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KUWAIT WELCOMES IRAN'S READINESS FOR DIALOGUE

JARALLAH HAILS IRAQI STATEMENTS, WARNS AGAINST INTERFERENCE IN YEMEN

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MPS DEMAND KHOR ABDULLAH DEBATE

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: A number of MPs have submitted a motion calling to hold a two-hour closed debate over the Khor Abdullah waterway between Iraq and Kuwait during next Tuesday's regular Assembly session, MP Faisal Al-Kandari said. The lawmaker said MPs want to hear briefings from the ministries of foreign affairs, defense and interior over the waterway, which has been a subject of controversy raised by various Iraqi political and militant groups.

Khor Abdullah is shared by Kuwait and Iraq and runs opposite the Kuwaiti islands of Warba and Bubiyan where Kuwait is building one of the largest container harbors in the region, the Mubarak Al-Kabeer Port. Kuwaiti and Iraqi land and maritime borders had been demarcated by a UN Security Council resolution issued in 1993. In 2012, the two countries signed an agreement on the way to share the use of the narrow waterway and began implementing the agreement recently.

However, the implementation has been faced with opposition from a number of Iraqi MPs, Shiite politicians and militant groups who claim that Kuwait has taken over some Iraqi territorial waters under the demarcation treaty and the 2012 agreement.

Continued on Page 13

AMIR FETES QURAN CONTEST WINNERS



KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah attends a ceremony to honor winners of Kuwait's 20th Grand Quran Memorization Contest at Bayan Palace yesterday. — KUNA (See Page 3)

KUWAIT: Kuwait has welcomed Iran's willingness for dialogue with its Gulf Arab neighbors, saying any talks are likely to help resolve civil wars in Syria and Yemen. Iran and US ally Saudi Arabia, which dominates the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), back opposite sides in Syria and Yemen. US President Donald Trump has added extra strain by ratcheting up pressure on Iran over its missile program.

Saudi Arabia and other members of the GCC accuse Iran of using sectarianism to interfere in Arab countries and expand its sphere of influence in the Middle East. Kuwaiti Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah, responding to Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif's comments that his country was ready for dialogue with the GCC, said: "It's what we're looking for."

Such a dialogue would "contribute effectively to containment of many areas of tension in the region, whether in Yemen or in Syria or anywhere else in our region," KUNA quoted Jarallah as saying at a national day reception at the Iranian Embassy. Referring to a letter sent in January to Iran's President Hassan Rouhani by HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah on the "basis for dialogue" between the six-member GCC and Iran, Zarif said Tehran hoped the message would show that Gulf states were willing "to resolve the issues." "In that case, Iran is also ready. We should all look forward and agree that we should aim together for a future that looks different," Iran's Ettelaat newspaper quoted Zarif as saying on Tuesday.

Jarallah also said Kuwait welcomes statements of Iraqi government officials aimed at dismissing false claims over the Khor Abdullah water inlet between Kuwait and Iraq. "We welcome the statements that aim at calming the situation down, and we care less about other statements that

Continued on Page 13

TRUMP SLAMS 'SO POLITICAL' COURTS

US COULD ASK VISA APPLICANTS FOR SOCIAL MEDIA PASSWORDS

WASHINGTON: US embassies could ask visa applicants for passwords to their own social media accounts in future background checks, Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly said Tuesday. Kelly said the move could come as part of the effort to toughen vetting of visitors to screen out people who could pose a security threat. He said it was one of the things under consideration especially for visitors from seven Muslim majority countries with very weak background screening of their own - Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen.

"We're looking at some enhanced or some additional screening," Kelly told a hearing of the House Homeland Security Committee. "We may want to get on their social media, with passwords," he said. "It's very hard to truly vet these people in these countries, the seven countries... But if they come in, we want to say, what websites do they visit, and give us your passwords. So we can see what they do on the Internet. If they don't want to cooperate, then they don't come in" to the United States, he said.

Kelly stressed that no decision had been made on this, but said tighter screening was definitely in the future, even if it means longer delays for awarding US visas to visitors. "These are the things we are thinking about," he said. "But over there we can ask them for this kind of information and if they truly want to come to America, then they will cooperate. — AFP

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump slammed the courts yesterday as "so political" as a panel of appellate judges weighed whether to reinstate an executive order barring US entry to refugees and nationals from seven mainly Muslim countries. The travel ban, which plunged airports around the country into chaos after it was announced without warning Jan 27, has embroiled Trump in a willful test of strength with the US judiciary less than three weeks into his presidency.

Speaking to police chiefs and sheriffs, Trump expressed "amazement" over ques-

tions raised about the ban in a high-stakes hearing Tuesday by three federal appeals judges, saying what he heard was "disgraceful, just disgraceful." "I don't ever want to call a court biased, so I won't call it biased and we haven't had a decision yet. But courts seem to be so political," he said.

The ban was suspended nationwide on Friday by a federal judge in Seattle, after two US states asked it to be overturned on grounds of religious discrimination and that it had caused "irreparable injury". Taking up the case, the federal court of

Continued on Page 13



WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump speaks at the Major Cities Chiefs Association and Major County Sheriffs Association Winter Meeting yesterday. — AFP



PARIS: This picture taken on Feb 1, 2017 shows a journalist reading an issue of French satirical newspaper "Le Canard Enchaîné". — AFP

100-YEAR-OLD WEEKLY KEEPS FRANCE ON TOES

PARIS: With its old-school layout, unwieldy pages and heavy doses of slapstick humor, France's Canard Enchaîné weekly may have seemed especially vulnerable as the Internet upended the newspaper business. But as its "fake job" claims against presidential hopeful Francois Fillon show, "The Shackled Duck", which last July celebrated 100 years in print, has hardly lost its bite.

Although circulation has fallen to about 400,000 copies in 2015 from 500,000 in 2010, its sales have spiked in tandem with its most explosive claims:

The edition detailing the money paid to Fillon's wife, dubbed "Penelopegate", quickly sold out an estimated 500,000 copies. But Le Canard Enchaîné refuses to post its reports on its website. It accepts no advertising. Its journalists are its only shareholders, and its finances are among the healthiest in the French media landscape. And every Tuesday night, politicians send couriers to the paper's Paris offices ahead of Wednesday's public distribution, hoping they won't be the subject of its skewering reports.

Continued on Page 13

French envoy decorates rights activist with top accolade



Pig bristles in brush with Malaysian halal law



India to remove limits on cash withdrawals



Jones scores in OT to lift Blue Jackets over Red Wings





KUWAIT: French Ambassador Christian Nakhla decorates Dr Al-Anoud Al-Sharekh with the French National Order of Merit.

French Ambassador Christian Nakhla delivers a speech during the ceremony. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

FRENCH EMBASSY CELEBRATES SHAREKH'S TOP ACCOLADE

FIRST KUWAITI TO BE ADORNED WITH 'FRENCH NATIONAL ORDER OF MERIT'

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The French Embassy decorated Dr Al-Anoud Al-Sharekh with the French National Order of Merit for her human rights work yesterday at French Ambassador Christian Nakhla's residence. Nakhla praised Sharekh's efforts in fighting for women's rights and being committed to it. "Today we honor the activist Al-Anoud by a presidential decree for her efforts in fighting for women's rights in Kuwait, Middle East and all over the world," he said. He stressed Sharekh is a role model for female activists, and the best evidence that Kuwaiti women are making a difference in their society.

"Al-Anoud serves as an advisor to a number of local and international governmental bodies and NGOs, offering her insights on various cultural and sociopolitical issues in the region. She has worked as a gender politics consultant for UNIFEM, Freedom House and the UNDP on academic and social outreach projects in Kuwait and the GCC, and at SOAS University of London. She had the courage to establish the 'Abolish 153' campaign that seeks justice for women killed for 'honor.' You made efforts to change the society," Nakhla said.

The French ambassador noted that France is a country that defends human rights, and shares the same interests

with Sharekh, adding that the medal represents all human rights defenders. "We chose to show the movie 'Wajida'. It is the story of a girl determined to fight for her dreams to ride a bicycle in Saudi Arabia. And this movie reminds us of you in your fight for equality," he added.

Sharekh thanked the French Embassy for selecting her to be honored as a qualified person in the human rights field in Kuwait, Europe and the United States. "I have been in this field for 18 years, and I'm supporting a lot of NGOs in Kuwait. I consider this medal as an award to the civil society in Kuwait that is doing important work. As for my dream, there's still much work to do," she told Kuwait Times. In 2016, Sharekh was awarded the National Order of Merit by the French Government for her work promoting women's rights in the region. She also received the Arab Prize for best publication in a foreign journal (2013-2014) by the Doha Institute in 2014, and won the Voices of Success

Kuwait award in 2012.

Defending women's rights

In an interview with Kuwait Times, Sharekh spoke about what this honor means to her, Kuwaiti women's struggle to obtain their political rights and plans to push for more rights for women in Kuwait. The following are excerpts from the interview:

Kuwait Times: Congratulations on being awarded the French National Order of Merit. This is an amazing honor. Can you tell our readers what it was awarded for?

Al-Anoud Al-Sharekh: I was awarded it for my work defending women's rights in the region. I have been involved in this field as an activist and academic for the past 18 years. I have been recognized by the French government for my contribution because my work embodies many of the values that they hold dear. In 2005, I was part of a four-woman delegation sent to France and the EU by the late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah to explain why there was such a delay in giving Kuwaiti women their full political rights. Over the years I have had the benefit of learning from the experience of the women's movement in France.

KT: You have been working to improve women's rights in Kuwait for nearly two decades. Can you tell us how things have changed since you started? What are some of the gains that women have made?

Sharekh: I was in the National Assembly when we lost the bill to gain our political rights in 1999. The arguments to keep women out of the political field that were being made between then and 2005 were offensive, vulgar and ridiculous. Today there are those that would deny women legal and economic equality with men; they make similar arguments for keeping women out of the judiciary, place them in subordinate roles irrespective of merit, or question their ability to contribute as legislators. It is still not a level playing field, and there is much that still needs to be done for our girls, but at least no one can deny them their voting rights or curtail their political ambitions through an unconstitutional legal loophole.

KT: What has been your greatest success as a women's right campaigner?

Sharekh: My greatest success has been encouraging young people to push past their immediate surroundings and see this gender issue as a world-wide phenomenon with clear blueprints for what works as a way forward. This means a conscious awareness by young Kuwaiti men and women that the inherited gender restrictions that are clearly discriminatory and serve no purpose beyond holding back female ambitions are now being rejected as fallacy. I see this success as a result of years spent building alliances and networks with organizations and institutions across the world - Europe and the United States - that have vastly enriched my work as a women's rights campaigner and enabled me to see this struggle from a universal perspective instead of a local one. This has also enabled me to build bridges of understanding from my perspective as an Arab Muslim woman with communities that are misinformed by a global media that at times portrays us as a homogenous, repressed, interchangeable entity.

KT: What has been the greatest challenge to your efforts?

Sharekh: The most frustrating aspect of working in a conservative country like Kuwait is that people equate traditions with religion and project that on gender roles in a manner that is convenient to them. Silencing voices of dissent with absolutist arguments is a repetitive strain on gender advocacy whether you are lobbying for curriculum reform, increased visibility for females in leadership positions, or putting an end to violent legislation.

KT: You are a strong proponent of civil society activism and activity in Kuwait. Please tell us about the role and importance of civil society in Kuwait? How does it connect with women's rights?

Sharekh: I think that Kuwait is unique among its GCC neighbors for the sheer diversity of its civil organizations and their ability to mobilize and lobby for political change. There are many issues that both the executive and legislative branch of government have not focused on that civil society groups have adopted and made a priority, whether in health, culture or politics. This is especially important for women's political agendas because they have been denied access to the decision-making process for so long, and are still kept out of the real powerbroker discussions that take place in diwanis, boardrooms and executive committees with very little female presence.

KT: What are some of the challenges facing civil society groups/activities here? Do you think that groups or activity has declined in recent years or that greater censorship/limits placed on public gatherings and other government actions are discouraging civil society development?

Sharekh: The biggest impediment is the lack of support for the non-profit and non-governmental sector, whether in teaching children the importance of volunteering at an early age, or through incentivizing corporate social responsibility (CSR) contributions for the private sector, or the many bureaucratic impediments to registering as an NGO in Kuwait. What started as a vibrant civil sector in the 1960s has become an increasingly politicized space in the absence of official political parties. I think that this has deviated some organizations from developing the professional and volunteer aspects that they were founded on, making them platforms for specific political agendas and ambitions instead.

KT: How did the political upheaval in Kuwait (2006-2013) impact the role/voice/capacity of civil society groups, in your view?

Sharekh: It has been a double-edged sword. In many ways



Dr Al-Anoud Al-Sharekh delivers a speech during the ceremony.

the politicization of the civil sector has been detrimental to the natural progression of volunteer work in Kuwait, and has impeded its development as an important resource for governmental and institutional projects. However, the last four years have witnessed a cultural revival in the non-governmental and non-profit sector, especially with young people embracing online tools to widen the scope of community-based projects they are interested in making a positive difference in.

KT: You are involved with many local initiatives, including the important Abolish 153 campaign to change the law regarding 'honor' killings in Kuwait. How do you go about building support/momentum for such a campaign? How has it fared so far and what challenges/successes has it experienced? Do you feel that it can be successful in forcing a change in the legislation? Is there significant opposition to the change? How common are 'honor' killings in Kuwait and what is the typical response from the authorities/society?

Sharekh: It is difficult to access numbers on victims of these types of crimes because those who commit them in the name of honor will try to cover them up for the same reason. Regardless of figures, the legalization needs to be abolished but our biggest challenge was that so few people knew of this law's existence, or that it is in fact derived from the crimes of passion in Napoleonic code and has nothing to do with Islamic sharia. After two years of campaigning we have succeeded in raising awareness on this archaic law even among legislators, and in January 2016 a formal inquiry was made by the head of the women and family affairs committee in parliament to the Minister of Justice on the constitutionality of article 153, which was an important milestone. We have also conducted the first survey in the GCC that looks at attitudes to such legislation and provided us with some valuable data on how to move ahead with this campaign and secure its success.


KT: As a published author, professor, activist and organizer, you have a lot on your plate. What's next for you? What are the key issues you would like to see addressed in Kuwait in the near future?

Sharekh: I am currently involved in a number of political studies with international institutions, looking at different aspects of inclusion reform in the GCC, as well as a book project that I am working on with a colleague from the UK. In terms of our civil society work, we are launching a registered volunteer committee that will focus on the issue of violence against women in Kuwait. This will be an important lobbying and advocacy tool for all NGOs that are interested in resolving the many complicated issues associated with gender-based violence, as well as providing much needed resources for abuse victims when the laws allowing the creation of shelters are passed. This vacuum in the protection and care of abuse survivors is the major issue that I would like to see resolved in the immediate future, as well as the abolition of laws that encourage or justify violence, and I would especially like to see the decision to appoint female judges honored soon.



French Ambassador Christian Nakhla and Dr Al-Anoud Al-Sharekh pose for a photo.

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KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah poses for a group photo with the winners of Kuwait's 20th Grand Quran Memorization and Recitation Competition. — Amiri Diwan photos

AMIR HONORS WINNERS OF KUWAIT QURAN CONTEST

KUWAIT: The ceremony to honor winners of Kuwait's 20th Grand Quran Memorization and Recitation Competition was held at Bayan Palace yesterday, under the patronage and attendance of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Upon arrival, His Highness the Amir was received by Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs and Minister of State for

Municipality Affairs Mohammad Al-Jabri. The ceremony was attended by His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem, Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, First

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Mohammad Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Deputy Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance Anas Al-

Saleh and senior officials. The ceremony screened a documentary film about the competition and was followed by His Highness the Amir's honoring of the winners. His Highness the Amir was also awarded with a commemorative gift during the event.

In his speech at the event, minister Saleh thanked His Highness the Amir for patronizing the competition, expressing his hap-

piness over the contest's continuous success in its 20th edition. He noted that the number of those who made it to the finals in the competition reached 27,000 since the launch of the event in 1997. Saleh also added that the number of winners reached 6,201 in the same time period. The competition involves all categories of societies including special needs people and those studying abroad, said the minister. —KUNA



Children greet His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah upon his arrival to the venue.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah greets a child during the ceremony.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah attends Kuwait's 20th Grand Quran Memorization and Recitation Competition's ceremony.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is seen during the ceremony.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah is greeted by an official during the ceremony.



A student takes a 'selfie' with His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

AMIR ATTENDS LUNCHEON BANQUET HELD IN HIS HONOR

KUWAIT: Sheikh Ali Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah held a luncheon banquet yesterday in honor of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, who was personally present. The banquet was also attended by His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Sheikh Jaber Al-Abdullah Al-Jaber Al-

Sabah, Sheikh Faisal Al-Saud Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, along with the rest of Al-Sabah family. —KUNA



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah arrives to attend the luncheon banquet.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah arrives to attend the luncheon banquet.



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah poses with a child during a luncheon banquet hosted by Sheikh Ali Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. — Amiri Diwan photos



His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah Al-Sabah arrives to attend the luncheon banquet.



Members of Al-Sabah family attend the luncheon banquet.



KUWAIT: United States Ambassador to Kuwait Lawrence Silverman and First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah cut the ceremonial cake.



United States Ambassador to Kuwait Lawrence Silverman delivers his speech.



US Ambassador Lawrence Silverman is pictured with Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs and Acting Minister of Information Sheikh Mohammad Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah.



(From left) US Ambassador Lawrence Silverman, First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah and the US Ambassador's wife Vicki Silverman attend the ceremony.

US EMBASSY HOSTS INDEPENDENCE DAY CELEBRATIONS

KUWAIT: United States Ambassador to Kuwait Lawrence Silverman and his wife Vicki hosted a ceremony on Tuesday to celebrate America's Independence Day. Senior Kuwaiti government officials attended the event, led by First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, in addition to diplomats, media personalities and other dignitaries.

Silverman delivered a speech during the event in which he highlighted the importance of his country's relations with Kuwait. "The state of US-Kuwait relations is very strong," the ambassador said in his statement. "With our

Strategic Dialogue launched in October, we believe we are creating a new opportunity for significant growth in our relationship."

The ambassador also emphasized the significance of the 'important' relations that his country shares with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states in general. "The US Administration recognizes the importance of US-GCC relations and of the bilateral relationship with Kuwait," he stressed. "There will be an active US role in this region. Together, our two countries will work to defeat IS (the Islamic State) and other extremists and terrorists, and to promote regional stability. We

greatly appreciate Kuwaiti full cooperation in these efforts, and we reiterate our commitment to Kuwait's defense."

On that regard, Silverman mentioned cooperation between the US and Kuwait in the defensive and economic domains. "The United States continues to demonstrate that commitment - through the supply of military systems that enhance the capabilities of Kuwaiti forces to defend their homeland, and the training that make those systems a credible deterrent to those who would seek to harm Kuwait," he underlined. "Not long ago, I was very proud to stand with Kuwaiti col-

leagues on the deck on the aircraft carrier USS Eisenhower and view flights of the advanced F-18 aircraft that we will be providing Kuwait. The United States also will continue to help Kuwait prevent terrorists from threatening your security."

In economy, the ambassador noted that the US will continue to be a strong commercial and economic partner to Kuwait. "In 2016 the US exported almost \$3 billion in goods to Kuwait and imported the same amount from Kuwait. New US aircraft are being delivered to Kuwait Airways virtually every month this year. US franchises have opened new locations

here. Meanwhile, the number of Kuwaitis visiting the United States for business, for tourism, for education, and for medical care was at an all-time high - 87,000 in 2016."

"We know Kuwaitis are major investors in virtually every sector of the US economy," he further indicated. "We will use the Strategic Dialogue that we have created to seek to enhance both bilateral trade and investment." Moreover, the ambassador expressed optimism that the strategic relationship between the two countries can contribute in helping Kuwait realize its recently announced 'New Kuwait' vision.

International Monetary Fund
Middle East Center for Economics and Finance
Kuwait
"Interpreter/Translator"
Vacancy Announcement

The mission of the IMF's Middle East Center for Economics and Finance (CEF) in Kuwait, is to build capacity through hands-on training for policy makers from the Arab League countries, as well as to lead conferences, symposia and seminars geared at strengthening the design and implementation of sound economic policies in the region.

The Center is seeking an "Interpreter/Translator" to handle its English-Arabic written translation and simultaneous interpretation needs.

This is a full time position with an initial appointment term of two-years (renewable), and carries a competitive salary and benefits package commensurate with the successful candidate's experience and qualifications.

Qualifications and Skills

- University degree in English language and/or translation or simultaneous interpretation;
- Knowledge of economics, and work experience in translation of economic and financial texts from English into Arabic;
- Candidates must have Arabic as their mother tongue and excellent translation skills from English;
- High level of competence in office automation;
- Ability to work efficiently and effectively under pressure and to adapt quickly to changing requirements while maintaining high levels of production and quality;
- Ability to produce translations that require little or no revision;
- Initiative, versatility, good interpersonal skills as well as ability to work as part of a team that may include both outside freelancers and CEF staff;
- Proof of work as a full-time/freelance interpreter with international organizations, including the IMF.

Closing date of the application is February 19, 2017. Interested applicants should visit www.imf.org/jobs for the full vacancy information and to apply to job # 1700196.

KUWAIT HAS LOW SECURITY RISK FORECAST, ACCORDING TO STUDY

KUWAIT: Kuwait has low security risk and medium political risk forecasts according to the Risk Map forecast; an annual guide published by Control Risks. It shares similar forecasts with Oman, Bahrain and Qatar, while the United Arab Emirates had a low political risk forecast to go with its low security risk forecast. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia had medium forecasts for both security and political risks.

The report mentioned the drawbacks of the ongoing privatization drive in the Middle East in general. "A privatization push across the Middle East and North Africa in 2017, including in Algeria, Egypt, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, will act as a siren call to investors around the world. As foreign companies prepare bids for new projects and tune into public debates about the benefits that privatization offers, they should closely inspect what is on offer - and from whom," the report reads.

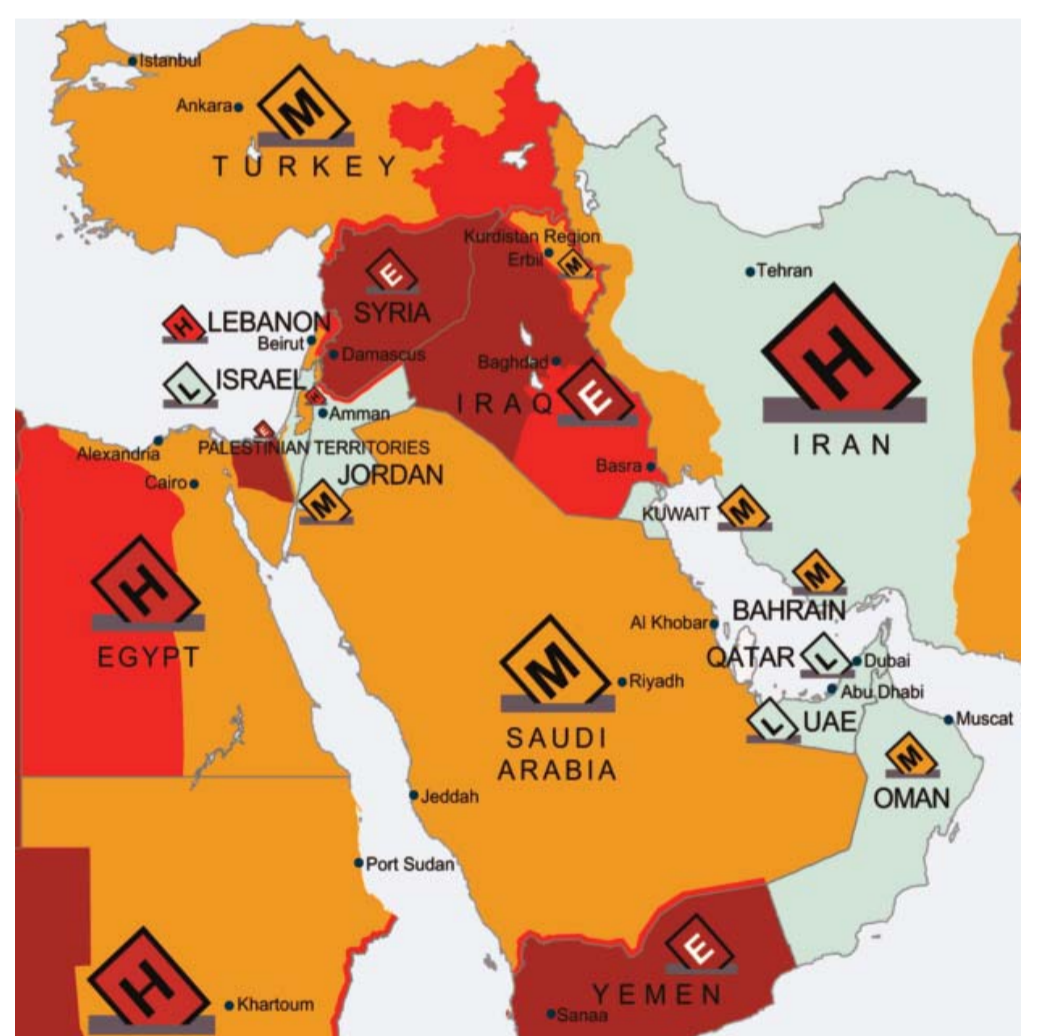
Drivers of risk

The report had the following to say about the drivers of risk in the Middle East and North Africa region this year:

"The big black swan of 2017 for the Middle East region will be a potential unraveling of the nuclear deal with Iran as a result of changes in US foreign policy under US President Trump. While we consider that to remain unlikely, this would have significant security and business implications for the region by pushing Iran back into aggressive foreign policy and into commercial isolation.

"Under our main scenario which provides for continuity of the nuclear deal beyond 2017, the top five likely drivers of risks to international businesses in the Middle East are:

- **Geopolitics:** Shifting global geopolitical relationships will be mirrored by a realignment of foreign policy alliances and priorities of major players in the Middle East. Countries such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Qatar and Iran will look to build or consolidate bridges with China, Japan, India and/or Russia to hedge against the uncertainty surrounding US' and Europe's engagement in the region. Such policy realignments are likely to play out in the commercial sphere when it comes to major project awards and bilateral trade agreements.
- **Fiscal consolidation:** Efforts to reduce government spending in response to low oil prices will continue to affect economic growth and dampen public investment levels across the region. They will also drive regulatory risk - particularly rises in local taxes and changes to local content regulations, as well as risks of non-payment and contract frustration. Reform efforts are also likely to trigger localized labor and/or social unrest against governments and businesses in North Africa, particularly in Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco.
- **Push for FDI:** Most countries in the region are putting in place plans and strategic visions to increase their attractiveness to foreign investors



in an effort to diversify their economies and secure growth in sectors other than oil and gas. While these efforts may be successful in non-strategic sectors such as education, healthcare and e-commerce might, they are unlikely to succeed in other major sectors, such as energy or telecommunications, where prevailing statistics trends and a desire for government interference will likely limit the extent of privatization and liberalization.

• **Weakening of Islamic State:** The collapse of IS territory is likely to prompt a global exodus of foreign fighters. As IS falls, many will be killed in battle, some captured trying to escape and others recruited into other groups - including rival al-Qaida affiliate Jabhat Fatah al-Sham (JFS) or continuing to operate in weak governance areas, such as the Sinai in Egypt, as well as parts of Libya, Syria and Iraq. The rest will most likely return to their home countries in Western Europe, Russia, North Africa or the GCC and will try to imbue local extremist networks in their home countries with their experience and capa-

bility. While in Iran and the GCC this trend is unlikely to trigger any significant increase in the threat of attacks, countries such as Tunisia, Morocco, Lebanon and Jordan may face higher challenges to contain returning IS fighters.

• **Cyber:** The conflict in Syria and the broader complex geopolitical situation in the Middle East is likely to have a significant impact on the regional cyber threat landscape in the coming year. In particular, Iran has continued to develop its capabilities and lags behind only Israel in the region in terms of its ability to conduct disruptive cyber-attacks on geopolitical rivals, though other states are also seeking to develop these tools for their own arsenals. In 2017, Iran and these emerging actors are likely to use their capabilities to conduct plausibly deniable data-wiping attacks in its rivals, using activist groups to claim credit for the incidents so as to complicate the victims' response. These attacks are particularly likely to target governmental bodies, symbolic targets and elements of critical national infrastructure in rival states."

COMPANY OWNER FORGED WORK PERMITS



By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Residency detectives discovered forgery in official documents as well as in the files of work permits of a company. Detectives received tips about the forgeries in work permit renewals of a company owned by a citizen, and discovered 61 cases through investigations. Detectives also found the company is fake and does not even have its own premises.

Airport traffic

The Interior Ministry's Airport Passports Department said that statistics show that the total number of passengers passing through Kuwait Airport from Jan 1, 2017 to Jan 31, 2017 was 1,021,598. Arrivals totaled 509,666 (189,271 Kuwaiti, 30,234 Gulf and 290,161 other nationals). Departures totaled 511,932 (216,233 Kuwaiti, 32,069 Gulf and 263,630 other nationals).

KNPC SIGNS DEAL TO TREAT LIQUID SULFUR

KUWAIT: Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) announced yesterday that it has partnered with Gulf Spic General Trading and Contracting Company (GS), for a project to build facilities for the treatment of liquid sulfur in Al-Ahmadi port refinery.

CEO of KNPC Mohammad Al-Mutairi said that he signed the deal on behalf of the company, along with his counterpart at GS Fouad Al-Khadhra. Moreover, Mutairi added that he was glad to have signed the contract for a significant project, with a reputable company

that has dabbled extensively in the oil sector. Meanwhile, the GS CEO thanked KNPC for their trust, saying that the project will be completed in a timely and efficient manner.

KNPC's official spokesman and Deputy CEO for Miscellaneous Services Basim Al-Essa revealed that the project is worth KD 29.6 million, with a 30-month timeframe. He also pointed out that the project comprises the construction of facilities to treat and store liquid sulfur. —KUNA

LAWMAKER PROPOSES WASTE DISPOSAL PROGRAMS

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: MP Khalil Al-Saleh said he made a proposal to form a committee under the authority of the Cabinet to set modern waste disposal programs and utilizing it in generating electricity. In his proposal, Saleh suggested that the committee should include elements from the Environment Public Authority, Kuwait Municipality, Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research and the Ministry of Electricity and Water, who would jointly set a scientific plan to process waste instead of burying it in landfills. The proposal also suggested allocating a collection point far from residential areas to collect waste and recycle it in environment-friendly ways to prevent the emission of toxic gases.

* Acting Manpower Authority Director Abdullah Al-Motoutah strongly denied local press and social media reports about the authority's role in dissolving some syndicates' boards of directors. Motoutah stressed that the manpower authority

is not entitled to dissolve syndicate boards, which is the absolute power of courts as per article 108 of the labor act 6/2010. Motoutah emphasized that the manpower authority respects related international laws and agreements including C087 - Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize Convention, 1948 (No. 87). He also explained that what happened in some syndicates was that boards of directors were replaced at their respective extraordinary general assemblies.

LABOR STATISTICS: 19,558 KUWAITIS HIRED IN PUBLIC SECTOR; 12,838 IN PRIVATE IN 2016

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: Statistics released recently by the Manpower and Government Restructuring Program showed that 19,558 citizens were recruited for public sector jobs and 12,838 were recruited in the private sector in 2016. Statistics also showed fewest citizens were recruited in December, while March witnessed the highest rate of recruitment with 2,844 employees; ie an average of 2,000 Kuwaiti employees per month. On the other hand, statistics explained the highest number of citizens recruited in the private sector was 1,315 in November, while the lowest figure of 941 was in June.

Oil sector's budget

Chairman of the parliament's budgets and final statements committee MP Adnan Abdulsamad said the committee met yesterday to discuss the oil ministry's final statement for 2015-2016 and auditors' remarks on it, which called for more internal auditing to be done within the ministry. The report also noticed an inaccurate registration of petroleum product subsidies with a 25 percent annual increase. The reason given was unstable international oil prices, although the finance ministry had rejected the oil ministry's request to add KD 700 million to its budget to be used as subsidies and reduced it to KD 300 million. He added that the committee believes that the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) was slow in detailing various issues such as production cost per barrel, the basis of subsidies and nonoperational revenues.

NBK'S SONG 'BAKOUN' ATTRACTS MORE THAN MILLION VIEWS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait's (NBK) National Song initiative entitled 'Bakoun' attracted more than million views on social media channels. 'Bakoun' was aired and broadcasted via all audio and visual media and social media channels. NBK has launched this Song in celebration of Kuwait's anniversary of independence and the anniversary of liberation.

Abdul Mohsen Al-Rushaid, NBK Public Relations Executive Manager said: "we are proud of this remarkable achievement. This jump in the number of views since the launch of the song a week ago stands as an evidence on NBK's success in meeting people's expectations in every occasion."

The song is chanted by the Kuwaiti famous singer Abdullah Al-Rewaished as a commemorative gift for Kuwait and to raise awareness towards social responsibility. The song is revealed on Al Rai and Kuwait TV stations as well as in cinemas. Social media followers can watch the song through NBK social media channels on YouTube and Facebook NBKGroup or Instagram and Twitter @NBKGroup. Special competitions are held with valuable prizes for NBK social followers.

It is worth mentioning the participation of Kuwaiti sports figures in this national song as the swimming champion Fai Al Sultan and world champion in free skydiving Osama Najaf. Both heroes reflected the cultural progressive side of the country. Also, to be noted the efforts of both the Ministries of Interior, Defense, the Red Crescent Society and many other partners who also had a remarkable contribution in this initiative.

72 KWD

77 KWD

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KFH PROMOTES ENVIRONMENT AWARENESS

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) exerted remarkable efforts to raise the environmental awareness in the community in an attempt to keep the environment safe, healthy and clean. This comes in collaboration with the concerned authorities such as the Environmental Mabarrah and Kuwait Dive Team.

KFH participated in the launch of the implementation phase of the plastic bottles recycling environmental project (Omnia) as an environmental partner and the first sponsor for this national project. KFH is the first bank to embrace this idea that aims at increasing the awareness of the importance of collecting and recycling the plastic bottles in Kuwait. In collaboration with KFH, Omnia installed plastic bottles collection boxes at the main Cooperative Societies in different areas including Aledayliyah, Alsalam, Sabah Alsalem, Mubarak Alkabeer, Saad Alabdallah, and Abdullah Almubarak.

Moreover, The Environmental Voluntary Foundation has received a number of Whaly Boats from Kuwait Finance House (KFH) as part of the bank's endeavors to optimally assume the social responsibility and support the efforts of Kuwait Dive Team.

The Whaly Boats help in lifting waste and neglected materials, not to mention assist in the protection and rehabilitation mission of Kuwait's aquatic world and the safety of the marine environment.

KFH is keen on supporting programs that serve the community and spread awareness among people in efforts to keep the environment safe, healthy and clean.

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A Wonderful World

News

in brief

FUNERAL FEES FROM EXPATS DISCUSSED

KUWAIT: Municipal Council member Dr Hassan Kamal announced that he supports the idea of collecting fees from expatriates for funeral services in Kuwait, which are currently free of charge. He said that the fee's amount would be 'nominal' while the returns would be used to improve graveyards and the quality of funeral services in general. He also suggested having a valid residency visa as a requirement for funeral services for foreigners. — Al-Rai

300,000 visas issued in Feb

KUWAIT: More than 300,000 visit visas were issued in the month of February, an Interior Ministry source said. They include tourist, family and electronic visas, including ones issued for guests to attend cultural events to be held during Kuwait's national celebrations later this month, the source added. — Al-Rai

Bedoons' passports suspended

KUWAIT: The Interior Ministry's Assistant Undersecretary for Citizenship and Passports Affairs Major General Sheikh Mazen Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah gave orders to suspend issuing temporary Kuwaiti visas for bedoons (stateless) for two months, and that in order to give enough time for the General Department of Citizenship and Passports to deliver electronic passports to Kuwaitis; a process that begins in mid-February. — Al-Jarida

78% roads need maintenance

KUWAIT: Nearly 78 percent of Kuwait's roads need maintenance, of which 36 percent require urgent maintenance whereas only 22 percent are considered usable, said MP Abdullah Fahhad Al-Enezi, chairman of the parliament's public utilities committee. The Ministry of Public Works needs at least 42 contracts worth KD 146 million to carry out the necessary road maintenance works over three years, he added. — Al-Anbba

Anti-Corruption Authority 'corrupt'

KUWAIT: A fact-finding committee formed by the Supreme Judicial Council to investigate possible violations at the Public Anti-Corruption Authority handed over its final report to Justice Minister Dr Faleh Al-Azb, which indicates that financial violations and other 'flaws' were detected. The report points out that the authority's chairman makes decisions without consulting with other members, and also indicates that suspicions of 'favoritism' and 'profiteering' were detected. — Al-Qabas



Crime

Report

SUSPECT FAILS TO FLEE

KUWAIT: An Egyptian man on the travel ban list failed in his attempt to leave the country undetected when he hid in the truck of a compatriot after paying him 10,000 Egyptian pounds. The man was discovered by officers on the Saudi border and was sent back along with the driver. The suspect got out of hiding and sat next to the driver when they left Kuwait's Salmi border, but Saudi police noticed his passport did not have a Kuwaiti exit stamp. After questioning, the suspect admitted he had left illegally, so both were sent back.

Physical assault

Two Bahrainis beat an Indian haris (building janitor) badly for not allowing them to park in front of the building he guards. The two suspects were arrested by detectives in Salmiya, and investigations are ongoing.

Deformations

A female citizen accused a beauty center of causing deformations during laser sessions in a complaint she lodged at Maidan Hawally police station.

Harassments

A stranger kept disturbing a Palestinian woman with calls at night that included insults. The woman went to Salmiya police station and lodged a complaint. Detectives are investigating.

Missing daughter

An Iranian man sought the help of police to find his 42-year-old daughter who disappeared mysteriously from their Sabah Al-Salem residence. A missing person report was lodged and detectives are working on the case.

Car theft

Jahra detectives are investigating claims by a taxi driver that his car was stolen along with KD 180 by two women. A security source said two veiled women asked him to take them from Zahra to Sulaibiya, and when he arrived there, he was asked to go to a remote area. There the two pulled knives at him and forced him to leave the car. Meanwhile, a thief stole the car of a citizen, who rushed after him. When the car stopped at the light, the victim demanded the thief get out of the car, but he refused and threatened to run him over, then disappeared.

Prostitution

An Asian woman was taken to Rawaniya Hospital after throwing herself out of a taxi after the cabbie attempted to take her to a prostitution den. — Translated from the Arabic press

الجريدة

Al-Jarida

APOLOGIES TO SUDANESE!

By Mohammed Al-Weshaihi

There is a stereotype regarding Sudanese people in the Arab mindsets that easily subjects them to jokes about laziness. I believe the causes of this are many, including speeches by Sudanese politicians, like Ja'far Nomairi. We used to watch Nomairi address the nation at length. People were forced to attend speeches broadcast live across the country. We used to see members of the audience sleepy or actually sleeping, though the Sudanese weather and spread of the Tsetse fly might have contributed to this.

The people who scored highest are the same ones making fun of the Sudanese for the alleged laziness

People from the Gulf subsequently started making jokes about Sudanese people. One such joke goes as follows: a Sudanese man was paralyzed, and all his family and neighbors congratulate him for his good luck. "I am afraid people will envy me and I will recover, having to stand up after this beautiful period of relaxation," the patient says. Millions of other jokes are made about the

alleged laziness of the Sudanese people and their endless love of sleep and comfort.

But the truth has finally appeared, dismantling the stereotype. Sudanese are not the laziest people in the world. According to a survey conducted by the British magazine, The Lancet, on 122 countries, GCC's populations are amongst the world's laziest! The Sudanese, by contrast, do not even appear in the list's top ten.

The study ranked the Saudis as the world's third laziest people, coming behind the Maltese, the gold medal winners, and the people of Swaziland, in second. Kuwait came seventh in terms of laziness and inactivity, while the people of UAE ranked ninth! The people who scored highest are the same ones making fun of the Sudanese for the alleged laziness. What a strange world.

— Translated by Kuwait Times

THE KUWAIT AVIATION SHOW TO BE HELD IN JANUARY 2018

KUWAIT: The Kuwait aviation show will be hosted in Kuwait from the 17th to the 20th of January, 2018 at the Kuwait international airport, Amiri terminal. This huge leap for the aviation industry in Kuwait will allow local and regional industry players to make a name on a global scale, as well as, allow global aviation industry players to become familiar with our regional and local aviation evolution.

The preparations for the Kuwait aviation show in 2018 are now in full force, which will ensure the success of the inaugural Kuwait aviation show, said Ahmed Ismail Behbehani - Chairman of the organizing committee of the show. Behbehani further highlighted the importance of the show in promoting investment and economic development in the state of Kuwait, in line with the vision of His Highness the Amir.

Behbehani emphasized the interest and participation of major aviation-related companies around the world, whom will display their products and services throughout the show. He also pointed out the attendance of noted industry professionals, which will be an addition to showcasing of the technological improvements of the aviation industry. Furthermore Behbehani spoke of the facilities provided throughout all tiers of par-



Ahmed Ismail Behbehani

icipation to ensure participants thoroughly display their products and services.

The show will host a wide range of local and international companies specialized in the aviation sector, from both commercial and military aviation entities. The range of products and services displayed is broad, from airport ground equip-

ment, to communication systems, to private and commercial planes and more.

The global airport market continues to develop, especially in the Middle East where aircraft purchases are the highest in the world. Also considering the vast local airport development, as well as local carrier development, the market in the region is one of the most lucrative and opportunistic in the world.

He added that Kuwait is one of the first investors in its aviation industry making it a historic leader for the region. And with wide expansion plans, Kuwait is one of the fastest growing aviation markets in the world, with a region that hosts more than 237 million passengers per year. Hence it is right at home.

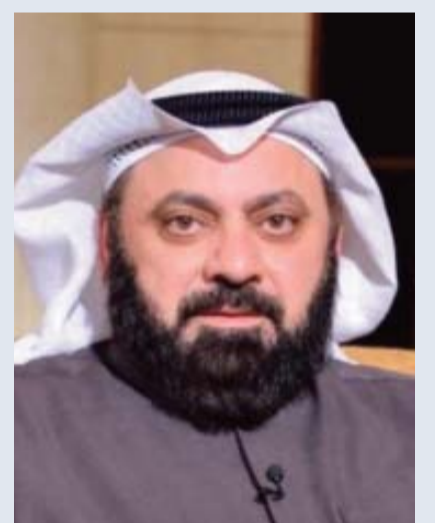
Behbehani added that the exhibition is a new start and evidence of development for the Kuwait aviation industry, and will bring it among other nations who have shown the world their aviation capabilities. This said, with the new changes taking place in Kuwait, the aviation show is the perfect vessel for the promotion of this development globally. Last but not least, with this great boom in the private aviation sector, within the gulf region and the open skies policy, competition is fierce and industry growth is at its highest in the world.

LAWMAKERS SEEK TO GIVE COURTS POWER OVER CITIZENSHIP CASES

KUWAIT: The government, represented by the Interior Ministry, rejected a proposal presented by a number of MPs to amend the citizenship law in order to give courts the authority to overlook citizenship withdrawal cases.

