



Labor attache recalled by Manila after twin deaths



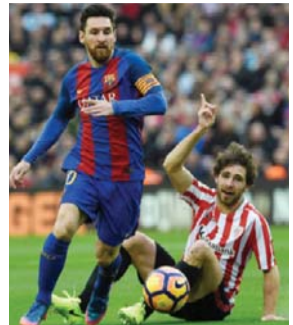
Indians go to polls in test for Modi's cash ban



Eminem returns with new Trump attack



Messi collects another record as Barca sink Athletic Bilbao



KUWAIT DENIES VISA BAN ON CERTAIN NATIONALITIES

CENTRAL BANK BACKS STRICT MONEY TRANSFER MEASURES



Min 01°
Max 16°
High Tide 05:52 & 15:35
Low Tide 11:42

150 FILS
NO: 17132
40 PAGES



TRUMP FUMES AFTER JUDGE LIFTS TRAVEL BAN

WASHINGTON/DAMASCUS: US President Donald Trump yesterday denounced a judge who lifted a travel ban for citizens of seven mainly Muslim countries, vowing that his government would reinstate it as affected travelers scrambled for tickets to try to quickly enter the United States. The federal judge in Seattle on Friday blocked Trump's week-old order to stop people from Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen from traveling to the United States as his administration develops stricter vetting rules for immigrants and travelers that Trump says are needed to prevent attacks.

The Washington state lawsuit is the first to test the broad constitutionality of Trump's travel ban, which has been condemned by rights groups that consider it discriminatory. "The opinion of this so-called judge, which essentially takes law-enforcement away from our country, is ridiculous and will be overturned!" Trump said on Twitter. It is unusual for a president to attack a member of the judiciary, which is an independent arm of the US government. "When a country is no longer able to say who can, and who cannot, come in & out, especially for reasons of safety & security - big trouble!" Trump tweeted.

Because of the temporary restraining order, the US government said travelers with valid visas would be allowed to enter the country. The State Department said almost 60,000 visas had been suspended because of Trump's ban. The order had set off chaos and moved thousands of people to protest at airports across the United States last week.

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LONDON: Demonstrators holding placards take part in a protest against US President Donald Trump outside the US Embassy yesterday. — AFP

KUWAIT: Kuwait Friday categorically denied media reports that it planned to stop issuing entry visas for some nationalities, affirming that issuance of visas was a "sovereign matter". The foreign ministry "categorically denies these claims and affirms that these reported nationalities (which he did not mention) have big communities in Kuwait and enjoy full rights," Sami Al-Hamad, Assistant foreign Minister for Consular Affairs, said in a statement to KUNA.

Hamad said citizens of the countries mentioned on social media visit Kuwait regularly through direct commercial flights. Businesspeople from Kuwait and those countries are bound by commercial relations, he explained. "The State of Kuwait believes that granting of visas is a sovereign matter, and is not linked to terrorism or violence or nationality or faith," he said.

Separately, Central Bank Governor Mohammad Al-Hashel yesterday said measures applied by exchange firms regarding combatting money laundering and terror financing are based on Central Bank instructions issued in July 2013. Hashel made the remarks in response to recent social media reports that exchange firms are taking strict measures against money transfers. He assured that the 2013 instructions had been made in line with law 6/2013 regarding combatting money laundering and terror financing.

The directives, targeting local banks and finance companies that are subject to Central Bank monitoring, reflect Kuwait's commitment to relevant UN agreements, Hashel noted. As part of the Central Bank's role in the protection of the banking and financial system from the hazards of money laundering and terrorism, measures by exchange firms, banks and finance institutions are compatible with relevant international requirements, he added. — KUNA



In this still image made from video, Reda El-Hamahmy (left), the father of the alleged Louvre attacker, gives an interview in his Egypt Nile Delta home. — AP

LOUVRE SUSPECT'S FATHER DENIES SON RADICALIZED

CAIRO: The father of an Egyptian suspected of being the machete attacker in Paris Louvre museum said yesterday his son showed no sign of radicalization and he believed in his innocence. Reda El-Hamahmy, a retired police general, told AFP he had been constantly in touch with his son who worked as a sales manager in Sharjah, in the United Arab Emirates. "He went on a company trip and when it was over visited the museum. He was supposed to leave on Saturday," Hamahmy said. "He is a simple guy. We all love him," he added, saying he had not detected any signs that his son had been radicalized.

French investigators believe the man who launched a machete attack outside the Louvre in Paris, before being shot and wounded by a soldier, is a 29-year-old Egyptian who entered the country on a tourist visa. A source close to the case said the man's condition has improved in hospital and it is "no longer life-threatening".

His father has disputed the police account of how his son came to be shot outside the museum. "The French government's account is not logical. He was 1.65 meters tall (five foot five) and attacked four guards? And in the end they found nothing in his bags," he said. "I can show you pictures where he has no beard," he said, referring to beards grown by some devout Muslims. "Our household is a moderate household and mind our own business," he added.

Hamahmy said he believed the wounded suspect was his son, Abdallah El-Hamahmy, who he said has had no contact

with the family since Friday. "National Security (police) came yesterday and asked for information about him, and I gave them whatever I had," he said. Abdallah El-Hamahmy is married, with his pregnant wife currently staying in Saudi Arabia with their seven-month-old son, his father said. He sent his father a photo of himself with the Eiffel Tower in the background shortly before the clash at the Louvre.

Abdallah's uncle, Riyadh, said: "I find it incomprehensible that a young man on his way to commit a terrorist act only has a knife with him. If you tell me he had a gun, a rifle, then yes, I'd believe you, but I don't know ... All we want is the truth." Abdallah's brother Ahmed, who works at the Health Ministry in Dubai, was interrogated for several hours by security officials in the United Arab Emirates, the father said. In Egypt, several domestic security agency officers visited the family home in the Nile Delta on Friday night to question family members.

The attacker is believed to have entered France legally on a flight from Dubai on Jan 26, a French source said. The suspect bought two military machetes at a gun store in Paris and paid €1,700 (\$1,834) for a one-week stay at a Paris apartment in the chic 8th arrondissement, near the Champs-Élysées Avenue.

Investigators are examining a Twitter account of an Egyptian man named Abdallah El-Hamahmy who posted around a dozen messages minutes prior to the attack. "In the name of Allah... for our brothers in Syria and fighters across the

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WASHINGTON IN ANXIOUS UNCERTAINTY

WASHINGTON: Two weeks into his presidency, Donald Trump has thrown Washington into a state of anxious uncertainty. Policy pronouncements sprout up from the White House in rapid succession. Some have far-reaching implications, most notably Trump's temporary refugee and immigration ban, but others disappear without explanation, including planned executive actions on cybersecurity and the president's demand for an investigation into unsubstantiated voter fraud.

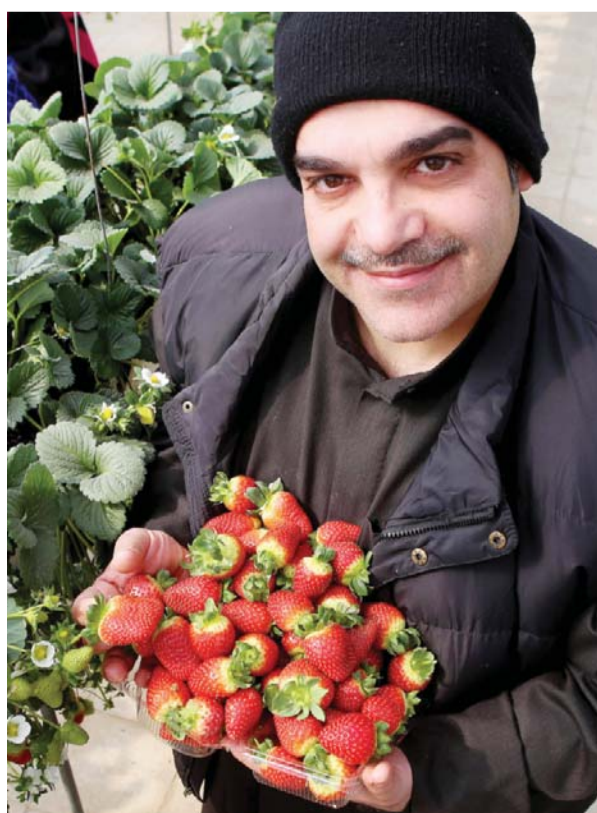
The day's agenda can quickly be overtaken by presidential tweets, which often start flashing on smartphones just as the nation's capital is waking up. "The last two weeks feel like six months," said Rep Thomas Massie. Indeed, the effect on Washington - as well as the network of lobbyists, businesses and other interest groups that orbit the political power centers - has been dizzying, beyond the normal commotion that typically accompanies a White House transition. One official compared it to walking through a sandstorm, grasping for a moment of clarity.

For Trump, a frenetic pace of activity and seemingly haphazard style is as much a part of his political brand as his signature promise to build a border wall. In business and as a candidate, he used controlled chaos to keep his rivals off balance and appears to be taking a similar approach to governing.

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US President Donald Trump chats with reporters onboard Air Force One before departing from Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland, bound for Palm Beach, Florida, on Friday. — AFP



KUWAIT: A visitor picks strawberries at the Blue Lake farm in Abdaly, 130 km north of Kuwait City, on Friday. The farm encourages people to pick their own strawberries before buying them according to weight, in an attempt to encourage agricultural tourism. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat (See Page 4)

TEHRAN VOWS 'ROARING MISSILES' IF THREATENED

DUBAI: A Revolutionary Guards commander said Iran would use its missiles if its security is under threat, as the elite force defied new US sanctions on its missile program by holding a military exercise yesterday. Tensions between Tehran and Washington have risen since a recent Iranian ballistic missile test which prompted US President Donald Trump's administration to impose sanctions on individuals and entities linked to the Revolutionary Guards.

Trump's national security adviser Michael Flynn said the Washington was putting Iran on notice over its "destabilizing activity", and Trump tweeted Tehran was "playing with fire". "We are working day and night to protect Iran's security," head of Revolutionary Guards' aerospace unit, Brigadier General Amir Ali Hajizadeh was quoted as saying by Tasnim news agency. "If we see smallest misstep from the enemies, our roaring missiles will fall on their heads," he added.

Despite the heated words, US Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said yesterday he was not considering raising the number of US forces in the Middle East to address

Iran's "misbehavior", but warned that the world would not ignore Iranian activities. Iran's Revolutionary Guards was holding the military exercise in Semnan province yesterday to test missile and radar systems and to "showcase the power of Iran's revolution and to dismiss the sanctions," according to the force's website.

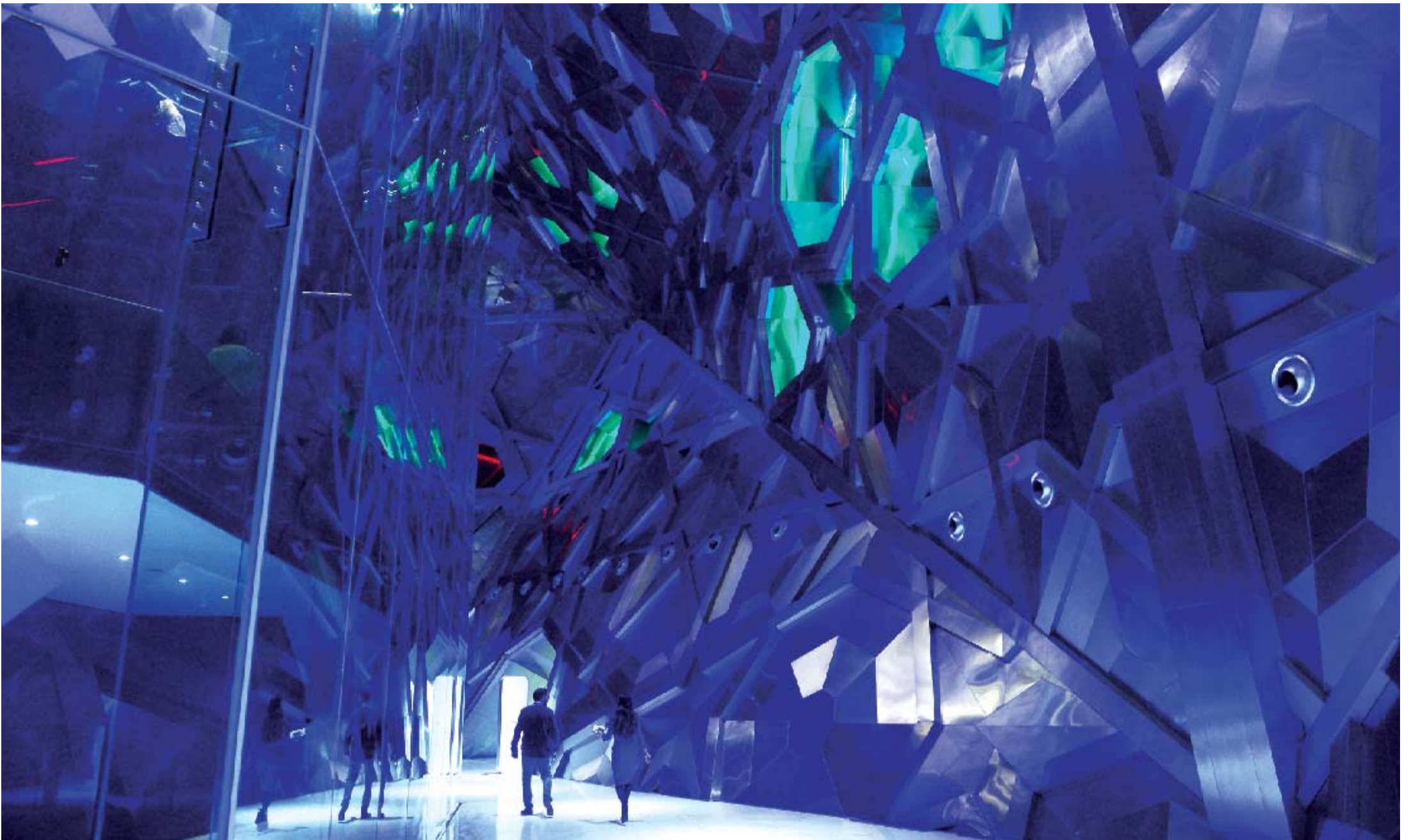
Dismissing Trump's comments that "nothing is off the table" in dealing with Tehran, the commander of Iran's ground forces said yesterday that the Islamic Republic has been hearing such threats since its 1979 revolution. "The defense capability and the offensive prowess of Iran's armed forces would make America or any other enemy regretful of any incursion," Ahmad Reza Pourdastan was quoted as saying by ISNA.

Iran's vice president yesterday urged calm heads to prevail. "These are worn-out accusations against Iran and even the (accuser) himself is ashamed of saying it," state news agency IRNA quoted Eshagh Jahangiri as saying. "If this nation is talked to respectfully and issues are resolved through negotiations and dialogue... it can be a win for everyone."

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Photo

of the day



KUWAIT: A photo taken from inside the Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center, which showcases the facility's interior design that was inspired by Islamic architecture with complex geometric shapes. — KUNA photo

NOUFEXPO ORGANIZES '1ST CONSULTING SERVICES FOR GOVERNMENTAL PROJECTS FORUM (ENCON1)'

UNDER THE PATRONAGE OF HIS HIGHNESS THE PRIME MINISTER

KUWAIT: In a joint press release, Dr Khaled Mahdi - Secretary General of the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development and Engineer Badr Al-Salman - President of the Federation of Kuwaiti Engineering Offices and Consultant Houses announced the convening of the 1st Consulting Services for Governmental Projects Forum. ENCON1 will be held under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, the Prime Minister of the State of Kuwait. NoufEXPO will organize the event due to be held at Al-Baraka Ballroom of Crowne Plaza hotel from 20 to 22 March 2017.

Dr Khaled Mahdi said that he is overwhelmed by the patronage of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. He added, "This patronage represents an invaluable support for the efforts exerted by the General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development and the Consultant Selection Committee to improve the outcome of consulting services. These, after all, are the basic foundation upon which development projects are built. All other phases that follow will be guided by the results of the consulting practice. Hence, the level of professionalism that governs the early consulting service phase will contribute to the success of projects' execution and implementation within agreed specifications, time, and budget. ENCON1 convenes under the notion of "Towards Professional and Transparent Consulting Services" to confirm that these values should govern projects' life

cycle throughout. These no doubt, help achieving the objectives of Kuwait's development plan and fulfilling the vision of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah to transform Kuwait into a global financial and trade center."

The Secretary General of the General Secretariat of the supreme Council for Planning and Development continued, "During ENCON1's opening ceremony; the Consultant Selection Committee will launch the Consulting Firms Portal. This is a comprehensive web portal through which the values of transparency will be enforced throughout all phases of consulting projects. The portal is developed using open data principles and best practices to enforce equal opportunity and disciplined governance on one of the most critical government spending channels represented by development projects. It is Kuwait's first open data implementation in a government entity to ensure full transparency throughout all its financial and administrative procedures."

Commenting on the participation of the Federation of Kuwaiti Engineering Offices and Consultant Houses at ENCON1, Engineer Salman said, "ENCON1's objectives and topics are of much relevance to us. Moreover, the patronage of His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Mubarak Al-Hamad AL-Sabah represents a compelling invitation to us all to exert all efforts to improve delivery of consulting services. ENCON1 is a clear manifestation of the strong partnership between the public



Dr Khaled Mahdi

and private sectors. The private sector is invited to lead Kuwait's economic development by encouraging competitiveness and improving efficiency benefiting from a genuine governmental support. All this should be accomplished while preserving Kuwait's social values, achieving human resources development and balanced growth; developing mandatory fit infrastructure, and setting necessary legislation and regulations. ENCON1 will have its impact on improving professional qualifications, enforcing transparency values, and exhibiting best technical practices to lead Kuwait's development plans.

Salman commented on the launch of the



Engineer Badr Al-Salman

Consulting Firms Portal by saying, "This portal is a long awaited ambition. It will assure Engineering Offices and Consulting Houses the full transparency of business processes throughout consulting services lifecycle. It will, also, encourage foreign companies to participate in Kuwait's development projects. In this technology dominated world, we have to open up and engage regionally and globally. This, in turn, will help improve the professionalism of Kuwait's engineering sector."

Dr Mahdi and Engineer Salman outlined ENCON1's program. They said that the event will feature a panel discussion regarding the documentary cycle of consulting projects.

Many senior government leaderships, as well as, the UNDP representative in Kuwait will take part. The technical sessions will leave it to many specialized companies to present their views on the design, supervision, and project management practices of both the engineering and administrative aspects of projects. Finally, ENCON1 will feature two informative workshops that will discuss the documentary cycle of projects, Consulting Firms Portal, and variation orders of consulting contracts.

Dr Mahdi and Engineer Salman concluded their press release by inviting engineering offices and consulting firms to participate effectively at this first round of ENCON1. They extended their invitation to consultants, engineering information systems analysts, project management specialists, and audit and governance specialists to benefit from this important event. They, as well, emphasized the excellent business development and networking opportunity that ENCON1's accompanying exhibition will provide to sponsoring companies where they will be able to showcase their specialized services and technologies. They invited all interested sponsors, organizations, and individuals to contact the organizing company, NoufEXPO on their phone number +965 22469921. They can also send their inquiries to info@noufexpo.com.kw, or visit ENCON1 website at www.noufexpo.com.kw/encon1.

The Federation of Kuwaiti Engineering Offices and Consultant Houses may be also contacted on +965 22420482 or website www.oiace.com.

KUWAIT AIRWAYS LINKS ARRIVAL OF 4TH B777-300ER, AIRCRAFT ACQUISITIONS TO 'DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2020'

NATIONAL CARRIER ON COURSE FOR 10 NEW AIRCRAFTS

KUWAIT: With the Kuwaiti government having outlined a comprehensive and far-reaching strategy for the financial diversification and commercial development of the country in its 'Kuwait Development Plan (KDP) 2020,' there can be little doubt that the official national carrier's aircraft acquisition plans fit hand-in-glove with the government's ambitions.

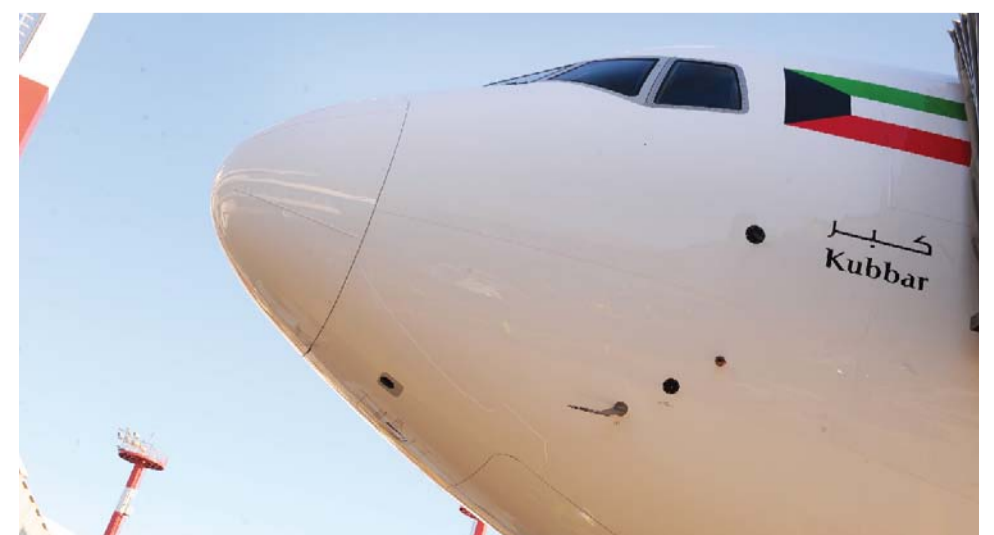
Friday's arrival - the fourth of 10 Boeing 777-300ER aircraft on order - has been named 'Kubbar' and is yet another key milestone being marked by the airline; however, Kuwait Airways' aggressive rebuilding and 'Transformation Strategy,' announced in September 2016, will also be a significant factor in supporting the government's KDP 2020 objectives to position the country as a key

regional hub for business and commerce.

In today's ever-increasing, globalized economy, few would argue with the position that a strong and competitive national airline can have a hugely positive impact on the economic prosperity of a country. Therefore, in order to deliver on the goals laid out in KDP 2020, the success of Kuwait Airways' and its aircraft acquisition policy has a role to play in turning those objectives into reality.

The contribution that aviation has already made to the economies of states in the GCC region is one that is now acknowledged worldwide. While Kuwait Airways' historical dominance in the regional aviation sector has seen increased competition in recent decades, it remains clear to investors and businesses across the country that a resurgent national carrier can only have a positive influence on the success of the KDP 2020 strategy.

"The capacity for Kuwait to position itself as an attractive proposition for international investment, tourism and be seen as a country open for business is undeniable. If all parties to the success of KDP 2020 synchronize their efforts and focus on helping realize the government's ambitions, there is a bright and proud future ahead for the State of Kuwait - both in the region and internationally," says Rasha Al-Roumi, Chairperson and CEO of Kuwait Airways. "For its part, Kuwait Airways stands ready to meet its obligations to the growth and prosperity of the wider economy and people of Kuwait," Roumi added.



KUWAIT: Kubbar - the fourth of 10 Boeing 777-300ER aircrafts acquired by Kuwait Airways.

CAFES WARNED AGAINST SERVING SHISHA TO TEENAGERS

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Cafes in Kuwait were warned yesterday against serving shisha to teenagers, as owners would be referred to investigations and expat workers would be deported if found guilty of this action. Ministry of Interior's Undersecretary Lt Gen Suleiman Al-Fahd stressed in a press release yesterday that security bodes are committed to respecting juvenile rights



Lt Gen Suleiman Al-Fahd

and providing them all facilities needed for their physical, mental, ethical, spiritual and social growth and development. Fahd added that Kuwait is one of the first countries that signed the UN's treaty on child rights in 1991, and thus the ministry will not stand still toward illegal practices at some cafes where juveniles are served shisha, as stipulated in law number 15/2015, which bans serving all types of tobacco to those younger than 21. Violators will be fined a maximum of KD 50 and that the fine will increase if the same violation is repeated. Accordingly, Fahd urged all cafe owners to respect these regulations to avoid legal accountability and deportation for expats. He also urged parents to monitor their children and report violating cafes.

Driving test

The general traffic directorate announced that the driving test department in South Surra would be transferred from today for a month, during which the premises would be refurbished by the Ministry of Public Works. The directorate added that the Mubarak Al-Kabeer section will be transferred to South Sabahiya, Farwaniya section will be transferred to Subhan and Hawally section will be transferred to the Capital traffic department in the afternoon hours from 1-5 pm.

SCHOOLS STILL ON DESPITE COLD

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: In preparation for the beginning of the second semester of the school year 2016-2017 today, the Ministry of Education strongly denied any intentions to suspend school because of the cold weather. It only stressed that all school directors are authorized to cancel the morning assembly if it is too cold for students.

Code blue

Farwaniya Hospital Manager Dr Hanan Al-Mutairi announced the success of the Code Blue (heart and lung revival) trial at the hospital after one month of application. Speaking on the sidelines of launching a public awareness campaign on the ideal use of antibiotics organized by the hospital's lab department headed by Dr Wadhwa Al-Fauzan under the auspices of Farwaniya medical zone director Dr Humoud Al-Zoby, Mutairi stressed that the experiment faced some impediments such as the lack of specialized calling devices to alert doctors in case of cardiac arrests. He said this problem was solved by using Internet-connected mobile phones and proved to be successful. Speaking about the awareness campaign, Mutairi said it involved explaining the concept of antibiotics and their uses, and that a booklet with guidelines about using antibiotics and the latest about the best medicines for every microbe was distributed. "The World Health Organization has emphasized that antibiotics abuse is one of the greatest health challenges the world is facing nowadays," he concluded.

Anti-corruption

During its meeting this morning, the parliament's public funds committee is scheduled to discuss reports that had been shelved by the Public Anti-Corruption Authority, in addition to complaints filed by the authority's board of trustees' members against their director. Informed sources said the Public Anti-Corruption Authority's Chairman Chancellor Abdul Rahman Al-Namash, his deputy Riyadh Al-Hajri and members Meshari Saad Al-Mutairi, Dawood Abdullah Al-Jarrah, Mohammed Sultan Al-Sobaei, Abdul Wahab Saleh Al-Muzaini and

Loai Ahmed Al-Saleh have been invited to the meeting. The sources added that the committee will inquire about the shelving of some reports without referring them to prosecution.

Elections law

Meanwhile, Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah is due to attend the parliament's interior and defense committee's meeting to discuss proposed amendments to the parliamentary elections law, said informed sources, noting that the government refuses to amend the condition of 'honor and honesty' for nominees on grounds that such attempts are only meant to tailor the conditions to match certain individuals. The parliamentary legislative committee will also discuss prosecution demands to lift the immunity of MPs Waleed Al-Tabtabaei and Jamaan Al-Harash to be prosecuted over charges of breaking into the parliament along with 70 other suspects in 2011.

Overlapping

Chairman of the parliament's budgets and final statements committee MP Adnan Abdulsamad said that the committee had discussed analytical studies by the State Audit Bureau about overlapping jurisdictions detected in over 65 state departments, which eventually affects the state budget. Abdulsamad expressed hope that a major restructuring of government bodies will be considered by the government.

Minister of Awqaf and Islamic affairs and Minister of State for Municipal Affairs and Chairman of the Awqaf Affairs Council Mohammed Al-Jabri headed the latter's first meeting in 2017, which discussed various issues and approved various financial statements. Further, the council also discussed the topic of unofficial mosques that are not run by the ministry and decided forming a committee to build temporary mosques pending the construction of permanent ones to be supervised and run by the ministry. Awqaf's Secretary General Mohammed Abdullah Al-Jalahma reviewed plans to build a prophetic (PBUH) traditions complex in West Mishref.

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Acting Philippines labor attache to Kuwait Angelita Narvaez was recalled yesterday by the Philippines Department of Labor and Employment Secretary Silvestre Bello III, after a Filipina was executed by Kuwaiti authorities for killing her employer's daughter and another Filipina was beaten to death by her employer on the same day - Jan 25. Narvaez was recalled a few days before her three-year stint ends on Feb 14.

"I did the job well to the best of my abilities. I served Filipinos in Kuwait with all my heart and if the price of serving the community with all honesty and wholeheartedly is a recall order, so be it. I accept this and will face the investigation," Narvaez said "While I feel bad about it, I respect the decision of our secretary of labor. I will go back home with my head high because as far as I know, I have always been very transparent with everyone," she said. "People can vouch for my performance - I followed the mandate given to us by the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration."

Narvaez said she never refused anyone asking for help. "I opened my office to all cases. If I have any shortcomings, I ask for understand-

ing, as we all have limitations. But I did not make any excuses not to perform and do my duty to help our compatriots," stressed Narvaez.

'Lack of concern'

Philippines Secretary Bello ordered Narvaez's recall for alleged



Angelita Narvaez

negligence and lack of concern for the welfare of OFWs in her jurisdiction. In a statement to local media yesterday in Manila, Bello said: "I issued a recall order for Narvaez for her inaction and lack of concern for our overseas Filipino workers." Bello said Narvaez failed to inform him

of the case of Amy Capulong Santiago when he flew to Kuwait on Jan 26. "Santiago died on January 25. I was there on January 26, and Narvaez did not inform me about Santiago's tragic fate," Bello said. Santiago was the victim of abuse and mistreatment. "Narvaez, in effect, misled the Secretary of the Department of Labor by concealing that information," Bello charged.

He also complained that Narvaez deliberately prevented him from meeting OFWs at the embassy shelter. "I was told by an OFW who returned from Kuwait that there are about 100 Filipino workers on the second floor. She hid them from me," Bello said. "She is therefore recalled and her case will be investigated by Manila."

In defense, Narvaez said she is ready to face any investigation by her department (International Labor Affairs Bureau) for the alleged negligence. "Amy Capulong Santiago died on January 25. Our beloved Secretary of Labor came to Kuwait on January 26. Amy died on the night of January 25. The following day our dear secretary of labor came. At that time, there was no report about the death of Amy, so how can I relay news that I haven't got yet," she explained.

Runaway maids

As to the issue of 'hiding' 100 more runaway housemaids when Bello visited the shelter, Narvaez claimed "it never happened." "We never hide any of the runaways. When the secretary of labor came, all the 200 plus runaway housemaids were there attending the meet and greet with the secretary. I've never hidden any of them," she said.

According to Narvaez, the so-called 100 'hidden' runaway housemaids could be those at Kuwait's Resource Center in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh. "They are not being hidden. Those are assistance to the nationals unit (ATNU) cases and they are all being cared for by the Kuwaiti government. Yes, they are kept separately because they have ATNU cases to be resolved before they are allowed to leave the country," she said.

Meanwhile, Bello said he had discussed the situation of Filipino household service workers with Kuwaiti Ambassador to the Philippines Musaed Saleh Ahmal Al-Thwaikh during the latter's visit to the DOLE office. There were no immediate details on what they discussed, although the Philippines is considering a temporary suspension on sending domestic helpers to Kuwait.

OOREDOO SERVES CUSTOMERS AROUND THE CLOCK IN 12 BRANCHES

AS PART OF ITS PLAN TO EXPAND ITS FOOTPRINT ACROSS KUWAIT

KUWAIT: Ooredoo, Kuwait's fastest network, is proudly serving its customers around the clock, seven days a week in 12 locations across Kuwait. This comes as part of Ooredoo's ongoing strategy to become closer to its customers in order to serve them better, and is in tandem with the company's core values of caring and connecting.

Ooredoo's 24 hour branches provide customers with services around the clock, seven days a week, including Ooredoo's offers on smartphones and tablets, which come with either postpaid and prepaid plans.

The branches, which are conveniently located in Kuwait's most vibrant locations, are in Sabahiya, Shaab Al-Bahri, Hateen, Salmiya Gulf Street, Mubarak Al-Kabeer, Al-Jahra, Al-Omariya, Qurtoba, Al-Messila, Abu Halifa, Kuwait International Airport, and Salmiya- Amr Bin Al-Aas Street.

The new branches follow the brand guidelines of Ooredoo's identity, giving the customers a sophisticated experience in a vibrant and lively atmosphere. This is part of the company's plan to expand its footprint around Kuwait, which was established in 2014. The company has since then increased branches with more than 70 additional branches, including 30 branches offering their services to small and medium enterprises and one drive-thru store located in Jahra, in addition to a shop fully equipped to serve customers with special needs, and 6 shops offering workshops to fix devices.

In addition to its branches and authorized dealers, Ooredoo offers its services on its comprehensive website shop.ooredoo.com.kw which offers monthly exclusive discounts and special offers, with free delivery for customers' comfort. Find more about Ooredoo's branches and latest offers on www.ooredoo.com.kw or by calling 121.



KUWAIT: Minister of State for Housing Affairs Yasser Abul and other officials tour the South Mutla City project. —KUNA



Ongoing construction works at the South Mutla City project.

HOUSING MINISTER: 2ND CONTRACT OF MUTLA CITY TO BE SIGNED IN MARCH

KUWAIT: Minister of State for Housing Affairs Yasser Abul said yesterday that the second contract of the South Mutla City project will be signed on March as scheduled. In a statement to reporters on the sidelines of a tour in South Mutla City project, Abul said that Public Authority for

Housing Welfare (PAHW) is studying all bids submitted by companies to announce the winner of the project. Abul underlined the importance of the second contract that it includes the infrastructure of 18,519 units in eight suburbs, adding that the term of the contract is 24 months. Meanwhile,

PAHW Director General Bader Al-Woqyan said the first contract was terminated due to the company's failure to meet its terms and conditions. He added that the international advisor's contract was also cancelled, and a fresh relevant plan was set out. —KUNA

BRITISH HEALTH EXPERTS TO VISIT KUWAIT SOON

KUWAIT: A British health management delegation is expected to visit Kuwait soon in order to set out necessary plans and strategies for training national staff. The would-be national staff will be running Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Hospital, the Ministry of Health said in a press release yesterday.

The British experts are expected to arrive

in Kuwait soon in order to discuss how to convey the British experiment of running and operating health utilities at Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Hospital, the ministry elaborated. A four-day workshop will be organized today at hospitals in this regard in order to boost the skills and capabilities of executives for treating patients at hospitals, it pointed out. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti farmer Abdurrahman Al-Awadhi poses near sugarcane at a reserve at the Blue Lake farm in Al-Abdali.



Kuwaitis pick strawberries at the Blue Lake farm in Al-Abdali. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



A man shows freshly picked strawberries at the Blue Lake farm in Al-Abdali.

Farmer turns **Abdali** farm into desert oasis

Homegrown strawberries, sugarcane fields open to the public

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti farmer Abdurrahman Al-Awadhi has defied Kuwait's nature and harsh weather condition to turn his personal farm into an oasis where kinds of fruits and vegetables thought to be impossible to be grown in Kuwait's desert can be found. Visitors of the "Blue Lake" farm in Al-Abdali, located 130 kilometers north of Kuwait City, can pick homegrown strawberries every Friday for 30-60 minutes after the Friday Prayer, and buy them for KD 4 a kilogram. They also can find sugarcane, corn, and other kinds of vegetables at any time during the week depending on their seasons. The farm also includes flower fields, an animal pen, a lake and tents that can be rented for KD 10 a day, while access to the entire premises is free of charge. Awadhi's personal endeavor is one of many in which Kuwaiti farmers have successfully turned their farms into producing ones yielding crops for many kinds of plants, including ones that normally cannot grow in Kuwait's harsh climate. Their properties encourage agricultural tourism and provide recreational outlets in a country with scarce local leisure options.



Kuwaiti farmer Abdurrahman Al-Awadhi checks a blossoming flower at a reserve at the Blue Lake farm in Al-Abdali.



Kuwaitis pick strawberries at the Blue Lake farm in Al-Abdali.



Kuwaitis pick strawberries at the Blue Lake farm in Al-Abdali.

INTERVIEW WITH ALISON SHAN PRICE; THE PERSON PRODUCER TALKS HOW SURVIVAL FUELS STRENGTH, DETERMINATION TO SUCCEED

By Nejouad Al-Yagout

KUWAIT: Alison Shan Price is one of those unique souls whose presence is felt the moment she walks into a room. It is not that she commands presence, but her aura speaks for itself. She has worked tirelessly in the field of dramatic arts for 20 years, and now has an MBE from Queen Elizabeth II to prove it! In this interview, however, Kuwait Times is focusing on the person rather than the persona, especially since information regarding her work is readily available online. Price is currently the CEO and Founder of One World Actors Center (OWAC) Kuwait, a leading theatre production and training center in Kuwait.

Kuwait Times: It must have been a challenge to resurrect theatre in this region, especially 20 years ago. Where did you get such resolve?

Alison Shan Price: From my family and private milestones. My grandmother started her businesses during the Great Depression. Everyone has a story to tell that would make a film script. Survival through physical hardship makes you stronger and determined to succeed. If you survive life-threatening

illnesses and loss of your belongings and loved ones, you feel different. You know that every day and people are precious. Creating theatre is always an exciting challenge. But you cannot do it alone, nor would you want to; and I have been very lucky to have met and worked with so many amazing people.

KT: Tell us about your temperament.

Price: I look in the mirror and see calm and quiet; however, recently I was privy to the funniest caricature of how other theatre people see me. So let's go with theirs... travelling at the speed of light; ultra alive early in the morning when they are still asleep; instant movement. Also, according to them, I laugh and love deeply and get sad over bad things happening to others, and hate gossip.

KT: The world of dramatic arts is not necessarily as glamorous as it appears. There are the moods and whims of all those involved and the stress that comes with presenting a show and funding. Are you a patient person? Or do you have ways to deal with the restlessness as it arises?

Price: I have been in theatre for five decades, so I totally believe that the magical 'it'll be alright on the night' is true. There are gut-wrenching moments of scheduling, money and organizational issues. But in perspective, it's a show, not a bomb. There are true artists who are the nicest of people and send good luck wishes in between organizing their own big shows. They help out, at impossible hours, if needed, or get you in touch with someone. They turn up on time, learn lines quickly and support other actors.

Then there are "wannabes" who consider one compliment entitles them to the main dressing room and who never "like" any photo on Facebook unless it's their own. They usually throw tantrums the day before the show when everyone is busy. You quickly know who to work with and who not to work with and get a lot of feedback from other directors in the country about them. I am a keeper of many secrets, so am starting a manuscript (names changed to protect the innocent) in the near future.

KT: Alison, what does success mean to you personally?

Price: Survival.

KT: I know you mentioned that you want to take a much-needed break after years of incessantly working. Are you the kind of individual who is always on the go?

Price: Totally. I get bored after 12 hours. The worst thing anyone can say to me is 'chill' or 'relax'. I love learning. When I talk to anyone, I find them fascinating and am at my happiest when I have learnt something.

KT: Finally, what many people do not know about you is that you love humor. What makes you laugh? In real life, of course!

Price: Shared situations. The English sense of humor is strange to some people. We don't laugh at people but get hysterical over empathetic situations and asides. I love comedians such as Michael McIntyre and Russell Peters and the film Date Night. We are always laughing during rehearsals - especially at the initial costume-fitting time. Life without laughter is simply not worth living.



Alison Shan Price



KUWAIT HOLDS MARATHON TO SHINE LIGHT ON CANCER

KUWAIT: Under the slogan 'Sports Beats Cancer,' men and women from across Kuwait turned out in droves yesterday for a marathon sponsored by the Public Authority for Sports (PAS), in conjunction with a team of

volunteers. The marathon kicked off from the Swimming Pool Complex located in the Arabian Gulf Road and coincides with World Cancer Day, which falls on February 4th of each year. — KUNA



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Crime

Report

CAMP THIEVES CAUGHT

KUWAIT: Three citizens and a Saudi were arrested for multiple camp robberies, said security sources, noting that a police patrol caught the robbers leaving the desert camping area with several items they failed to explain where they got them from. Notably, detectives had received various reports about camp robberies. The robbers, aged 19 to 26, confessed to stealing the items, adding they had sold some of the loot.

No deportation

Well-informed security sources strongly denied arresting or deporting any Egyptians who celebrated after the Egyptian national football team won a match against Burkina Faso in the African Nations Cup. The sources highly commended Egyptian fans' respect of the country's laws and regulations, denying that any of them broke the law as mentioned in some rumors.

Policemen tested

Security sources said the Ministry of Interior (MoI) has been randomly subjecting its personnel to drug tests, and if anyone tests positive, he is given a choice either to be treated or dismissed. The sources added that the tests are mandatory and no military personnel can reject them.

