 dancers from the different salsa schools of the city dance on the streets wearing colorful costumes, representing all aspects of salsa music culture, this the largest parade of salsa dancers in the world. — AFP

TURNING E-WASTE INTO ART AT GHANA'S TOXIC DUMP

PEOPLE THINK WE ARE BAD BECAUSE THEY THINK WE ARE MAD PERSONS

Joseph Awuah-Darko sits on a stool at one of the world's largest electronic waste dumps, watching polystyrene and insulation cables burn on the blackened ground. "It's survival and dystopia," says the 21-year-old British-born Ghanaian, surveying the stretch of wasteland around him as dense plumes of acrid smoke rise into the air. Awuah-Darko and his university friends have ambitious plans for the sprawling Agbogbloshie dumping ground in Ghana's capital, Accra. In January this year, he co-founded the non-profit AgbogbloShine Initiative, which encourages people working at the dump to turn waste into high-end furniture.

'We are suffering here'

When Awuah-Darko first saw the piles of circuit boards, wires and plastics at Agbogbloshie he decided he wanted to use his artistic talent as a force for change. So he set up the AgbogbloShine project with Cynthia Muhonja, a fellow student from Ashesi University, about an hour's drive from Accra. They repurpose the electronic scraps, "upcycling" them into furniture, and offer training for the young men who work at the dump to create the pieces. The students straddle two worlds—a privileged life on the lush campus of a private university in a forested area, and the harsh reality of life for some of Ghana's poorest people.

Mohamed Abdul Rahim, who is in charge of about 20 young men, has been working at Agbogbloshie since 2008. The 25-year-old from the north of Ghana works 12-hour days, six days a week. On average the workers make only about 20 cedi each (\$4.50, 3.75 euros) a day. He knows the work is bad for his health but doesn't see any other option. However he is optimistic that Awuah-Darko's initiative will help. "We are suffering here because the heat is there, the smoke, too, it disturbs us. If we see good work we will go join it and leave this," he says.

The toxic fumes hurt his lungs, while his hips and waist ache from carrying heavy objects to burn. The money he earns supports his mother, wife and three children. The ground he works on is black, muddy and littered with plastic bags, cables, bottles and broken shoes alongside smashed television sets and computer monitors. Workers use plastics and polystyrene as fuel to melt down components to extract the copper.

Grandfather clock

Awuah-Darko recognises that the people of Agbogbloshie "are basically in pursuit of what we all want, which is a better life". "Unfortunately, the side effects or the by-product of this is the detriment of their health," he said. He hopes that his initiative will not only improve their lives but also the planet, as waste from the site is given another life. Awuah-Darko's first upcycled work is a grandfather clock, made from a galvanized car axle, aluminum and part of a discarded wall clock. Two high-end hotels in Accra are currently vying to buy the unusual timepiece, he said, and with such interest he has plans to create more and expand operations.

Awuah-Darko sees a future where around 100 people from Agbogbloshie can leave their harmful work to build furniture. He also wants to exhibit the creations at major galleries around the world and sell them at auction houses. That would be a world away for someone like Mohammed Sofu, a thin 26-year-old with small tattoos on his face. But Sofu wants to live in a world where he does not have to burn waste to survive. "Some people think we are bad because they think we are mad persons," he said. "If we get money no one will look at us like that. Some day will come when no one will be working here." —AFP



Women sell water satchets at Agbogbloshie dumpsite in Accra. — AFP photos



A young man carries electronic waste at Agbogbloshie dumpsite.

The dump workers typically risk exposure to harmful fumes by burning obsolete and unwanted appliances such as mobile phones, computers, televisions and plastics that are brought to Ghana from around the world. After burning, they salvage and resell copper and other metals from these leftovers of modern consumer culture. The dump and scrapyard sit next to the heavily polluted Odaw River in the slum-like area, home to an estimated 40,000 people. The United Nations has said that salvaging materials for recycling provides income for more than 64 million people in the developing world. Ghana is said to have the largest informal recycling industry in Africa and imports some 40,000 tons of this e-waste annually.



Ghanaian artist Joseph Awuah-Darko works on a clock, the pieces of which were found at Agbogbloshie dumpsite, at his workshop at Ashesi University College where he studies, outside Accra.



A table made by Ghanaian artist Joseph Awuah-Darko made of pieces of scrap metal found at Agbogbloshie dumpsite is pictured at his workshop.



A table made by Ghanaian artist Joseph Awuah-Darko made of pieces of scrap metal found at Agbogbloshie dumpsite is pictured at his workshop.



A young man carries an old refrigerator at Agbogbloshie dumpsite in Accra.



A general view of the Agbogbloshie dumpsite in Accra.

Lifestyle

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 28, 2017



Children play with toy balloons at a park in Manila on Christmas Day on December 25, 2017. — AFP

Bizarre news

Two US Navy airman claim spotting a UFO

Two US Navy airman claimed they both spotted a UFO during a training mission. Commander David Fravor and Lieutenant Commander Jim Slaight insist they saw something "accelerate like nothing" they have ever seen before through the sky, the New York Times has reported. The UFO was tracked for a couple of weeks before the objects appeared at 80,000ft then sped away towards the sea then shot up into the sky. Speaking about the sighting, Fravor said: "It accelerated like nothing I've seen before. We were at least 40 miles away, and in less than a minute this thing was already at our cap point. I have no idea what I saw. It had no plumes, wings or rotors and outran our F-18s. I want to fly one."