This was revealed by MP Dr Waleed Al-Tabtabaei in response to a Cassation Court order released last Tuesday which rejected a challenge made by former MP Abdullah Al-Bargash against the government's decision to withdraw his citizenship and those of his family members. The court based its ruling on the fact that the judicial authority does not have power over citizenship withdrawal cases; a matter that the government has sole authority over at the present time.

In order for that to change, legislation is needed to be passed in the parliament to give a similar authority to courts. Something like this had happened before, according to Tabtabaei. "The law has given the government sole authority over four topics: licensing newspapers, citizenships, warship places and administrative deportation," he said. "The law has already been amended to free newspapers' licensing



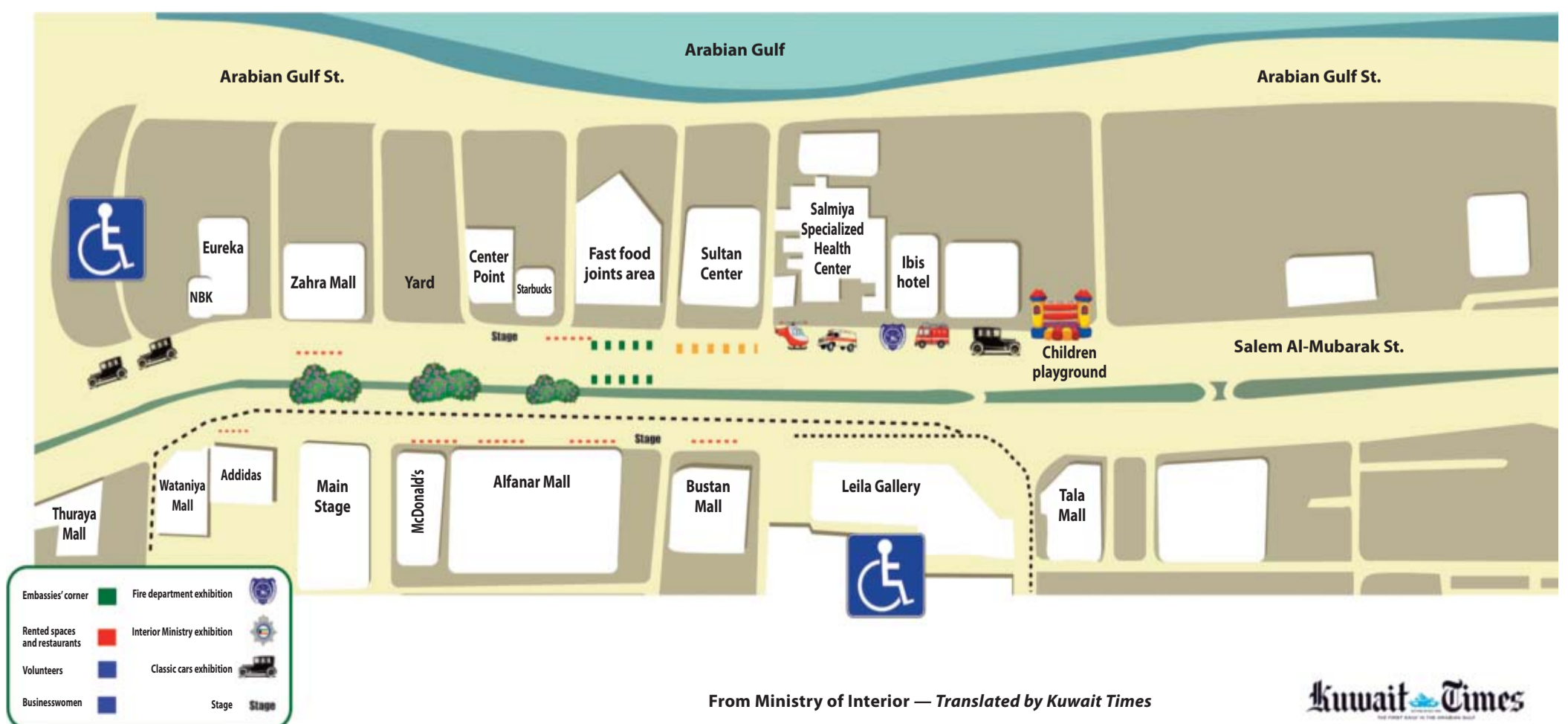
MP Dr Waleed Al-Tabtabaei

from the government's sole authority." The lawmaker argues that as a result, a proposal to amend the citizenship law in order to give courts the authority of looking into citizenship-related cases is valid from legal and constitutional standpoints. — Al-Rai

HALA FEBRUARY FESTIVAL OPENING TOMORROW

KUWAIT: The Relations and Security Information Department at the Interior Ministry said that on the occasion of the launch of the 18th Hala February festival tomorrow, all measures have been taken to facilitate and coordinate contacts with other security sectors for the start of celebrations of the 56th National Day and 26th Liberation Day, which coincide with the 11th anniversary of His Highness the Amir's ascension to power.

It said that Salem Al-Mubarak Street will be closed at the intersection of Qatar St and Amro bin Al-Aas St in both directions. All entrances leading to Salem Al-Mubarak St will be closed starting from tonight at midnight. It said that all open yards near Salem Al-Mubarak will be used as parking spaces, and there will be two locations for those with special needs - one behind Laila Gallery and the other across from Thuraya Mall and next to Eureka showroom. The statement said there will be buses for those with special needs, the elderly and sick people to go to the celebration site. The festival is set to take place tomorrow afternoon following the Friday Prayer.



From Ministry of Interior — Translated by Kuwait Times



Tornadoes wreak havoc in southeast Louisiana

PALESTINIANS FEAR BEING SIDELINED BY TRUMP WHITE HOUSE



KUALA LUMPUR: A domestic trade enforcement official checks on the paint brushes that are believed the brushes are made from pig bristles at a hardware store outside Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia yesterday. — AP

MALAYSIA SEIZES UN-ISLAMIC PIG-HAIR BRUSHES

MUSLIM CONSUMERS ASSOCIATION CALLS FOR STRICTER ENFORCEMENT

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysian authorities have seized thousands of paint brushes suspected of containing pig bristles after consumers in this Muslim-majority nation demanded a crackdown, officials said yesterday. Pigs and dogs are considered unclean by many Muslims, who make up some 60 percent of Malaysia's 30 million people. It is illegal in the country to sell products made from any part

of a pig or a dog, unless the goods are labeled and kept separately. Zarif Anwar, an enforcement official with the domestic trade and consumer ministry, said that since Tuesday, officials nationwide have been inspecting shops selling paint brushes for art and commercial use. He said the brushes seized were not labeled and found to have a different texture

from other brushes and frayed ends, signs that they could be made from pig bristles. In some cases, the brushes had a "halal" certification that had expired, he said. The halal tag is issued by an Islamic government body to certify products safe to be used by Muslims. The seized brushes will be sent to a lab to be examined, Zarif said. "We want to protect consumers and we want traders to be aware of

the religious sensitivity involved. This is a big offense," Zarif said. He warned that traders who flout the rule face up to three years in jail, a fine of 100,000 ringgit (\$22,522) or both. Conservative attitudes have been on the rise in Malaysia. A wide range of products have been certified halal, from mineral water to a newly launched internet browser, to appeal to Muslims. The Muslim Consumers Association

of Malaysia called for stricter enforcement not just for paint brushes, but for other products as well. An official from the group, Nadzim Johan, said the association also received complaints that culinary brushes used in eateries may also contain pig bristles. "The key issue here is about labeling," he said. "We want Muslim consumers to be forewarned. It's not fair to deceive them." — AP

PENCE BREAKS TIE TO CONFIRM EDUCATION SECRETARY DEVOS

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump's administration claimed a victory over Democrats Tuesday with the US Senate's confirmation of Betsy DeVos as Education Secretary, after Vice President Mike Pence cast a historic tie-breaking vote. The chamber deadlocked at 50-50, with two Republicans breaking ranks to oppose Trump's hotly contested nominee, a billionaire who champions using taxpayer monies to help fund privately run schools.

Pence was needed to break the tie, the first time a sitting vice president has ever cast a deciding vote for a cabinet pick. The White House applauded the confirmation, with spokesman Sean Spicer saying DeVos "will ensure that every student has access to a good school, whether it's public, private or charter." But Pence trooping up to the Capitol to salvage DeVos's nomination was lousy optics for the administration as Trump struggles to get his cabinet in place.

Just five of 15 cabinet members have now been confirmed, in addition to the cabinet-rank positions of CIA director and US ambassador to the United Nations. By the same time in 2008, all but three members of president Barack Obama's cabinet were in place. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell blasted Democrats for slow-walking nominees, saying they ought to "get over the election (and) let this administration get up and get running." McConnell has placed the nominations for attorney general, health secretary and head of US Treasury on the calendar. "All should be confirmed this week," he said.

Contentious pick

DeVos, the 59-year-old political scion from Michigan, had triggered an outpouring of frustration and anger late last year, as critics blasted Trump's education pick as someone who had never attended public schools or worked in the public school system. Two moderate Republicans, Susan Collins and Lisa Murkowski, bucked Trump and opposed his choice, citing

DeVos's lack of qualifications for the post that oversees thousands of schools, millions of students and curriculum standards. Democrats were unable to convince another Republican to defect, despite intense lobbying that culminated with an all-night Democratic talk-a-thon late Monday into Tuesday on the Senate floor. "I thought we had some chance," said top Senate Democrat Chuck Schumer. "We realized even if we didn't, to make the point that DeVos was so anti-public education was an important point to make." Several Democrats highlighted lingering questions about DeVos's financial entanglements and her apparent lack of understanding about basic education issues. Supporters praise the politically-connected businesswoman and philanthropist as a fierce advocate of school choice, a US movement that seeks to use tax credits and vouchers to allow parents to opt out of the public school system in favor of privately managed charter schools for their children.

'Local control'

Republican Senator Rob Portman said DeVos would not rule with a heavy hand from Washington. "She strongly supports local control of education and has pledged not to impose her own views on states and local school districts, but rather to allow them-along with parents-to make the decisions that best fit the needs of their children," Portman said. The president has strongly criticized Democrats for opposing his cabinet nominations, tweeting that they should be "ashamed of themselves" for obstructing the process. One nominee that Democrats have pushed back sharply against is one of the Senate's own, US attorney general nominee Senator Jeff Sessions, an early Trump backer during the presidential campaign. Sessions endured a contentious hearing, during which Democrats questioned his civil rights record and his opposition to immigration. His colleagues voted to advance his nomination, setting up a confirmation vote for this week. DeVos is less well known



WASHINGTON: Dick DeVos (center) watches as his wife, US Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos (left), shakes the hand of US Vice President Mike Pence after taking the oath of office during a swearing-in ceremony in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building. — AFP

than Sessions. But she is a fixture in the education world, having served on the boards of non-profit groups that support school choice. "Parents no longer believe that a one-size-fits-all model of learning meets the needs of every child, and they know other options exist-

whether magnet, virtual, charter, home, religious or any combination thereof," she said at her confirmation hearing.

Until her nomination, she chaired the American Federation for Children, a DeVos family umbrella organization that supports advance-

ment of school choice outside of Michigan. "Our work in Michigan was so successful that some of our friends in the movement began to say, 'We really need to do this nationally,'" DeVos said in a 2013 interview with the Philanthropy Roundtable. "And I said, 'Yes, I think we do.'" — AFP

SOUTH KOREA PILOT WINS BEARD BAN LEGAL BATTLE

SEOUL: A South Korean pilot has won his legal battle to keep a beard after a court ruled yesterday that his company's ban on facial hair was unfair and discriminatory. The pilot at Air Asiana, the country's number two carrier, was banned from flying for a month in 2014 after violating company policy by having a beard. He was allowed to return to work after shaving.

Seoul High Court said the policy-which only

applied to workers of South Korean nationality-was illegal, turning over an earlier ruling by a lower court supporting the Air Asiana ban. "The firm says that workers are required to maintain neat appearances...but there is no ground to believe that a beard makes one look untrustworthy or shabby," the high court said.

"Also, imposing the ban only on South Korean employees is discrimination based on nationality," it added. Dozens of foreign pilots

and cabin crew at Air Asiana had facial hair but were not punished for it, the high court said. The lower court had ruled in favor of the ban, saying airlines were allowed to enforce stricter policies on staff appearance than other businesses. The pilot's beard became the subject of a legal battle after a local labor rights body said in 2015 that the Air Asiana policy was unlawful and the carrier had been wrong to discipline the pilot. The pilot has not been named. — AFP

PALESTINIANS FEAR BEING SIDELINED BY TRUMP WHITE HOUSE

RAMALLAH: Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas, who spent hundreds of hours on the phone and in meetings with US presidents and secretaries of state in the past 12 years, has tried unsuccessfully to reach out to President Donald Trump. Abbas and his aides are alarmed by the possibility of being sidelined at a time when the administration is embracing Israel's prime minister who heads to the White House next week. Here's a look at what's at stake for Abbas and Palestinian hopes for statehood.

Are Palestinians ignored?

In December, the Trump transition team refused to meet with Palestinian officials visiting Washington, putting them off until after the Jan 20 inauguration, according to senior Abbas aide Saeb Erekat, the main point man for official contacts with the United States. Other advisers say Abbas tried to arrange a phone call with Trump after the November election and again after the inauguration, but received no response to his requests. The White House did not respond to a January letter in which Abbas expressed concerns about possibly moving the US Embassy in Israel to contested Jerusalem. Erekat, whose contacts are now limited to the US Consulate in Jerusalem, has been quoted as saying that "we have sent them letters, written messages; they don't even bother to respond to us." In contrast, Trump spoke twice with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu by phone, on Nov 9 and Jan 22, and will receive him at the White House on Feb 15.



WEST BANK: A picture taken from the Palestinian West Bank village of Yasuf shows the Israeli wildcat outpost of Kfar Tapuah West, located near the settlement of Kfar Tapuah. The Israeli High Court ordered the removal of parts of a Jewish settlement outpost that were built on private Palestinian land, hours after parliament passed a law legalizing similar cases. —AFP

What has Trump said?

The White House earlier this week denied an Israeli newspaper report, based on a secondhand quote from a Trump aide, that the administration does not intend to have a relationship with the Palestinian Authority, Abbas' self-rule government, at this point. However, the statement did not say what kind of relationship the White House envisions with the Palestinians. A US official said he was given the impression that everything is on hold because Trump hasn't decided how to deal with the

Palestinians. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to discuss the issue with reporters.

Why does it matter?

A strong relationship with the US has been the centerpiece of the Palestinian strategy for winning statehood. The US served as sole broker in two decades of intermittent negotiations on how to set up a Palestinian state on lands captured by Israel in 1967. Many Palestinians are disillusioned with a

process they say effectively provided diplomatic cover for Israeli settlement expansion and distanced statehood prospects. However, Abbas has not come up with a strategy that could circumvent Washington. The Palestinian leadership is in uncharted waters with the Trump administration and "not having a relationship with Washington is cutting off their air supply, essentially," said Khaled Elgindy, an analyst at the Brookings Institution, a Washington-based think tank.

Palestinian leadership

Abbas and his advisers have been careful not to antagonize Trump with public statements, other than urging him to rein in Israel's latest settlement escalation. They hope he'll eventually get in touch, arguing that Trump needs to involve them if he's serious about negotiating a Middle East peace deal. "The foreign policy of the US administration is not clear yet, aside from its clear support of Israel, but the administration knows nothing can be done without the Palestinians," said Abbas adviser Mohammed Ishtayeh. Despite alarm over Israel's recent measures, including legislation retroactively legalizing settler homes built on private Palestinian land, Palestinian officials have drawn some hope from recent US policy tweaks. The White House has shifted to a mildly critical position on settlements, saying they "may not be helpful" to peace. There also are signs Trump will not rush to relocate the US Embassy to Jerusalem, a move that could inflame the Muslim and Arab worlds. —AP



HOMS: Syrian government forces flash the sign for victory as they approach the strategic Jihar oil fields on the eastern outskirts of Homs. —AFP

TURKISH ARMY AND SYRIAN REBELS CLOSE IN ON ISLAMIC STATE TOWN

TURKEY, REBEL ALLIES CAPTURE WESTERN OUTSKIRTS OF AL-BAB

ANKARA: Syrian rebels supported by Turkish armed forces have seized control of strategically important hills around the Islamic State-controlled town of Al-Bab, Turkey's military said yesterday. It said in a statement that 58 Islamic State militants were killed in air strikes, artillery fire and clashes. Two Turkish soldiers had been killed and 15 slightly wounded. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said the operations had made important progress and the next target would be the Syrian city of Raqqa, the de facto capital of Islamic State.

"The al-Bab operation must be completed immediately in the period ahead ... In recent days our special forces and the Free Syrian Army (rebels) have made serious progress," Cavusoglu told a news conference in the capital Ankara. The battle for Al-Bab has raised the prospect of confrontation between the Turkish military and the Syrian army, which has pushed to within a few kilometers of the city's southern outskirts. A Syrian rebel official and a monitoring organization said the advancing rebel and Turkish forces had captured the western outskirts of Al-Bab, some 30 km south of the Turkish border.

"With last night's assault, Islamic State's defenses have been broken through and the advance is now continuing," said the official, speaking from the Turkish city of Gaziantep. Turkish military reinforcements had been sent to the area about a week ago, the rebel added. Al-Bab has been a major target of a Turkish offensive launched in northern Syria last August to drive Islamic State away from the border and prevent further gains by US-backed Kurdish militia that are also fighting the jihadist group. Syrian government forces and allied militia have mounted their own rapid advance towards Al-Bab in the last few weeks. The city was encircled earlier this week when Syrian government forces cut the last way into the city.

Rebels say inside Al-Bab

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a UK-based organization that reports on the war, said the Turkish forces and their Free Syrian Army rebel allies had captured a hill on the western periphery of the city. "We don't know if Daesh (Islamic State) will be able to recover it, or if it is in a state of collapse," Observatory Director

Rami Abdulrahman said. In a video sent by the rebel official, three Syrian rebel fighters with the Sultan Murad faction said they were speaking from inside al-Bab. It was not possible to confirm the authenticity of the footage. "I am in Bab now but not at the centre. We are on the outskirts. Thank God, we have reached this place," said one of the rebels. Blasts were heard in the background. The Observatory said at least six people had been killed and 12 more wounded in the latest shelling of Al-Bab.

The organization says Turkish bombardment has killed scores of people since December. Turkey says it has been careful to avoid civilian casualties. Turkish presidency sources said yesterday President Tayyip Erdogan and US President Donald Trump agreed in a phone call overnight to act jointly against Islamic State in Al-Bab and Raqqa, another Syrian city held by IS. The White House said in a statement that Trump spoke about the two countries' "shared commitment to combating terrorism in all its forms" and welcomed Turkey's contributions to the fight against Islamic State, but it gave no further details. — Reuters

AFTER COURT VICTORY, EGYPTIAN RIGHTS LAWYER EYES PRESIDENCY

CAIRO: The congratulatory bouquet of flowers sitting in Khaled Ali's austere downtown Cairo office has withered away, but the writing on the attached card is clear: "Tiran and Sanafir are Egyptian." It's a reference to the court victory that brought to prominence the rights lawyer who was a leading player in Egypt's 2011 uprising but was little noticed outside his leftist circles when he ran for president in 2012. With a suit he and other lawyers led last year, Ali succeeded in blocking the government's plan to hand over two Red Sea islands to Saudi Arabia.

The court ruling, upheld on appeal in January, was an unexpected setback to President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi, who had promised the oil-rich kingdom the islands of Tiran and Sanafir in an agreement last year. It gave Ali the shine of a defender of the country's integrity among the many who opposed the handover. Now Ali is considering running again in elections next year to challenge El-Sisi, the former general who came to office in 2014 in a landslide, riding on the support for his fierce crackdown on Islamists.

Democratic, social forces

Ali's candidacy would be a long shot, but the 44-year-old sees it as a way to breathe some life into Egypt's leftist, revolutionary and pro-democratic forces after years of defeat and disarray under a crackdown. "Of course, I am a likely candidate, but I have yet to make a final decision," he said. He said consultations are underway among "democratic and social forces" - his term for those behind the 2011 uprising and its supporters - to formulate a joint position on the election and consider whether to field a candidate or boycott. He

said that his chief concern is the "legal and constitutional" environment of the vote, which is due in the summer of 2018.

Ali has been a key figure among the small but vibrant core of mostly young pro-democracy and secular activists known loosely as the "revolutionaries." They were the main force behind the 18-day uprising that toppled longtime autocrat Hosni Mubarak in 2011. For a brief window after his fall, they were celebrated in Egypt. But they failed to present a cohesive political force. The military took over after Mubarak's fall and pushed an election process that led to the Muslim Brotherhood winning the presidency and dominance in parliament. Ali came in seventh in the initial round of voting in the 2012 election.

The 'revolutionaries'

Since leading the military in a 2013 ouster of the Brotherhood, El-Sisi has waged a heavy crackdown on dissent, not only among Islamists but also against the ranks of secular activists. El-Sisi has frequently argued that the country needs stability to repair its economy and fight an Islamic militant insurgency. Many of the "revolutionaries" have been jailed, quit political activism or left the country. They have been relentlessly demonized in the largely pro-El-Sisi media, depicted as foreign agents who conspire against Egypt and pose a national security threat.

But Ali argued that the climate maybe conducive for change, pointing to new energy generated by the courtroom victory and discontent over reforms introduced by El-Sisi that aim to rescue the deeply damaged economy but have hit most Egyptians hard with spiraling prices. —AP



Activist lawyer Khaled Ali

SUPPORTERS OF IRAQI CLERIC DEMAND ELECTORAL REFORM

BAGHDAD: Hundreds of supporters of Iraqi cleric Moqtada Al-Sadr demonstrated in Baghdad yesterday to demand electoral reform ahead of a planned provincial vote in September. The protesters, who have been demanding deep political reform since last year, argued that the current rules were tailored for Iraq's leading parties, which they accuse of cor-

ruption and nepotism. "We came here to demand that the electoral law be amended and the members of the electoral commission replaced," said Naim Toma, a 43-year-old taxi driver who lives in Sadr City.

Many of the protesters were from the same northern Baghdad neighborhood, which was named after the influential cleric's father and

from which he draws much of his support. "One of our main demands is for the members of the electoral commission to be changed because they are currently all affiliated to a big political party," said another of the protesters, Ikhlas Al-Obeidi. "Ultimately, we want to change the political leadership that has dragged this country into crisis and replace them with people who work to serve the Iraqi nation and people," said the young doctor.

The protesters, most of them waving Iraqi flags, all argued that the Independent High Electoral Commission was anything but independent. Earlier this year, Prime Minister Haider Al-Abadi's cabinet approved a September date for provincial elections. The commission's term expires that month. "We must... pick independent members who are competent and not loyal to parties or blocs because they will always be under intense political pressure," said Hana Edwar, a veteran activist.

The other key demand pushed by the few hundred protesters who gathered in front of the heavily fortified Green Zone in central Baghdad was a reform of the electoral law. The current seat allocation system for parliament was adopted before 2014 parliamentary polls, after small parties made significant gains in provincial elections a year earlier. Sadr supporters held a string of massive rallies last year, which on two occasions saw protesters break into the Green Zone, which is home to the country's key institutions as well as major Western embassies. —AFP



BAGHDAD: Supporters of Iraqi cleric Moqtada Al-Sadr demonstrate in Baghdad yesterday to demand electoral reform ahead of a planned provincial vote in September. —AFP

POLISARIO ON ALERT ALONG W SAHARA SAND BARRIER

TINDOUF: Behind a long sand wall winding through the disputed Western Sahara, leaders battling for the independence of the former Spanish colony say they are on alert. Morocco insists the territory is an integral part of its kingdom, but the Algeria-backed Polisario Front demands a referendum on self-determination. "There are 25,000 Sahrawi fighters and any other Sahrawi is recruitable," whether man or woman, says Polisario defense Chief Abdullahi Lehbib.

His comments come after the president of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), Brahim Ghali, on Sunday said "all options remain open" to resolve the dispute, hinting at a possible return to armed struggle. Morocco fought the Polisario from 1975 to 1991, gaining control of most of the territory before a UN-brokered ceasefire took effect. It has built six mostly sand barriers along roughly 2,700 kilometers to cord off this land.

On the other side is the Polisario-run SADR. Since the 1991 ceasefire, the United Nations has maintained peace keepers in the vast desert territory where around half a million people live. A refer-

endum on independence was set for 1992 but was aborted when Morocco objected to the proposed electoral register, saying it was biased.

"Despite the ceasefire we have continued recruitment and conscription," Lehbib said. Tensions flared last year after the Polisario set up a new military post in the district of Guerguerat near the Mauritanian border, within a stone's throw of Moroccan soldiers. The move came after Morocco last summer started building a tarmac road in the area south of the buffer zone separating the two sides.

"The stalling of the peace process, and especially the situation in Guerguerat, mean that we are on alert along the wall," Lehbib says. Trenches, barbed wire and mine fields flank the Sahrawi side of the wall near El-Mahbes. Cheikh Bechri Mhame, the sector's commanding officer, describes how his men patrol the area in four-wheel-drives, looking out for any movement near the barrier which is two to three meters high. Dressed in military fatigues and armed with automatic rifles, his soldiers are also tasked with cordoning off land peppered with anti-personnel mines. —AFP

TORNADOES WREAK HAVOC IN SOUTHEASTERN LOUISIANA

NEW ORLEANS: The tornadoes that struck southeastern Louisiana on Tuesday injured about 20 people, destroyed homes and businesses, flipped cars and trucks, and left about 10,000 customers with-

out power, but no deaths were reported, the governor said. Gov John Bel Edwards took an aerial tour and made a disaster declaration before meeting with officials in New Orleans. The worst damage

was in the same 9th Ward that was so heavily flooded in Hurricane Katrina.

Edwards, a Democrat, said he was heartbroken to see some of the same people suffering again, and promised that the state will provide the affected citizens with the resources they need as quickly as possible. He said seven parishes were hit by tornadoes in an afternoon of tumultuous weather across southeastern Louisiana. Hatchet-wielding firefighters walked up and down the debris-strewn Chef Menteur Highway after the storm, looking for anyone missing or trapped. Their primary search came up empty, and a secondary search was planned to make sure and to better assess the damage.

Edwards said he called in the Louisiana National Guard to police and secure the area, and urged people to stay away. "This is not a time to sight-see," he said. The storm ripped apart homes, toppled a gas station canopy, snapped tall power poles and flipped a food truck upside-down. It left shards of metal hanging from trees, and trapped a truck driver as power lines wrapped around his cab. The wall of severe weather also delivered heavy rain and hail to Mississippi and Alabama.

Press Secretary Sean Spicer said the White House was monitoring the weather's impact, and that President Donald Trump would be reaching out to local and state officials. Yoshekia Brown lost everything to Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Now she's lost everything again: Three-quarters of her home in eastern New Orleans collapsed. "Sister, your house is gone," her brother told her as she drove

home. She didn't believe it until she saw it herself. "I lived in between two blighted properties. One of those would have been gone before my house," she said. "It's just gone. Like the movie Twister."

Luckily her 2-year-old son and three dogs have survived, and her home was insured. She said she's not sure what to do next, but said "something good has to come from this." Outside the heavily damaged Royal Palms Motel, Malcolm Ballard, 65, was left homeless by the tornado. His room was ransacked; the furniture and carpet soaked after the door and windows blew open. Kevin Ballard, 56, came to check on his older brother, but his own injuries turned out to be worse, with cuts and bruises on his head and neck, after an auto repair shop he was in collapsed around him. "I was standing in front of the building at first and I seen something black, twisting," Kevin Ballard said. "Tires and everything fell on the back of my neck and head."

The Baton Rouge area also got hit. Ascension Parish Sheriff's spokeswoman Allison Hudson says three people suffered minor injuries and several homes and some other buildings were damaged in the historic part of Donaldsonville, about 20 miles southwest of the capital. In Killian, just east of Baton Rouge, the mayor said several houses were destroyed and several others damaged, but an elderly couple suffered the only injuries he knew of: One a broken leg, the other a broken arm. "How you manage to get blown completely across the street with cinderblocks flying and no worse than a couple broken limbs - apparently the good Lord was looking after them," said Mayor Craig McGehee. —AP



NEW ORLEANS: A man stands next to a destroyed home after a tornado tore through the eastern neighborhood of New Orleans. — AP

JOVENEL MOISE SWORN IN AS HAITI'S NEW PRESIDENT

PORT-AU-PRINCE: Jovenel Moise was sworn in Tuesday as Haiti's 58th president, ending a protracted electoral crisis that created a power vacuum in the impoverished Caribbean nation. Moise, a 48-year-old banana exporter who has never held political office and is not well known to the general public but ran as the candidate of the center-right Tet Kale Party (PHTK), took the oath at a ceremony at the National Assembly. He was former president Michel Martelly's hand-picked choice to lead the poorest country in the Americas.

"I congratulate you because you have chosen democracy rather than anarchy, the road to peace rather than violence, order and progress rather than disorder and crime," Moise said in his first speech after taking the oath of office. He said he would work to boost the economy and lure Haitians living abroad to come back home, invest and create jobs. An estimated two to three million people who are Haitian or of Haitian origin live outside the country, which has a population of about 10 million.

Haiti is also fighting to emerge from a major cholera outbreak, with an estimated 30,000 cases expected this year, as well as the effects of the January 2010 earthquake, with tens of thousands of people still camping in tents without proper sanitation. The government and aid officials have said Haiti needs nearly \$300 million to provide urgent assistance for its most vulnerable inhabitants, including those affected by Hurricane Matthew last October. The hurricane caused \$2.8 billion in damage, and more than 1.5 million people are still in dire

need of humanitarian assistance, said El-Mostafa Benlamlah, Representative of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH).

Lengthy political crisis

Moise's election brings to a close a political crisis that began in October 2015 when the results of a first round of voting—which Moise won—were annulled because of massive fraud. In February 2016, with Martelly's five-year term nearing its end and his political succession in limbo, Haiti's legislature elected Jocelerme Privert, president of the Senate at the time, to be interim president. The presidential election was rescheduled for October and then postponed to November in the wake of Hurricane Matthew. Haiti's political temperature remains high, with several of Moise's main opponents contesting his first-round victory.

The businessman is also at the center of a money laundering probe. He denies any wrongdoing. The investigation was launched in 2013 as a routine bank-regulation procedure. The Central Financial Intelligence Unit forwarded a secret report about the inquiry to prosecutors last summer. However, the investigating judge took no action until four opposition senators recently demanded information about the findings. The judge delivered the conclusions to the government prosecutor, who has made no public announcements on the case. Moise was declared the winner in November with 55 percent of the votes, but with a dismal turnout of just 21 percent. —AFP



WASHINGTON: Attorney General-designate, Sen Jeff Sessions, R-Ala, leaves his office on Capitol Hill in Washington yesterday. — AP

US SENATORS CLASH BITTERLY OVER TRUMP'S ATTORNEY GENERAL PICK

CRITICISM LED TO RARE REPRIMAND OF A SENATOR

WASHINGTON: Tensions over confirming US President Donald Trump's cabinet nominees erupted late Tuesday in the US Senate, where a lawmaker's criticism of attorney general pick Jeff Sessions led to the very rare reprimand of a senator. Senate Democrat Elizabeth Warren was told to sit down for reading a 1986 letter critical of Sessions written by Coretta Scott King, widow of slain civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. The chamber's Republican leader Mitch McConnell interrupted Warren to accuse her of having "impugned" Sessions, a fellow senator. "The senator has impugned the motives and conduct of our colleague from Alabama, as warned by the chair," McConnell said, taking the extraordinary step of invoking Senate Rule 19 that prohibits highly critical remarks against a fellow senator.

"The senator will take her seat," said the presiding officer, Senator Steven Daines. When

Warren challenged the ruling, the Senate voted along party lines to uphold it. It was a rare and powerful rebuke in the body where decorum is a cherished tradition. But tensions have soared in the few weeks since Trump took office, particularly over the process of confirming his cabinet nominees. During debate over education secretary nominee Betsy DeVos, Democrats held the Senate floor Monday through the night as a protest against her nomination.

She was eventually confirmed Tuesday, but only when Vice President Mike Pence was brought in to break a 50-50 tie. Pressure built during debate about Sessions, whose record on civil rights ultimately doomed his nomination to a federal judgeship in the 1980s. At the time King wrote the Senate Judiciary Committee warning that Sessions used to "intimidate and chill" voters, and that confirming him as a judge would have

"a devastating effect" on the US justice system. "Mr Sessions has used the awesome powers of his office in a shabby attempt to intimidate and frighten elderly black voters," she wrote.

Warren, a potential 2020 presidential candidate, was reading the King letter when she was blocked from continuing, a move that astonished Democratic Senator Sheldon Whitehouse. With the ruling decided, "I don't know how we go about doing our duties," he said. "Are we supposed to simply blind ourselves to derogatory information?" An exasperated Senator Orrin Hatch, the longest-serving Republican currently in the Senate, called for a more dignified debate of Trump's nominees. Senators must treat one another with respect, "or this place is going to devolve into nothing but a jungle," he said. A confirmation vote for Sessions as attorney general was expected today. —AFP



PORT-AU-PRINCE: A supporter of Haiti's new President Jovenel Moise holds up his image with Haiti's map and the National Palace during his inauguration ceremony on Tuesday Feb 7, 2017. — AP

CONTROVERSIAL DAKOTA PIPELINE TO GO AHEAD AFTER ARMY'S APPROVAL

WASHINGTON: The US Army will grant the final permit for the controversial Dakota Access oil pipeline after an order from US President Donald Trump to expedite the project despite opposition from Native American tribes and climate activists. In a court filing on Tuesday, the Army said that it would allow the final section of the line to tunnel under North Dakota's Lake Oahe, part of the Missouri River system. This could enable the \$3.8 billion pipeline to begin operation as soon as June.

Energy Transfer Partners is building the 1,170-mile line to help move crude from the shale oil fields of North Dakota to Illinois en route to the Gulf of Mexico, where many US refineries are located. Protests against the project last year drew thousands of people to the North Dakota plains including Native American tribes and environmental activists, and protest camps sprung up. The movement attracted high-profile political and celebrity supporters. The permit was the last bureaucratic hurdle to the pipeline's completion, and Tuesday's decision drew praise from supporters of the project and outrage from activists, including promises of a legal challenge from the Standing Rock Sioux tribe.

"It's great to see this new administration following through on their promises and letting projects go forward to the benefit of American consumers and workers," said John Stoodly, spokesman for the Association of Oil Pipe Lines. The Standing Rock Sioux, which contends the pipeline would des-

crate sacred sites and potentially pollute its water source, vowed to shut pipeline operations down if construction is completed, without elaborating how it would do so. The tribe called on its supporters to protest in Washington on March 10 rather than return to North Dakota.

"As Native peoples, we have been knocked down again, but we will get back up," the tribe said

in the statement. "We will rise above the greed and corruption that has plagued our peoples since first contact. We call on the Native Nations of the United States to stand together, unite and fight back." Former President Barack Obama's administration last year delayed completion of the pipeline pending a review of tribal concerns and in December ordered an environmental study. — Reuters



LOS ANGELES: Demonstrators march to the Federal Building in protest against US President Donald Trump's executive order fast-tracking the Keystone XL and Dakota Access oil pipelines, in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

WHITE HOUSE EXECUTIVE ORDER TARGETING 'CONFLICT MINERALS'

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump is planning to issue an executive order targeting a controversial Dodd-Frank rule that requires companies to disclose whether their products contain "conflict minerals" from a war-torn part of Africa, according to sources familiar with the administration's thinking. Reuters could not learn the precise timing of when the order will be issued, or exactly what it will say.

However, the 2010 Dodd-Frank law explicitly gives the president authority to order the Securities and Exchange Commission to temporarily suspend or revise the rule for two years if it is in the national security interest of the United States. The sources spoke anonymously because it is not public and they were not authorized to speak on the record. The plan for the executive order comes on the heels of another order issued by the White House last week that takes aim more broadly at the Dodd-Frank rules put into place after the 2007-2009 financial crisis.

That order did not single out any one particular rule, but it called on the Treasury Secretary to consult with other regulators, including the SEC, and to come back with a report outlining possible regulatory changes and legislation. The conflict minerals rule is one of several

disclosure regulations that was tucked into Dodd-Frank that are unrelated to the financial crisis itself. A second Dodd-Frank SEC disclosure rule that required oil, gas and mining companies to disclose payments to foreign governments, meanwhile, was repealed by the Republican-controlled Congress last week.

The conflict minerals rule was pushed by human rights groups who want companies to tell investors if their products contain tantalum, tin, gold or tungsten mined from the Democratic Republic of Congo, in the hopes it will help curb the funding of armed groups. But business groups have staunchly opposed the measure, saying it forces companies to furnish politically-charged information that is irrelevant to making investment decisions. They have also complained it costs too much money for companies to trace the source of the minerals through the supply chain. In 2014, a US appeals court struck down a part of the conflict minerals law after the Business Roundtable, the US Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers sued the SEC over the rule. The court found part of it violated the free speech rights of companies by forcing them to publicly state that their products are not conflict free. — Reuters

EMBATTLED ROMANIA PM SEEKS TO QUELL UNREST

BUCHAREST: Romania's embattled premier Sorin Grindeanu sought yesterday to quell nationwide unrest over his government's attempt to weaken corruption laws with a speech to MPs ahead of a no-confidence vote. "We have a duty to the people who gave us their trust during the election and to continue to govern," the 43-year-old told lawmakers in Bucharest. "I ask you to trust this government... and reject this motion".

The vote, tabled by the centre-right opposition, is expected to fail as Grindeanu's left-wing Social Democrat party (PSD) holds a solid majority. "Romanians don't want corrupt politicians to be pardoned and shielded from justice. We call on you to stop acting against the law," read the motion filed by 123 opposition MPs. On Tuesday, the prime minister remained defiant in the face of Romania's largest protests since the fall of communism in 1989, insisting he would not resign.

For more than a week, hundreds of thousands of people have been taking part in demonstrations against an emergency decree approved on January 31, which critics say would have protected the corrupt from prosecution. Although the decree was scrapped late Sunday, the marches have continued, with some protesters vowing not to stop until the

government steps down. While the crowds have noticeably shrunk from the half a million people thronging cities and towns on Sunday, they are expected to grow again over the weekend.

"Every action the government took in the last week proves that they are not honest at all. So we cannot trust them," protester Danhiric, who works in advertising said at Bucharest's Victory Square where 3,000 people had rallied on Tuesday night. Meanwhile, around 2,000 pro-government supporters had gathered outside the presidential palace, calling President Klaus Iohannis a "traitor" for championing the mass protests.

Earlier on Tuesday, the opposition-backed Iohannis had hinted that the government should quit. "The repeal of the decree and the possible sacking of a minister is too little. Early elections are too much," Iohannis told parliament. Instead, he said, the onus was now on the Social Democrats to find a solution. "If the PSD, which has created this crisis, fails to resolve the crisis immediately, I will summon all the political parties for talks," the president warned. "You've won, now govern and legislate-but not at any price." Iohannis has hiked the pressure on PSD head Liviu Dragnea, considered to be the real power bearer in the Romanian government. —AFP



BUCHAREST: A pro-government demonstrator holds a cardboard cross with Romania President Klaus Iohannis' name on it during a protest outside the Romanian presidential palace in Bucharest. — AP



AULNAY-SOUS-BOIS: France's President Francois Hollande (right) stands next to alleged victim, identified only by his first name, Theo, at Robert Ballanger hospital in Aulnay-sous-Bois, north of Paris, France. Violence in suburbs northeast of Paris have now spread to at least five towns, erupting after a young black man was allegedly sodomized with a police officer's baton last week, during an identity check. — AP

VIOLENCE SPREADS ACROSS PARIS NORTHERN SUBURBS

POLICE VIOLENCE, RAPE ACCUSATION BEHIND UNREST

PARIS: Violence spread in Paris's northern suburbs for a fourth night and French police arrested a dozen people, police said yesterday, amid accusations that police officers raped and beat a man they were detaining. Dozens of vehicles and a nursery school were set on fire by youths during standoffs with police in an area of Paris where riots in 2005 drew global attention to the stark contrast between wealthy Paris and the suburbs that surround it. As well as damaging the nursery school and a car sales outlet, youths had also used a shopping trolley full of petrol bombs, police said.

The trouble began in Aulnay-sous-Bois on Feb 2 where four police officers were accused of using excessive force while arresting a 22-year-old man, including raping him with a baton. "For the moment we're talking of very violent but isolated standoffs," said Luc Poignant from the

SGP police union. While much more limited than 12 years ago, the unrest served as a reminder of the simmering tensions in neighborhoods with higher-than-average unemployment and big immigrant populations, as France prepares to elect a new president this year. The jobless rate in Aulnay-sous-Bois is nearly twice the national average of 10 percent.

"Sadly these neighborhoods have been turned into ghettos," said police representative Yves Lefebvre, who said that police were not sufficiently trained or equipped to deal with the problems in the sprawling suburbs where drug dealing is rife. The four police officers have been suspended pending an inquiry and one has been placed under formal investigation for suspected rape and three others for unnecessary violence. The victim, a young black man, has himself called for calm, and he and his family say

they trust the justice system will deal properly with the affair. President Francois Hollande visited the man on Tuesday at the Aulnay hospital.

Police said the skirmishes on Tuesday night were mainly in towns around Aulnay-sous-Bois, which itself was relatively calm. The unrest is playing out against a backdrop of growing political uncertainty in France, with support growing for far-right leader Marine Le Pen and conservative Francois Fillon hit by accusations his wife was paid by the state for a fake job. The 2005 riots, in which 10,000 cars and 300 buildings were set on fire, prompted then interior minister, Nicolas Sarkozy, to declare a state of emergency. Political opponents say Sarkozy made matters worse when, as president from 2007 to 2012, he scrapped specialized local police teams and cut police staffing by 10,000. — Reuters

PUTIN ENEMY NAVALNY GIVEN 5-YEAR SUSPENDED JAIL TERM

MOSCOW: Prominent Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny was convicted yesterday of embezzlement and given a five-year suspended sentence in a ruling that threatens his bid to challenge President Vladimir Putin in next year's presidential poll. The judge in the court in the provincial city of Kirov found the Kremlin critic and anti-corruption whistleblower guilty on a charge that the 40-year-old lawyer insists is aimed at knocking him out of the vote.

Navalny in December announced his intention to run for president in 2018, while Putin has yet to confirm his expected participation. The fierce Kremlin critic insisted he would keep on campaigning despite Russian law banning people serving such a sentence from standing for office. "According to the constitution I have a full right to take part in the elections and I will do that," Navalny said after the verdict.

"I will continue to represent the interests of people who want to see Russia a normal, honest and non-corrupt country." The court held a retrial case after the European Court of Human Rights last year quashed an original 2013 against Navalny ruling, saying that the politician and his co-defendant, businessman Pyotr Ofitserov, did not have a fair trial. They had been convicted of alleged embezzlement from the Kirov regional government budget of 16 million rubles (\$270,000, 253,000 euros) in a timber deal when he was working as a consultant to the governor.

The judge gave Navalny and Ofitserov exactly the same sentences as before. "It's 100 percent the same," Navalny told journalists in court. The judge however took into account the years that the men served from their suspended sentence before the ECHR verdict last year. This means



Russian opposition leader and anti-corruption blogger Alexei Navalny

Navalny's suspended sentence will run out in about 18 months, his lawyer Olga Mikhailova told journalists. Navalny vowed to appeal and continue his bid for the presidency regardless. "There's no question that we will appeal," he said. "We don't recognize this verdict, this verdict will be annulled," he told journalists in court.