Accident

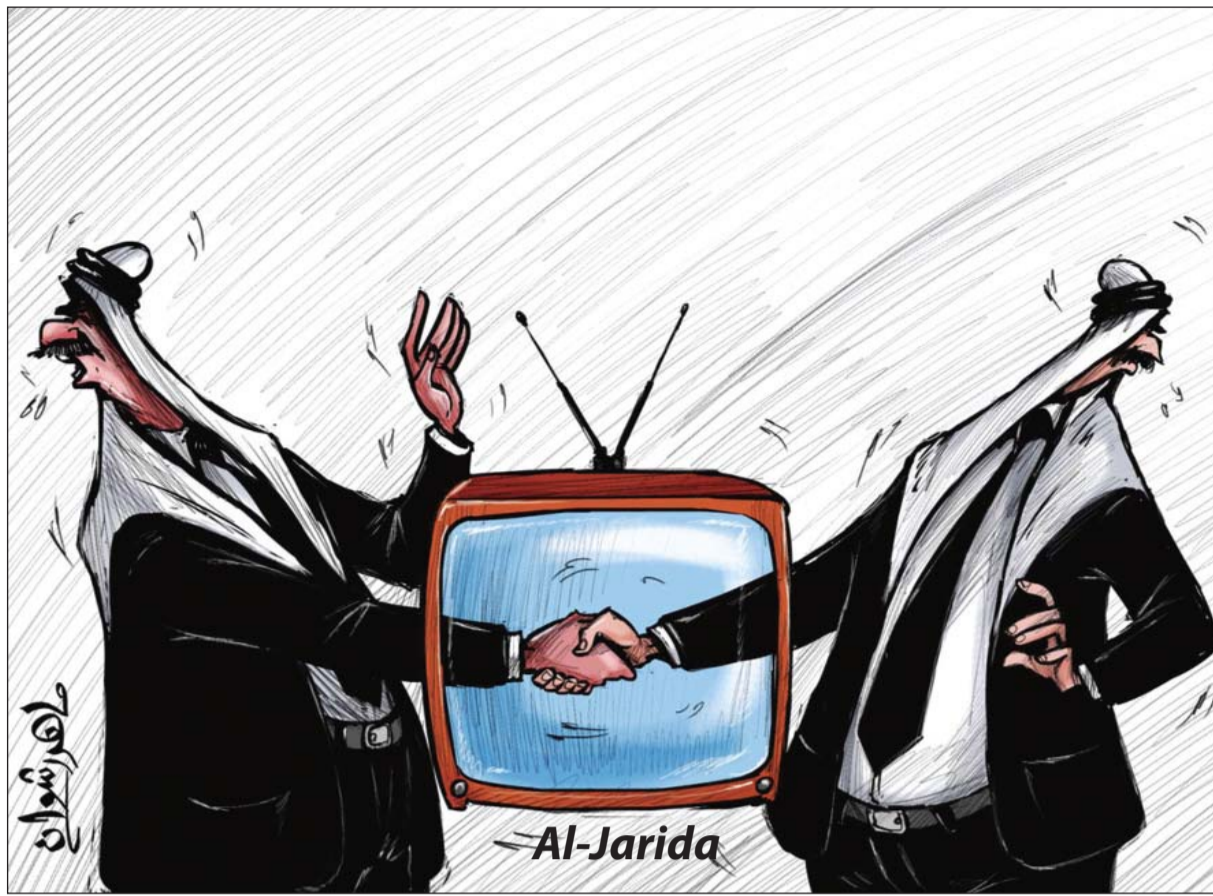
A citizen lost control over his vehicle and drove into a compatriot's garden fence in Kaifan. Security sources said the problem was resolved amicably when the driver promised to repair the damage at his expense.

Ad denied

Informed sources at a local transport company refuted stories about a provocative ad offering vehicle insurance for 'Expats Only' for KD 7, and explained that these fees were only for pickup trucks and half lorries, which are urgently needed for the company's use. So it offered transferring owners' residencies and published the low insurance fees to attract them.

Kidnap

A bedoon was arrested for abducting a citizen and forcing him to withdraw over KD 4,000 to pay the interest to a sum he had loaned him to pay off some debts, said security sources. Case papers indicate that a citizen reported that his brother had been kidnapped from a Subhan street, and on investigating the matter, detectives found the suspects were part of a gang led by a bedoon that was active in cashing the value of purchases. The gang had paid off a KD 55,000 debt of the kidnapped person in return for interest they never got because a go-between had taken it. Detectives also found that after taking the kidnapped person to various banks to withdraw the amount, the suspects took him to the airport, where bank branches work 24/7. They were arrested there. — Translated from the Arabic press



Al-Anbaa

EXPATS AND UNGRATEFULNESS

By Awadh Al-Fadhli

Religiously speaking, we refuse to slander our expatriate brothers and sisters who are our siblings in religion, Arabism and humanity. They have undeniably done us favors, even if they are paid to do their jobs.

We are the ones who needed their support, and still do. We have recruited some to teach our children, others to design and construct our infrastructure, others to keep our environment clean, disease-free and habitable, and others to provide us with medical services.

Those expat siblings of ours came to this country at our request

An old Arab says that: "I become forever indebted to anyone who teaches me even one letter!"

Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) Hadith also glorifies productive workers when he said: "It would be better for a man to go out logging instead of begging people for charity." Those expat siblings of ours came to this country at our request to do decent, regular jobs and be paid for them. They did not climb walls or infiltrate our border against our will. So, it is unacceptable under any circumstances to offend them by insulting statements!

Kuwait is a sovereign country. It is not a new one. The topic of demography has been subject to discussion since the state was founded, and we began hosting expats to help develop our country. Only the ungrateful amongst us would deny the favors they have done us. The issue has been discussed at length, and the state is the sole decision-maker.

This issue has social, cultural, economic and political dimensions and should not be summed up by clumsy media statements attempting to flirt with voters, the majority of whom see all sides of this particular issue.

We therefore urge reasonable executives and legislators to study the matter meticulously and objectively to make the right decisions that would serve your country and people. We hope this will lead them to adjust demography according to realistic, scientific measures without offending our expat siblings and partners in development.

Therefore, lawmakers, the ones elected by the people, let us replace slogans and statements with legislation and reform, because the people who choose you expect you to seek true reform rather than staging scenes. The people want real representatives, not actors and actresses!

— Translated by Kuwait Times

Al-Anbaa

ARABS' PRIMARY ENGINEER

By Saad Al-Mo'tesh

Any structure built to last a long time has to have strong foundations and skilled, experienced architects to build them. If the architect is focused on the long-term, the owner will rest assured that the job will be well-planned and that he would not leave a single detail to chance.

If you ask any employee in our Foreign Ministry for the reasons behind Kuwait's successful foreign diplomacy, he will tell you that it is the strong foundation laid by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah during his time as foreign minister. Kuwait's success in building diplomatic relationships is plain for all to see. It has become a role model for diplomats worldwide.

The latest success is the appointment of Kuwait's chancellor Faleh Majid to the head of the Arab League's mission in Ankara, Turkey. The appointment is not luck; the process is strenuous, including interviews and tests conducted by the Arab League, a fact that reflects the true success of Kuwait in the diplomatic field.

Thank you, Your Highness, for wisely laying Kuwait's strong diplomatic foundations, which are unrivaled worldwide and cannot be replicated. Appointing one of your children, Majid, to the position proves the strength of the foundations laid whilst you were the Amir of Arab diplomacy. Long live primary engineer of Kuwait's diplomacy!

— Translated by Kuwait Times

Kuwait's success in building diplomatic relationships is plain for all to see. It has become a role model for diplomats worldwide.

NBK GRANTS CHILDREN'S WISHES: VICTOR BECOMES REAL-LIFE BOXER

PART OF 'I DREAM TO BE' INITIATIVE

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) continues its 'I Dream to Be' initiative, a first-of-a-kind initiative that aims at granting wishes for children with severe illnesses around Kuwait, giving them the chance to live their dreams. Victor Abraham, who is undergoing treatment at NBK

Gym, where he was given special lessons and practices.

The Burrow's staff alongside with Victor's family and the NBK team were given a tour of the area and learnt all the boxing techniques and trainings through participating in various activities, competitions and



Hospital, has always dreamed of being a boxer. NBK and the Burrow Gym helped him make his dream come true.

NBK's family organized a visit for Victor and his father to The Burrow

many other training techniques.

The Burrow's team greeted Victor with a boxing show, giving him precious memorabilia that will help with his future as a boxer. "Victor's dream to become a boxer is yet another wish

granted through NBK's initiative 'I Dream To Be.' We are proud to be a part of the children's wishes and expand our support to them as much as possible to fulfill their dreams," said Joanne Al-Abdul Jaleel, NBK Public Relations Officer.

"I Dream To Be' initiative is a lifetime experience for children," she added. "This initiative is a great way to spread joy and show that there's always a positive side to a difficult situation."

NBK gives top priority to children through its commitment to its corporate social responsibility. NBK works closely with the Kuwait Association for the Care of Children in Hospitals (KACCH), Bayt Abdullah for the Care of Children in Hospice (BACCH) and several other special needs organizations to maximize its reach to all the children in numerous hospitals and schools.

NBK has been at the forefront of supporting Kuwait's community through a range of initiatives toward education, health, sports and social responsibilities. The establishment of NBK's Children Hospital for Oncology and Hematology at Al Sabah Medical Area stands as one of many ongoing corporate social initiatives toward health and children.

'I Dream To Be' aims at focusing and supporting NBK's efforts towards children and addressing their needs as much as possible.



Gulf Bank representatives pose with the three winners of the first monthly red account draw.

GULF BANK WELCOMES RED ACCOUNT WINNERS INTO ITS HEAD OFFICE

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank was pleased to welcome the three winners of the first monthly red account draw on Monday January 30, 2017 and present them with their Apple prizes. The red account draw was held on Monday January 23, 2017.

Yousef Ahmad Edrees, winner of the iPhone 7, Mohammed Saleh Hussain, winner of the iPad Pro, and Abeer Khalil Salem Al-Rashed, winner of the iWatch all visited Gulf Bank Head Office where they were greeted by Manal Barakat - Manager of red and Nassour Consumer Banking and Mohammad Al-Otaibi-Manager of External Relations at Gulf Bank.

Upon welcoming the lucky winners, Barakat said: "We are thrilled to have in our Head Office. We are also glad that you were all fortunate enough to win exciting Apple prizes that would be useful to you in your daily student lives. Thank you for being Gulf Bank's customers and for trusting our products and services."

Gulf Bank's red is an account for high school students, college and university students aged between 15 and 25. Eligible customers will get the chance to enter the draw automatically and on a monthly basis, upon transferring their student allowances.

The next draw dates are announced as follows:
- February 20, 2017
- March 30, 2017



Manal Barakat, representative of Gulf Bank, hands over a prize to one of the red account draw winners.

- April 24, 2017
- May 22, 2017
- June 29, 2017
- July 24, 2017
- August 30, 2017
- September 28, 2017
- October 23, 2017
- November 20, 2017
- January 11, 2018

In addition to the Apple prizes, students will have the opportunity to win a Fiat 500-Model 2017 at the annual car draw, upon transferring their allowance! Also, movie tickets at all Cinescape theatres will be available for only KD2 seven days a week by

simply being a red account holder; not to mention the exclusive offers from Edfa3ly, which is an international internet shopping services company.

Gulf Bank invites all students to take part in its red account draws, as they might be the lucky winners for year 2017! To take part in the red account draws, prospective customers can open an account at any one of Gulf Bank's 56 branches, transfer online using the Bank's App or through the bank's bilingual website at www.e.gulfbank.com, or call the Customer Contact Center on 1805805.





US-backed Syrian militias in a new phase of assault

EPIC BATTLE LOOMS OVER US SUPREME COURT PICK



TEHRAN: In this file photo, Iranian armed forces members march in a military parade marking the 36th anniversary of Iraq's 1980 invasion of Iran, in front of the shrine of late revolutionary founder Ayatollah Khomeini, just outside Tehran, Iran. By putting Iran 'on notice,' the new US administration is laying the groundwork for a more confrontational approach toward the Islamic Republic. — AP

US PRESIDENT SLAPS SANCTIONS ON IRAN

SANCTIONS PROVOKE ANGRY RESPONSE FROM TEHRAN

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump slapped fresh sanctions on Iran's weapons procurement network Friday, provoking an angry response from Tehran in what is an increasingly tense stand-off. Officials said the new measures were in response to Iran's recent ballistic missile test and its support for the Houthi rebels in Yemen, who recently targeted a Saudi warship. The new sanctions do not yet mean that the US has abandoned commitments it made under the deal to lift measures aimed at Iran's nuclear program, officials said.

But Trump has made no secret of his contempt for that accord, which his predecessor Barack Obama approved in July 2015, and officials said Friday's measures would not be the last. "Iran is playing with fire - they don't appreciate how 'kind' President Obama was to them. Not me!" Trump tweeted. Underlining what he sees as the tougher stance under Trump rather than Obama, hardline US National Security Adviser Michael Flynn drew a stark line in the sand.

"The days of turning a blind eye to Iran's hostile and belligerent actions toward the United States and the world community are over," he said. "This behavior seems continuous despite the very favorable deal given to Iran by the Obama Administration. These sanctions target these behaviors." Iran reacted angrily to the sanctions, vowing to impose "legal limitations" on Americans that Tehran alleges are involved in creating and supporting "extreme terrorist groups." US intelligence and Treasury officials are constantly scrutinizing Iran's networks, looking for evidence of extremist funding and advanced weapons procurement.

'Strategic review'

The immediate trigger for the sanctions was Iran's test, on Sunday, of a ballistic missile that US officials judge to have been capable of one day carrying a nuclear warhead. But the latest detailed list of designations has clearly been in preparation for some time, and the White House says "nothing is off the table" even military action. "We are undertaking a larger strategic review," a senior US administration official told reporters. "The launch of the missile was the triggering event." Washington is also concerned about attacks by Houthi rebels, a powerful faction in Yemen's civil war which US intelligence believes is armed and supported by Iran.

This week Houthi forces attacked a Saudi warship operating off Yemen and on Friday, a US official said: "We're very concerned about freedom of navigation in the Bab El-Mandeb area." The senior official said Iran was "not necessarily responsible for every tactical decision" made by Houthi forces, but that

it will be made to bear responsibility for its "proxies." The United States has already protested about Iran's missile test at the United Nations, arguing it was "inconsistent" with UN Security Council Resolution 2231.

Angry taunts

But Russia, which is allied with Iranian forces in its defense of Bashar Al-Assad's Syrian regime, is unlikely to allow new international sanctions to target Tehran. US Treasury officials hope that preventing Iran's networks in Lebanon and China from buying US goods or using the US financial system will curtail their activity. Nevertheless, Trump's pronouncements on the 2015 nuclear deal, and Iran's angry response that his taunts are "baseless" and "provocative," have raised fears of an imminent showdown.

The nuclear deal obliged Iran to curtail its nuclear program and halt any nuclear weapons research in exchange for relief from US and international sanctions targeting the sector. It was agreed between Tehran and six powers-Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the US-and Obama's White House hailed it as a blow against nuclear proliferation. Trump, Israel and many US foreign policy hawks argue instead that the deal was too soft and that the windfall Iran won with sanctions relief will be funneled to terror networks.

If the deal collapses, however, some observers fear a nuclear arms race in the Middle East. US officials insist that the new sanctions have no bearing on the deal-for now. "Iran has to determine its response to our actions. Iran has a choice to make," a senior administration official said. "We are going to continue to respond to their behavior in an ongoing way and at an appropriate level to continue to pressure them to change their behavior." Many in Washington are arguing for tougher action, and hawks in Congress have been calling for broad measures to target entire sectors of Iran's fragile economy.

Severe price

"Unless the Iranian regime pays a severe price for its malign activities, they are unlikely to stop," said Mark Dubowitz, CEO of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies. Think tank the Eurasia Group said the fate of the nuclear deal itself is in US hands and will be decided by "the harshness of the sanctions Trump puts in place." If he sticks to designating new individuals for existing sanctions, the deal will probably hold-"but it is a close call"-the group said in a briefing note. If he aims for broader sanctions designed to hobble the Iranian economy, it may fall apart. — AFP

'BATTLE OF THE TOILETS' TO GET ITS DAY IN US SUPREME COURT

WASHINGTON: The US Supreme Court on Friday said it will consider which bathrooms transgender people are allowed to use at a hearing next month, amid raging debate on the politically charged issue. The case, set to be heard March 28, involves 17-year-old Gavin Grimm, who was born a female but identifies as a male. He filed suit to be allowed to use the boys' bathroom at his high school in Gloucester County, Virginia.

One of the highest-profile cases this session, it is likely to be heard by the conservative Neil Gorsuch-President Donald Trump's pick for a vacancy on the Supreme Court-if he is confirmed.

Should the case be heard before Gorsuch or another ninth and final justice is installed, the matter could end in a tie because the court is currently

divided between four conservative and four liberal-leaning justices.

The previous administration of President Barack Obama has said public schools should grant access to toilets and locker rooms based on the gender with which students identify, not the birth gender. But more than a dozen Republican-controlled states, bitterly opposed to that approach, are challenging the federal government in court. Some conservatives see the directive from Washington as improper interference in local school affairs and an abuse of executive power. Many opponents of the Obama administration's position-who point to both their religious values and questions of security and privacy-rally behind the slogan "No men in women's bathrooms." — AFP

HCA NHS Ventures



Committed to collaboration

HCA NHS Ventures is a subsidiary of HCA International which was set up in 2006, the HCA NHS Ventures division leads on private partnerships with NHS Trusts across the country.

Harley Street at UCH is a joint partnership with top teaching hospital University College London Hospital, formed in 2006. Based on level 15 in the tower at UCLH, the 18 bed acute facility is a specialist cancer centre for complex and rare conditions. Patient rooms are private and en-suite offering panoramic views across London. We offer medical and surgical care including day case chemotherapy and a comprehensive JACIE accredited bone marrow and stem cell transplant service one of only a few in the UK. The centre offers the pioneering cord blood transplant, this treatment significantly widens the opportunity to find a suitable unrelated donor particularly beneficial for international patients.

The Young Person's Unit at Harley Street at UCH is the only private teenage cancer unit in Europe, treating any form of cancer in 13-19 year olds and further establishes the relationship with UCLH. The 6 bedded Unit treats all kinds of cancers and provides high quality care. All rooms are private and en-suite with views across central London. There are facilities in each room for a parent or guardian to stay with patients throughout their treatment and international entertainment packages, including internet access to keep in touch with friends and family abroad. Patients also have access to educational facilities and an entertainment lounge. 5* catering is provided with specially adapted menus to suit international patient requirements.

State-of-the-art technology includes the revolutionary TrueBeam STxTM, the latest radiotherapy and radiosurgical equipment which the most advanced linear accelerator in the world and is the first of its kind to be installed in the UK.

Harley Street at Queen's is a joint partnership with Barking, Havering and Redbridge University Hospitals Trust, based at Queen's Hospital Romford, offering advanced cancer, neurosurgical and general surgery treatment. It is the only centre of its kind in Essex and includes a dedicated High Dependency Unit, Chemotherapy Day Care Unit and advanced radiotherapy through a dedicated linear accelerator including

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The Christie Clinic is the latest HCA NHS Venture and a partnership with The Christie NHS Foundation Trust in Manchester. The £35million development houses a state-of-the-art cancer clinic with 34 inpatient rooms, 10 chemotherapy chairs, advanced radiotherapy, sophisticated operating theatres and private patient pharmacy. This impressive facility takes the HCA standard of care outside of London to Manchester and the North of England. Located in the heart of Manchester The Christie Clinic offers light and airy private en-suite rooms, with international entertainment packages and is in close proximity to the city centre.



PENTAGON PUBLISHES, THEN PULLS YEMEN RAID VIDEO

WASHINGTON: A US commando raid in Yemen that was beset with problems triggered fresh controversy Friday after the Pentagon published a jihadist video meant to highlight the value of intel seized during the operation, only to pull it moments later. The video, which US special operations forces seized from a computer, depicted a masked jihadist at a whiteboard delivering lessons on "How to Destroy The Cross" and demonstrating how to make explosives.

Trouble is, the video was about 10 years old and had been circulated online before. "We didn't know it was an old file," said US Central Command spokesman Colonel John Thomas. He said he pulled the video because he did-

n't want critics to claim the military was rehashing old intel, and he stressed commandos grabbed a trove of more current and useful files that remain classified.

"I just didn't want anyone to say... we are putting out the information and trying to be deceptive, because that's not the case," Thomas said. The White House and Pentagon have been on the defensive since Sunday's raid the first authorized by President Donald Trump—which targeted an Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula compound in Yemen. A Navy SEAL was killed and three other US troops were wounded in a fierce firefight with AQAP fighters, including women.

Three more service members were

injured when their tilt-rotor aircraft made a "hard landing." The \$75 million MV-22 Osprey had to be destroyed in place to avoid having it fall into enemy hands.

And on Wednesday, the Pentagon acknowledged that several non-combatants, including children, had apparently been killed in the raid. White House spokesman Sean Spicer on Thursday said the raid was a "success by all standards." The military seldom puts videos online highlighting intel it has seized. Thomas said the raid was successful from an intelligence perspective. "This is more information than we've gotten at any one time from an AQAP location (in Yemen) up till now," he said. —AFP



SANAA: Men walk amid the rubble of a house destroyed by a Saudi-led airstrike on the outskirts of Sanaa, Yemen. — AP



AL-BAB: Fighters from the Free Syrian Army disembark from an armored vehicle near the town of Bizaah northeast of the city of Al-Bab, some 30 kilometers from the Syrian city of Aleppo. — AFP

US-BACKED SYRIAN MILITIAS IN NEW PHASE OF RAQQA ASSAULT

IS BEING FOUGHT BY 3 SEPARATE ENEMIES

RAQQA PROVINCE: An alliance of US-backed militias started a new phase of its campaign against the Islamic State-held city of Raqqa yesterday, aiming to complete its encirclement and sever the road to militant strongholds in Deir al-Zor province. The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) said in a statement the action was being undertaken with "increasing support from the (US-led) international coalition forces" through both air strikes and backing from coalition special forces on the ground.

The SDF, which includes the powerful Kurdish YPG militia, launched its multi-phased campaign aimed at encircling and ultimately capturing Raqqa in November. It is the main US partner in the fight against Islamic State in Syria. Fighting also raged between Islamic State and Syrian government forces northeast of Aleppo, where the Syrian army is nearing the IS-held city of Al-Bab, risking a confrontation with Turkish forces that are fighting the group in the same area.

The Syrian army captured a town from IS to the south of the city yesterday, while the Turkey-backed forces captured one to its east, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported. Islamic State is being fought in separate campaigns in Syria by the US-backed SDF, the Turkish army and the Syrian rebel groups it backs, and the Syrian army with help from the

Russian air force and Iranian-backed militia. A SDF commander told Reuters the forces had so far advanced a few kilometres (miles) in the latest phase, which aims to capture areas to the east of the city, including the highway linking it to Deir al-Zor province.

Deir al-Zor, which is almost entirely in Islamic State hands, stretches all the way to the Iraqi border. A Kurdish military source told Reuters on Tuesday that the goals of this phase included capturing the main highway. Several hundred US special forces soldiers have been supporting SDF operations against Islamic State in northern Syria. France said in June that its special forces were advising rebels in the same area. Representatives of the US-led coalition looked on as the statement declaring the start of the new phase was read out in a village in northern Raqqa province.

Phase three

This is the third phase of the Raqqa operation. The first phase targeted areas north of Raqqa city. The second, targeting areas to the west of the city, is ongoing, with SDF forces yet to capture the Islamic State-held Euphrates dam. Air strikes on Friday in Raqqa hit two bridges over the Euphrates river, hindering movement from the city southwards and killing six IS militants, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights

reported. US support for the SDF has been a point of tension with NATO ally Turkey, which views the YPG as an extension of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), a group that has fought a three-decade insurgency in Turkey. The United States says it is providing training and material support only to Arab elements of the SDF. It supplied them last month with armoured vehicles for the first time to help in the Raqqa campaign. US President Donald Trump signed an executive order last week requesting the Pentagon, joint chiefs of staff and other agencies to submit a preliminary plan in 30 days for defeating Islamic State.

One key decision awaiting the Trump administration is whether to directly provide weapons to the YPG. The US-backed campaign against Islamic State in Syria has focused mostly on northern parts of the country. Turkey launched its own offensive against the group along the border in August, deploying its army in support of Free Syrian Army rebel groups. The Turkish campaign, which also aims to prevent further expansion of YPG control, has been encountering fierce Islamic State resistance in al-Bab since December.

Syrian government forces have staged a rapid advance of their own towards al-Bab in the last two weeks. — Reuters

IRAQI MAN 'SPEECHLESS' AFTER 7-YEAR-WAIT TO GET INTO US

NEW YORK: Munther Alaskry first bonded with American Marines over a shared love of Metallica. He later cleared roads of bombs for US troops and translated for them, helping the military navigate his war-torn country. The 37-year-old Iraqi engineer spent nearly a decade working for the US government in his home country and received death threats for doing so. On Friday, a bespectacled Alaskry, his wife and children stepped onto American soil to begin new lives. His arrival ended an anxiety-filled week in which he was initially banned from the United States because of President Donald Trump's immigration order.

His life, he said, had suddenly turned into a feel-good film. "I don't believe this is real," he said. "We always watch American movies, and this is just like my life is in one now. I'm speechless." Alaskry waited seven years for a special visa to the United States. But the last week seemed the longest: He and his family were booted off the final leg of their US-bound flight only hours after Trump's Jan 27 executive order halted travel from Iraq and six other Muslim-majority countries to the United States for 90 days.

His wife was shaking as she was escorted off the plane in Turkey. Their children were crying. When they returned to Baghdad, the ordeal kept him up at night. Alaskry thought their hopes of living free from death threats had been shattered. Then the US Embassy called and told Alaskry he would be welcome. After arriving in New York at last, the family filled out paperwork for five hours. Alaskry said he felt like emotionally he had gone between "hell and heaven." Less than a week ago, he struggled to console his 7-year-old daughter, who had asked him through tears "Why the Americans don't want us?"

On Friday, his daughter clutched a colorful paper sign covered in hearts and the words "Welcome Munther and family." It was given to the girl by a woman from a New York synagogue who volunteered to give the family a ride to a hotel. "I'm so excited," Alaskry said at the hotel, where his children were playing with Legos, blocks and other toys given to them by New Yorkers who turned out to help. Alaskry was among nearly a dozen Iraqi interpreters who told The Associated Press they were taken off planes or were told their flights were cancelled after Trump's order, which also banned refugees from Syria indefinitely. The ban outraged combat veterans who credited the Iraqis with saving their lives. The Pentagon recommended

that Iraqis who had supported the US mission be let in.

Days after the order, US Embassy officials in Baghdad began contacting Iraqis who had received special immigrant visas because they worked for the US government during the war. Among them were Alaskry and a 26-year-old man who had worked for the State Department vetting Iraqi contractors. Alaskry first started working for the US military in 2003 after meeting Marines in the streets of Baghdad. He translated for the Army and National Guard and then cleared away bombs. In 2005, he fled to Jordan after a threatening letter was left hanging from his car door.

He returned to Iraq and got a job with an Iraqi company that supported K-9 teams for the US mission and later worked for a US government-funded project that provided information on health care and trauma to Iraqis displaced by the fighting. All the while, he waited for his visa to the US, hoping to raise his children in a safe place. He applied when his daughter was a year old and was still waiting four years later when his son was born. Meanwhile, he and his family limited their outings, afraid of the violence and crime. After hundreds of emails, multiple interviews and medical exams, he got the call in December. The visas were ready.

Alaskry promised his daughter that she would finally see Disneyland. He quit his job, sold his car and other belongings and bought their plane tickets, spending more than \$5,000. After he and his family were pulled from the plane in Turkey, he had to buy four more tickets to return to Baghdad. They sat in silence in a taxi as they went to his in-laws' home. "I felt so alone," Alaskry said. Then he turned on the TV and saw the protests at US airports. "Every time I see those people protesting on the news, I cry," Alaskry said. "It's touching to me. These people don't know me. They don't know my story, though there are hundreds like me who supported the American troops."

When Trump was elected, Alaskry said, he was happy because he believed he would help Iraq get rid of the Islamic State group. "I just want to tell Mr Trump, President Trump: 'We are your allies,'" he said. "Please let us be your friends. We want to be your friends. Don't let the Iraqi people down. We look to America like it is our big brother." In the end, he said, US veterans, including the veteran-run No One Left Behind organization, came to his rescue during what he felt were his life's darkest moments after his return to Baghdad. — AP

NIGERIAN POLITICIAN RETURNS HOME AFTER YEARS IN UK JAIL

LAGOS: One of Nigeria's most powerful men, who was jailed in Britain for money laundering and fraud in a landmark anti-corruption case, has returned home, his aides said yesterday. "Chief James Ibori has arrived. He landed in Abuja in the early hours," said Ighoyota Amori, a political adviser to Ibori, who was governor of the oil-rich Delta state between 1999 and 2007. He said Ibori, who was released in London in December after serving just over four years of a 13-year jail term, would later fly to the southern port city of Warri in Delta state. "A chartered private plane will fly him to Warri and he will land at Osubi airfield operated by Shell," he added.

The former politician would be received at the airstrip by supporters and sympathizers who have lined up to welcome him back, he added. "For now, it is going to be a quiet ceremony. An elaborate reception will be organized later for him at Oghara, his hometown," he said. Ibori's media aide, Tony Eluemunor, also confirmed his arrival, saying only: "He is in town. I will keep you posted later." Ibori was jailed in April 2012 for fraud amounting to nearly 50 million pounds (at the time \$78.5 million/62 million euros) following a drawn-out extradition procedure and his evasion of arrest and prosecution in Nigeria. He had fled to Dubai in 2010, from where he was extradited to Britain.

Rare blow against graft

Anti-corruption campaigners say billions of pounds of ill-gotten wealth is moved each year through Britain, its overseas territories and dependencies and Ibori's conviction was a rare success against global graft. Ibori, 57, has vowed to appeal the conviction, claiming that at least one police officer involved in the investigation against him had been compromised by taking bribes.

London's Metropolitan Police has said it has investigated the claim but no charges were brought. Transparency International on Friday called Ibori's intent to appeal "an affront to justice." "Ibori claims that the



Former governor of Nigeria's oil-rich Delta State James Ibori

police who investigated him were themselves corrupt. "All allegations of corruption against the police force must be taken with the utmost seriousness and independently investigated, and those found guilty should be held accountable," it said. "But this should have no bearing on the guilt of an individual who amassed an astonishing personal fortune, whilst his notional official salary as a state governor would typically have been no more than \$25,000 annually," it said. "Attempts to mask his own corrupt dealings by highlighting corruption elsewhere must not be allowed to prevail." Opinions are divided in Nigeria itself about whether Ibori should face a fresh trial on his return given the strong anti-corruption stance of President Muhammadu Buhari. Ibori is said to have partially funded the election of Umaru Yar'Adua in his successful bid to become president in 2007. Even during his time in prison, he is said to have influenced the election of the current Delta state governor and other politicians. — AFP

VICTIMS ANGRY; RUSSIA CUTS DOMESTIC ABUSE PENALTIES

MOSCOW: Alexandra Glebova knows only too well the trauma of domestic violence in Russia after suffering years of physical and psychological abuse at the hands of her father. "He would always hit me on the head," Glebova, 26 said. "Sometimes he hit me so hard I bounced off his hand round the whole room like a ping-pong ball." Now a law set to be signed by President Vladimir Putin will soften the punishment for such domestic violence from a jail term to a fine. Already fast-tracked through parliament, the proposed law was drawn up by conservative pro-Kremlin lawmakers who argue that tough legislation on domestic abuse represented undue interference into family life.

But the change has infuriated rights groups and victims and prompted unusually heated debate in a country where violence at home is not seen as out of the ordinary. Glebova, whose father abused her for around five years but was never reported to the police, said the proposed law had prompted her to speak out. "With this law, they break lives," she said. "These are people, and the authorities should protect people. It turns out they protect some people but others not at all."

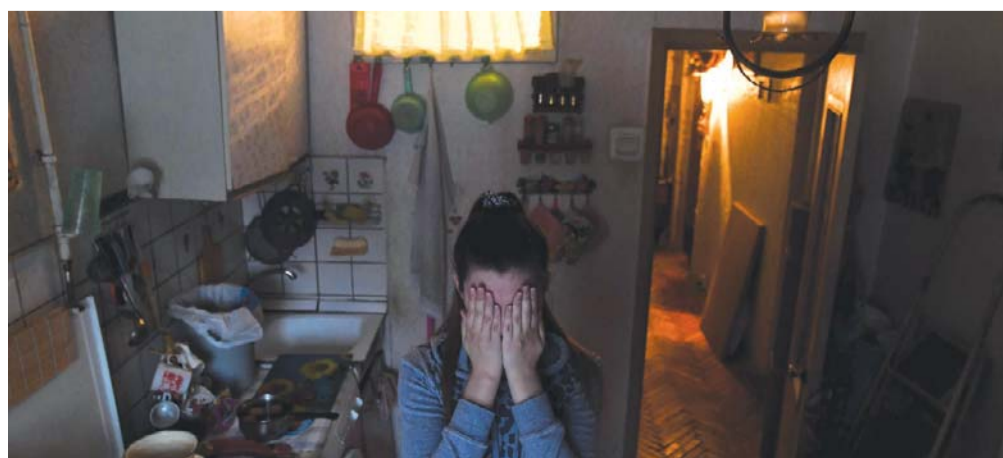
Living with her boyfriend in Moscow, she said she still suffers from depression and has nightmares about her "tyrant" father, with whom she has ended contact. One in five Russian women has suffered physical violence from a partner, according to a 2011 official report. Rights group ANNA estimates 7,500 women died in 2015 from

domestic violence. "If he beats you, it means he loves you," a popular saying goes, and a recent survey by the state-run opinion polling agency found 59 percent thought such violence could be acceptable.

In Russia there is no separate law covering domestic violence where the victim is living with the attacker, unlike in many other countries, but rather it is lumped in under battery. There are also no restraining orders against abusers. Now the new legislation would cut the punishment that first-time abusers could face from two years in jail to a fine and says they will only face criminal

charges if they reoffend within a year. Even then, the onus will be on the victim to launch legal action.

Proponents of the new law, such as prominent senator Yelena Mizulina, slam Western countries for taking children into care and praises patriarchal values and corporal punishment. She claimed the changes offer the "very good" option of community service for abusers "which won't hit the family budget." Meanwhile foreign affairs committee chief Konstantin Kosachev said the West was criticizing the measure with the aim "of attacking our country." — AFP



MOSCOW: Alexandra, 26, a victim of domestic violence, poses for pictures in a kitchen at a flat in Moscow. — AFP

MASSACRE? JOKES FLY IN CITY KNOWN FOR CAR-EATING SINKHOLE

KENTUCKY: A White House adviser's commentary about a massacre in Kentucky that never happened has sparked seemingly endless snickering online, with jabs like "never remember" and "I survived the Bowling Green massacre." Kellyanne Conway mentioned the fictional massacre in an MSNBC interview Thursday as the reason for a temporary travel ban for Iraqis in 2011, saying it also proved why the Trump administration's ban was necessary. It thrust this college town back into the national spotlight, nearly three years after a sinkhole that swallowed several classic Corvettes at a museum in Bowling Green garnered worldwide attention.

Even Big Red, the beloved, furry Western Kentucky University mascot, wasn't immune: One social media post shows him sprawled on the ground with the inscription "Never forget." "The jokes are flying for sure," said Guy Jordan, who teaches at Western Kentucky. "My sense of things is that we are today a city of people walking around looking at their phones and giggling softly to ourselves." Jordan quipped the only massacres in Bowling Green have been some of Western's football victories. For Bowling Green radio personality Jelisa Chatman, Conway's remarks were like a gift from heaven as an on-the-air subject.



Kellyanne Conway

"You wake up in the morning and you think, 'What am I going to talk about today?'" she said. "And God is like, 'here you go. You need something to talk about,

how about this?'" At Home Cafe & Marketplace, the most popular pizza Friday was "the Bowling Green Massacre" pie. The specialty pizza with blackened chicken, mac and cheese and jalapenos was on pace to set a one-day sales record at the Bowling Green restaurant, said owner Josh Poling. "The minute I heard it last night, I was like, 'Oh gosh, that's too good of an opportunity to pass up,'" he said. All proceeds from the specialty pizza's sales will go to the Southern Poverty Law Center, he said.

Meanwhile, someone registered the domain name bowlinggreenmassacre.com, and people clicking on the site were automatically directed to the website of the American Civil Liberties Union. Conway initially cited the Bowling Green "massacre" as a reason why the Trump administration's temporary ban on immigration from several Muslim-majority nations is necessary. She said President Barack Obama implemented a similar ban in 2011 after two men from Iraq were arrested in Kentucky on charges that they plotted to send money and weapons to Al-Qaeda. The men had been mistakenly admitted to the US as refugees in 2009 but never were accused of plotting attacks inside the US.

Conway tweeted Friday that she meant to say "terrorists" instead, and not everyone in Bowling Green was piling on. Mayor Bruce Wilkerson said he

understands how someone can "misspeak" during an interview, and said he appreciated the "clarification." Asked how people were responding, the mayor said: "People roll their eyes at trying to make a mountain out of a mole hill." Bowling Green is the home of Republican US Sen Rand Paul. His spokeswoman said Friday the focus should be on immigration policy. "Regardless of her words, our visa and refugee systems are severely broken, and the situation regarding the Bowling Green terrorists demonstrates that point," said Paul spokeswoman Kelsey Cooper.

Bowling Green has long had a reputation as a welcoming place for refugees, and the city is home to the International Center of Kentucky, a refugee resettlement agency. In the past 10 years, more than 2,000 refugees resettled in Bowling Green from more than a dozen countries, including some Muslim-majority countries, said the agency's executive director, Albert Mbanfu. Even some of those poking fun at Conway's "massacre" comment, however, said it reflected more serious concerns. "It's funny and we can laugh at it," said Barry Kaufkins, who teaches at Western Kentucky. "But I think a lot of the laughter is so we don't cry. A lot of people are really worried about some of the rhetoric, not to mention the behavior, from this administration." — AP

IN A HAVEN FOR REFUGEES, NEW ANXIETY IN THE AGE OF TRUMP

UTICA: It's not unusual around Utica to see tables full of Bosnians sipping strong coffee in cafes, Muslim women in hijabs shopping at grocery stores and Somalis raised in equatorial heat heading to work in the blowing snow. An influx of thousands of refugees from around the world over the past few decades is credited with injecting new energy and optimism into this faded post-industrial city of 62,000. But now, Utica is beset with new anxiety in the age of Trump. The president's order restricting refugees and travel from certain Muslim countries has immigrants in Utica feeling uncertain about their place here. Some also worry they will not be able to bring over family members fleeing war zones and refugee camps.

"There's one saying my mom used to tell me in camp in Iraq: A refugee will always be a refugee," said 18-year-old Manal Alawsaj, a Palestinian who just became a citizen. "It makes me terrified. I ran out of Iraq because of this. And now I'm here, and yet I'm feeling the same way. ... Maybe this is not home, maybe I should move, or this is not my country." Thousands have settled in Utica, about 170 miles north of New York City, through the Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees, which grew out of efforts to bring over Vietnamese refugees in the 1970s. It has since shepherded in 16,000 people from around the world, about 400 refugees a year, including Somalis, Bosnians, Syrians, Sudanese and people from Myanmar.

By some estimates, refugees and other immigrants make up more than 20 percent of Utica's population. Signs of the diversity abound, from the polyglot shop signs, to restaurants serving Asian and Bosnian dishes, to the teenagers from Myanmar and Somalia playing together at a community center. A large mosque is visible from the City Hall office of Mayor Robert Palmieri, who calls the refugees the "next evolution" for a city that was once known for its textile mills and was built generations ago by immigrants from Italy, Germany and Poland.

"We are Utica, said Hana Selimovic, a nursing student who was a Bosnian refugee, "the city that loves refugees." It's not always a smooth transition.

Somali Bantu refugees accustomed to camp life in Kenya can have a hard time getting used to upstate New York winters. Alawsaj recalls looking at all the trees on the ride to Utica and thinking, "Oh, my God, am I living in a forest?" The mayor's staff had to warn Somalis about the danger of using small grills in their living rooms.

The city poverty rate remains at 32 percent - in line with other upstate cities but above the national rate. The streets are dotted with empty storefronts and ramshackle homes. And the school system last year settled lawsuits that accused it of steering refugee students into inferior education programs. Still, Selimovic considers Utica a cultural oasis where friends and family can go to a cafe and talk politics in Bosnian. Alawsaj, who wears a hijab, said the city has always made her feel welcome. The mayor loves the cosmopolitan culture and how Bosnians have built up Utica's east side by rehabbing old homes.

"I would love to have the president come to Utica, New York, to see what it's all about and how beneficial it's been as a melting pot and blending them into the fiber of America," Palmieri said. The refugees work in dozens of businesses, including nursing homes and local manufacturers. At least one major employer has taken notice of President Donald Trump's order. Chobani yogurt founder Hamdi Ulukaya, who employs about 300 refugees among the 1,000 workers at a plant south of Utica, said the company will assist any affected employees and family members and "have their backs every day and every step of the way," according to an in-house letter obtained by The Associated Press.

Trump's order suspends the admission of nearly all refugees for 120 days and bars travelers from seven Muslim-majority countries for 90 days. The move prompted Mowlid Hussein, a Somali Bantu, to cancel travel plans to see his two children from a previous marriage in Kenya. He is upset the order will delay efforts to bring them here. "Imagine your kid is away from you. You don't have enough sleep at night. ... And the order comes: They cannot come anymore until four months," he said. "What can we do? How did this happen?" — AP

FINAL FUNERAL HELD FOR QUEBEC CITY MOSQUE SHOOTING VICTIMS

QUEBEC CITY: Mourners gathered at the Quebec City convention center Friday for the funeral of the last three of six men shot dead while praying at a local mosque earlier this week. The service began midday with traditional Friday prayers, followed by an Islamic funeral ritual. Thousands packed into the center to pay their respects to Guinean-Canadian Mamadou Tanou Barry, 42, and Ibrahim Barry, 39, and Azzeddine Soufiane, 57, of Moroccan origin. The commemoration followed another funeral for three other victims held Thursday at a Montreal arena, which was attended by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

"Another sad day where we gather to reflect on the lives that have been torn from us," Trudeau said as he arrived for Friday's service. Again, he called on Canadians to "unite in love, and reject division and hate." The mosque shooting victims were a scholar, a butcher, a daycare operator, a food industry worker, a public servant and a computer programmer—all connected by faith. They had been attending evening prayers at their mosque in Quebec City when a 27-year-old student stormed in and unleashed a barrage of bullets from a pistol and a semi-automatic rifle. The suspect later surrendered to police and was charged with six murders and five attempted murders. Police are still investigating and said terrorism charges may follow. Four of the wounded in the attack, meanwhile, remain in hospital.