Schoolgirls find theory Jack could have survived Titanic

A group of schoolgirls have found a way for both Jack and Rose to survive in 'Titanic'. The end of the hit James Cameron movie sees Rose - played by Kate Winslet - survive the sinking of the iconic ship by laying on top of a door while her lover Jack (Leonardo DiCaprio) stayed in the water and eventually died from hypothermia. Ever since the film was released back in 1997, fans have argued that the door was big enough for both of the main characters to sit on - although they would've sunk. Now a group of Year 10 pupils at Westminster School, in Adelaide, are convinced they've come with the perfect maths formula suggesting they both could have survived. Abigail Wicks, Christy Zhang and Julia Damato have claimed Jack and Rose could have both stayed on the door if they have

put their life jackets underneath to make it float, according to The Mary Sue. However, some have argued that Jack wasn't wearing a life jacket at the end of movie.

Teddy bear causes storm on internet after having 4ft long legs

A cuddly teddy is being sold with freakishly long legs. The 6.5ft bear is available to purchase ahead of Christmas but consumers have been left puzzled after they noticed that the soft toy is disproportion and has 4ft long limbs. The product description reads: "This heavyweight offers more huggability than your average bear. Kids and adults alike love to cuddle up with the soft silky giant." Shayne Rama wrote on Twitter after sharing a picture of their teddy: "Looking at the bear my wife has, the legs do seem a little too long. Hadn't really noticed until now. Thanks for ruining our favorite bear. (sic)" There are only a few more bears left in stock, according to the MirrorOnline.

Women are celebrating Equal Pay Day by putting out of office message on

Women have been encouraged to put their "out of hours" on their work emails on Equal Pay Day to make a stand. The Women's Equality Party (WEP) have asked females to set their out of office alert on Equal Pay Day on November 10 in a bid to remind colleagues women play a vital role in any work place and deserve to receive the same salary as their male counterparts, the Metro Online has reported. The WEP said: "Friday November 10 is Equal Pay Day, which marks the moment which women effectively stop being paid until the end of the year. "The full-time pay gap in the UK is 14.1 per cent and if you factor in part-time work, the vast majority of which is done by women, it leaps to a shocking 18.4 per cent. "We don't think men's work should be valued more highly than women's - so why should we be working? "We're

asking women across the UK to set their Out of Offices on Friday 10th November as a sign to the world that they won't stand for this any longer. "The work women do, the industries they work in, and the caring responsibilities they generally shoulder are not valued by our society - not enough to pay them a fair wage. "This is exactly what the Women's Equality Party seeks to overturn. "We represent the women who are being paid unfairly and often not being paid at all - either for their domestic labor or care duties - or because they have been fired for getting pregnant. "Equal pay is both a cause and consequence of gender inequality and it creates the context for other inequalities, such as violence against women and girls and unequal access to health." And the party have provided a template that can be used for out of office messages.



Burglar stuck in window rescued after five hours

A burglar had to be rescued by police after he got stuck in a window for five hours. A man, who was wearing jeans, black socks and no shoes, was crying for help when he got trapped in the tight spot when he was

trying to enter a home uninvited. A picture taken by the West Midlands Police, which was obtained by the Metro Online, captures the crook with half his body hanging out the window with the other inside the house. The male, who has remained unnamed, was taken into custody by police after being rescued and quizzed about his actions. West Midlands Response Team took to social media to share the news. They tweeted a picture of the man and captioned it: "#dontgetstuck if your trying to break in. "5 hours later shouting help #triptocustody by all means (sic)".



Petition launched to change football on road signs

A petition has been launched to change the 2D representation of a football on road signs. Comedian Matt Parker started the plea because he thinks the traffic sign, which has been used since 1994, displaying the sporting equipment made from hexagons is "mathematically impossible", the BBC News has reported. Matt said: "The football shown on the UK street signs (for football grounds) is made entirely of hexagons. "But it is mathematically impossible

to construct a ball using only hexagons. Changing this to the correct pattern of hexagons and pentagons would help raise public awareness and appreciation of geometry." Although more than 20,000 people have signed the petition already, the Department for Transport has said they won't be making any changes. They said: "The Government considers the current football symbol has a clear meaning and is understood by the public. "The purpose of a traffic sign is not to raise public appreciation and awareness of geometry which is better dealt with in other ways. "The detail of the geometry would also not be taken in by most drivers who were merely looking at the sign for direction. "The higher level of attention needed to understand the geometry could distract a driver's view away from the road for longer than necessary which could therefore increase the risk of an incident." — Bang Showbiz



Woman visits the Zaryadye Park, with St Basil's Cathedral (right) and the Kremlin's Spasskaya Tower (left) seen in the background, in downtown Moscow on December 26, 2017. — AFP

'The Last Jedi' tops Christmas box office in North America

The force was with Disney as the latest Star Wars movie "The Last Jedi" beat out the competition to top the Christmas weekend box office, according to updated industry estimates released Tuesday. The eighth installment of the blockbuster space saga topped the charts in North America for a second week, according to box office tracker Exhibitor Relations, pulling in \$99 million from Friday through Monday to rack up total earnings of \$395.6 million since it opened last

weekend.

Christmas week is traditionally a time when studios flood the screens with new releases, and the Star Wars epic was trailed by three new films. In second place was the Dwayne Johnson family adventure "Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle" which made \$55.4 million for Sony over the same four-day period. "Pitch Perfect 3," which follows the continuing adventures of glee singers the Bellas, led by Anna Kendrick, was in third, earning \$26.5 million for Universal.

That was followed by "The Greatest Showman," a musical in which Hugh Jackman plays the legendary circus impresario PT Barnum. That earned \$14 million. Animated feature "Ferdinand," the story of a pacifist bull forced to face down the greatest bullfighter in the world, was fifth. It netted four-day receipts of \$9.6 million in the United States and Canada in its second week. — AFP