Legal confusion

After Navalny appealed to the European court, Russia's supreme court ordered that Navalny and Ofitserov face a retrial. A conviction for a serious crime would disqualify him from standing for president according to the federal law on elections, eliminating the most prominent and eloquent representative of the opposition to Putin. However, in a legal confusion, the Russian constitution allows anyone who is not in prison to stand for election.

Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov ahead of the verdict denied that Navalny's possible exclusion would make the 2018 polls look bad to international observers. "As for how it will look, here we don't consider any fears to be appropriate," Peskov said. The 2013 verdict in Kirov forced Navalny to step away from frontline politics and concentrate on digging up compromising information on the lavish lifestyles of top politicians and officials. The lawyer came to fame with punchy oratory at mass rallies in 2011 and 2012 against Putin's return to the Kremlin. — AFP

FROM BREXIT SHOCK TO THE PARLIAMENTARY APPROVAL

LONDON: From the victory of the "Leave" campaign to an expected vote by parliament for starting talks with Brussels, here is a snapshot of key Brexit developments which have shaken Britain since June 23:

Britons vote Brexit

On June 23, Britons vote 52 percent to 48 percent in favor of leaving the European Union after 43 years in the fold. Mass immigration from other parts of the European Union is cited as a key factor in the vote, along with national pride. Britain starts on a path to become the first country to leave the 28-nation EU.

Markets shudder

The result hammers global markets as sudden uncertainty compounds concern over weak economic growth. Stock exchanges, the pound and oil prices tumble. On June 27, the ratings agencies Standard and Poor's and Fitch downgrade Britain's sovereign debt. While equities bounce back, the pound remains well below its pre-referendum high of around \$1.50. Since the vote, sterling has lost almost 17 percent of its value against the US dollar.

Cameron quits

Conservative prime minister David Cameron, who had called the EU referendum and backed the "Remain" side, says on June 24 that he will resign, leaving it to his successor to invoke Article 50 of the EU's Lisbon Treaty, the formal process for withdrawing from the EU. On June 30, Cameron's leading rival Boris Johnson, who backed the "Leave" campaign, says he will not try to become prime minister. The other leading Brexit figure, UK Independence Party leader Nigel Farage, steps down on July 4.

Labor crisis

On June 26, top lawmakers in the opposition Labor Party quit the so-called shadow cabinet to protest against leader Jeremy Corbyn's lacklustre efforts in campaigning for a "Remain" vote. Corbyn refuses to resign and is challenged for leadership of the party, but survives owing to strong support among Labor rank-and-file members.

Cameron swansong

Cameron meets with EU peers for the last time on June 28, and German Chancellor Angela Merkel warns that the EU will not agree to allow Britain to "cherry-pick" rights enjoyed by member states. Scottish overtures to EU leaders for possi-

ble independent admission are rebuffed by France and Spain.

Leadership race

Interior minister Theresa May, 59, launches her successful bid for the Conservative Party leadership on June 30. May had backed "Remain" but kept a very low profile during the referendum campaign. She moves into 10 Downing Street on July 13 vowing to hold the United Kingdom together and "forge a bold, new positive role" for Britain in the world. May names Johnson foreign minister and gives leading Brexit campaigner David Davis the task of negotiating with Brussels, after warning that "Brexit means Brexit and we're going to make a success of it."

Friction with Brussels

In September, May explores post-EU access to global markets during a G20 meeting in China, but is warned by EU commission chief Jean-Claude Juncker that for now, trade talks are an "exclusive matter" for the EU on behalf of its members. On October 2, May says that Britain will trigger Article 50 before the end of March 2017, establishing 2019 as a deadline for EU withdrawal.

Court ruling

The High Court in London rules on November 3 that the government must obtain parliamentary approval to begin the Brexit process. May files an appeal, but the Supreme Court upholds that ruling on January 24, 2017.

Clean break

On January 17, May says Britain must make a clean break, telling foreign ambassadors: "What I am proposing cannot mean membership of the single market." She vows not to accept unfavourable terms from EU partners, saying: "No deal for Britain is better than a bad deal for Britain."

Trump endorsement

New US President Donald Trump welcomes May to Washington on January 27, calling Britain's decision to leave the EU a "wonderful thing" and hailing the "most special relationship" between the two countries.

MPs back draft Brexit bill

On February 1, British MPs approve by a margin of 498 to 114 the first stage of a bill allowing May to trigger Article 50. Following the vote in the House of Commons, the bill then passes to the House of Lords for final approval expected next month. — AFP

POWER, SEX, SLAVES: NIGERIA BATTLES THE BELIEFS OF BOKO HARAM'S BRIDES

MAIDUGURI: Changing her son's nappy, a wry smile flickered across Aisha's face as she recalled the power she wielded as the wife of a leading Boko Haram commander, living in the jihadists' forest stronghold in northeast Nigeria. "I had many slaves - they did everything for me," the 25-year-old said, explaining how women and girls kidnapped by the Islamist militants washed, cooked and babysat for her during the three years she spent in their base in the vast Sambisa forest.

"Even the men respected me because I was Mamman Nur's wife. They could not look me in the eye," Aisha said in a state safe house in Maiduguri, where she has lived for almost a year since being captured by the Nigerian army in a raid in Sambisa. Aisha is among around 70 women and children undergoing a deradicalisation program - led by psychologists and Islamic teachers - designed to challenge the teachings they received and beliefs they adopted while under the control of Boko Haram.

Thousands of girls and women have been abducted by the group since it began its insurgency in 2009 - most notably the more than 200 Chibok girls snatched from their school in April 2014 - with many used as cooks, sex slaves, and even suicide bombers. Yet some of these women, like Aisha, gained respect, influence and standing within Boko Haram, which has waged a bloody campaign to create an Islamic state in the northeast. Seduced by this power, and relieved to

escape the domestic drudgery of their everyday lives, these women can prove tougher than men to deradicalise and reintegrate into their communities, according to the Neem Foundation, which runs the program.

With more women likely to be freed from Boko Haram or widowed as Nigeria's military strives to defeat the militants, experts say insults, rejection and even violence towards them as they return to their communities could hinder efforts to repair the social fabric of a region splintered by Boko Haram. "There is a possibility of violence (when these women go home) because they were married to Boko Haram militants," Fatima Akilu, the head of Neem said. "There is still a lot of anger and resentment from communities that have been traumatised for years, and subjected to atrocities by the group," she added.

Newfound power

While other women huddled around the communal television in the safe house in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno state, 22-year-old Halima recalled the 'beautiful home' built by her Boko Haram husband in the Sambisa, and the easy life she enjoyed. Trucks arrived regularly with food and clothes, a hospital staffed with doctors and nurses tended to the ill, and Halima was given her own room in the house she shared with her husband. "Anything I requested, I got," said Halima, sitting under a tree in the yard and lazily picking her toenails. —Reuters

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CHINA VOWS TOUGH PENALTIES FOR ORGAN HARVESTERS TRANSPLANT CHIEF PLEDGES 'ZERO TOLERANCE'

VATICAN CITY: China is making progress in eliminating transplants using organs from executed prisoners, but violations still exist and offenders will be punished severely, the director of Beijing's transplant program said. "In China, organ donations from civilians and from prisoners cannot co-exist," Dr Huang Jiefu told a Vatican conference bringing together nearly 80 doctors, law enforcement officials and representatives of health and non-government organizations.

"In my governmental organization there is zero tolerance," he told reporters. "However, China is a big country, with 1.3 billion people, so sure, definitely, there is some violation of the law. If there is some violation of the law it will be severely punished." More than 100 doctors, judicial officials and others had already been pun-

ished recently, he said without elaborating. In 2015, China officially ended the systematic use of organs from executed prisoners in transplant procedures, a practice long condemned by international human rights groups and medical ethicists.

But the advocacy group Doctors Against Forced Organ Harvesting said in a statement on Tuesday there was "no evidence that past practices of forced organ harvesting have ended" in China. "Without transparency, verification of alleged reforms is impossible," said DAFOH executive director Dr Torsten Trey, adding that those responsible for past abuses must also be held to account. DAFOH criticized the Vatican for inviting Huang, saying the goals of the conference would be compromised "if China is allowed back into the commu-

nity of nations without providing evidence that it has truly abandoned its cruel and illegal practice of forcibly harvesting organs."

The head of the Vatican's Pontifical Academy of Sciences, Monsignor Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo, rejected suggestions that Huang should not have been invited, saying the two-day meeting was "not political". Huang said China had a right to be at the conference. "This will help China speed up our reforms. Without international cooperation, there will be no transplant reform." The conference is paying particular attention to the exploitation of migrants by people-smugglers in north Africa. Many are brought from sub-Saharan Africa to Libya and told they need to pay more to get to Europe, forcing them to part with organs if they do not have the cash. — Reuters



MANILA: Smoke billows from houses gutted by a fire overnight in an informal settlers area, near the south harbor port in Manila yesterday. —AFP

HUGE FIRE ENGULFS PHILIPPINES SLUM

THOUSANDS RENDERED HOMELESS

MANILA: As many as 15,000 people are homeless after a huge fire engulfed an overcrowded slum in Manila, destroying thousands of homes and sending residents fleeing with their few possessions. The inferno started in a sprawling slum near the port late Tuesday and raged for about 10 hours, as hundreds of firefighters from across the Philippine capital hauled their hoses across rickety, tin roofs to reach the flames.

As the blaze whipped across the squalid area, sending a huge plume of smoke billowing into the night sky, residents ran for their lives carrying refrigerators, religious icons and other valuables. Others, desperate to save their homes, used buckets of water to douse the fire. About 3,200 homes, many made from little more than scrap wood, were destroyed and four people were injured, Edilberto Cruz, a fire investigator looking into the cause of blaze, told reporters yesterday. "The houses in that place are all (made of) light materials. That is why the fire was quick to spread. We are just lucky that no one was killed," he said.

Manila city government officials said that between 9,000 and 15,000 people from the area, which is hit by fires almost every year, were left homeless. At daylight thousands of people gathered on surrounding streets, warily guarding the belongings they had managed to salvage in the chaos while they waited for food and other aid to arrive. Temporary evacuation centers have been set up at

nearby gyms and schools. The Manila fire department said such fires were common in the city's densely populated slums where many residents still use candles to light their



MANILA: Residents look on as a fire destroys hundreds of houses at an informal settlers community in Delpan, Tondo, Manila. —AFP

homes. Nearly a quarter of Manila's 13 million residents live in slums due to poverty and a shortage of low-cost housing, studies have found. —AFP

REPATRIATION AND DISPLACEMENT WORRY WAR-TORN AFGHANISTAN

JALALABAD: Marooned in a tent billowing in the winter wind, Gul Pari's family is among thousands of war-displaced Afghans crammed into settlements alongside a flood of returning refugees, in a double-pronged humanitarian crisis engulfing the country. Conflict-torn Afghanistan is struggling to reabsorb large masses of refugees and failed asylum seekers being sent back from Pakistan, Europe and Iran, joining more than half a million others uprooted by war.

Clutching meagre household possessions, often with small children in tow, unprecedented numbers like Gul Pari seek refuge in crowded cities such as eastern Jalalabad, straining public resources that are already near breaking point. "We are praying our tent does not fall down in the winter rain," the mother-of-four said, as her children huddled around a kettle inside the fragile shelter cobbled together from rags. Gul Pari's family was forced to flee the badlands of

Pachiragram district in Nangarhar, bordering Pakistan, where the Islamic State group has ushered in a new age of barbarity with beheadings, arson attacks, and by blowing up some enemies with explosives buried beneath them.

More horrifying, Gul Pari said, was their diktat in some areas to families with unmarried daughters or widows to raise white flags over their houses, marking the women as wives for new IS recruits. "It is better to live in misery like this than to become a victim of Daesh," Gul Pari said, using the Arabic acronym for IS which is common in the area. Officials say IS is on the retreat owing to a sustained campaign of US airstrikes, but the UN has documented an alarming increase in attacks by the groups on civilians, perhaps evident in the steady number of people fleeing areas with their presence.

'Returnees becoming IDPs'

As violence spiked last year across Afghanistan, about 1,700 people were displaced every day from their homes, hitting a record annual figure of more than 600,000, according to the United Nations. Hundreds of thousands of refugees separately have returned from Iran and, particularly, Pakistan, a regional nemesis cracking down on undocumented Afghan refugees. Many of them are stuck in limbo as their home districts are torn by insecurity.

In a perfect storm, the European Union last year signed an agreement with Kabul to return Afghans whose asylum appeals are rejected, which could result in tens of thousands of repatriations. "2016 was a record year for both displacement and returns, and together these challenges are having a serious impact on the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan," said Matt Graydon, spokesman for the International Organization for Migration (IOM). —AFP



KABUL: Men bury a victim of a suicide attack on the Supreme Court in Kabul, Afghanistan yesterday. A suicide bomber on Tuesday targeted the Supreme Court building in the Afghan capital, Kabul, killing at least 19 people. —AFP

News

in brief

Colombian nun kidnapped by gunmen in south Mali

BAMAKO: A Colombian nun has been kidnapped by gunmen in southern Mali, a Malian security source and a local official said yesterday. The woman was kidnapped late Tuesday near Koutiala, a city some 400 kilometers east of the capital, Bamako, which is in the Sikasso region near the Burkina Faso border. "The Malian army is in pursuit," a security source who asked not to be identified said. A local official said the kidnapers drove away in a vehicle owned by the nun's Franciscan order. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the kidnapping which follows the Christmas Eve capture of a French aid worker, Sophie Petronin, in the restive north of Mali, where jihadists have staged repeated attacks. Last month, Al-Qaeda's affiliate in North Africa released a new proof-of-life video of Swiss missionary Beatrice Stockly, who has been held hostage by the group for more than a year. The Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) video showed Stockly, who was captured in the north, saying she was in good health.

Bangladeshis arrested over 'fake penis' scam

DHAKA: A family in Bangladesh has been arrested after using a fake penis to trick villagers into believing a genie had performed a sex change on their teenage daughter, police said yesterday. Villagers in southern Bangladesh rushed to the family's home seeking miracle cures after hearing the genie had changed the girl's sex and performed a circumcision as proof. But police smelled a scam, and took the 15-year-old to a hospital for an examination. "A doctor examined the teenager and discovered a fake penis tied to her waist," Monzur Murshed, the local police chief said. "The girl and her parents have set up a profitable business promising to heal people with a genie." As news spread that the girl had not only been transformed but undergone a mystical circumcision, villagers flocked to seek the genie's intervention with their own medical woes, Murshed added. The three will be charged with fraud and prosecuted, police say.

Strong 6.3 quake strikes off Pakistan coast: USGS

QUETTA: A strong 6.3-magnitude earthquake struck off the coast of Pakistan yesterday, the US Geological Survey (USGS) said, but there were no immediate reports of injuries. The shallow quake struck at 3:03 am, with the epicenter 23 kilometers southwest of the coastal town of Pasni, the USGS said. There were no immediate reports of casualties in the remote province of Balochistan which covers the quake zone. An AFP reporter in the provincial capital Quetta said residents in towns and cities near the epicenter, including the port of Gwadar, woke in panic and rushed out of their homes reciting verses from the Quran. Pakistan straddles part of the boundary where the Indian and Eurasian tectonic plates meet, making the country susceptible to earthquakes. In October 2015, a 7.5-magnitude quake in Pakistan and Afghanistan killed almost 400 people, flattening buildings in rugged terrain that impeded relief efforts.



CULIACAN: A Mexican marine stands close to the body of a gunman as it lies next to a vehicle after a gun fight in Culiacan, Mexico. — AP

Mexican marine and five suspects die in shootout

MEXICO CITY: Five suspected criminals and a marine died in a shootout on Tuesday in the northwestern city of Culiacan, where 10 other people were killed over the weekend, authorities said. Marines were on patrol in the city when "heavily armed" civilians who were traveling in several vehicles opened fire, prompting the troops to hit back, the Sinaloa state prosecutor's office said. The five suspects were all men who were wearing bulletproof vests and were armed with AK-47 and AR-15 assault rifles, the office said in a statement. The attack took place as Culiacan hosts the 2017 Caribbean baseball championship, which includes Cuba, Puerto Rico, The Dominican Republic, Venezuela and Mexico. Ten other people were killed in three separate shootouts in the city over the weekend, officials.

Fresh gunfire in Ivory Coast barracks town

ABIDJAN: Ivory Coast Special Forces troops fired in the air in the army barracks town of Adiaké yesterday after weeks of trouble with mutinous soldiers over pay, residents said. "The shooting has started again. Today, it's market day, and they (the troops) told the women to return to their houses. Everyone is terrified, and holed up in their homes," a resident of Adiaké said. The elite troops appeared to be angling for a deal with the government along the lines of one struck with mutinous soldiers in January that offered some of them large one-off lump sum payments. Tuesday's trouble in Adiaké, located to the east of the commercial capital Abidjan, was the first protest action by the Special Forces who are in charge of the president's security. Earlier protests were by soldiers and members of the security forces.

In Argentina, women drop tops to protest topless ban

BUENOS AIRES: Scores of women took to the streets in Argentina Tuesday in a bare-breasted demonstration of solidarity with women recently confronted by police for going topless on a South Atlantic beach. The demonstrations in Buenos Aires, in Mar del Plata and Rosario, were prompted by an incident two weeks ago in Necochea, 500 kilometers south of the capital. Three women in bikini bottoms were ordered by 20 police officers to put on their tops or head out. Many in Argentina, once one of the world's wealthiest countries, were stunned. Now used to struggling with economic woes and corruption, they are increasingly tired of what some see as the authorities' overreach. "There is this macho way of thinking that just has to end," said a protestor named Noelia, 28, who declined to give her family name. "We are the owners of our bodies and we can show our bodies if we like."

100-YEAR-OLD WEEKLY KEEPS FRANCE ON TOES

Continued from Page 1

Created to take an anti-war stance during World War I, the Canard Enchaîné long styled itself a "satirical" paper happy to deride the foibles of the famous, before shifting its focus towards investigative journalism in the 1970s. In French a "canard", or duck, is the colloquial name for a newspaper, while the chains refer to the heavy press censorship of the war. For years, hardly any of its rivals could match its stream of scoops, some of them uncovering the most infamous political scandals in French history.

Even with a relatively small newsroom that relies heavily on freelance contributors, the Canard punches above its weight, with sources ranging from diplomats and judges to corporate executives and whistle-blowers. Among its most prominent victims in recent years: Herve Gayraud, a finance minister who had the state pay for a huge luxury duplex even though he owned a Paris apartment and Michele Alliot-Marie, accused of too-cosy ties with Tunisia's president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali as the country's revolution erupted at the end of 2010.

"The Canard is neither right-wing or left-wing, it's in the opposition," Erik Emptaz, a co-editor in chief, says in a documentary airing on French TV tomorrow. Politicians of all stripes are among its most devoted readers, and sometimes its sources. "We quickly turn to Page Two," where snippets of government gossip fill the page, Roselyne Bachelot, a former rightwing minister, says in the documentary. "I've told them a few things myself," she adds with a smile.

And President Francois Hollande was often called the Canard's "junior editor in chief" when he was head of the Socialist Party. The paper's scoop about Fillon's wife

could be one of its biggest yet in terms of fallout. Fillon, a conservative, was leading the presidential race until the Canard revealed that his wife had been paid more than \$800,000 (\$860,000) over 15 years for a suspected fake job as a parliamentary aide to Fillon and an ally.

Polls after the story broke showed him falling back into third place, behind far-right leader Marine Le Pen and centrist candidate Emmanuel Macron, with Macron tipped to ultimately emerge victorious. Fillon has lashed out at the Canard and other media that carried the story, declaring himself the victim of a "lynching" while admitting that he made an "error" in using public funds to hire his wife.

For Greens lawmaker Noel Mamere, "Penelopegate" is an example of the meticulous investigative work that, together with its caustic tone, has earned the Canard cult status. "The Canard never puts out a claim that could end a politician's career without checking and double-checking," said Mamere, adding: "It's the opposite of a social network." — AFP



TRUMP SLAMS 'SO POLITICAL' COURTS

Continued from Page 1

appeals in San Francisco heard oral arguments in a live-streamed conference call in which a Justice Department lawyer argued that the president had clear authority to order the ban on national security grounds. "This is a traditional national security judgment that is assigned to the political branches and the president," Justice Department lawyer August Flentje argued.

Critics of the ban claim it violates the constitution by discriminating against people on the basis of their religion. The judges - two of whom were appointed by Democratic presidents, and a third by a Republican - appeared skeptical of the government's case. "Has the government pointed to any evidence connecting these countries with terrorism?" asked Judge Michelle Friedland, who was appointed by former president Barack Obama. Flentje said the government had not had an opportunity to present such evidence, given the speed at which the case had moved.

The court must decide whether to maintain the lower court's suspension, modify it or lift it. Its ruling was expected before the end of the week. Experts say they believe the argument to reinstate the ban is facing an uphill struggle. But the case is likely to eventually wind up on appeal in the Supreme Court, which currently is evenly divided between liberal and conservative justices. A tie there would leave in place the appeals court decision.

Trump vented his frustration in tweets, referring to the ban's suspension as "the horrible, dangerous and wrong decision." He went further in a rambling speech to the law enforcement chiefs, which at points drew polite applause. "It's really incredible to me that we have a court case that's

going on so long," he said. "Now we're in an area that, let's just say, they are interpreting things differently than probably 100 percent of the people in this room. A bad high school student would understand this - anybody would understand this," he said.

Trump then read out the text of a law - interspersed with his commentary that confers on the president authority to suspend entry to any alien or class of alien deemed detrimental to the interests of the United States. Trump's decree summarily denied entry to all refugees for 120 days, and travelers from Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen for 90 days. Refugees from Syria were blocked indefinitely.

Top administration officials have argued it is needed to keep out Islamic State and Al-Qaeda fighters migrating from Middle East hotspots, insisting time is needed to implement stricter vetting procedures. But the sudden roll-out and blanket nature of the ban sparked protests and international condemnation. Polls now show eroding public support for it in the United States, amid jubilant scenes at airports of returning immigrants.

Shifting the blame to his security advisers, Trump said he had proposed giving a one-month notice, but his law enforcement experts told him "people will pour in before the toughness." "I wanted to give like a month. I said, 'What about a week?' They said you'll have a whole pile of people perhaps, perhaps, with very evil intentions coming in before the restrictions. I think it's sad, I think it's a sad day. I think our security is at risk today, and it will be at risk until such time as we are entitled and get what we are entitled to as citizens of this country, as chiefs, as sheriffs of this country. We want security." — AFP

KUWAIT WELCOMES IRAN'S READINESS...

Continued from Page 1

are wrong and aim at escalation," Jarallah told reporters on sidelines of the reception. "We look at the positive side. The positive statements of Iraqi officials including Prime Minister Haidar Al-Abadi and Foreign Minister Ibrahim Al-Jaafari are what matters," he added.

Kuwait and Iraq have agreed to organize navigation in Khor Abdullah, he said. "This is not a border demarcation because this issue was settled by UN resolution 833." The two countries are in the process of implementing an agreement signed in 2012, which organized navigation in Khor Abdullah.

The 2012 agreement, deposited at the UN following its signing, calls for formation of a joint commission to organize navigation, guarantee safety of the inlet, protect environment, maintenance and expansion of the inlet, and handling fishing boats. Abadi, in a statement on Jan 31, termed as "unjustified" some parties' raising the issues of Khor Abdullah and the border demarcation with Kuwait. "The aim of raising these issues at this time is to deflect

attention from victory achieved in the city of Mosul," Abadi told a news conference. "Unjustified media frenzy had been created over Khor Abdullah," he added.

Jarallah also reaffirmed that any foreign interference in Yemeni affairs could only prolong the crisis and suffering of the Yemeni people. "The interferences by foreign powers could further worsen the already complicated situation in sisterly Yemen," he said, commenting on a recent statement by Yemeni President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi on Iranian interference in Yemen.

Commenting on the call by the Russian ambassador to Kuwait for a Russian-Gulf strategic security partnership, Jarallah said the GCC and Russia already have a strategic dialogue that could provide ground for taking into account new initiatives. The coming round of the Russian-GCC strategic dialogue may discuss the viability of the Russian-Gulf partnership and its possible impacts on the interests of both sides, he added. Regarding relations with Iran, Jarallah noted that Kuwait and Iran enjoy special relationships that are deeply-rooted in history. — Agencies

MPs DEMAND KHOR ABDULLAH DEBATE

Continued from Page 1

Iraqi premier and top politicians have denied these claims and said Kuwait has taken nothing from Iraq and that the agreement was signed to facilitate navigation by the two nations in Khor Abdullah.

The Assembly's foreign relations panel discussed the Khor Abdullah issue with the government two days ago and agreed to hold the closed debate on Feb 14. Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem also said he will invite the government for the closed debate. The Kuwaiti army meanwhile categorically denied reports yesterday on social media that Iraqis have infiltrated Khor Abdullah waterway and that Kuwaiti naval forces have been placed on alert. The army said on Twitter there have been no developments in the area.

Meanwhile, opposition MP Riyadh Al-Adasani demanded yesterday that the government should present compelling evidence about alleged forgery committed by those whose citizenship has been revoked. The lawmaker warned that the selective revocation of citizenship is very serious and the government must provide sufficient evidence for the reasons of its action.

He also charged that revoking the citizenship of a num-

ber of opposition figures and activists in 2014 was done for political reasons and called for amending the nationality law to prevent such action without a court ruling. Adasani said he will send questions to the government regarding the issue and warned that he will hold the prime minister and the interior minister to account if they do not provide sufficient answers.

The court of cassation, the highest court in the country, on Tuesday supported the government's action in revoking the citizenship of former opposition Islamist MP Abdullah Al-Barghash and 57 of his family members. The court said that the judiciary was not competent to hear citizenship cases because it is a sovereign issue.

Separately, pro-government MP Hamad Al-Harashani yesterday launched a scathing attack against the parliamentary opposition, calling them liars and plotting to take over the country and bring down the government. He also accused the opposition of plotting to spread chaos in the country and called on national forces to confront them, saying that the aim of grilling former information and youth minister Sheikh Salman Al-Humoud Al-Sabah was not over the sports suspension but to revive corrupt elements he did not name.

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



TRUMP PAINTS DARK PICTURE IN DEFENSE OF BAN

The more Donald Trump tries to build support for his refugee and immigration ban, the darker the world seems to get. In defending his policies barring refugees and curbing immigration, the president is painting an increasingly ominous picture of the danger posed by Islamic extremists. In his speeches, tweets and an imposing new tally of what Trump calls an unreported "genocide" by the Islamic State group, he has raised the prospect of imminent attacks on the United States and cast the debate over safety as a clash between radical Islam and the West.

Yesterday, Trump took to Twitter to say that if the US doesn't win the court case over his travel ban, the country "can never have the security and safety to which we are entitled". To Trump's supporters, the president's dark warnings show that he has a clear-eyed view of the terror threat facing the US - a threat they believe Barack Obama downplayed. Trump's critics fear he is hyping one threat at the expense of others.

Islamic extremism is "an enemy that celebrates death and totally worships destruction," Trump said Monday while visiting the headquarters of the military's Central Command. The list his administration is circulating highlights the debate. The White House points to the 78 incidents as evidence that the news media are intentionally downplaying the dangers of the Islamic State group. "Most" incidents on the list haven't received sufficient attention, the White House says.

Trump's terror list, however, focuses only on attacks the White House says were "executed or inspired by" the Islamic State. Terrorism carried out in the name of other causes didn't make the list. For example, Trump's list does not include violence by Boko Haram, an Islamist insurgent group operating in West Africa that pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in 2015. It is responsible for far more deaths than IS, including suicide bombings, mass shootings and massacres of civilians in Nigeria and neighboring countries.

The White House list also leaves off last month's attack on a mosque in Quebec, where six Muslim men were shot and killed. A French Canadian man known for far-right, nationalist views has been charged and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has called it an act of terrorism against Muslims. The White House says Trump did call Trudeau to express condolences. But his failing to mention it now appears to reflect his narrow focus on the Islamic State. Although he has been vague about his plans for countering the Islamic State in its strongholds in Iraq and Syria, he has moved swiftly to try to keep the group's followers out of the United States, signing an executive order in his first week in office that banned all entries from seven Muslim-majority countries with terror ties. Trump's directive also halted the entire US refugee program for four months and banned Syrians from the US indefinitely.

Personal attack

The ban is now held up in the courts, prompting a fierce response from the president. In a strikingly personal attack on the judiciary, Trump said the judge should bear the blame if an attack occurs while his ban is paused. He's warned that the court order has allowed people to start "pouring in" to the United States, despite the fact that those who do not currently hold legal visas must go through lengthy vetting procedures before entering the country. "ISIS said we are going to infiltrate the United States and other countries through the migration," Trump said during a White House meeting with sheriffs Tuesday. "And then we're not allowed to be tough on the people coming in? Explain that one."

Evelyn Farkas, who served as deputy assistant defense secretary during the Obama administration, argues that the president's warnings are creating "a level of concern that probably isn't warranted by the threats assessment." In recent years, federal law enforcement agencies have focused more on the threat posed by homegrown extremists - people, usually men, who are already in the US and who find themselves attracted to Islamic State propaganda of violence and mayhem. Still, officials concede that it's impossible to guarantee a mistake-free screening process for people seeking to come to the US, particularly given the paucity of information sometimes available on people entering from Syria.

White House spokesman Sean Spicer says the president isn't trying to scare Americans. Still, he said forebodingly on Tuesday, "The earth is a very dangerous place." The president's intense focus on Islamist terrorism is shared by some of his top aides, including National Security Adviser Michael Flynn and chief strategist Steve Bannon, who was one of the architects of the refugee ban. Flynn has called Islam a "political ideology" and said it "hides behind being a religion."

Trump's rhetoric marks a sharp shift from his most recent predecessors. In the aftermath of the Sept 11, 2001, attacks, President George W Bush emphasized that the US was not at war with Muslims. Obama refused to use the term "radical Islamic extremism," arguing that it validated terrorists who claimed they were acting on behalf of their faith. The contrast between Trump and Obama is particularly striking. —AP

TRUMP ACCUSER FOLLOWS COSBY PLAYBOOK

When former reality television contestant Summer Zervos accused Donald Trump of sexual misconduct last fall, she pursued her claims solely in the court of public opinion, since the allegations dated too far back to allow a lawsuit. But last month, she found a fresh approach to fight the former host of "The Apprentice," who has vehemently denied her allegations that he groped her in 2007. By professing his innocence, the man who is now president of the United States had effectively called her a liar, Zervos alleges in a defamation lawsuit.

The suit copied a rare legal tactic employed most notably by several women who have accused the actor and comedian Bill Cosby of sexual assault: using his denials as the basis for a defamation claim. It is not uncommon for high-profile allegations against celebrities to prompt defamation lawsuits, but they are usually filed by the star against the accuser. In 2014, however, Joseph Cammarata, the attorney for Cosby accuser Tamara Green, realized he could adapt that strategy for his own purposes after Cosby's lawyer issued a statement calling the allegations "fantastical."

Like many other Cosby accusers, Green

was unable to sue for assault because the alleged incident occurred decades ago. "A direct claim for the assault is not available, so I came up with the idea that a defamation claim would be the appropriate vehicle to use to address the underlying harm," said Cammarata, whose lawsuit now includes seven Cosby accusers as plaintiffs. All told, 10 Cosby accusers filed four defamation lawsuits in three states.

In simple terms, the argument is that Trump and Cosby have effectively branded the women as liars by denying the incidents occurred. But the women face a difficult challenge in making their cases, experts say. "Merely saying, 'I didn't do it,' is traditionally not seen in defamation law as calling your accuser a liar, even though logically that's what it means," said Rod Smolla, dean of the Delaware Law School and a First Amendment scholar. "But if you go beyond that - if you go from, 'I didn't do it,' to, 'She's a liar,' now you have arguably made a statement of fact" that could be subject to liability, he added.

Trump's status as president does not shield him from civil liability for actions he took prior to assuming office. In a statement on Tuesday, the attorney defending Trump in the Zervos lawsuit, Marc Kasowitz, said he and Trump's personal lawyer would soon file a response to the lawsuit. "President Trump continues to

deny any allegation of wrongdoing raised in said complaint," he said. Cosby, 79, who faces allegations of sexual misconduct from approximately 50 women, has also denied any wrongdoing.

Burden of proof

The Cosby and Trump plaintiffs are taking on a tough double burden, experts said. First, the only way to show the denials by both men are untrue is to prove the incidents took place as described. "The burden is going to be on her to show that Trump is actually saying something that's false," Clay Calvert, a First Amendment expert at the University of Florida, said of Zervos. In addition, the women must show Trump and Cosby crossed the line into defamation by deliberately making false statements that seriously harmed the accusers' reputations.

In defamation cases, courts typically examine statements to determine whether they were factual or opinion, as expressing an opinion is generally protected by the First Amendment. Making that distinction can be challenging. In the Cosby cases, for instance, judges have split on whether the lawsuits should proceed, even coming to opposite conclusions regarding the same statement from his attorney.

US District Judge Mark Mastroianni in Massachusetts rejected Cosby's attempts to have two cases, including Green's lawsuit, thrown out. In his rulings,

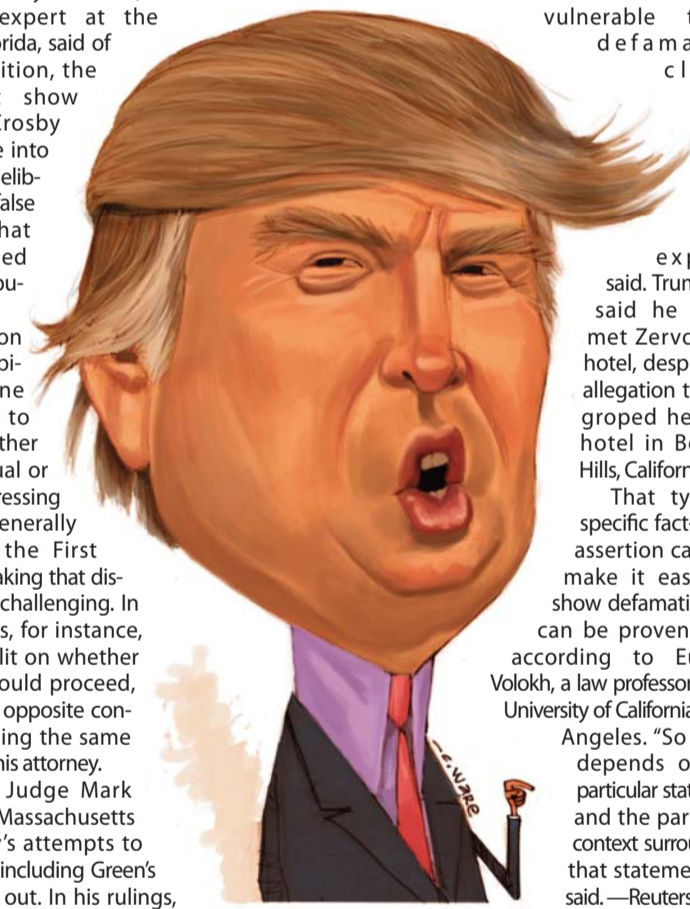
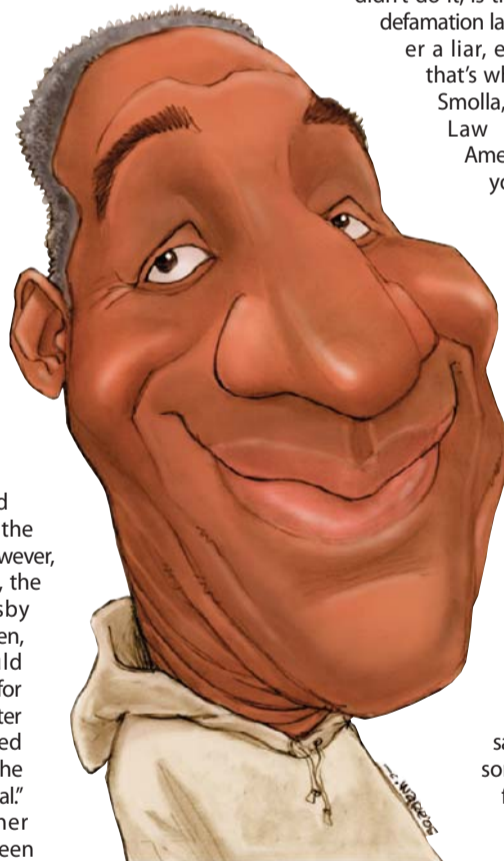
the judge found that a November 2014 statement from Cosby's lawyer calling the allegations "unsubstantiated, fantastical stories" could be reasonably seen as factual, and therefore potentially defamatory. By contrast, a Pittsburgh federal judge, Arthur Schwab, tossed a similar case against Cosby, finding that the same statement was "pure opinion" and thus protected.

Unlike Cosby, who has been fairly circumspect in his public statements, Trump has aggressively attacked his accusers, calling the claims "100 percent fabricated and made-up." His rhetoric could make him more vulnerable to a defamation claim,

experts

said. Trump has said he never met Zervos at a hotel, despite her allegation that he groped her at a hotel in Beverly Hills, California.

That type of specific fact-based assertion can also make it easier to show defamation if it can be proven false, according to Eugene Volokh, a law professor at the University of California in Los Angeles. "So much depends on the particular statement and the particular context surrounding that statement," he said. —Reuters



VISA CHANGES COULD STUNT US-INDIA TIES

The US and India seem like a natural fit in the Trump era: rambunctious democracies, led by populists, focused on economic growth and fighting radical Islam. It's a budding partnership that could be set back by a nuts-and-bolts dispute over employment visas. As US President Donald Trump looks to help American workers, his administration is considering a broad review of a visa program used heavily by India's massive technology and outsourcing industries to send programmers and other computer specialists to the United States. Speculation about tougher rules on so-called H-1B visas sent tech stocks tumbling in India last week, and compounded concerns about the protectionist direction of US policy after Trump temporarily suspended immigration from seven Muslim-majority countries. The technology sector is vital for India's economy and creating jobs for a fast-growing, young workforce - a top priority for Hindu nationalist Prime Minister Narendra Modi. America is the main customer: It accounted for more than 60 percent of India's \$108 billion in foreign tech and outsourcing sales last year, according to the National Association of Software and Service Companies, an Indian industry lobby group.

"There is a general sense of anxiety in the industry," said Dipen Shah, an IT analyst at Kotak Securities in India. He said it seemed likely that the cost of hiring people on H-1B visas would increase, hurting tech companies' bottom lines. A draft executive order prepared by Trump's team is short on specifics. It calls for a report within nine months on the injury caused to US workers by several working visa categories, including H-1B, and a re-consideration of how to allocate the visas to ensure they go to "the best and the brightest."

The US government grants up to 85,000 of these visas each year. They're open to a broad range of occupations and recipients who can stay

in the country for up to six years. First Lady Melania Trump, who comes from Slovenia, had one as a fashion model in the 1990s. The top occupations, however, are tech-related and about 70 percent of the recipients are Indian.

Critics say the program is abused, with many companies contracting out jobs to consulting firms that bring in lower-paid workers from overseas. Employees on H-1B visas are unable to change employers. Critics say that leaves them with little leverage to negotiate their salaries. Trump's nominee for attorney general, Sen Jeff Sessions, has long opposed the program, and there's bipartisan congressional support for reform.

Advocates say the visa program allows companies to fill skills shortages and encourages students with hi-tech degrees to stay in the US and

set up companies of their own. Vinson Palathingal, who runs a mid-sized, US-based IT consulting company, said the administration's priority should be training American workers to address skills shortages, and developing a quicker path to permanent residency for Indian talent. Without those steps, he said, restricting H-1B visas would mean tech jobs leaving the US.

Concern

India's government wants more of the visas to be issued, not less. After visa fees were hiked in late 2015, India challenged the US at the World Trade Organization - a rare instance in which one WTO member contended that another's immigration laws violated international trade rules. "Limitations on this visa are sure to cause of a lot

concern in Delhi and that will be conveyed in fairly strong terms to Washington," said Rick Rossow, an India specialist at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

"The question is how much is the Indian government willing to put on the table to represent corporate interests in its discussions with the US," said Bharath Gopalaswamy, director of the South Asia program at the Atlantic Council, another Washington-based think tank. "I don't think they will bet all their chips on this."

Over the past decade, India shifted from a Cold War-era foreign policy of non-alignment to become more comfortable as Washington's partner. Its military, long reliant on Russian weaponry, is being modernized with US help. Modi has called the US an "indispensable partner". India hopes Trump's vow to take a harder line on Islamic extremism will mean a tougher stance on Pakistan over militants that India blames for launching attacks on its territory. It also shares Washington's concern about a rising China and would favor an effort by Trump to improve ties with Russia.

But economic interests are paramount. India's Foreign Ministry spokesman Vikas Swarup said last week that it had raised the visa issue with Trump's administration and Congress at "senior levels". The heads of India's biggest IT companies plan to visit Washington this month to make their case to US officials and lawmakers.