Victims of terrorism

At the Quebec City funeral, Trudeau reminded listeners that the attack had "shocked and horrified" the Muslim community in Quebec and all Canadians. "Unfortunately, it reminded us of what the Muslim community has known for a long time, that around the world Muslims are the most often victims of terrorism," he

said. "We live side by side, but we don't know each other," said Imam Hussein Guillet, who emigrated from Lebanon 40 years ago, as he called for greater outreach between Canada's "multitude of solitudes." "As we chose this country, we ask this country to choose us," he said. Mourners Abdelmalek Elganah agreed. "We need to get to know each other better," he said. "It's ignorance, not hate that leads to this kind of tragedy." "We must work together to break this vicious cycle, this fear of others."

The bodies of several of the victims—all dual nationals—were to be sent to their birth countries for burial because there is no local Muslim cemetery and only one in the entire province, in a suburb of Montreal. In the wake of the attack, Quebec City mayor Regis Labeaume said that would soon change. Earlier, Quebec Premier Philippe Couillard spoke to reporters about the need to speak out against bigotry and for a crackdown on hate speech to prevent a repeat of last Sunday night's tragic events. "Practically speaking we need to be more active around security, and all these social media and extremist statements are monitored by security forces," he said.

A Toronto rabbi, meanwhile, led an interfaith effort to form "rings of peace" or human chains around mosques across Canada during midday prayers. The act of solidarity was prompted after many in the Muslim community said they have felt unsafe in Canada since the attack. As three of the shooting victims were mourned on Thursday a Montreal mosque was vandalized. A man in a suburb of Montreal, meanwhile, was charged earlier this week with inciting hatred and uttering threats online. The city's police hate crime unit has reported a spike in hate-related complaints since the Sunday night attack that has led to 52 investigations. — AFP

EPIC BATTLE LOOMS OVER US SUPREME COURT PICK

CABINET MEMBERS REQUIRE A MAJORITY OF 51 VOTES

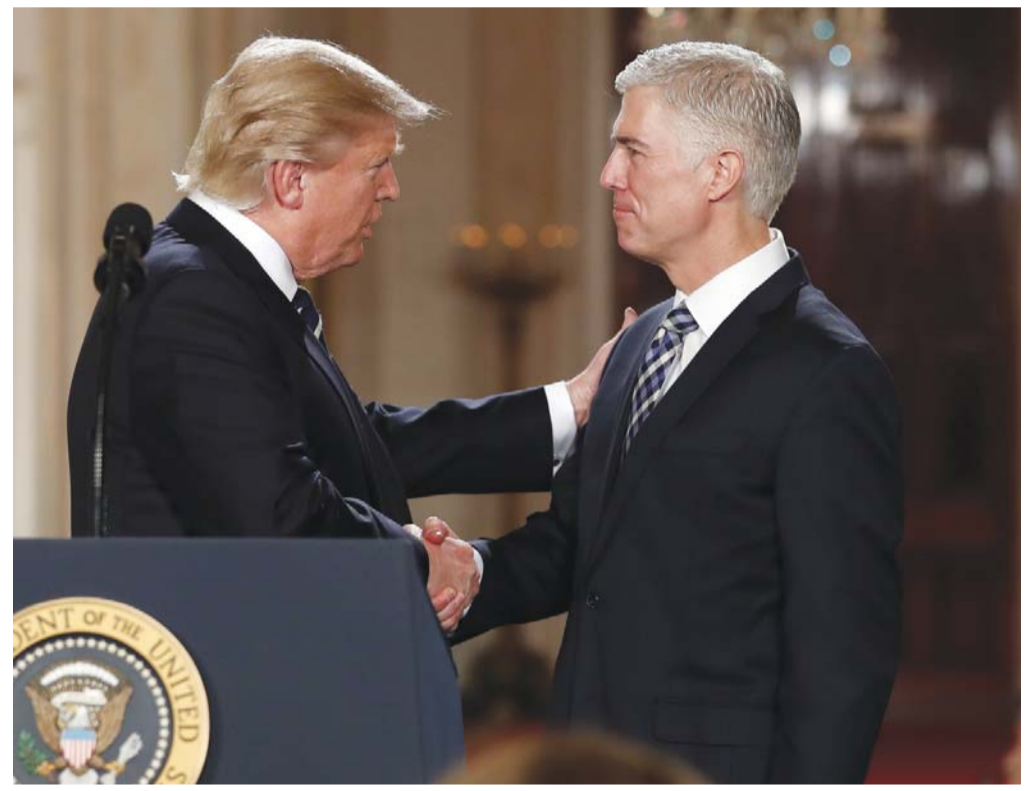
WASHINGTON: Neil Gorsuch, nominated this week by President Donald Trump to fill a vacant seat on America's highest court, faces an epic confirmation battle in the US Senate. Gorsuch's main task will be to argue that he is not the partisan, reactionary judge his critics say, in a process that will last months in the amphitheater of Capitol Hill. There he will meet significantly more opposition from Democrats than they are currently creating for Trump's efforts to assemble his government. If cabinet members can remain in office a maximum of the eight years spanning two presidential terms—exceedingly rare in any case—Supreme Court justices are appointed for life. If confirmed, Gorsuch, at 49, could weigh in on US law for the next three decades. The rules for confirming members of the country's highest court also raise the bar for nominees.

Cabinet members require a majority of 51 votes from the country's 100 senators. Supreme Court justices must land at least 60 in order to avoid the possibility opponents would obstruct the process by mounting a filibuster—a procedure that essentially prevents a vote with endless debate. With only 52 seats in the Senate, the majority Republicans will have to convince at least eight Democrats to cross party lines to vote for a nominee who supports the death penalty and other core right-wing positions. Supporters of Gorsuch, whose nomination was announced by Trump on Tuesday, paint him as a fierce defender of the conservative family and religious values championed by the justice he would replace: Antonin Scalia, the Republican icon who died early last year.

But Democrats are under strong pressure from an electoral base alarmed at the direction in which Trump is taking the country, insisting Democratic senators take an uncompromising line in retaliation for Republicans' refusal to even schedule hearings to consider Merrick Garland, former president Barack Obama's nominee to replace Scalia last year. Gorsuch can expect a full-scale fight, the first phase of which will take place behind closed doors and the second under the full glare of the media spotlight.

Weak links

Gorsuch will begin his campaign holding individual meetings with as many senators as possible to try to win them over or reassure them about his positions. The Republican leadership is helping by identifying possible weak links among the Democrats. They have identified a dozen so far, representing states that voted for Trump. Gorsuch must also complete a questionnaire that could run into the hundreds of pages,



WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump shakes hands with 10th US Circuit Court of Appeals Judge Neil Gorsuch - his choice for Supreme Court associate justice in the East Room of the White House in Washington. — AP

spelling out his income, clients he's defended, media interviews he's given, travel destinations, writing and many other details. Federal law enforcers will verify the information while the Senate Judiciary Committee conducts a parallel review. The second phase—public hearings in the Senate—will be more difficult to negotiate. Gorsuch will have to explain each of his past decisions without displaying views staunch enough to force him to recuse himself from future cases before the court.

Armies of supporters are lining up on each side. Backing Gorsuch are the heavyweights of the conservative universe, from evangelical Christians to the anti-abortion and gun lobbies. "We're going to do everything we can to make sure Justice Scalia's seat is filled... with a real constitutional scholar, and that's what we have in Neil Gorsuch," said Chris Cox, a Washington lobbyist for the hugely powerful National Rifle Association (NRA). NRA leader Wayne LaPierre appeared at Trump's side on Wednesday, when the president summoned conservative figures to the White House ahead of the confirmation fight.

Nuclear option

Gorsuch's opponents include civil and women's rights activists and anti-capital punishment campaigners. "Gorsuch argued use of birth control is 'wrongful conduct,'" tweeted NARAL, which opposes restrictions on abortions. "There is nothing normal about this #SCOTUS nomination, this White House, or this fight," it added, using an abbreviation for the Supreme Court. "We MUST #StopGorsuch."

The ACLU, the country's leading civil liberties group, expressed "concern" about Gorsuch's belief that the constitution must be interpreted according to the original meaning its framers intended. Among Democrats' concerns is that failing to make a convincing-enough argument would ease the job of those Republicans who want to end the filibuster for Supreme Court nominees, meaning they would require a majority of only 51 votes for confirmation. Many other Republicans want to avoid the so-called nuclear option because it would remove their own ability to filibuster future Democratic nominations when they are in the minority. Trump, who appears to have no such qualms, has urged them to "go nuclear." — AFP

DROUGHT-EASING CALIFORNIA SNOW HEAVIEST IN 22 YEARS

PHILLIPS STATION: Clambering through a snowy meadow with drifts up to the tree branches, California's water managers measured the state's vital Sierra Nevada snowpack Thursday at a drought-busting and welcome 173 percent of average. Runoff from the overall Sierra snowpack, which provides arid California with a third of its water in a good year, stood at the highest level since 1995 for this point in the year, California's Department of Water Resources said.

State officials say Gov. Jerry Brown will wait until closer to the end of California's rain and

snow season this spring to decide whether to lift an emergency declaration addressing the devastating five-year drought. But Thursday's snowpack reading, which took place in a meadow that had been bare of snow at the height of the drought, was good news. "It gives everything a much brighter outlook," said Frank Gehrke, the state's snow-survey chief, who conducts the snow surveys several times each winter. Photographers and other journalists trailed Gehrke in a Groundhog Day-style ritual in the state, where water shortages from the drought and from overuse have often dominated the

news. Gehrke noted the snow plows rumbling and ski lifts humming up and down the mountain range when he poked a rod into the drifts at Phillips Station, about 90 miles east of Sacramento. Gehrke had to change his route because the snow was so much higher than normal. At Phillips Station, his measurements showed snow at a level that would have melted down to 28.1 inches of water. That compares to 11.3 inches in an average year. The state measures overall snowpack through more than 100 electronic sensors throughout the Sierra Nevada.

Statewide, snowpack stood at 173 percent of average for the date. Back-to-back-to-back storms in January that each dropped a hurricane's worth of water have put the state at 108 percent of its normal rain and snow for the whole year, said Michael Dettinger, a hydrologist for the US Geological Survey. That's with two months still left in the rainy season. The storm systems, known as atmospheric rivers, "caught us all off-guard, how many came in so quickly, and turned everything around," Dettinger said.

January's storms have lifted the northern half of the state out of drought. On Thursday, 51 percent of the state remained in drought, compared to 95 percent at this time last year. In January of 2014, Brown stood at Phillips Station to declare a drought emergency in California. Phillips Station at that point held no measurable snow, amid the state's driest three-year stretch in history. In 2015, Brown ordered mandatory water conservation in cities and towns. State water officials lifted the statewide mandate for a 25 percent reduction in water use as the drought eased. Some conservation orders remain in effect. — AP



CALIFORNIA: Fog and mist shroud the Sierra Nevada near Echo Summit, Calif. The California Department of Water Resources held the second manual snow survey Thursday at nearby Phillips station. — AP

EU POPULISTS SEEK 'TRUMP BOOST' FOR UTILIZING ANTI-ISLAM STANCES

PARIS: In Donald Trump, Europe's populist leaders think they have found a champion. For now. The opening salvos of Trump's presidency, most notably his ban on immigration from seven Muslim-majority nations, are being gleefully milked by anti-Muslim lawmaker Geert Wilders in the Netherlands and other populist leaders in Germany, Italy and elsewhere who want to roll back the European Union and stem the influx of migrants and refugees.

Ignoring the anti-Trump protests, the wide criticism and legal challenges that have erupted over the new US president's ban, populists in Europe argue that Trump is proving that immigration can be stemmed, even stopped. They see a quick and decisive leader - and their latest weapon with which to attack the European governments and institutions they accuse of being soft on immigration.

'Trump is a path-finder'
For Alexander Gauland, deputy leader

of the anti-immigrant Alternative for Germany party, Trump is "a path-finder, by proving that with political will you can change policies." "It makes it easier for people who want to stop Islamic immigration that Trump says: 'You can do it,'" Gauland said. "If this policy works, and if Mr. Trump works with these goals, then it could be helpful in the next general election in Germany or the French presidential elections."

Czech President Milos Zeman's spokesman, Jiri Ovcacek, calls Trump "a trailblazer." "The EU has been discussing the necessity of protecting its external borders for months. However nothing has happened so far. Europe should perceive the steps taken by President Trump as an inspiration," he said. With national elections this year in the Netherlands, France and Germany, the rising tide of populism is being watched with growing alarm at EU headquarters in Brussels, which is still reeling from last year's Brexit vote to take Britain out of the 28-nation bloc. Donald

Tusk, the EU president, flagged up the threat of populism in a sobering letter this week to EU governments before they meet Friday to discuss their collective future without the British. But political analysts aren't convinced that populists' enthusiastic welcome of Trump's ban - "Well done @POTUS it's the only way to stay safe + free," Wilders tweeted - will help them as much as they think.

While the ban has pushed immigration back to the top of the global agenda, analysts say that's no guarantee of more votes for populists at the ballot box. In fact, they say, associating too closely with Trump could backfire on populists if his promised "America first" trade protectionism policies end up hurting European workers - which populists are wooing, as the new U.S. president did in the United States, to gain power.

'Big differences'
"In a few weeks, months or years, there could be big differences between

leaders of populist parties and Trump," said Marco Tarchi, a political scientist at the University of Florence in Italy. "Long-term, things could get really complicated." In the Netherlands, Wilders was already polling strongly before he started furiously tweeting and praising Trump's immigration ban.

Koen Vossen, a political scientist at Radboud University in Nijmegen, says Wilders' core supporters were already convinced, long before Trump took power, by the populist leader's arguments that Islam poses a grave threat to the Netherlands. But the broad criticisms and problems caused by Trump's ban could also scare wavering Dutch voters away from Wilders' Party for Freedom, he said. "He's preaching to the converted and also to a few percent - maybe 10 percent - who are still doubting whether they will vote for Wilders," said Vossen, author of a book on Wilders. "Maybe he will win a few percent extra because of Trump, but he could also lose a few percent."

In France, National Front leader Marine Le Pen also believes that Brexit and Trump are favorable winds filling the sails of her far-right, anti-immigration party, which is polling strongly ahead of the presidential first-round vote in April. "The whole world - it's true of Brexit and it's true for Mr. Trump - is waking up to what we've been saying for years," Le Pen said.

But, again, strengthening support in France for Le Pen's nationalist platform pre-dates Trump's election victory. And workers mulling a shift to Le Pen in France's rust-belt industrial towns want to protest job losses and ineffective traditional French politics, without necessarily fully espousing the National Front's anti-Islam and anti-immigration views. Nonna Mayer, a leading expert on the party at Sciences Po in Paris, said Trump is only "an added bonus" and "a sales argument" for Le Pen, rather than an electoral game-changer. "If Trump trips up, it will come back at them," she said. "They know that if it backfires, it will be a problem for them." — AP

LE PEN KICKS OFF CAMPAIGN WITH PROMISE OF FRENCH 'FREEDOM'

HOPING TO PROFIT FROM TURMOIL TO SCORE TRUMP-STYLE UPSET

LYON: French far-right leader Marine Le Pen kicked off her presidential campaign yesterday with a promise to shield voters from globalisation and make their country "free," hoping to profit from political turmoil to score a Donald Trump-style upset.

Opinion polls see the 48-year old daughter of National Front (FN) founder Jean-Marie Le Pen topping the first round on April 23 but then losing the May 7 run-off to a mainstream candidate. But in the most unpredictable election race France has known in decades, the FN hopes the

ing the euro zone, holding a referendum on EU membership, slapping taxes on imports and on the job contracts of foreigners, lowering the retirement age and increasing several welfare benefits while lowering income tax.

The manifesto also foresees reserving certain rights now available to all residents, including free education, to French citizens only, hiring 15,000 police, curbing migration and leaving NATO's integrated command. "The aim of this program is first of all to give France its freedom back and give the people a voice," Le Pen said in

of thousands of euros of public money for work she may not actually have done. A poll yesterday showed the conservative slipping to third place in round one.

The FN officials taking to the stage targeted Macron more than any other of Le Pen's opponents, presenting the former investment banker as the candidate of "international capitalism." The crowd booed his name every time. "This presidential election puts two opposite proposals," Le Pen said in her manifesto. "The 'globalist' choice backed by all my opponents ... and the 'patriotic' choice which I personify."

EU overhaul phase

If elected, Le Pen says she would immediately seek an overhaul of the European Union that would reduce it to a very loose cooperative of nations with no single currency and no border-free area. If, as is likely, France's EU partners refuse to agree to this, she would call a referendum to leave the bloc.

The electoral manifesto is short on macro-economic details and does not give any public deficit or debt targets. Nor does not explain how a Le Pen government would balance raising welfare benefits with cutting taxes. The program is far less detailed than her 2012 platform and has softened the presentation of a number of controversial issues, with the FN trying to find the right balance between reassuring voters and keeping its anti-establishment image.

For instance, instead of devoting a whole chapter to "the orderly demolition of the euro" as the 2012 manifesto did, the 2017 one only briefly mentions regaining France's "monetary sovereignty." Opinion polls showing a majority of voters, especially the elderly, want to stay in the euro. Immigration remains the party's signature theme. When Franck de Lapersonne, an actor and FN supporter, told the rally that 19th century writer Victor Hugo "did not learn Arabic at school and that makes me happy," he received the loudest ovation of the day, with the crowd chanting the party's trademark slogan "On est chez nous" ("This is our country!") Le Pen and her party are facing their own scandals, including one over assistants in the European Parliament and investigations over her 2012 campaign financing. But that leaves grass-roots supporters undeterred. "We're fighting to win the 2017 election," said Victor Birra, the regional head of the FN youth association. — Reuters



PARIS: Far-right leader and candidate for next spring presidential elections Marine Le Pen, center, visits the Entrepreneur Fair. — AP

scandal hitting conservative candidate Francois Fillon and the rise of populism across the West will help convince voters to back Le Pen.

"We were told Donald Trump would never win in the United States against the media, against the establishment, but he won... We were told Marine Le Pen would not win the presidential election, but on May 7 she will win!" Jean-Lin Lacapelle, a top FN official, told several hundred party officials and members.

In 144 "commitments" published at the start of a two-day rally in Lyon, Le Pen proposes leav-

the introduction to the manifesto. Emmanuel Macron, a pro-European centrist candidate who polls say is likely to face Le Pen in the presidential election run-off, will also hold a rally in Lyon yesterday to propose a radically different platform.

Opinion polls suggest Macron would easily beat Le Pen in the second round, but faith in pollsters has been shaken after they failed to predict Trump's election win or Britain's vote last June to leave the European Union. Former frontrunner Fillon has been damaged by allegations, which he denies, that he paid his wife hundreds

FACING CHALLENGER, MERKEL RALLIES TROUBLESOME ALLY

BERLIN/MUNICH: Chancellor Angela Merkel meets her Bavarian allies today for two days of talks aimed at rallying their troubled conservative ally to take on the re-energised Social Democrats in a September election she expects to be "tough like no other".

Horst Seehofer, leader of the Bavarian Christian Social Union (CSU), sister party to Merkel's Christian Democratic Union (CDU), has been a thorn in her side for much of the last two years, pressing for a cap on migrants that she is unwilling to support. But a spectacular revival in the Social Democrats' fortunes, after they nominated former European Parliament president Martin Schulz as party leader last week, is forcing the conservative "Union" allies to bind together if they are to hold on to power.

"Seehofer has to end his onslaught against Merkel if the Union wants to have any chance at all," said Forsa pollster Manfred Guellner. A survey by another pollster, Infratest dimap, on Thursday showed support for the centre-left Social Democratic Party (SPD) jumped by 8 points to 28 percent, the highest since the last federal election in 2013, following Schulz's nomination.

The CDU/CSU alliance remained ahead on 34 percent, but worryingly for Merkel the poll showed Schulz beating her comfortably in a theoretical head-to-head contest. Seehofer's prime concern has been holding onto the CSU's absolute majority in Bavaria in a regional election in 2018, when he is wor-

ried about losing votes to the anti-immigration Alternative for Germany (AfD).

However, the revival of the SPD is focusing attention in the CSU, which needs a strong CDU to retain the national clout that gives it sway in Bavaria. Likewise, Merkel needs the CSU to perform well in the federal election if she is to retain power. The fact that Merkel is carving two days out of her schedule to spend on the meeting in Munich

underlines the importance she places on improving relations between the allies.

Seehofer, who has been relentless in his criticism of her decision in 2015 to open Germany's doors to a wave of migrants from the Middle East, must now convince Bavarians she is the right candidate for chancellor in the Sept. 24 election. "We are going to have a lot of convincing to do in this election with our base and in the community," said

Markus Soeder, Bavaria's finance minister.

Another CSU lawmaker said he was confident Merkel's experience and role as a pole of stability in uncertain times would get voters behind the conservative ally, but that they might not resolve all their differences at the Munich meeting. "The CDU and CSU will come together - but perhaps not in February," he said, speaking on condition of anonymity. — Reuters



MALTA: German Chancellor Angela Merkel attends an EU summit. — AP



VATICAN: In this June 23, 2016 file photo, Pope Francis delivers his blessing during his meeting with Grand Master of the Knights of Malta Matthew Festing. — AP

CONSERVATIVE CRITICISM DEEPENS AGAINST POPE

VATICAN CITY: Conservative criticism of Pope Francis intensified yesterday after his intervention in the Knights of Malta order, with posters appearing around Rome citing his actions against conservative Catholics and asking: "Where's your mercy?" The posters appeared on the same day that Francis cemented his authority over the Knights by naming a top Vatican archbishop, Angelo Becciu, to be his special delegate to the ancient aristocratic order.

Francis gave Becciu, the No. 2 in the Vatican secretariat of state, "all necessary powers" to help lay the groundwork for a new constitution for the order, lead the spiritual renewal of its professed knights and prepare for the election of a new grand master, expected in three months. The Vatican's intervention with the sovereign group had provided fuel for Francis' conservative critics, who until Saturday had largely confined their concern with his mercy-over-morals papacy to blogs, interviews and conferences.

Yesterday, dozens of posters appeared around Rome featuring a stern-looking Francis and referencing the "decapitation" of the Knights and other actions Francis has taken against conservative, tradition-minded groups. Within hours, the city of Rome had plastered over the posters. Police launched an investigation into the conservative circles believed responsible, aided by closed-circuit cameras, the ANSA news agency said.

The posters, written in Roman dialect, also cited the way Francis had "ignored cardinals," a reference to the four cardinals who have publicly asked Francis to clarify whether divorced and civilly remarried Catholics can receive Communion. Francis hasn't responded directly, though he has

made it clear he favors case-by-case allowances.

Vocal critics

One of the four cardinals is Raymond Burke, a conservative American whom the pope removed as the Vatican's supreme court judge in 2014 and named to be his liaison with the Knights of Malta. Burke, a staunch defender of Catholic doctrine on sexual morals, has become Francis' most vocal critic and was instrumental in the Knights' saga.

With Burke's support, the Knights' grand master Fra' Matthew Festing sacked the grand chancellor, Albert von Boeselager, over a condom scandal. After learning that the ouster had been done in his name, Francis effectively took over the order. He asked Festing to resign, restored Boeselager to his position, declared all the Knights' sovereign decisions on the matter "null and void" and appointed Becciu to help run the order temporarily.

Becciu's mandate as the pope's "exclusive spokesman" with the order now confirms Burke's marginalization. In his letter Saturday, Francis said Becciu would work in "close collaboration" with the No 2 official who technically is in charge at the Knights. But he stressed: "I delegate to you all the necessary powers to decide possible questions that might emerge in carrying out the mandate I have given you."

At a press conference this week, Boeselager insisted the order's sovereignty was never in question during the stand-off, though he acknowledged the Vatican's strident statements had led to such misunderstanding that he planned to convene ambassadors accredited to the order to explain. — AP

SHELLING FLARES UP IN E UKRAINE AHEAD OF TRUMP'S CALL TO KIEV

KIEV: Ukraine and Russia-backed separatists accused each other of resuming artillery attacks in east Ukraine yesterday, breaking a lull in shelling at a frontline hot-spot that had raised hopes the conflict's worst escalation in months was waning. The reports came hours before a planned telephone call between Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko and US President Donald Trump, whose aim to improve relations with Moscow has alarmed Kiev while the east Ukraine conflict remains unresolved.

Kiev said pro-Russian rebels had resumed firing heavy artillery at government troop positions in the industrial zone of the town of Avdiyivka. The area has been at the center of intensified shelling during the last week in which more than 40 people have been killed in both government- and rebel-held areas. A spokesman for Poroshenko said separatists had also fired at workers repairing power lines near the town. "Ukraine demands Russia immediately cease firing," spokesman Svyatoslav Tsegolko said in a post on Facebook.

Security monitors for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) also said shooting had interrupted work to repair power lines near Avdiyivka, thousands of whose citizens have been without electricity since Monday in freezing winter temperatures.

The reports followed a period of relative calm in Avdiyivka overnight on Friday

and early yesterday, although the Ukrainian military and separatists had reported attacks on other parts of the front line.

Separatist officials said shelling from the Ukrainian side at 1130 GMT had hit electricity lines in rebel-held territory, cutting off all power to the town of Horlivka, which has more than 250,000 residents. The past week's escalation has brought global attention back to the simmering conflict, which has seen periodic surges in violence in defiance of the two-year-old "Minsk" ceasefire agreement.

Fighting between government troops and separatist rebels first broke out in April 2014, after a pro-European uprising in Kiev ousted a Moscow-backed president. About 10,000 have been killed since. The call between Poroshenko and Trump, scheduled for 2145 GMT, will be the first since the US president's inauguration and its outcome will be closely scrutinized for signals on Trump's policy on Russia.

Last week, Trump said it was too early to discuss easing sanctions against Russia, but emphasized that he wants to carry through on his campaign pledge to pursue better ties with the Kremlin. Russia has been hit with US and EU sanctions for its involvement in the nearly three-year-old conflict and annexation of Crimea. The Kremlin denies accusations that it supports the separatists with troops and weapons. — Reuters

INDIAN POLICE BUST DUPING \$550-MLN INTERNET SCAM

NEW DELHI: Indian police have busted an internet scam in which around 650,000 people lost a combined 37 billion rupees (\$549 million) after sending money to a company that promised they would earn cash by clicking on web links, police said on Friday. Police, who described the pyramid-style scheme as one of India's biggest ever, said they had arrested three ringleaders on the outskirts of New Delhi, the capital, and seized more than 5 billion rupees (\$74

million) from bank accounts. "They learned that if you give some money back to members, the investments would go up exponentially," Amit Pathak, head of a police cyber crime unit in India's populous northern state of Uttar Pradesh, told Reuters. The men ran a series of websites that promised would-be subscribers a chance to earn five rupees (\$0.07) each time they clicked or liked web links sent to their mobile phones, police said.

The unsuspecting investors each paid thousands of rupees into the company's bank accounts to join the scheme, but the web links they received were fake. The company running the alleged scam had operated for years, but earned almost all the money over a few months from last August, after it began to distribute some of the proceeds, using the beneficiaries to draw in more investors. Police said the ringleaders had not yet appointed lawyers as the chargesheet

was still being prepared. When police raided the company's head office in the city of Noida they found 250 passports of employees and members who had been rewarded with a holiday to Australia. The scammers planned to film the holiday and then post it online as promotional material to lure more subscribers. The alleged mastermind spent some of the proceeds on houses, cars and celebrity parties. Pathak said it would take time to trace most of the money, and sev-

eral bank employees were believed to be involved. "It's a very big task for us. We have brought in the income-tax department, and other government agencies, to trace the money," Pathak said. Cyber crime in India, home to the world's second largest number of internet users, jumped 350 percent in the three years to 2014 as criminals exploited booming smartphone use, a study by auditing services firm PwC and industry lobby group Assocham showed last year. — Reuters

SRI LANKA PRESIDENT SLAMS RIVALS, VOWS RECONCILIATION

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's President Maithripala Sirisena yesterday slammed critics of his ethnic reconciliation plan as the country emerges from a decades long ethnic war that claimed over 100,000 lives. Sirisena marked the Indian Ocean island's 69th anniversary of independence from Britain with a promise of ethnic unity despite opposition from hardline nationalists. "Those who oppose our commitment to ethnic reconciliation and national unity are working against the country," Sirisena said in an address to the nation.

Stopping short of naming his predecessor, strongman Mahinda Rajapakse, Sirisena said those who oppose him were working against stability and the rebuilding of the nation's war-battered infrastructure. "Those opportunists who oppose ethnic reconciliation and national unity are working to achieve their narrow political objectives (of gaining power). They are anti-national forces," Sirisena said.

The ceremonies at Colombo's seafront Galle Face promenade ended with school children singing the national anthem in Tamil, the language of the main minority community, despite opposition from hardliners among the majority Sinhalese. Last year Sirisena also ordered the national anthem sung in Tamil during independence celebrations, for the first time in over six decades. Tamils called it a "giant step" in

ethnic inclusiveness. The previous government of Rajapakse had banned the singing of the national anthem in Tamil at official ceremonies. Security forces under Rajapakse crushed Tamil rebels in a no-holds-barred military campaign to end a 37-year separatist war. Rajapakse refused to investigate allegations that troops under his command killed up to 40,000 ethnic Tamil civilians in the final months of the conflict that ended in May 2009.

While the main Tamil political party joined the main independence day celebrations in Colombo, a handful of Tamils staged a peaceful street protest in the Tamil heartland of Jaffna, 400 kilometers north of the capital. Protesters wearing black bands demanded that Sirisena agree to an international investigation into war crimes under his predecessor. The election of reconciliation-minded Sirisena, a Sinhalese, in January 2015 has helped mend relations although core Tamil demands for political power-sharing with the majority Sinhalese is yet to be addressed.

Sirisena has pledged to set up special war crimes courts, but there has been little progress on accountability in the past two years. Tamils account for just over 11 percent of the island's population of about 21 million and are demanding greater autonomy. — AFP



AMRITSAR: Indian women stand in a queue to cast their votes outside a polling station, at Kamaseke village. — AP photos

INDIA STATE ELECTIONS TO TEST MODI POPULARITY AFTER CURRENCY CHAOS

INDIA IS JUST EMERGING FROM THE FALLOUT

NEW DELHI: Nearly three years ago, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi won a sweeping national election victory with promises to develop the economy and root out corruption. But with a series of key state elections beginning yesterday, Modi's popularity - and his surprise currency decree that sparked months of financial uproar - is about to be tested.

India is just emerging from the fallout of a November decision that withdrew India's two largest currency notes from circulation and caused weeks of chaos as people waited to get their money back in new bills. Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party hailed the move as a way to curb tax fraud and corruption and push India toward more digital spending. Opponents say it was a self-inflicted blow on the world's fastest-growing economy, causing enormous hardship for the vast majority of Indians, who rely often completely on cash.

While the five state elections will not decide whether Modi remains in office, a loss would be seen as a serious blow to his political image. Most important is the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, whose immense population of 204 million means state elections often help shape the national political agenda. "In these elections, Uttar Pradesh is the real biggie," said Ajoy Bose, a political analyst in New Delhi. "If the BJP were to lose in Uttar Pradesh, it would be a huge setback, both for the party and for Modi. It would destroy the myth of Modi, who has been projected as this political juggernaut of invincible proportions," Bose said.

Seven phase cycle

The elections began yesterday in the northern state of Punjab and the beach resort state of Goa. Hundreds of paramilitary troops and police were posted near voting stations across Punjab to ensure security as voters stood in long lines to cast their vote. In the next phase of the election, the Himalayan state of Uttarakhand votes on Feb 15, and remote northeastern Manipur votes on March 4 and 8.

Elections in northern Uttar Pradesh begin on Feb 11, but because of the state's size, voting is divided into seven phases. Results from all the elections will be declared on March 11. In 2014, the BJP had won an overwhelming 71 out of 80 parliamentary seats in Uttar Pradesh, or 15 percent of all national legislators in the powerful lower house, ensuring that it emerged as the single largest party in Parliament.

But Modi now faces a tough fight in Uttar Pradesh, with the state's current top official, Akhilesh Yadav, in a political alliance with the Congress Party, led by Rahul Gandhi, scion of the



NEW DELHI: In this Aug 15, 2014, file photo, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses the nation on the country's Independence Day.

Nehru-Gandhi family that ruled India for decades. While the Congress Party is a shadow of its former self, it remains the country's second most popular. The alliance is seen as a way to boost the chances of Yadav's Samajwadi Party while the Congress Party tries to remain relevant in a politically key state.

All those candidates must also face Mayawati, a former chief minister of the state and a master of caste-based politics. Mayawati, who uses only one name, is a Dalit, the name given to the lowest rung of India's caste hierarchy. She commands strong support among the state's Dalits, who form more than one-fifth of the population. Uttar Pradesh voters are divided over the recent currency decree, analysts say.

The equalizer

"People in rural areas of the state saw the currency withdrawal as an equalizer, where the rich and the poor were hit by the same shortage of currency notes," said Nomita P Kumar, an economist at the Giri Institute of Development Studies, a think tank in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh's capital. "Poor people were happy that, for once, the rich were in the same boat as themselves. They think it was a smart move by Modi to curb corruption."

Not so in Punjab, where the ruling coalition of the BJP and the regional Shiromani Akali Dal party faces the twin challenges of strong anti-incumbency sentiment and palpable anger against the chaos unleashed by the currency

withdrawal. Voters appeared to hold Modi responsible for the economic disruption that followed the abrupt removal of currency.

"The people's anger is directed against Modi and this will be reflected in the way they vote," said Bose, who returned Tuesday from a trip through that state. The BJP-led coalition also faces a strong challenge from the upstart Aam Aadmi Party, or Common Man Party, which has tapped into the voters' disappointment with the state government.

In Goa, the ruling BJP was beset with divisions among its political allies, while the Aam Aadmi Party and the Congress were also putting up a strong fight. Modi's performance in the current state-level elections is also likely to determine his political strategy in the run-up to the next national elections due in 2019, when he is hoping to wrest a second term in office, analysts said.

"This makes the outcome so important. It could be a make-or-break election for Modi," said Bose. The state elections are also significant for their power to help elect a new president. While the Indian presidency is largely ceremonial, it is a high-profile position, and the president can wield significant power in times of political crisis. The current president is Pranab Mukherjee, a Congress Party stalwart whose term ends in July. Presidents are elected by a combination of national and state lawmakers. For Modi to bring in his own president, he needs to win Uttar Pradesh and at least one other state. — AP



COLOMBO: Sri Lankan president Maithripala Sirisena, center, along with security forces commanders watch the Independence Day parade, marking the country's independence from British colonial rule in 1948. — AP

UN DROPS SANCTIONS ON AFGHAN WARLORD

KABUL: The United Nations Security Council has dropped sanctions against Afghan strongman Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, potentially paving the way for the notorious warlord to return openly to Afghanistan. The Afghan government requested the move as part of a peace deal with Hekmatyar and his militant group, Hezb-i-Islami, in September. The deal was criticized by some Afghans and human rights groups for the pardon it granted to Hekmatyar and many of his fighters.

While playing only a small role in the current insurgent conflict in Afghanistan, Hekmatyar was a major figure during the bloody civil war of the 1990s, when he was accused of indiscriminately firing rockets into Kabul, as well as other human rights abuses. The Afghan government welcomed the UN's decision made on Friday as a "major step toward peace and stability in Afghanistan," said Mohammad Akram Khpalwak, a political advisor for

President Ashraf Ghani. "This was a demand of the people and government of Afghanistan," he told Reuters on Saturday. "It is a major step for the peace process between Hezb-i-Islami and the government of Afghanistan." In removing Hekmatyar from the list of people sanctioned for their ties to al-Qaeda, Islamic State, and other militant groups, the U.N. unfroze his assets, and dropped a travel ban and arms embargo against him.

Hekmatyar's whereabouts have been unknown since he signed the peace deal with Ghani in September via a prerecorded video from an undisclosed location. With the UN sanctions now removed, government officials expect Hekmatyar to eventually return to the Afghan capital, despite the continued controversy.

Many foreign governments, including the United States, praised the accord at the time as a step toward wider peace in Afghanistan. — Reuters



KABUL: Amin Karim, representative of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, center, and Akram Khpalwak, President Ashraf Ghani's adviser on political affairs, left, speak during a joint press conference. — AP

PUNJAB'S JOBLESS YOUTH TAKE CHANCE WITH OUTSIDER PARTY

TEONA: Twenty seven-year-old Rupinder Kaur Ruby is a political novice but her message is clear: Jobs for young people. Grabbing the microphone, the law student tells a few hundred supporters in a dusty village square in the northwest Indian state of Punjab that the ruling parties have failed them.

"Punjab is not in a good place. And the youth are the most affected. They want to fight back," she said, raising her fist to cheers, as the crowd covered her in garlands before heading off to canvass for votes in a state election. Ruby is one of several inexperienced candidates her Aam Aadmi (Common Man) Party is fielding to tap anger among an increasingly aspirational but frustrated youth, and to challenge Prime Minister Narendra Modi as his party heads into five state polls over the next month starting with Punjab.

A strong showing by AAP, which won a handful of seats in Punjab in the 2014 general election and governs the city-state of Delhi, would serve as a mid-term warning for the still-

popular Modi as the economy fails to fulfil expectations. The young in Punjab have been hit hardest by factory shutdowns, amid allegations that corruption has hastened the economic decline of a relatively rich state of 28 million people bordering Pakistan. Unemployment tops voter concerns there, according to a recent poll, and young people are less and less willing to work their parents' fields in the state known as India's "bread basket".

Generational shift

Most recent opinion polls show Congress, India's main opposition party, in the lead in Punjab, ahead of AAP which has been criticised by rivals for failing to flesh out how it would boost employment were it to come to power. But Ruby's party is most popular among the young, reflecting a generational shift in India that poses a problem for Modi as newer parties seek to capitalise on the lack of jobs.

Nearly two-thirds of India's 1.3 billion people

are under 35 - a demographic "bulge" that will create the world's largest working-age population before 2050. Despite average annual economic growth of 6.5 percent between 1991 and 2013, India added less than half the jobs needed to absorb new entrants into the workforce.

The incumbent Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) party that rules Punjab alongside Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party, and Congress, have governed the state alternately for decades with a focus on Sikhism, the state's dominant religion, and farm subsidies.

Those priorities resonate less among the young, and now all the main parties are promising free smartphones and 2,500 rupees (\$37) a month for the unemployed. "The other parties are all the same," said 30-year-old Jaskaran Sharma, who works as a truck driver in the Middle East and was helping with Ruby's campaign in between jobs. "She is energetic, and young people understand the system," he told Reuters in the village of Teona. — Reuters

EXILE, JAIL AND ABDUCTION: THE PERILOUS LIVES OF CHINA'S RICH

BEIJING: The mysterious case of a billionaire who went missing from Hong Kong last week, reportedly abducted by mainland security agents, has underscored the precarious lives of China's ultra rich. Local media say financier Xiao Jianhua was last seen at his apartment in Hong Kong's Four Seasons hotel and is under investigation in connection with China's 2015 stocks crash.

There is no shortage of examples of other tycoons who have met a similar fate in a country that has the largest number of billionaires in the world: 594, according to the latest ranking of the magazine Hurun. In China, company chiefs need the backing of the Communist Party to get rich, but they also need it to survive. It is a relationship that when the political winds change can leave them out to dry, experts say. "Chinese businessmen know their

country, and they all know that they must have the support of the authorities," said Jean-Pierre Cabestan, a professor at the Baptist University of Hong Kong. "Every day, local Communist Party officials receive gifts from company bosses... who need protection." Without this support, a businessman might have to pay more taxes, for example, "because taxation is very arbitrary in China," said Willy Lam, a political scientist at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. "If you don't have official protection, it's possible that your business might be wiped out, for whatever capricious reasons."

'Double-edged'

There has been widespread speculation that Xiao's disappearance was part of Chinese President Xi Jinping's ongoing anti-corruption drive, which some critics believe has been used to target his politi-

cal opponents. The campaign was launched after Xi took power in 2012 and has brought down government officials and corporate executives. "There is always the risk of being dragged into the fall of a politician when he is prosecuted for corruption," said Jean-Pierre Cabestan. "If your protector is doing OK then you make a lot of money," said Mr Lam. But if he's arrested "this may suddenly become a big disadvantage. So it's a double-edged sword."

There has been no shortage of examples in recent years. In addition to Xiao Jianhua who is believed to be close to Xi's family, a real estate kingpin, Guo Wengui, who had strong political connections, has fled abroad. Several of his supporters who were at the top of the state hierarchy have since fallen in the anti-corruption purge.