N R Narayana Murthy, co-founder of the Indian tech giant Infosys, cautioned that the Indian software industry's role in building and maintaining the information infrastructure of major US corporations is critical to their success. "Tampering with it is not going to be easy," he said. He said Indian tech businesses will have to adapt by depending less on visas for Indian workers and hiring more Americans. —AP



In this Nov 10, 2016 photo, an Indian vendor who sells snacks and chewable tobacco reads a Gujarati language newspaper that has the headline "this time Trump government" in Ahmadabad, India. —AP

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JESUS DELIGHTED BY FLYING CITY START

LONDON: Manchester City striker Gabriel Jesus said yesterday he had been "surprised" by his extraordinary start to life in the Premier League. The 19-year-old rising star arrived in England last month after City agreed a deal with Brazilian side Palmeiras in pre-season. While some overseas players take time to adjust to the physicality and pace of the Premier League, Jesus has settled in immediately with three goals in four appearances, including a double in Sunday's 2-1 win at home to Swansea. Such has been his impact, he has kept Argentina ace Sergio Agüero out of the side for the last two matches, which has in turn led to speculation about the Argentine striker's future at Eastlands. "Yes, I am very surprised," Jesus told *mancity.com* when asked how things had gone since he joined the club. "Although I work a lot every single day, with everyone's support, in order for that to happen. I am very happy. Each day I feel that I am adjusting really well, with the support of everyone in the club. —AFP



OLYMPICS

TOKYO 2020 BID CHIEF QUIZZED OVER PAYMENTS

TOKYO: Japanese prosecutors have questioned Japan's Olympic chief and other officials over millions of dollars in payments made during Tokyo's successful bid to host the 2020 Olympics, reports said yesterday. Japanese Olympic Committee (JOC) president Tsunekazu Takeda, who also led the Tokyo bid, was among those quizzed in recent weeks at the request of French investigators, the *Yomiuri Shimbun* reported. French authorities said in May last year that they were investigating the 2.8 million Singapore dollar (1.8 million euros, \$2 million) payments to a Singapore-based consultancy. Japanese officials have consistently denied wrongdoing and have said that the payments were for consulting services. The two payments, linked to a son of disgraced ex-world athletics chief Lamine Diack, were made either side of Tokyo winning the hosting rights at a vote in Buenos Aires in September 2013. "Having no recognition of the violation

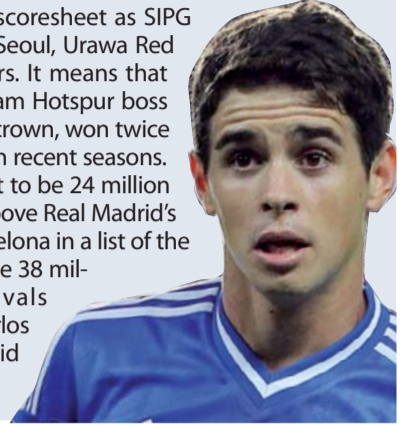
of laws nor bribery, I have told (prosecutors) the same explanation I've given (previously)," Takeda told the *Yomiuri*. Private broadcaster Nippon TV carried a similar story. A JOC investigation reported last September that it had found no evidence of bribery by Japanese officials in the case. Diack, whose son Papa Massata Diack has denied receiving the money, was an International Olympic Committee (IOC) member at the time of the Tokyo bid. The Tokyo prosecutors office declined to comment, while JOC officials and Tokyo 2020 organisers could not immediately confirm the reports. "The Tokyo 2020 Organising Committee has no means of knowing the bid committee's activities," the organising committee said in an email to AFP. Allegations the payments were improper were first reported by Britain's *Guardian* newspaper in last May. Tokyo beat Istanbul and Madrid for the right to host the 2020 Games. —AFP

JAPAN CLUB 'BAFFLED' OVER SEXISM ROW

TOKYO: The chairman of the Japanese golf club set to host the sport at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics said they are bewildered by requests to lift its ban on women becoming full members. Kasumigaseki Country Club in Saitama, north of Tokyo, postponed a decision to review its membership policy following a board meeting on Tuesday after the club came under fire from Tokyo's female governor Yuriko Koike. The governor said she felt "uncomfortable that women cannot become full members in the 21st century," while the International Olympic Committee also expressed concerns about the rule. Tokyo organisers have also filed a written request to the golf club to change the rule, a Tokyo 2020 official told AFP yesterday. A meeting to discuss requests to drop its ban on full female members ended with no firm decision, according to public broadcasters NHK. "It's extremely annoying the situation has evolved into what it is so quickly," board chairman Kiichi Kimura told local media. "There was no decision and we will discuss it further. "We are baffled, that's our situation right now," he said. —AFP

OSCAR SHOWS GOLDEN TOUCH FOR SHANGHAI

SHANGHAI: Megabucks import Oscar began repaying some of his hefty price tag when he scored on his competitive debut for Shanghai SIPG, helping them seal a spot in the AFC Champions League group stage. The Brazil midfielder, who quit Chelsea in a 60 million euro (\$64 million) deal, rolled in SIPG's opener in Tuesday's 3-0 play-off victory over Thailand's Sukhothai FC. Fellow Brazilian Elkeson also got on the scoresheet as SIPG took their place in Group F alongside FC Seoul, Urawa Red Diamonds and Western Sydney Wanderers. It means that SIPG, coached by ex-Chelsea and Tottenham Hotspur boss Andre Villas-Boas, get a shot at Asia's club crown, won twice by Chinese rivals Guangzhou Evergrande in recent seasons. Oscar's deal with Shanghai SIPG is thought to be 24 million euros a season — which would put him above Real Madrid's Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi of Barcelona in a list of the world's best-paid players. It is still below the 38 million euros reportedly paid by city rivals Shanghai Shenhua to Argentine striker Carlos Tevez, which rates him as the highest paid footballer on the planet. —AFP



ST MORITZ: From left to right, Silver medalist Kjetil Jansrud of Norway, Gold medalist Erik Guay of Canada and Bronze medalist Manuel Osborne-Paradis of Canada, celebrate on the podium during the flower ceremony after the men's Super-G at the 2017 Alpine Skiing World Championships in St Moritz, Switzerland, yesterday. — AP

ALPINE SKIING

EMOTIONAL GUAY TRUMPS JANSRUD IN SUPER-G UPSET

ST MORITZ: Canada's Erik Guay capped his return from an injury nightmare to claim an emotional second world title when he surprised the field to win the men's super-G in St Moritz yesterday. The 35-year-old, the 2011 world downhill champion in Garmisch, timed 1min 25.38sec down the 1.9km-long Corviglia course in overcast conditions and admitted to tears after streaking into the finish area. Norway's Kjetil Jansrud, the reigning Olympic super-G gold medalist and winner of three super-Gs this season, claimed silver, at 0.45sec, with another Canadian, Manuel Osborne-Paradis, taking bronze on his 33rd birthday (+0.51sec). "It's incredible," said Guay, who best mastered the flat light and at-times rolling course that saw a handful of favoured racers ski out including Olympic downhill champion Mathias Mayer, winner of the Kitzbuehel super-G. Guay, who had a big crash last week in Garmisch, has notched up just five World Cup wins in his long career, the last coming in the Kvitfjell downhill in March 2014 before undergoing knee surgery that summer that almost saw him end his life as a ski racer. "It's just the whole history with coming back from injuries... coming back here and forgetting about everything and enjoying it," said the Quebec native, who finished third in last season's World Cup downhill final in St Moritz. "Happy as can be. It's incredible to be on the podium with Jansrud and Manny, two close friends."

of it well that would be it," he said. "It's the beauty of racing. "It feels so good... To share it with Erik, I think I was able to get third because he won, I was so jazzed at the start, I had so much

energy, it was pretty cool." Osborne-Paradis edged out a second "attacking Viking" in the shape of Aleksander Aamodt Kilde by three-hundredths of a second. — AFP

'REAL TEAM EFFORT'

Guay added: "You hear it often in sports that it's a team effort, but in this case it really is a team effort. "I have to thank my therapists and doctors and coaches for getting me in the right mental space: all the people behind the scenes who helped to get me here. "When I crossed the line and I saw the crowd react, everyone standing up and cheering, I knew that something good had just happened. "I turned sideways and saw the green light. To finish 0.45 seconds in front of Jansrud is incredible, he's such an unbelievable skier and has been dominating super-G. "I was quite emotional and was glad I had googles on so no one saw my eyes." Jansrud expressed his delight at silver, saying he would now focus on Saturday's blue-riband downhill. "I always want to aim for the gold, but Erik today showed us how it was supposed to be done. It was very impressive by him," the Norwegian said. "I'm not feeling any disappointment, I'm very happy with the silver. "I've been struggling a little bit with preparation coming into the world champs with sickness, but it's a perfect day for me and I am now looking forward to the downhill." Osborne-Paradis made the most of improving light from his start bib number of 26, describing his bronze medal as "the best birthday present." "I made a big mistake in the middle of the course and I knew if I didn't ski the rest

STUHEC TOPS WOMEN'S DOWNHILL TRAINING

ST MORITZ: Slovenia's Ilka Stuhec laid down a marker for Sunday's world championship downhill by topping times in yesterday's training in St Moritz. Stuhec, winner of five races this season including three downhills and a super-G, timed 1min 34.53sec. Swiss duo Fabienne Suter and Lara Gut, bronze medalist in the super-G, came in second and third, with three other teammates in the top 10. "The slope is really nice, it has a lot of terrain and jumps, so it's fun to ski," said Stuhec, who leads the World Cup downhill standings. "Every day will be different and everyone will be pushing more." American speed queen Lindsey Vonn skied out of Tuesday's super-G, but was left satisfied with her training session in which she finished 11th, 2.34sec off the Slovenian's pace. "I just wanted to get a feeling for the course," the 32-year-old said. "I wanted to ski down solid and build my confidence, have a first look. "I took it easy on some of the jumps because I didn't know what to expect and with this light it was hard to see the ground. "When the light is good it's going to be really, really fun. "Training is a good time to get a feeling for the snow and terrain," said Vonn, who was set for her first slalom practice Wednesday in a very long time ahead of possible participation

in Friday's alpine combined event. **SHORT NIGHT** Super-G gold medalist Nicole Schmidhofer admitted that celebrations after her shock victory on Tuesday meant a poor showing in training, coming in 4.57sec off Stuhec. "It was not so good," she said. "It was very slow because the night was really short! "So it wasn't really a training run for me." Liechtenstein's Tina Weirather claimed silver behind Schmidhofer and acknowledged that she had suffered the same relatively sleepless experience after medalling in the women's opening event of the February 6-19 world championships. "I wanted to go really easy today because I have some more training runs before my race Sunday," she said of the downhill proper. "I wanted to save some energy because I'm a bit tired from yesterday. It was a full day, I got to bed pretty late and wasn't really able to sleep because I was so fired up." Among other favourites, Austrian Ann Veith and Italian duo Sofia Goggia and Elena Curtoni all safely negotiated the course although Austrian Mirjam Puchner crashed out. The women have two more downhill training sessions, scheduled for tomorrow. — AFP



Ilka Stuhec

'GHOST SKIER' LEADS WINTER GAMES DATA REVOLUTION

ST. MORITZ: A "ghost skier" hurtling down the slope, an athlete's glucose levels flashing across the screen along with his heart rate—it is all part of an Olympic data revolution awaiting television viewers. With the one-year countdown to the Pyeongchang Winter Games starting today, European broadcaster Eurosport along with counterparts in North America and Japan are racing to get their gadgets ready and approved by the International Olympic Committee and athletes. Peter Hutton, chief executive of Eurosport, said 2018 Games viewers next year would see a "major jump" in the volume of data compared to Sochi in 2014. "The amount of data on screen will be revolutionary," he said. Broadcasters want the "ghost skier" on the screen to show how far a competitor is in front, or behind, the leading time. Just as the super-imposed line that showed the world record time has improved TV viewing of swimming, Hutton and others believe the Winter Games is also ripe for reform. The swimming line was simple but added clarity, Hutton said. "If you can use ghost skiers or have a line to say where is the leader on the course, that explains the story so much better," he said, adding that viewers would no longer have to wait for split times. "The technology is still being tested, but we are really close to it." Rival firms are also working on performance patches worn by athletes that can transmit real-time information on medal contenders.

those patches be attached, what relevant information can we get out of them. "A lot of athletes are obviously suspicious of releasing data and that is something we need to work through with federations. "But the direction is very clear we should be able over the next year to see more and more analysis that says this person is generating more power than that person," said the veteran television sports executive. "If we can provide real information that educates people about what is going on in an athlete's body then we are really doing something interesting." Broadcasters still need to get the IOC and international federations to sign off on the data revolution. But Hutton said the International Ski Federation wants change. "They are clearly ambitious to integrate more data into what they do." For athletes, performance patches would be voluntary. But the broadcaster has already won over cycling with cameras on bikes. This has also been voluntary, but Hutton said riders are now asking to be the camera-carrier as it brings them more attention. "It makes them centre stage and athletes like being centre stage." Eurosport has a research unit also looking at cameras on helmets for skiers, virtual reality and other data experiments. "Fifty percent of what they do will never get out," he said. Eurosport, which paid 1.3 billion euros (\$1.4 billion) for the European rights on television and multimedia platforms to the Olympics for 2018-2024 is in contact with US giant NBC and Japanese broadcasters on the new technology, said Hutton. J.B. Perrette, president of Discovery International, the US parent company of Eurosport, said the new coverage would also aim to show more of the human side of Olympic stars. "The emotional side of the story extends well past the athletes. It extends to their families, it extends to their siblings, it extends to their kids in some cases. We have to find ways to tell their stories." — AFP

ATHLETES 'SUSPICIOUS'

These patches can reveal the heart rate and an athlete's position, but even detail such as glucose level—a key indicator of fatigue. "That is something that can make sport more understandable and at the same time more dramatic, whether it be cycling or tennis or winter sports," said Hutton. "We are having very similar conversations in all those sports now. Where can



SEOUL: Dancers in traditional costumes perform during the unveiling ceremony of the countdown clock for the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics in Seoul, South Korea, yesterday. Pyeongchang is the host city of the 2018 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games which will start from February 2018. — AP

PREVIEW

GIDLEY CALLS FOR SHOWPIECE CLASH AS SUPER LEAGUE RETURNS

LONDON: The new Super League season may promise excitement, drama and plenty of controversy, but Warrington Wolves star Kurt Gidley believes there is one key missing ingredient from English rugby league: a State of Origin showdown. The former Australia international, who is likely to line up in his side's opening match of the new season at Catalan Dragons on Saturday, knows all about the State of Origin having played for and captained New South Wales during his 14-year career with the Newcastle Knights.

TV Ratings may be up and match attendances solid in England, but rugby league still languishes behind football,

cricket and rugby union in the nation's sporting psyche.

And Gidley, who is hoping to help his side bounce back from October's Grand Final defeat to Wigan, thinks an English State of Origin match could make all the difference. "I think one of the greatest things about league in Australia is the State of Origin," he said.

"That's the pinnacle of every year and I'd love to see a similar thing here. I know they've trialled it before but I think Yorkshire v Lancashire, mid-year, would be great. "It could really work, you'd have two mates playing against each other and I think all league fans would get behind that. "It's up to us to play an

attractive game that people want to see.

"Playing at Old Trafford (in Manchester), the Four Nations final at Anfield (in Liverpool), hopefully we can, maybe not pinch some football fans, but encourage more fans to watch and enjoy league. "If you're a league fan, try to drag along a mate who maybe isn't a league fan to a game and we can change their minds. "There are some wonderful tries in the northern hemisphere game."

FIRST GLIMPSE

Defending champions Wigan open their campaign against Salford Red Devils, giving fans a first glimpse of Thomas Leuluai and George Williams's

exciting half-back partnership after the former returned to the club from New Zealand Warriors.

And captain Sean O'Loughlin admits they are not feeling any pressure, despite the 11 other sides targeting their crown. "It's always a nice position to be in, starting the season as the holders, but I think once you've got your hands on it everyone wants more," he said.

"The fans want to win it again, the players want to go out there and get it again so there's that little bit more pressure on us to perform."

Meanwhile, ahead of the opening game of the season against the defending champions, Salford half-back

Michael Dobson expects a hard-fought campaign.

"I think the competition has got a lot closer over time in terms of the players we've got and anyone can really beat anyone," said the former Canberra Raider.

"I think everyone is going to be a threat this year because the competition is so good." The season kicks off on Thursday as St Helens take on 2015 champions Leeds, with promoted side Leigh Centurions starting life in Super League on Friday away to Castleford.

The other Friday game sees Widnes host Huddersfield Giants, while on Sunday Wakefield host last year's Challenge Cup winners Hull FC.—AFP

GOLF

INSPIRED BY TIGER, ROOKIE JJ SPAUN MAKING EARLY MOVE

PEBBLE BEACH: JJ. Spaun remembers the red sweater, the 4-foot putt and the uppercut from Tiger Woods when he won the 1997 Masters.

Spaun was 6 years old. "He inspired me," Spaun said. "He inspired all of us from my generation to compete and be the best."

That explains why Spaun was nervous two weeks ago at Torrey Pines. The PGA Tour rookie who grew up in the Los Angeles area was sick when he arrived at the Farmers Insurance Open and had to rest on Monday. He played the South Course on Tuesday and because he wasn't in the pro-am, he walked the North Course with his caddie. When they got to the 14th hole, they noticed a huge crowd.

"I was like, 'Oh, that's Tiger. Let's stay out of the way,'" Spaun said. That would have worked except that he ran into Amy Bartlett, who works at Nike and told him to stick around so he could meet Woods.

"I said, 'No, no, no, no. I'm not meeting him.' I was too scared. And I didn't want to bug him."

Spaun said. "We were on 15 and he hits his tee ball. Amy gets his attention and says 'I want you to meet a fellow Nike guy who grew up in LA.' It was cool. We talked about the Rams, sports, where I went to school. He was really open, easy to get along with. It was totally not what I expected. I didn't think he would be that welcoming to a rookie. "He made me feel like I belonged

out there," he said. "It inspired me to play well. I wanted to play good to have a chance to play with him on the weekend."

Spaun did his part. He played so well that he was one shot behind Jon Rahm going into the final hole on Sunday when he made a careless mistake, hit the high side of the green and saw his ball spin back into the water, leading to a double bogey.

The difference between a birdie and a double bogey turned out to be \$556,100. It was Spaun's best finish on tour, yet he walked away frustrated until his coach and manager reminded him that a top 10 finish (he tied for ninth) at least got him into the Phoenix Open.

Spaun was right back to work, closing with a 67 to tie for fourth. He finished two shots out of the playoff won by Hideki Matsuyama. The rookie from San Diego State who spent five years working his way to the big leagues is on a roll going into Pebble Beach, coming off back-to-back top 10s. He needs one more to assure a spot at Riviera next week, his hometown tournament. He played it last year on the Charlie Sifford exemption.

And he can only hope Woods will be there in a playing capacity. Woods' foundation now runs the Genesis Open. Woods, who missed the cut at Torrey Pines, withdrew after one round in Dubai with back spasms. "I'm pulling for him hard," Spaun said.—AP

WORLD NUMBER ONE LYDIA KO CONFIRMS GILCHRIST AS COACH

WELLINGTON: Women's world number one Lydia Ko confirmed Gary Gilchrist as her new coach yesterday and said the South African had already "ripped apart" her swing ahead of her season debut in Australia next week.

New Zealander Ko said she had been working with Gilchrist for about a month, having parted ways with British swing guru David Leadbetter in December after a three-year association.

Gilchrist is already working with two of Ko's main rivals in Thai world number two Ariya Jutanugarn and Chinese world number four Shanshan Feng.

"When I talked to the other players that were with Gary, they told me he was very simple and wasn't very mechanical," the 19-year-old told local media in Auckland.

"That was the aspect I thought would be great. "I tried a few lessons with him and we ripped the swing apart. I think that was really important and it's been good to see the changes we've made. "I think if you looked at the swing, it might not look so different, but to me, it feels a little different. It kind of cleared up my mind and that's very important going forward."

Twice major champion Ko heads to next

week's Australian Open in Adelaide after having also changed her caddie and clubs after a disappointing finish to her 2016 season, the first lean period of her stellar career. She fired former caddie Jason Hamilton in October and hired South African Gary Matthews, former bag-man to Sergio Garcia. She parted ways with Callaway after signing a multi-million dollar deal with equipment maker PXG.

Ko has not tasted victory since the Marathon Classic in July and finished outside the top 40 in three of her last six LPGA starts. "I don't think I've been very worried about the changes because it almost takes me back to three years ago when I was a rookie," she said.

"When you're a rookie coming on tour, everything is new and exciting, so that's a similar mindset coming into this year too."

Ko added that she had no problem sharing Gilchrist's expertise with her tour rivals.

"Just because we're at that position in our rankings doesn't mean (Jutanugarn) hates me and I hate her. She's one of the sweetest players on tour," she said.

"I don't think it's necessarily a rivalry thing, but it gives me confidence he's a great coach."—Reuters



ROME: File photo shows Italy's Braam Steyn, left, tackles Wales' Alun Wyn Jones during a Six Nations rugby union international match between Italy and Wales at the Rome Olympic Stadium, on Feb 5, 2017.— AP

RUGBY

ENGLAND UP THERE WITH ALL BLACKS: WARBURTON

LONDON: Wales star Sam Warburton has compared arch-rivals England to world champions New Zealand ahead of their Six Nations clash in Cardiff on Saturday.

Grand Slam champions England will arrive in the Welsh capital aiming for a 16th successive Test match win against all opponents. The All Blacks hold the world record of 18 straight international wins by a tier-one nation but another Six Nations clean sweep this season would see England go one better.

"England are deservedly tagged as the best team in the northern hemisphere," Warburton told the BBC.

"It's a fair judgment to compare them to the All Blacks right now—that's how good they are. It is going to take a huge game out of us to get a win and it will be one of the biggest games of the championship for sure." Even when they are not one of the world's leading teams, England, for historical reasons, remain the one their European rivals want to beat above all others.

But they have become an even bigger target under Eddie Jones, with the Australian yet to lose a match as England boss after taking over after a 2015 World Cup where defeat by Wales prevented England getting out of the group stage and played a major role in the sacking of Stuart Lancaster. "If you're Wales the biggest game you play in the Six Nations is England," said back-row forward and former skipper Warburton. "If you're Scotland, it's England. If you're Ireland, it's England. Or if you're France or Italy, it's England," added Warburton, whose father was born in England.

"We know as players that's the one game the fans look forward to most and you sense that in the build-up. It's a huge occasion for everyone in Wales." England, who beat Wales twice in 2016, started the defence of their Six Nations title with an unconvincing 19-16 win against France at Twickenham on Saturday.

By contrast, Wales launched their Six Nations with a 33-7 win away to Italy the following day that included 30 unanswered points in the second half in Rome.

Warburton, back in the ranks this season after experienced lock Alun Wyn Jones was appointed captain by interim coach Rob Howley, could miss out on a starting berth against England if No 8 Taulupe Faletau recovers in time from a knee injury.

Ross Moriarty was at No 8 against Italy in a back-row featuring Warburton and Justin Tipuric. "The back-row competition is so fierce at the minute, I don't want to put pressure on him, but Toby (Faletau), when he's playing well, is one of the best players in the world," said Warburton.

"If he did come back I'm sure there would be a few selection headaches in the back-row because Ross and Justin went extremely well against Italy." England and Wales will name their teams today.—AFP

CHEIKA NOT BUGGING ALL BLACKS FOR AN APOLOGY

SYDNEY: Wallabies coach Michael Cheika yesterday said he's not expecting an apology from New Zealand after a security consultant employed by the All Blacks was charged with bugging their hotel before last year's Sydney Test against Australia.

Cheika welcomed the news that police had laid charges of public mischief after a listening device was discovered in the All Blacks' hotel. New Zealand coach Steve Hansen has labelled the charge as "bizarre and unbelievable". Asked whether he wanted an apology from New Zealand, Cheika told the Sydney Morning Herald: "I'm not expecting anything, I don't think that's necessary. They made a call."

"They made their play and the police have shown that to be a different outcome to what maybe that inference was but I don't expect anything like an apology."

"I'd forgotten about it really and then it came up. I was surprised they (police) were still onto it but there was an investigation to be had and they did their business and came up with that solution and that outcome. "I knew one thing was definite... the inference was that we were involved, I know that was ridiculous. I knew that would be in the final outcome." Adrian Gard, who has worked as a security consultant for the All Blacks for a

number of years, will appear in a Sydney court on March 21. Australian Rugby Union chief Bill Pulver said it had left a "bitter taste" that the story broke on the morning of the Test, which New Zealand won 42-8, although the bug was reportedly found five days earlier. Cheika said it was reassuring that no one from Australian rugby had been linked to any kind of espionage.

"It's not nice to have to answer questions from police and stuff like that, especially when you've got absolutely nothing to do with it," Cheika said. "I certainly didn't think that (a charge being laid) would happen. I'm surprised. I'll be interested to see what happens from here." Cheika also hosed down suggestions that relations between Australian and New Zealand rugby were at their lowest ebb.

"I don't see that there's any great all-time low or anything like that... it is what it is," Cheika said.

"I'm not going to gain anything out of carrying it with me or having a chip on my shoulder about it. "Everyone listened and some agreed, some gave me grief, and that was it. Carrying it on is not worth it. The thing I need to carry is more the result of that day, not worrying about who was doing what."—AFP



Coach Michael Cheika



Lydia Ko

39 SIXES AS INDIAN BATSMAN HITS T20 TRIPLE TON

NEW DELHI: A little-known batsman made headlines across India yesterday after scoring an unbeaten triple century in a Twenty20 match, a knock which included a staggering 39 sixes. Mohit Ahlawat also smashed 14 fours in his 72-ball 300 — thought to be the first T20 triple century—which has earned him a trial with the Delhi Daredevils for next month's glitzy Indian Premier League (IPL).

Ahlawat, who hails from a family of

farmers, hammered the hapless bowlers from a team called Friends XI to all corners of the ground in east Delhi on Tuesday. The 21-year-old was playing for the Maavi XI, a semi-professional team which had invited him to join them for a league match at the last moment. "They invited me to play and I simply went. It's good that something like that has happened," Ahlawat told The Times of India newspaper. "When I reached 150, I told myself 250 was there

for the taking. So I told my partner at the other end that I was going to take most of the strike."

His last 50 runs came off the final two overs, leaving him unbeaten on exactly 300 as his team finished on 416 for two. Friends XI only managed 200 in reply.

Sanjay Bhardwaj, Ahlawat's coach at the LB Shastri Cricket Academy in Delhi, said he was not surprised by his protégé's heroics. "This doesn't surprise me. He is an aggressive batsman who hits it

long but also has a clear sense of the game," Bhardwaj told AFP.

Bhardwaj, who has coached several Indian players including the opener Gautam Gambhir, said news of Ahlawat's barnstorming knock had spread so quickly that he had already been tapped up by the Delhi Daredevils.

"You won't be able to reach him on the phone today as the Daredevils called him for a trial after they heard of his knock," Bhardwaj said.

It is the first time that anyone is believed to have hit a triple century in a T20 game, although it was not classified as a first class match.

The highest score recorded in a first-class T20 was the West Indian batsman Chris Gayle's 175 while playing for the Royal Challengers Bangalore in the 2013 IPL. Australia's Aaron Finch holds the record for the highest score in a T20 international after hitting 156 against England in 2013. — AFP

IMPROVED BANGLADESH SEEK MORE 'ACID TESTS'

HYDERABAD: After finally winning respect of the game's big boys on home turf, Bangladesh now face the challenge of competing with the best away from home when their debut Test in India begins today. "What they've got to do is to start winning outside of their own country," legendary all-rounder Ian Botham told AFP after Bangladesh's first Test win over England in Dhaka in October. "That's the acid test."

Since gaining full status in 2000, Bangladesh have won just three out of 44 Tests on foreign soil, two of them in 2009 against a West Indies team depleted by a players' strike. Their only other win was over Zimbabwe. Even after the morale boost of their breakthrough victory against England, they lost both Tests on January's tour of New Zealand.

They declared at 595 for eight in the first Test in Wellington and still contrived to lose by seven wickets after being dismissed for 160 second time round.

That collapse pointed to both a mental fragility and an inability among batsmen more used to playing spin to adapt to seaming pitches. Former Bangladesh captain Habibul Bashar, who is now a selector, told AFP that the biggest problem was a lack of matches. "Away Tests are difficult for every team, not just for us," said Bashar, a veteran of Bangladesh's inaugural Test against India in Dhaka.

ENCOURAGING SIGNS

"Recently we've started playing well... but we don't play many away matches. If that were to change then the scenario could be different." While India's long-awaited decision to host Bangladesh represents something of a breakthrough, it is still only a one-off match and illustrates the reluctance of teams to find space in their schedules. Besides bottom-ranked Zimbabwe, the last team to play a three-match series against Bangladesh was Sri Lanka in 2007 while their one and only tour of Australia was in 2003.

There is little doubt that Bangladesh

have markedly improved since then, especially in the one-day format where they have won home series against India, South Africa, Pakistan, New Zealand and the West Indies in the last five years.

There have also been encouraging signs in Tests with last year's 1-1 result against England following draws in rain-affected home series against India and South Africa in 2015. The lack of opportunity to play away from home is beginning to rankle.

'GIVE US MORE'

"Every other country has given us two Tests but they are just giving us one and that's only because they couldn't give us any less," former skipper Mohammed Ashraful said of India's one-off invitation.

"Let's hope our boys play well and then they'll have to give us more next time," Ashraful, who is on the comeback trail after a match-fixing ban, told AFP.

With Tamim Iqbal and Imrul Kayes at the top of the order, Bangladesh have quality batsmen while Shakib Al Hasan is a classy all-rounder.

But their big failure has been to develop fast bowlers who can thrive overseas, and none of their pacemen have taken 100 Test wickets. Their most successful fast bowler, Mashrafe Mortaza, has not played a Test since 2009 due to a long-running knee problem and their latest pace starlet, Mustafizur Rahman, has also been plagued by injury. "To win a Test match you need to have a quality bowling attack, which we don't have at the moment," said Bashar.

But former India wicketkeeper Saba Karim, who played in the inaugural Test in 2000, said the team still ranked ninth out of 10 in the Test rankings does not lack talent.

"They actually surprised us with their performance in Dhaka by putting up 400 in the first innings," Karim recalled of the 2000 Test. "Having said that I expected more rapid progress in terms of their consistency and performance in Test matches and that has not come about," he said. "They have not done justice to the kind of talent they have in their country." — AFP



RAJKOT: In this Sunday, Nov. 13, 2016 file photo, England's cricket captain Alastair Cook gestures after scoring century on the fifth day of the first cricket test match between India and England in Rajkot, India. Alastair Cook has resigned as England's Test captain after a disappointing 2016. — AP

CRICKET

COOK TO BAT ON DESPITE QUITTING CAPTAINCY

LONDON: "It's not an obituary, I still will be around," Alastair Cook said on Tuesday as he vowed to continue his Test career despite resigning as England captain.

Opening batsman Cook stood down as skipper after an England record 59 matches in charge. But the 32-year-old Essex left-hander, already England's all-time leading Test run-scorer with 11,057 runs from 140 matches at an average of 46.45, including 30 hundreds, insisted he was far from spent as a player. "I really hope I am here in four or five years' time because it means I've scored some runs and England are doing well," Cook told reporters at Lord's as he gave his first detailed explanation for resigning the captaincy. "I genuinely love playing cricket," he said. "I really enjoyed the challenge of captaincy... I couldn't give the required level anymore but I can certainly do that to my batting."

"Hopefully, the new guys will let me lead in a slightly different way," added Cook, a potential mentor to fledgling England openers Haseeb Hameed and Keaton Jennings, who both made their Test debuts in 2016.

The increasing strain of Cook's four-and-a-half year spell as full-time England captain was evident from the fact he managed seven hundreds in his first 11 Tests as skipper, but only five in his last 48. "It (resigning) will probably give me a bit

more time to dedicate to it (batting)," said Cook, who made a hundred on his Test debut against India in Nagpur in 2006.

'I was done'

For all that Cook oversaw series wins in India (2012) and South Africa (2016) as well as the 2013 and 2015 home Ashes triumphs, England stuttered last year.

In 2016, England lost eight of their 17 Tests—including a maiden defeat by Bangladesh.

The year ended in a 4-0 series loss in India that marked the end for Cook, obdurate and generally well-liked by his team-mates if not always tactically innovative, as England captain.

"It was easy (resigning) because I felt, unfortunately, that I was done," said Cook. "I think getting on that plane, leaving India, if I was brutally honest, I would have been very surprised if I captained (England) again." England's next Test is not until their July 6 clash against South Africa at Lord's. "You could have had those six months when you're sitting there and the pressure's off, you are not playing cricket, you can kid yourself a bit (to carry on as captain), but unfortunately I wasn't for kidding," said Cook.

Although England chief Andrew Strauss, Cook's predecessor as captain, has so far refused to confirm vice-captain Joe Root as the new Test

skipper, the Yorkshire batsman remains the overwhelming favourite for the role.

Former England spinner Graeme Swann believes the 26-year-old Root should continue to be "the best batsman this country has ever produced" without "the burden" of being captain.

But Cook countered those concerns by pointing to the example set by several of Root's world-class contemporaries, whose batting had been "driven to another level" since becoming a Test captain. "Virat Kohli (India) for example has flourished, Steve Smith (Australia) has flourished, Kane Williamson (New Zealand) as well," said Cook. "The fact he (Root) has been vice-captain for the last two years makes him the most likely candidate." After the South Africa series, this year England also face the West Indies at home before travelling to Australia in defence of the Ashes. When England won the 2010/11 Ashes in Australia, Cook scored a mammoth 766 runs at an average of over 127, including three hundreds. But in 2013/14, England's last Ashes series 'Down Under', saw them routed 5-0 with Cook, now captain, averaging a meagre 24.60.

"It would be nice to win in Australia," said Cook. "It was great in 2010, an incredibly special moment. "The talent is there but we will have to play some great cricket because they (Australia) are very hard to beat at home," he added. — AFP



HYDERABAD: Bangladesh captain Mushfiqur Rahim dives to catch the ball during a practice session on the eve of a Test match between India and Bangladesh at the Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium in Hyderabad. — AFP

SOUTH AFRICA STICK TO WINNING FORMULA

JOHANNESBURG: South Africa yesterday retained the squad that has outplayed Sri Lanka in a one-day series for the limited-overs section of a tour of New Zealand starting next week. The same 14 players lead Sri Lanka 4-0 in a five-match home series. The final match is in Centurion tomorrow and the squad will leave for New Zealand the next day.

Fast bowler Dane Paterson was added as cover for all-rounder Dwaine Pretorius, who will miss the only Twenty20 international in Auckland on February 17 and the first one-day in Hamilton on February 19 because his wife is expecting their first child.

Paterson will return home when Pretorius joins the tour. Batsman David Miller, ruled out of the last three matches of the Sri Lanka series because of a finger injury, is fit to travel but fast bowler Lungi Ngidi, who suffered a hip injury during the Twenty20 series against Sri Lanka, has not

recovered. The squad will do duty for the Twenty20 international and five one-day internationals. A squad for three Test matches will be announced later. Cricket South Africa selection convener Linda Zondi said: "We are very happy with the way the squad has jelled over the past six months and consistency in selection is very important as we continue our build-up towards the ICC Champions Trophy tournament (in England in June). "New Zealand are playing very good cricket at the moment and as always will provide very tough opposition, particularly under their home conditions."

South African squad: AB de Villiers (one-day international captain), Faf du Plessis (T20 international captain), Hashim Amla, Farhaan Behardien, Quinton de Kock (wkt), JP Duminy, Imran Tahir, David Miller, Chris Morris, Wayne Parnell, Dane Paterson, Andile Phehlukwayo, Dwaine Pretorius, Kagiso Rabada, Tabraiz Shamsi. — AFP

TRIPLE TON NOT ENOUGH FOR NAIR, RAHANE TO RETURN

HYDERABAD: Karun Nair's triple century in his previous test was not enough to secure his place in the India team for their one-off test against Bangladesh beginning at Hyderabad today. Replacing an injured Ajinkya Rahane, Nair smashed 303 not out in India's last test match in Chennai to help secure the team's 4-0 series victory against England in December.

With Rahane having recovered from the finger injury that kept him out of the last two tests against England, Nair will now have to wait at least until the home series against Australia to play his fourth test.

"I feel one game does not overshadow two years of hard work from another player," India captain Virat Kohli said yesterday.

"You need to understand what Jinks (Rahane) has done for the team over the past

two years. He averages almost 50 in this format and is probably the most solid batsman in the team in the test format. We look at him from that point of view certainly."

"Karun was stepping into his shoes and what he did was remarkable... but you can't overlook two years of hard work from Ajinkya. He deserved to walk back into the team whenever he got fit." Currently the top test team with a formidable home record, India are overwhelming favourites in the one-off match against a side eight rungs lower in the official rankings. Bangladesh are particularly handicapped by their limited test exposure and the team managed to lose a test match in Wellington last month despite scoring almost 600 in their first innings.

It was yet another instance of their batting

inconsistency but Kohli refused to be complacent. "It's an equal battle, you can't discount Bangladesh batting," said the 28-year-old.

"They did really well in New Zealand... Scoring more than 350 runs in one day was phenomenal and going at four-and-half throughout the day was something very special. "We can't take any aspect of their team lightly. We need to play the same way that we played against any other team in the world. Bangladesh do have many quality players."

Bangladesh enjoyed an unbeaten run in six bilateral ODI series at home until England ended it last year. With more test exposure, they can replicate their limited-overs success in the longest format, said Kohli. "They have the skill, it's just that they don't play that many test matches to gain confidence as a squad." — Reuters



HYDERABAD: Indian cricketers take part in a catching session during a team practice session on the eve of a Test match between India and Bangladesh at the Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium in Hyderabad yesterday. India and Bangladesh will play one Test match against Bangladesh. — AFP

BASEBALL

CHRIS CARTER AGREES TO \$3.5M ONE YEAR DEAL WITH YANKEES

NEW YORK: Last year's National League home run co-leader found a new home on Tuesday when Chris Carter agreed to a deal with the New York Yankees. Carter accepted a \$3.5 million, one-year contract, which is subject to a successful physical. The deal includes a \$500,000 signing bonus, a \$3 million salary and \$500,000 in performance bonuses: \$100,000 each for 250, 300, 350, 400 and 450 plate appearances.

"I am excited to go play for a bigger market team with more national exposure," Carter said in a telephone interview with The Associated Press. Carter, whose career-high 41 home runs last season matched Colorado's Nolan Arenado for tops in the NL, became a free agent in December when Milwaukee failed to offer a 2017 contract. Carter hit .222 with a career-best 94 RBIs while appearing in a NL-leading 160 games last season. He played 155 games at first base in his first year in the NL after spending the first six years of his career in the American League with Oakland and Houston. Carter's 27 doubles, 122 hits, 76 walks and 84 runs scored last season were also career-highs, but he struck out 206 times.

It's unclear how the Yankees will use the 30-year-old Carter; left-handed-hitting Greg Bird is expected to play first and Matt Holliday likely to be the regular designated hitter. Seeking right-handed bats to balance a batting order dependent on lefty power, the Yankees agreed earlier this off-season to a \$13 million, one-year contact with Holliday.

Carter spent the majority of the last two seasons playing first base but spent 120 games at DH for the Astros in 2014.

"I'm ready for whatever role they give me," he said. "I know they have Holliday and I know Bird's there, so I'm looking to help

the team in way I can." It's been a tough few months of uncertainty for Carter, who hit 102 homers in the last three seasons.

"It's definitely been tough having to wait this long in the offseason when spring training is so close," he said. "I'm glad to have this out of the way now so I can get out there at spring training and have a team and be out there with the guys."

Carter's successful 2016 season came after a difficult 2015 when he hit just .199 for the Astros with 24 homers and 64 RBIs. "After bouncing back last year I'm looking to having a better season and contributing to my new team," he said.

The 6-foot-4, 245-pound Carter was a 15th-round pick of the White Sox in 2005. He was traded to the Diamondbacks in December 2007, dealt to the Athletics later that month and made his major league debut with Oakland in 2010.

He was traded to Houston in 2013 and he hit 29 homers with 82 RBIs that season before tying for second in the majors with 37 homers and had 88 RBIs the following season.

Carter was benched in the summer of 2015 before working his way back into the Astros lineup and hitting .344 in September to help Houston earn the second AL wildcard spot, its first postseason berth since 2005. He was also solid for the Astros in the ALDS before they were eliminated by the Royals, hitting .294 with a double, a homer and an RBI.

Carter started at first base in each of Houston's six playoff games and was a triple shy of the cycle in Game 3 of the ALDS when he finished 3 for 3 with one RBI and two runs scored. He is a career .218 hitter with 150 homers, 102 doubles and 374 RBIs. — AP



PITTSBURGH: This Sept. 3, 2016 file photo shows Milwaukee Brewers' Chris Carter watching his two-run home run in the sixth inning of a baseball game in Pittsburgh. Carter, who tied for the National League home run lead last season, has agreed to a \$3.5 million, one-year contract with the New York Yankees, Tuesday. — AP

NFL

FALCONS HIRE STEVE SARKISIAN AS NEW OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR

FLOWERY BRANCH: After only one game as Alabama's offensive coordinator, Steve Sarkisian is heading to the NFL. To work with MVP quarterback Matt Ryan and the league's highest-scoring offense, no less.

Less than 24 hours after Kyle Shanahan left to become head coach of the San Francisco 49ers, the Falcons announced Tuesday that Sarkisian would be his replacement. The stunning move came with Sarkisian less than a month into what was to be his first full season running Alabama's offense, a job he took over for the national championship game in place of Lane Kiffin. But Falcons coach Dan Quinn said he's had his eye on Sarkisian since last spring, figuring it was only a matter of time before Shanahan moved on to a team of his own.

"I knew how good Kyle is," Quinn said. "I wanted to make sure I had contingency plans in place." The two have known each other since Sarkisian coached at Washington and Quinn was Seattle's defensive coordinator. Sarkisian stopped by Atlanta last year to check out the Falcons' offseason workouts, as well as training camp.

Even though Sarkisian has only one year of pro experience, Quinn expects a smooth transition for the new coordinator, who is familiar with many of the wide zone blocking schemes that worked so well for Atlanta on its way to the Super Bowl.

"We love the way we attack," Quinn said. "It took a lot of work to put that system in place. We have a real emphasis on the personnel and how we can feature the guys in that system. So it's very important that we stay consistent with that."

Sarkisian will certainly have plenty of weapons at his disposal. Ryan threw for 4,944 yards and 38 touchdowns to become the first Falcons player to win the MVP award. Julio Jones is one of the league's top receivers, an

All-Pro who caught 83 passes for 1,409 yards. Devonta Freeman earned Pro Bowl recognition with his second straight 1,000-yard rushing season, teaming with Tevin Coleman to give Atlanta a dynamic backfield pairing. In all, 13 players caught touchdown passes, an NFL record.

EMBARRASSING DISPLAY

In addition to five years as Washington's coach, the 42-year-old Sarkisian held the same job at Southern Cal. But he was fired by the Trojans during the 2015 season when officials said he showed up in no condition to lead practice following an embarrassing public display at a pep rally where he appeared to be intoxicated. He later sought treatment for alcoholism. Quinn said he has no concerns about Sarkisian's personal life. "We went through the process, obviously, to check and make sure everything would align with our organization, in terms of cultures and values," Quinn said. "He's done a fantastic job. There were zero hesitations, zero limitations."

Sarkisian spent most of last season as an offensive analyst for Alabama. When Kiffin was hired as the head coach at Florida Atlantic, Sarkisian was designated as his replacement.

Kiffin was planning to stay with the Crimson Tide through the College Football Playoff and, indeed, he coached in the Peach Bowl victory over Washington. Then, without much of an explanation, he left early for his new job and Sarkisian took over for the title game against Clemson, with only a week to prepare. Alabama squandered a 10-point lead heading to the fourth quarter and lost 35-31 on a touchdown pass with one second remaining. The Falcons certainly know how that feels. They let a 25-point lead slip away in the Super Bowl, losing to the New England Patriots 34-28 in overtime. — AP



Steve Sarkisian



CHARLOTTE: Brooklyn Nets' Trevor Booker (35) reacts to his dunk against the Charlotte Hornets in the second half of an NBA basketball game in Charlotte, N.C., Tuesday. The Hornets won 111-107. — AP

HORNETS END LOSING SKID, TOP BROOKLYN 111-107

CHARLOTTE: Someone's streak was going to continue Tuesday. The Charlotte Hornets were simply happy it wasn't them as they snapped a seven-game losing streak and held onto a 111-107 victory over the Brooklyn Nets. Charlotte (24-28) had not won since a Jan. 21 triumph over Brooklyn. The Nets (9-43) dropped their 10th straight, and still have not won since a Jan. 20 victory at New Orleans.

"We needed that game," Charlotte forward Nicolas Batum said. "We're back home. We need to protect our home court and we needed to win that game." Batum, Kemba Walker and Marco Belinelli each had 17 points to lead the Hornets as seven players scored in double-digits in a game where Charlotte's lead ballooned to as many as 17 points in the second quarter thanks to a quick start.

Bojan Bogdanovic scored 22 points and Brook Lopez added 20 for the Nets. Jeremy Lamb tallied 16 points for the Hornets, while center Frank Kaminsky recorded 12 points, 11 rebounds and five assists. "We dug ourselves a big hole in the first half," Brooklyn coach Kenny Atkinson said. "Again, it was kind of a similar story - turnovers hurt us."

The Nets tallied 18 turnovers, which resulted in 18 Hornets points. "Turnovers are killing us because it allows them to have too many easy layups," said Nets forward Bojan Bogdanovic. "Everybody talks about defense, but I think also we have to start with the offense to limit turnovers." In Brooklyn's last four games, the Nets are averaging 19.5 turnovers per game.

In this game, the Hornets pulled away early, using a 10-0 run in the first quarter to take a 14-4 advantage with 5:28 left in that period. In all, Brooklyn scored just 16 first-quarter points compared to Charlotte's 24. Only the Nets' 14-point first quarter on Jan. 21 was a smaller opponent output for the Hornets this season.

But the Nets continued to attack, scoring nearly as many points in each the third and fourth quarters (35 each) as they scored in the entire first half (37). The Nets sliced Charlotte's lead to 91-87 with 6:11 remaining when Joe Harris knocked in a 3-foot jumper.

ROCKETS 128, MAGIC 104

James Harden had 25 points and 13 assists as the Rockets built a big lead early and held off a late rally to get a win over the Magic. The Rockets had led by as many as 23 before the Magic began chipping away at the lead. Serge Ibaka made a turnaround jump shot midway through the fourth quarter to cut Houston's lead to nine points. Harden grabbed a bad pass from Evan Fournier not long after that and dished to Eric Gordon, who finished with a 3-pointer. Trevor Ariza added a 3-pointer for Houston to extend the lead to 112-97 with about four minutes remaining to put the game away. Patrick Beverley made seven points after that to help extend the lead to 120-99 with less than two minutes left and send Houston's starters to the bench. It is Houston's second straight win and the 10th loss in 13 games for the Magic. Ibaka had 28 points for the Magic and Evan Fournier added 21.

TRAIL BLAZERS 114, MAVERICKS 113

C.J. McCollum scored 32 points, the last two on a runner in the lane with 0.9 seconds left to give the Trail Blazers a win over the Mavericks. McCollum's shot capped a final minute in which the two teams traded leads six times and Dirk Nowitzki hit two clutch 3-pointers, the second a potential game-winner with 3.9 seconds left. McCollum scored Portland's last seven points. Damian Lillard added 29 points for the Blazers, who tied their season series with the Mavericks at 2-2 - each team winning twice on the others' home floor. Harrison Barnes had 26 points and Nowitzki 25 for Dallas. The two teams, battling for the eighth and final playoff spot, see-sawed through a tense fourth quarter, trading 13-0 runs at one point. Portland led 101-89 before the Mavericks answered the Blazers' run with one of their own. Neither team led by more than two points after that. — Agencies

NBA results/standings

Portland 114, Dallas 113; Houston 128, Orlando 104; Charlotte 111, Brooklyn 107.

Eastern Conference				Western Conference					
Atlantic Division				Northwest Division					
W	L	PCT	GB	Utah	LA Clippers	LA Lakers	Phoenix		
Boston	33	18	.647	-	Oklahoma City	30	23	.566	3.5
Toronto	32	21	.604	2	Denver	23	28	.451	9.5
NY Knicks	22	31	.415	12	Portland	23	30	.434	10.5
Philadelphia	18	33	.353	15	Minnesota	19	33	.365	14
Brooklyn	9	43	.173	24.5	Pacific Division				
Central Division				Golden State	43	8	.843	-	
Cleveland	35	15	.700	-	LA Clippers	31	21	.596	12.5
Indiana	29	22	.569	6.5	Sacramento	20	32	.385	23.5
Chicago	26	26	.500	10	LA Lakers	18	36	.333	26.5
Detroit	24	28	.462	12	Phoenix	16	36	.308	27.5
Milwaukee	22	28	.440	13	Southwest Division				
Southeast Division				San Antonio	39	12	.765	-	
Washington	30	21	.588	-	Houston	38	17	.691	3
Atlanta	30	22	.577	0.5	Memphis	32	22	.593	8.5
Charlotte	24	28	.462	6.5	Dallas	20	32	.385	19.5
Miami	22	30	.423	8.5	New Orleans	20	32	.385	19.5
Orlando	20	34	.370	11.5					



HOUSTON: Orlando Magic guard C.J. Watson, right, looks to pass as Houston Rockets center Nene Hilario (42) defends in the first half of an NBA basketball game, Tuesday, in Houston. — AP

BOXING

BOXERS WILDER, POVETKIN IN COURT AFTER CANCELED FIGHT

NEW YORK: Heavyweight boxing champion Deontay Wilder and Russian boxer Alexander Povetkin battled in court on Tuesday, at a trial over a title bout that was called off after the Russian tested positive for a banned substance.

The boxers sat on opposing sides of a Manhattan federal courtroom as jurors heard their attorneys give opening statements in a trial focused on whether Povetkin ingested meldonium after a World Anti-Doping Agency ban of the drug went into effect in January 2016.

That question has become key to dueling lawsuits the boxers have filed against each other over the championship boxing match scheduled for May 21 in Moscow, which was called off after Povetkin tested positive on April 27 for meldonium. Judd Burstein, a lawyer for American Wilder and promoter DiBella Entertainment Inc, told jurors that positive urine test came after three negative ones earlier in April, which meant that Povetkin took the drug after passing the earlier tests.

"The only rational explanation for what transpired here is that Mr. Povetkin took meldonium in 2016," he said.

But Kent Yalowitz, a lawyer for Povetkin and promoter Andrew Ryabinskiy's company, said the Russian boxer had, like many other athletes, taken meldonium at a doctor's direction before

the World Anti-Doping Agency had even announced plans to ban it.

"The evidence will show that meldonium can stay in the body for many months," he said.

The lawsuits came after the World Boxing Council announced on May 13 that Povetkin had tested positive for meldonium and subsequently announced the postponement of his bout with champion Wilder.

In June, Wilder and DiBella sued Povetkin and Ryabinskiy's World of Boxing LLC, saying they were owed at least \$5 million for the defendants' breach of a contract requiring Povetkin to be produced for the match.

Povetkin and World of Boxing soon after countersued, seeking \$34.5 million for what they said was Wilder's own breach of contract for walking away from the fight and defamation for engaging in a "smear campaign."

The World Boxing Council in August announced that based on scientific and medical information it received, it was not possible to determine whether Povetkin ingested meldonium after Jan. 1, 2016, when it was officially banned. In December, a super heavyweight title bout between Povetkin and Haitian-born Canadian Bernane Stiverne was called off after the Russian tested positive for a different banned substance, ostarine. — Reuters

FA CHIEF GREG CLARKE VOWS TO IMPROVE GOVERNANCE

LONDON: Football Association chairman Greg Clarke has pledged to improve governance of the English game's ruling body ahead of a parliamentary committee debate into potential legislation to reform the organisation. The Culture, Media and Sport (CMS) committee debate will take place at the House of Commons today, with a motion of "no confidence" in the FA's ability to reform itself.

It comes four months after sports minister Tracey Crouch gave the FA six months to overhaul its board and council or risk losing funding.

The FA, the world's oldest football federation, risks losing around £30 million (\$37.5 million, 34.8 million euros) from funding body Sport England.

But Clarke insists he is willing to put forward plans to overhaul FA governance and said he would resign if those suggestions were rejected by the Government. "Our governance needs changing. We do need to be more diverse, more open about decision-making and we do need to better represent those playing the game. But we are not sitting idly by," Clarke said in an FA statement on Tuesday. "The FA has a set of proposals to

improve our governance which we will ratify and then take to the Minister of Sport in order to get her approval.

"Change won't be easy, but I am confident it will happen and it will be substantial. Delivering real change is my responsibility and I firmly believe this is critical for the future of the game.

"If the Government is not supportive of the changes when they are presented in the coming months, I will take personal responsibility for that. I will have failed. "I will be accountable for that failure and would in due course step down from my role." Five former senior FA executives

have criticised the organisation for failing to "self-reform".

David Bernstein, David Davies, Greg Dyke, Alex Horne and David Triesman said the FA was outdated, held back by "elderly white men" and unable to counter the power of the Premier League. But, while Clarke is willing to consider changes to the FA's governance, he disagrees with the suggestion that they are failing football at present.

"I don't believe that The FA is failing football. That's completely different," he said. "In fact I strongly dispute the motion put in front of Parliament that

The FA is not meeting its duties as a governing body. "I do hope that those attending today make themselves aware of The FA's duties and the great work we are actually doing.

"Our duties require us to promote, develop and invest in the game; and whilst I freely admit that our governance needs improvement, it doesn't prevent us from supporting the game from top to bottom. "I am also confident that when the time comes to present our changes to the Minister, she will agree that we are making positive and proactive change." — AFP

LUCAS RESCUES PSG, 10-MAN MONACO EDGE MONTPELLIER

PARIS: Lucas grabbed a controversial late winner as Paris Saint-Germain beat Lille 2-1 on Tuesday to stay three points behind Monaco after the Ligue 1 leaders secured a gritty 2-1 victory at Montpellier. Edinson Cavani netted his league-leading 23rd goal of the season to put the reigning champions ahead on 70 minutes at the Parc des Princes. A dreadful mistake from Alphonse Areola allowed Nicolas de Preville to level with four minutes left, but Lucas claimed a crucial three points for PSG in stoppage time despite being in an offside position. "We never gave up despite conceding a goal just a few minutes from the end.

We kept going and were able to get the winner," Lucas told Canal+ Sport. Lille boss Patrick Collot admitted to feeling "huge frustration" and called for video technology to help out referees in such situations. "That's the vagaries of football and it will be until there is video to help the referees," said Collot.

After scoring twice in the final 10 minutes of Saturday's 3-1 defeat of Dijon, Unai Emery's side again left it late to keep themselves within touching distance of Monaco.

Areola made a sharp low save to keep out Franck Beria's first-half header, while PSG struggled to convert their dominance into a lead as Vincent Enyeama stuck out a strong right hand to thwart Angel Di Maria on the hour. But Cavani eventually broke the deadlock when he steered a looping free-kick into the far corner via a combination of head and shoulder. Lille looked to have snatched a point when Areola lost control of a backpass under pressure from Eric Bautheac, with fellow substitute De Preville gleefully slotting home the equaliser. However, Lucas forced the ball in from close range in the second minute of added time after Cavani's initial shot was charged down amid a desperate scramble in the Lille box.

INJURIES CLOUD MONACO WIN

Earlier, Poland international Kamil Glik's brave header gave Monaco a 16th-minute lead in Montpellier before 18-year-old Kylian Mbappe struck on the counter-

attack to double their advantage five minutes later. Veteran Brazilian centre-back Vitorino Hilton pulled a goal back early in the second half, but Monaco withstood a late onslaught despite the dismissal of Jemerson for a second booking.

"I congratulated the players, it's good to be able to weather the storm and keep a lead intact," said Monaco coach Leonardo Jardim. "You never win every game in football and that was the time to defend the lead, to show that attitude.

"It's important for a team to have this mentality, lots of matches are lost in the last 10 minutes."

Despite Montpellier hovering just three points above the relegation zone, Monaco were fully aware of the dangers facing them at the Stade de la Mosson where PSG were thrashed 3-0 in December.

Monaco grabbed the opening goal on the quarter-hour as Glik courageously got on the end of Thomas Lemar's free-kick, the Polish defender clobbered by Montpellier goalkeeper Geoffrey Jourden as he headed in his fourth league goal of the season.

A lightning-quick break delivered Monaco's second goal on 21 minutes. The visitors won back possession deep in their own half before Benjamin Mendy released Mbappe, who slotted coolly through the legs of Jourden. Benin international Steve Mounie dragged just wide as Montpellier sought to work their way back into the contest. Hilton, 39, then became the oldest player this century to score in France's top flight when he turned in a corner two minutes into the second half to give Montpellier renewed hope.

Monaco saw Valere Germain forced off with a calf injury while France full-back Djibril Sidibe added to their injury concerns ahead of their Champions League last 16 showdown with Manchester City in a fortnight. Montpellier ramped up the pressure as Monaco were reduced to 10 men when Jemerson brought down Ryad Boudebouz, but Danijel Subasic turned away a stinging shot from Jerome Roussillon while Souleymane Camara's last-gasp header clipped the crossbar. — AFP

NEUER'S HEROICS PUT BAYERN INTO CUP QUARTERS

BERLIN: Holders Bayern Munich squeezed into the quarter-finals of the German Cup with a 1-0 win over Wolfsburg on Tuesday following Douglas Costa's first-half strike and goalkeeper Manuel Neuer's heroics.

Bayern were coasting at Munich's Allianz Arena after a well-taken goal from Costa on 17 minutes, but it took two superb saves from Germany shotstopper Neuer to put the Bavarian giants through.

Wolfsburg, who are struggling in the Bundesliga, upped the pace for the final ten minutes as Bayern lost their shape at the back. Attacking midfielder Yunus Malli, a new signing last month from Mainz, forced Neuer into spectacular parries in quick succession as Carlo Ancelotti's Bayern endured a tense final few minutes.

"We were trembling a bit at the end, but all in all it was a deserved win," Bayern's president Uli Hoenes told broadcaster ARD. Costa's goal was a boost for Bayern amidst reports the Selecao forward is considering leaving the German giants to fur-

ther his career at the end of the season.

And according to another report in magazine Sport Bild, Bayern captain Philipp Lahm has decided to retire in June despite having a year left on his contract.

Elsewhere, Borussia Moenchengladbach won their third round match 2-0 at second-division Greuther Fuerth thanks to goals by Oscar Wendt and a penalty from Thorgan Hazard, brother of Chelsea star Eden. Gladbach's cause was helped when Fuerth's Hungary international midfielder Adam Pinter was sent off with just 19 minutes gone for a dangerous tackle on Germany midfielder Christoph Kramer.

Hamburg, who are in the Bundesliga's relegation places, brushed off poor league form, winning 2-0 at home to Cologne with goals by Gideon Jung and US striker Bobby Wood. Second division Arminia Bielefeld are into the last eight after a scare against fourth division minnows Astoria Waldorf, progressing 5-4 on penalties after a 1-1 draw. — AP



MINICH: Wolfsburg's Ricardo Rodriguez, from left, Bayern's Thiago and Bayern's Arturo Vidal challenge for the ball during the German Soccer Cup match between FC Bayern Munich and VfL Wolfsburg at the Allianz Arena stadium in Munich, Germany, Tuesday. — AP



BARCELONA: Atletico Madrid's French defender Lucas Hernandez (l) vies with Barcelona's Portuguese midfielder Andre Gomes during the Spanish Copa del Rey (King's Cup) semi final second leg football match FC Barcelona vs Club Atletico de Madrid at the Camp Nou stadium in Barcelona on Tuesday. — AFP

SOCCER

SUAREZ SENT-OFF AS BARCA OUST ATLETICO TO REACH FINAL

BARCELONA: Luis Suarez booked Barcelona's place in a fourth consecutive Copa del Rey final but was sent off as a bad-tempered 1-1 draw with Atletico Madrid on Tuesday secured a 3-2 aggregate win. Suarez's second goal of the tie looked to have put the semi-final beyond the visitors just before half-time.

However, the Uruguayan was one of three players sent-off in a pulsating second-half and will miss May's final against Alaves or Celta Vigo. Kevin Gameiro set up a grandstand finish seven minutes from time moments after blazing a penalty over the bar.

But Barca saw out five minutes of stoppage time with nine men after Suarez's first red card for the club. "It makes me laugh because it was like he (the referee) wanted to do it," an angry Suarez told Gol Television.

"We need to see if we can appeal the second yellow because it isn't even a foul, but we already know how these things go." Atletico needed a first win at the Camp Nou since 2006 to have any chance of overturning a 2-1 first leg deficit inflicted by stunning goals from Suarez and Lionel Messi.

Yet, a fine performance in which they pushed Barcelona all the way gave Atletico boss Diego Simeone hope they can recapture during the rest of the campaign the form that took them to the Champions League final last season. "We are out of the competition but have our heads held high and the strength that we have three fantastic months (ahead)," said Simeone. "Hopefully we can maintain what we showed against them in the second-half the other day and during the 90 minutes today."

MESSI-SUAREZ MAGIC

Atletico nearly secured the perfect start with a lightning counter-attack from a Barca corner that ended with Yannick Carrasco stinging the palms of Jasper Cillessen.

However, the visitor's intense early pressing eased as the half wore on and Barca went in front just before half-time thanks to more magic from Messi and Suarez.

Messi sucked in the Atletico defence and when his effort from the edge of the area was parried by Miguel Angel Moya, Suarez gobbled up the rebound for his 23rd goal of the season.

Atletico were dealt an injury blow at the start of the second period as Diego Godin had to be replaced by Lucas Hernandez just five days after the French defender was arrested on suspicion of domestic violence. However, Simeone's men were given a glimmer of hope just before the hour mark when Sergi Roberto dived in on Filipe Luis and was deservedly shown a second yellow card. That hope should have been bolstered moments later when Antoine Griezmann smashed the ball inside Cillessen's far post, but was wrongly flagged offside. Barca's nerves were eased when Atletico were also reduced to 10 men 21 minutes from time when a slip from Carrasco saw him wipe out Arda Turan, the Belgian also being shown a second yellow card.

Messi's incredible run of scoring free-kicks in 2017 nearly continued with a driven effort from fully 35 yards that came crashing back off the bar. Atletico were given a lifeline when Gerard Pique was adjudged to have tripped Gameiro

inside the area with 10 minutes remaining. Griezmann had missed his fifth penalty in seven attempts at the weekend and handed over responsibility to his compatriot, but Gameiro blazed over. Just three minutes later, though, the two combined to great effect as Griezmann's decision to cross rather than shoot caught the Barca defence off guard and Gameiro rolled into an empty net.

Atletico then pilled on the pressure in search of a winning goal on the night to send the game into extra time.

Suarez was the third player to be shown a second yellow for a stray elbow on Koke. But a great block from Samuel Umtiti to divert Luis's goalbound drive preserved Barca's incredible record of not having lost a tie to anyone other than Real Madrid in the Cup since 2010. — AFP

EDIN DZEKO DOUBLE AS ROMA ROUT FIORENTINA

MILAN: Edin Dzeko hit a brace to go top of the Serie A goal charts on Tuesday as Roma stayed in the title chase with a comprehensive 4-0 win over lacklustre Fiorentina. Rescheduled due to Sunday's Six Nations rugby match between Italy and Wales, Roma hosted Paulo Sousa's men knowing defeat would leave them in third place-seven points behind leaders Juventus and one point behind Napoli. But Luciano Spalletti's men were in no mood for throwing away what is shaping up to be a strong title challenge and kept the scudetto race alive with a dominant performance at a half-empty Stadio Olimpico. Roma now sit four points behind Juventus, although the Turin giants, bidding for a record sixth consecutive title, will open up a seven-point gap if they beat Crotone yesterday.

Fiorentina's heavy defeat has given a minor boost to crisis-hit AC Milan. Both are among several teams fighting for Europa League places and Milan, who suffered a third straight loss with a 1-0 defeat to Sampdoria on Sunday, moved back above La Viola to seventh. Fiorentina started brightly and when Federico Chiesa sprung the offside trap the hosts had Federico Fazio to thank for a goalline clearance after Chiesa lobbed onrushing goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny. Dzeko had been warned by Fiorentina's Carlos Sanchez, who in the past has "marked lots of top players, including Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi", that he would be hard to get past.

The towering Bosnia international must have been listening because he produced an uncharacteristically committed performance that paid dividends. Now on 17 league goals for the season, he is one ahead of Napoli's Dries Mertens. Stephan El Shaarawy and Bruno Peres, twice, came close to beating Ciprian Tatarusanu in the Viola net early on while the keeper did well to smother a Dzeko effort on the turn.

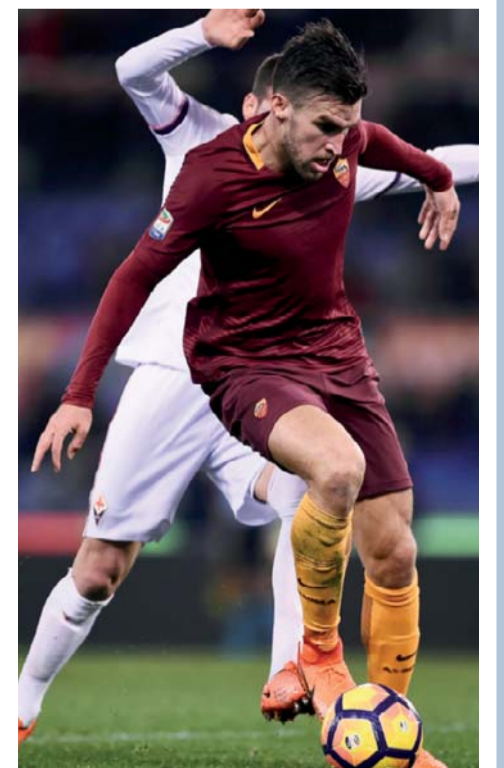
Sanchez was booked for a badly-timed tackle on Emerson Palmieri and the Colombian's woes continued when Daniele De Rossi sent a ball over the top that Dzeko controlled on his chest before finishing low past Tatarusanu seven minutes from the interval. Fiorentina looked rudderless without the pace and creativity of injured striker

Nikola Kalinic and did well not to ship more than three goals in a totally uninspiring second half. De Rossi had his second assist of the game on the hour when he delivered a free kick for Fazio to nod downwards and in off the post for his first league goal of the season.

Antonio Rudiger drilled inches wide and Dzeko was close to a second after chipping past the onrushing Tatarusanu, only for Davide Astori to rush back and clear.

When Fiorentina were caught on the counter, De Rossi sent Kevin Strootman down the left to set up Radja Nainggolan, who controlled well under pressure before coolly prodding the ball past Tatarusanu.

Dzeko had his brace minutes from the end when he caught Astori in possession and ran clear to fire past Tatarusanu. — AFP



ROME: Roma's midfielder from Netherlands Kevin Strootman (r) controls the ball during the Italian Serie A football match Roma vs Fiorentina at the Olympic Stadium in Rome on Tuesday. — AFP

Sports

Emotional Guay
trumps Jansrud
in super-G upset



World number one
Lydia Ko confirms
Gilchrist as coach



THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2017

BOXERS WILDER, POVETKIN IN COURT AFTER CANCELED FIGHT Page 18



DETROIT: Columbus Blue Jackets' center Brandon Dubinsky, left, and Boone Jenner, right, celebrate a goal by Cam Atkinson, not shown, as Detroit Red Wings goalie Petr Mrazek (34) looks back in the first period of an NHL hockey game Tuesday, in Detroit. — AP

JONES SCORES IN OT TO LIFT BLUE JACKETS

LAHM RETIREMENT SURPRISES BAYERN

BERLIN: Philipp Lahm caught team-mates and club bosses by surprise when he not only announced he will retire in June but also that he will spurn an offer to fill the vacant sports director role at Bayern. After making his 501st appearance for Bayern in Tuesday's 1-0 German Cup win over Wolfsburg, Germany's World Cup winning captain confirmed reports he will stop playing at the end of the season - with a year left on his contract. News that he had also turned down the sports director role raised eyebrows. Chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge put out a statement on Wednesday saying the club is "surprised by Philipp Lahm and his advisor" and he had "assumed a joint statement would be made".

Rummenigge stressed "the door will always be open for Philipp at FC Bayern", but, for now, the 33-year-old plans to walk away from the Bavarian giants, who he joined as an 11-year-old in 1995.

The timing of Lahm's decision is strange, but his hand was forced by magazine Sports Bild, who first broke the news on Tuesday, hours before the Wolfsburg match.

"On Friday, Lahm turned Karl-Heinz Rummenigge down, but it is not



Bayern Munich's defender Philipp Lahm.

wanted to talk about it some more on Wednesday," but Sports Bild leaked the news and Lahm went public.

FIRST TREBLE

He will retire as one of the best defenders of his generation, yet was flexible enough to also play in midfield for club and country. He retired from international football after lifting the 2014 World Cup with Germany and made 113 appearances for the Mannschaft. With Bayern, he has won the Bundesliga title seven times, the German Cup six times - with more silverware likely to come in May - and has been club captain since January 2011.

He led them to the 2012/13 Champions League title when they became the first German club to win the treble of European, league and cup titles. With midfielder Xabi Alonso also retiring in June, Lahm's added departure will leave Bayern short on experience next season, but he explained his reasons. "I see my leadership role the same way as I give my best every day, give my all in training and in every game," Lahm told reporters. "I believe I am capable of doing that this season, but not after that, so it was clear for me, that I would stop at the end of the season. "We are talking about more than a year and I believe that I am not able to maintain the level that I am used to and my team mates are used to." Bayern's Germany centre-back Mats Hummels only learnt of Lahm's decision in post-game interviews and said: "It's a pity he won't be here from this summer. I am surprised, but I respect it. He'll have his reasons." Lahm's decision to turn down the sports director job, vacated by Matthias Sammer last year, caught Hoeness off guard.

"I'm just surprised. We did not see there being a rush. The job would have only started on January 1 2018 and he had the job description," Hoeness told the Funke Media Group. "There were four meetings about it and I can imagine that he will one day work for FC Bayern."

POWER STRUGGLE?

Sport Bild claim Lahm turned down the job because it did not include a position on Bayern's board and he wanted to have the same power as Rummenigge and Hoeness.

Lahm painted a different picture, not wanting to go from his playing career into a high-profile position at Bayern, even with a break. "There were talks and I decided it isn't the right time to jump into a job with FC Bayern," he said. "I won't go into details, but one thing was clear: I wouldn't have started immediately, there would have been a small break for me, which I would have needed, so I could have prepared myself.

"There is no plan now, the only thing is I will be a private person from this summer.

"I can take care of other things and meet other people. I have been at the club so long, I want to see what the future brings.

"No one expected that I would stop and do nothing." — AFP

DETROIT: Seth Jones took a drop pass from Brandon Dubinsky and wired a high slap shot past Petr Mrazek 3:22 into overtime, lifting the Columbus Blue Jackets to a 3-2 victory over the Detroit Red Wings on Tuesday night. Dubinsky and Cam Atkinson also scored for the Blue Jackets, who had dropped two in a row and four of five. Sergei Bobrovsky stopped 24 shots. Nick Jensen got his second career goal, both in the last four games, and Thomas Vanek added a tying score midway through the second period for Detroit. Mrazek made 24 saves.

WILD 4, JETS 2

Jason Pominville and Nino Niederreiter each scored twice, and Minnesota closed out a 3-1 road trip. Pominville also had an assist, and Charlie Coyle added three assists. Niederreiter's second goal was an empty-netter. Jason Dubnyk made 38 saves for the Western Conference-leading Wild. Joel Armia had a goal and assist and Bryan Little scored his 15th goal of the season for Winnipeg. Ondrej Pavelec went to the dressing room just over six minutes into the second period after stopping 11 of 14 shots. The Jets announced he wasn't returning because of a lower-body injury.

RANGERS 4, DUCKS 1

Henrik Lundqvist made a season-high 43 saves, Michael Grabner scored twice and the Rangers won for the sixth time in eight games. Mats Zuccarello and Oscar Lindberg also scored, helping coach Alain Vigneault to his 600th career victory. Lundqvist gave up fewer than three goals for the sixth time in his last seven starts, improving to 6-1-0 in that stretch. In this one, he topped the 40 saves he made in a 3-2 win at Philadelphia on Nov. 25. Jakob Silfverberg scored for Anaheim and John Gibson finished with 16 saves. The Ducks have lost five of their last seven (2-4-1).

AVALANCHE 4, CANADIENS 0

Mikko Rantanen scored three times for his first career hat trick, Calvin Pickard stopped 27 shots and the Avalanche posted back-to-back wins for the first time since November. Andreas Martinsen added a goal as last-place Colorado won two straight at home for the first time this season. Pickard also had an assist. All-Star goaltender Carey Price wasn't sharp early, giving up two quick goals, and the Canadiens never recovered. This after routing Colorado 10-1 on Dec. 10 in Montreal. The Atlantic Division-leading Canadiens are 1-4-1 over their last six games.

CAPITALS 5, HURRICANES 0

Alex Ovechkin got his 26th goal of the season, helping the NHL-leading Washington earn its fourth straight victory. Brett Connolly, Lars Eller, Evgeny Kuznetsov and Marcus Johansson also scored for the Capitals, who picked up their second consecutive shutout. Braden Holtby stopped 23 shots in an easy outing two days after backup Philipp Grubauer made 38 saves in a 5-0 win against Los Angeles. Holtby's seventh shutout of the season ties him with the Kings' Peter Budaj for the NHL lead. Carolina goaltender Eddie Lack made 23 saves in his first start since Nov. 6. He had been plagued by concussion problems.

FLAMES 3, PENGUINS 2, SO

Kris Versteeg scored the only goal in the shootout and Calgary recovered after a furious third-period rally by Pittsburgh. Chad Johnson stopped 31 shots in regulation

and then turned away Pittsburgh's Phil Kessel and Sidney Crosby in the shootout. The Penguins' Kris Letang hit the post on his team's final attempt. Michael Frolik scored his 13th goal and Micheal Ferland added his eighth as the Flames picked up two valuable points in the crowded chase for one of the final playoff spots in the wide-open Western Conference. Crosby inched closer to becoming the 86th player in NHL history to reach 1,000 points when he assisted on Chris Kunitz's third-period goal for career point No. 998.

MAPLE LEAFS 3, STARS 1

Rookie sensation Auston Matthews scored his team-leading 25th goal and scuffling Toronto picked up a much-needed victory. Curtis McElhinney made 39 saves as the Maple Leafs won for the second time in six games (2-3-1). Struggling defensively of late, Toronto held Dallas in check after yielding 22 goals over the previous four games. Jake Gardiner and Nikita Zaitsev also scored for the Maple Leafs. Antti Niemi stopped 31 shots and Tyler Seguin scored for Dallas. The Stars haven't won at Toronto since Dec. 23, 2008.

LIGHTNING 5, KINGS 0

Ben Bishop made 28 saves, Nikita Kucherov scored twice during a three-goal second period and Tampa Bay won consecutive games for the first time since Dec. 20-22. Jonathan Drouin, Gabriel Dumont and Braydon Coburn also scored for the Lightning. Kings goalie Peter Budaj turned aside 16 shots in losing for the second straight game after a five-game winning streak in which he had three shutouts. Budaj was pulled after allowing four goals over two periods in Sunday's 5-0 loss at Washington. It was Bishop's first shutout this season.

BLUES 6, SENATORS 0

Jake Allen made 30 saves and Vladimir Tarasenko scored twice, leading St. Louis to the road win. Magnus Paajarvi, Patrik Berglund, Alex Steen and Ivan Barbashev also scored for the Blues (27-22-5). It was Allen's second shutout of the season. Ottawa goaltender Andrew Hammond had 24 saves in his first start since Dec. 18. He had been sidelined by a high ankle sprain. The Senators (27-18-6) were coming off a 4-0 loss at Buffalo on Saturday night. They dropped to 1-3-1 in their last five games.

PREDATORS 4, CANUCKS 2

Viktor Arvidsson and Calle Jarnkrok each had a goal and an assist, powering the Predators to the home win. Filip Forsberg and Mike Fisher also scored and Pekka Rinne made 31 saves for Nashville. Roman Josi added two assists. Markus Granlund and Alexander Edler had the goals for Vancouver, which has lost four straight.

SABRES 5, SHARKS 4, OT

Evander Kane scored 1:05 into overtime, and Buffalo rallied for the win. Kane scored twice in the game, and the Sabres got three goals in a span of 3:28 to erase San Jose's 4-1 lead. Ryan O'Reilly had a goal and assist, while Kyle Okposo and Matt Moulson also scored for Buffalo. Jack Eichel set up two goals, including Kane's game-winner. Driving up the right wing on a 2 on-1, Eichel slipped a pass through the middle that Kane snapped in before falling headfirst into the end boards. The Sabres rallied from a three-goal deficit to win for the first time since a 4-3 shootout victory over the New York Islanders on Dec. 27, 2014. Joel Ward, Logan Couture, Joe Pavelski and Melker Karlsson scored for the Pacific Division leading Sharks. — AP

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NEW YORK: Construction cranes tower over the large-scale redevelopment program, Hudson Yards. — AFP

INDIA TO REMOVE CASH WITHDRAWAL LIMITS

CENTRAL BANK LEAVING INTEREST RATES UNCHANGED

MUMBAI: Limits on cash withdrawals will be removed entirely from March 13, India's central bank said yesterday, as it left interest rates on hold for the second time since a ban on high-value rupee notes. The Reserve Bank of India capped cash withdrawals after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's shock decision in November to take all 500 (\$7.40) and 1,000 rupee notes out of circulation to deter tax-dodging -- 86 percent of the currency in the cash-reliant nation.

The ensuing cash crunch saw long queues outside banks and ATMs, which ran dry within hours and left many without the means to buy food or daily essentials, especially in rural areas. In a statement, the bank said withdrawal limits would be

nearly doubled from 24,000 rupees to 50,000 from February 20 and removed altogether from March 13.

The bank also said it was leaving interest rates unchanged at 6.25 percent, despite pressure for a cut to stimulate the economy amid fears the cash ban had slowed growth. "It's a bit surprising and slightly perplexing that they didn't do a cut," said Ashutosh Datar, economist at IIFL Institutional Equities. "Maybe they could have been a bit more aggressive... their assumption is that the impact of demonetization is transitory but if it isn't, and if it continues for a few months, that could lead to a sub-seven percent growth for the first half of next year."

India's economy grew by 7.6 percent in the year to April

2016, but the government has forecast that will slip to around 7.1 percent in the current financial year. Last month the government warned that demonetization had hit a host of sectors including real estate and farming, but also said tax revenues could be boosted in the long run.

The cash crunch has also prompted the International Monetary Fund to knock a percentage point off its forecast for India's economy in the current fiscal year. The new estimate is 6.6 percent, bringing it below China's projected rate of 6.7 percent. The central bank said the benchmark repo rate-the level at which it lends to commercial banks-would remain steady after being cut to 6.25 percent in October. — AFP



MUMBAI: Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Urjit Patel (I) attends a news conference. — AFP



DUBAI: Henrik Stenson of Sweden plays a shot during the third round of the Omega Dubai Desert Classic at the Emirates Golf Club on February 4, 2017. — AFP

DUBAI WELCOMED RECORD 14.9M VISITORS IN 2016

DUBAI: Dubai welcomed a record 14.9 million visitors in 2016, the city's tourism department said Tuesday, as the Gulf emirate capitalized on its reputed safety in a region wracked by turmoil. The city-state, one of seven sheikhdoms that make up the United Arab Emirates, aims to attract 20 million visitors annually by 2020 when it hosts the global trade fair Expo 2020.

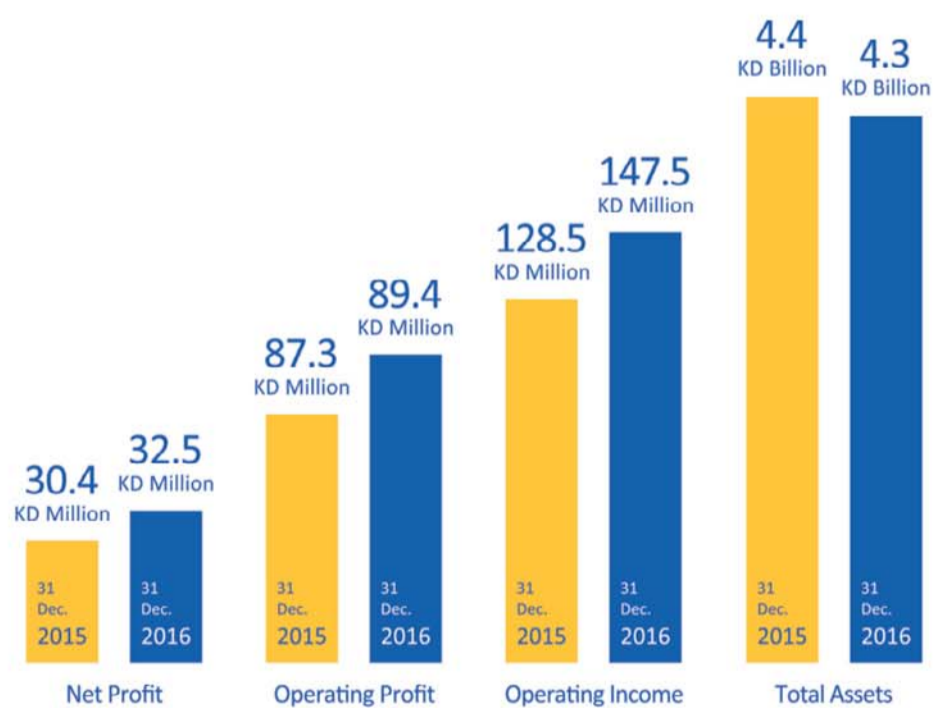
As turmoil hits traditional tourism destinations in the Middle East and North Africa, Dubai has benefitted from its reputation as a safe haven for tourism and business. The desert emirate boasts opulent shopping malls, numerous luxury resorts and even an indoor ski resort. The number of visitors to Dubai in 2016 increased by five percent com-

pared to the previous year, the tourism department said in a statement.

Travelers from Gulf countries made up almost 23 percent of all visitors, it said, with Saudis alone accounting for almost half of them. Western Europe followed closely with 21 percent of visitors, it said. Travelers from China surged by 20 percent to more than half a million, while Russian tourism rose by 14 percent to 240,000 visitors. Dubai International Airport retained its position as the world's busiest hub for international passengers in 2016, handling 83.6 million travelers. The economy of Dubai is seen as the most diversified in the Gulf, helped by trade and tourism, and is not dependent on oil revenues. — AFP

ABK'S FINANCIAL RESULTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2016

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ECONOMICALLY AILING ARGENTINA, BRAZIL PRESIDENTS TO TALK TRADE

BRASOLIA: The presidents of Brazil and Argentina two South American neighbors with ailing economies are set to meet Tuesday in Brasilia for talks expected to focus on reviving the troubled Mercosur trade bloc. Brazilian President Michel Temer and his Argentine counterpart Mauricio Macri both head business friendly administrations that came in over the last two years, ending long periods of leftist rule.

Now they hope to boost trade which reached \$23 billion in 2015, according to Brazil - just as the new Trump administration's shift toward more protectionist policies in the United States looks to shake up the region. "It's a moment when both gov-

ernments are on the same page on how to organize the economy and on the type of changes needed to return to growth," said Paulo Estivallet de Mesquita, Brazil's diplomat charged with Latin American relations.

One of the top objectives, de Mesquita said, will be discussing "strengthening the economic and commercial aspects of Mercosur," with a removal of protectionist barriers between Brazil and Argentina in particular. Brazil would also like to give a boost to Mercosur's ambitions of a free trade deal with the European Union and stronger commercial links in Canada, Japan and South Korea, he said. The bloc, which also includes Paraguay, Uruguay and crisis-

hit Venezuela, was founded in 1991. But an initially strong boost to regional trade gradually evaporated as persistent trade barriers weighed the bloc down.

Recession and reforms

Domestic economic weaknesses have contributed to the slump in trade between the big neighbors and famous footballing rivals. The economy in Brazil-Latin America's biggest-shrank 3.8 percent in 2015 and is estimated to have shrunk another 3.5 percent last year. Temer came into power last year after the impeachment of leftist president Dilma Rousseff. He is attempting to push through far-ranging

pro-business reforms, with a 20 year federal spending freeze his first victory.

However Temer still faces what economists say will be at best anemic economic growth this year, as well as the unpredictable fallout of a huge corruption scandal at the Petrobras state oil company. Macri, who was elected at the end of 2015, is hoping for around three percent growth this year, a big turnaround from nearly two percent decline in 2016, according to analysts. He has also enacted unpopular reforms that he says will free up the economy. But he needs Brazil to improve since the country is Argentina's main destination for exports.

There could be an unexpected opportunity, however, in the protectionist policies espoused by US President Donald Trump. Since taking office in January Trump has withdrawn the United States from the Trans-Pacific Partnership and called for renegotiating the NAFTA pact with Canada and Mexico.

"The indirect effect of the US government's policy toward Mexico and Latin America could be a moment of opportunity if Brazil and Argentina strengthen their relations in the region and take opportunities on the market," said Alberto Pfeifer, an expert on diplomacy at Sao Paulo University. — AFP



ATHENS: A firefighter's helmet stands next to a flare during a protest. — AP

GREECE BAILOUT 'CREDIBLE' DESPITE IMF CRITICISM: EU

BRUSSELS: The EU on Tuesday insisted Greece's economy remained on track despite a withering opinion by the IMF that Athens's debt was "unsustainable" and calling for further European debt relief. A standoff between the eurozone and the International Monetary Fund has dragged on for months, raising fears of a new debt crisis and sparking fresh talk of Greece tumbling out of the euro.

The fund and the 19-nation single currency area are battling over how much debt relief Greece needs, and over economic targets required of Athens as part of a third massive bailout, agreed in 2015. "We continue to believe that the commitments reached for the program are both credible and ambitious," said Annika Breidhardt, a spokeswoman for the European Commission, the EU's executive arm which monitors the bailout for the eurozone, along with the IMF and the ESM bailout fund.

More debt relief is the condition set by the IMF to lend more to Athens, but that demand is staunchly resisted by Germany and other fiscal hardliners in the single currency zone. An IMF Debt Sustainability Analysis - which was not released publicly but obtained by AFP - warned Greece's debt "is highly unsustainable" and "will become explosive in the long run." A breakthrough in the standoff is key, with Athens at risk of hitting a financial wall this summer when it must repay nearly 7.0 billion euros it cannot afford without new bailout funds.

Eurogroup head Jeroen Dijsselbloem

said on Tuesday he had been "surprised" by the IMF's tough tone, saying: "Greece is already doing rather better than what is described in the report."

"Jobs are increasing and large measures have been integrated into the budget even if there are some remaining major reforms such as the running of the jobs market, taxation and pensions. On these points we agree with the IMF that work still needs to be done," he told Dutch television RTLZ.

The IMF on Monday said that a majority of its board felt strongly that Greece could not be subject to more austerity, even though this is demanded by Germany. "Most directors agreed that Greece does not require further fiscal consolidation at this time," a statement by the IMF said after the fund held a board meeting to discuss the country in Washington. However, "some... had different views on the fiscal path and debt sustainability," the statement added, with reports widely citing Berlin as leading the opposing view.

The feuding has spooked investors with Greece's two year borrowing rates soaring to near 10 percent on the financial markets. To ease tensions, the IMF reluctantly said in December it could go along with the tighter budget targets, but only if Athens passes new austerity laws in case the targets are missed. But the Greek government on Tuesday criticized these demands as "illogical," even though it supports calls by the IMF for more debt relief. — AFP

WHY THE TRADE GAP MAY OBSTRUCT TRUMP'S ECONOMIC VISION FOR US

COMBATIVE STANCE TOWARD TRADING PARTNERS MAY NOT HELP

WASHINGTON: The US trade deficit hit a four-year peak in 2016 and is posing a tough challenge to President Donald Trump's drive to shrink the deficit, accelerate the economy and create many more jobs. Trump's combative stance toward America's trading partners may not help. The president has threatened to slap punitive tariffs on imports from China, Mexico and other nations deemed to be trading unfairly. If those frictions were to fuel a trade war, it could actually worsen the US trade gap. Here's what's at stake.

Q: What is America's trade deficit?

A: The deficit measures how much the value of the goods and services the nation imports exceeds the value of its exports. For 2016, the deficit totaled \$502.3 billion - the gap between \$2.711 trillion in imports and \$2.209 trillion in exports.

Q: Was the 2016 deficit unusually large?