The billionaire Xu Ming, who is close to former top-ranking leader Bo Xilai (a

political rival of Xi), died in prison at the end of 2015. Others, who had disappeared, resurfaced after claiming to have "cooperated with investigations". "In China, a joke says that if your name appears in the list of the 100 richest people in the country, then you should be careful because many of these people have been arrested for tax evasion or economic crimes," said Willy Lam. The former leader Deng Xiaoping was attributed with the phrase: "To get rich is glorious"; but Lam pointed out another aspect of wealth: "It is dangerous to be rich in China, certainly."

Hong Kong haven?

While the anti-graft campaign has had few macroeconomic consequences, it nevertheless generates a cautious outlook among the business community, said Klaus Baader, senior economist for

Asia at Societe Generale. "When you have major anti-corruption drives, what often happens, is that it makes decision makers very reluctant... to take decisions," he added.

"Because they are concerned that any decision could potentially be linked back to some bribery or some degree of corruption of one sort or the other." Especially in China, economics, politics and the judiciary "are all linked," said Willy Lam. "If you are arrested by the police, there is no guarantee that you will receive a fair judgment." As a result, many tycoons domiciled themselves in Hong Kong, reassured by the judicial independence enjoyed by the former British colony. But it is not clear how much longer they can shelter there. "Until what happened to Xiao Jianhua... many of these top business people thought that Hong Kong was safe, but no longer so," said Lam. — AFP



TOKYO: US Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, left, and Japanese Defense Minister Tomomi Inada pose for a photo prior to their meeting at Defense Ministry. — AP

CHINA LASHES OUT AT MATTIS REMARKS ON EAST SEA ISLANDS

NEW DEFENSE SECRETARY VOWED TO BACK JAPAN

TOKYO: China warned the US yesterday it was risking instability in Asia after President Donald Trump's new defense secretary vowed to back Japan in any military clash with Beijing over a disputed island chain. The Senkaku Islands, known in China as the Diaoyu, are at the center of a festering row between Tokyo and Beijing, which claims they have been part of Chinese territory for centuries.

Wrapping up a visit to the region yesterday, US Defense Secretary James Mattis said in Tokyo the islands were subject to a decades-old treaty between Washington and Tokyo. "I made clear that our long-standing policy on the Senkaku Islands stands the US will continue to recognize Japanese administration of the islands," Mattis told a press conference.

"And as such Article 5 of the US-Japan Security Treaty applies." Article 5 commits the United States to defend Japan or territories it administers against any attack. China, which is also involved in a widening dispute with several Southeast Asian countries over islands in the South China Sea, accused Washington of stirring up trouble.

"We urge the US side to take a responsible attitude, stop making wrong remarks... and avoid making the issue more complicated and bringing instability to the regional situation", Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang said,

according to official news agency Xinhua. Lu added the US-Japan treaty was a product of the Cold War, and should not affect China's territorial sovereignty, Xinhua reported.

Mattis arrived in Japan on Friday from South Korea. His visit to the region, the first overseas trip by a senior official from the Trump administration, was aimed at reassuring Washington's key East Asian allies about America's commitment to their security. Concerns arose during the presidential campaign when Trump accused Tokyo and Seoul of not paying their fair share for US troops stationed in their countries, sparking concerns about the future of their security alliances with Washington.

'Military moves'

But Mattis, during his meetings in both capitals, made clear that Washington was ready to answer any threats the US allies may face. In response to a question, Mattis called the defense cost sharing arrangement with Japan a "model".

"It is quite remarkable that Mattis was bold enough to say in his opening remarks that the Senkakus should be protected under the Japan-US security treaty," Hideshi Takesada, professor at Takushoku University in Tokyo and expert on Asian security. Mattis also had strong words over the South China Sea, saying Beijing "has

shredded the trust of the nations in this region", though tempered that message with a call for disputes to be settled through arbitration and diplomacy. "At this time we do not see any need for dramatic military moves at all," he said.

The call for military restraint stands in contrast to hawkish comments by Rex Tillerson, Trump's newly approved Secretary of State, who said before confirmation that China's access to South China Sea islands it has been fortifying might be blocked-raising the prospect of a military confrontation. China lays claim to a vast swathe of the South China Sea within a so-called "nine dash line", including waters claimed by several of its Southeast Asian neighbors.

The artificial islands, some with the potential for military use, are considered a potential flashpoint, though Beijing has been adamant in saying it will not back down over the claims. A former US Marine general who has served in both Japan and South Korea, Mattis told Japan's hawkish Defense Minister Tomomi Inada Saturday that their alliance remained a "cornerstone" of regional stability. Speaking in Seoul on Friday, he warned North Korea against any violence. "Any attack on the United States or our allies will be defeated and any use of nuclear weapons would be met with a response that would be effective and overwhelming," he told reporters. — AFP

PROBE OF LAWYER'S KILLING BESET BY LEAKS, CONFUSION

YANGON: Myanmar's national police chief has taken personal charge of an investigation into the killing of a prominent lawyer and adviser to Aung San Suu Kyi's ruling party, police sources said, after leaks and conflicting comments by officers about its progress. The killing of Muslim advocate Ko Ni, 63 - shot in the head on Sunday in front of onlookers while he held his grandson outside Yangon's international airport - has rocked the commercial capital, where acts of political violence are rare.

It comes amid heightened religious and communal tensions in the Buddhist-majority country, with a report from the United Nations human rights office on Friday saying a military crackdown on Rohingya Muslims in the northwest in recent months "very likely" amounted to crimes against humanity.

Tens of thousands turned out for Ko Ni's funeral, and the public is closely watching how authorities investigate a killing the civilian president's office has called an attempt to destabilise the state. Colleagues have told Reuters Ko Ni was working on amendments to Myanmar's military drafted constitution to help the National League for Democracy-led government rule effectively in a system that keeps soldiers in control of key ministries.

Major General Zaw Win, chief of the Myanmar Police Force, arrived in Yangon from the capital, Naypyidaw, on Thursday to oversee the probe, which is being led by the police's criminal investigation department, two police officials told Reuters. The official, who like other police spoke about the investigation on condition of anonymity, said the military's domestic intelligence agency was also involved in the probe. A military intelligence agent told Reuters he was instructed to monitor Ko Ni in the months before the lawyer's death. The intelligence agency was primarily concerned with finding out how the suspect obtained a firearm, ownership of which is tightly controlled in Myanmar, the official said.

Citizen investigators

The suspected shooter - named by

police as Kyi Linn, 53 - was arrested after a group of taxi drivers chased the him down. One of the drivers was himself shot and killed. Despite a ban on police talking publicly about the case, photographs showing parts of a report on Kyi Linn's interrogation have spread widely online. Officials believe the images were leaked after police used the messaging app Viber to share them with colleagues.

The leak sparked a race on social media - use of which has rocketed in Myanmar since recent telecommunications reforms - to identify a man who, according to the document, Kyi Linn said enticed him to shoot Ko Ni. Facebook users posted photos of purported suspects, and analysed CCTV footage from the airport to devise often far-fetched conspiracy theories. Many in Myanmar distrust the police, who are under the remit of the military.

Police themselves have made contradictory statements on whether suspects are under arrest or not. The office of President Htin Kyaw said late on Friday that a 46-year-old named Aung Win Zaw had been detained in the early hours of Monday, just hours after Ko Ni's shooting, in the eastern state of Kayin, which borders Thailand.

Aung Win Zaw is accused of conspiring with Kyi Linn to kill Ko Ni, the office said in a statement, adding that police were searching for more suspects. Police said Kyi Linn - who is charged with murder - has been jailed twice in the past for trafficking Buddhist artifacts, but was released in a 2014 amnesty granted by then-President Thein Sein. Another former cell mate told Reuters he thought Kyi Linn would do anything "for his business and money," adding: "I don't think he is related to any political and religious issues."

In his home village of Sai Lyar, members of Kyi Linn's family were shocked by the news, carried by police and reporters who have visited their farming community in rural Sagaing Division since Sunday. "I am sure my brother would not kill someone on his own," Kyi Linn's younger sister, Win Kyi, told Reuters. "There must be someone behind him." — Reuters



YANGON: In this Monday, Jan 30, 2017, file photo, a Buddhist monk holds a portrait of Ko Ni, legal adviser and prominent member of Myanmar's Muslim minority, during his funeral. — AP

PHILIPPINE CATHOLIC CHURCH TO SLAM 'REIGN OF TERROR' BEHIND DRUG WAR

MANILA: The Philippines' Catholic Church will assail President Rodrigo Duterte's war on drugs for creating a "reign of terror" among the poor, in sermons to be read at services across the country this weekend, three church sources told Reuters yesterday. In its most strongly worded attack so far on the crackdown on drug pushers and users, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines will say that killing people is not the answer to trafficking of illegal drugs and will voice concern about the indifference of many to the bloodshed.

"An additional cause of concern is the reign of terror in many places of the poor. Many are killed not because of drugs. Those who kill them are not brought to account," they said in a pastoral letter, a copy of which was obtained by Reuters. More than 7,600 people have been killed since Duterte launched his anti-drugs campaign seven months ago, more than 2,500 in what police say were shootouts during raids and sting operations.

Extrajudicial killings

Both the government and police have strenuously denied that extrajudicial killings have taken place during the campaigns. The president's office had no immediate comment on the bishops' let-

ter. Beginning with Mass services on Saturday evening, priests will read out the letter signed by the bishops of Asia's biggest Catholic nation.

Their address will not mention Duterte by name, but will urge "elected politicians to serve the common good of the people and not their own interests" and call for steps to tackle "rogue policemen and corrupt judges". Nearly 80 percent of the Philippines' 100 million people are Catholic and, unlike in many other countries where the faith has waned, the majority still practice with enthusiasm.

While that support has historically given the Church significant political and social clout, it has been hesitant to criticise the blunt-spoken president's current war on drugs. In interviews with Reuters last year, more than a dozen clergymen said they were uncertain how to take a stand against the killings given the popular support Duterte's campaign enjoyed. Some said challenging him could be fraught with danger. Duterte has routinely attacked the Church. He cursed the Pope for causing traffic snarl-ups during his 2015 visit, and as recently as this week called for a "showdown" with priests whom he has accused of having wives, engaging in homosexual acts, misusing state funds and molesting children. — Reuters

INDONESIANS, FILIPINOS PROTEST TRUMP'S IMMIGRATION POLICY

JAKARTA: Indonesian and Filipino students yesterday protested President Donald Trump's immigration policy outside the US embassies in

their capitals. In Jakarta, dozens of students and activists from several rights groups called on the Indonesian government and the international

community to help stop Trump's order that temporarily banned travelers from seven predominantly Muslim countries. They do not include Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim nation, and the Philippines, a key US ally.

However, Indonesia is home to nearly 14,000 refugees seeking resettlement in third countries, and Trump's ban will significantly impact their chances of going to the US, said rights activist Veronica Koman, who organized the protest. A US judge on Friday imposed a nationwide hold on Trump's ban on travelers and immigrants from Iran, Iraq, Syria, Sudan, Somalia, Libya and Yemen, siding with two states that had challenged the executive order that has launched legal battles across the country. "We are here to protest Trump's xenophobic and Islamophobia policies," Koman said.

Protesters waved banners such as "I'm angry with Trump" and "No ban, no wall." "Actually this is not only for Muslims but this is war against humanity because the immigrants or refugees around the world, not only from Muslim countries, don't have to be treated like this," said activist Filza Inanuma. "Everybody should have rights to go everywhere they want for their protection, for their life." A similar rally was held outside the seaside US Embassy in the Philippine capital, Manila, where protesters burned a portrait of Trump. No violence was reported. — AP



JAKARTA: Muslim activists hold posters depicting US President Donald Trump during a protest outside the US Embassy. — AP

TEHRAN VOWS 'ROARING MISSILES'..

Continued from Page 1

Iranian state news agencies reported that home-made missile systems, radars, command and control centers, and cyber warfare systems were to be tested in yesterday's drill. Iran has one of the Middle East's largest missile programs and held a similar exercise in December to showcase its defense systems, including radars, anti-missile defense units, and short and medium-range missiles.

Tehran confirmed on Wednesday that it had test-fired a new ballistic missile, but said the test did not breach the Islamic Republic's nuclear agreement with world powers or a UN Security Council resolution endorsing the pact. Iran has test-fired several ballistic missiles since the nuclear deal in 2015, but the latest test was the first since Trump

entered the White House. Trump said during his election campaign that he would stop Iran's missile program.

The United Nations Security Council held an emergency meeting on Tuesday and recommended the missile testing be studied at committee level. The new US ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley, called the test "unacceptable". The Security Council resolution was adopted to buttress the deal under which Iran curbed its nuclear activities to allay concerns they could be used to develop atomic bombs, in exchange for relief from economic sanctions. The resolution urged Tehran to refrain from work on ballistic missiles designed to deliver nuclear weapons. Critics say the resolution's language does not make this obligatory. Tehran says it has not carried out any work on missiles specifically designed to carry nuclear payloads. — Agencies

LOUVRE SUSPECT'S FATHER DENIES...

Continued from Page 1

world," Hamahmy wrote, linking to a post he wrote on his Facebook page. "No negotiations, no compromise, steadfastness and no retreat," he added. His Facebook page and his Twitter account have since been suspended.

In another post on Twitter, he cited a Quranic verse that promises heaven to those who are killed fighting for the sake of God. Another post questioned: "Why are they afraid of the creation of a state for Islam? Because the state of Islam defends its resources and the honor of Muslims." He also insulted US President Donald Trump the same day,

labeling him "Donald Duck". He had announced his trip to France in a Twitter message on Jan 26. "Travelling to Paris, France from DXB," he wrote.

A friend of Hamahmy said he believed the Twitter account to be that of the suspect, who he insisted had not been an extremist. "I knew him since he graduated," he said of Hamahmy, who travelled to the United Arab Emirates after obtaining a law degree from Egypt's Mansoura University. "I didn't pay attention to his Twitter account, but read it after the incident," said the friend, who requested anonymity. "It's as though it's a different person. As though it was hacked." — Agencies

TRUMP FUMES AFTER JUDGE LIFTS TRAVEL BAN

Continued from Page 1

The order late Friday by Seattle US District Judge James Robart is valid across the United States, pending a full review of a complaint filed by Washington state's attorney general.

In the wake of Friday's ruling, Qatar Airways was the first to say it would allow passengers from the seven countries to resume flying to US cities if they had valid documents. Fellow Gulf carriers Etihad and Emirates said they would do the same, as did others including British Airways, Air France, Spain's Iberia and Germany's Lufthansa. In Cairo, aviation sources said Egypt Air and other airlines had told their sales offices of Friday's ruling and would allow people previously affected by the ban to book flights. Officials in Lebanon and Jordan, however, said they had received no new instructions regarding the Jan 27 travel ban. A spokeswoman for budget airline Norwegian, which operates transatlantic flights including from London and Oslo, said the situation was "still very unclear".

"I am very happy that we are going to travel today. Finally, we made it," said Fuad Sharef, an Iraqi with an immigration visa who was prevented from boarding a flight to New York last week. "I didn't surrender and I fought for my right and other people's right," Sharef told Reuters as he and his family prepared to fly from Erbil, the capital of the Kurdish region of northern Iraq, to Istanbul and then to New York, before starting a new life in Nashville, Tennessee.

Virtually all refugees also were barred, upending the lives of thousands of people who had spent years seeking asylum in the United States. Yesterday, a small group of immigration lawyers, some holding signs in English and Arabic, gathered at New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport, offering services to passengers arriving from overseas destinations. "This is an instance where people could really slip through the cracks and get detained and nobody would know," said John Biancamano, 35, an attorney volunteering his services. At Dulles International Airport outside Washington, volunteer lawyers also were in place to help travelers and monitor how visa holders and permanent residents were being treated as they arrived.

The Department of Homeland Security said yesterday it would return to its normal procedures for screening travelers but that the Trump administration would fight to overturn Friday's ruling. "At the earliest possible time, the Department of Justice intends to file an emergency stay of this order and defend the president's executive order, which is lawful and appropriate," DHS spokeswoman Gillian Christensen said a statement.

Some travelers told Reuters they were cautious about the sudden change. Overnight, some international airlines were uncertain about whether they could sell tickets to travelers from the countries in Trump's ban. "I will not say if I have hope or not. I wait, watch and then I build my hopes," said Josephine Abu Assaleh, who was stopped from entering the United States after landing in Philadelphia last week with five members of her family.

Abu Assaleh, 60, and her family were granted US visas in 2016, some 13 years after they initially made their applications. "We left the matter with the lawyers. When they tell us the decision has been canceled, we will decide whether to go back or not," she told Reuters in Damascus, speaking by telephone. Trump's order also put a 120-day halt on the US refugee admission program and barred Syrian refugees indefinitely. With Friday night's restraining order on the ban, refugees who have been cleared can now board planes.

Iraqi refugee Nizar Al-Qassab, 52, told Reuters in Lebanon: "If it really has been frozen, I thank God, because my wife and children should have been in America by now." He said his family had been due to travel to the United States for resettlement on Jan 31. The trip was canceled two days before that and he was now waiting for a phone call from UN officials overseeing their case. "It's in God's hands," he said.

Two Sudanese travellers told Reuters they were trying to travel as soon as possible, fearing the ban might be reinstated. They declined to be named, for fear of possible consequences. "I'm in a race against time," said a 31-year-old female academic who said international airlines were still refusing to sell her a ticket. "Now I am going from one airline company to another to convince them about the court's decision." — Agencies

WASHINGTON IN ANXIOUS UNCERTAINTY

Continued from Page 1

At times, Trump's style has tripped up his own White House. After an early morning tweet calling for an investigation into voter fraud, Trump's advisers announced that the president planned to sign an order to begin an inquiry. An Oval Office event was scheduled and members of the media were assembled. But the signing was abruptly scrapped and the investigation appears to have been shelved.

The president's advisers have taken some steps in recent days to try to alleviate some of the anxiety gripping Washington, including coordinating more closely with Republican lawmakers ahead of the signing of executive orders and giving more deference to the agencies putting in the refugee ban. But uncertainty still remains the capital's prevailing mood. Just yesterday, the departments of State and Homeland Security said they were stopping enforcement of the travel ban after a federal judge put the order on hold. The White House promised a prompt legal appeal.

Republicans who back Trump's calls for overhauling President Barack Obama's healthcare law are eager for guidance from the White House on what Trump will require in a replacement package. The insurance industry is becoming more alarmed by the day. Insurers start designing and pricing their offerings for 2018 early in the spring and there's still no word on tens of billions of dollars in the law's subsidies for consumers' premiums and out-of-pocket costs. "We need predictability, and we need predictability for long periods of time in order to price, and price effectively," Marilyn Tavenner, head of America's Health Insurance Plans told a Senate committee this past week.

Some businesses are on edge, too. Amid fierce customer opposition to Trump's immigration order, Uber CEO Travis Kalanick dropped out of a White House business council. Other executives fear theirs could be the next company to wind up in Trump's crosshairs for a high-cost government contract or overseas factory move. "There's dread in corporate America to wake up every morning and see what the latest tweet is," said Tony Podesta, a prominent Washington lobbyist.

At government agencies, many of which are waiting

for Cabinet secretaries to be confirmed, career employees and holdovers from the Obama administration are sorting through executive orders that landed on their desks with little notice, compared with the lengthy interagency discussions that usually precede major policy announcements.

The rollout of travel ban was so helter-skelter that a Justice Department lawyer defending the order in court Friday didn't know how many visa-holders have been affected. The lawyer told a judge that 100,000 visa-holders have had their visa cancelled, while the State Department later clarified that it was actually fewer than 60,000 people. With the ban on hold, the State Department said yesterday it reversed the visa revocation.

Trump aides blame any early instability in government agencies on the backlog of Cabinet nominees waiting for confirmation votes in the Senate. The president has just five Cabinet nominees confirmed, far less than Obama at this point in his tenure. But Rep Charlie Dent, a longtime Trump skeptic, said the White House appears intent on "trying to check boxes" and speed through campaign promises as quickly as possible, even when ideas aren't fully formed. "They're accelerating that when perhaps they ought to move more deliberately," Dent said.

For some organizations that oppose Trump's early actions, the chaos has been a boon. Anthony Romero, the executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union, said he hired 30 new employees following the election, including three new immigration lawyers since Trump signed the refugee ban. He said the organization has raised more than \$24 million in that same one-week stretch. "People are motivated to take action," Romero said.

Washington veterans say it's likely Trump will settle into a more regular rhythm over time. But they say that's still unlikely to resemble anything Washington has seen before. "He doesn't have the sensitivities, the hesitations, or the diplomacy of a politician," said Ari Fleischer, press secretary to President George W. Bush. "He was CEO of a privately held corporation who knows how to drive organizations forward to big, new and different objectives and figure out the details later." — AP

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Focus

TRUMP EFFECT: MEDIA SEE LIFT AS PRESIDENT SHARPENS ATTACKS

As US President Donald Trump steps up his attacks on the "dishonest" press, major American media outlets are seeing an apparent resurgence after years of downward spiral. Newspapers, radio and television had begun to see growth during the 2016 election campaign, and that has accelerated since the inauguration, despite - or perhaps because of - the vitriol from the new president and his aides. While much of the industry has been slumping in recent years, the war between the president and the news media has seemingly drawn in a flood of new readers, listeners and viewers, including many willing to pay for news.

CNN viewership rose a stunning 94 percent during the week of Trump's inauguration in January, even as the president assailed the cable news operator as a purveyor of "fake news". The New York Times announced this week it added nearly 300,000 paid digital subscribers in the fourth quarter of last year, the highest number since it began its paywall model. Trump's hometown newspaper has vowed to invest \$5 million in covering the new administration even as the president continues his Twitter barbs about the daily. On Sunday, the president tweeted: "Somebody with aptitude and conviction should buy the FAKE NEWS and failing @nytimes and either run it correctly or let it fold with dignity!"

Good news for industry

Gordon Borrell, a media analyst with Borrell Associates, said Americans are beginning to realize the value of independent media, and are in many cases showing a willingness to pay for it. "The election of Donald Trump has been a seminal moment for online subscriptions," Borrell said. "What's more valuable is not the news itself but the perspective." Borrell said that Trump's attempts to quickly shake up government and policy have made consumers aware of the need for news. "Right now, there's news every single day. It's a mad rush, a fire hose," he said. "This is good for the paid news industry."

Trump's apparent disregard for facts - such as his persistent claims of a record inauguration audience and allegations of millions of fraudulent votes cast - has also played a role in the media's revival. In a campaign on Twitter, celebrities and others vaunted the value of paying for news with the #PressOn hashtag. Comedian Ben Stiller joined the effort, tweeting, "We all need to accept the same truths. Facts are facts. Subscribe to a real journalism outlet." A similar message came from the NBA's Golden State Warriors coach Steve Kerr, saying: "I subscribed to the Washington Post today because facts matter." Among other media outlets, National Public Radio said the audience for its flagship news program "All Things Considered" jumped 20 percent in November. Media that are more friendly to Trump have gotten a lift too. Fox News, which is home to many conservative commentators, has become the number one non-premium cable channel, overtaking for the first time the sports channel ESPN.

Smaller outlets gain too

Even outside the big national media, the Trump effect seems to be significant. The Seattle Times spokeswoman China Levy said the newspaper in the Pacific Northwest has seen growth in internet traffic and subscriptions. "Since the election, we have seen a notable uptick in traffic and users, as well as subscribers," she said. "While we know the election and current political climate is contributing to our success, the extent to which that is the case is unclear."

The same is the case at the Minneapolis Star Tribune, according to marketing chief Steve Yaeger, who said, "The election has been of great interest to Minnesotans and we've seen that engagement reflected in rising subscription rates, engagement with our digital properties and even single-copy newspaper sales."

Dan Schaub, corporate director of audience development at the newspaper chain McClatchy, also cited a "nice uptick" for the group which includes the Miami Herald and Kansas City Star. "We've heard from consumers that there really is a vibrant desire on the part of the consumers to get facts and to get the truth and to turn to what they know are good brands and credible sources," he said. It remains to be seen if the recent gains will be sustained or if the downward trend - with many people relying on free online news - will resume at some point. Analyst Borrell said he believes consumers won't abandon their interest in news even if tensions ease. "There will probably be a little churn, but for the most part, people are resistant to disconnect their information sources after the big surge or the key interest ends," he said. — AFP

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Washington Watch

IT'S NOT JUST A MUSLIM BAN, IT'S MUCH WORSE

By Dr James J Zogby

With a stroke of the pen on a misdirected and, I believe, malicious Executive Order (EO), President Donald Trump unleashed a dynamic that will, I fear, have consequences as far-reaching and damaging to my country and my community as the Bush Administration's wrong-headed responses to the 9/11 terror attacks. What the various provisions of the EO have done is deepen Arab popular anger at the United States, provide IS with a public relations gift, fuel Islamophobic fear here at home, while, at the same time, exacerbating sectarian tensions within the Arab community.

Suspending and placing restrictions on immigration and refugees from seven mostly Arab and Muslim-majority countries will not make America safer. The data is clear. Immigrants from the countries on the White House list have not posed a threat to the US. Those who have been excluded are largely either students, family members visiting their kin, or business people. And vulnerable refugees from these same countries who are now being denied admission are among the most rigorously vetted individuals coming to America - insuring that they pose no danger to our country.

What the EO has, in fact, done is cancel the visas of between 60,000 to 100,000 individuals. It has also resulted in a nightmare situation for hundreds of innocents, caught on the cusp of the order's implementation, who were detained at airports, interrogated for hours, and, in some instances, sent back to their countries of origin. This has produced deeply moving stories of separated families, broken promises, shattered dreams, and personal hurt that have intensified anti-American sentiment across the Middle East. After 9/11, in stark contrast to the widely held view that "Arabs hated our values", our

polling made clear that Arabs respected our people, our culture, our products, our country's openness and tolerance, and the promise of our democracy. What they resented was our policy toward them. As one respondent noted - "I love America. I just feel that America doesn't love me". Despite our devastating war in Iraq, our anti-Palestinian bias, and our other failed policies across the region, what continued to hold hope for Arabs was that someday America would be true to its stated values. Trump's Executive Order and the anti-Muslim rhetoric that accompanied it have shattered that hope. IS must be pleased.

Islamophobia

Administration protests that the EO is not "a Muslim ban" doesn't pass the smell test. Granted that the freeze only includes seven countries but the rhetoric used to describe the intent of the order has been clearly inspired by the anti-Muslim animus of a White House populated by a group with individuals with a long record of Islamophobia. The language they have used to make the case for the order has been taken directly from the writings of well-known Islamophobes. In any case, this is how Trump's supporters have been encouraged to understand the EO's intent. Added to this are stories circulating that the list will soon be expanded to include many more Muslim-majority countries, among them: Lebanon, Egypt and Pakistan.

Making matters worse, the Administration has coupled its freeze of the refugee program with the caveat that, in the future, priority status will be given to "persecuted minorities" - by which they have meant Christians. Trump has justified this arguing that during the Obama years it was "very difficult for Christians" to get refugee status to come to America. This is a patently false case that has been frequently made by far-right ideologues.

In reality, the number of Christian and Muslim refugees entering the US each year are roughly the same. The percentage of Iraqis admitted in the refugee program already includes a very large number of Iraqi Christians. And while the numbers of Syrian Christians admitted as refugees were, in fact, quite low, it can be shown that this is due to the fact that most Syrian Christians are not refugees. Many, however, have come to America, either as asylees or under other visa programs.

Nevertheless, this Administration's stated preference for Christians has only served to reinforce the notion that the Executive Order was anti-Muslim, while exacerbating sectarian tensions within the Arab community. Having worked for decades to overcome religious divides, Arab Americans have had to face down multiple challenges to their unity. Recent immigrants still bearing wounds from their countries of origin have been the most vulnerable. In this context, an Administration-led anti-Muslim bias has taken a toll. Added to this, recent news articles quoting some immigrant Syrian Christians and some Arab American Republicans expressing support for President Trump's Executive Order have been hurtful.

The fallout of this Executive Order will continue to play out. The partisan and sectarian divide it has fostered, the extremism it has fueled, and the damage it has done to America's image will be with us for a long time. Far from making us safer, this Administration is putting us at greater risk. IS is, no doubt, an evil movement that must be defeated. But, in reality, this group has never posed an existential threat to our country. It could never do as much damage to the very idea of America and to the values to which we aspire as the foolish and dangerous policies put forward by this Administration.

NOTE: Dr James J Zogby is the President of the Arab American Institute

SCANDALS TEST FRENCH VOTERS' PATIENCE

French politicians accused of playing fast and loose with their finances have long gotten a pass from voters, but a string of recent scandals is putting their patience to the test. For many, "Penelopegate" - the media's term for the furor over the fake-jobs claims against presidential candidate Francois Fillon - may be the last straw. Once considered the frontrunner in elections set for April and May, Fillon is scrambling to save his candidacy after the Canard Enchaîné newspaper reported that his wife, Penelope, was paid more than €800,000 (\$860,000) to be his parliamentary aide, but never actually worked.

He is also accused of hiring two of his children when he was a senator from 2005 to 2007, paying them a total of €84,000, the paper said. But financial shenanigans have often caught up with prominent French officials: Ex-president Jacques Chirac was found guilty in 2011 over a "fake jobs" scandal while he was mayor of Paris in the 1990s. Former president Nicolas Sarkozy, for his part, is under investigation on charges of illegal campaign financing, and Marine Le Pen, the far-right candidate in this year's presidential race, is facing claims of using EU funds to pay officials in her National Front party.

"It all stems from a culture of caste, of privilege... where they assume that reaching public office means they can get away with doing whatever they want with public money," said Jean Garrigues, a history professor and author of "Elysee Circus". Many voters are also still fuming over the "Cahuzac case" of 2013, when former budget minister Jerome Cahuzac was found to have stashed money in Switzerland to avoid taxes. Cahuzac, who was sentenced in Dec 2016 to three years in prison, became a huge embarrassment for President Francois Hollande, who has bowed out of trying to win a second term.

"There was a healthy electroshock with the Cahuzac case," said Daniel Lebegue, president of Transparency International France. The French "no longer overlook these things, they don't accept them," he said. "It's a consequence of the financial crisis, the sacrifices that everyone had to make." A 2010 report from his group on transparency among public officials in 27 European countries ranked France second to last, just ahead of Slovenia.

An 'invitation to fraud'

After Cahuzac, new efforts were made to ensure financial probity, such as requiring MPs to declare their financial assets and to identify their assistants and other employees. In 2014, a specialized financial prosecutor's office was created, with judges focusing on fraud and corruption. And in November 2016, France finally created an official anti-corruption agency.

"But between the moment they change the rules and

the institutions, and seeing a change in politician's attitudes and behavior, it takes some time," Lebegue said. "There's a gap between people's demand for morality and the sense of impunity among politicians, which explains why Francois Fillon might not even understand what's happening to him."

Unlike at the European Parliament, or in Germany's Bundestag, French law allows a lawmaker to hire family members, a practice that astonishes many foreign observers. "The fact that you can hire your close relations,

with almost no oversight, is an invitation to fraud," said Bjorn Willum, a Danish journalist based in Paris. A French poll taken in the wake of the claims against Fillon - one of an estimated 15 percent of French MPs who have hired relatives - found that 76 percent oppose the practice and now want it outlawed.

But if it were, there would still be work to be done: for example, MPs are given some 9,500 euros a month to pay their assistants. But no one checks to see how that money is spent... — AFP

AUSTRIA DEAL GAINS TIME, LIKELY NOT MANY VOTES

"A little less conversation, a little more action" sang Elvis Presley as Austrian Chancellor Christian Kern unveiled his "Plan A" list of policies last month - an injunction to coalition partners to get on board or face "Plan B" - a snap election. Last week, after another threat by Kern to dissolve the coalition, the government agreed a compromise package of policies aimed at shaking off its image as hopelessly ineffective in the roughly 18 months left until its term ends.

But that package - which includes a rise in the minimum wage and other economic adjustments, as well as a ban on Islamic face veils - may not be enough, analysts say, especially as some policies follow, rather than challenge, the stance of the far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ), which has a commanding poll lead. The FPÖ, which has capitalized on Europe's migration crisis, presenting it as a threat to security and jobs, has the support of roughly a third of voters, polls show, followed by Kern's Social Democrats on around 27 percent, and his coalition partner, the conservative People's Party, on about 19 percent.

"This is the program of two parties that, out of fear of the FPÖ, have transformed themselves into a kind of soft FPÖ," political analyst Anton Pelinka said, judging the economic and social policies to be "of astonishing harmlessness." They shied away from the big measures, political analyst Thomas Hofer said. "This is not an ambitious shot, but it is a life-extending measure for the coalition." While Chancellor Kern said the policy package "must achieve results" in the 18 remaining months, there is a good chance the coalition will not last that long. There is already speculation that a snap election will be called this autumn.

If You Can't Beat Them, Join Them?

Worryingly for the coalition's prospects, the plan's emphasis on security and immigration is likely to play into the hands of the FPÖ, analysts say. With law-and-order measures ranging from tighter border controls to electronic monitoring of former jihadists, as well as restrictions on Islamic dress, the coalition has tried to counter the FPÖ's anti-immigration platform. But it risks backfiring, according to Christoph Hofinger of pollster SORA. "Weakening someone by imitating them never works in politics," he said.

The proposals say civil servants should dress in a "religiously neutral" way, raising questions about how that will be implemented in the largely Catholic country. The government says it will ban Muslim headscarves and other religious symbols but not remove the crucifixes often present in schools and courtrooms, drawing criticism from judges. The confusion meant the public would continue to focus on the FPÖ's core issue, Hofinger said.

Kern, a former head of the national rail company who took over as chancellor in May, has styled himself as a competent manager freshly arrived from the business world. He can take some solace from the fact that in terms of making the unruly coalition more productive than before, the bar is relatively low. "The policy plan" is more than the coalition has been able to achieve in most of its years working together," Hofer said. "The aim for him was to show that he is capable of taking action and he managed to do that, to a limited extent, but still..." Having chosen as his soundtrack a song that only became a global hit after Elvis died, Kern must now ensure he wins over his audience before he leaves the building. — Reuters

SPRINGBOK LEGEND FIGHTS FOR LIFE

JOHANNESBURG: South African rugby legend Joost van der Westhuizen, who is battling motor neurone disease, is in a "critical condition" after he was rushed to hospital yesterday, his foundation said. The 45-year-old former scrum-half, a Springboks captain who won the 1995 World Cup, was diagnosed with the condition in 2011. "He was taken to hospital earlier today and is in a critical condition," his J9 Foundation said in a statement on Facebook. The incurable disease which damages parts of the nervous system has left van der Westhuizen confined to a wheelchair and he was given two to five years to live when he was diagnosed. "I realise every day could be my last," he told the BBC in 2013. Van der Westhuizen scored 38 Test tries in 89 appearances in the green and gold by the time he retired in 2003. The iconic rugby player set up the J9 Foundation to promote awareness around motor neurone disease. —AFP

CARTUCHO CYCLING NAME UNVEILED IN SPAIN

MADRID: Chairman of Kuwait Cycling Committee Abdullah Al-Shemmeri announced yesterday a new Kuwait-Spanish cycling team, to be named Kuwait-Cartucho, aimed at competing in international tournaments. Al-Shemmeri, founder of Massi-Kuwaiti Cycling Project, said Kuwait-Cartucho would include Kuwaiti cyclists to compete in under the Kuwaiti flag. Speaking to KUNA, Al-Shemmeri said the 16-cyclist team included five Kuwaitis, three Spaniards, an Italian, as well as other cyclists from Argentina, Morocco, and South Africa. Kuwait had one international cycling team last year, he said, but the number grew to four this year: two in Spain, one on

Sweden, and the other in Switzerland. The team management, he explained, sought to distribute another 13 potential Kuwaiti cyclists on those four teams to benefit from international competitions. "The Kuwaiti teams do not only want to participate in international competitions, but to genuinely and seriously compete," he added. Al-Shemmeri said that Kuwait-Cartucho team was officially introduced in Madrid, Spain, few days ago. The team, consisting of many squads, would be competing in tournaments in France and the Philippines on February 18, he said. "The team will race under the name of Kuwait in more than 15 countries in four continents," he said. — KUNA

SWARM OF BEES STOPS PLAY AT S AFRICA ODI

JOHANNESBURG: A swarm of bees halted play and left the teams prone on the pitch during the third one-day international between South Africa and Sri Lanka in Johannesburg yesterday. Sri Lanka had just lost their fourth wicket with the total on 115 in the 25th over when, with new batsman Asela Gunaratne about to face his first ball, the slip fielders dropped to the ground. Other players followed and there was a short delay. At one time all 13 players and both umpires were lying face down on the field as the bees buzzed about. Play resumed but midway through the 27th over the bees converged on a helmet which had been placed behind wicketkeeper Quinton de Kock and the umpires stopped play. Ground staff at Wanderers Stadium emptied the contents of two fire extinguishers into the swarm. The players returned after a delay of more than 20 minutes but again left the field because there were still bees in the area where de Kock needed to stand. — AFP

AUSSIE GOLFER BOWDITCH ARRESTED FOR DRINK DRIVING

LOS ANGELES: Australian golfer Steven Bowditch apologized on Friday after his overnight arrest on suspicion of drink driving in Arizona, where he was competing in the USPGA Tour Phoenix Open. "I would like to apologize to my family, friends and supporters, as well as the PGA Tour and Waste Management Phoenix Open for the incident reported today," he said in a statement after his round on Friday. "As I intend to fully cooperate with the authorities, I will not be making further comment at this stage." Bowditch was charged with "extreme driving under the influence" after testing for a blood alcohol content of more than 0.20, police said. The legal limit in Arizona is .08. Police sergeant Ben Hoster told the Arizona Republic that Bowditch, who has a home near Dallas, Texas, was booked into jail because he was an out of state resident, and later released on bond. Bowditch made his second-round tee time at the Phoenix Open on Friday, but fired his second straight 74 to miss the cut. He was arrested shortly after 1 am after a motorist called police to report a white vehicle swerving on the road. —AFP



MELBOURNE: Bolt All Stars Captain Usain Bolt of Jamaica (L) practices the baton exchange with his team mate Jenna Prandini of the United States before their Mixed 4 x 100 Metre relay event at the Nitro Athletics meet in Melbourne, Australia yesterday. — AFP

FALCONS SEEK TO LAND FIRST SUPER BOWL WITH WIN OVER PATS

HOUSTON: The Atlanta Falcons will try today to remove their name from the list of teams never to have won a Super Bowl while the New England Patriots seek to rewrite the record book as the National Football League kicks off a new era with a vintage matchup. Upwards of 180 million Americans and a worldwide television audience are set to tune in for a contest that possesses all the hallmarks of a classic, as Atlanta's explosive top ranked offense piloted by quarterback Matt Ryan clashes with New England's number one defense in a Texas showdown for the Vince Lombardi trophy. The high-flying Falcons averaged 33.8 points per game during the regular season, best in the NFL, as Ryan enjoyed a most valuable player-caliber campaign tossing 38 touchdowns, second only to Green Bay's Aaron Rodgers.

Roger Goodell suspended Brady for the first four games for his part in Deflategate, the 2015 scandal over deflated footballs. "Every year is different," said Brady. "Every year, every team starts with the same goal. Every team wants to win it. Every team has hope. "The fans believe in it, and there's a lot of promise and hope. At the end of the day, there's only one team that wins it. "The fact that I've been able to do it before, it just means I've been a part of some really great teams, and this team is trying to be one of those really great teams that finishes a job, not one of those teams that comes up short." A potentially provocative halftime performance, politics and protests could also feature in Super Bowl 51 as the biggest showdown in American sports moves into its second half-century. President Donald Trump will kickoff Super Bowl Sunday with a pre-game televised interview and Lady Gaga will grab the halftime spotlight but the focus will remain on the field where a Patriots dynasty will confront a Falcons franchise desperate to make their mark.

While Ryan's New England counterpart Tom Brady, as usual, controlled the spotlight it was the Patriots' defense that paved the road to a record ninth trip to the Super Bowl allowing a league low average of just 15.6 points per game. "They are a great football team, a team that plays complementary football from offense to defense to special teams," said Ryan. "Their success has been their longevity and consistency, something all people admire. "New England has a great defense and watching them on film, their ability to keep people out of the end zone has been unbelievable all year." While Ryan is still trying to establish his credentials as an elite quarterback, Brady and coach Bill Belichick have already amassed Hall of Fame resumes. A win on Sunday would give Brady five Super Bowl rings, breaking a tie with Joe Montana and Terry Bradshaw, while Belichick would go to the top of the all-time coaching list, also with five titles, surpassing Pittsburgh Steelers' Chuck Noll. Widely considered the NFL's most hated team, the Patriots, despised as the 'Evil Empire' outside of their New England fortress, arrive at the Super Bowl wearing a chip on their collective shoulder. For New England and their fans this season has been hyped as the Patriots against the world after commissioner

Over the last decade it is a rare year when Boston has not celebrated a sports championship, with the National Basketball Association (NBA) Celtics getting a parade in 2008, the National Hockey League (NHL) Bruins in 2011, and Major League Baseball's Red Sox in 2007 and 2013. But it is the Patriots who have been the toast of New England as they prepare to play in a seventh Super Bowl since 2002, having won four of them. Atlanta meanwhile has had little to celebrate. Their NHL team, the Flames left town and moved to Calgary, while the NBA Hawks have not won a title since moving from St. Louis in 1968. The Atlanta Braves claimed a World Series in 1999 but last season tied for the worst record in the National League. The Falcons have made only one other trip to the Super Bowl in their 51-year history, losing to the Denver Broncos in 1998. "I'm really happy for the city of Atlanta," Ryan said. "I've played here for nine years, it's an unbelievable place to live." — Reuters



HOUSTON: Atlanta Falcons tackle Ryan Schraeder (73), offensive guard Chris Chester (65) and center Alex Mack (51) go through drills with teammates during a practice for the NFL Super Bowl 51 football game Friday, in Houston. Atlanta will face the New England Patriots in the Super Bowl today. — AP

BOLT LEADS HIS ALL STARS TO VICTORY IN NITRO MEET

MELBOURNE: The world's fastest man Usain Bolt led his Bolt All-Stars to victory on the opening night of the inaugural Nitro Athletics teams event in Melbourne yesterday.