A: Not by the standards of recent history. But higher and higher US trade gaps have become a long-running trend. (The last time the United States enjoyed a trade surplus was 1975.) The deficits shrank somewhat after the Great Recession of 2007-2009, which cut Americans' appetite for both domestic and foreign-made products. But as the U.S. economy has regained momentum, the deficit has widened again. A key reason: More financially secure American consumers have grown confident enough to spend more on imports. Yet the same time, weak economies abroad have kept a lid on U.S. exports. So has a more highly valued dollar, which makes U.S. products more expensive overseas.

Q: Why can't the world's biggest economy run trade surpluses?

A: That's a question Trump posed repeatedly during the campaign. He heaped blame on misconceived trade deals, which he said have exploited the United States while rewarding other nations. Private economists say the answer is hardly so simple. A nation's trade surplus or deficit, they note, reflects diverse factors, including how strong consumer spending is at home and abroad and the value of, say, the US dollar against other currencies - something the United States can't easily control. What's more, the United States, as a highly advanced economy, pays higher wages than many developing nations do - a potential disadvantage on trade.

Q: How does Trump plan to address the trade deficit?

A: One complaint he lodged during the campaign was that other nations, notably China, were cheating the United States by manipulating their own currency to keep it undervalued. By doing so, these nations could make their



BALTIMORE: In this Oct 24, 2016, photo, containers wait to be unloaded from a ship at the Port of Baltimore. — AP

goods less expensive abroad than similar American products. Trump also attacked the North American Free Trade Agreement, which two decades ago created a free trade area covering the United States, Canada and Mexico, as a catastrophe which he would renegotiate to better protect American workers and goods.

Trump has also proposed imposing punitive tariffs - as high as 45 percent - against such countries as China and Mexico if they don't stop what he calls unfair trading practices that he says have cost millions of American manufacturing jobs. Doing so, however, would likely make countless goods that the United States imports from those countries - think avocados and tomatoes - far more expensive for Americans.

Q: Do economists generally think Trump's policies would help the trade deficit?

A: Many economists are worried. They say they fear that Trump's threats would not only fail to produce more favorable trade terms for US companies and workers but also trigger tit-for-tat trade wars with other nations. Other nations could retaliate by raising the tariffs they impose on US goods.

Q: Has this ever happened before?

A: Yes. Congress approved the Tariff Act of 1930, known as the Smoot-Hawley Act, to fight the effects of a deepening downturn. The law raised tariffs on imports in an effort to protect American jobs. Instead, it led other countries to

retaliate, and global trade shrank. Eventually, a severe recession turned into a global Great Depression.

Q: Could that happen again?

A: Most economists don't think Trump's efforts will trigger anything like what happened in the 1930s. But there's concern that the president could incite a trade war that would harm the U.S. economy. A more optimistic view is that Trump will use tough talk to gain trade concessions from other nations and give the United States a more advantageous playing field.

Q: Could this approach significantly shrink the chronic trade deficits?

A: Few think so. But if Trump could manage to forge better trade agreements, and if those deals helped increase US exports while holding down imports, the US trade gap would narrow as a result.

The economy would accelerate, too. Trade is again expected to be a drag on the economy in 2017, but economists have forecast that other factors, including solid consumer spending, will lift the economy to growth of around 2.5 percent. Even stronger expansion is expected next year if Trump succeeds in winning Congress' approval of his stimulus program of tax cuts, deregulation and increased infrastructure spending. Most forecasters think those initiatives would deliver a bigger economic boost than Trump's efforts to shrink the trade deficit. — AP

RIO TINTO ANNUAL PROFIT SURGES ON SPIKING COMMODITY PRICES

SYDNEY: Rio Tinto yesterday reported a surge in annual net profit on the back of improving commodity prices in a strong turnaround from last year's loss, and rewarded shareholders with a buyback. The world's second-largest miner reported an annual net profit of US \$4.62 billion for the year to December 31, compared to a US\$866 million net loss in the previous financial year when key metals prices plunged and Chinese demand slowed.

The result, which was slightly below analysts' expectations, is a reflection of the brighter outlook for the mining sector amid the commodity upswing in late 2016. The price of iron ore, Rio's main commodity, has recovered from less than US\$40 a ton just over a year ago to rising above US\$80 earlier this year.

"Today's results show we have kept our commitment to maximize cash and productivity from our world-class assets, delivering US\$3.6 billion in shareholder returns while maintaining a robust balance sheet," chief executive Jean-Sebastien Jacques said in a statement. "We enter 2017 in good shape," he added.

As part of the US\$3.6 billion return to shareholders, Rio declared a full-year dividend of 170 US cents per share and a share buyback of US \$500 million this year.

While the dividend was 21 percent lower than the previous year, it was above market forecasts of about 140 US cents. The full-year amount was also higher than the minimum 110 US cents flagged by Rio last year.

Capital spending, which came in at US\$3.01 billion for 2016, was expected to be about US\$5.0 billion this year and about US\$5.5 billion each in 2018 and 2019, Rio said.

Underlying profit, a measure the Anglo-Australian giant prefers, came in at US\$5.10 billion, a 12 percent increase from the prior period. The underlying result was ahead of consensus, which was about US\$4.9 billion. Shares in Rio closed 0.81 percent higher at Aus\$65.69 in Sydney ahead of the release of the results.



GOBI DESERT: This file photo taken on June 23, 2012 shows trucks working on the open pit mine at the Rio Tinto operated Oyu Tolgoi gold and copper mine. — AFP

Positive outlook

"The big improvement in the year was cost-cutting," Fat Prophets resources analyst David Lennox told AFP. "They managed to pull out US\$1.2 billion in costs, which I suspect most pundits wouldn't have been expecting."

Prices in key commodities such as steel-making ingredient iron ore have soared in recent months, supporting producers, with shares in Rio Tinto jumping more than 60 percent from a year ago. Before the recent rebound, miners had slashed spending, sold assets and wound back capital expenditure to combat market headwinds as commodity prices tumbled.

Rio last month sold most of its Australian coal assets to China-backed Yancoal in a deal worth up to US\$2.45 billion as part of a divestment drive that analysts said would lead to a complete exit from the sector. Lennox said the outlook for Rio was positive, amid expectations of infra-

structure growth in not just China but also the United States and India.

"We've got three pressure points now on pricing, whereas over the last three years, we've really only had China," he added. The World Bank said in its commodities forecast last month that most prices appeared to have bottomed out last year and were on track to climb in 2017. The bank projected metals prices to rise by 11 percent this year, up from an earlier forecast of four percent.

One of the few clouds hanging over Rio is the possible impact of investigations by regulators over US\$10.5 million in payments linked to the world's biggest untapped iron-ore deposit in Guinea. The miner said the outcome of the investigations and any related litigation was "subject to a number of significant uncertainties" and "could ultimately expose the group to material financial cost". — AFP

SYNGENTA SAYS PROFITS DOWN, CHEMCHINA TAKEOVER LOOMS

ZURICH: Swiss pesticide and seed giant Syngenta said yesterday that restructuring costs hit 2016 earnings, even as its planned takeover by ChemChina looks set to be completed by the middle of the year. Last year, Syngenta raked in a net profit of \$1.2 billion (1.1 billion euros), which was 12 percent lower than a year earlier, blaming ballooning restructuring and impairment charges, including costs linked to the pending ChemChina deal.

Syngenta's 2016 sales were meanwhile hit by low crop prices and a stronger dollar, slipping five percent year-on-year to \$12.8 billion, it said. The net profit and sales numbers were largely in line with the expectations of analysts polled by Swiss financial news agency AWP. "In 2016, Syngenta showed a resilient performance in the face of another difficult year for the agriculture industry," company chief executive Erik Fyrwald said in the earnings statement.

China's state-owned chemical corporation ChemChina is awaiting final regulatory approval for its planned purchase of the Swiss company for \$43 billion, and completing what should be the biggest overseas takeover ever for a Chinese firm. "ChemChina and Syngenta have made significant progress towards achieving the necessary regulatory approvals and closing the transaction," Syngenta said.

It said the deal so far had received

the approval of 13 regulatory authorities, but was still waiting for a green light from Brazil, Canada, China, the EU, India, Mexico and the United States. The deal, it said, was expected to close during the second quarter. "ChemChina and Syngenta remain fully committed to the transaction and are confident of its closure," the statement said.

The expected closing date has been pushed back several times as regulators in the United States and other countries have dragged their feet. The deal is just one of several huge takeovers in the agro-chemical sector that regulators are grappling with, with German giant Bayer offering \$66 billion for US firm Monsanto, which in 2015 had tried to acquire Syngenta for \$46 billion.

US giants Dow Chemicals and DuPont have also proposed a \$130-billion tie-up. Syngenta's board has decided to host the general assembly in June, after the final settlement of the ChemChina is expected to go through, and said it did not plan to pay out dividends this year. However, once the ChemChina deal goes through, a special dividend of 5.00 Swiss francs (\$5.01, 4.70 euros) per share will be paid out, it said. Following the news, Syngenta saw its share price rise 1.18 percent to 430.40 Swiss francs a piece in morning trading as the Swiss stock exchange's main SMI index remained largely flat. — AFP

5 QUESTIONS ON CHINA'S FALLING FOREX RESERVES

BEIJING: China's cash stockpile fell last month to just below \$3 trillion, its lowest level since 2008 at the height of the global financial crisis and a trillion dollars down from its record high seen in mid-2014. The figure is still more than double second-placed Japan's \$1.2 trillion and larger than the gross domestic product of Britain. However, it's shrinking, and the ongoing reduction is ringing alarm bells around global markets. So, what is the big deal? Here are five questions and answers.

What are China's forex reserves?

The total amount of cash, bonds, and financial assets in a foreign currency held by China's central bank, the People's Bank of China. While it does not disclose exactly which currencies it holds in what proportions, economists believe roughly two-thirds is in US dollars, particularly US Treasury bonds.

Why does it matter?

China's mountain of foreign exchange was growing rapidly every year as it ran an enormous trade surplus with the rest of the world and many viewed it as a symbol of its mounting national power. With so much of the holdings in US Treasury bonds, American politicians worried that Beijing could use them as leverage over Washington. These fears, however, have not yet materialised.

Why has it shrunk?

The dollar has rallied since Donald Trump's November US election win as investors bet he will push on with his promises of big spending and tax cuts that will ramp up inflation and force the Federal Reserve to lift interest rates-attracting investors to the US for better returns.

This has weakened China's holdings in other currencies, creating a large paper loss. However, slowing economic growth has spurred capital flight, with citizens,

investors, and businesses moving large sums of money offshore-causing the yuan currency to weaken further and it is now near eight-year lows. To stem outflows and stabilise the yuan, the central bank has been using its war chest to buy up the currency; its foreign exchange reserves slipped \$12.3 billion to \$2,998 trillion in January alone, People's Bank of China data showed.

Is this a problem?

Many observers have seen the \$3 trillion threshold as psychologically important, and some expect that capital flight-and downward pressure on the yuan-will increase now that China has crossed it. But Beijing is working hard to curb outflows through regulations, and it recently rolled out stricter rules on buying foreign currency and making it tougher for firms to make overseas acquisitions. "Policymakers may eventually have to resort to more forceful steps such as formally re-imposing restrictions on outflows," said Louis Kuijs of Oxford Economics.

Any risks from Trump?

Yes. If the tycoon follows through on his protectionist rhetoric and meets promises to stimulate the US economy, the green-back would likely rise further. That in turn would attract more capital flows from China and put further downward pressure on the yuan. Keeping the unit stable could get very expensive for Beijing. But the alternative-letting the yuan depreciate sharply-could roil markets and fuel instability, which the Communist Party loathes.

"The PBoC is caught between the devil and the deep blue sea, facing a choice of either continued slow erosion of (forex) reserves, or further currency adjustment that could be destabilising for China and may also cause turmoil in Asian currency markets," said Rajiv Biswas of IHS Global Insight. — AFP



LIMA: In this Nov 17, 2016, file photo, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, center, listens to questions from the media after meeting with then US President-elect Donald Trump during his stopover in New York en route to an APEC meeting. — AP

JAPAN'S ABE HOPES PROMISES ON JOBS, WILL TEMPER TRUMP'S TONE ON TRADE

TOKYO WORRIES TRUMP MAY GO OFF SCRIPT AT SUMMIT

TOKYO/WASHINGTON: Prime Minister Shinzo Abe heads to Washington today hoping promises to help create US jobs and bolster Japan's military will persuade US President Donald Trump to turn down the heat on trade and currency and stand by the decades-old alliance. Japanese officials have been soothed by security assurances from Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and others. But they worry Trump may go off script when the two leaders meet, first for a summit in Washington tomorrow and then for a round of golf near the "Winter White House" in Florida.

Some in Tokyo even worry that Trump, a global businessman and author of "The Art of the Deal", might eventually make some sort of pact with rival China that leaves Japan out in the cold. "What we want to know is Mr Trump's attitude towards China," said Yukio Okamoto, a former Japanese diplomat with ties to the government. "If it becomes only an economic one, then a deal might be made at some point without the consideration of security issues in the region." Japanese politicians are also concerned that Abe might make hard-to-keep promises when the two play a round of golf that has echoes of one between Abe's Prime Minister grandfather, Nobusuke Kishi, and President Dwight Eisenhower in 1957.

US newspapers then dubbed the golf game a "triumph of diplomacy" between the former World War Two enemies. Three years later, Kishi had to resign because of a public furore over the 1960 US-Japan security pact. "The symbolism of playing golf is very important to the Japanese," said Dennis Wilder, a former National Security Council official. "Abe is very proud of his grandfather and has worked hard to fulfill his unrealized dream of building a full strategic partnership with Washington."

Cars, trains and screens

During his election campaign, Trump complained that Tokyo and Seoul were not sharing enough of the cost of the US security umbrella. Trump has also lumped Japan with China and

Mexico as big contributors to the US trade deficit, targeted its auto trade as "unfair" and accused Tokyo of using monetary policy to devalue its currency to boost exports.

Addressing such concerns, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshide Suga said yesterday Tokyo's share of America's trade deficit had declined from historic highs and Japanese firms have invested in the US significantly. Japan posted a trade surplus of 6.8 trillion yen with the United States last year, down 4.6 percent from 2015, but US-bound car shipments rose for a second straight year, ministry of finance data showed.

Abe, who will be accompanied by Finance Minister Taro Aso and Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida, will bring a package of steps Tokyo says could create 700,000 US jobs through private-public investment in infrastructure such as high-speed trains, government sources say. Speculation is also simmering that Japanese manufacturers like Toyota Motor Corp, whose president Akio Toyoda met Abe last week, could time announcements about investment - either already planned or new - to coincide with the summit.

Japanese display maker Sharp Corp may start building a \$7 billion plant in the United States this year, a person with knowledge of the plan said yesterday. Hoping to update what Japan believes is Trump's outdated image of Japan forged in decades-old trade wars, Abe will also be armed with data, showing, for example, that Japanese firms are the biggest direct foreign investor and foreign employer in the United States second only to Britain.

Bilateral trade deal

Trump, who has abandoned the 12-nation Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade pact championed by his predecessor Barack Obama, wants to open talks on a bilateral free trade deal with Tokyo. He also wants to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) binding Mexico, the United States and Canada, the basis of many

Japanese firms' investment plans.

Abe prefers multilateral trade deals, but has left the door open to talks on a bilateral pact - despite misgivings by some officials that Tokyo would come under intense pressure to open further politically sensitive sectors such as agriculture, while gaining scant economic benefits. "I don't think Mr Abe will say 'no' to the bilateral option but I don't think he will say it is a good idea, either," one Japanese official said.

Financial markets are keen to see whether Trump repeats his criticism of Japan for using money supply to weaken the yen to boost exports. Japanese sources have made clear Tokyo will push back on any attempts to bind its hands on a hyper-easy monetary policy central to "Abenomics" growth prescriptions.

Disputed islands

Abe will be eager for Trump to repeat assurances that his administration will adhere to Washington's commitment to defend disputed East China Sea islands under Japanese control but claimed also by China. The islands are called the Senkaku in Japan and the Diaoyu in China.

Abe is likely to reassure Trump that Japan is willing to play a bigger regional defense role and beef up its military capabilities. A pledge to boost defense spending, however, could be contentious at home in view of Japan's huge public debt. Some experts cautioned that too subservient a response by Abe, such as a government-inspired jobs creation package, risks confirming Trump's view that old-style Japan bashing works.

"It's a very difficult line to walk to satisfy Trump at the same time not giving the impression that it's Japan Inc all over again," said Jun Okumura, a former trade negotiator who is a visiting scholar at the Meiji Institute for Global Affairs.

Others, though, said Japan has little choice. As the Japanese official put it, "We have no choice but to ride with the United States, whoever the president is." — Reuters



BEIJING: A woman leaves a supermarket holding her groceries in Beijing yesterday. China's cash stockpile fell last month to just below 3 trillion USD, its lowest level since 2008 at the height of the global financial crisis and a trillion dollars down from its record high seen in mid-2014. — AFP

CHINA INVITES BRITAIN TO ATTEND NEW SILK ROAD SUMMIT: SOURCES

BEIJING/LONDON: China has invited British Prime Minister Theresa May to attend a major summit in May on its "One Belt, One Road" initiative to build a new Silk Road, diplomatic sources told Reuters, as London said she would visit China this year. "One Belt, One Road" is Chinese President Xi Jinping's landmark programme to invest billions of dollars in infrastructure projects including railways, ports and power grids across Asia, Africa and Europe.

China has dedicated \$40 billion to a Silk Road Fund and the idea was the driving force behind the establishment of the \$50 billion China-backed Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. China has so far given few details about who will attend the summit, to be held in Beijing. The country's top diplomat, State Councillor Yang Jiechi, told the official China Daily last week that leaders from about 20 countries have confirmed their participation, representing Asia, Europe, Africa and Latin America, though he did not give names.

One Beijing-based diplomatic source with direct knowledge of the invite list told Reuters that May was among the leaders who had been invited. "China is choosing the countries it sees as friends and who will be most influential in promoting 'One Belt, One Road'," said the source, speaking on condition of anonymity. Two other diplomatic sources confirmed May was on the invite list. "It's China's most important diplomatic event of the year," one of the sources told Reuters.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang said plans for the summit are proceeding smoothly, and that details of the participants will be announced at a later date. "China welcomes Prime Minister May to visit China at the appropriate time," Lu told a daily news briefing. Sri Lanka has already confirmed its prime minister is coming, and China says Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte is also attending. Foreign leaders often combine attendances at important multilateral events China is hosting with official state visits to China.

May to discuss trade

Speaking in London, May's aides confirmed she would visit China this year to

discuss trade ties, the latest in a series of foreign trips to cement relations with major powers as she negotiates Britain's divorce from the European Union. May's aides gave few details about the trip, but she is keen to strengthen her hand by securing foreign support before launching Brexit talks, which are set to be among the most complicated Britain has ever undertaken.

"It would be a renewed expression of the close relationship between Britain and China, something that you have seen obviously develop over the past few years," May's spokesman told reporters on Tuesday. "I would imagine that trade would form some part of the discussions that we have."

The Commerce Ministry has said China has an open attitude towards a free trade deal with Britain once it leaves the EU and was willing to study it, but Chinese officials have otherwise said little publicly about the subject.

May attended a summit in China of the G20 leading economies last September, shortly after she became prime minister following June's referendum vote to leave the EU, and was invited by Xi to visit again. With May having made clear she plans for Britain to leave the EU's single market, trade has dominated her talks with foreign leaders in recent months.

She has secured assurances from US President Donald Trump, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other world powers that they are keen to start talks on boosting links. But her attempts to up the stakes in talks with the EU, which she is due to launch before the end of March, have also drawn criticism.

Some opposition lawmakers have accused May of ducking difficult issues to win promises for trade - a charge repeating when she became the first foreign leader late last month to meet Trump, who has since been criticized over his immigration curbs. She also came under fire for strengthening ties with Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan, who has been criticized by rights groups for jailing tens of thousands of people after a failed coup in July. — Reuters

RENAULT-NISSAN CLOSE TO 10M SALES IN 2016

PARIS: Renault-Nissan said yesterday it sold nearly 10 million vehicles worldwide as the group faces up to accusations that Renault participated in an emissions scandal. Renault-Nissan, which has aspirations to become one of the world's top three carmakers behind Volkswagen and Toyota, said in statement that unit sales jumped by nearly 17 percent to 9.96 million vehicles last year.

German giant Volkswagen is the world's biggest in terms of units sold, with 10.3 million vehicles sold last year. Japanese rival Toyota sold 10.18 million vehicles, while US giant General Motors has yet to publish its 2016 sales figures. Renault-Nissan said the strong rise in overall sales came despite the disappointing performance of Mitsubishi, the Japanese unit that was added to the group last year when Nissan took a 34-percent stake. Overall, Renault-Nissan's sales accounted for about one in nine of the cars sold in the world last year. The Nissan arm said solid demand in China and the United States helped it to sell 5.6 million vehicles in 2016, a 2.5-percent increase. For its part, Renault said earlier this month it had benefited from buoyant markets in Europe, India and increasingly as it opens up its markets to the West-Iran. It saw a 13-percent surge in sales. Mitsubishi is struggling though, with a 13-percent drop in sales last year, partly because its Japanese market

was hit by admissions that some of its workers had falsified fuel performance data for years. It sold just over 934,000 vehicles. Renault-Nissan also boasts of being the world leader in electric cars with nearly 425,000 sold last year, led by the Nissan Leaf model. A year and a half after

Volkswagen's "dieselgate" scandal erupted, Paris prosecutors announced last month that they are probing Renault over possible "cheating" in diesel emissions. Renault's commercial director Thierry Koskas has said the group was moving swiftly to address those concerns. — AFP



LOS ANGELES: In this Wednesday, Nov 18, 2015, file photo, the 2016 Nissan Sentra is debuted during the Los Angeles Auto Show. — AP

VOLKSWAGEN CONSIDERS SLASHING EXECUTIVE PAY

FRANKFURT AM MAIN: German car giant Volkswagen is considering a cap on executive pay and bonuses in the wake of its "dieselgate" scandal, AFP learned Tuesday. A salary cap "may be on the agenda" for a supervisory board meeting on February 24, a VW source told AFP, partially confirming local media reports. VW's existing pay and bonus system, based on past performance, meant some executives received multi-million-euro payouts even after the group admitted to having installed software to cheat regulatory emissions tests on some 11 million cars worldwide in September 2015.

Under the plans the firm is considering, board members' pay will not exceed 10 million euros (\$10.6 million) in any one year, business daily Handelsblatt reported, citing sources close to the supervisory board. Citing its own anonymous source, news agency DPA said only the

chief executive's pay limit would be 10 million euros, with lower caps for other executive board members. A Volkswagen spokesman said the supervisory board "has been considering the question of a new pay system for a long time." Former chief executive Martin Winterkorn, who quit over the cheating scandal and remains under investigation over his role, was paid more than 10 million euros in several of the years he was at the helm. Fixed salary will make up a larger share of executive pay at VW in future, Handelsblatt said. In the past, variable bonus payments have reached up to four times as high as fixed salaries for some of the car maker's executives. Some of the payout will be in the form of long-term investments in the company, giving executives a "future-oriented view," VW sources told Handelsblatt.

Managers' pay became a political football last week following media reports that VW compli-

ance chief Christine Hohmann-Dennhardt, a former judge and Social Democratic Party (SPD) politician, would leave the board with a golden parachute of more than 12 million euros after just one year. With general elections slated for September, the SPD is battling to present a left-wing alternative to Chancellor Angela Merkel's conservative block.

VW is particularly exposed to social-democratic ire at managers' pay, as SPD ministers from its home state of Lower Saxony, a major shareholder, and powerful labor representatives sit on the group's supervisory board. VW announced earlier this month that it will pay at least \$1.2 billion to compensate some 80,000 US buyers of 3.0-liter diesel engines as well as buying back or refitting their vehicles. Along with earlier payouts promised to drivers, car dealers and US states, that brings the total cost of the emissions crisis so far to over \$23 billion. — AFP



QMMF ANNOUNCES A NEW CHALLENGING ROUTE FOR QATAR CROSS-COUNTRY RALLY

DOHA: Officials at the Qatar Motor and Motorcycle Federation (QMMF) are currently finalizing the route for this year's renamed Qatar Cross-Country Rally, round four of the FIA Cross-Country Rally World Cup and round two of the FIM Cross-Country Rallies World Championship. They also announced that the revised five-day event would take place on April 17-22. Traditionally one of the most demanding rounds of both cross-country championships, in terms of tricky navigation and intricate tracks and sand trails, this year's event has been shortened from five selective sections to four and features a number of exciting innovations.

"We have fine tuned the route and the format for the Sealine event, based on feedback and our intuition," said QMMF President Abdulrahman Al-Mannal. "We have reduced

the number of long selective sections from five to four and reduced the actual competitive distance to around 1,380km from 1,635km. The rally will also cover a larger geographical area on this occasion and we will have less stony sections."

Rally headquarters and the media centre will be based at the Losail international circuit for a second year. The timetable has been modified slightly and administration checks and pre-event scrutinizing will now take place at Losail, to the north of Doha, on Monday, April 17. After a drivers' briefing and the pre-event press conference, competitors will tackle a new super special stage in the Doha area on Tuesday, April 18. The first of four selective sections through the desert gets underway on April 19 and is followed by three further sections on April 20, April 21 and April 22 - each of around 350km.

The fourth stage on April 21 will take place entirely in the north of the country for the first time, while two of the stages will finish in the dunes around the former bivouac location at Sealine, south of Doha. The fourth stage will start in the same area. Portugal's Pedro Almeida will continue to work as Clerk of the Course for the FIA event, with Rashed Al-Sulaiti acting as his deputy and Frenchman Franck Vayssié appointed as the new Rally Director.

The former Sealine event developed from the Qatar International Baja that ran as a candidate event for the FIA World Cup in 2011 and was won by Qatar's Nasser Saleh Al-Attiyah at the wheel of a SAM Mercedes 35CC. Australia's Justin Taylor and local rider Adel Hussein Abdulla won the motorcycle and quad categories. The event is now entering its

sixth season as a round of both the FIA and FIM World Championships. Al-Attiyah claimed further wins in 2012, 2014, 2015 and 2016 in Toyotas and Minis and two-time Dakar winner Jean-Louis Schlesser was victorious in 2013.

Five-time Dakar winner Marc Coma dominated the motorcycle category with his KTM in 2012, 2013 and 2015, with Spaniard Joan-Barreda Bort winning in 2014 and recent Dakar winner Sam Sunderland claiming another win for KTM last year. Poland's Rafal Sonik won the quad event on a Honda TRX 700 in 2012, 2013 and 2015, although Qatar's Mohammed Abu Issa was victorious in 2014 and Chile's Ignacio Casale claimed the win in 2016. The closing date for entries at reduced rates is Monday, March 6, with the final cut-off planned for Monday, March 27.



VIVA RECEIVES PRESTIGIOUS ISO 27001:2013 GLOBAL CERTIFICATION

KUWAIT: VIVA, Kuwait's fastest-growing and most developed telecom operator, has received the ISO/IEC 27001:2013 certification for Information Security Management System, attaining global status by meeting applicable mandatory requirements from two leading entities International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC).

On this occasion, Eng Salman Bin Abdulaziz A-Badran, VIVA's CEO, said: "The ISO/IEC 27001:2013 standard provides a tried and tested framework for implementing and managing information security processes through a systematic approach, thus allowing us to continuously provide top notch service to all our customers. It is our duty of care to safeguard our customers and partners information and data and to meet or exceed their expectations, in an ever-evolving environment, which forms a core part of our long-term vision for security best practices. By achieving this internationally recognized certification, VIVA has demonstrated its commitment to data protection and continuous improvement."

This certificate will foster VIVA's position as a leading telecom company in the Middle East region by adhering to the highest internationally accepted standard for Information Security

Management Systems (ISMS). VIVA is one of the few telecom companies to earn this accreditation in Kuwait to date. In its endeavor to meet ISO 27001 standards, VIVA has shown its commitment by adopting a systematic and on-going approach to managing sensitive company and customer information.

The certification is a key indicator of VIVA program to protect vital customer data from a wide range of cyber threats and vulnerabilities that can lead to data loss. It provides third-party verification that the company's ISMS conforms to a standard that helps protect the integrity of customer's information assets.

This ISO 27001 certification is a reflection of VIVA commitment to the quality of its information security management system. VIVA successfully completing the rigorous certification process demonstrates VIVA's effort to safeguard the information assets and intellectual property of our company and our clients. ISO/IEC 27001:2013 specifies the requirements for establishing, implementing, maintaining and continually improving an information security management system within the context of the organization. It also includes requirements for the assessment and treatment of information security risks tailored to the needs of the organization.

KFC OPERATOR YUM CHINA BEATS EARNING EXPECTATIONS

BEIJING: Yum China, the operator of fast-food giants KFC, Pizza Hut and Taco Bell in the country, beat earnings expectations in its first report since spinning off from its US parent. The firm said operating profit for 2016 hit \$640 billion in China, up 31 percent from 2015 when it was a unit of Yum Brands. The growth came as Yum added 575 new restaurants over the year with more than half coming in the final three months bringing its total in the country to more than 7,500.

"We believe the majority of our restaurants in China are yet to be built," CEO Micky Pant said in a statement posted with the results on Tuesday. "Right now, our top priority is consistently delivering positive same-store sales growth." Same-store sales expanded three percent at KFC but Pizza Hut's performance fell seven percent, it added.

Nevertheless "this was a momentous year for Yum China," Pant said, adding that the new independent firm has enhanced its leading position in the Chinese market. After three decades in the country, Yum Brands in October split its \$6.9 billion operations as the fast-food industry faces sluggish sales growth with consumers increasingly turning to upmarket dining options. The company's China business was also hammered by a tainted meat scandal in mid-2014. Three months after the spin-off move, Yum China opened China's first Taco Bell, in Shanghai with a menu adapted to local tastes. — AFP

WARBA BANK BOOSTS AL-SUNBULA AND HOLDS THE FIRST DRAW IN 2017

KUWAIT: Warba Bank began 2017 by carrying out the first monthly draw for Al-Sunbula Account clients with more cash prizes and winning opportunities, according to the renovations announced for this account at the beginning of the year. Twelve winners were announced during a ceremony attended by the bank's executive management and staff, in addition to Ministry of Commerce and Industry's representative.

Starting from this year, two Warba Bank clients can win the KD 5,000 grand prize. This month's award went to Mohammad Abdulkareem Khalaf Al-Enezi and Nasser Mufarraj Hamdan Al-Adwani. The other ten awards (KD 1,000 each) went to Halima Ahmad Falah Abdullah, Essam Youssef Nasser Ahmad, Saad Jaber Nahar Al-Adwani, Abdullah Humoud Abdullah Al-Otaibi, Abdullah Fuhaid Mohammad Al-Ajmi, Saad Awadh Hasher Al-Enezi, Saab Ebdah Khaled Al-Hajri, Fadhela Ali Rashid Al-Shaalan, Ghannam Dahham Mohammad Al-Husseini and Rashid Mutaq Mohammad Al-Azmi.

As part of the renovations that Warba Bank introduced, the number of winners increased from six to 12, while the total amount of monthly prizes increased from KD 10,000 to KD 20,000. Furthermore, each client becomes entitled to enter the draw for every KD 10 deposited, instead of KD 100 in the past.

Al-Sunbula Account is a Wakala investment saving account according to the Islamic Sharia completely. It is certified by the bank's fatwa and sharia control department, and is considered the best choice for clients to save money

and make returns on their deposits at the same time. Furthermore, it qualifies clients to enter monthly draws to win a minimum of KD 1,000 in cash.

This account is characterized by not requiring the client to transfer his salary to Warba Bank. Any individual who meets the required terms and conditions can open Al-Sunbula Account and enter the monthly draw within minutes at any of the bank's branches, or online or through the bank's app available on the App Store and Google Play. Each client gets a chance to win for every KD 10 deposited in his account, which means that the more money is deposited, the more chances that a client will have to win any of the awards throughout the year. And similar to other accounts provided by Warba Bank, the Sunbula Account allows clients to benefit from all distinguished and innovative services that it provides, including the ATM and credit card services.

It is worth mentioning that the monthly draw takes place on the first Monday of each month under the supervision and attendance of a representative from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. Each client will be verified to make sure that they meet the conditions to become eligible for the draw; which is done electronically and randomly. The cash prizes are deposited directly in the winners' accounts within a maximum of two working days from the day of the draw. In order to meet the conditions, a client must deposit an amount in his Al-Sunbula Account for an entire month to be eligible to enter the draw that takes place the following month.

NISSAN AL BABBAIN AFTERSALES OFFERS 35% OFF ON GENUINE PARTS

KUWAIT: Abdulmohsen Abdulaziz Al-Babbain Company (AABC), the authorized dealer of Nissan vehicles in the State of Kuwait has reaffirmed its commitment to exceeding customer expectations by launching a new aftersales offer for all Nissan vehicles purchased prior to December 2014 aimed to increase their vehicle longevity and overall condition resulting in safer driving and sustainable mobility.

The after sales offers, a token of gesture for customer loyalty, are running from January 29th till February 27th, 2017. The promotion offers three different programs, which include a Free Engine inspection and Free Engine Cooling System Inspection in addition to a 35% discount on their parts and 17% discount on labor; Free Suspension Inspection as well as 32% off on its parts and 15% on labor, while the third program provides a Free Brake Inspection in addition to 30% off on its parts and 12% on labor.

Nissan Al Babbain cars are equipped with world-class Japanese technology that reminds the driver to be responsible and with regular checks. Not only does the driver extend a vehicle's life, but also retains its residual value while avoiding unforeseen events. Nissan Al Babbain urges all its customers who have purchased a Nissan prior to December 2014 to take advantage of this offer and to accentuate their unique Nissan experience by visiting one of Nissan Al Babbain's service centers located in Al Rai and Ahmadi that are recognized for their unparalleled customer service and housing the automobile industry's most advanced technology.



BOURSA KUWAIT HOSTS INFORMATIVE SESSION FOR THE 'NEW GRADUATES - 3RD EDITION'

KUWAIT: Boursa Kuwait recently hosted an informative session for twenty newly graduates trainees, in support of the Capital Markets Authority (CMA) in its program entitled "New Graduates-3rd Edition". This session falls in line with the CMA's belief in the importance of investing in human capital that will enable local competence to flourish.

The CMA launched a training program for the newly graduates in its third edition in order to build and enhance the Kuwaiti economy and contribute to economic growth based

on the current business requirements. In fact, the CMA has adopted this program with the aim to attract the available talents in capital markets as a step forward in establishing Kuwait as an investment and developmental projects hub.

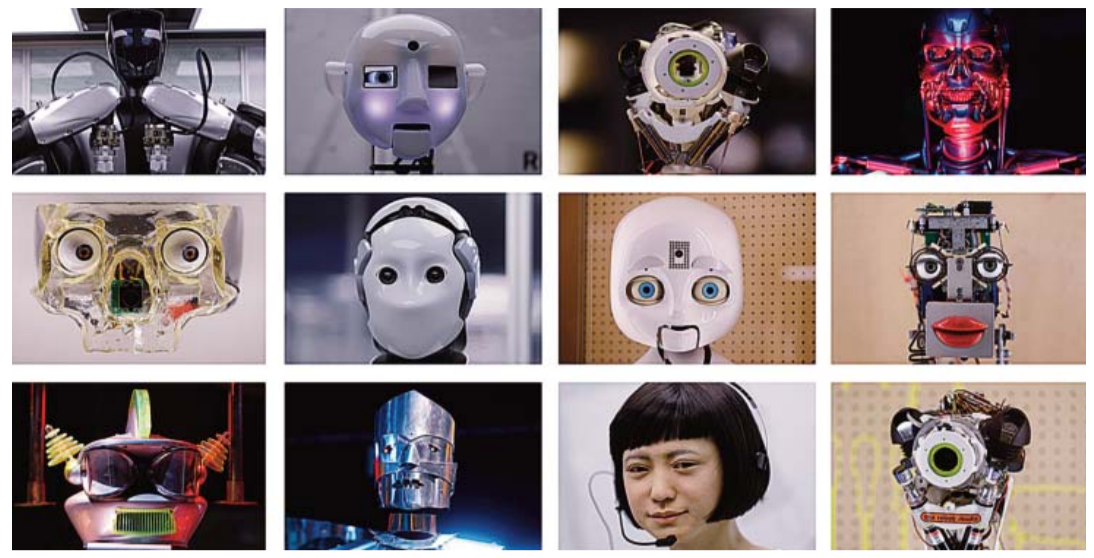
The CMA collaborated with Boursa Kuwait to give a detailed introduction on the company's objectives and responsibilities as well as its activities and achievements. Trainees got the opportunity to learn closely about the role and mission of each of the company's sectors that range

from HR to Markets, Trade, and Strategic transformation among others.

Boursa Kuwait also gave a brief about its success stories that were accomplished last year and projected its vision of the Kuwaiti economy and its stock market. Boursa Kuwait will continue to raise awareness of the organization and its main objectives, while contributing to the development of the 'private culture' among government institutions through similar educational sessions.



LONDON: A robot produced by the Toyota Motor Corporation called 'Harry Trumpet - Player Robot' Japan 2005 is on view at the ROBOT exhibition at the Science Museum in London. —AFP



LONDON: This combination photo shows a selection of robot faces, from futuristic comic book to life like newsmen, on display during a press preview for the Robots exhibition held at the Science Museum in London on Tuesday, Feb 7, 2017. —AP

500 YEARS OF ROBOTS GO ON SHOW IN LONDON

LONDON: Why do humans build machines that resemble them and what does that say about us? A London exhibition opening on Tuesday is surveying 500 years of simple to sophisticated robots to find out. Take a lip-syncing monk from the 16th century or a cartoon-like humanoid avatar that helps children with autism today. They and 100 other robots on display at the Science Museum chart an evolution of machines that fascinate and terrify in equal measure.

"One of the big issues with doing a show like this is people's preconceptions that robots come in, they destroy the world and they enslave us all," lead curator Ben Russell said. "One of the advantages of taking a long view of robots as we have done, is that you realise a lot of these concerns have been with us for a very, very long time," Russell said. But he dismissed these fears as overblown and said humans would prove "much more adaptive".

Studying robots is a good way to learn what society was like at any given point, the exhibition argues. A 16th-century articulated manikin—a little model of a man—allowed its owners to explain and explore the human body. A monk statue built on behalf of King Philip II of Spain, also from the 16th century, was designed to impress. It is able to pray, walk across a table while moving his lips, and raise a crucifix. And dating from 1773, a stunning Silver Swan moves with grace thanks to three separate clockwork mechanisms.

Science fiction has fed for more than a century on fears that humans might be overtaken by the machines they create, and the robotisation that is increasingly a part of everyday life still stirs up debate. A report from the Reform think tank this week predicted 250,000 British public service jobs could be lost to robots over the next 15 years. In France, a presidential candidate wants to create a "robot tax". Artificial intelligence (AI) has also divided the scientific community, with renowned physicist Stephen Hawking saying AI could be "either the best, or the worst thing, ever to happen to humanity."

A replica of "Maria" from the film "Metropolis" and the original T-800 Endoskeleton robot used in the film "Terminator Salvation" are straight from the trope of dystopian fiction on the subject. But many of the latest robots are all about entertaining, and even taking care of, humans. Kaspar, with its mop of thick black hair and interactive features, is designed to engage with children with autism and help them learn about communication. Its minimally expressive face is easier to interpret for autistic children than a human face is.

And its pre-programmed behavior helps teach children about cause and effect. If hit, Kaspar makes a sad face, turns away and says "Ouch, that hurts." Zeno R25 is used in learning activities and therapy for children. One of the most expressive humanoid robots that can be bought off the shelf, it can replicate facial expressions of people it sees in front of him. Finally Harry, Toyota's first walking humanoid, can play the trumpet. The exhibition runs until September 3. —AFP



LONDON: A robot produced by Engineered Arts named 'Robothespian' UK, 2016 is on view at the ROBOT exhibition at the Science Museum in London. —AFP

ARBOR NETWORKS ENHANCES GLOBAL HONEYPOT NETWORK

DUBAI: Arbor Networks Inc, the security division of NETSCOUT (NASDAQ: NTCT), announced yesterday that it has enhanced its global honeypot network with additional cloud based infrastructure to monitor scanning activities that could lead to Internet-of-Things device (IoT) compromise. These instances provide presence in Northeast Asia Pacific, Southeast Asia Pacific, Central EU, Western EU, Eastern South America, Eastern US and Western US regions.

IoT devices are an ideal target for attackers looking to build DDoS botnets because they have limited or non-existent security features. Some IoT devices utilise hard-coded default passwords, many have unnecessary services running that can be exploited, and others have unprotected management interfaces. Most important for DDoS attackers, IoT devices offer high-speed connections and are always on, which allows for a large, predictable amount of attack traffic volume per compromised device.

Looking at the honeypot data over a two week period, Arbor saw a total of 1,027,543 login attempts, of which 819,198 failed, from a total of 92,317 unique source IP addresses. Overall, Arbor witnessed a peak of 18,054 login attempts per hour during the monitoring period. Telnet is being targeted more frequently than SSH. The average rates show the overall trend clearly - 756 versus 2,762

attempts per hour for SSH and Telnet respectively.

Regional differences

The hardware and software used in a large proportion of current IoT devices comes from a very small number of manufacturers based in Asia. In 2014, one of the major manufacturers issued a new software release that solved some security issues. However, these fixes were only made for the English version of the software. A regional breakout of the data showed a variation in the rate of login attempts by geographic area, with the APAC and South America honey pots seeing higher average and maximum attempt rates, more than one per minute in some cases.

"This report from Arbor validates, on a broad regional level, so much of what we have learned over this last year about the expected increase in massive DDoS attacks. It is becoming more and more critical that manufacturers of IoT devices integrate security by design, including update capabilities, into their products to reduce the likelihood of their devices being used in botnets," said Ari Schwarz, Venable's Managing Director of Cybersecurity Services and former Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Cybersecurity in the Obama administration. To download the full Worldwide Infrastructure Security Report, which includes the special sections on IoT botnet tracking, click here.

CHINA PROPOSES FURTHER TIGHTENING OF INTERNET

BEIJING: China is proposing a further tightening of controls over the Internet with the possible establishment of a new commission to vet Internet services and hardware, Beijing's Internet regulator has said. China adopted a controversial cyber security law in November to counter what Beijing says are growing threats such as hacking and terrorism, but the law triggered concerns among foreign business and rights groups.

Overseas critics of the law say it threatens to shut foreign technology companies out of various sectors, and includes contentious requirements for security reviews and for data to be stored on servers in China. New draft rules, released by China's Internet regulator at the weekend, propose setting up an intra-departmental body to examine and coordinate policies nationwide.

The commission would consider risks to national security and stop Communist Party and government departments

from buying online products and services that have not been approved. It is not clear if, or when, the new body would be set up. The proposed rules are open for public comment until March 4. Draft proposals often end up looking different when they are actually passed into law in China.

The proposed new commission, and the adoption of the cyber security law, come amid a broad crackdown by President Xi Jinping on civil society, including rights lawyers and the media, which critics say is meant to quash dissent. In 2015, Beijing adopted a sweeping national security law that aimed to make all key network infrastructure and information systems "secure and controllable". China keeps a close watch over the Internet, deleting comments on social media it deems harmful and blocking popular foreign websites including Google and Facebook. China has defended its controls as necessary to ensure national security and social stability. —Reuters

FACEBOOK ADDS TOOL FOR HELPING IN TIMES OF CRISIS

EMPLOYEES TO GET 20 DAYS OFF FOR BEREAVEMENT

SAN FRANCISCO: Facebook yesterday updated its Safety Check feature with a way for people to lend, or get, helping hands after disasters. A new "Community Help" feature provides a forum at the leading social network where assistance can be offered to victims of floods, earthquakes, fires or other kinds of natural or accidental tragedy, according to Facebook vice president of social good Naomi Gleit. "In times of crisis, connecting is more important than ever," Gleit said.

Facebook launched Safety Check in 2014 as a way for members of the social network to let family or friends easily see whether they are unharmed after disastrous events. Community Help now lets people find, or give, assistance such as food, shelter or transportation in the aftermath of a crisis. "Safety Check has been activated hundreds of times, but we know we can do more to empower the community to help one another," Gleit said. The feature was inspired by Facebook members using groups or posts at the social network to organize aid for people after disasters such as flooding in Chennai, India, in late 2015.

Community Help is being added to Safety Check initially in the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, India and Saudi Arabia and will be expanded as it is refined, according to Facebook. Safety Check is activated after Facebook receives alerts from global crisis reporting agencies



LOIRE-ATLANTIQUE: Photo shows logos of US online social media and social networking service Facebook in Vertou, western France. Facebook yesterday updated its Safety Check feature with a way for people to lend, or get, helping hands after disasters. —AFP

and posts regarding the incidents spike at the social network. If an incident is a natural or accidental disaster, the Community Help tool will be triggered, Gleit said.

20 days off

In another development, Facebook says it is extending its bereavement policies and will also

allow employees paid time off when a family member is sick. The Menlo Park, California, company said Tuesday that its employees will now get up to 20 days paid leave to grieve for an immediate family member and up to 10 days to grieve for an extended family member. Workers will also be able to take up to six weeks paid leave

to care for a sick relative. In a Facebook post announcing the changes, Chief Operating Officer Sheryl Sandberg said the company is also introducing paid family sick time - three days to take care of a family member with a short-term illness. The company already offers four months of paid leave to new parents. —Agencies

A NEW SOFTWARE TO HELP INDIAN POLICE SNARE HUMAN TRAFFICKERS

BENGALURU: New software for police could revolutionise the fight against human trafficking in northeast India and speed up cross-border investigations with Bangladesh and Myanmar, its creators said. Police in six Indian states now have access to the Impulse Case Info Centre software, which provides new ways of sharing intelligence, accessing a database of wanted traffickers and getting updates on cases.

Reports of human trafficking in India rose by 25 per cent in 2015 compared to the previous year, with northeast states such as Assam reporting the highest number of minor girls being trafficked, according to government data. Years of ethnic conflict in many parts of the northeast have made it a trafficking hotspot, campaigners say, adding that the region is a source, destination and

transit point. Sanjeevan Devnath of the start-up DFM Info Analytics said it took two years to develop and fine tune the software. "The biggest challenge was the fact that our users were going to be policemen, many of whom had never worked with a computer before," said Devnath.

Salomi Thommy of the charity Impulse, that worked with Devnath to develop the system, said it can provide detailed information such as profiles of traffickers. "The best feature is the alert mechanism that tells investigators if there are other cases registered involving the same trafficker they are looking for," said Thommy.

Thousands of people, mostly from poor rural areas, are taken to India's cities every year by gangs who sell them into bonded labor or hire them out to unscrupulous

employers. Many end up as domestic workers or laborers in brick kilns, roadside restaurants or small textile and embroidery workshops. Many women and girls are sold into brothels.

The software has connected India's northeastern states with anti-trafficking units in Bangladesh and Myanmar, fast-tracking cross-border investigations. Devnath and his team collated the statistics on trafficking cases, building a database of traffickers, the routes they frequently use and the vulnerable people they target. "We have been able to solve many cases by logging into this system," said Yankeela Bhutia, head of the anti-trafficking unit in Sikkim. "Many traffickers are criss-crossing the borders in the region and this system makes it easy to track them." —Reuters

WEST NILE VIRUS EPIDEMICS MADE WORSE BY DROUGHT

PARIS: Drought has sharply boosted the intensity of deadly West Nile virus epidemics, which are set to worsen with global warming, scientists reported yesterday. Their research, published in the Royal Society journal *Proceedings B*, offers the best explanation of why the disease's impact has varied so much from year to year since arriving in the United States nearly two decades ago.

"We thought epidemics would coincide with the most ideal temperatures for transmission," said co-author Marm Kilpatrick, a professor at the University of California at Santa Cruz (UCSC). "Instead, we found that the severity of drought was far more important." Birds are the main host for the West Nile

virus, which is transmitted to humans by mosquitoes. The study also issued a warning: over the next 30 years, the number of West Nile cases in some parts of the country could triple as climate change provokes more frequent and severe dry spells, it found. West Nile virus from the same family as yellow fever and Zika was introduced into the United States in 1999. Since then, it has infected some 45,000 people and claimed about 2,000 lives, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Like Zika, the virus causes no symptoms in up to 80 percent of people infected. Others report fever, rash, body pain, headache, vomiting or diarrhea. In rare cases,

brain swelling and neurologic infections can occur, sometimes resulting in death. For years, epidemiologists have puzzled over fluctuations in the severity of the epidemics, which hit during the summer months. In some years, there have been only a few hundred severe human cases across the nation. In others—notably 2002, 2003 and 2012—some 3,000 people suffered brain-damaging meningitis or encephalitis each year, and almost three hundred died.

Infected mosquitoes

Variations from region to region were even more pronounced. Human immunity built up with the spread of the disease was

thought to be a factor, but still could not explain the differences. Government scientists, essentially throwing up their hands, declared that predicting the size of future epidemics was too difficult, perhaps impossible. In the study, a team led by Kilpatrick and Sara Paul, also from UCSC, looked at the possible impact of weather variables: summer temperature, precipitation, winter severity, and drought. They were surprised to find that drought emerged as the main driver of more severe outbreaks of the disease. The study also showed that the impact was worse in regions that had not suffered large epidemics in the past, suggesting that people exposed to the virus had built up lasting

immunity. Exactly how drought boosts transmission of the virus is still not clear. Preliminary data suggests the number of mosquitoes during drought years does not increase, but that the percentage infected with West Nile virus does. The scientists speculate that drought conditions favor contact between birds and the mosquitoes that feed off them and pick up the virus in the process. A recent study showed that West Nile can turn deadly years after people have recovered from an initial infection. In one outbreak in Texas that killed nearly 300 people within three months, nearly as many died in the following decade due to complications associated with the virus. — AFP

CHINA TIGHTENS SMOG DATA CONTROLS AMID PUBLIC ANGER

BEIJING: China has established a single network to monitor air pollution levels across the country, as the government attempts to control the spread of information about the country's toxic smog in response to rising public anger. The announcement follows instructions from the national Meteorological Administration last month ordering local meteorological bureaus to stop issuing haze alerts, raising suspicions the government was attempting to suppress information about the chronic problem.



BEIJING: In this Tuesday, Feb. 7, 2017 photo, a couple wearing protection masks visits the Temple of Heaven. — AP

Until now data has in large part been manually compiled from local stations, but the national network will now track pollutants using a combination of manual sampling stations, satellite sensing and airborne platforms, the People's Daily state newspaper reported on Tuesday. "Though data collected by ground base stations can be manually forged, real-time satellite data cannot be changed," He Kebin, a Tsinghua University professor, told the paper.

The initiative aims to accelerate pollu-

tion reduction and eliminate falsified data, the People's Daily said. In October, environmental protection officials in Xi'an, Shaanxi province were caught tampering with air quality monitoring equipment to produce fraudulent numbers.

The network's creation coincides with government efforts to suppress reports about the country's choking pollution, which afflicts most major cities.

According to the China Digital Times, this week authorities directed all Chinese websites to "find and delete" a two-year-old story from The Paper, a Shanghai-based digital news site, about pollution's health risks. Yesterday, a link to the story was being circulated on Chinese social media, but clicking on it redirected to a page saying it was "already offline."

The piece cited a Peking University study finding that PM 2.5 atmospheric pollution caused 257,000 excess deaths in 31 Chinese cities. The microscopic particles are linked to higher rates of chronic bronchitis, lung cancer and heart disease. Measures of the toxin in Chinese cities regularly exceed the World Health Organization's recommended safe limit of 25 micrograms per cubic metre of air, often by as much as ten times.

The study contradicts a statement made last month by a National Health and Family Planning Commission official, who told the Economic Daily that "it is too early to make conclusions about the health consequences of smog, particularly long-term". While national pollution levels have been falling over the past few years, heavy smog this winter and the accompanying alarm have brought renewed urgency to the issue.

The Chinese government has tried to quiet some of the public reaction. Last month, a 29-year-old Chengdu man was detained for five days by local police after he allegedly spread rumors about the smog levels, the Chengdu Commercial Daily reported. — AFP

VATICAN ROW AS CHINA INVITED TO ORGAN TRANSPLANT MEETING

VATICAN CITY: Ethics experts and human rights lawyers slammed the Vatican Tuesday for inviting a top Chinese health official to an organ trafficking summit despite concerns it still uses tissue from executed prisoners. The Pontifical Academy of Sciences invited Huang Jiefu, the man in charge of overhauling China's transplant system, to the two-day conference and he was expected to address the floor later on Tuesday.

Wendy Rogers, a medical ethics expert at Macquarie University in Australia and the chair of an advisory committee on tackling organ theft in China, slammed Huang's presence as "shocking". Both the European Parliament and US Congress have recently condemned organ harvesting in China amid widespread concerns tissue is sourced from executed prisoners of conscience.

Victims reportedly include not only death-row prisoners but also religious and ethnic minorities such as Uighurs, Tibetans, Falun Gong spiritual practitioners and "underground" Christians. Beijing issued its first regulation banning the trade of organs in 2007, but trafficking remains common as the country suffers a drastic shortage of donated body parts. The practice of using executed prisoners' organs for transplants was also banned in 2015, but some international medical groups suspect prisoners may be being reclassified as voluntary donors to get around the rules.

Rogers and a group of experts including a former surgeon from Xinjiang in China wrote to Bishop Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo, the academy's chancellor, to warn that the church risked appearing to sanction the practice.

'New form of slavery'

The Vatican "should be aware of how the endorsements—even indirect—of prestigious foreign bodies are used by China's propagand-

da apparatus to burnish the reputation of its unethical transplant system," the letter said. Sorondo's short response, seen by AFP, said the conference aimed "to be an academic exercise and not a reprise of contentious political assertions". A Vatican spokesman declined to comment on the issue to AFP. Pope Francis has slammed illicit organ trafficking as a "new form of slavery". But the Vatican is also keen not to create a diplomatic incident with China. It is trying to re-establish ties with the country after six decades of estrangement.

The hope is to reconnect with China's 12 million Catholics, which are currently divided between a government-run association and an unofficial church which swears allegiance to the Vatican. Rogers wrote again, insisting the "failure of the academy to examine the evidence that forced organ harvesting has been, and is still happening in China, amounts to a form of complicity in these crimes". She heard nothing back. Critics say that while Huang claimed China would stop using organs from executed prisoners from the start of 2015, the country has passed no new laws or regulations outlawing the practice.

China's ratio of public organ donations was 0.6 to 100,000 people in 2014, one of the lowest in the world. A 2016 investigative report entitled "Bloody Harvest/The Slaughter: An Update" claimed that while the official figure for legal transplants was around 10,000 per year, data from hospitals showed between 60,000 and 100,000 organs were being transplanted each year. Concerns over the use of organs from executed prisoners persist today. On Tuesday, the scientific journal *Liver International* retracted a 2016 China-based study on transplantation after its editor-in-chief, Mario Mondelli from Italy's Pavia University, said the authors had failed to provide any evidence of the source of tissues used. — AFP



BALI: This file photo taken on December 19, 2016 shows a tourist walking past debris washed up on Kuta beach near Denpasar on Indonesia's resort island. — AFP

CASSAVA CARRIER BAGS: AN INDONESIAN ENTREPRENEUR FIGHTS PLASTIC SCOURGE

TACKLING THE PROBLEM WITH ALTERNATIVES

JAKARTA: From bags washing up on Bali's beaches to food packaging scattered across roads and clogging waterways in cities, Indonesia is facing a plastic waste crisis driven by years of rapid economic growth. Now an entrepreneur from Bali, disgusted at the rubbish littering the famous holiday island, is trying to tackle the problem with alternatives to conventional plastic.

His company, Avani Eco, produces goods including cassava carrier bags, takeaway food containers made from sugar cane and straws fashioned from corn starch, which founder Kevin Kumala says biodegrade relatively quickly and don't leave any toxic residue.

"I'm an avid diver and surfer, and I'm out there seeing this plastic pollution in front of my very eyes," says Kumala, explaining why he decided to get into the business of biodegradable plastics, known as "bioplastics". After witnessing the pollution around Bali, he insists tackling the problem is "something that needs to be done". His project comes at a critical time for action on the issue. A 2016 report by the Ellen MacArthur foundation warned that by 2050 there will be more plastic than fish in the ocean, measuring by weight. At the World Economic Forum in Davos this January, 40 of the world's biggest companies agreed to come up with cleaner ways to make and use the material.

In Indonesia, the waves of plastic flooding into rivers and oceans has been causing problems for years—waterways in cities become clogged, increasing the risk of floods, as well death and injury to marine animals who become trapped or ingest plastic packaging. The archipelago of over 17,000 islands is one of the worst offenders when it comes to marine littering, with US charity Oceans Conservancy estimating the country dumps the second-highest amount of plastic into the sea, behind only China.

'Hope for sea animals'

Kumala set up Avani Eco several years ago with its headquarters on Bali and a main factory on Java island, and the biodegradable goods went on sale in 2015. The most popular product is the bags made from cassava—an edible tropical root that is cheap and abundant in Indonesia—with the words "I AM NOT PLASTIC" emblazoned on them.

The entrepreneur, who is a biology graduate, is happy to demonstrate the bags are not harmful—he put some material from a cassava bag into a glass of hot water, watched it quickly dissolve, and then gulped down the resulting concoction. "It gives hope to sea animals, they are no longer choking or ingesting something that could be hazardous," he said.

About three tons of the bags are produced a day at the Java factory and sold to businesses including shops and hotel groups, mostly in Bali and across Indonesia, but also to a growing number of companies abroad. Being environmentally friendly does cost however, with a cassava bag typically about three US cents more expensive than a plastic bag.

The material for the other products Avani Eco sells are sourced in Indonesia, but some items are currently made in China as it is more cost effective to do so—though this does add to their carbon footprint. Kumala says the final products can biodegrade in just a matter of months—and the bags disappear almost instantly in hot water—unlike the years required for conventional plastic to break down.

However other bioplastics have long been on the market, and the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) has expressed skepticism about



JAKARTA: This photograph taken on January 24, 2017 shows Kevin Kumala, founder of Avani Eco, displaying his products during an interview. — AFP photos

the industry. The UN body concluded in a 2015 report that they tended to be more expensive and were unlikely to play a major role in reducing marine litter. Bioplastics are defined as plastics made from materials such as corn starch and vegetable fats and oil, while common plastics are made from natural gas or petroleum.

UNEP senior official Habib El-Habr, who works on protecting the marine environment, said bioplastics were "innovative solutions" that could be part of a long-term solution, but added: "We don't know enough about this technology." He said the UN body favored the management of plastic through such strategies as working with big companies. Still Indonesia needs all the help it can get to deal with its waste. Current rubbish collection

and disposal systems are inadequate to deal with rising plastic use. Tuti Hendrawati Mintarshih, a senior official from Indonesia's environment ministry who deals with waste, conceded there was currently no government funding specifically aimed at reducing plastic waste.

However she said authorities were planning to implement a nationwide scheme compelling shops to charge for plastic bags this year, a scheme that has been trialed in other cities and has successfully reduced usage.

Despite the challenges, Kumala is upbeat that Indonesia's plastic scourge can be tackled and has plans to expand to other countries in the region. He explained: "The whole of Asia is really drowning in an ocean of plastic pollution." — AP

INDIA SCRAPS FUNDING TIES WITH GATES FOUNDATION

NEW DELHI: A group backed by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation that works on India's immunization programs will now be funded by the health ministry, a government official said, a move in part prompted by fears foreign donors could influence policy making. The decision is seen as part of India's broader clampdown on non-governmental organizations to assert control over decision making in key policy areas. Last year, India ordered the dismissal of dozens of foreign-funded health experts working on public welfare schemes.

The Gates Foundation has for years funded the Immunization Technical Support Unit (ITSU), which provides strategy and monitoring advice for New Delhi's massive immunization program that covers about 27 million infants each year. It will now be funded by the government which felt there was a need to completely manage the crucial program on its own, senior health ministry official Soumya Swaminathan told Reuters.

"There was a perception that an external agency is funding it, so there could be influence," Swaminathan said yesterday. Swaminathan, however, stressed there were no instances of influence found and the decision was only in part prompted by a wider perception about for-

eign funding of the program. The unit will continue to exist, she said. A spokeswoman for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) said its grant for the ITSU ends this month. "We are in advanced stages of discussion with the ministry on the contours of the next phase of technical support," she said.

Critics have in the past raised concerns the BMGF should not have any association with the program due to apparent conflicts of interest. That's because BMGF also backs GAVI, a global vaccine alliance that counts big pharmaceutical companies as its partners. India's immunization program vaccinates children to shield them from life-threatening conditions such as measles and polio, and is viewed by experts as crucial for improving public health.

A key win has been the successful eradication of polio, but more than a million Indian children still die every year before reaching the age of five. "The government must ensure that universal immunization does not suffer in any way," said Keshav Desiraju, a former federal health secretary. BMGF, the charity funded by the personal wealth of Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates, has enjoyed good relations with the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. — Reuters



VATICAN CITY: Faithful photograph and film with their smart phones Pope Francis arriving for his weekly general audience in Paul VI Hall. — AP

GECKO DOES 'STRIPTease' TO AVOID BECOMING DINNER

PARIS: A newly-discovered gecko uses a weird but ingenious tactic to evade capture: it strips down to its pink, naked skin and flees, leaving its attacker with a mouthful of scales, scientists have revealed. The hard, dense flakes come off with "exceptional ease" and grow back in a matter of weeks, a team of researchers reported in the journal *PeerJ* this week. Dubbed *Geckolepis megalepis*, the little lizard was previously confused with another member of the family of fish-scale

geckos, known for their large, sheddable scales. But closer scientific scrutiny revealed it is a species quite apart—boasting the largest scales of any gecko. And it is more skilled than any other at shedding them at even the slightest touch. *G. megalepis* is resident in Madagascar. "This remarkable ability has made these geckos a serious challenge to scientists who want to study them," said a statement from the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich. "One of the main ways reptile

species can be told apart is by their scale patterns, but these geckos lose their scales with such ease that the patterns are often lost," added study co-author Mark Scherz. Methods have included trying to catch them with bundles of cotton wool or luring them untouched into plastic bags. "You have to think outside the box with *Geckolepis*," said Scherz. "They are a nightmare to identify." Without its scales, the matchbox-sized critter is not much to look at—resembling a

piece of pink, raw chicken. But alive. Apart from noting the exceptionally large scales, the team used micro-CT scanning to examine skeletons for other distinguishing characteristics, such as skull width and length. Among *G. megalepis*'s unique traits is a smaller "attachment area"—where the scales meet the skin—than other fish-scale geckos. This is what allows the flakes to tear from the skin so easily, without leaving a scar. The creature's name was derived from

the Greek *me-gas* for "very large", and *lepis* for "scale." It is the first new gecko species to be described in 75 years. Reptiles, including geckos, are known for the ability to shed a body part, often all or part of the tail, to escape predator attack. Few geckos survive to adulthood with their original tails intact, the study authors said. Scientists are interested in the regenerative ability of lizards for restorative medicine, possibly re-growing lost limbs for accident survivors one day. — AFP

CLINIC FALSELY TOLD DOZENS THEY HAD ALZHEIMER'S: SUIT

TOLEDO, Ohio: Shawn Blazsek knew a string of concussions from high school football and boxing was catching up with him. He would go days without sleeping and was forgetting how to tie his shoes. Still, at age 33, he was stunned after being told he had Alzheimer's disease.

He started planning out who would take care of his four kids if something happened to his wife, and thought about how hard it would be for them when he could no longer recognize his family. So he stuffed fistfuls of sleeping pills into a bottle and wrote himself a note, vowing to swallow all of them when he wasn't able to remember the names of his children. That day never came. Nine months later, he learned that the memory-loss center director who diagnosed him didn't have a medical or psychology license needed to do so. Then another test confirmed he did not have Alzheimer's.



TOLEDO: In this Thursday, Jan. 26, 2017, photo, Kay Taynor holds a photo of her late husband, Gary. — AP

He is one of more than 50 people suing the now-closed clinic's former director and its owner, saying they, too, were told they had Alzheimer's or another form of dementia. Most now know it's not true, while a few are awaiting confirmation. Some say they spent months undergoing treatment while planning out their final years. Some quit their jobs, sold possessions or took one last special trip. One killed himself.

Preparing for the worse

Blazsek crammed years of fatherly advice into a matter of months, showing his son how to check the oil on a car and teaching his wife about the household finances. "I was preparing her to be a single mom," he said. The couple figured he had no more than 10 years to live and even less time before his memory was gone. "Here I am, thinking I'm going to be a widow at 43. What am I going to do?" said his wife, Jennifer. "Who's going to teach my boys how to shave? Who's going to play ball with them?"

So far, the case has yet to result in any charges against Sherry-Ann Jenkins, who opened the Toledo Clinic Cognitive Center in early 2015 through the Toledo Clinic, a multi-specialty medical center with more than 150 doctors. Attorneys on both sides would not say whether there is a criminal investigation, although court records indi-

cate the Ohio Medical Board has talked with some of the patients.

The lawsuits say that Jenkins, who has a doctorate degree in physiological science, wasn't authorized to order medical tests and that her husband, a licensed doctor who is a partner in the Toledo Clinic, signed off on the tests and was sometimes listed as the referring physician on billing even though he did not see any of the patients.

An attorney for the couple would not answer questions about the cognitive clinic, which abruptly shut down after about a year in early 2016. Jenkins and her husband did not respond to messages seeking comment. In court filings responding to the lawsuits, each of which seeks more than \$1 million in damages, their attorney did not dispute that Jenkins was unlicensed but denied most of the other allegations.

The former patients have sued the Toledo Clinic, as well, saying it should have known Jenkins lacked the training and credentials to treat and diagnose patients. Michael D'Eramo, chief administrative officer of the Toledo Clinic, said he could not comment. Some describe her as compassionate and easy to talk with, saying she ended therapy sessions by telling them to give her a hug. At her suggestion, a few patients appeared in articles touting the benefits of her holistic treatments, which included memory games and daily doses of coconut oil. But they also say she fought hard against medication and getting a second opinion.

Worsening issue

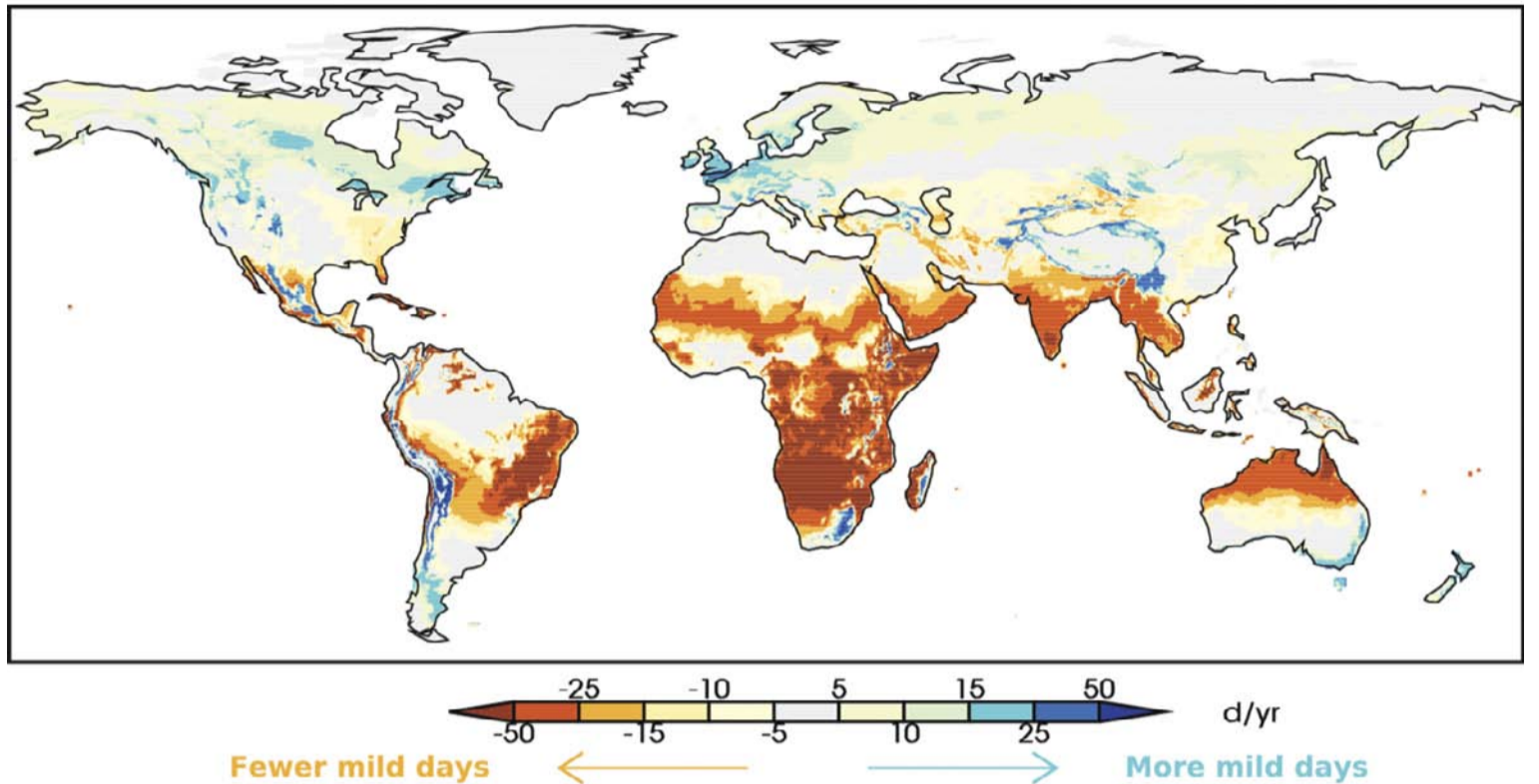
Nearly all of those diagnosed by Jenkins began seeing her after suffering traumatic brain injuries or worsening cognitive issue. Some, like Blazsek, are continuing treatment with other doctors. Attorney David Zoll, who is representing those suing Jenkins, said that it's not clear how many patients she saw and that others might not know they were misdiagnosed with Alzheimer's. More than 30 people added their names to the lawsuits late last month.

He said he believes she was motivated by greed, saying several patients were over-billed. The cognitive clinic grew rapidly, he noted. "Many times she would see the first person and have them bring in their whole family," Zoll said. "And many times she would diagnose the whole family." Kay Taynor was diagnosed with Alzheimer's on her second visit to Jenkins and then referred five or six friends and family members to her office, including her husband of 48 years. All were told they had the disease, she said, but her husband, Gary, took it hardest.

"He's got a smile that just lights up the room, and I never saw it again," she said. "He just sunk in his chair. To me, he never stood up again. He was never tall again. He gave up." Gary fell into depression, spending his final weeks sitting in a chair with his hands in his lap until he went into their garage and shot himself in the head, she said. An autopsy did not show any signs of Alzheimer's, she said. — AP

Change of annual number of mild days

mean: -10 d/yr per km²; -11 d/yr per person



In this image provided by Karin van der Wiel/ NOAA/ Princeton University, shows climate change effects on patterns of mild weather. — AP

MAJOR GLOBAL WARMING STUDY QUESTIONED, AGAIN DEFENDED

CLAIMS THERE HAS BEEN A PAUSE IN GLOBAL WARMING

WASHINGTON: Another round of bickering is boiling over about temperature readings used in a 2015 study to show how the planet is warming. The issue is about how readings gathered decades ago were adjusted to try to get a clearer picture of how the Earth's temperature is changing now. Those adjustments have been questioned by some who reject mainstream climate science and have tried to claim there has been a pause in global warming.

A January study in a scientific journal used another set of measurements to confirm the readings and prove again that the earth's temperature is rising quickly and that the warming has not paused. But a congressional committee on Tuesday seized on complaints from a retired scientist from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration about how the original data were handled to claim the data were falsified - even though the retired NOAA scientist they cite does not argue that it was.

What is being touted as a scientific scandal is more about data handling than what rising temperatures show, according to phone and email interviews with more than two dozen experts on the issue, including the former government scientist, whose blogging Saturday reignited a debate.

'Thumb on the scale'

The hubbub was sparked when retired NOAA data scientist John Bates claimed in a blog post that his boss, then-director of the National Centers for Environmental Information Thomas Karl, "con-

stantly had his 'thumb on the scale' - in the documentation, scientific choices and release of datasets - in an effort to discredit the notion of a global warming hiatus" and rushed a study published in the journal *Science* before international climate negotiations.

Bates said in an interview Monday with *The Associated Press* that he was most concerned about the way data was handled, documented and stored, raising issues of transparency and availability. He said Karl didn't follow the more than 20 crucial data storage and handling steps that Bates created for NOAA. He said it looked like the June 2015 study was pushed out to influence the December 2015 climate treaty negotiations in Paris.

However Bates, who acknowledges that Earth is warming from man-made carbon dioxide emissions, said in the interview that there was "no data tampering, no data changing, nothing malicious." "It's really a story of not disclosing what you did," Bates said in the interview. "It's not trumped up data in any way shape or form." Still, after Bates' blog post, the House Science Committee, a British tabloid newspaper and others who reject mainstream climate science accused NOAA of playing "fast and loose" with land and water temperature data. House Science Committee Chairman Lamar Smith, R-Texas, speaking at a hearing Tuesday, called on *Science* to retract the 2015 study and blasted NOAA for not being cooperative with his subpoenas. When the journal's publisher Rush Holt, a physicist and former Democratic congress-

man, said the charges don't support a retraction because the issue is more about data procedures than science, Smith, an attorney, interrupted him and insisted: "They falsified global warming data."

Modern monitoring devices

The Karl study looked mostly at ocean temperature records several decades old and determined that those older readings skewed too warm when compared to modern monitoring from buoys and other devices because they were taken in ships' engine rooms. He adjusted those old readings down, which makes it clearer that the earth's temperature is rising now. Since then, a new independent study from the University of California, Berkeley looked at the same issue in a different way, and confirmed the Karl calculations.

"Not using their data we get the exact same results, both for the ocean record and for the land," said Zeke Hausfather, lead author of the Berkeley study. He called Bates' claims "all about procedural disagreements within NOAA that have very little bearing about our understanding about what's happening to Earth's climate."

Marcia McNutt, who was editor of *Science* at the time the paper was published and is now president of the National Academy of Sciences, praised Bates for wanting to highlight the importance of data archiving, but said his criticisms have little to do with the main part of the paper and chastised the House for using issues of data archiving to try to discredit the 2015 study. — AP

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Dr. Fahad Al-Mukhaizeem
ر. فهد علي المخيزيم

استشاري أطفال
M.B. Bch. FRCPC. FAAP. PEM

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



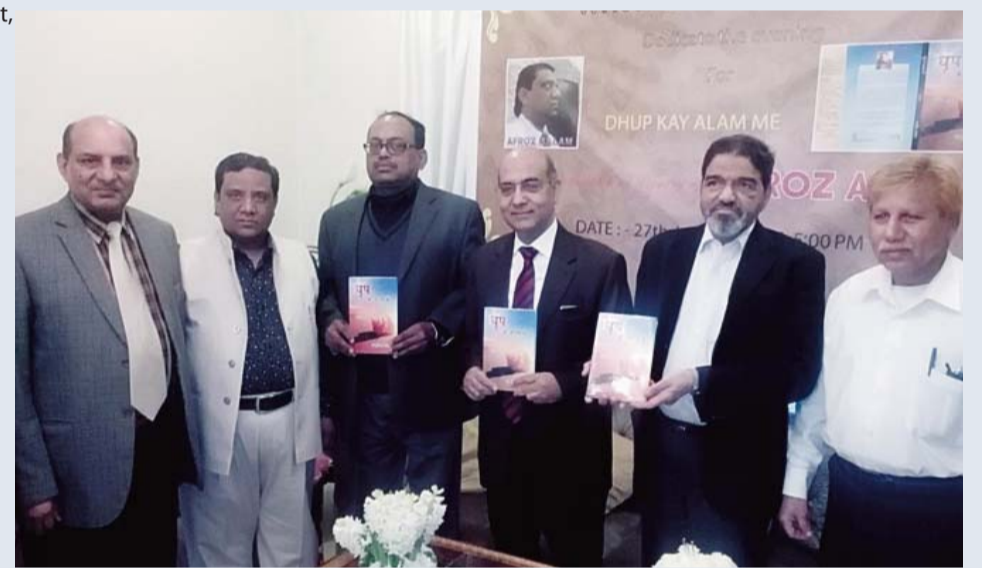
ASSE HOSTS THIRD SESSION OF CONTRACTOR SAFETY MONTH

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 toward social responsibility and commitment, American Society of Safety Engineers (ASSE), Kuwait Chapter, in collaboration with Kuwait Oil Company organized Third session of the Contactor 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 and Acting Serretary. In his opening address CH Rama Krishna 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 contactors who have a major role in industrial sector are updated to the

best HSE practices and latest technologies in the personal protective equipment. Ashok Garlapati, Advisory Committee Member of ASSE Kuwait Chapter, in his speech spelled the importance of the days topic which is covering the importance parts of the body Eye and Head. Brett Horter, Sales and Marketing Manager, MENA Region and India, UVEX explained the topic "Eye wear and Hearing Protection in detail. Muhammad Aalamgir Vice President 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 appreciated the Technical Event Committee Head Adnan Yousef and his Team for Successful event and thanks to all the participants who shows presence in event to 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.



LITERARY DELIBERATIONS ON: 'DHOOP KE ALAM MEIN'

The Writers' Forum, Kuwait (WFK)— an organization founded in 1995, is not only a platform that infuses and encourages its members to think, write and recite or narrate, but also felicitates and celebrates when a member makes significant forays in the realm of Literature. The well-known Urdu poet and a familiar figure in the Mushairas held in Kuwait, India and in many other countries in the world-Afroz Alam, is also an active member of the WFK. On January 27, the WFK dedicated an evening, at the residence of Maimuna Ali Chougale, to honour Afroz Alam, and discuss his recently published collection of poetry: Dhoop Ke Alam Mein.

The evening was presided over by Dr Arvind Raina- who writes poetry in Hindi, Dogri and English. The Chief Guest for the evening was A K Srivastava, Second Secretary (PIC), Indian Embassy in Kuwait, while Dr Abdul Razzak Rumani graciously consented to be the Guest of Honour. All the three dignitaries along with the President of WFK officially displayed the Book:

Dhoop Ke Alam Mein. 'Dhoop ke Alam Mein'- a collection of ghazals and nazms, written by Afroz Alam, was released by Applied Books, New Delhi. The literary circles of India, Kuwait, and of even across the frontiers of India had been eagerly awaiting for this Book, which is written in Urdu but published in Hindi / Devanagari script. Afroz Alam has written two books namely Alfaz ke saye and Dhoop ke Alam Mein; compiled Fasl-e-Taza, Kuwait ke Ahl-e-qalam, Rashid Mewati-Fun-o-Shakhsiyat, Agahi ke phool, Alam-e-khumaar, Hamasar-e-khumar and Hamasar Urdu Ahl-e-Qalam Khawateen. Two books have also been published on Afroz Alam - Afroz Alam: Shakhsiyat wa fun by Nasreen Naqqash and Afroz Alam: Adabi Safar ke Saeed Roshan. He has carved a niche for himself, not only in Bihar to which he belongs, but all across the country and in Kuwait where he presently resides.

The evening was steered by another renowned Urdu poet -Sayedee Nazar Kadapavi. He invited the former General Secretary of the WFK-Sunil Sonsi at the very out-

present a summary of the life, childhood, achievements and writings of Afroz Alam. The members of the WFK who participated in the deliberations and presented their views on the Book included Dr Navnit Gandhi, Syed Qamar Minto, Sabir Omer Galsulkar, Maimuna Ali Chougale, and Syed Nazar Kadapavi. The President of WFK Umesh Sharma apprised the audience about the tradition of WFK to celebrate poets and their works, and also presented his analysis of the Book. Ameeruddin Ameer expressed his profound admiration for Afroz Alam, while Kamaal Ansari recited a Ghazal in praise of the poet and his poetry.

All the members were unanimous in their views that the collection comprises poems reflecting a wide variety of sentiments. There is anguish; there is innocence; there are questions; there is beauty and there is love in the spectrum that Afroz Alam has weaved for his readers. The poems inspire one to think and ponder over

the inexplicable realities of life. The Chief Guest - A K Srivastava then expressed his views, and congratulated Afroz Alam for his achievements till date. The Guest of Honour-Dr Abdul Razaak Rumane, who is a very well-known Engineer in Kuwait and has authored several Books, offered encouraging inputs and comments on the evening. Dr Arvind Raina who had presided over the deliberations also expressed his satisfaction and happiness at the proceedings and urged Afroz Alam to keep writing further and cross many more milestones.

Toward the culmination of the evening, Sayeedee Nazar Kadapavi expressed his gratitude to the hosts-Maimuna Chougale and Ali Chougale, to the WFK President-Umesh Sharma, to the Chief Guest and the Guest of Honour. Other members present on the occasion included Ibrahim Sange Raja, Samiuzama, Syed Kaif, Asif, Shah Nawaz, Rajesh Verlekar, Ali Chougale, Nazneen Ali, and Dr Rubina Chougale.



NSH CELEBRATES 'POTENTIAL VICTORIANS - 2017'



The faces of hundreds of engineers and managers from different disciplines were found with pleasure and excitement during the NSH's celebration, Potential Victorians - 2017 held in association with the achievement of 500,000 ID (Inch Dia) piping fabrication of MAA. The presence of NSH Vice President Sabu added more joy to the event, he congratulated the Project Manager PV Santhosh Kumar and his laden team for their dedicated efforts that resulted in such a fantastic achievement.

Vice President Sabu honored the Plant Maintenance supervisor Jojo for the 20 years long service. The supportive and enthusiastic engineers were presented with line of

ice breaking games such as balloon breaking, find the quote and tail plucking by HR Manager Pani J Anthony. The winners were honored by General Manager Harikumar and Project Manager P.V. Santhosh Kumar. The Halwa Orchestra enthralled the audience is another addition.

The presence of officials from JGC - Takedomi, Kenji Suzuki and Hiroyuki Kunifusa - became additional strength, and their excellent dance brought a good team spirit. Somarajan, Michael O Baili, Ullas, Henry, Subbayya, Tulasi, Renjith, Prakash, Hareesh, Shiju Poulouse were among those present. The event was signed-off by a grand finale, followed by dinner.





Al-Ahmadi Governorate kicks off its celebrations of the National Holidays with a festival that is set to take place tomorrow at Kuwait Oil Company's stadium in Ahmadi. Several activities are prepared for the event by various companies and state departments. Ahmadi Governor Sheikh Fawaz Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah chaired a meeting recently to review the security plan for the event.

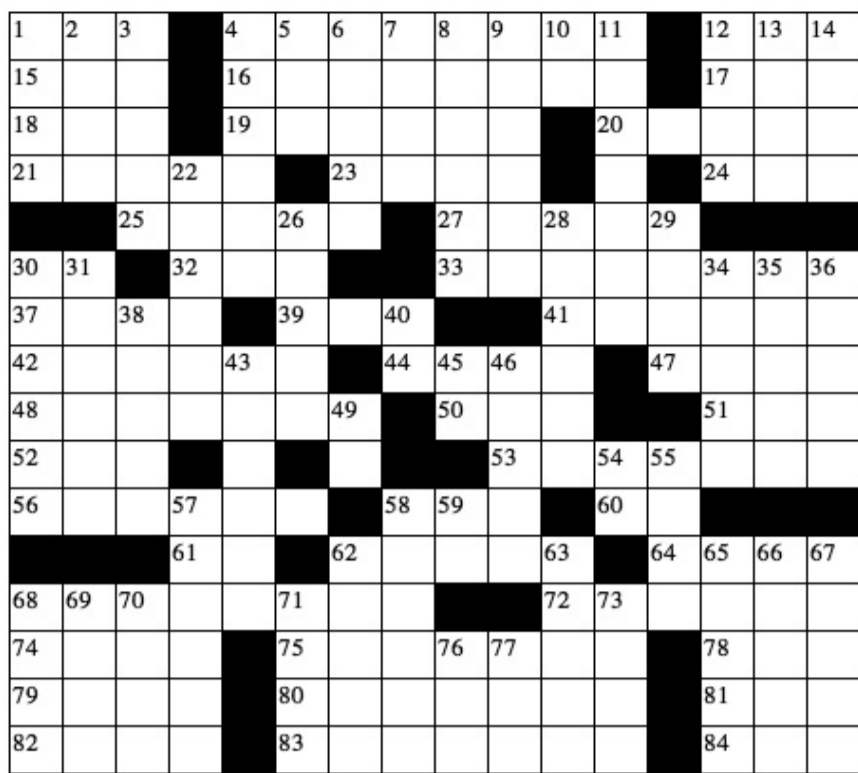


KNES STUDENTS PARTICIPATE IN SCIENCE QUIZ COMPETITION

Key stage one and two pupils of Kuwait National English School (KNES) participated in the Annual Science Quiz Competition recently. The competition aims to develop a spirit of teamwork and critical thinking skills amongst pupils. Pupils were divided into mixed ability teams. This quiz has had a positive impact on the teaching and learning of Science and a steady improvement in pupil results over the years. This competition is very popular amongst pupils and they are always enthusiastic and eager to participate in the competition. The winning teams received medals.