The world record holder for the 100m and 200m sprints led the Bolt All Stars including athletes from Jamaica, the USA and Kenya against teams representing Australia, England, New Zealand, Japan and China.

The 30-year-old Jamaican sprint star ran in the final event on the programme, the 4x100m mixed relay, featuring two male and two female athletes from each team, as did fellow Jamaican Olympic gold medalist Asafa Powell. With their captain running the unfamiliar second leg, handing over to American Jenna Prandini, the Bolt All Stars won that race to notch up their fourth outright win of the night and finish with a total of 1080 points.

"It was just a wonderful night. I was just enjoying myself from the start to the end," Bolt said. "Everybody was just having fun. Everybody was trying to support their teammates-going over to the long jump, to the javelin—that's something were not really used to."

The Australian team won three of the 12 events to sit second with 1050 points. The two teams finished equal first in two other events while Australia's Kurtis Marschall also tied for first place with China's Xue Changrui in the men's pole vault.

New Zealand won the other two events, while China finished third on the points table with 845.

"At the start (of the night) I was a little bit worried. We started kinda slow and I was talking so much smack that everyone was looking at me like 'you're losing'," Bolt said.

"But we won at the end, so that's the key thing and I'm very happy with how everything turned out."

The winner of gold medals in the 100m, 200m and 4x100m relay at the past three Olympics, Bolt said he had never run a competitive race in February before, and was impressed with the form of the local athletes.

"They came out ready. Most people aren't really at the level that they want because it's February, but you guys were ready and that's what we want, competition."

"So it's fun and it was loud, so it was good." Bolt may have been the main attraction but the Australian athletes enjoyed accolades from the crowd of around 7,000.

Nitro Athletics involves a mixture of traditional and modified events designed to provide non-stop action over a two-hour period, with each team consisting of 12 male and 12 female athletes. Twelve events, from mixed gender relays, to 60m and 150m sprints awarded points for each placing.

Highlights included the men's elimination mile, which saw the last-placed runner eliminated at the end of each of the first three laps of the track. A similar programme will be held on Thursday with the final of the three-event series at the same venue next Saturday. — AFP

MOSLEY WOULD HAVE KEPT ECCLESTONE AT F1 HELM

LONDON: Formula One's new owners Liberty Media may have made a mistake in ousting commercial supremo Bernie Ecclestone immediately after completing their takeover of the sport, according to former FIA president Max Mosley. Ecclestone, 86, was replaced by American Chase Carey on Jan. 23 as chief executive of Formula One and appointed 'Emeritus Chairman' - a position without a clearly defined role for the Briton.

Liberty have, however, said they hope Ecclestone will continue to offer advice to the board. "If it had been me in the case of Liberty, I'd have kept Bernie on to do the things that he's superbly good at - such as dealing with the promoters and the organisers and all that side of it," Mosley told Reuters.

The Briton, a close ally of Ecclestone while running the governing body, said Liberty could have concentrated on "doing the things that up to now have not been done" in Formula One such as virtual reality and digital technology. "But of course they bought a business and are fully entitled to come in and think they can run the whole business better and we'll just have to see what happens," added the 76-year-old, speaking at F1's annual Zoom charity auction on Friday night. Mosley, who stood down as president of the International Automobile Federation in 2009, cautioned against too much rapid change in the sport. Liberty have spoken about increasing the number of grands prix, particularly in the Americas, changing the weekend format and giving every round of the championship the 'Super Bowl' treatment. Carey, who has appointed former ESPN executive Sean Bratches to run the commercial side with former Mercedes principal Ross Brawn overseeing motorsport matters, has spoken of F1 being like '21 Super Bowls' in a season.

"You've always got to be careful, if it ain't broke don't fix it. But they are fully aware of that," said Mosley. "They (Liberty) are serious business people. Whether they can deal with everything better than they could have dealt with it using Bernie for the things he's good at, and then doing the things that they know about, is an open question. We shall see."

FEW BUMPS Mosley agreed that Liberty had plenty on their plate in the coming months and might find a few bumps in the road ahead despite their undoubted expertise.

"It always looks easy from the outside," he warned. "It's like if I think I could go and fix horse racing. But if you actually go and try and do it, you find there are a whole mass of problems you never even knew about. But maybe they will be very successful and get the job done." With Super Bowl 51 coming up in Houston today, Mosley was also wary of comparisons between how the National Football League spectacular is presented over the course of a week and grand prix racing.

"I think that's easy to say, it's not quite clear to me what that means," he said of the suggestion that every race could be treated like a Super Bowl, with more razzamatazz and events leading up to it. "But the Super Bowl...is that so wonderful? I don't want to be unkind, but Americans always think they can do everything better than anybody else. And they're not always right as a lot of recent history shows." — Reuters



Bernie Ecclestone (left) and former FIA president Max Mosley at a news conference.

REALIST JENKINS TARGETS WALES WIN IN ROME

ROME: Looking back with nostalgia at past Six Nations romps over Italy would be a mistake, Wales legend Neil Jenkins said on the eve of the sides' tournament opener today.

Italy, who scored an historic 20-18 win over South Africa in the November tests, host Warren Gatland's men knowing that failure to remain competitive for the entire match will prove costly.

Second-half collapses by Italy saw Wales romp to a 67-14 win in Cardiff last year and, although Italy pushed Gatland's men hard in a 23-19 World Cup warm-up defeat in September 2015, Wales had left Rome with a 61-20 victory on their previous visit to the

capital six months earlier.

But Jenkins, working as Wales' skills coach, said Italy's win over South Africa has made rivals sit up and take notice. Although Wales are expected to coast to victory in Rome, Jenkins said they are taking nothing for granted.

"It's going to be tough, very tough," Jenkins said yesterday in Rome. "It always has been. The scores the last two years have been blown out a bit. We got away in the last 20 minutes and scored quite a few tries.

"But those games were tough from the word go and we had to earn the right to play and score the points we did. Tomorrow's not going to be any dif-

ferent." Now under the helm of Irishman O'Shea, Italy are playing with renewed confidence and conviction as they look ahead, long-term, to being competitive at the 2019 World Cup.

"They had a fantastic win against South Africa," added Jenkins. But if the Azzurri fail to keep their foot on the pedal, as they did on their last two tournament meetings with Wales, it will be costly, says Italy captain Sergio Parisse.

"I know from experience that if you train hard, you play hard: I'm sure that, physically, we're ready but we also know that if we're going to have any chance to win it, it will come down to the last 10 minutes," said Parisse. Yet

despite the threat of heavy rain, few rugby aficionados will really expect another upset in Rome. In the absence of Gatland, currently with the British and Irish Lions, coach Rob Howley has appointed Alun Wyn Jones as skipper in place of record-setting former skipper Sam Warburton, who will start at blind-side flanker alongside in-form openside Justin Tipuric and Gloucester's Ross Moriarty.

Scott Williams started two of four games for Wales in the autumn and keeps his place ahead of stalwart centre Jamie Roberts, with Ospreys pair Rhys Webb and Dan Biggar in the half-backs. With bonus points now available for

the first time in the tournament, targeting a maximum haul ahead of next week's England showdown in Cardiff is a big temptation.

But Jenkins, Wales' highest ever points scorer, said that is not the priority. "Anything can happen in test rugby. You've got to put your points on the scoreboard and sometimes that's three, six, nine and not seven, 14, 21," he said.

"But test matches are all about winning, it's as simple as that. If the bonus points come into play at the end then it will be a fantastic tournament. If we can get over the line with any sort of win tomorrow, we'll be happy to get our championship under way." — AFP

NEW ZEALAND FACE FIJI IN CRUNCH SEVENS Q-FINAL

SYDNEY: New Zealand will face Fiji in a crunch quarter-final after going through the opening day of the World Sevens tournament unbeaten in sweltering Sydney yesterday.

It will be another quarter-final between the two Sevens powerhouses after the Fijians beat them at the same stage in last weekend's tournament in Wellington.

New Zealand topped their pool after wins over Australia, Papua New Guinea and Scotland, while Fiji were shocked 28-15 by Wales in their group to set up the quarter-final with the Kiwis.

Kiwi star Tim Mikkelsen said the hot weather in Sydney had been challenging, with more heat forecast today.

"You need to get the ball to beat Fiji and if we can get the ball from the kick-offs we can make it a contest and really go forward on attack," Mikkelsen said.

"Recovery is huge, hydration too. A few boys are cramping up and I hear it'll be even hotter tomorrow so we'll have to be even better."

In today's other quarter-finals, Australia will play Wales, England take on Argentina and the United States face South Africa.

England finished top of Pool A with wins over Kenya, Japan and South Africa. They

defeated series leaders South Africa 21-15 in their final match of the day having started the tournament with an impressive 19-12 victory over Kenya.

England also had a comfortable four-try 26-0 victory over Japan. The Springboks had wins over Japan and Kenya before being edged by England in their final pool match. "We never managed to pick up any momentum as the day progressed," coach Neil Powell said.

"Last week we managed to build up steam, but today we just could not do the same. "In a way, this was a good thing to happen, because our character will now be tested. It will be interesting to see how we shape up tomorrow against America."

Australia qualified for a quarter-final against Wales after finishing second in Pool C with victories over Scotland and Papua New Guinea.

"You saw what Wales did to Fiji today so we know they are a quality side," Australia coach Andy Friend said. "We had a good win against them last week in Wellington but we also know that every game and tournament is different so they'll be tough today. "We haven't been (in the final eight) in the last two tournaments so it's great to be back into that." — AFP



SYDNEY: Tim Mikkelsen of new Zealand (L) avoids James Stannard of Australia (C) as team mate Iopu Iopu-Aso (R) looks on in their pool C match at the Sydney Sevens World Series tournament in Sydney yesterday. — AFP

FRANCE COMPLETE DAVIS CUP WIN OVER JAPAN

TOKYO: France wrapped up victory in their Davis Cup first-round tie against Japan after Pierre-Hugues Herbert and Nicolas Mahut won yesterday's doubles to give the visitors an unassailable 3-0 lead.

The Wimbledon champions swatted aside Yuichi Sugita and Yasutaka Uchiyama 6-3, 6-4, 6-4 after Richard Gasquet and Gilles Simon had dominated the opening day's singles in Tokyo on Friday.

"We didn't play our greatest match but did what we had to do to win," Mahut told reporters after helping France secure a spot in the Davis Cup quarter-finals.

"It's rare you get easy matches in the Davis Cup," he added, struggling to be diplomatic after second lopsided day of tennis. "We had a few complicated moments but we managed to deal with them. We've been together for over three weeks so we know each other well and have this strength."

Japan have failed to win a single set in three matches in the absence of world number five Kei Nishikori, who opted to sit out the World Group clash.

Gasquet swept past Taro Daniel 6-2, 6-3, 6-2 on Friday before Simon overpowered Yoshihito Nishioka 6-3, 6-3, 6-4 to put Yannick Noah's team firmly in the driving seat. "It was quick and well played, yes," said Noah, a losing Davis Cup finalist in 1982.

"Three-zero against a Japan team without Nishikori looks normal," added the former French Open champion, whose team will face either Britain or Canada in April's quarter-finals.

"And the doubles-number one in the world against 300, you expect this on paper. But you still have to get the job done. We will go out and party tonight!"

Nine-time winners France have now won all four of their Davis Cup meetings with Japan, who will look to avoid a white-wash in Sunday's dead-rubber reverse sin-

gles. Japan captain Minoru Ueda doffed his cap to the victorious French. "You could feel the strength of the French team," he said. "It's obvious they have a strong desire to go all the way and win the Davis Cup. Their doubles pair were superb, they never looked like faltering."

NEW ZEALAND BEAT INDIA

In Pune, New Zealand's Artem Sitak and Michael Venus beat India's Leander Paes and Vishnu Vardhan yesterday in the Davis Cup doubles rubber in Pune, with the host's still leading the Asia/Oceania Group I tie 2-1.

The 3-1 loss in the match against the visitors denied Paes a chance to set a record of winning the maximum matches in the tournament as he stands level with Nicolo Pietrangeli of Italy with 42 match victories.

Paes, 43, was playing his 55th doubles match since making his debut in the Davis Cup in 1990. The Indian pair lost 3-6, 6-3, 7-6(6), 6-3 after starting off strongly in the first set without losing a serve.

But Sitak, ranked 56, and Venus, ranked 36, fought back to level the scores in the next round. The Kiwis rode the momentum in the third set and won it in a tie-breaker 7-6(6). Paes, ranked 64 and Vardhan, ranked 338, were humbled in the fourth set 6-3.

On Friday India won both their singles matches against the visitors in straight sets, taking a 2-0 lead in the rubber.

In the first match Yuki Bhambri beat Finn Tearnay which was followed by another comprehensive victory by Ramkumar Ramanathan against Jose Statham.

India have not lost to New Zealand in the Davis Cup since 1978 when the visitors beat them 4-1 in Delhi during the Eastern Zone semi-final.

Bhambri is slated to play Statham, and Ramanathan will take on Tearnay in the two reverse matches tomorrow. — AFP



TOKYO: French tennis player Pierre-Hugues Herbert (R) and Nicolas Mahut (L) return a shot against Japanese pair Yuichi Sugita and Yasutaka Uchiyama during their Davis Cup tennis world group first round match between Japan and France in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP

DAZZLING SCOTLAND HANG ON TO UPSET IRELAND 27-22

EDINBURGH: Scotland hung on to upset Ireland 27-22 in a pulsating match at Murrayfield yesterday and secure their first opening day win in the Six Nations for over a decade.

Two late penalties from captain Greig Laidlaw snatched a victory for the Scots that was founded on a dazzling first-half display which pushed the hosts into a 21-8 lead at the break. Fullback Stuart Hogg, the player of last year's tournament, scored Scotland's first two tries and centre Alex Dunbar dotted down for an unconventional third in a set move from a lineout. Ireland winger Keith Earls crossed for Ireland in the opening period while lock Iain Henderson and flyhalf Paddy Jackson, a late replacement for Johnny Sexton, bagged tries in Ireland's second-half fightback which earned them a losing bonus point.

"That was a cracking game," Hogg told the BBC. "We switched off a bit in the start of the second half but the boys are delighted with that result and a great way to kick off the Six Nations here at Murrayfield."

"The boys stuck to it but credit to Ireland - they were fantastic in the second half," Hogg added. It was an impressive performance by Scotland but perhaps one that fans knew might be on the cards with many of the Glasgow team that demolished Leicester 43-0 in Europe's top tier club competition just weeks ago in the side.

Scotland had not won their opening game of the Six Nations since 2006 and entertaining an Irish side who beat the mighty All Blacks last year was a tough task.

Yet in the first half it looked straightforward. Wave after wave of attacks created an overlap for Hogg to collect a scrappy pass from flyhalf Finn Russell and open the scoring within the first 10 minutes.

It was not long before Hogg added to his tally with an audacious dummy, allowing him to ghost past Earls out wide. Earls crossed for his own try in the corner minutes later to take the scores to 14-5, before the Scots added a training-ground third.

Dunbar bamboozled the opposition forwards by moving into the heart of the lineout, snatching the ball off the top and running over unchallenged. Laidlaw converted again and Jackson added a penalty to take the scores to 21-8 at halftime. Ireland came out firing in the second half and quickly clawed back to 21-15 when Henderson crashed over from close range. Scotland had winger Sean Maitland to thank for maintaining their lead after an intercept and a last-gasp tackle prevented try-scoring chances, before Jackson converted his own try to give the visitors a 22-21 lead as the match headed into its final quarter.

With Scotland's hopes of a famous win seemingly slipping away, Laidlaw kept his cool and added two penalties in the final 10 minutes. — Reuters

ZVEREV BROTHERS' DEFEAT LEAVES GERMANY TRAILING

BERLIN: Hosts Germany are trailing Belgium 2-1 in their home Davis Cup World Group first-round match after brothers Alexander and Mischa Zverev lost their doubles rubber yesterday.

Belgium's Ruben Bemelmans and Joris De Loore sealed a 6-3, 7-6(7/4), 4-6, 4-6, 6-3 win over the Zverev brothers in Frankfurt over three hours and 13 minutes of a tight doubles rubber. Alexander Zverev, 19, was a late replacement for doubles expert Jan-Lennard Struff, who dropped out with a virus.

The teenager has the chance to redeem himself in today's deciding singles when he is due to face Steve Darcis before Philipp

Kohlschreiber plays Arthur De Greef.

After Kohlschreiber lost the first singles rubber 6-4, 3-6, 2-6, 7-6(7/2), 7-6(7-5) to Darcis on Friday, Alexander Zverev levelled the tie with a straight-sets win over De Greef.

The Germans had started as favourites to win the tie in Frankfurt after Belgium number one David Goffin dropped out to recover after reaching the quarter-finals of the Australian Open.

Defeat to the Belgians would be Germany's third straight first-round defeat having lost to France, also in Frankfurt, in 2015 and the Czech Republic in Hanover last year. — AFP



FRANKFURT: Germany's Alexander Zverev (R) and Mischa Zverev attempt to return a shot during the first round Davis Cup tennis match between Germany and Belgium yesterday at the Fraport-Arena in Frankfurt am Main, western Germany. — AFP

IOC JOINS TALKS TO GET NHL PLAYERS IN 2018 OLYMPICS

LOS ANGELES: The four top stakeholders in the discussion over whether NHL players will participate in the Winter Olympics in South Korea next year met without resolution Friday...

March in Korea," Fasel told reporters at NHL offices in New York. "We need to know about the accommodation. We need to know about the transportation. The sooner we know, the better we can prepare the conditions for the NHL players and the NHL."

being of our players, whether or not there's fatigue. From our standpoint, I think the clubs are very much focused on disruption to the NHL season."

agreement. "We all want to see the best players at the Olympic Winter Games Pyeongchang 2018, and we know the players feel the same," Bach said.

tion in Detroit as he and the rest of the New York Islanders prepared for a game against the Red Wings. Tavares, a union representative, said the topic seems to be a bargaining chip between the league and players.

DE VILLIERS STEERS S AFRICA TO ODI SERIES WIN OVER S LANKA

JOHANNESBURG: AB de Villiers struck an unbeaten half-century to steer South Africa to a series-winning seven-wicket victory over Sri Lanka in the third one-day international at The Wanderers yesterday.

on. Only two other batsmen managed double-figures as Sri Lanka lost 10 wickets for 103 runs to record another low score on what has been a dismal tour with the bat.



NEWARK: Micheal Ferland #79 of the Calgary Flames watches the game tying goal by Matt Stajan #18 (not shown) go in the net past Cory Schneider #35 of the New Jersey Devils at the Prudential Center on Friday in Newark, New Jersey. The Flames defeated the Devils 4-3 in overtime. —AFP

KESSEL'S OT WINNER LIFTS PENGUINS OVER BLUE JACKETS

COLUMBUS: A goal at 3:15 of overtime by Phil Kessel gave the Pittsburgh a win over the Columbus at PPG Paints Arena on Friday. Working on the lone power play of the contest, Kessel dealt a pass from the high slot to defenseman Kris Letang in the right circle.

FLAMES 4, DEVILS 3 (OT) Mikael Backlund's goal 1:13 into overtime lifted Calgary to a victory over New Jersey at the Prudential Center. The Devils carried a 3-2 lead into the third period, but Calgary forged a tie on Matt Stajan's goal at 7:22.

HURRICANES 2, OILERS 1 Sebastian Aho scored 1:48 into the third period on a power play as Carolina defeated Edmonton at PNC Arena. Aho took defenseman Justin Faulk's pass and converted on a one-timer from the right side.

PANTHERS 2, DUCKS 1 Jonathan Huberdeau scored the winning goal off an assist from Aleksander Barkov-both players fresh off the injured list to lead Florida past Anaheim at the BB&T Center. Skating four-on-four, Barkov got control of the puck on the left wing after a Keith Yandle stretch pass.

RED WINGS 5, ISLANDERS 4 The Red Wings started slowly but they finished with a bang. A point shot by Detroit defenseman Danny DeKeyser pinballed off the legs of New York Islanders defenseman Nick Leddy and Thomas Hickey and into the net with 27.9 seconds left in regulation time, giving the Red Wings a victory.

NHL results/standings table showing scores for Florida 2, Anaheim 1; Calgary 4, New Jersey 3 (OT); Detroit 5, NY Islanders 4; Carolina 2, Edmonton 1; Pittsburgh 4, Columbus 3 (OT). Includes Western, Central, Pacific, Eastern, and Atlantic divisions.

SCOREBOARD

JOHANNESBURG: Scores in the third one-day international between South Africa and Sri Lanka at the Wanderers Stadium yesterday. Table listing scores for Sri Lanka and South Africa batsmen/bowlers.



JOHANNESBURG: Sri Lanka's batsman Niroshan Dickwella plays a shot during the third One Day International (ODI) match between South Africa and Sri Lanka at Wanderers cricket ground yesterday in Johannesburg, South Africa.

SOUTH AFRICA LAUNCHES 'GLOBAL' T20 LEAGUE

JOHANNESBURG: Cricket South Africa yesterday announced plans for a Twenty20 league which it hopes will attract major international investment and big-name players.

we have chosen will make it possible for franchises to attract top-class players to South Africa," said CSA chief executive Haroon Lorgat. Plans for the league were revealed to International Cricket Council member countries during ICC meetings in Dubai which ended on Friday.

ICC MOVES CLOSER TO TEST SHAKE-UP

LONDON: The International Cricket Council has moved closer to a radical shake-up to pave the way for Afghanistan and Ireland to become Test nations and restrict the power of the 'Big Three' of India, England and Australia.

tions to the future structure of bilateral cricket ranging from the status quo to two tier leagues and every possible option in-between. The former South Africa wicket-keeper added: "The model the group has agreed on enables us to provide context for all three formats of the game and in the case of the ODI and T20 solutions the approach goes beyond the full members and aligns bilateral cricket with qualification for ICC events."

Sports

Bolt leads his All Stars to victory in Nitro meet



France complete Davis Cup win over Japan



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FALCONS SEEK TO LAND FIRST SUPER BOWL WITH WIN OVER PATS Page 15



LONDON: Chelsea's Brazilian-born Spanish striker Diego Costa (C) sends a shot wide during the English Premier League football match between Chelsea and Arsenal at Stamford Bridge in London yesterday. — AP

HAZARD JEWEL CUTS ARSENAL 12 PTS ADRIFT

Chelsea 3

Arsenal 1

LONDON: Eden Hazard scored a sublime solo goal as Premier League leaders Chelsea thrust a dagger into Arsenal's title aspirations with a 3-1 victory at Stamford Bridge yesterday. The Belgian winger left a trail of defenders in his wake to double Chelsea's lead in the 53rd minute, in between a contentious header by Marcos Alonso and a late lob from Arsenal old boy Cesc Fabregas.

It was Chelsea's 11th home victory in succession and their 16th win in 18 league games, stretching their lead over third-place Arsenal to a huge 12 points with 14 games of the season remaining.

Chelsea have been close to unplayable since Antonio Conte changed their system during their 3-0 loss at Arsenal on September 24 and it seems only a matter of time until they are crowned champions.

For Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger, who watched from the stands as he served the third game of a four-match touchline ban, his side's season is following a wearily familiar pattern.

Arsenal have lost their last five games at the Bridge and had conceded 13 unanswered goals prior to Olivier Giroud's stoppage-time consolation.

They have lost four of their last nine league games and once again face the prospect of a run-in given suspense only by the tussle for Champions League places. With a raft of midfielders unavailable, Wenger was obliged to start with Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain alongside Francis Coquelin in the middle, while Theo Walcott replaced Giroud in attack.

Arsenal had conceded two goals in the first 13 minutes of Tuesday's 2-1 loss at home to Watford. They

almost caught Chelsea cold here, Alex Iwobi curling wide after Thibaut Courtois overhit a pass towards David Luiz. But after Gary Cahill had headed into the ground and over the bar at the other end, Chelsea went ahead in the 13th minute with a goal that left Arsenal fans fuming.

BELLERIN FORCED OFF

Pedro sent a cross into the box from the right that Diego Costa headed against the bar at the near post, sending the ball spinning into the air.

As Hector Bellerin got himself in position to head it away, and with Walcott watching on impassively, Alonso flew in, cleaning his fellow Spaniard out with his forearm and heading the ball home.

Referee Martin Atkinson allowed the goal to stand and Arsenal's disappointment was compounded by the sight of a dazed Bellerin being led down the tunnel, with Gabriel taking his place.

Chelsea were buoyant, Costa driving a shot into the side-netting and Pedro forcing Petr Cech to push the ball

behind from Alonso's accurate cut-back.

But Arsenal ended the first half strongly, Courtois producing a stunning one-handed save to turn Gabriel's header over the bar and then dropping onto a tame effort by Mesut Ozil.

It took a last-ditch tackle by Laurent Koscielny to prevent Hazard scampering clear early in the second half, but when the Chelsea number 10 picked up the ball in the 53rd minute, there was no getting it back.

After striding onto a loose ball in the centre circle, he beat Koscielny, shrugged off Coquelin, leaving him flat on his back, and then outfoxed Koscielny again before squeezing a shot past Cech.

On the touchline, Conte celebrated with characteristic abandon. There were flickers from Arsenal, Courtois clawing away a deft header from substitute Danny Welbeck, before Fabregas lobbed in from 25 yards after Cech shanked the ball straight to him.

Giroud reduced the arrears, heading in from Nacho Monreal's cross — AFP



LONDON: Tottenham Hotspur's Son Heung-min, left, competes for the ball in the air with Middlesbrough's Calum Chambers during the English Premier League soccer match between Tottenham Hotspur and Middlesbrough at White Hart Lane stadium in London, yesterday. — AP

KANE KEEPS SPURS TITLE HOPES ALIVE

Tottenham 1

Middlesbrough 0

LONDON: Harry Kane's penalty ended Middlesbrough's resistance as Tottenham's 1-0 win yesterday kept their flickering Premier League title challenge alive.

Spurs are nine points off runaway leaders Chelsea thanks to Kane's second half spot-kick-the players answering manager Mauricio Pochettino's demand on Friday to maintain their hold on second place and pray for Chelsea's form to slump.

Tottenham lost precious ground after being held by Sunderland in their previous game and Middlesbrough were in danger of repeating the trick. That was until Kane struck in the 58th minute to give the hosts their seventh successive home win and leave Middlesbrough without a win away since the opening month of the campaign-looking nervously over their shoulders. Aitor Karanka's side are just a point above the bottom three. Tottenham's task would have been much tougher had Alvaro Negredo not planted Adama Traore's right-wing cross over in the opening minutes. It appeared to spark Spurs into action as man of the match Korean inter-

national Heung-Min Son saw his low shot pushed out by Middlesbrough goalkeeper Victor Valdes. Dele Alli was next to try, but hit the side netting after Christian Eriksen's shrewd pass had opened up the visitors' defence. Valdes, though, could find himself in hot water with the Football Association after raising his hands at Alli in the aftermath which was missed by referee Mark Clattenburg but caught on camera. It promised to be a busy night for the Spaniard, who was saved by his post in the 24th minute.

Eriksen's corner was met by Toby Alderweireld and the Belgian's powerful header bounced off the outside of the post.

Middlesbrough frustrated the home side but the breakthrough almost arrived via Kane in the 24th minute. Son's cross found the England striker but Kane was stretched and could not direct his header on target from six-yards out. The game was played exclusively in Middlesbrough's half but Karanka's side were happy to sit back and soak up pressure.

When it looked like they had been breached, the assistant referee's flag saved them as Kane had strayed offside after turning home Son's cross. Spurs were hitting a brick wall as Eriksen's piledriver was pushed away by Valdes but Spurs were finally presented with the chance in the 57th minute that would not be passed up. — AFP



SOUTHAMPTON: Southampton's Sofiane Boufal, left, and West Ham United's Aaron Cresswell in action during their English Premier League soccer match at St Mary's Stadium in Southampton, England, yesterday. — AP

WEST HAM SEAL WIN AT SOUTHAMPTON

Southampton 1

West Ham 3

SOUTHAMPTON: West Ham United recovered from a goal down to cruise to a comfortable 3-1 Premier League victory away

against Southampton yesterday.

Southampton's Italian forward Manolo Gabbiadini, making his debut following his arrival from Napoli, finished superbly from a tight angle in the 12th minute before Andy Carroll leveled with a neat finish two minutes later-his fourth goal in four league games.

Pedro Obiang, provider for Carroll's goal, put the visitors ahead with a long-range strike in the 44th before Mark Noble's free kick was deflected off Steven Davies and into the net to condemn Southampton to a sixth defeat in seven league games.

The victory lifted West Ham, winners of six of their last nine league games, to ninth while out-of-form Southampton sit four points and four places below in 13th. — Reuters

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Dollar's sudden weakness could help profit picture

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KSE in red zone; Price Index down by 0.13%

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US president orders review of Dodd-Frank

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IN A CORNER OF PRO-TRUMP AMERICA - HOPE FOR ECONOMIC REVIVAL

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BEIJING: Workers eat their lunch outside a construction site wall depicting the skyline of the Chinese capital at the Central Business District in Beijing. — AP

CHINA RAISES SHORT-TERM INTEREST RATES

MOVES COULD OFFER SUPPORT FOR YUAN

SHANGHAI: China's central bank surprised financial markets yesterday by raising short-term interest rates on the first day back from a long holiday, in a further sign of policy tightening as the economy shows signs of steady-ing. While the rate increases were modest, they reinforced views that Chinese authorities are intent on both containing capital outflows and reining in risks to the financial system created by years of debt-fueled stimulus.

Higher interest rates could prod debt-laden firms into deleveraging, though at the risk of stunting growth. "It appears to be an intent to control a real estate bubble. It could also be aimed at arresting the yuan's depreciation, although it is on the reverse repo they touched upon and the impact remains to be seen," said Naoto Saito, chief economic researcher at the Daiwa Institute of Research in Tokyo. "All in all, it comes across as a move to tweak interest rate levels to accompany a broader monetary policy shift." The People's Bank of China (PBOC) raised the interest rate on open market operation reverse repurchase agreements (repos) by 10 basis points, effective on Feb. 3.

It also raised the lending rates on its standard lending facility (SLF) short-term loans. PBOC assistant governor Zhang Xiaohui said later on Friday that monetary policy will be kept generally prudent and stable, while also avoiding either a rapid slowdown in economic growth or excessive liquidity injections. Zhang also said China will keep the yuan basically stable and will avoid large volatility in interest rates and foreign exchange rates. The comments were made in an essay published by China Finance, a PBOC-affiliated magazine, through the messaging service WeChat.

Analysts said the tightening of primarily money market rates suggested the PBOC wanted to retain policy flexibility as it balances the need to keep the economy from slowing again. Other moves in recent months had signaled that Beijing was eyeing a gradual shift from its loose policy stance. In late January, the PBOC raised rates on its medium-term loan facility (MLF) for the first time since it debuted the liquidity tool in 2014. It was the first time it has raised one of its policy interest rates since July 2011.

Analysts expect any further steps to be

gradual as policymakers weigh their impact on economic growth, and believe the PBOC will be in no hurry to raise the policy lending rate for now. The one-year policy lending rate was last cut in October 2015 to 4.35 percent. "China's economic recovery is still shaky, while the global economic situation is unstable, so raising open market rates is more appropriate than raising benchmark rates," said Li Huiyong, chief economist at Shenwan Hongyuan Securities. "It's a flexible tool, which can be easily reversed if China's economy shows signs weakness again."

The world's second-largest economy grew 6.7 percent last year - roughly in the middle of the government's target range. But heavy policy stimulus - evident in record lending from mostly state-owned banks and increased government spending - has fuelled worries about the risks of high debt levels and an overheating housing market that could threaten financial stability if not addressed. China's debt to GDP ratio rose to 277 percent at the end of 2016 from 254 percent the previous year, with an increasing share of new credit being used to pay debt servicing costs, UBS analysts said in a note.

A different type of tightening

Asian stock markets extended modest early losses after the rate rise, while China bond futures fell as much as 1.5 percent at one point. Most Chinese and global metal prices also fell on fears that higher rates will sap demand. The PBOC raised the seven-day open market operations rate - its unofficial policy rate - to 2.35 percent from 2.25 percent, while also lifting rates for SLF loans. The SLF rate acts as a de facto ceiling for interbank lending, analysts said. (For details on other rate moves, see)

China's central bank also injected funds through 7-day, 14-day and 28-day repos on Friday, although there was a net drain of funds for the day owing to maturing open market operations. "It's not a good kick off of the Lunar New Year. It is a clear sign that the central bank has switched to tighten its monetary policy," said a trader at a Chinese bank in Shanghai. China's economy has seen a broad-based pickup in recent months, due largely to a strong housing market and higher government spending on infrastructure projects.

At the same time, however, capital flight from the tightly managed economy has been

strong, fueled by expectations that the yuan currency will depreciate further after sliding to more than eight-year lows against the dollar. The yuan fell nearly 7 percent last year, its biggest loss against the dollar since 1994, on worries about shaky growth early in the year and amid a surge in the dollar. Bearish yuan views have persisted despite a slew of moves in recent months aimed at making it more difficult for Chinese individuals and companies to send money abroad. China's currency reserves fell by a tenth last year and, at \$3.011 trillion, are close to falling below psychologically significant levels. "The signal is very clear," said Zhou Hao, senior Asian emerging market economist at Commerzbank in Singapore, referring to the latest rate move. Hao said this time the tightening was more targeted compared with China's previous tightening cycle that ended in 2013. "Inflation at that time was rising very rapidly and at this time inflation is not really an issue. Secondly, the yuan was under pressure to appreciate at that time." "Right now it's totally different. If you have capital outflows, that's already tightening. And then you tighten further, which is a double-whammy." — Reuters

BUSINESSES GROWING IN FACE OF UPCOMING RISKS

POLITICAL RISKS COULD CURTAIL GROWTH

LONDON: Business started 2017 on a solid footing, surveys showed yesterday, thriving ahead of a myriad of political risks in the coming year. Fears of a growing protectionist agenda in the United States, whether national elections across Europe upset the status quo and just how fractious Britain's divorce proceedings from the European Union become, are all expected to weigh in the months ahead. Yet so far those risks seem to have been mostly ignored with firms from Asia to Europe increasing or at least largely maintaining activity. Similar upbeat results are expected later from the United States.

Euro zone businesses started 2017 by increasing activity at the same multi-year record pace they set in December. China's factory activity grew for a seventh month and while India's services business contracted for a third month as firms struggled to recover from a government crackdown on currency in circulation, the pace slowed. "The outlook for this year is reasonably

bright despite all the risks. The numbers for January have generally been quite positive," said Andrew Kenningham, chief global economist at Capital Economics.

Growth in Britain's services sector slowed for the first time in four months in January, dipping just below its long-run average, as businesses battled the sharpest rise in costs in more than five years. But on Thursday the Bank of England sharply revised up its growth forecast for 2017 to 2.0 percent, a view held by only the most optimistic forecaster in a Reuters poll of 50 economists taken last month. Britain's economy unexpectedly outpaced all its major peers last year, wrongfooting those who expected an immediate hit from June's Brexit vote.

The Markit/CIPS British services Purchasing Managers' Index dropped to a three-month low of 54.5 last month from December's 15-month high, at the bottom end of a range of forecasts in a Reuters poll of economists, but Markit said the

PMIs still point to first quarter growth of 0.5 percent. IHS Markit's final composite PMI for the euro zone, seen as a good guide to growth, held at 54.4. It has not been higher since May 2011 and has remained above the 50 mark dividing growth from contraction since mid-2013.

That points to first quarter expansion of 0.4 percent, Markit said, matching the median prediction in a Reuters poll. "Despite the slightly disappointing outcome this remains a very strong report," said James Knightley, senior economist at ING. China's factory activity expanded for the seventh straight month in January, giving Beijing more room to tackle chronic imbalances in the economy. The Caixin/Markit Manufacturing PMI fell to 51.0. The world's second largest economy has seen a broad-based pickup in recent months, with fourth-quarter GDP beating expectations due largely to a strong housing market and higher government spending on infrastructure projects. — Reuters



WASHINGTON: Workers prepare the National Mall in Washington, DC. The US economy continued to pump out new jobs in January, adding 227,000 positions, while the unemployment rate rose a tenth to 4.8 percent, the Labor Department reported. — AFP

UNDER TRUMP, DODD-FRANK TO GO UNDER THE KNIFE

WASHINGTON: The landmark Dodd-Frank financial reforms were adopted in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis. On Friday, US President Donald Trump ordered a review of the law and told business leaders: "We expect to cut a lot out of Dodd-Frank." The following explains the law, which was intended to avoid a repeat of the financial meltdown brought on by Wall Street excesses:

Crisis intervention

Passed in 2010, the 2,300-page Dodd-Frank legislation enacted sweeping reforms of the banking and financial industries and to securities regulation. The aim was to prevent a repeat of the cascading wave of crises that swept through the world financial system in 2008, nearly bringing it down and plunging the world into depression. As it was, it led to the "Great Recession." The crisis originated with the collapse of the market for mortgage-backed derivatives, threatening major financial institutions and the wider economy. The federal government was forced to intervene to save financial institutions deemed "too big to fail." The massive federal bailouts, however, proved highly unpopular with taxpayers, giving political impetus to the reforms, which were introduced by two former Democratic lawmakers, Chris Dodd of Connecticut and Barney Frank of Massachusetts.

Reining in Wall Street

The legislation imposed yearly "stress tests" on banks to determine whether they were on sound

financial footing. It required them to submit "living wills" that would allow their activities to be rapidly wound up in the event they failed. It created an "orderly liquidation authority" as an alternative to bankruptcy, with the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation given the power to liquidate failing financial institutions. Investment bankers were prohibited under the so-called Volcker Rule from using their firms' own funds, rather than that of investors, to make certain speculative investments that could endanger their capital foundation. Dodd-Frank also greatly expanded oversight by securities regulators, making privately run hedge funds and private equity firms subject to regular inspection by the Securities and Exchange Commission.

Protecting consumers

Dodd-Frank also mandated the creation of the new Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, an independent agency intended to protect consumers from unscrupulous practices in the financial services industry. In September, the CFPB took action against the retail banking giant Wells Fargo for generating fees by creating sham accounts in their customers' names.

Backlash

Since its passage, the law has been under unrelenting assault from the financial industry and free market Republicans, who complain of burdensome regulations that hinder economic activity. Republican lawmakers this week voted to end Dodd-Frank regulations that required



WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump signs an executive order in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington. —AP

mining, oil and gas firms to disclose payments they made to foreign governments—a measure intended to foster transparency and help end corruption in the developing world. Under Republican leadership, the SEC has been directed

to reconsider another Dodd-Frank rule requiring manufacturers to declare whether certain mineral content in consumer goods including mobile telephones is tied to conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo. —AFP

US BIG BANKS CAUTIOUSLY GREET TRUMP'S MOVE TO LOOSEN RULES

'RULES ARE HARMING BUSINESS'

NEW YORK: Wall Street bankers expressed quiet satisfaction yesterday with signals that President Donald Trump intends to roll back some of the tough financial regulations enacted after the 2008 financial crisis. A trader at one hedge fund described sentiment as "positive" upon news of the White House moves.

Trump signed two executive actions asking the Treasury and the Labor Department to study ways of reforming regulations that were designed to make markets safer and give consumers more protection. Trump and many in the banking industry say the rules are harming business.

"We expect to cut a lot out of Dodd-Frank," Trump said, referring to the 2010 law passed in response to the financial crisis that has sparked complaints from bankers. "We are satisfied," said a banker, who, like others spoke to AFP on the condition of anonymity. Banks have "faced tremendous headwinds that came with a sharp increase in highly prescriptive government regulation," said Rob Nichols, president of the American Bankers Association, in a statement. "Reducing the strong regulatory headwinds banks face is critical to increasing lending that drives job creation across America."

'Betrayal' of populism?

But Wall Street insiders, mindful that Big Finance remains broadly unpopular after the crisis, do not want to appear too euphoric about the easing of the rules. Spokesmen from large banks, including Goldman Sachs and JPMorgan Chase, declined comment Friday. In January, liberal activists organized protests outside Goldman Sachs offices in several US cities to draw attention to the bank's role in the biggest financial crisis since the 1929 Great Depression.

Trump capitalized on this anger in the presidential election, running as a populist who promised to take a wrecking ball to the system that abandoned everyday people. Critics accuse him of hypocrisy. "It's a betrayal of his campaign promises, especially those savaged by the Wall Street crash who presumably were the core of his base," said Bartlett Naylor, financial policy advocate at consumer rights nonprofit



FLORIDA: Tourists from Taiwan carry shopping bags as they walk along Lincoln Road Mall, a pedestrian area featuring retail shops and restaurants in Miami Beach, Fla. President Donald Trump's executive order suspending immigration from seven majority-Muslim countries could slow the US economy by hampering two of the nation's top export industries: Tourism and higher education. —AP

Public Citizen. "At his inauguration Donald Trump promised a government for the people, but today's announcements will only make life easier for Wall Street execs and the richest of the rich," said Brandon Wu, senior policy analyst at ActionAid USA.

"Trump is trying to roll back legislation designed to prevent another financial crisis, giving bankers free rein to once again put profit before people." Investors are anticipating Trump's plans will force the banks to spend millions less on compliance staff and other costs for new regula-

tions that had been expected in the coming years under Dodd-Frank. Trump administration officials have also signaled they intend to target the Volcker rule, which limits the ability of big banks to make highly lucrative investments from their own funds, and the fiduciary rule, which requires financial advisors to prioritize the interests of their clients.

Some Wall Street insiders were cautious about the prospect for major rollbacks in Dodd-Frank, noting that Congress would also need to support the measures. Many

in Congress, including Republicans, hail from regions that were devastated by the subprime loan crisis. Gains in shares of large banks Friday suggested the market was preparing for fatter days ahead for the largest financiers. Bank of America and JPMorgan gained more than two percent and Goldman Sachs jumped 4.2 percent. The bond market was more subdued, with the spread between interest rates on bank bonds and US treasuries stable, suggesting greater caution in the outlook for easing regulation. —AFP

UK SERVICES ACTIVITY SLOWS AS PRICE PRESSURES ROCKET

LONDON: Growth in Britain's services sector slowed for the first time in four months in January as businesses battled the sharpest rise in their costs in more than five years, a closely watched survey showed yesterday. Britain's economy outpaced its main peers last year, wrong-footing those who expected a rapid hit from June's Brexit vote. But Friday's data offered signs that a limited slowdown might be taking place.

The Markit/CIPS services purchasing managers' index (PMI) dropped to 54.5 from December's 15-month high of 56.2, just below its long-run average and at the bottom end of a range of forecasts in a Reuters poll of economists. Combined with drops in manufacturing and construction PMIs this week, the survey was consistent with quarterly growth slowing to 0.5 percent in early 2017 from 0.6 percent at the end of last year, Markit said, in line with the Bank of England's relatively upbeat growth forecasts released on Thursday.

Nonetheless, sterling dropped almost half a cent against the US dollar after the PMI was published, extending its hefty falls on Thursday when BoE Governor Mark Carney gave no hint that interest rates were likely to rise soon. Samuel Tombs, an economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics, said he believed the survey overstated growth for the economy as a whole, as it did not include retailers likely to be hit hardest by rising prices. "Momentum is fading as prices shoot up," he said. Services firms said their costs were rising at the fastest since March 2011 due to sterling's fall since the referendum. "Anecdotal evidence widely attributed cost pressure to fuel, salaries, freight charges and imports," Markit said. —Reuters

US PRESIDENT ORDERS REVIEW OF DODD-FRANK FINANCIAL REFORMS

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump on Friday ordered a review of key reforms enacted after the 2008 financial crisis, in the first step towards scaling back toughened regulations on the banking industry. The so-called Dodd-Frank law aimed to curb the actions of the finance sector that led to the "Great Recession," but critics claim it created red tape that stifles the industry. "Today we are signing core principles for regulating the United States financial system," Trump said in the Oval Office as he signed two executive orders aimed at scrapping parts of the 2010 law. "Doesn't get much bigger than that, right?" he said.

The president's move gives the upper hand to opponents of the landmark legislation who have long battled attempts to rein in Wall Street excesses. Addressing a White House meeting with industry leaders earlier in the day, Trump said: "We expect to cut a lot out of Dodd-Frank." "I have friends who can't start businesses because the banks wouldn't let them borrow because of rules and regulations and Dodd-Frank." Trump's directives were quickly denounced by Senator Chuck Schumer, the leader of the minority Democrats in the upper house of Congress, who vowed to fight to prevent the law's undoing.

Campaign promises kept?

"President Trump promised to stand up to the big banks, now he's letting them write the rules of the road," Schumer said in a statement. Like Trump, the Democratic senator hails from New York state, home to the financial industry's largest global hub. The mammoth Dodd-Frank legislation was adopted after a systemic crisis in the global financial system caused by the failure of widely traded but complex derivatives backed by poor-quality mortgages.

The resulting taxpayer bailout of failing banks and financial institutions deemed "too big to fail," or so large their collapse could cause widespread economic harm, provoked lasting public outrage. "If we allow Wall Street to go unchecked again, it's only a matter of time before history repeats itself," Democratic Congresswoman Chellie Pingree said on Twitter. The Dodd-Frank rules required banks to demonstrate their solid financial grounding in annual "stress tests" as well as refrain from certain risky transactions, and significantly expanded the role securities regulators play in overseeing the investment industry.

Trump's twin decrees came on the heels of his meeting with business leaders including chiefs of the largest banks and invest-

ment firms, such as JP Morgan Chase, Blackstone and BlackRock, which may stand to gain from looser rules. The directives will also delay a fiduciary rule adopted under the previous administration, which had yet to take effect but would have required investment advisors handling retirement funds to put their clients' interests before maximizing their own profits. Among the many provisions of the 2,300-page legislation, Dodd-Frank also gave rise to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, an agency meant to police how banks and others provide services to the public.

Republicans and industry lobbyists have made no secret of their criticism of the CFPB and other checks on industry imposed by Dodd-Frank, waging battles against it in court and on Capitol Hill. The Federal Reserve, which plays a key role in banking regulation, had yet to react to Trump's move. Any repeal of Dodd-Frank itself would require congressional action but the Trump White House is keen to send a signal that it is ready to slash red tape. Gary Cohn, the former Goldman Sachs president who now heads Trump's National Economic Council, told The Wall Street Journal ahead of the signing that freeing up the financial services sector again would be a boon to consumers. —AFP

CUSTOMER SERVICE TIPS

The forefront of any company is its customer service. This department deals with all kinds of customers and makes sure they are satisfied at the end of the day - no matter how grumpy they get. When customer service is excellent, the customer finds it more appealing to deal with said company, and if any issues occur, the customer knows the company will take care of it. Being customer-centric, thinking like a customer, and believing the customer is always right are familiar sayings that you might hear whenever there is business-to-customer interaction. But what does it really mean to have superb customer service skills? Bayt.com, the Middle East's #1 Job Site, presents you with the essential habits to ensure the satisfaction of your customers.

Communicate

Nearly two thirds (63%) of employers in the Middle East look for candidates with good communication skills in English and Arabic, according to the Bayt.com Middle East Job Index Survey. This proves that communication is a skill in high demand. Clear correspondence, language competency, business acumen for the relevant field, and overall confidence in speaking, writing and reading are essential ingredients for excellent customer service.

Listen

Effective listening is another secret to successful customer service. To be an effective listener means to truly pay attention and to be able to repeat or rephrase what the customer says. To solve their problems, you need to comprehend the needs of your customers. Ask them about their problems, challenges, frustrations, and goals. Keep on asking questions until you know exactly what they want and only then start offering solutions.

Empathize

What this means is expressing authentic concern, care, and desire to be helpful. There's a difference between quickly going through customer emails and truly understanding what customers really need in every correspondence. This is where "placing yourself in the customer's shoes" comes in; you know how they feel and you want to make sure they are satisfied.

Solve

New challenges arise daily as the global economy becomes more complex. According to the Bayt.com poll, Education and Innovation in the Middle East and North Africa, creativity is an essential skill for professionals to have. 88.5% of respondents agree that creative thinking is more important in today's economy. Hence, every business should aim to foster and reward innovation, allowing employees to suggest new ideas, embrace challenges and explore innovative solutions to customers' requests. This way, the customer is impressed, yielding positive results for the business.

Handle

Harsh words are not always insulting and when customers complain it should not be taken personally. Complaints are unavoidable. However, most professionals fail to prepare for objections. Prepare a list of the 10 to 20 common objections and prepare answers for each. The answers should be clear and concise. Rehearse your answers until they sound natural, not robotic. Another thing to keep in mind is that objections can often be turned into invaluable feedback if the situation is controlled, the issue is acknowledged, and the focus is redirected towards the solution.

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GULF BANK ANNOUNCES AL-DUWAIKAN AS GEN MANAGER OF CORPORATE BANKING

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank is pleased to announce the appointment of Ahmad Khalid Al-Duwaisan to the position of General Manager - Corporate Banking, following the approval of the Central Bank of Kuwait.



Ahmad Al Dowaisan

In his new role, Al-Duwaisan will be managing Gulf Bank's corporate banking division, and will be supporting senior management in the execution of the Bank's long-term vision and strategy. Al-Duwaisan has over 15-years experience in corporate banking with a thorough understanding of the Kuwait market.

His deep financial knowledge is combined with a strong record in building and maintaining client relationships. Prior to this appointment, he served as Deputy General Manager of Corporate Banking and Head of Remedial and Structured Workouts for Gulf Bank. Al-Duwaisan holds an Executive Masters in Business Administration from the American University of Beirut, and Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering from Northeastern University. He has also attended executive management courses from the Harvard Business School.



UNITED REAL ESTATE'S ASSOUFID GOLF CLUB RECEIVES TWO COVETED AWARDS

KUWAIT: Kuwait's leading real estate development company has announced its win for Africa's Best Golf Course 2016 and 'Morocco's Best Golf Course 2016' at the 3rd annual World Golf Awards for its development in Morocco. Supported by an award-winning portfolio as 'Africa's Best New Course 2014', 'Morocco's Best Course 2015' and 'Trip Advisor 2016 Certificate of Excellence', Assoufid Golf Club's 18-hole golf course was recognized at the annual World Golf Awards, which took place at the Conrad Hotel, Portugal.



Ahmad Kasem

Set against the backdrop of North Africa's snow-capped Atlas Mountains, Assoufid Golf Club is situated 20 minutes from the old town (Medina) - a UNESCO World Heritage site. The natural desert-style, 18-hole golf course, designed by Scottish PGA professional and former European Tour professional, Niall Cameron won the prestigious awards through a voting system cast by professionals working within the golf travel and tourism industry - senior executives, travel buyers, tour operators, public (golf tourism consumers) agents and media professionals.



Ahmad Kasem, Deputy CEO of United Real Estate Company said, "We are proud to be part of yet another success story that has achieved consecutive recognition for its unique design concept. The 222-hectare development will include a 5-star hotel and residences, offering seasoned golfers an excitingly diverse challenge across an undulating desert landscape."

Drawing in international golfers from UK, France, Germany and Scandinavia, Assoufid Golf Club is equipped with several elevated tees made for spectacular play, and is a classic make-up of 10 par 4s, four par 3s and four par 5s spread equally between the two nines with only 45% of the course's acreage planted to minimize water consumption.

WINNERS IN GULF BANK 'WIN BIG' CAMPAIGN

KUWAIT: Sixty customers have won following Gulf Bank's 'Win Big' campaign which was launched in collaboration with Lulu Hypermarket. The campaign ran from 22 November 2016 until 20 December 2016 and was exclusive for Gulf Bank credit card holders. During this one-month campaign, Gulf Bank's customers were automatically enrolled whereby they got the chance to enter a draw and win valuable prizes upon



spending KD 10 in Lulu Hypermarket. Customers increased their chances to win by increasing the number of their transactions.

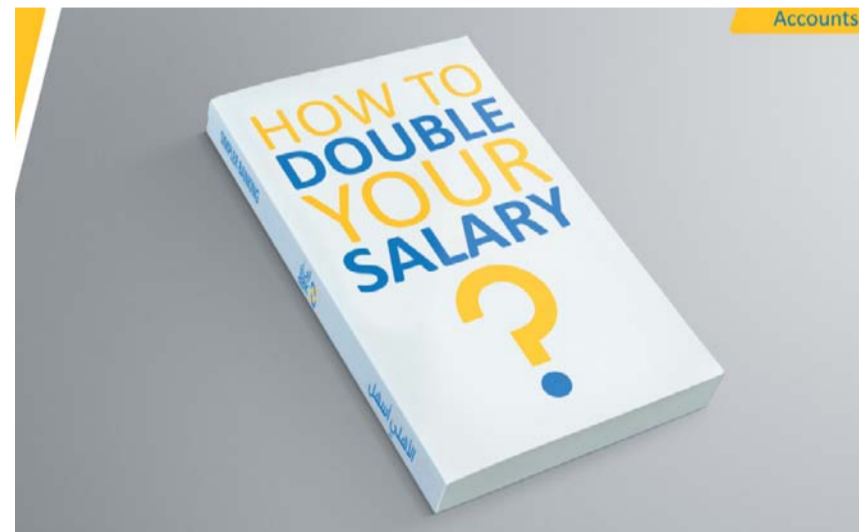
Sixty customers are winners of this campaign and they are: Mona Abdulateef Al-Najdi- Suha S Oubeid; Peyman Mohamed Ojjan; Vesley Joa Fernandes; Sayed Hussain Mahboob; Kumar Kamlesh Shelm; Seong Joon Kong; Collin Cyril D Souza; Calum Edward Mcewan; Sarosh George; Mishaal Ali Al-Dowiliah- Cheriya Foulda Saleim; Omar Enrique Alvarado; Hetlakumar Vyas; Jaims Bawel Askalona Ventura; Jayanta Madhab Saikia; Babu Joseph Joseph Lat; Qubess Ali; Abbas Ali Bohra; Daiwei Lin;

Mohammed Abdulmateen; Chandarasekar Nagarajan; Darshan Narasingh Rao Deshmukh; Kallat Ramesh Kallat; Zaid Abdullah Al-Olayan; Mahendra Babu Putta; Alberto Delaroché Hernandez; Jismon George; Catherine Malar; Ouni Kreshnan Rajahavan; Mohammed Taer Al-Harbi; Shaji John Poikavilayil; Nincy Joseph Francis; Ginu George; Neetha Cherian Pranjot and Sandeep Ranganatham

Others include; Manikandan Raju Raju; Vimal Arockiaraj Alfhonse; Kashish Tandon; Sonal Gupta; Ghassan Marwan Daaboul; Manal Sulaiman Al-Kandari; Ahmad Rajab Ibrahim; Jerry Pampamkuzhivil Varughese; Waleed Fahad Al-Meraj; Rohit Singh Baghel; Bader Mohammad Ashor; Olimpia Salas Guzman; Ratish Tashantraman; Praveen Kumar Ramish Rawoo; Mostafa Mahmoud El-Gayar; Benniyamin Magimaiddoss Magathuyadoss; Sujith Prabha; Mahesh Kumar Dhawan; Rammurthy Bhaganathan Santosh; Ayad Bassam Abdulatif Al-Haj; Krishnamurthy Natarajan; Shah Hussain Ugam; Sinu Joe Elannjeelat and Gulam Ali Busheri.

Gulf Bank would like to congratulate all winners and promises to launch new campaigns for those who did not get the opportunity to win, will soon do by simply being the Bank's customers. To find out more about the Gulf Bank, customers can visit the bank's bilingual website at www.gulfbank.com, call the Customer Contact Center on 1805805, or visit one of Gulf Bank's 56 branches in Kuwait.

ABK ANNOUNCES WINNERS OF 'DOUBLE YOUR SALARY' DRAWS



KUWAIT: Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) held its 39th 'Double Your Salary' weekly draw on 23rd January, 2017 at the Bank's Head Office in the presence of a representative from the Ministry of Commerce, announcing the names of the winners for this week. The promotion includes weekly draws, with two winners per draw. The campaign will run until 27th June, 2017. The winners this week were: Metwalli Mohammad Metwalli Madkout (University Branch)

and Leena Kurian Pappy Kurian (Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh Branch). New customers who transfer their salary to ABK receive KD 100 and will automatically be entered into the weekly draws to double their salaries. Existing customers who are already transferring their salary to ABK are entered into a separate draw. For more information about Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait please visit eahli.com or contact a customer service agent via 'Ahlan Ahli' at 1899899.

RUSSIAN ECONOMY RETURNS TO GROWTH

MOSCOW: The Russian economy, hurt by weak energy prices and Western sanctions, returned to growth late last year after seven quarters of contraction, official data suggested. Russia's statistics service surprised economists by finding gross domestic product (GDP) contracted by only 0.2 percent in 2016. That implies fourth-quarter growth could have been around 1 percent year-on-year if there were no revisions to data for the previous three quarters.

"The important thing is that the economy showed a stronger recovery at the end of last year," said Dmitry Polevoy, chief Russia economist at ING Bank. "Growing private consumption and investments will fuel headline GDP growth, and an improving expansion of exports will mostly offset the rebound in imports," he added. The GDP figures chime with upbeat comments from Russian policymakers that the commodity-dependent economy is over the worst of a deep slump after a deal by global oil producers to cut output helped support energy prices.

Signs of economic recovery also

strengthen the hand of President Vladimir Putin in the lead up to next year's presidential election.

Last year's GDP data benefited from an improvement in the mining and manufacturing sectors, but consumer-facing sectors such as hotels and retail trade contracted. A Reuters poll of 15 economists late last year predicted the Russian economy had contracted by 0.5 percent in 2016.

Rosstat, the data agency also revised down its estimate of the GDP decline Russia suffered in 2015 to a drop of 2.8 percent from an initial reading for a 3.7 percent fall, reflecting changes to its methodology. Citi economists said the Russian economy was entering 2017 with strong momentum and predicted GDP could rise by 2 percent this year, versus the government's official forecast for growth of 0.6 percent. Russian Economy Minister Maxim Oreshkin said at the World Economic Forum in Davos last month the economy could grow 2 in 2017 percent as long as there were no external shocks such as a renewed fall in oil prices. — Reuters

KIB CHAIRMAN NAMED 'ISLAMIC BANKING CHAIRMAN OF THE YEAR'

KUWAIT: World Finance, the premier London-based global banking and finance journal, has named Sheikh Mohammed Jarrah Al-Sabah, Chairman of Kuwait International Bank (KIB), its "Islamic Banking Chairman of the Year" for 2017. This is the second time that Al-Jarrah has been recognized by World Finance for his leadership and outstanding record of excellence in the realm of finance, after having previously been named "GCC Chairman of the Year" in 2015. The prestigious magazine has also bestowed several awards on KIB over the past few years, including "Best Islamic Bank in Kuwait" for three consecutive years - in 2014, 2015 and 2016 - as well as "Best Islamic Bank in the GCC" in 2016.

Receiving the Award, Chairman Al-Jarrah said: "It is both a great honor and a privilege to be receiving such a prestigious award and I am absolutely humbled by this recognition. This award is much more than a personal or individual accolade; rather it is a testament to the overall success of KIB. A success which simply would not have been possible without the incredible support and dedicated efforts of every single person at the Bank; from our Board of Directors, to our executive management team, to each and every employee in our organization."

A seasoned veteran of the banking industry with extensive experience in the financial sector, Al-



KIB Chairman Sheikh Mohammed Jarrah Al-Sabah

Jarrah has served as Chairman of KIB since 2010, after having first joined the Board of Directors in 2007. His strong leadership and focused vision have proven to be vital components driving the Bank's continuous growth and success over the past few years; helping to position KIB at the forefront of the Islamic banking sector not only in Kuwait, but across the region as well. Throughout his prolific career, Al-

Jarrah has established himself as an influential figure in the Arab banking industry, earning a reputation for being a first-class leader and savvy financial strategist. In addition to his role at KIB, Al-Jarrah currently serves as Chairman of the Union of Arab Banks (UAB) and Board Member of the Kuwait Banking Association (KBA). Al-Jarrah is also a member of the Board of Trustees at the Arab Academy for Banking and Financial Sciences, and serves as Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors of Warba Insurance Company.

During his tenure as Chairman of UAB, Al-Jarrah has been an instrumental force in furthering the Union's efforts to augment the reputation of the Arab banking sector on the global stage. Al-Jarrah has been a keen advocate of joint Arab-International banking cooperation, and has sought to promote greater collaboration and unity amongst financial institutions across the Arab World.

Al-Jarrah concluded his statement saying: "I am proud of the immense success that KIB has achieved in the decade that I have been with the Bank, but I am confident that this is simply the beginning for us. I am confident that our fast-paced growth and expansion will continue to propel KIB to the forefront of the Islamic Banking sector, not only in Kuwait but across the region as well."



GAUHATI: An impoverished Indian family transports recyclable material on a cart on the outskirts of Gauhati, India. India's Finance Minister has pledged relief for middle class taxpayers and small and medium-sized companies, saying the government would spend billions of dollars to double farmers' incomes, upgrade ramshackle infrastructure and provide cheap housing. — AP

GOOGLE MUST TURN OVER FOREIGN EMAILS: US JUDGE

PHILADELPHIA: A US judge has ordered Google to comply with search warrants seeking customer emails stored outside the United States, diverging from a federal appeals court that reached the opposite conclusion in a similar case involving Microsoft Corp. US Magistrate Judge Thomas Rueter in Philadelphia ruled on Friday that transferring emails from a foreign server so FBI agents could review them locally as part of a domestic fraud probe did not qualify as a seizure.

The judge said this was because there was "no meaningful interference" with the account holder's "possessory interest" in the data sought. "Though the retrieval of the electronic data by Google from its multiple data centers abroad has the potential for an invasion of privacy, the actual infringement of privacy occurs at the time of disclosure in the United States," Rueter wrote.

Google, a unit of Mountain View, California-based Alphabet Inc, said in a statement on Saturday: "The magis-

trate in this case departed from precedent, and we plan to appeal the decision. We will continue to push back on overbroad warrants." The ruling came less than seven months after the 2nd US Circuit Court of Appeals in New York said Microsoft could not be forced to turn over emails stored on a server in Dublin, Ireland that US investigators sought in a narcotics case.

That decision last July 14 was welcomed by dozens of technology and media companies, privacy advocates,

and both the American Civil Liberties Union and US Chamber of Commerce. On Jan 24, the same appeals court voted not to revisit the decision. The four dissenting judges called on the US Supreme Court or Congress to reverse it, saying the decision hurt law enforcement and raised national security concerns.

Both cases involved warrants issued under the Stored Communications Act, a 1986 federal law that many technology companies and privacy advocates consider outdated. In court

papers, Google said it sometimes breaks up emails into pieces to improve its network's performance, and did not necessarily know where particular emails might be stored. Relying on the Microsoft decision, Google said it believed it had complied with the warrants it received, by turning over data it knew were stored in the United States. Google receives more than 25,000 requests annually from US authorities for disclosures of user data in criminal matters, according to Rueter's ruling. —Reuters



In these undated photos received yesterday taken by Dariusz Knuksta, scenes from a video game featuring a Tesla gigafactory is seen. —AP

SEEKING ATTENTION, LITHUANIA BUILDS TESLA VIRTUAL FACTORY

VILNIUS: Lithuanians badly want Tesla Motors to build its next giant factory on their soil, so to grab the attention of the California tech company they built a virtual version of a facility inside the "Minecraft" video game. Vladas Lasas, who was behind the project, says they wanted to send a message to Tesla CEO Elon Musk that Lithuania "has plenty of skillful" people as well as a perfect facto-

ry site. He said yesterday that 41 computer geeks spent two days building the virtual factory in Kruonis in central Lithuania near a hydroelectric plant and two airports. Tesla tweeted Friday: "Lithuania knows the way to our heart." No date has been set for the announcement of where the factory - estimated to cost €5 billion (\$5.4 billion) - will be built. —AP



46 BN ELECTRONIC RED PACKETS SENT OVER CHINESE NEW YEAR

BEIJING: Chinese exchanged billions of electronic "red envelopes" over the Lunar New Year holiday, state media said yesterday, as more people turned to modern technology to perform the ancient tradition of handing out cash. For centuries parents, relatives and employers have distributed red paper envelopes containing money, known as "hong bao", to children or menial workers to celebrate the dawn of the new year.

But tech-savvy givers in China are increasingly opting to transfer money via their smartphones rather than go to the trouble - and expense - of buying envelopes and handing them out. About 46 billion electronic hong bao were sent or received via the popular messaging app WeChat from January 27 - the eve of the Year of the Rooster - to Feb 1, the China Daily reported. That was 43 per-

cent more than last year. On Jan 27 alone more than 14 billion electronic red envelopes were transferred on WeChat, which is owned by Internet giant Tencent and has more than 800 million users. That was up nearly 76 percent on last year, the newspaper said, and included a record 2,125 hong bao sent by a man in Shenzhen. An apparently very popular man in the eastern province of Shandong received a staggering 10,069 envelopes. Tencent did not reveal the total amount of money contained in the red packets.

Since its launch in 2011, WeChat has become China's most popular mobile social media platform. Besides sending text, audio and video messages for free, users can also use the WeChat digital wallet to pay utility bills, make donations and buy plane tickets. —Agencies

IN ISRAEL, TEACHING KIDS CYBER SKILLS IS A NATIONAL MISSION

BEIT SHEMESH, Israel: In some Israeli schools, fourth-graders learn computer programming while gifted 10th-graders take after-school classes in encryption tactics, coding and how to stop malicious hacking. The country even has two new kindergartens that teach computer skills and robotics. The training programs - something of a boot camp for cyber defense - are part of Israel's quest to become a world leader in cybersecurity and cyber technology by placing its hopes in the country's youth.

To that end, Israel announced this week the establishment of a national center for cyber education, meant to increase the talent pool for military intelligence units and prepare children for eventual careers in defense agencies, the high-tech industry and academia. "You students need to strengthen us with your curiosity," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told an Israeli cyber technologies expo, sitting next to high school students in a training program overseen by the defense establishment. "Your years in the security services will be golden years for the security of the nation."

Israel has long branded itself the "Cyber Nation" but authorities say they have been facing a shortage of cyber experts to keep up with the country's defense needs and keep its cybersecurity industry booming. To build up a well-spring of talent, Israel is starting young: Teaching children the basic building blocks of the web. "In the first grade, they learn the letters, then how to read and how to write. We are building the next level of knowledge - how to code," said Sagy Bar of the Rashi Foundation, a philanthropic group running the cyber education center as a joint venture with Israel's defense establishment and academic institutions.

The center will also oversee educational programs launched in recent years, including the Education Ministry's Gvachim pilot program that introduced computer and robotic classes to the fourth-grade curriculum in 70 schools, and the after-school Magshimim program, which trains talented high-schoolers from underprivileged areas in college-level cyber skills. Drawing youth into the highly technical field of cybersecurity is not a novelty, and the United States and Britain have implemented similar training programs.

The National Security Agency, America's global surveillance and intelligence agency, co-sponsors free cybersecurity summer

camp throughout the US for students and teachers from kindergarten through high school. The GenCyber program seeks to improve cybersecurity teaching in schools as early as kindergarten. GCHQ, the UK's powerful signals intelligence agency, has a host of youth outreach initiatives, including an annual competition for amateurs and youngsters at dramatic venues such as Winston Churchill's World War II-era bunker under central London.

In 2015, the competition invested in whizz kid-friendly puzzle games - including a specially designed Minecraft level - to pique children's interest. Also, GCHQ is trying to bridge the gen-

eration. "Israeli talent comes mandatorily to the army," Col R, deputy head of Unit 8200, told AP over the phone.

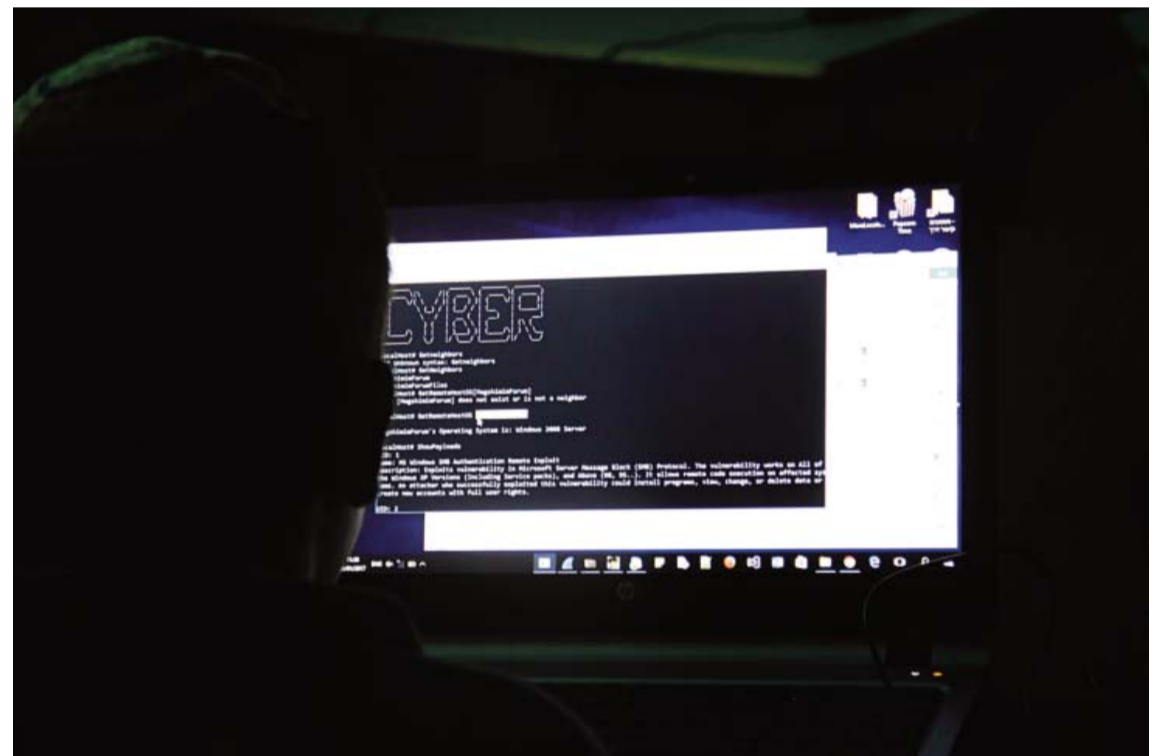
'Cyberists'

The colonel, who could only be identified by her first initial under military regulations, said Unit 8200 is trying to encourage more girls to study computer sciences and eventually join the unit as "cyberists". In the Magshimim program, applicants must first pass a home quiz of riddles and challenges involving math, logic and algorithms. Previous computer expertise is not needed, and they can even look up answers online or ask a parent for

work, and hack into the hacker's system to determine his identity.

"I broke in!" a student suddenly exclaimed. The fictional hacker was a popular cartoon character. Glued to his computer, 16-year-old Shalev Goodman said he hopes to use his cyber skills in military intelligence when he enlists. "I'm not the most athletic person," he said. "I do want to give something to the country. So cyber is a good thing to do."

Program leaders say cyber ethics are enforced - students who use their skills to hack would not be accepted into the military and would likely ruin their future in the cyber industry. But once in the army, the definition of ethics



BEIT SHEMESH, Israel: This photo made on Sunday Jan.1, 2017, shows a tenth grader attending a class how to investigate a computer network that has been hacked in Beit Shemesh, Israel. In its quest to become a world leader in cyber security and technology, Israel is placing its hopes in the country's youth. —AP

der gap and last month announced a national cybersecurity challenge for schoolgirls aged 13 to 15. In Israel, the two cyber training programs feed Israel's vaunted military intelligence Unit 8200, which intercepts digital communications and collects intelligence on Israel's enemies across the Middle East - the Israeli equivalent of America's NSA.

Many members of the unit eventually move on to Israel's high-tech and cybersecurity industries. Some of the most successful technology companies have been founded by the unit's veterans. Military service is compulsory for most Jewish high school graduates in Israel, giving military intelligence the power to enlist the country's best and brightest. For military intelligence, it's a win-win situa-

tion. The idea is to recruit students who are not intimidated by challenges, organizers say.

Those accepted to the program meet twice a week after school for three-hour classes, complete 10 hours of cyber-related homework a week, and participate in workshops twice a year. During a recent workshop for 10th-graders at a school in the central city of Beit Shemesh, a group of 15 religious Jewish girls attended a lecture on artificial intelligence. One of the girls was knitting an orange yarmulke during class. In a darkened classroom across the hall, a group of teens in sweatshirts and sweatpants hunched over laptops, playing a simulation game: a fictional network of computers had been hacked, and they had 45 minutes to learn an unfamiliar computer code, regain control of the net-

can become blurred. In 2014, a group of reservists in Unit 8200 signed a letter protesting its role in surveillance of Palestinians. One of the soldiers said the unit was sometimes asked to perform ethically questionable tasks, like spying on Palestinians uninvolved in violence.

"It feels a bit like a game, like a cool computer game," said Gilad, who could only give his first name because Israel's military censor has prohibited the protesters from revealing their full identity. During his compulsory army service, Gilad said he worked part time in programming. "You develop apathy, moral numbness ... You are far away from the target," he recounted of those days. Still, the computer skills Gilad gained while in the army helped him get his current job in the high-tech industry, he said. —AP

MACRON OFFERS REFUGE IN FRANCE TO US SCIENTISTS, ENTREPRENEURS

LYON: French presidential candidate Emmanuel Macron yesterday called on US scientists, academics and entrepreneurs at odds with Donald Trump's administration to move to France. The former economy minister, one of the frontrunners in the upcoming presidential election, urged US-based scientists working on climate change, renewable energy or health issues who were wary of the new political situation to seek refuge across the Atlantic. "I want all those who today embody innovation and excellence in the United States to hear what we say: from now on, from next May, you will have a new homeland, France," he said.

Rogue Twitter feeds voicing employee concerns at more than a dozen US government agencies have been launched in defiance of

what they say are Trump's attempts to muzzle federal climate change research and other science. Representing scientists at the Environmental Protection Agency, NASA and other bureaus, either directly or through friends and supporters, the accounts protest restrictions they view as censorship since Trump took office on Jan 20.

Without naming Trump in his campaign speech in the southeastern city of Lyon, Macron, a former investment banker, said his "solemn call" was meant to all "researchers, academics and companies in the United States fighting obscurantism and who are afraid today", to join the land of innovation he wants France to be.

Macron's campaign for the Elysee palace has been given a fil-

lip by a scandal over fake pay embroiling his main rival, conservative Francois Fillon, and the nomination of a hard-left candidate to represent the ruling Socialist party. The 39-year old is now seen reaching the election's crucial second round runoff in May and beating far-right leader Marine Le Pen by a comfortable margin, according to a number of opinion polls published this past week.

Macron also had a thinly veiled dig at Trump's intention to build a wall along the Mexico border, comparing it to France's Maginot Line, which in 1940 failed to keep Nazi invaders out of France. "I don't want to build a wall. I can assure you there's no wall in my program," he told about 8,000 cheering supporters. "Can you remember the Maginot Line?" —Reuters



Former French Economy Minister, founder and president of the political movement "En Marche !" and candidate for the France's 2017 presidential elections Emmanuel Macron gestures during a public meeting at the Palais des Sports in Lyon, yesterday. —AFP

CANCER EXPERTS URGE GREATER FOCUS ON PREVENTION

PARIS: Cancer is not an inescapable fate. But while prevention can save millions of lives much more cheaply than treatment, it remains an underfunded, much-neglected weapon in the anti-cancer arsenal, experts say. Some 14 million new cancers are diagnosed each year, according to the World Health Organization (WHO) - a number expected to swell to 21 million by 2030. As the global cost of treatment skyrockets, measures to prevent people getting cancer in the first place are an increasingly important focus in seeking to limit the expected explosion.

"The way things will evolve over, let's say the next 20 years, are very dramatic; many countries (will have) probably twice as many cancers," said Christopher Wild, director of the WHO's International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC). "That's particularly true for countries with limited resources, the low and middle-income countries," he told AFP.

With less access to diagnosis and treatment, these countries already bear two-

thirds of the world's annual 8.8 million cancer deaths. In 2015, governments and patients spent \$107 billion on cancer drugs - an increase of 11.5 percent from 2014, according to the Global Oncology Trend Report of the IMS Institute. The figure was expected to grow to \$150 billion by 2020, it said, a rise driven largely by the expense of newer, more specialized drugs to which just a minority of patients have access. "Treating our way out of the cancer problem is not realistic," Wild told AFP on the eve of Saturday's World Cancer Day.

With prevention, on the other hand, as much as a third of cancers can be avoided today, according to the WHO. Public enemy number one is tobacco, which "will kill a billion people in the world in the 21st century," said Thierry Philip, president of the Institut Curie cancer research center in Paris.

'We know the causes'

Of these, 100 million will be in China alone. Cervical cancer, in turn, can be

avoided by vaccinating against the human papilloma virus (HPV). Regular screening can pick up pre-cancerous lesions, which can be treated before developing into full-blown disease. Physical inactivity, obesity and heavy drinking are risks factors for all sorts of cancer, while eating too much red and preserved meat can lead to cancer of the colon, says the WHO.

Too much sun, easily avoided by wearing a hat or seeking out the shade, causes melanoma. Vaccination prevents Hepatitis B infection, which can lead to cancer, and basic, good hygiene can thwart the bacterium Helicobacter Pylori, which boosts the risk of stomach cancer. "We already know a lot about the causes of cancer," said Wild. We could probably prevent 40 to 50 percent of cancers if we could really convert our knowledge about risk factors into effective interventions." But while investment in new treatments has exploded, prevention "has certainly been under-resourced," he added.

Part of the reason is commercial - the

pharma industry stands to make little money from research into preventing disease. For prevention, "the return on investment only comes after 10, 20, 30 years, which is hard to defend in a tough economic environment," said Beatrice Fervers of the Centre Leon-Berard, a research clinic in Lyon, France. According to the WHO, cancer care and labor productivity lost to illness and death cost the world about \$1.16 trillion in 2010.

Not too strict

"One of the things we have to change is to stop thinking about cancer prevention only as an individual responsibility," said Wild. "It's also government responsibility, it's about policies and legislation," he said - citing tobacco taxes. Other interventions should include vastly expanding HPV and Hepatitis vaccination, cleaning up polluted air and water, and regularly checking people with a genetic predisposition for certain cancers. Furthermore, people should be better educated about

lifestyle choices that put them at risk. "We need to translate the science for the public, make it accessible and warn people of the real risk between cancer and behavior," said Fervers.

"The risk, if there are too many recommendations, too many constraints, people will just throw it all overboard," she added - like advising French people to steer clear of wine. "We need to adapt the message to the context, to the culture," said Fervers. "If we can get people to respect a limit of one or two units (of alcohol) per day, that would already be something."

On Friday, the WHO unveiled new global guidelines, seeking to place more emphasis on early cancer diagnosis and treatment. "Too many cancers arrive too late in the health system," Etienne Krug, head of the UN health body's non-communicable diseases division, said in Geneva, adding, "millions of lives could be saved." The guidelines urge countries to improve awareness of cancer symptoms and encourage people to seek care. —AFP

HONDURAS MANAGES TO STALL PINE-MUNCHING BUGS' MARCH

SIGUATEPEQUE, Honduras: Over the past three years, Honduras has lost a quarter of its pine forests to a plague of bark-munching beetles. Now though, after a long campaign that saw soldiers wielding chainsaws to contain the bug invasion, a little green is growing back. In mountains north of the capital that were

stripped bare, trees replanted by students from the National University's forest sciences department are growing.

The reforestation work started four months ago. The professor leading the students, Oscar Leveron, explained it will be a slow healing of the landscape: It takes 25-30 years for the trees

to mature to the heights of the ones lost. The infestation of the southern pine beetle, whose scientific name is *Dendroctonus frontalis*, was first detected in 2013. Its march blighted bigger and bigger swaths of woodland until, a year ago, the exponential spread prompted President Juan Orlando Hernandez to declare a "forest emergency". The pest has delivered what is considered one of the worst ecological disasters to befall the Central American country.

Chainsaws vs bugs

Some experts attributed the massive invasion to a prolonged drought brought on by the El Niño phenomenon felt across the region. Satellite images show a total 509,000 hectares (1.2 million acres) have been destroyed by the insect since 2013. The emergency decree allowed authorities to set up task forces of up to 3,500 people deployed in mountains across the country under the supervision of the Forestry Conservation Institute.

Wielding chainsaws, their mission was to cut down infected trees, and healthy ones in a close radius, to prevent the beetles jumping onto new hosts. The forestry students joined soldiers in chopping down vast areas of the 5,000 hectares (1,300 acres) of pine forest owned by the university. Traps made of rows of black funnels and pungent resin were hung from shrubs to attract and catch the bugs, which measure no more than four millimeters.

At the worst point of the plague, they found one tree infested with 139,000 of the insects, and a trap contained up to 12,000. As he helped students collect the bugs inside the plastic devices, Leveron said the ideal is to have "zero in the traps". He showed one trap that contained two bees and a dozen beetles. Leveron and authorities from the forestry institute told AFP that the plague "is being controlled." But the woods remain vulnerable to new attacks.

Dry season risk

The Forestry Conservation Institute official in charge of fighting back the beetle, Juan Barrios, told AFP that 883 hectares were still infected, with little pockets of up five trees teeming with the insects. "The plague is under 98 percent control. But the problem is to prevent the dispersion of the outbreaks," he said. The students and the forestry institute have been using seeds from pine cones to replant the devastated zones, although they believe much of the woodland will eventually regenerate naturally. But Leveron said the rainy season that started last September helped slow the bugs' advance. The risk now, he said, was the next dry season might see them expanding again, as the lack of water reduces the trees' production of resin, a natural defense. —AFP



SIGUATEPEQUE, Honduras: A student of the Forest Sciences University (ESNACIFOR) cuts firewood - after the woods had to be cut down to stop the advancing of a bark beetle infestation on Jan 28, 2017. —AFP



View of a bark beetle.



CHENNAI: Indian firefighters and volunteers try to clean up oil that has washed ashore in Chennai yesterday, after an oil tanker and an LPG tanker collided off Kamarajar Port in Ennore. —AFP

OIL SPILL THREATENS INDIA NESTING TURTLES

CHENNAI: Hundreds of students and fishermen were working to clean up an oil spill on India's southern coast that campaigners say threatens the turtles that nest there every year. The Indian Coast Guard said around 35 km of coastline off the southern city of Chennai had been affected by the spill which occurred when two ships carrying fuel collided last week. Campaigners and fishermen have accused the government of being slow to contain the damage from the spill, the scale of which has only emerged in recent days.

"What ought to have been a localized incident has now become a regional one because of the culture of denial," said Nityanand Jayaraman, a Chennai-based environmental activist. Jayaraman told AFP it was the peak nesting season for Olive Ridley turtles, which swim to the beaches of South India to lay eggs after mating at sea. "The key thing is not technology but honesty. You need to reveal the true extent of the damage otherwise it leads to a false sense of complacency. With oil spills long-term effects are certain," he said.

Olive Ridelays are most abundant of all sea turtles around the world, according to WWF India, but their numbers have been declining and the species is recognized as vulnerable by the IUCN Red list. Their unique mass nesting, where thou-

sands of females come together on the same beach to lay eggs, is a major tourist attraction. It is not known how many turtles have been affected, but AFP pictures showed workers in safety suits removing a dead turtle from the shore this week.

Local fishermen also criticized the speed of the official response to the spill. "They (authorities) didn't remove it immediately, and so now it has spread across all beaches, including Marina (beach)," K Bharati of the Fishermen's Welfare Association in South India said, referring to a popular local beach. Volunteers wearing gloves could be seen scooping up the thick tar with shovels off Kamarajar Port in Chennai, the capital of Tamil Nadu state.

"We have tried all kind of technology and found that only manual cleaning is possible. So we have deployed more than 500 people, they are working really hard," M A Bhaskaran, chairman of Kamarajar Port, told reporters. Oil spills are not uncommon in peninsular India, which saw one of the worst leakages in 2013 when a gas pipeline off the western Mumbai coast spewed at least 1,000 litres of crude oil into the sea. In 2010, two merchant ships collided off the Mumbai coast again, spilling over 800 tonnes of oil and damaging mangroves along the coastline. —AFP

W AFRICAN PUSH TO CLEAN UP TOXIC FUEL HITS SNAGS

LONDON: A West African drive to clean up toxic fuels that campaigners say pose a health hazard to millions has run into difficulties less than two months after it was announced, according to importers, traders and other oil industry insiders. Late last year, Nigeria, Ghana, Benin, Togo and Ivory Coast unveiled a plan to reduce the amount of poisonous sulphur they would allow in fuel. But the announcement, under the auspices of the United Nations Environment Programme, did not give full details of the changes or when they would come into force. That has caused uncertainty, particularly in Nigeria and Ghana, which consume more than half of the fuel used in the region.

Ghana has issued guidance and invited public comment on the fuel quality it wants. But political sources told Reuters that a recent change in government could delay new rules. Nigeria is still drafting its own rules. Fuel suppliers who bid for 2017 contracts do not know the quality of fuel they will have to import. "Follow-on detail has been conspicuously sparse, leaving the market effectively in no man's land," said James McCullagh, an

analyst with Energy Aspects in London. A source at a fuel importing company added: "It's ridiculous. You can't expect us to bid for a contract if we're going to suddenly have to supply a totally different fuel."

Air Quality

Tightening the law is crucial to improving air quality in West Africa, where 335 million people use fuel that has a sulphur content many times above what is legal in Europe and the United States. Sulphur is the target because of its recognized impact on respiratory health, and the acute danger in traffic-clogged cities like Lagos or Accra. There is a plentiful supply of low-sulphur fuel on international markets, and widely available refinery technology that can strip transport fuel of sulphur.

UNEP, the African Refiners Association (ARA), and health campaigners have been pressing governments for years to improve fuel quality. The issue was highlighted in September, when Public Eye, a Swiss campaign group, said international trading companies were using West Africa as a dumping ground for high-sulphur fuels. UNEP program officer

Jane Akumu said Public Eye's report had helped fast-track improvements in fuel quality that had been under consideration for a decade.

Legal changes and regulatory enforcement will be needed if the trade in high-sulphur fuels to the region is to be curbed, industry experts said. In Nigeria, dozens of traders and local importers compete to supply fuel and the lowest bidder usually wins, making it hard to market high-quality fuel of the kind used elsewhere. Ghana last week published proposals, still not finalised, for a limit of 50 parts per million (ppm) of sulphur content in both gasoline and diesel sold at the nation's pumps.

Nigeria's proposals, also not finalised, would cut the sulphur level on imports from 1,000 to 150 ppm for gasoline, and from 5,000 to 500 ppm for diesel. The Nigerian National Petroleum Company (NNPC), said its three domestic refineries would be exempt until at least 2020. The aim is to publish draft changes in March, although this year's tenders to swap imported fuel for crude oil were set to close on Feb. 2. Because Nigeria is short of dollars, such swap deals account for

the bulk of its fuel imports.

In the meantime, officials at government ministries and the NNPC would not confirm the new sulphur levels. And to add to the confusion, some of those bidding for the fuel swap deals said they understood the limits to be 50 ppm for gasoline and a much-higher 500 ppm for distillates. Spokesman Ndu Ughamadu said the NNPC it was "working towards meeting improved fuel quality standards alongside the trade and environment ministries."

Sensible, But Expensive

David Bleasdale, executive director of CITAC, a consultancy that works closely with the ARA, said the changes are sensible and "what civil society expected to reduce urban pollution". But he said cost would be substantial. Traders said the proposals would cost at least \$10-15 per tonne, or more than \$250,000 for each cargo of gasoline. "Behind it all, there is a real dollar shortage in Nigeria, so the government needs to clarify its priorities," Bleasdale said.

Nigeria's environment minister, Amina Mohammed, the force behind the regional campaign, will leave the

ministry soon to take up a senior post at the United Nations, a potential setback for efforts to reduce sulphur. But Akumu of UNEP said the governments had already agreed, and the only question was implementing the changes. "It was costing them in terms of health," Akumu said. "It's a priority."

Refineries and Enforcement

The proposals will heap costs on West African oil refineries. None of NNPC's facilities produce enough of the high-quality fuels needed, nor do Ghana's state-run Tema Oil Refinery or Ivory Coast's SociÉTÉ Ivoirienne de Raffinage. For Nigeria, Ughamadu said upgrades were underway at the Port Harcourt refinery, and planned at Kaduna and Warri, where installing equipment to cut sulphur levels could cost millions.

There are other costs too. Rolake Akinkugbe, head of energy and natural resources at FBN Bank, said up to 20 percent of Nigeria's oil product imports were smuggled to neighbouring countries, so if new fuel standards are to work, it will require regional cooperation and tough enforcement. "The cost of doing so may be prohibitive," Akinkugbe said. —Reuters



SAN SEBASTIAN, Spain: People protect themselves from the strong wind as a wave hits the Basque Monument 'El Peine de los Vientos' in northern Spain yesterday. Northern Spain has suffered gale-force winds of up to 120 km per hour for several days. —AP

MEXICO'S VAQUITA PORPOISE CLOSE TO EXTINCTION, 30 LEFT

MEXICO CITY: Mexico's vaquita marina is edging closer to extinction as scientists warned that only 30 were left despite navy efforts to intercept illegal fishing nets killing the world's smallest porpoise. 'The already desperate situation has worsened, despite existing conservation measures and current enforcement efforts,' said the report by the International Committee for the Recovery of the Vaquita (CIRVA). 'At the current rate of loss, the vaquita will likely decline to extinction by 2022, unless the current gillnet ban is maintained and effectively enforced.'

An analysis of acoustic data from the upper Gulf of California in northwestern Mexico found that, as of November, only about 30 vaquitas likely remained in their habitat, the report said. A previous census between September and December 2015 had found around 60 vaquitas. There were 200 of them in 2012 and 100 in 2014. Authorities say the vaquitas have been dying for years in gillnets that are meant to illegally catch another endangered species, a large fish called the totoaba.

Smugglers ship the totoaba's dried swim bladder to China, where it fetches tens of thousands of dollars and is eaten in soup. Known as the 'panda of the sea' because of the dark rings around its eyes, the 1.5-m cetacean has rarely been seen alive. In a pos-

sibly last-ditch effort to save the vaquita, scientists plan, after getting government approval, to capture specimens and put them in an enclosure in the Gulf of California where they can reproduce.

Some environmentalists oppose this because of the risk that vaquitas, which only exist in the Gulf of California, could die in the process. 'Illegal fishing continues and if we don't capture them, they will die anyway,' CIRVA chairman Lorenzo Rojas-Bracho told AFP.

'Many questions'

CIRVA recommends 'urgently' locating and putting vaquitas in a temporary sanctuary this spring, and keep them there for up to one year. Rojas-Bracho said the program could begin in the fall, around October. Their capture would take place in a staged manner, which will be reviewed by CIRVA at appropriate intervals, with the option of stopping it if necessary.

Vessels, small aircraft and dolphins trained by the US Navy could be used to locate vaquitas, which could be caught with a light salmon gillnet and then taken to a shore-based enclosure with fences. Four possible sites are being considered. But CIRVA acknowledges that 'capturing and housing vaquitas will be difficult, and perhaps impossible, and the species may not prove to be suitable for such conservation actions.' —AFP

INVASIVE AQUATIC WEED, STARRY STONEWORT, CREEPS ACROSS US

MINNEAPOLIS: An aquatic weed is creeping across the Great Lakes region that grows really fast and is very hard to kill. Scientists don't know a lot yet about starry stonewort, but they're hurrying to find out more. The plant, which forms dense surface mats in lakes, first turned up in North America in 1978 in the St Lawrence River in New York state. Researchers think it probably arrived in ballast water from ships entering the Great Lakes.

It wasn't a big concern for about 30 years, but then it took off. Now it's widespread on Michigan's Lower Peninsula, where it has infested more than 200 inland lakes, and parts of western New York. It was found in Wisconsin in 2014 and in Minnesota in 2015. It has also reached some lakes in Indiana, Pennsylvania, Vermont and Canada.

What is starry stonewort?

The name comes from a tiny, white six-pointed-star-shaped "bulbil" on the stems. The plant is considered beneficial and even endangered in its native Europe and Asia. But for some reason it turned aggressive in American waters. It's difficult to kill with herbicides because it doesn't have a vascular system that could carry the poison to the entire plant, said University of Minnesota invasive species specialist Dan Larkin. Herbicide treatments often

result in a "haircut effect" that burns off the top of the plant, but leaves the rest alive to regrow.

Why it's a concern

The weed mats can be a nuisance to boaters and anglers. Scientists are also concerned about the potential harm to native plants, fish habitats and other disruptions to aquatic ecosystems. But Larkin said there's almost no peer-reviewed research documenting the adverse effects. For example, it isn't known yet whether it crowds out wild rice. Still, experts wouldn't be sounding the alarm if they weren't worried. Researchers are just starting to understand the conditions in which the plant thrives, and modeling suggests that large swaths of the US could be highly suitable, including the mid-Atlantic states, the Great Plains and much of the West, Larkin said.

How it spreads

It reproduces when plant fragments and bulbils break off, and they can hitchhike on contaminated boats and trailers. Recent discoveries have often been concentrated near public accesses such as boat ramps. Scientists don't know yet how long those plant fragments can stay viable out of water, Larkin said. Starry stonewort resembles other plants, and the distinctive bulbils don't appear until late in the sea-

son, so it can go unidentified for a long time.

It was confirmed in September in Lake Winnibigoshish in northern Minnesota, but that infestation probably went unnoticed for several years. That finding is concerning because the Mississippi River flows through "Big Winnie," a popular fishing destination and wild rice lake. No infestations have been found downstream so far, though monitoring continues, said Tim Plude, an invasive species specialist with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. He said the species doesn't seem to like fast-moving water.

How to control it

It's tough. Wisconsin has had some success with an expensive method known as DASH — Diver Assisted Suction Harvesting. Divers hand-pull plants and feed them into a big suction hose. Researchers hope to learn this summer whether a different approach worked on Lake Koronis, a popular recreational lake in central Minnesota where the weed was first discovered in the state. Crews used a mechanical harvester, aided by a diver, and followed up with herbicide. The best strategy is prevention. Boaters are urged to thoroughly clean their watercraft, trailers and other equipment of plants, mud and other debris before moving them from one body of water to another. —AP

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ACK students first in Kuwait to receive William Glasser's Institute certification

The Australian College of Kuwait's (ACK) School of Business students attended the "Choice Theory" Course from the William Glasser Institute (WGI), USA. The course, founded by Dr William Glasser in 1967, helps people understand themselves and better manage the events and people in their lives, providing a strong foundation for Leadership Management.

Over 10 ACK students participated in the course as an extracurricular activity to provide them with skills and competitive edge in the field of Management, proudly receiving certifications from WGI. After completing the 27- hour course, they continued to the Basic Practicum Course in preparation for the Advanced Level.

Commenting on this achievement, Bashayer Alzawawi, Instructor at WGI said: "William Glasser's Choice Theory focuses on the human need to fulfill one or all psychological needs from the cradle to the grave. The theory posits that behaviors stem from the inner self and not from external control. ACK students have successfully been trained on Choice Theory and received their first level certificates. They are carrying the basic foundations of the theory including our ability to choose happiness over negativity. The strong relationship between the students and their cohesion was a very impressive characteristic we noticed in them." ACK will continue to support its students by offering certified courses from international institutes for higher learning and adding to their skills set, while providing them with the ultimate knowledge and experience for their upcoming professional careers.



One Month Full of Celebrations
هلا فبراير (أشهر واحد ملي) بختيار من الاحتفالات

LOOK FOR THE PRODUCT OF THE DAY AT THE LOWEST PRICE

Killer Price

تنزيلات SALE

Perma Fresh

Digital CONNECT

BIG SCREEN MAJILIS

لولو LULU

EGAILA-SALMIYA-DAQEEQ-AL QURAIN-AL RAH-FAHAHEEL

LULU HYPERMARKET LAUNCHES SPATE OF PROMOTIONS FOR HALA FEBRUARY

Lulu Hypermarket, the leading hypermarket in the country, launched its month-long Hala February promotions. The main activities and promotions during Hala February celebrations include attractive low prices on a range of products, exclusive prices on selected 'product of the day' and 'brand of the week' items, and exciting raffle draws so that one can 'win big' with purchases made at the hypermarket.

The Hala February promotions, which run at all outlets of Lulu Hypermarket from 1 to 28 February, is offering something for everyone during the country's month-long festivities. Children can avail of the coolest toys at the 'Toys Fest', while digital aficionados

can peruse and purchase the latest electronic gadgets during the 'Big Screen Majilis' and 'Lulu Digital Connect' promotions. An inauguration ceremony will be held at Lulu's Al-Qurain outlet to commemorate Kuwait's National and Liberation Day. Since its inception Lulu Hypermarket has shown its commitment to customer satisfaction by tailoring shopping experiences to suit shopper preferences. The brand has launched exciting promotions that consistently draw large crowds of shoppers and offered competitive prices that attract customers to make Lulu Hypermarket their preferred retail destination.

IISM ORGANIZES LINGUATORIUM



Experimenting with English Language skills and showcasing of the same has always been welcomed with open arms at IISM. Be it in house or inter school activities or competitions, all quests are applauded with much pomp and show. The appreciation and acknowledgement took to center stage culminating as 'linguatorium', a mashup of literary creativities at its best. 28 January was set to present winning streaks of its endeavored journey in the academic year 2016- 2017.

The program order was hosted by students across grades I to VIII displaying and depicting cultural agenda of storytelling, elocution, one act play, recitation, choral recitation, declamation, ballet, pantomime, songs and mad ads including anchoring. The artistic point of view of the show was students' performance, costume and stage presence and management.

Trophies, mementos, certificates, informative placards, prize winning charts, handmade props, budding write-ups, cartoon frameworks, scholarly projects and photographs of special moments were the exhibits that held the hall-

ways engaging. As a part of 'Parents Teachers Meet', the show garnered good turnout of audience and applause kept performances upbeat. Aqeela Ahmed and Megha Suresh were the smart masters of ceremony.

School Director Malayil Moosa Koya, Principal F M Basheer Ahmed and the Sr.Vice Principal

Narinder Kaur appreciated and congratulated all the participants and faculty. Sophy John-Vice Principal Junior Section, Rejea Santhosh-HOD, Department of English and Feroza, CCA in charge were the reckoning force behind the grinding hard work and grand finale.



ASSE KUWAIT CHAPTER ORGANIZED 2ND SESSION OF CONTRACTOR SAFETY MONTH



American Society of Safety Engineers (ASSE) Kuwait Chapter is Kuwait's premier voluntary and non-profit organization providing professional guidance, training and consultancy; in the field of Health, Safety and Environment; to the industrial and social sectors in the region.

Continuing its constant efforts towards social responsibility and commitment, American Society of Safety Engineers (ASSE), Kuwait Chapter, in collaboration with Kuwait Oil Company organized Second session of the Contractor Safety Month 2016. The event was conducted at KOC Hubara Assembly Hall at Ahmadi Township.

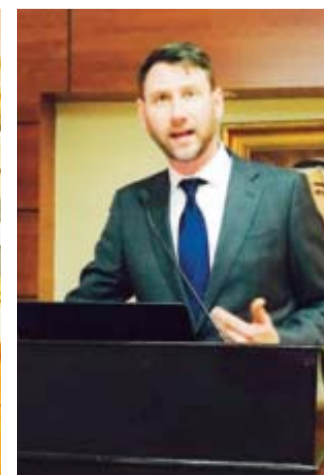
The event started with a safety moment and welcome address by Sunil Sadanand, Chapter Treasurer. In his opening address

CH Rama Krushna Chary, President ASSE Kuwait chapter, informed that the chapter is organizing the Contractor Safety month for the benefit of contractors in state of Kuwait who are exposed to various safety risks. He mentioned that these technical meet events are open to everyone, so that the contractors who have a major role in industrial sector are updated to the best HSE practices and latest technologies in the personal protective equipment. Engineer Fadhel Al Ali, Chairman of ASSE Kuwait Chapter thanked the participants for their participation and briefed about the Contractors Safety Month organizing every year for the benefit of Contractors personnel.

Gary Collins, Regional Director - EMEA and Ross Atkins, Technical Support Manager - MEA of Scott

Safety explained about the Portable Gas Detection for Tyco Gas and Flame in detail and the uses of it in the field of HSE.

Sunil Sadanand, Treasurer of ASSE Kuwait Chapter, in his closing address acknowledged the support of Kuwait Oil Company to ASSE Kuwait chapter in conducting these events. He also thanked the Speakers and the sponsors Raja Company for the presentations. He thanked the all the participants who took their time in the evening to attend and enrich their knowledge. Around 150 persons from different sectors participated in this event. As a token of appreciation, speakers were presented with a memento. Certificate of participation was distributed to all the participants.





Bella Roog

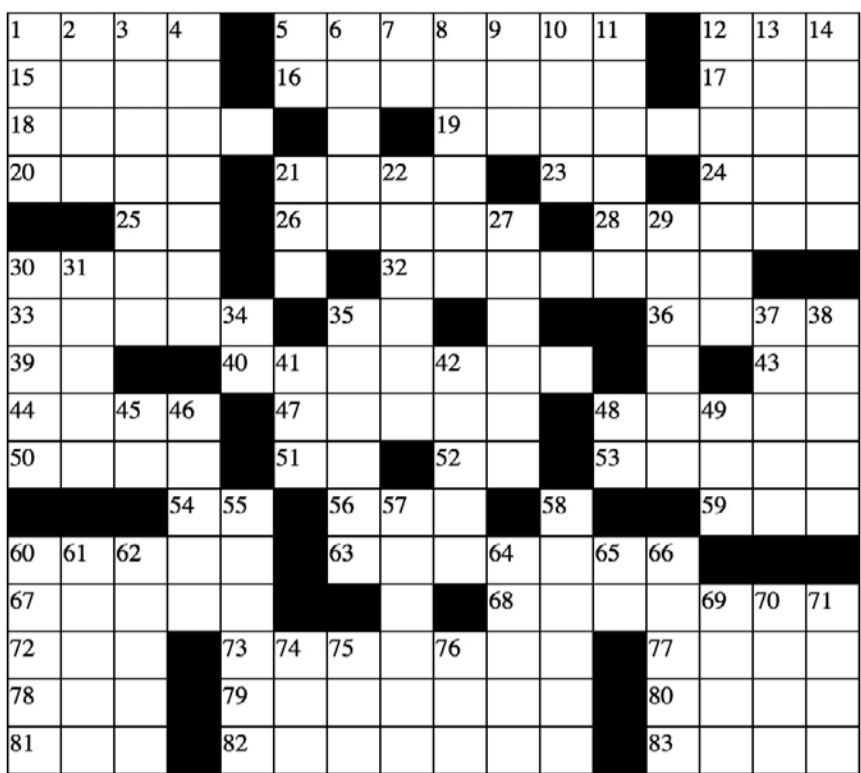
IWC members visit Capital Governorate

Upon invitation from the Capital Governor Colonel Thabet Al-Muhanna and with the attendance of the foreign minister's spouse Sheikha Ayeda Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah, the International Women Committee

(IWC), which consists of ambassadors' wives, recently visited the Capital Governorate at the historic Nayef Palace, said the committee consultant Narjis Al-Shatti.



CROSSWORD 1512



ACROSS

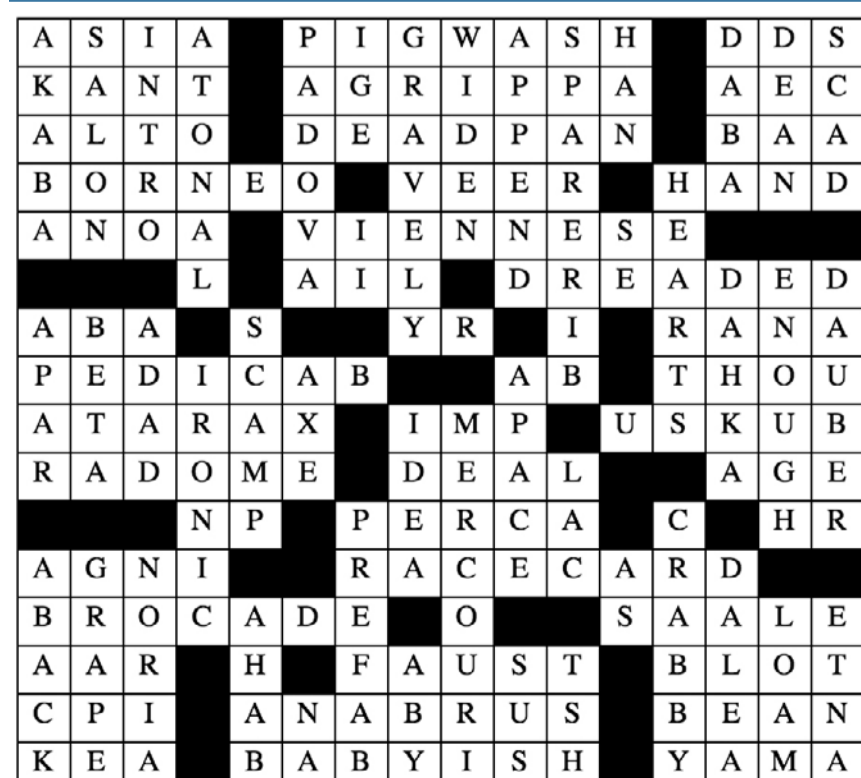
1. Noisy talk.
5. City in central Iran.
12. Any of various trees of the genus *Ulmus*.
15. Title for a civil or military leader (especially in Turkey).
16. Provide commentary for a film, for example.
17. 100 pyas equal 1 kyat.
18. (used informally) Very small.
19. Any of several silvery marine fishes with very flat bodies.
20. English Quaker who founded the colony of Pennsylvania (1644-1718).
23. A unit of weight equivalent to 1000 kilograms.
24. Any thick messy substance.
25. A silvery soft waxy metallic element of the alkali metal group.
26. A mountain peak in the Andes in Argentina (20,997 feet high).
28. A river that rises in central Germany and flows north to join the Elbe River.
30. (Babylonian) God of storms and wind.
32. Music with a syncopated melody (usually for the piano).
33. Submerged aquatic plant having narrow leaves and small flowers.
36. The 4th planet from the sun.
39. A monarchy in northwestern Europe occupying most of the British Isles.
40. A tricycle (usually propelled by pedaling).
43. Being nine more than ninety.
44. Framework for holding objects.
47. Proceeding from or ordered by or subject to a pope or the papacy regarded as the successor of the Apostles.
50. Type genus of the family Arctidae.
51. A silvery ductile metallic element found primarily in bauxite.
52. A soft silvery metallic element of the alkali earth group.
53. Having the slant of a bevel.
54. A metric unit of length equal to one thousandth of a meter.
56. Being nine more than thirty.
59. A condition (mostly in boys) characterized by behavioral and learning disorders.
60. Jordan's port.
63. Tropical American shrub bearing edible acid red fruit resembling cherries.
67. An imaginary elephant that appears in a series of French books for children.
68. (zoology) Lacking a tail or taillike appendage.
72. A self-funded retirement plan that allows you to contribute a limited yearly sum toward your retirement.
73. Of or related to aplit.
77. A Chadic language spoken south of Lake Chad.
78. A potent estrogen used in medicine and in feed for livestock and poultry.
79. Class of protozoa having cilia or hairlike appendages on part or all of the surface during some part of the life cycle.
80. Chief port of Yemen.
81. The compass point midway between northeast and east.
82. The supreme commander of a fleet.
83. (British) An open river valley (in a hilly area).

DOWN

1. Make a raucous noise.
2. American novelist (1909-1955).
3. A city in Tamil Nadu on the Bay of Bengal.

4. A Dravidian language spoken in southern India.
5. Half the width of an em.
6. The capital and largest city of Yemen.
7. A radioactive element of the alkali-metal group discovered as a disintegration product of actinium.
8. A large fleet.
9. 10 hao equal 1 dong.
10. (physics and chemistry) The smallest component of an element having the chemical properties of the element.
11. A Uralic language spoken by a Samoyed people of northern Siberia.
12. Small creeping evergreen shrubs.
13. A clear oily brown solution of cresols in soap.
14. Shrubby tree widely distributed along tropical shores.
21. A chronic skin disease occurring primarily in women between the ages of 20 and 40.
22. Widely cultivated plant having a large fleshy edible white or yellow root.
27. A member of the Siouan people formerly inhabiting the Black Hills of western South Dakota.
29. A complex inorganic compound that contains ammonia molecules.
31. The capital and chief port and largest city of Senegal.
34. A person forced to flee from home or country.
35. A port city in southwestern Turkey on the Gulf of Antalya.
37. Having corresponding sounds especially terminal sounds.
38. A burn caused by hot liquid or steam.
41. A federal agency established to coordinate programs aimed at reducing pollution and protecting the environment.
42. A telegram sent abroad.
45. Being ten more than one hundred ninety.
46. A Bantu language spoken by the Kamba people in Kenya.
48. The blood group whose red cells carry both the A and B antigens.
49. Any of various coarse shrubby plants of the genus *Iva* with small greenish flowers.
55. A percussion instrument consisting of a pair of hollow pieces of wood or bone (usually held between the thumb and fingers) that are made to click together (as by Spanish dancers) in rhythm with the dance.
57. Being eight more than ninety.
58. Of or relating to or near the coxyc.
61. The Tibeto-Burman language spoken in the Thailand and Burmese borderlands.
62. Lower in esteem.
64. An Indian side dish of yogurt and chopped cucumbers and spices.
65. A white soft metallic element that tarnishes readily.
66. Wild sheep of northern Africa.
69. An informal term for a father.
70. Norwegian mathematician (1802-1829).
71. A narrow way or road.
74. Inflammation of the female pelvic organs (especially the Fallopian tubes) caused by infection by any of several microorganisms (chiefly gonococci and chlamydia).
75. An advanced law degree.
76. Any of various dark heavy viscid substances obtained as a residue.

Yesterday's Solution



STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

You have the energy to deal with your busy day. If the weather is acceptable you will want to complete whatever chores are imperative for outside as well as inside. It may be important to provide fresh water and food outside for the birds. You may become interested in building some sort of bird feeder. There could be a disappointment this afternoon that you might not find the least disappointing-one less chore to do perhaps. You draw emotional nourishment and a sense of security from ideals, friends and some social involvement later today. Your inner resources and emotions are accented. With your positive attitude and your ability to adjust to changing situations, support and goodwill is yours. A family matter is healing.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

You have the motivation for improving your surroundings or life situation. Counseling young people may occupy your day, along with a bit of team sports or some other fun activity. Try to eliminate any aggressiveness or preaching for now-you will avoid hard feelings. You appreciate your ties to others. You seek to observe and promote harmony in the interactions between people. Broadening your intellectual and spiritual horizons takes on a high priority. You are intent on seeing the big picture and getting to the point. You have become more confident in your ability to make decisions. Being in touch with ideas and people on a grander scale than ever, perhaps through telecommunication or psychology, keeps your enthusiasm high.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Conversing with others to obtain different opinions, comments and ideas will help you to come up with new solutions or inventions. Mental activity is accented now. Working with-rather than against-the flow should be easy to do. An acquaintance may bring you some news about a job opportunity that is too good to resist. You might want to spend the afternoon updating your resume. Close relationships have a big impact on your life: old ones will be transformed or perhaps even ended-new ones will come on like gangbusters. Everything conspires to reveal you at your most elegant this evening-particularly in social situations. You have a grasp of theoretical and spiritual ideas and conversations are most motivating this evening.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

This is a great morning to consider and understand your own circumstances, just how you feel about yourself. The emotions and feelings of those around you may become very clear. Exchanging information takes on more emotional significance for you. Being more involved with neighbors or siblings is fun and somewhere in this day, you will be reacquainted with an old friend and be ready to develop a new friend. You become more active with regard to your special talent and you enjoy the art of expression. This may mean you have a passion to be an advocate for some public issue or it may mean you know just how to entertain others and make them smile. For the next two years you will be learning to see things differently.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

You may have a strong urge for a social life this day but chores come first this morning. One thing cannot happen without some other thing being completed. If you come across any problems or obstacles, you will be able to work out an answer. You feel confident to proceed with each task before you. You will easily tackle maintenance or technical problems around your living quarters. Others may wish they could handle some of the same maintenance problems-you save money! You may feel like stretching a few muscles later in the afternoon and a little resistance exercise would do great things to level out your energy. This evening is for relaxing and you can find just the right people or person to relax away the evening. Harmony is easy to find.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Because you are comfortable with your usual friends, you may send out strange messages as you are being introduced to people you do not know. Just being aware of this fact should help you to create a new approach with others. When you make friends, you tend to keep them a very long time and it is today that you will be coming into contact with some wonderful opportunities to expand your friendships. You can be a fun, upbeat sort of individual and you enjoy the company of all sorts of personalities. This makes you a good host to all sorts of entertainment and if you are ever finding that you need a second income or a new job, some form of the entertainment media is a good choice. Planning events becomes second nature and laughter is contagious.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

You seem open and ready to respond to the day with a great deal of enthusiasm. There are some fun times ahead and you will receive support for whatever you set out to do. Emotional beginnings, a fresh start and perhaps the establishment of new habit patterns set the tone for quite some time to come! This is a good time to stop smoking! You may find a particular project you want to accomplish at this time and your concentration is good. Your passion is strong and you have the energy for following through with whatever is needed. If that means having a talk with the teenager or taking over the chores for a sick friend, you can do it! Self-delusion is strong this evening for everyone, due to the planetary aspects-tread lightly.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

You are coming into a time of experimenting with new concepts and putting aside a few of the old ideas. Learning and knowing a little about a lot of things, staying in touch and on top of the latest developments satisfy a need for being informed. A busy day keeps your mood elevated. You could be in the stores today, just hunting down the most up-to-date equipment for some project that will make your current work more fun. Take time to relax and enjoy your surroundings. Take a good look at your surroundings and discover the design of the buildings that are around you. Somehow, this will give you some wonderful creative ideas. Leave the work, hobby or home projects behind you this evening and enjoy being with your loved ones.



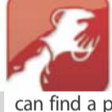
Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

Strong and effective methods for obtaining your particular goal this day may take you into some feelings of accomplishment that you may not have previously experienced. Keep those feelings in your mind for future reference when you want to achieve another goal. Remember the focus, the process and the outcome of today in order to encourage and strengthen you in the future. This will set a tone that only achievement can bring-for quite some time to come. This evening you will pay more attention to upkeep in the home. Have you changed the batteries in the fire alarm lately do you have one be aware of the frequency of disagreements with your spouse-instead, agree to think things over before making any decisions. The blessings multiply.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

This is a time when your life is full of friends and groups who share some of your ideas with others about how life should be enjoyed. Some of your friends are likely to be way off the beaten path-at the least unusual, and maybe eccentric, and perhaps revolutionary. Your social consciousness is raised. A young person can weave an interesting story today. Do not assume anything; know the facts before you come to any conclusions. Unexpected expenses may have you wondering if you should buy a coat that is on sale this weekend. You will see financial improvements soon-then you can breathe a sigh of relief. One of the greatest indications of growth for you at this time is an open mind-possibilities. Pay attention to the little things.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

You are always the hard worker, even on your day away from work you can find a project with which to involve yourself. Your urge to move forward probably comes from your good attitude and your good health. You will certainly be a good mentor to others wherever you go. Today, the challenge comes as a writing challenge; you have a story to tell. If it seems that your patience is about to end before you complete your writing task, you will have begun to encounter the real challenge: patience. Before you abandon your project, consider recording the story in order to help speed the process. You or someone else can transcribe it later. There are publishing possibilities in your future. Enjoy your day.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

There are sudden lucky breaks today. This luck may happen as you strive to be noticed or chosen. Now more than ever, you want to be admired and appreciated by others, to do and create things that stir their hearts. This could encompass romance, performing or taking a chance on some adventure. Investments at this time that seem too good to be true are so-hang onto your checkbook. Be sure to check out any high-tech gambles. Close personal relationships are likely to undergo some testing. This is a time to cement your ties to others-make sure they are rock-solid. Fairness with and responsibility to the other people in your life are emphasized now. Romance and recreation take on an unusual character, out of step with ordinary expectations.

Wordsearch Puzzle

John Wayne Movies

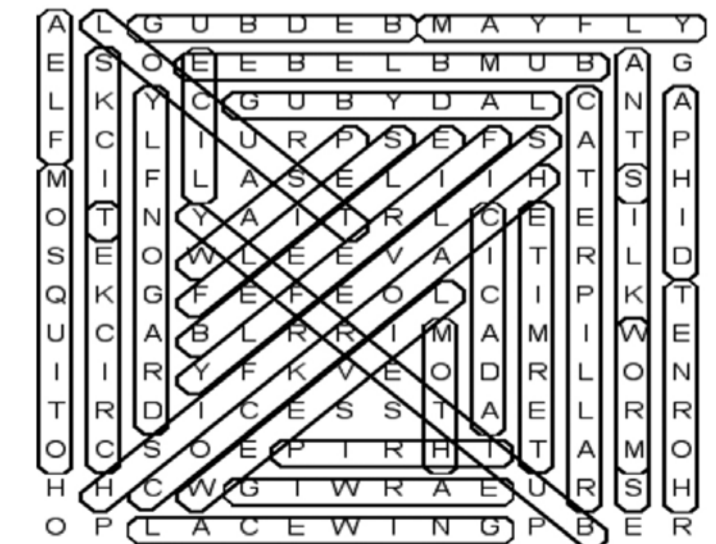
Find and circle all of the John Wayne movies that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell a John Wayne quotation.



- | | | | |
|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| ALAMO, The | COWBOYS, The | JET PILOT | RIO LOBO |
| ARIZONA | DAKOTA | LONELY TRAIL, The | SEA CHASE, The |
| BABY FACE | DAWN RIDER, The | LONGEST DAY, The | SEARCHERS, The |
| BIG JAKE | DECEIVER, The | MCLINTOCK | SHOOTIST, The |
| BIG TRAIL, The | DESERT TRAIL, The | MCQ | SPOILERS, The |
| BLOOD ALLEY | EL DORADO | NEW FRONTIER | STAGECOACH |
| BLUE STEEL | FLYING TIGERS | NIGHT RIDERS, The | STAR PACKER, The |
| BRANNIGAN | FORT APACHE | PITTSBURGH | TRUE GRIT |
| CHISUM | GREEN BERETS, The | QUIET MAN, The | TYCOON |
| CIRCUS WORLD | HATARI | RANGE FEUD | UNDEFEATED, The |
| COMANCHEROS, The | HELL FIGHTERS | RED RIVER | WAR WAGON, The |
| CONFLICT | HONDO | RIO BRAVO | WESTWARD HO |
| CONQUEROR, The | IN HARMS WAY | RIO GRANDE | |

Yesterday's Solution

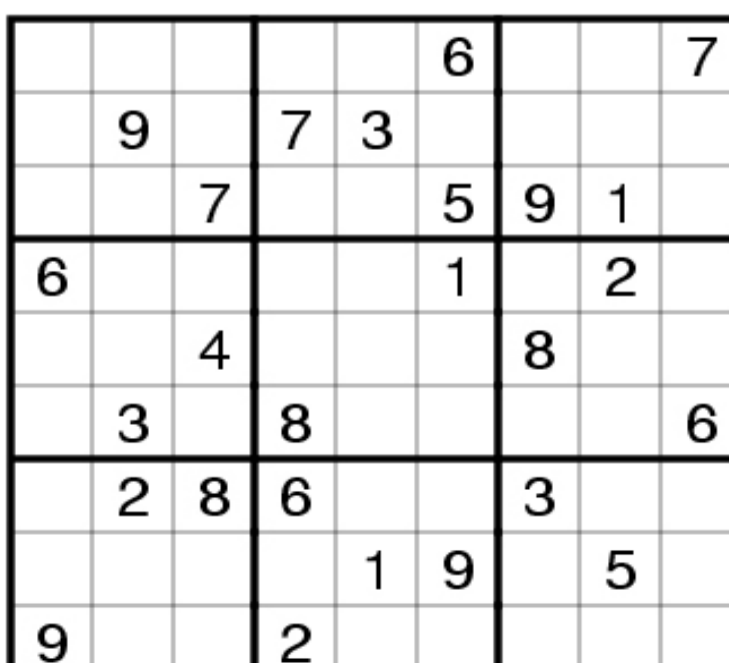
Insects



- | | | |
|-------------|----------|------------|
| ANTS | EARWIG | MOSQUITO |
| APHID | FIREFLY | MOTH |
| BEDBUG | FLEA | SILKWORM |
| BEEBLE | FLIES | SILVERFISH |
| BUMBLEBEE | HORNET | TERMITE |
| BUTTERFLY | LACEWING | THRIP |
| CATERPILLAR | LADYBUG | TICKS |
| CICADA | LICE | WASP |
| COCKROACH | LOCUST | WEEVIL |
| CRICKET | MAYFLY | WORMS |
| DRAGONFLY | | |

The hidden message is: GRASSHOPPER

Daily SuDoku



Yesterday's Solution



For labor-related inquiries and complaints: Call MSAL hotline 128

Hospitals

Table of hospitals including Sabah Hospital, Amiri Hospital, Maternity Hospital, Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital, Chest Hospital, Farwaniya Hospital, Adan Hospital, Ibn Sina Hospital, Al-Razi Hospital, Physiotherapy Hospital, and others.

Clinics

Table of clinics including Kaizen center, Rawda, Adaliya, Khaldiya, Kaifan, Shamiya, Shuwaikh, Abdullah Salem, Nuzha, Industrial Shuwaikh, Qadsiya, Dasmah, Bneid Al-Gar, Shaab, Qibla, Ayoun Al-Qibla, Mirqab, Sharq, Salmiya, Jabriya, Maidan Hawally, Bayan, Mishref, W Hawally, Sabah, Jahra, New Jahra, West Jahra, South Jahra, North Jahra, North Jleeb, Ardhiya, Firdous, Omariya, N Khaitan, and Fintas.



PHARMACIES ON 24 HRS DUTY

Table of pharmacies categorized by Governorate (Ahmadi, Jahra, Capital, Farwaniya, Hawally) with columns for Pharmacy Name, Address, and Phone Number.

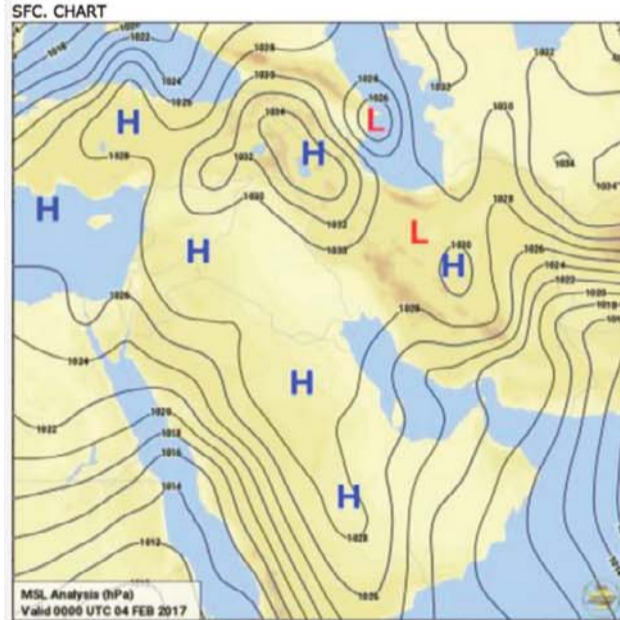
STATE OF KUWAIT DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF CIVIL AVIATION METEOROLOGICAL DEPARTMENT



Contact information for the Meteorological Department: Tel: (+965) 161 Ext: 2627 - 2630, Fax: (+965) 24348714, www.met.gov.kw

Expected Weather for the Next 24 Hours

Issued 04/02/2017-07:00 LT UTC +3hr. Max Temperature 15 °C. By Day: Cool with light variable wind... By Night: Very cold with light to moderate north westerly to light variable wind...



Four-Day Forecast

Table with 4 columns for days (Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday) and rows for weather icons, expected weather, min/max temperature, wind direction, and wind speed.

Warnings & Weather Watches

no warnings or weather watches

Kuwait Forecast

Table listing forecast for various stations (KUWAIT CITY, ABDALY, BUBYAN, etc.) with columns for Station, MIN °C REC, and Max °C EXP.

Recorded Yesterday at Kuwait Airport

Table of recorded weather data: Max Temp (°C), Min Temp (°C), Max Rel Hum (%), Min Rel Hum (%), Max Wind Speed (km/h) and Direction, TOTAL RAINFALL IN 24 HR.

Prayer Times

Table of daily prayer times: Fajr, Sunrise, Zuhr, Asr, Sunset, Isha.

INTERNATIONAL CALLS



Large table listing international call numbers for various countries from Afghanistan to Lesotho.



PRIVATE CLINICS

Table of private clinic professionals: Ophthalmologists, Family Doctor, Psychiatrists, Ear, Nose & Throat (ENT), General Practitioners, Urologists.

Table of private clinic professionals: Plastic Surgeons, Family Doctor, Psychiatrists, Gynaecologists & Obstetricians, Internists, Chest & Heart, General Surgeons, Internists, Chest & Heart, Neurologists, Gastrologists.

Table of private clinic professionals: Paediatricians, Dermatologist, Dentists, Neurologists, Gastrologists.

Table of private clinic professionals: Endocrinologist, Physiotherapists & VD, Rheumatologists, Internist, Chest & Heart, Consultant Cardiologist.

Contact information for various centers: Psychologists, Soor Center, Kaizen center, Noor Clinic, William Schuilenberg, RPC 2290-1677.

GOSSIP

Beyonce's Coachella performance will go ahead

The 35-year-old star is set to headline the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival on Saturday April 15 and Saturday April 22, and although she recently announced she is expecting twins, sources insist she will not cancel the shows. A source told TMZ that Beyonce has already lined up two other artists to join her on stage and made travel arrangements for herself and the guest stars. The website reports that Beyonce will most likely be in her third trimester by the time she performs at Coachella. Beyonce is no stranger to Coachella, having made surprise appearances in 2010 to join her husband Jay Z on stage and once again in 2014, where she took to the stage alongside her sister Solange Knowles. The 'Lemonade' hitmaker announced her pregnancy on Instagram, with a picture of herself showing off her baby bump. She wrote: "We would like to share our love and happiness. We have

been blessed two times over. We are incredibly grateful that our family will be growing by two, and we thank you for your well wishes. - The Carters (sic)." And Beyonce's father Matthew Knowles has insisted that his daughter will also perform at the Grammys this month. Mathew, who teaches entertainment industry courses at Texas Southern University, explained on 'The Insider': "I was shocked. Let me tell you what happened. I got a first text, and I was like, 'Why is this person saying congratulations?' Then I get a second text from one of my students at Texas Southern, and I was like, 'What are you talking about?' He was like, 'Go to the web.' I didn't know myself." However, once he heard the news, Mathew - who used to be Beyonce's manager - quickly called his daughter and they had a "wonderful" chat.



Dunham and Antonoff in no rush to get married

The 'Girls' star has been dating the musician since 2012 and insisted that while they are still blissfully in love, they have no plans to wed. She told The Times: "I am not against marriage in any way, but I do like the fact that Jack and I have placed zero pressure on ourselves about it. I have friends who have met someone, married them and got divorced during the period of time that Jack and I have been dating. We are as close as you can get to a pair of 100-year-old people. Every night we go home, walk our dogs, put them into their crates, take melatonin, watch 20 minutes of TV, then we go to sleep. It is the schedule of ancient, ancient people." However, Lena, 30, admitted that she still comes under pressure from other people to be the "perfect partner". She explained: "Even if you're a woman without children, there's so often an expectation that you're going to go to work, and be the perfect partner to your boyfriend, and show up cheerfully at all of his work drinks, and remember everyone's birthday, and get to every baby shower, and take care of the cat, and make sure you have toilet paper. It's just too much." And the star is often fearful of being labeled a diva. She said: "There are so many moments when I am afraid that if I cancel something, I will develop some kind of diva reputation. The same if I turn up to a photoshoot and I am not in a perfect mood, or if I don't want to answer an interview question. Whereas, if I were a guy, I would be given 87 excuses for that."

Octavia Spencer has a 'skunk party' problem



The 'Hidden Figures' actress is being plagued by a group of the creatures that have taken residence in her garden and she can't bear the stench of the animals. She told Empire magazine: "Skunk is the worst [smell in the world]. They smell worse than sulphur and they love my backyard. There are five of them stinking it up. There's some kind of skunk party going on at my house." But the 46-year-old actress isn't a stranger to creating stench of her own and once had a "bad bad" experience when she got sick after getting stuck into some cinema snacks. Asked the strangest place she's vomited, she said: "An elevator. I had a bad hot dog at a movie theatre. It was coming out of both ends. I thought I was going to make it home but I did not. It was a bad time. It was bad, bad, bad." When Octavia goes to the cinema, she refuses to leave until the end of the movie, even if she isn't enjoying it. She said: "I don't [walk out]. If I've spent my money and bought my popcorn, you've got me. If people took the time to make it, then I'll stick with it to the end." And the actress will drop everything if one of her favourite movies is on TV, even if it affects her other commitments. She said: "There are three I've seen more than any other, 'The Color Purple', 'The Shawshank Redemption' and 'Driving Miss Daisy'. No matter when they're on, I'm going to have to watch them and I'm going to be late."

MORENA BACCARIN WANTS TO STOP PAYING HER EX-HUSBAND



The 'Deadpool' star and film director Austin Chick were granted a "status only" dissolution of marriage in March 2016 but the former couple are still working out a breakdown of their assets. And according to TMZ, Morena claims she has paid Austin "\$340,088 in spousal support, another \$100k from their community estate and \$147,302 in 'Deadpool' residuals" since June 2015. She said in court documents, obtained by the website, that she has been sending her ex around \$20,000 a month while they work out a permanent deal but has asked the judge to cut her payments. Morena, 37, and Austin were granted their "status only" divorce, which means they agreed to settle assets, issues and other items at a later date, just weeks after she gave birth to a daughter with 'Gotham' co-star Ben McKenzie, 38. The tot, who they named Frances, is Ben's first child but Morena already has a son, Julian, with Austin. In February 2016, the Brazilian-born actress delayed divorce proceedings because she was nearing the end of her pregnancy. She stated in court documents: "I am now almost eight months pregnant, and I continue to have a high-risk pregnancy. My physician, who I last saw on Jan 29, 2016, has advised me to have as much bed rest as possible and limited activities."



Kim knew Kanye West was 'The One'

The couple - who have children North, three and Saint, 13 months, together - tied the knot in 2014 but Kim knew things were serious when she stayed over at his residence and Kanye made sure the heating was on for her. She wrote on her website: "I love only hot rooms and hate when the air conditioning is on. I knew Kanye and I were meant to be when I slept over and he had the heat on." In the post on KimKardashianWest.com, the star revealed a list of 20 facts, that she said no one knew about her. One included her weird sleeping habits and Kim also claimed that she is secretly hilarious. She wrote: "I sleep with my eyes slightly open and it scares the s**t out of people. I'm secretly the funniest person, but only in my inner secret. The things I say are wild." And Kim also revealed that she once almost got kicked out of tennis camp, for kissing a boy. She said: "I used to play tennis and went to tennis camp but almost got kicked out for kissing a boy. My dad came to yell at me." While Kim always looks picture perfect for the cameras, she revealed some beauty secrets that no one knows about. She said: "I have a permanent retainer on my teeth inside that you can't see," and "I had a dark mole on my forehead that I had removed three times and it is skin colored and everyone thinks it is a pimple." She also added some other facts, including: "I have six piercings - one bellybutton, one in right ear, three on my left and one really high on left ear. I have a freckle on my eyeball" and "I hate the sleeve on a Starbucks cup. I leave the room for someone to take it off for me because I cringe from the sound. It's like nails on a chalkboard for me. I hate chalkboard."

Reynolds says daughter is 'infatuated' with her younger sister

The 'Deadpool' star and his wife Blake Lively have children James, two and, Ines, who was born in September 2016, together, and Ryan says the best thing about fatherhood is seeing their close bond. He said: "Just seeing my older daughter be so infatuated with our younger daughter, who's four months old. Seeing her kiss her and hug her and hold her, it kinda crushed me. But would put anyone else to sleep." Speaking at the Hasty Pudding Theatricals 2017 Man of the Year award at Harvard University, Ryan also praised Jake Gyllenhaal for insisting that Ryan should have received an Oscar nomination for 'Deadpool'. He said: "It's always generous for another actor, who's in that conversation as well, to bring up someone else in that kind of light. But I wish I could say I'm surprised. But I've known Jake for a while and he's one of the most talented and generous actors. I was pretty touched by that." Ryan, 40, works on both comedy and drama but admitted he loves the former because it "is everything". He explained: "It's one of the greatest tools of social commentary. In the best of times it's amazing. In the worst of times, it's even better. For me, it's a real shelter from the storm and I know it is for a lot of people too. I love smart comedy. I think its value is somewhat under-appreciated in the arts, but overall, I think it ain't going anywhere."



Sarah Jessica Parker is uneasy with social media



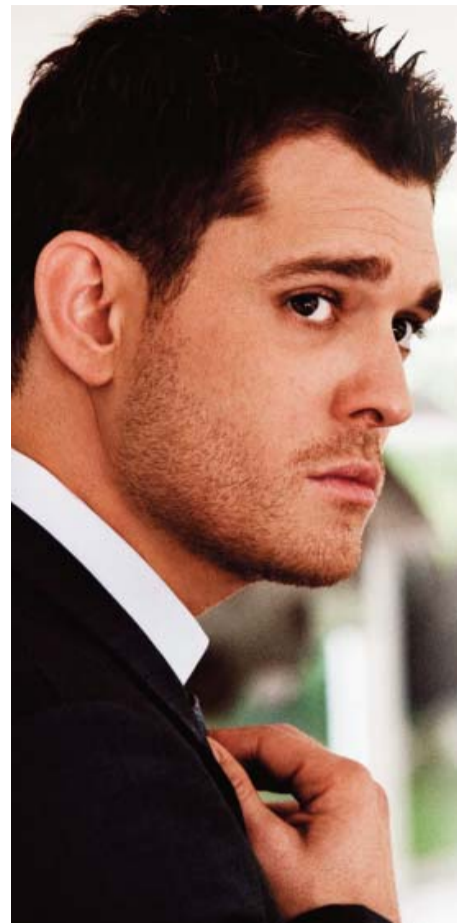
The 51-year-old actress - who has son James Wilkie, 14, and twin daughters Tabitha and Loretta, seven, with husband Matthew Broderick - is an avid user of picture-sharing site Instagram but admits she is unsure where her boundaries are and how much she actually wants to share and engage with the world online. She said: "I'm not easy with [social media and technology] and I'm unclear of my own boundaries. I'm unclear of how much I want to engage and how to have it not be a personal experience and how to have conversations that I think are productive with people when they're feeling anxious or angry or they're wanting to say unfriendly things." And the 'Divorce' star feels conflicted about her son's recent embracing of social media and worried he might do something he shouldn't in order to fit in. She told Red magazine: "I don't know what to do... James has a phone for travelling to school, even though I travelled to school forever [without a phone] but we held off for longer than most parents." And after having it pointed out that parents never say "Little George is doing so well since I got him that iPhone", she replied: "I know, but also Little George might get hurt. He might end up saying something that might not be kind and would hurt someone else. Maybe Little George will say something he isn't inclined to say but he learns the language quickly and, like with other things, wants to be like his peers."

GOSSIP

Frank Ocean's father has called the star a 'scam artist'



The 29-year-old star is being sued by his dad Calvin Cooksey over a Tumblr post following the shooting at a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida, in June last year, where he wrote: "I was 6 years old when I heard my dad call our transgender waitress a f****t as he dragged me out of a neighborhood diner saying we wouldn't be served because she was dirty. (sic)" Cooksey has denied the incident ever took place and has filed a \$14.5 million defamation lawsuit against the star. He told Rolling Stone in a statement that the Tumblr post is a "lie" and said: "The events that defendant describes on June 21st 2016, that I called a transgender waitress F****T NEVER HAPPENED ... The defendant is a scam artist, a fraud and a hypocrite who deceive the LGBT community on June 21st, 2016 for the financial success of [Ocean's album] Blonde (sic)." He called the post a "publicity stunt in the wake of the Orlando attack" and said the star is "using his father as an instrument for personal connection in order to sell records". Cooksey believes his son's accusation has undermined his ability to make money in the film and music businesses. According to the lawsuit, Cooksey argues that "Frank was aware that his father [has] written a manuscript titled Part of the Game, which is a crime thriller and defendant and his mother are in the movie. The defendant has destroyed his father's reputation so that his father can never get a deal or produce his father's movie." The lawsuit also referenced Frank's collaborator Tyler, the Creator, who was previously banned from the UK because of homophobic lyrics. The suit states: "Frank knew that Tyler, the Creator had been banned from Australia and the United Kingdom for homophobic rap lyrics which could incite violence against LGBT members. Yet [he] still allowed ... Tyler, the Creator to be a music producer on ... 'Blonde'. He attacked God's scriptures as if God only sees homosexuality as a sin. Please see the Ten Commandments. Lying, stealing, lust and defendant's favorite: disrespecting thy father."



Michael Buble's SON cancer treatment is 'progressing well'

The 'Haven't Met You Yet' singer and his wife Luisana Lopilato have cancelled everything to aid their three-year-old boy Noah in his fight against the disease and so far the youngster has responded well to his treatment. A statement released on behalf of Michael and Luisana said: "We are so grateful to report that our son Noah has been progressing well during his treatment and the doctors are very optimistic about the future for our little boy. He has been brave throughout and we continue to be inspired by his courage. We thank God for the strength he has given all of us." The couple - who married in 2001 and also have 13-month-old son Elias together - also took

the opportunity to "thank the thousands of people" who have sent their best wishes to the family since little Noah was diagnosed. The statement shared by their representative added: "Our gratitude to his doctors and caretakers cannot be put into words. We'd also like to thank the thousands of people that have sent their prayers and good wishes to us. As we continue this journey, we are greatly comforted by your support and love." As well as cancelling all of his planned concerts, Michael, 41, also pulled out of hosting the 2017 BRIT Awards which are being held at the O2 arena in London on February 22.

Stewart anxious about hosting 'Saturday Night Live'



The 26-year-old star has resisted offers to present the iconic comedy show for years and now she's finally decided to "bite the bullet", Kristen admits to suffering some last-minute nerves. She shared: "For six years I've been a total wuss about it, and then I was finally like, at some point you have to bite the bullet, you know ... and just fail. "It makes you stronger, man!" Kristen revealed she felt similarly nervous during the making of her new movie 'Personal Shopper', for which she rode a scooter in France without any meaningful training. She told 'The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon': "They kind of let you do anything. "Like I rode a scooter in the movie, I had two hours training beforehand. I feel like in the States they'd probably have me for a month with certification, insurance and all this stuff ... I was genuinely terrified." Meanwhile, Kristen recently admitted to making a "million bad movies" during her career. The actress and director -

who has starred in the likes of 'Twilight', 'Equals' and 'Snow White and the Huntsman' - said it is "rare" that something turns out exactly as she had hoped. Asked how she would describe herself as a director, she said: "I'm a pretty obsessive person, which is I think entirely necessary. You have to be a little crazy to put yourself through something like that and actually make it happen. "I was probably a little bit more controlling than I thought I would have been. My favorite thing in the world is when it feels like something starts to get up and walk itself. "When something's really good, and it's rare - honestly I've made a million bad movies. Not bad, it's just like sometimes they don't come together in a way that feels miraculous and when they do, it genuinely feels like something is floating and you're all sort of blowing on it to keep it up and it's like, that fully happened." — Bangshowbiz



Brand hopes his daughter will 'formulate' her own gender

The 41-year-old British comedian has two-month-old Mabel with his fiancée Laura Gallacher and revealed that since she was born he has started to examine his own beliefs about gender. Speaking on 'This Morning', he said: "Now that I have these very important women in my life [Mabel and fiancée Laura] I have re-evaluated the way I look at gender. "I don't have to dress her in feminine clothes, I don't need to dress her in clothes for her gender, I'd rather just see how she formulates it herself. "I've become quite sensitive and aware of that since she was born." Speaking about the decision to call his daughter Mabel, Russell said: "I stared at her for ages to make sure she looked like that name. "You have to name their essence. Her essence was twinkling, sparkling, joyous. If she'd have had different sexual organs she wouldn't have been Mabel obviously!" Russell also revealed that

he is a hands-on father but admitted that his life has changed dramatically since Mabel was born. He said: "It's an abrupt and sudden change. It's like having a relative over to stay, but not a minor relative, like a distant uncle. "There's not an area of her life I'm not involved in. Sadly I'm unable to produce breast milk." Speaking before Mabel was born, Russell admitted he didn't want to "impose a gender" on his child. He said: "I've painted the room, I've done the things that you're supposed to do, I've accepted the idea that person will be more important than me. I'm thinking of calling him or her, we don't know the gender. I may not even ever impose a gender upon it, let the child grow up and be the whatever the hell it is, never tell it there is such a concept."

LOUISA JOHNSON WANTS A PET DOLPHIN

The 19-year-old singer has always paid for the care of the marine mammals and while she currently has an adopted creature in Scotland, she's never been able to visit it so her dream would be to have one of her own. Asked her ideal pet, she said: "A dolphin. I just think they're really sweet. "I adopted one in Scotland so I'm close to owning one. "It's called Rainbow. I haven't ever been to see it but I really want to. I've adopted dolphins since I was little." And Louisa is also desperate to get a dog but knows her busy career means it isn't possible. She told Top of the Pops magazine: "I want a French bulldog so badly but I can't because I'm away so much. "They're so cute." As well as animals, the former 'X Factor' winner is smitten with her boyfriend Daniel Elliott and loves the romantic things he does for her. She said: "I quite like the lovey-dovey, cringey stuff. "I think a lot of people pretend not to but deep down we love it. "For our first anniversary, my boyfriend wrote on the mirror all the things he loves about me and I thought it was the sweetest thing ever." The 'So Good' singer is always grateful for the support of her fans and loves being an inspiration to them. She said: "They're the best. Fans are always telling me they like how I stick up for myself and that it makes them want to be more confident, which I love. Everyone deserves th



Minogue has confirmed she has split from her fiancé Joshua Sasse

The 48-year-old Australian pop star has taken to her Instagram account to reveal that she and the 29-year-old British actor have gone their "separate ways" but "wish only the best for each other" moving forward. Alongside a photo of a sun-kissed sky, Kylie wrote: "Thank you for all your love and support throughout this recent chapter of my life. Thank you now for your love and understanding with the news that Josh and I have decided to go our separate ways. We wish only the best for each other as we venture towards new horizons. #thesunalwaysrises (sic)" Kylie and Joshua got engaged in February 2016 and had been planning their nuptials in the latter half of the year, although they vowed to only tie the knot once same-sex marriage was legalized in her native Australia. At the height of their romance, Kylie had described herself as being on "cloud nine" because of Joshua. Over the years, the 'I Should Be So Lucky' hitmaker has been unlucky in love. Her previous boyfriends include her former 'Neighbours' co-star Jason Donovan, late INXS rocker Michael Hutchence, French actor Olivier Martinez and Spanish model Andres Velencoso.

Bruno Mars slays at pre-Super Bowl concert

The Super Bowl halftime show is today. Someone maybe ought to tell Bruno Mars that. The pop singer was in grade A form at a pre-Super Bowl show on Friday night, performing a top notch concert that matched the energy he showed when he hit the stage at halftime last year and in 2014.

He worked Club Nomadic in Houston like a veteran: He danced slickly on one song, sang impressively on another, and played guitar throughout his 90-minute set. Mars kicked off with the anthemic "24K Magic," hitting the stage with his remarkable eight-piece band that worked the room like a powerhouse ensemble. "Houston we here ... we're trying to have some fun tonight," he yelled near the top of his show for Pepsi's LIFEWTR. "I wanna see everyone moving. I wanna see everyone dancing."

He wove classic R&B records into his set — including Michael Jackson's "Rock With You," Ginuwine's "Pony" and Soul for Real's "Candy Rain" — and also performed a number of his well-known hits, from "Treasure" to "Just the Way You Are" to "Locked Out of Heaven," which featured gold confetti bursting from the side of the stage.

Mars, 31, danced sensually and slowly — enticing the crowd — during "Show Me" and "Our First Time." He earned a rousing applause for his jaw-dropping vocals during "When I Was Your Man." And he echoed James Brown during the energetic "Runaway Baby" — though he didn't have a cap, his curly bangs worked as an accessory.

His band was part of the magic: Seven of the eight members danced collectively onstage, including Philip Lawrence, Mars' longtime co-writer and co-producer; guitarist and pianist Phredley Brown; bassist Jamareo Artis; saxophonist Dwayne R. Dugger; trombone player Kameron T. Whalum; trumpet player James King; and keyboardist John Fossitt.

The only member to sit in place throughout the night was Mars' brother, drummer Eric Hernandez. Mars, and most of his bandmates, sported Houston Astros shirts at the show. Lady Gaga will headline Sunday's halftime show in Houston — a stage Mars performed at last year alongside Beyonce and Coldplay, and was the headlined in 2014. "We can't leave yet," Mars said, as he and his band imitated a football team by huddling up before the last song, "Uptown Funk."

The crowd of 9,000 — which included John Legend, Michael Strahan and CeeLo Green — danced the hardest during the Grammy-winning funk track, becoming frenzied as Mars lit up the stage. It seemed only fitting when a pair of "firefighters" appeared to spray him down as Mars closed the show. Too hot, hot damn, indeed. — AP



Jamie Dornan, left, and Dakota Johnson arrive at the Los Angeles premiere of Fifty Shades Darker at The Theatre at Ace Hotel. — AP photos

Dornan and Johnson go darker in 'Fifty Shades' sequel

Two years after the bonkbuster film "Fifty Shades of Grey" had housewives reaching for the smelling salts, its sequel reunites Christian, Anastasia and a variety of tools that really ought to be kept in a riding stable. Northern Irishman Jamie Dornan and US actress Dakota Johnson return as the kinky couple in "Fifty Shades Darker," the next installment of EL James's bestselling "mommy porn" novels.

Expanding on events set in motion in 2015's box office smash that opened on \$85 million in the United States and grossed more than \$571 million globally, the movie hits US theaters on February 10 — just in time for Valentine's Day. Expect another heady blend of erotic submission, bondage and ball gowns as James Foley takes over the director's chair from Sam Taylor-Johnson, who reportedly clashed with the author during the filming of the original.

The follow-up picks up where we left the characters, with a wounded Christian Grey trying to entice the cautious Ana back into his life as shadowy figures from his past start to circle. We pull out all the stops, Dornan, 34, told reporters as Hollywood rolled out the red carpet for the premiere at the Ace Hotel on Thursday. "If you're making a sequel to anything, I think there has to be some kind of advancement on the first," he said. "You have to go a bit bigger in a lot of areas and I don't think this film's any different."

Foley shot "Fifty Shades Darker" and the final installment, "Fifty Shades Freed," simultaneously, with the threequel slated for a 2018 release. Dornan, who has two young daughters with wife Amelia Warner, has become a worldwide sex symbol since the first movie, but insists his role hasn't influenced his sex life.



Bella Heathcote arrives at the Los Angeles premiere of Fifty Shades Darker.

Raunchy

He told GQ Australia's February edition that bondage "doesn't float my boat," although he added: "I've always been open-minded and liberal." I'd never judge anyone's sexual preference. Universal has been shrewdly building anticipation with not-safe-for-work trailers involving underwear being jettisoned at dinner and a raunchy, hands-on display in an elevator.

The marketing appears to be working, with the film topping social media buzz with 246,000 new conversations last week, according to data analyst comScore. That's 86,000 more than the next most talked-about movie, "Star Wars: The Last Jedi." Don't expect it to achieve the "Star Wars"-sized numbers that the original managed, however, as it has competition from Lionsgate's action sequel "John Wick" and the hotly anticipated Warner Bros release "The LEGO Batman Movie."

Pre-release tracking suggests "Fifty Shades" will open in the \$35 million to \$40 million range, still a big win for a movie made for around \$55 million. Several support actors are returning from the original, including Marcia Gay Harden, who won an Oscar for her portrayal of painter Lee Krasner in "Pollock" (2000) and the British singer Rita Ora.

They are joined by a cast of newcomers including Kim Basinger another Oscar-winner as Christian's ex Elena, the woman who introduced him to BDSM. Bella Heathcote, 34 years younger than Basinger, plays another ex, Leila, while Eric Johnson is Ana's new boss, Jack Hyde. Johnson told NBC's Today show on Wednesday that she felt more comfortable filming the sex scenes this time around. "It's never really easy, but this time it was definitely not completely uncharted waters, Jamie and I obviously having known each other for a long time now." — AFP

SUPER BOWL ADS TREAD CAREFULLY IN DIVISIVE CLIMATE

Super Bowl advertisers are treading carefully this year to avoid alienating customers as a divisive political climate takes some of the buzz away from what is usually the biggest spectacle on TV. Ad critic Barbara Lippert says that while "people need an escape," like the Super Bowl, this year's matchup on the field feels "so much less important than what's going on politically." To get the attention back, some advertisers are turning to nostalgia, celebrities and marketing stunts. P&G is sexing up Mr. Clean, Honda is featuring nine celebrities and Snickers is running a live ad.

Others are touching on social issues, without being too blunt about it. Budweiser won the pre-game buzz with a sweeping cinematic ad showcasing founder Adolphus Busch's 1857 immigration from Germany to St. Louis. Although it has been in the works since May, the ad felt topical, as it was released online just days after President Donald Trump's travel ban against people from seven Muslim-majority countries. The ad got more than 8 million views on YouTube in just four days. Although many brands released ads online ahead of time, there will still be surprises during Fox's Super Bowl broadcast Sunday. At \$5 million for a 30-second spot, and an expected U.S. audience of more than 110 million, the pressure is on.

TIPTOEING AROUND POLITICS

Audi's spot addresses gender equality as a man muses about his daughter receiving equal pay as men one day. Building supplies retailer 84 Lumber had to revise its original ad because a scene featuring a border wall was deemed too

controversial by Fox. The new ad shows a Mexican woman and her daughter making a trip by foot across Mexico. The ad's ending will be revealed at halftime at <http://journey84.com>; the website suggests excised footage will be shown.

And Kia attempts a humorous approach. In an ad for the Niro car, Melissa McCarthy takes on political causes like saving whales, ice caps and trees, each time to disastrous effect. The message: "It's hard to be an eco-warrior, but it's easy to drive like one" with a fuel-efficient Niro.

Though advertisers are being extra careful, taking on any sort of political topic might backfire, says Mark DiMassimo, CEO of ad agency DiMassimo Goldstein. Against the backdrop of an "emboldened, enraged or traumatized audience," he says, themes that might have been innocuous in the past "seem more strident and jarring this year."

STUFFED WITH CELEBRITIES

In turbulent times, brands can count on celebrities to ensure goodwill among consumers. And why use one celebrity when you can have many? In Honda's ad, the high-school yearbook photos of Amy Adams, Steve Carell, Viola Davis, Missy Elliott, Tina Fey, Magic Johnson, Jimmy Kimmel, Stan Lee and Robert Redford come to life with special effects. The animations encourage people to follow their dreams in a nod to Honda's longtime slogan, "The Power of Dreams."

Website hosting company Squarespace shows an intense John Malkovich berating the owner of john-

malkovich.com domain name. Justin Bieber shows off dance moves to tout T-Mobile cellphone offerings. For the baby boomer crowd, Mercedes-Benz shows a biker gang being amazed by Peter Fonda's AMG GT roadster to the tune of Steppenwolf's "Born to Be Wild."

"The proliferation of athletes and more personalities is a reflection of not taking too much risk," says Kelly O'Keefe from Virginia Commonwealth University's advertising graduate program. "When in doubt get a personality."

BLAST FROM THE PAST

Anheuser-Busch joins Mercedes-Benz in trying to reach consumers with nostalgia. The brewer's ad shows a mountain man opening a can of Busch beer to the sound of "Buschhhhh." It's a nod to the brand's ad campaign, introduced in 1978, which lasted for decades. Meanwhile, Bud Light is bringing back the ghost of its 1980s spokesdog Spuds Mackenzie — literally. In its ad, the dog appears as a ghost dangling in the air, urging a Bud Light drinker to go out and join his friends, like the ghosts in the holiday classic "A Christmas Carol." And P&G sexes up its Mr. Clean mascot, introduced as an animated character in 1958. In the new ad, he distracts a woman as he cleans her kitchen. "Emotions are the secret sauce of getting people to do things, and nostalgia is a great reason for people to pay attention," says Devra Prywes of video analytics firm Unruly.

HERE'S TO HEALTH

After 10 years, Frito-Lay has retired its "Crash the Super Bowl" campaign for Doritos. Those ads, created by consumers, were usually filled with slapstick humor. Taking its place? A healthier approach. PepsiCo is featuring its new bottled water called LifeWTR and its sugar-free soft drink, Pepsi Zero Sugar. Bai Brands investor Justin Timberlake helps promote the company's antioxidant-infused drinks. And one of Wonderful Co.'s 15-second ads promotes the health benefits of its pistachios. Avocados from Mexico is focusing on its "healthy fats" in a humorous ad showing a secret society subliminally influenced by Jon Lovitz to chow down on guacamole.

SURPRISES

The biggest buzz may come from what hasn't been revealed ahead of time. Snickers' ad with Adam Driver and a "Wild West" theme will be performed live during the third quarter. Hyundai tapped "Deepwater Horizon" director Peter Berg to shoot an ad during the game itself for airing right after the game ends. Chrysler, long known for its surprise two-minute ads starring celebrities like Eminem and Clint Eastwood, won't even say whether it's advertising this year. Coca-Cola says it bought two spots, but it's keeping the topic a mystery. "Ultimately, the advertiser who gives us sweet relief without that aftertaste is going to win," DiMassimo says. "Something simple, delightful and cheerful."



Eminem performs with Rihanna

Eminem returns with new Trump attack

Hip-hop superstar Eminem has returned with a fresh attack on US President Donald Trump, contributing an angry verse on the new album of Big Sean. The lyrics mark the latest political intervention by Eminem, who re-emerged weeks before the November 8 election with a charged, eight-minute freestyle rap against the billionaire Republican.

On "No Favors," a track on Big Sean's album "I Decided," which came out Friday, Eminem and the fellow Detroit rapper both boast of rising from humble means as they question the world's direction. Eminem declares himself an avowed opponent of Trump and his administration: "I'm anti / Can't no government handle a commando ... I'll make his whole brand go under."

The rapper denounces the racial dynamics behind the white tycoon's campaign and reserves his most heated verses for Ann Coulter, a conservative commentator known for her provocative statements. Eminem-in his trademark delivery of super-fast verses that crescendo in anger-imagines acts of violence against Coulter including running her over with a car. "Gotta make an example of

her / That's for Sandra Bland... and Philando," he raps, in reference to two African Americans whose deaths following police traffic stops triggered protests.

Eminem similarly imagined vengeance in his October song "Campaign Speech," in which he spoke of attacking George Zimmerman, the volunteer neighborhood watchman in Florida who shot dead African American teenager Trayvon Martin as he walked home with iced tea and candy. Eminem, the best-selling rapper of all time and by far the most prominent white artist in hip-hop, was rarely described as political as he built his career in the 1990s. But in interviews he has long identified with the political left, even as his songs-often rapped in character-often generated controversy for derogatory lines about women and gays. Eminem has said he is working on a new studio album, which would be his first since 2013. "I Decided," the fourth album by Big Sean, is a concept album about a man who is reborn and sees the same life with new eyes. — AFP



This Jan 13, 2017 photo shows model Miranda Kerr, left, and NFL player Cam Newton pose together during the filming of a Buick commercial for this year's Super Bowl telecast in Los Angeles. The commercial is set to air during the first quarter.

FASHION



The John Varvatos men's collection is modeled during Men's Fashion Week in New York. — AP photos

Raf Simons salutes New York at Fashion week



It's the little brother to women's Fashion Week — the very little brother. But men's Fashion Week has its fans, and it's a lot less frenetic: You can actually find a taxi! Here are some highlights of the week:

RAF SIMONS

It's safe to say Raf Simons' runway show was the marquee event of Men's Fashion Week. The Belgian designer — formerly of Dior, soon to debut with Calvin Klein — was showing his own, eponymous menswear label for the first time in New York, and the buzz was palpable as guests packed into the Gagosian Gallery in Chelsea. Among them: rapper ASAP, Neil Patrick Harris, a slew of fellow designers, and even a frisky, clearly well-connected dog in the front row.

What followed was essentially a love letter to New Yorkers — and a statement or two about current events. Instead of belts, the young models, many clad in generous overcoats of wool or satin, simply wore duct tape to cinch their waists, emblazoned with "I (Heart) You" or "New York" or a cityscape, or non-geographical messages like "Walk With Me." Baggy deconstructed sweaters — some draped like scarves across the torso — also were emblazoned with "New York" or "I (Heart) You."

In a unique style accent, there were colorful, striped arm warmers piled on top of the coats — just like leg warmers, but arguably a lot hipper. Whether they would actually keep the arms warmer was not immediately clear. The young men also wore chunky necklaces. After Wednesday evening show, as Simons accepted countless "welcome to New York" hugs, he explained what he was going for in the collection.

TODD SNYDER

At 49, Todd Snyder was feeling the looks and sounds of his college days at Iowa State. Inspired by thrift shop finds and 1980s college radio, the designer who once worked for Ralph Lauren and J. Crew put out a menswear collection Wednesday of slouchy topcoats, thick-cable sweaters, slacker plaid prints and military-detailed workwear pants cut in relaxed stovepipes.

While Snyder stuck to muted reds, blues and army green, pops of color came in wide racing stripes on sweaters and more delicate stripes on scarves. He reinterpreted the retro ski sweater for urbanites in lush cashmere turtlenecks worn with a range of looks, from button-down shirts to blazers. And he went for defiance in British-made Sanders combat boots.

But really what he did was make these college dudes, including those in nerdy high-water pants, sexy. Snyder has been in business for himself for about six years, including a brand new store in New York, but he's been in the business for more than two decades. Fashion has become, well, fashionable for even more men in his professional life span.

"I think one of the biggest things about menswear is a lot more guys are getting into it," he said in a backstage interview. "I think you're starting to see a lot more younger guys getting into clothes." For fall, Snyder was going for rugged while playing with traditional men's tailoring, mixing and matching as he went along. At his new store, he said, customers are everything from 20-somethings to Baby Boomers. Generally, are more men willing to spend big on fashion? "I think guys appreciate better quality," Snyder said. "They also love great design." Colton Haynes, Liev Schreiber and Neil Patrick Harris were among the celebrities on Snyder's front row. — AP



Todd Snyder men's collection



Raf Simons men's collection



Lifestyle

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An acrobat performs during a rehearsal of the Giant Fountains show in the Belarusian State Circus in Minsk, Belarus, Friday, Feb 3, 2017. — AP

Nordstrom to drop **Ivanka Trump's** clothing, accessories line

Nordstrom says it will stop selling Ivanka Trump clothing and accessories, creating some questions about the future of the brand elsewhere. The Seattle-based department store chain said the decision was based on the sales performance of the first daughter's brand. Neiman Marcus may be the next one to pull back on the label, as the branded jewelry is nowhere to be seen on the upscale retailer's website as of Friday.

"We've said all along we make buying



Ivanka Trump models an outfit following an interview to promote her clothing line. — AP

decisions based on performance," said Nordstrom in a statement emailed to The Associated Press. "We've got thousands of brands— more than 2,000 offered on the site alone. Reviewing their merit and mak-

ing edits is part of the regular rhythm of our business." Nordstrom said that each year the chain cuts about 10 percent and refreshes its assortment with about the same amount.

"In this case, based on the brand's performance we've decided not to buy it for this season," Nordstrom added. Lord & Taylor only said it continues to carry the brand. Neiman Marcus, Macy's and Dillard's, which also carry the label, didn't immediately reply to AP's query. The move by Nordstrom Inc. comes amid a social media campaign called "Grab Your Wallet," urging a boycott of stores that stock Ivanka Trump or Donald Trump products.

In a statement emailed to The Associated Press late Friday, Rosemary K. Young, senior director of marketing at Ivanka Trump, said that the brand continues to expand across all categories and distribution, resulting in "significant" revenue growth last year compared to the previous year. "We believe that the strength of a brand is measured not only by the profits it generates, but the integrity it maintains," said Young in the statement. "The women behind the brand represent a diverse group of professionals and we are proud to say that the Ivanka Trump brand continues to embody the principles upon which it was founded."

An unnamed spokesperson for the brand contradicted Nordstrom's statement, saying that Nordstrom did order both shoes and clothing for spring and moved forward with the purchase of clothing. Wendy Liebmann, CEO of WSL Strategic Retail, says that retailers walk a tight rope when it comes to celebrity brands but given the politics surrounding the Ivanka Trump brand, that only adds extra controversy, particularly given such a politically divisive climate. Liebmann noted a decision of whether to pull a brand is politically loaded even if it's based on poor sales performance.

"The brand is vulnerable," Liebmann said. "Retailers view their role as having the right products for the right consumer, not being pulled in a political situation." She noted that some shoppers may not want to wear the Ivanka Trump brand because they may want to avoid making a political statement. Ivanka Trump announced earlier this month that she would take a leave of absence from her clothing and accessories business as well as the Trump organization. — AP

Happy to be an **Estefan**, Gloria's daughter charts own path

Emily Estefan was so self-conscious about being the daughter of Cuban-born superstar Gloria Estefan that she avoided singing in front of anyone until she was 18. Then, one winter night at the family's Florida beach house, she finally sang for her mother. First she asked her to look away. "I was like shaking, shaking, shaking, shaking. Everything in my body was shaking. But I did it," said Emily Estefan, now 22.

Then Gloria looked at her, and she cried— the two things her daughter had asked her not to do. Four years later, the younger Estefan is releasing her debut album, "Take Whatever You Want," which came out Friday like a declaration of independence. "I am honored to come from this family. I would love to yell it from the mountains and also be recognized as a person," she said.

Parents footsteps

Emily already had been following in the musical footsteps of her parents. Her father, Emilio Estefan, is one of the biggest names in Latin music production and founder of the band that turned Gloria Estefan into a star. The younger Estefan had learned guitar, keyboards and drums and enrolled in Boston's prestigious Berklee College of Music. But after that night when she let herself go, inspiration to become a singer and songwriter kicked in.

When she returned to Berklee after her winter break, she began to spend her early morning hours writing feisty songs about freedom, penning the

lyrics and the music of every instrument for her soul and jazz-influenced album. In an interview at her late grandparents' mansion in an exclusive island between Miami and Miami beach, Estefan talked about "huge shoes to fill," born the heiress of the performer of such hits such as "Conga" and "1-2-3."

Of her parents she said: "I will never be them." But she went on to say: "The moment when you say none of that matters is when you realize that you love it, and you love it enough to dedicate yourself to it. It doesn't matter what comes out, as long as it is honest."

At the mansion's garage, her mother watched her rehearse with her band for her first solo concert, and then stepped out for a chat. "There's soulfulness, there's R&B influences, there's depth. She sounds like, honestly, a 40-year-old singer who went through hell. It comes out, all this emotion in her music," Gloria Estefan said. Gloria Estefan thought maybe she was just a proud mom, blinded by love. So, Gloria played a track to her husband without telling him who performed it. "He said 'Oh my God. She is amazing. Who is that?'" She is your daughter," I said, and he flipped."

More shy

Emily Estefan is, at least right now, more shy than her famous mom onstage, preferring to be shielded by drums or with a guitar around her neck. She dresses all in black with bulky military boots, and her dark black hair is pulled to one side, the rest shaved.

At a concert on Thursday at the University of Miami, Estefan performed a medley of songs by Alanis Morissette, Beyonce, Whitney Houston and then drew cheers when she included parts of her mother's "The Rhythm is Gonna Get You."

One ticket-buyer, Mark Solloway, said he came because he loves Gloria Estefan but he left impressed by her daughter: "I am blown away. She has such stage presence. She plays all the instruments. She is incredible, 22 years old. She just grabs the audience and brings them in." Listeners may find a common vibrato in Emily's first single, "Ask Me To," to her mother's early boleros such as "If We Were Lovers." Emily sings in a different way, but both voices are rich, and crisp, especially in falsettos.

"When people say 'Oh, you have terrible similarities to your mom.' I say 'Yes. I lived in her womb for nine months,'" she said. "That's cool. If that comforts you, that's OK. But listen to me also." Gloria Estefan said that when she was pregnant and recording the music to the video of "Turn the Beat Around," her baby kicked so hard she knocked the microphone down. Maybe, she thinks, Emily's obsession with percussion started before she was born. "I told myself 'This is definitely a girl who loves rhythm,'" Gloria said. — AP



Emily Estefan