CROSSWORD 1516



ACROSS

- 1. A condition (mostly in boys) characterized by behavioral and learning disorders.
- 4. In a series.
- 12. A light touch or stroke.
- 15. Flower arrangement consisting of a circular band of foliage or flowers for ornamental purposes.
- 16. A card game in which each player is dealt 6 cards and discards one or two to make up the crib.
- 17. A constellation in the southern hemisphere near Telescopium and Norma.
- 18. 4-wheeled motor vehicle.
- 19. The prejudice that members of one race are intrinsically superior to members of other races.
- 20. A mountain peak in the southern Sinai Peninsula (7,500 feet high).
- 21. Squash bugs.
- 23. A program under which employees regularly accumulate shares and may ultimately assume control of the company.
- 24. The elementary stages of any subject (usually plural).
- 25. Any of numerous plants of the genus Capparis.
- 27. A puzzle where you decode a message consisting of pictures representing syllables and words.
- 30. A metric unit of weight equal to one thousandth of a kilogram.
- 32. A doctor's degree in education.
- 33. Exhibiting self-importance.
- 37. (New Testament) Disciple of Jesus.
- 39. Aircraft landing in bad weather in which the pilot is talked down by ground control using precision approach radar.
- 41. A republic in central Africa.
- 42. A port city of south central Ukraine on an arm of the Black Sea.
- 44. An independent group of closely related Chadic languages spoken in the area between the Biu-Mandara and East Chadic languages.
- 47. Trace the shape of.
- 48. A raised doughnut filled with jelly or jam.
- 50. The cry made by sheep.
- 51. A human limb.
- 52. A legal document codifying the result of deliberations of a committee or society or legislative body.
- 53. Thick heavy expensive material with a raised pattern.
- 56. Find repugnant.
- 60. A heavy brittle diamagnetic trivalent metallic element (resembles arsenic and antimony chemically).
- 61. (astronomy) The angular distance of a celestial point measured westward along the celestial equator from the zenith crossing.
- 64. The basic unit of money in Bangladesh.
- 68. The fruit of a variety of winter melon vine.
- 72. A nonmetallic bivalent element that is normally a colorless odorless tasteless non-flammable diatomic gas.
- 74. According to the Old Testament he was a pagan king of Israel and husband of Jezebel (9th century BC).
- 75. (Norse mythology) A dwarf who possessed a treasure that was stolen by Loki.
- 78. A religious belief of African origin involving witchcraft and sorcery.
- 79. Port city that is the capital and largest city of Latvia.
- 80. Any of numerous herbs of the genus Maranta having tuberous starchy roots and large sheathing leaves.
- 81. The most common computer memory which can be used by programs to perform necessary tasks while the computer is on.
- 82. An utterance expressing pain or disapproval.
- 83. Relating to the Elysian Fields.

- 84. A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.

DOWN

- 1. Type genus of the Alcidae comprising solely the razorbill.
- 2. An administrator in charge of a division of a university or college.
- 3. English theoretical physicist who applied relativity theory to quantum mechanics and predicted the existence of antimatter and the positron (1902-1984).
- 4. A harsh noise made by scraping.
- 5. A period marked by distinctive character or reckoned from a fixed point or event.
- 6. A kitchen utensil used for ricing soft foods by extruding them through small holes.
- 7. Wading birds of warm regions having long slender down-curved bills.
- 8. Become imbued.
- 9. A tool for tamping (e.g., for tamping tobacco into a pipe bowl or a charge into a drill hole etc.).
- 10. A class of proteins produced in lymph tissue in vertebrates and that function as antibodies in the immune response.
- 11. (informal) Foolish.
- 12. (Irish) Mother of the Tuatha De Danann.
- 13. An Arabic speaking person who lives in Arabia or North Africa.
- 14. The Tibeto-Burman language spoken in the Dali region of Yunnan.
- 22. Sexual pleasure obtained by inflicting harm (physical or psychological) on others.
- 26. The younger brother of Edwy who became king of Northumbria when it renounced Edwy.
- 28. A shop where a variety of goods are sold.
- 29. (computer science) A standardized language for the descriptive markup of documents.
- 31. A student in medical school.
- 34. A promontory in northern Morocco opposite the Rock of Gibraltar.
- 35. Having corresponding sounds especially terminal sounds.
- 36. Japanese architect (born in 1913).
- 38. (Roman mythology) Goddess of the hearth and its fire whose flame was tended by vestal virgins.
- 40. Before noon.
- 43. A square dance figure.
- 45. The blood group whose red cells carry both the A and B antigens.
- 46. A region of Malaysia in northeastern Borneo.
- 49. A unit of information equal to 1024 bytes.
- 54. A Russian river.
- 55. A large and densely populated urban area.
- 57. An inhabitant of ancient Thebes.
- 58. Tastelessly showy.
- 59. An international organization of European countries formed after World War II to reduce trade barriers and increase cooperation among its members.
- 62. Of or relating to punishment.
- 63. The large trunk artery that carries blood from the left ventricle of the heart to branch arteries.
- 65. 100 agorot equal 1 shekel.
- 66. Cubes of meat marinated and cooked on a skewer usually with vegetables.
- 67. (Jungian psychology) The inner self (not the external persona) that is in touch with the unconscious.
- 69. A midwestern state in north central United States in the Great Lakes region.
- 70. Kamarupan languages spoken in north-eastern India and western Burma.
- 71. Informal terms for a (young) woman.
- 73. A city of central China.
- 76. A tube in which a body fluid circulates.
- 77. Black tropical American cuckoo.

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Look for experiences that will build your self-esteem. Instead of wishing that things will happen, think about ways in which you can make them happen. Financial ties to other people are highlighted-money matters and investments are a focus. Making your mark on the world has special significance for you. Achievement, ambition and authority take on importance now. Organizing and administering people will become central to your lifestyle. It takes one step at a time to reach your goals and you have to do the work yourself. Wanting something or someone seems to take on special importance later today; there are desire and passion. Know the difference between realistic expectations and obsession.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Make sure that your activities in the business world, as well as your personal contacts, do not take away from the needed time you require for your own personal upkeep. You most always say yes to the overtime requests because you know you are needed. You could be in the limelight, especially with superiors or in relation to your work. You may find that you enjoy your job or the responsibility it entails more than usual. Balance in all of your activities is one of the most important considerations before you agree to give up your time. You may become more involved with neighbors or siblings this evening. Others could seek you out for your psychological insight and understanding. Do not forget to give a pat on the back to children.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

People work well together this day and communications are clear. This is a time when many people contribute their time and effort into making a project end quickly and having the most positive results. You may be sought after as just the person to head the next project. This can be an extremely productive time for imagination and creativity when it comes to finding answers to questions that society has been asking. You teach others to be more spiritual as well as physical. In this way, the people you work and play with are most positive and open to expanding their possibilities. You captivate and spellbind others and are willing to serve-you teach through example. A sense of harmony makes this evening with friends and family a happy time.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

You may find a person, perhaps a co-worker, who is interested in helping you increase your income with a sideline business. Ask many questions regarding a new moneymaking deal and perhaps check a business review. You are wise to take advantage of the opportunities offered to you just now but you are also wise in how you pick and choose. Loved ones, young people and friends dear to your heart are emphasized at this time... There are opportunities to socialize during the week occasionally. Help young people with their schoolwork, if necessary. You are appreciated for the special things you do-there is a chance to create a healing between you and a loved one today. Taking chances can bring big rewards.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

This is a day for thinking and exploring new ideas or getting happily lost in a conversation. Be wise and stay away from the gossip circuit. Soon, all the facts will become clear about a friend or associate. Your social life is improving and you will find the temptation to talk on the phone, visit in the halls or take too many breaks-take it easy. This is a good day and you accomplish many things. Your creative side is active and when a piece of equipment does not work or someone has difficulty with accounts-you will be able to come to the rescue. You could also be lending a hand at some changes in the office or home that will add a special touch only you can demonstrate. Give one red rose to your loved one; you may be pleasantly surprised at the results.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

You may see an investment today that others could think frivolous. You may not want to brag just yet, but you will soon be rewarded for your wise choices. Your system of values may deepen and this will help you with a better sense of discrimination and life choices. This day seems to flow along quite well. Being in touch with ideas and people on a grand scale is fun. You may find that your organizational talents are in demand at this time. You have many more friendships than in the past, and you will enjoy communicating with one group of friends when it comes to your favorite hobby and another group of friends when it comes to work or internet groups. You are constantly meeting new friends. You are wise to keep updated with current events.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

Tension of a psychological or political nature may be present in the workplace today. Take notes on your ideas but introduce them at a more appropriate time. Your self-confidence and leadership potential are improving. You are learning to think on a broader scale and you will accomplish great things. Broadmindedness and an enjoyment of travel are huge factors in your life. Figuring things out and understanding the mechanics of special projects take on a special significance. There is an urge to get things organized into a rational system, at work as well as at home. There is much mental busy-work at this time. Emotions in particular, or the feelings of those around you, may become very clear and you have become noticeably patient.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Others may slow you from expressing yourself at times-perhaps a blessing in disguise. You may want to give yourself time to refocus your ideas and, if time permits, you can present your ideas when others are more receptive. You could receive unexpected help or support from those around you, especially from someone your junior. Charisma, self transformation and the development of personal power are the things that play a bigger role in your life. You are very important to someone. Shopping and romance can be enjoyed all afternoon and evening. Save tonight for you and your sweetheart. What is so remarkable about love at first sight is when people have been looking at each other for years that it becomes remarkable!



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

How many give up, stop too soon or quit too early in the game of success is a natural tendency to underestimate your potential. There are some undiscovered powers you possess that will help you make some progress in the workplace now. You are in a very expressive cycle. Use this energy wisely-as now, more than ever, success is near; there are rewards. This may mean you find ways to create peace, teach problem-solving techniques, invent, refine, write, etc. Others may find you especially witty this afternoon as you enjoy settling on just which path you will want to take. If you find yourself saying your own name often, you may want to work on a change. You will notice a positive difference in people's attitude toward you.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

You may find yourself facing some difficult people today. Back away for a time and work solo as much as possible. You will find an easier afternoon and productivity improves for all. Do not make judgments even when you think you know both sides of an issue. You will find harmony everywhere this afternoon. It is easy to overindulge in foods when the days and evenings are cold, but if your exercise program does not match your eating habits, you may be running into some trouble. Pay attention to these things and bring about a balance here, even if it means you need to do a little more exercise. Keep your positive outlook; you will rub off on the negative people faster than you realize. You encourage others when it comes to attitude and healing.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

You may be rushing to meet a friend before work this morning. Perhaps this is someone you have not seen in awhile... Or a friend that has some special news just for you this morning. You are feeling good as you reach the workplace and you gain positive attention in your profession. Like cream, rising to the top-you perform your work well and are rewarding in many different ways. Stop to be grateful for the people in your life at this time. You could be an excellent troubleshooter, detective or doctor. Although you would enjoy celebrating all day long, your sense of responsibility is very strong. You are enterprising and find ways to complete any unfinished business. This afternoon there is time to relax a bit.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Personal and business undertakings are progressing nicely. For a short while you can sit back and watch as the wheels of motion begin moving faster and faster. You will need to contribute your expertise again soon; it is fun to see how well you have set up or contributed to this business. You do well in the advertising areas and might consider pursuing this avenue of work in the future. This is one of your better days this month. Your power of persuasion is in high gear-especially if you are easygoing with your request. Use clear commonsense reasoning. Enjoy the success and achievement that this busy time brings and do remember to occasionally relax a bit. This afternoon you can spend a little money on your loved one. Enjoy a lovely romantic evening.

Wordsearch Puzzle

Marine Life

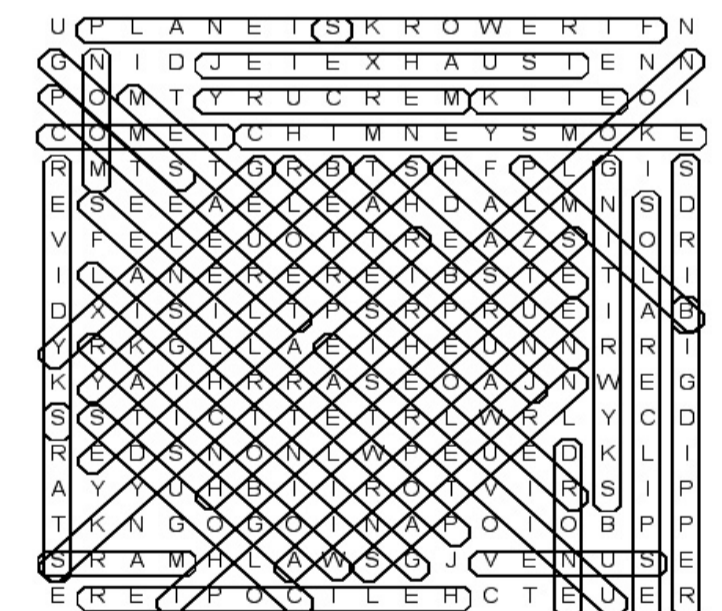
Find and circle all of the listed words that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell the name of a sea animal.



- ANCHOVY
- BARRACUDA
- CLAM
- CLOWNFISH
- COD
- CRAB
- DOLPHIN
- HALIBUT
- JELLYFISH
- LAMPREY
- LOBSTER
- MANATEE
- MARLIN
- OCTOPUS
- OYSTER
- PENGUIN
- PORPOISE
- PRAWN
- SARDINE
- SCALLOP
- SEA LION
- SEA OTTER
- SEA TURTLE
- SEALS
- SHELLFISH
- SHRIMP
- SPONGE
- SQUID
- STARFISH
- STINGRAY
- TUNA
- WALRUS
- WHALE

Yesterday's Solution

Look Up!



- AIRPLANE
- BIG DIPPER
- BIRDS
- BLIMP
- BLUE SKY
- CHIMNEY SMOKE
- CLOUDS
- COMET
- DRONE
- FIREWORKS
- GALAXY
- HAZE
- HELICOPTER
- HOT AIR BALLOON
- JET EXHAUST
- JUPITER
- KITE
- LIGHTNING
- MARS
- MERCURY
- METEOR SHOWER
- MOON
- PLANETS
- POWER LINES
- RAINBOW
- SATELLITE
- SATURN
- SKYSCRAPER
- SKYWRITING
- SMOG
- SOLAR ECLIPSE
- STARS
- STREET LIGHT
- THE SUN
- TREETOP
- UNIVERSE
- VENUS

The hidden message is: UNIDENTIFIED FLYING OBJECT

Yesterday's Solution



Daily SuDoku



Yesterday's Solution



GOSSIP

Diplo teases new Ed Sheeran and Major Lazer collaboration

Diplo has announced there is a new Major Lazer and Ed Sheeran song coming soon. Diplo has teased a new Ed Sheeran and Major Lazer collaboration. The 38-year-old producer - whose real name is Thomas Pentz - took to Twitter on Tuesday to share how great the new track between the 'Thinking Out Loud' hitmaker and the electronic trio - also comprised of Jillionaire and Walshy Fire - is sounding. He wrote: "Damn ... this @MAJORLAZER x @edsheeran is sounding (sic)" The 25-year-old flame-haired hunk simply responded: "woof (sic)" 'Castle on the Hill' hitmaker Ed co-wrote Major Lazer, Justin Bieber and M?'s smash hit single 'Cold Water' - which was co-produced by Benny Blanco - which features on the 'Lean On' group's new album 'Music is the Weapon', which is expected to drop this year. Diplo and Bieber previously collaborated together on

'Where are U Now' with Skrillex and the dance producer previously hinted they are more songs coming in the future. He said: "You know, I've been writing with him [Bieber] for a long time and we did some cool material together - we did a new song for our project." R&B superstar Usher and 'Cheap Thrills' hitmaker Sia are also among artists featured on the new record. Asked who will be on the hotly-anticipated LP, Diplo said: "Definitely we have Usher on it, M?'s back on songs, we have a song with Sam Hunt which is very unusual but I love him. Travis Scott... Sia is on a couple ideas but one of the records might be her record. She's definitely background vocals on a song for sure."



Niall Horan's writing method

Niall Horan writes a "paragraph" based on the concept behind his songs before penning the tracks for his upcoming solo album. Niall Horan writes a paragraph about each of his songs before jotting down the lyrics. The 23-year-old singer recently took a six-week break from working on his debut solo album, but now he's back and has been plotting out exactly what he wants to achieve with each single. Speaking about his method on 'The Chris Evans Breakfast Show' on UK station BBC Radio 2 yesterday, the Irish star said: "I am in the middle of writing my album at the moment, so I have spent a lot of my time here [in Los Angeles]. There are a lot of writers out here, which is good. "The way I write is I write concepts before, and come up with whether it will be a life story or making something up. I will always write something up, before I start writing (the song), maybe a paragraph about what I want the song to be based around and work from start to finish, let it flow out of your mouth and write it down as you're going." The former One Direction star has admitted he has good days and bad days writing, but he's on to something "good" at the moment. He explained: "I feel like, at the moment, I go through phases where I am writing some good stuff and some bad stuff. But at the moment, I think I am writing some good stuff, hopefully. It's been great, absolutely hectic. I've got to keep writing." The 'This Town' hitmaker decided to push back the release of his debut because he doesn't want to "rush it". He previously said: "I am taking my time on it. I don't want to rush it. I said it would be out at the start of the summer but I might push it back now a small bit. I don't really have an idea. I'll keep writing until it's there and when it's there I'll let everyone know. It's not going to be all singles."



Kiedis tears tendon but still continues tour

Red Hot Chili Peppers' frontman Anthony Kiedis is currently performing on a torn tendon in his ankle, but won't be cancelling any shows for it to heal. Anthony Kiedis is currently touring with a "torn tendon in his ankle" whilst on Red Hot Chili Peppers' world tour. The 'By The Way' hitmaker has not had much luck with his ailments of late, in December they were forced to postpone their Dublin shows due to the frontman suffering from flu, however, nothing will stop him performing on stage. In an interview with ET Canada, he said: "I'm always getting banged up, and hurt, and repairing, and recovering, and hurting, and it's just normal. "At the moment, I have a torn tendon in my ankle from spinning around night after, but it'll heal." The 54-year-old rocker admits that he still gets "nervous" before gigs, but he wouldn't be able to go up and perform without his pre-show anxiety. He said: "I'd be a little bit lost without nerves. "I'd want to be borderline ready to throw up from nerves, and then I'm ready to go out." RHCP - also comprised of Flea, Chad Smith and Josh Klinghoffer - were due to perform at the Irish Capital's 3Arena on December 20 and 21, but had to put the shows on

hold until the new year so that Anthony can get better. In a statement, released via promoters MCD, the band said at the time: "We are so sorry that we cannot come to Dublin as planned for the next few days. "Anthony has been fighting off the flu all week and after the show last night it was clear that he has to stop touring and recover, hence the decision to push back the shows to next year." In May, the rock group had to pull out of their KROQ Weenie Roast headlining slot at the Irvine Meadows Amphitheatre in Irvine, California, and their planned performance for iHeartRadio after Anthony was rushed to hospital by ambulance with "extreme stomach pains". The band's drummer Chad Smith revealed the medical emergency was "really scary", but assured fans Anthony was "on the mend". At the time, he said: "His stomach was killing him (and) It was really scary. So we went directly to the hospital and we were really upset we couldn't play for the fans, but also more worried about him. I really appreciate all the well wishes. People sent so much stuff."

CARLY RAE JEPSEN ADMITS DONNA SUMMER IS HER MUSICAL INSPIRATION

Canadian star Carly Rae Jepsen has revealed her new album is inspired by Donna Summer. Carly Rae Jepsen's new album is inspired by Donna Summer. The 31-year-old singer is currently in Sweden working on her latest record and has offered fans an insight into what they can expect from the album, admitting that it's got a strong disco sound. Asked if she's still inspired by a 70s vibe, having previously cited ABBA and the Bee Gees as influences, Carly said: "I would say more Donna Summer than the Bee Gees. That would be the disco inspiration that's leading the pack at the moment. "That said, some of the songs that have surprised me have not been in the disco realm as much. I can't really put my finger on what it is, but that's exciting too. There's so much music out there right now and so much quality stuff, so I'm trying to find out what I have to offer that's different." And while Carly remains some way off finishing her new album, she is relishing

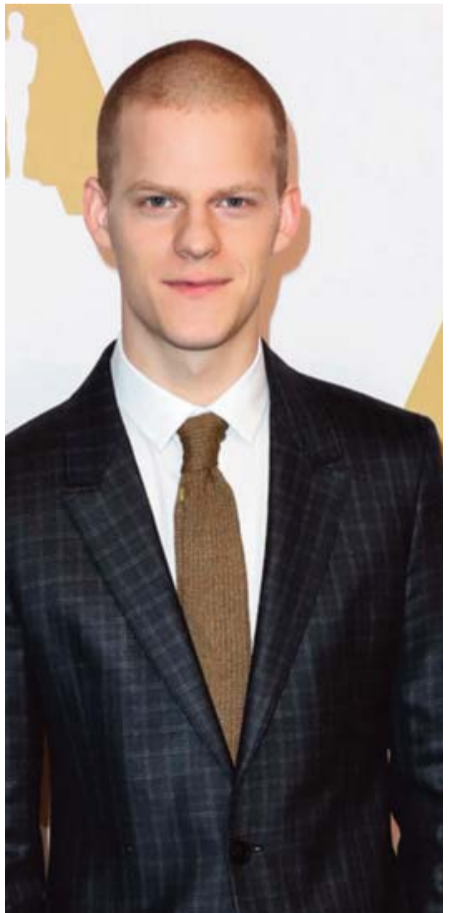
the creative process. The chart-topping star told Entertainment Weekly: "I'm just really enjoying being in the thick of it. I'd say there's a lot of work left to do, but I'm definitely finding some new sounds for me, which is always the goal: to challenge what you did last time, to break some rules, and to discover new places where you want to go musically. "I categorize myself as a bit of an over-writer. I don't know if that's a good thing or a bad thing, but it definitely has become part of my process. "I can't quite seem to just write eight or nine songs and call it a record. I think on this record alone I'm up to at least 42 songs. I'm like, 'Okay, narrowing it down!' but I'm still continuing [to write and record]. "I know that by the time I'm finished I'll have a whole little catalogue - the secret ones that nobody hears, and the ones that I feel are really special and put out there."



Lucas Hedges is not missing the Oscars buzz

Lucas Hedges has denied claims that he's missing out by not celebrating his Oscar nomination for Best Supporting Actor for 'Manchester by the Sea'. Lucas Hedges has rejected claims he's missing out by not celebrating his Oscar nod. The 20 year old is the youngest Oscar nominee this year but instead of joining other Hollywood stars by promoting his supporting role as Patrick in drama 'Manchester by the Sea' he's busy starring

in Off Broadway play 'Yen'. Speaking to Vulture at the play's opening night, Hedges admitted he doesn't have FOMO - Fear of Missing Out. He laughed and said: "No FOMO! It's a bit challenging, but it's also my dream, to be doing this play and be nominated for all these awards. And I get to work for a theater that's accommodating to me. I feel like I'm fitting in everything, not like I'm missing out on anything." Prime example of him squeezing everything in was when an understudy filled in for him in the stage show last weekend so he could fly out to Los Angeles for the Screen Actors Guild Awards (SAGs). And he made it back in time to hit the stage again on the Tuesday. And he made it to Monday's Oscars nominees' lunch. Hedges missed out on joining his cast mates at the Golden Globes because the play was in rehearsals but he wasn't nominated for a gong. And he's not the only one to miss out on glitzy events - Andrew Garfield who stars in Oscar-nominated war film 'Hacksaw Ridge' is currently starring in London revival of 'Angels in America' this spring. He explained: "I feel like I'm in good company, with respect to missing out on some stuff. If I'm missing out, he's missing out, too." It was announced this week that 'Yen' is extending its limited run to March 4. And instead of skipping his performances and using an understudy to step in so he can attend the Oscars and the Independent Spirit Awards, Hedges plans to take to the stage whilst also making pit stops at the awards' ceremonies. He added: "This is my life! I'm not getting a lot of sleep, but I am getting a lot of frequent-flyer miles."



Jennifer Connelly joins cast of Alita: Battle Angel

Jennifer Connelly has joined the cast of Robert Rodriguez's sci-fi film 'Alita: Battle Angel'. Jennifer Connelly has joined 'Alita: Battle Angel'. The 46-year-old actress has been cast by director Robert Rodriguez in his adaptation of Yukito Kishiro's 'Battle Angel Alita' manga series on which filming began in Austin, Texas, last October. Connelly's role is as-yet unknown but she joins a stellar cast in the sci-fi film - being produced by James Cameron - which includes Rosa Salazar, Keean Johnson, Ed Skrein, Christoph Waltz and Jackie Earle Haley. 'Alita: Battle Angel' tells the story of the titular character, an amnesiac female cyborg living in the 26th century who becomes a bounty hunter after being saved from being scrapped by a professor of cybernetics. Salazar is portraying Alita and Waltz is playing professor Dr. Dyson Ido. The movie is scheduled for release in July 2018. Connelly - who is married to actor Paul Bettany - will next be seen in drama film 'Granite Mountain' which will tell the true story of the Yarnell Hill Fire, a wildfire which raged in Prescott, Arizona, in June 2013 that tragically claimed the lives of 19 City of Prescott firefighters.

Will Arnett: My Batman is more fun than Christian Bale's

Will Arnett believes his Lego Batman is more "reckless and fun" than Christian Bale's portrayal of the superhero in the acclaimed 'Dark Knight' trilogy. Will Arnett says his Lego Batman is more "fun" than Christian Bale's portrayal of the superhero. The 46-year-old star is the voice of The Caped Crusader in 'The Lego Batman Movie' and is one of the nine actors to have portrayed the DC Comics character on the big screen, with Ben Affleck currently donning the cape and cowl in Warner Bros. Pictures' DC Extended Universe movies. Bale played the Gotham City saviour and his real life alter ego Bruce Wayne in 'The Dark Knight' trilogy and his brooding performances won rave reviews. But Arnett believes his interpretation of The Caped Crusader is more playful like Adam West's famous portrayal from the 1960s TV series and one-off film. When asked by the Metro newspaper how his version differs from Bale's, he said: "I would say Lego Batman is a little less self-aware and a little more reckless. He's dark and brooding, of course. But he's also more fun. One of the things I loved about the Batman of the 1960s was the playfulness to it that sometimes I think got lost along the way." The 'Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles' star first voiced Lego Batman in 'The Lego Movie' and he admits playing the superhero was on his bucket list and he loves the fact he didn't have to hit the gym hard for his portrayal. He said: "It wasn't something that had occurred to me. But it's kind of the perfect way of doing it. I didn't have to work out with a trainer, get poured into a rubber suit every day or spend eight hours in the make-up chair. I could just show up in my flip-flops and stand in front of the microphone." And Arnett enjoys one of the big perks of working on the film - getting given lots of free Lego toys. The actor - who has two sons, Archibald, eight, and Abel, six,

with his ex-wife Amy Poehler - said: "I hoard a lot of it in my closet. My closet looks like a toy store. I hope my kids don't read this because then they're going to know where it's all hidden!" Arnett will next star in buddy cop movie 'Show Dogs' and he accepted the comic role after consulting with his kids. He spilled: "We're shooting it in Cardiff. I play an FBI agent paired up with a police dog who does a lot of eye-rolling and talking to other dogs about what a fool I am. When I got the script I pitched it to my kids to see what they thought and they were like, 'Yeah, that sounds great! There are dogs in it!' So I did it. It's important I get to do stuff my kids enjoy. And films like 'Show Dogs and Ninja Turtles' mean I get to make things like 'Bojack' or 'Flaked'."



MUSIC & MOVIES

JACK NICHOLSON ATTACHED TO REMAKE OSCAR NOM 'TONI ERDMANN'

After a seven year hiatus from film, Jack Nicholson is expected to return to the big screen in an English language remake of the Oscar-nominated German comedy "Toni Erdmann." Nicholson and Kristen Wiig are attached to star, according to a person close to the production who requested anonymity because of a lack of authorization to speak publicly about the project. The trade publication Variety first reported the news Tuesday.

Nicholson last appeared in a film in 2010 in James L Brooks's "How Do You Know" and has been considered by many to be retired from film acting. "The movie business is the greatest business but I only want to do films that move peo-

ple, films about emotions and people," Nicholson said in a 2013 interview with The Sun. "Toni Erdmann," from writer-director Maren Ade, became somewhat of an international sensation after its Cannes premiere in May 2016. The film, about a father with a proclivity for corny pranks who tries to get his overworked grown daughter to lighten up, is up for a foreign language Oscar this year. Ade will executive produce the remake, but no director has been set.

In a 2016 interview with The Associated Press, Ade commented on the possibility of a remake. "We've had interest but I have to think about it. It depends. There are so many things remade. I don't feel the need that it's remade but it depends

on the conditions," she said. "Everybody has his price." Representatives for Nicholson and Wiig did not immediately respond to request for comment. — AP

In this file photo, Jack Nicholson speaks onstage during the Oscars at the Dolby Theatre in Los Angeles. — AP



In this file photo, Chinese actress Zhou Dongyu, right, and Ma Sichun hold their award for Best Leading Actress at the 53rd Golden Horse Awards in Taipei, Taiwan. — AP

'Soul Mate' leads Hong Kong Film Awards nominees with 12

Romance drama "Soul Mate" has charmed the Hong Kong Film Awards. The coming-of-age tale of two girls falling for the same boy received 12 nominations, with Zhou Dongyu and Ma Sichun both getting nods in the best actress category. Their dual nominations are not unprecedented - the co-stars both won the category at Taiwan's Golden Horse Awards last year. The film, its screenplay and director Derek Tsang also received nominations, which were announced Tuesday by two of last year's winners, "Port of Call" co-stars Aaron Kwok and Elaine Jin.

Trailing closely with 10 nominations is the cop thriller "Cold War II," nominated as best film, screenplay, cinematography and best actor, Tony Leung Ka Fai. In the best film category, both films will compete alongside the comedy "Mermaid," the baseball film "Weeds on Fire" and crime thriller "Trivisa." The best director category is a battle between veterans and new talent. Three-time winner Johnnie To is nominated for crime drama "Three" while 2002's best actor and director

winner Stephen Chow is nominated for "Mermaid." Director Derek Tsang from "Soul Mate," Wong Chun from "Mad World" and Frank Hui, Jevons Au and Vicky Wong from "Trivisa" are all just beginning to make their mark in film direction. In the best actress category, Zhou and Ma face competition from Tang Wei for "Book of Love," Kara Wai in "Happiness" and Nina Paw from "Show Me Your Love."

Leung is joined in the best actor category by Francis Ng in "Shed Skin Papa," Shawn Yue in "Mad World" and "Trivisa" co-stars Richie Jen and Lam Ka Tung. Kwok expressed pride in Leung's performance, even though he wasn't nominated for his own role in "Cold War II." "I never doubt myself, but I think the jury members have their point of views, their preferences and angles," he said at the news conference. "It's not a problem that I'm not nominated. I'm still very confident in myself." The Hong Kong Film Awards ceremony is on April 9. — AP

Pakistanis condemn ban on Bollywood blockbuster 'Raees'

Pakistan's ban on Bollywood thriller "Raees" sparked a social media backlash yesterday, after the film featuring Indian superstar Shah Rukh Khan was denounced for portraying Muslims as "terrorists". The government decision to bar the 2017 action film came after Pakistani cinemas lifted their own ban on Indian films. Bollywood movies and Khan in particular are immensely popular in Pakistan and the film also stars a leading Pakistani actress, Mahira Khan.

But the industry has become a political battleground amid heightened tensions between the nuclear-armed states in the disputed Kashmir region. The film "portrays Muslims as terrorists and violent people", Mubahsar Hassan, chairman of the Pakistan Film Censor Board, told AFP. A second official complained about the comparison between

Muslims and Hindus. "This film gave a message that all Muslims do bad things and are involved in crimes while Hindus are gentlemen and they stop them from the dirty work," he told AFP on condition of anonymity. But fans dismissed the concerns, with many arguing that art can be about politics but politics should have no place in art.

"This ban on #Raees is an example of the kind of absurdities Pakistan's moral crusaders and groveling bureaucrats can attain on their own," tweeted Pakistani film maker and journalist Hasan Zaidi. "Ban on Indian movie Raees is a ban on #Mahira for her barely acting debut. Why Pak censor boards hate Mahira so much?" said writer Haji S Pasha. Some, however, backed the censors. Yasmeen Ali, a lawyer and university professor, wrote: "I support the ban on #Raees owing to showing Muslims of a

particular sect of Islam conducting heinous crimes & being terrorists". Pakistani cinemas last October announced a ban on Indian films following strained relations between Islamabad and Delhi, lifting it only last month.

For its part, the Indian Motion Pictures Producers Association banned Pakistani actors and technicians from working on Bollywood sets after last year's tensions. India and Pakistan have fought three wars since independence from Britain seven decades ago, two of them over Kashmir. The Pakistani censor board officials said other Bollywood films such as "Kabul" and "Ae Dil hai Mushkil" can still be shown as they do not contain objectionable content. — AFP



This file photograph shows Indian Bollywood actor Shah Rukh Khan (right) as he speaks during a promotional event for Hindi film "Raees" directed by Rahul Dholakia (left) in Mumbai.



A Pakistani vendor poses for a photograph with pirated copies of Indian Bollywood film "Raees" at his shop in Karachi yesterday. — AFP photos

Review: 'John Wick 2' is an extravagantly violent good time

Before you buy a ticket to see "John Wick: Chapter 2," the improbably fun sequel to the implausibly good "John Wick," you might want to ask yourself how much tolerance you have for gun shots to the head, because there are a lot of those in "John Wick: Chapter 2." More than you might think possible in a single movie. Is it gratuitous? Yes. Do all those people deserve to die? Probably not. But for our bearded boogeyman, who one character calls a priest and the devil in a single sentence, a shot to the head and one to the chest gets the job done quickly and efficiently. Why make things overly complicated?

The same goes for the movie, about the storied hitman who was driven out of retirement and back into the game after some mobsters stole his 1969 Mustang and killed his puppy. Stuntman-turned-director Chad Stahelski's sequel is straightforward, fast-paced and gets the job done entertainment-wise. True to its name, "Chapter 2" literally picks up where the first left off. In a skull-crushingly loud sequence involving multiple men getting tossed off car hoods, John Wick (Keanu Reeves) retrieves his Mustang from the crooks holding it hostage (allowing for some knowingly extreme exposition about just how scary this guy is). It's like a bonus "final scene" from the first film that gives closure to John's revenge mission and reminds us of his folk hero legend status. It also pushes reboot on the whole thing, allowing John to finally return to his modernist castle in the woods, bury his weapons once more in concrete, reminisce about his dead love and play with his dog (yep, there's a new one).

But soon enough, Santino D'Antonio (Riccardo Scamarcio) is knocking at his door asking John to repay the debt he owes. In this elaborate criminal underworld, there are only two rules: No blood is to be spilled at the Continental (the hitman hotel), and "markers" must always be honored. Santino helped John get out of the game, and into his multimillion dollar home, and now he wants to cash in the favor. This request leads John even further

into the world of these dandy assassins as he goes to execute Santino's mission, and boy is it fun - especially the "getting ready" sequence where we get to see John being fitted for bespoke suits (Occasion? Social. Buttons? Two. Style? Tactical) and choosing his weapons from The Sommelier (Peter Serafinowicz).

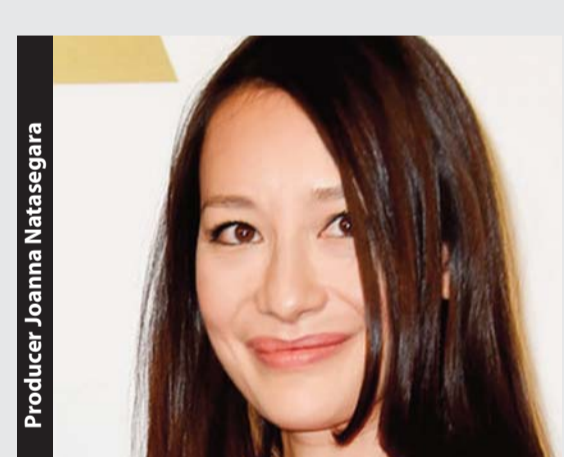
Fellow assassin

From there, it's really just action sequence after action sequence - from an Italian rave to a final showdown at a modern art exhibit. The visuals are always exciting and over the top, and creative in well-trod territory for the genre (like a subway platform), even if the plot gets a little repetitive in the third act. The film is jam-packed with amazing cameos and supporting players, from Franco Nero as the manager of the Rome branch of The Continental and Common as a fellow assassin with a grudge, to Laurence Fishburne as the Bowery King. Ruby Rose is an amusing standout, too, as a sultry, mute bodyguard who communicates in sign language. There are also some returning players, like Lance Reddick as the Continental's concierge and Ian McShane as the New York Continental manager as well as a handful of others.

And Reeves is in top form as the perpetually unruffled John Wick. It's a role that is tailor-made for his low-key intensity and one that will fit him for years to come. Both "John Wick" films are sendups of the tasteless excess of B-action pics and all-out celebrations of their vulgarity. "Chapter 2" is the best one could hope for in an action sequel, and it doesn't even have the "killed the puppy" gimmick on its side. The only real question is when we'll get the gift of a "Chapter 3": "John Wick: Chapter 2," a Lionsgate release is rated R by the Motion Picture Association of America for "strong violence throughout, some language and brief nudity." Running time: 122 minutes. Three stars out of four. — AP



This image released by Lionsgate shows Keanu Reeves in a scene from, "John Wick: Chapter 2." — AP



'White Helmets' filmmakers say Trump travel ban hurts Syrian subjects

The filmmakers of Oscar-nominated "The White Helmets" about Syria's rescue workers said the documentary's subjects are directly affected by US President Donald Trump's travel ban and their absence at the Oscars is a "lost opportunity." "The White Helmets," nominated in the Oscars short subject documentary category, gives a glimpse of the daily lives of the Syrian Civil Defense, also known as the White Helmets, civilians who volunteer as rescue workers in the war-ravaged country. The founder of the White Helmets, Raed Saleh, and a young Syrian rescue worker who shot scenes for the documentary are unable to attend the Feb 26 Oscars ceremony due to Trump's executive order that bars entry to the United States for citizens from Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen for 90 days. "We feel even more responsibility and pressure to make sure that the White Helmets' message is shared with the world if they cannot be here to share it," the film's producer Joanna Natesegara told Reuters at a luncheon for Oscar nominees in Beverly Hills this week. The documentary, available on Netflix, aims to convey the "hope, inspiration and collaboration" of the White Helmets amid the years-long civil war, Natesegara said. The absence of the two White Helmets volunteers at the Oscars prevents them from being recognized and celebrated, director Orlando von Einsiedel said. "In this particular moment, the voices of Syrians and people from the Middle East are so important to be heard in order to break down misunderstandings and stereotypes," he said.

Trump's temporary travel ban has been a deeply divisive issue across the nation. The president defended the measure as necessary for national security, whilst critics have challenged the ban as discriminatory against Muslims. On Tuesday, a federal appeals court heard arguments in the action and whether a federal judge was wrong to suspend the temporary travel ban. The head of the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, organizers of the Oscars, noted the "empty chairs" in the room during the luncheon, adding that the United States should not put barriers in the way of artists from around the world. Iranian director Asghar Farhadi and actress Taraneh Alidoosti, who stars in his foreign-language nominated film "The Salesman," said last week they would boycott the Academy Awards to protest Trump's travel restrictions. — Reuters

Madonna felt 'compelled' to adopt twins: Court papers

US pop superstar Madonna felt "compelled" to adopt four-year-old twin girls from an orphanage in Malawi after hearing of their plight through her charity work, court papers revealed yesterday. The High Court in the Malawian capital Lilongwe on Tuesday granted the singer permission to adopt the twins, adding to two other children she has already adopted from the country. Court documents detailed how the twins were taken in by the orphanage because their mother died soon after childbirth, their father left to marry another woman, and their grandmother struggled to look after several children.

Some Malawian activists have criticized Madonna for allegedly bending the rules and for exploiting one of the world's poorest countries. But judge Fiona Mwaale said the singer would provide a loving family life for the children in "a luxurious, spacious and comfortable abode in an affluent neighborhood" of the United States. The ruling also said that Madonna, 58, was "above the age normally considered within the ranges of parenting" and had submitted a medical report to prove her good health. "Her charity work brings her into contact with orphanages... and it was as a result of this contact that she felt compelled to fill a gap in their lives and open up her home to them," Mwaale said. "The petitioner satisfied me that this adoption is motivated by her desire to offer a home, love, protection and guidance to the infants." "She would like to share what she has with those who are less privileged."

Adoption disputes

The ruling said the twins' father, identified by the initials AM, gave his consent for the adoption and accepted it "permanently terminates" his parental rights-adding that he had not received any incentives. Madonna's earlier adoption of David Banda in 2006 and Mercy James in 2009 from Malawi have been plagued by accusations from some biological family members over lack of contact with the children. The US singer, who was in court for the private ruling, has made no immediate comment and it is unclear if the family have left the country.

She set up a charity called Raising Malawi in 2006, and has been a regular visitor to the country, taking David and Mercy last year when she visited a children's hospital surgical unit funded by the charity. She has not always been welcomed with open arms. In 2013, she was stripped of VIP status by former president Joyce Banda's government, which accused her of being "uncouth" and wanting unending gratitude for her adoptions. — AFP



Madonna

My thoughts on 'plant-based' eating

By Yalda Golsharifi

The concept of "plant-based" eating has been a concept that I've been interested in for a while. I always felt like eating plant-based was the right way to go, however it was always hard for me to take that first step and commit to this lifestyle. A "plant-based" lifestyle basically means that your diet consists of foods only from the earth. All fruits, vegetables, grains, nuts and legumes fit into this lifestyle. I always thought it would be so hard to cut out meat, chicken, and dairy and that it would be so hard to create delicious meals but since trying out eating plant-based, I've been having so much fun creating different recipes and variations of plant foods and it hasn't been hard at all.

The benefits of eating plant-based are endless. Its been

proven that this way of eating can ward off chronic diseases and even reverse some diseases like heart disease and diabetes. Its also amazing if you want to lose weight because your consuming less calories but still getting everything you need. Eating plant-based also means your food is loaded with fiber, which aids in digestion as well as lowers cholesterol and blood sugar levels. Cutting out animal products also means skipping most of the saturated fat that they include which clogs pores, resulting in healthier more vibrant looking skin with less visible pores.

I've been feeling amazing since I converted to eating "plant-based" and I can see it being something I'll stick with in the long run. I feel less fatigued and so much lighter and I've noticed that even my mind feels clearer. I've also noticed changes in my husband Hassan, who deals with a lot of anxiety. He also feels like his anxiety has been so

much better after switching to plant-based foods. Some studies have actually shown that a "plant-based" lifestyle can cure mental diseases like depression and anxiety, which I think is amazing.

Of course having a little bit of dairy once in a while or some seafood here and there wont hurt but I think if the majority of your food is plant-based you really will be able to notice the benefits and it will feel amazing. I've even tried to incorporate more plant-based foods in my kids' diets as well and they're starting to love all the new colorful meals we've been making. I recommend everyone who's into a more natural, organic lifestyle and eating healthy to try out eating plant-based and cutting out the chicken, meat and dairy. You know what they say, don't let your stomach become a graveyard!



The main entrance of the Sarajevo's newly opened 'War Childhood Museum'.



A book entitled "Childhood In Wartime" displayed near the main entrance of Sarajevo's newly opened "War Childhood Museum".



A picture shows children's choir uniform, displayed at Sarajevo's newly opened "War Childhood Museum". — AFP photos

Telling stories of wartime childhood in Bosnian museum

Ballet slippers, tinned food and drawings by a sister killed from shelling are found among the objects in a new Sarajevo museum used to tell stories of life during Bosnia's war through the eyes of children. An unfinished letter, kept safe by a young Bosnian woman for 20 years, was started by her mother who perished when their apartment was shelled in the Balkan country's 1992-1995 civil war. To obtain such personal and treasured possessions, "you have to create trust," said Jasenko Halilovic, the 28-year-old founder of the newly opened War Childhood Museum.

During Bosnia's inter-ethnic conflict nearly 3,400 children were killed, including 1,500 in the capital Sarajevo. The city was besieged for 44 months by Belgrade-backed Bosnian Serb forces, who launched shells and sniper fire from the surrounding mountains. Sarajevo still bears the scars, from the bullet holes in buildings to curved monuments in a city centre square engraved with the names of hundreds of children who lost their lives. Among them was 17-year-old Aida, hit by artillery shells at the entrance to her family's home. She loved to draw Disney characters, including Minnie Mouse with a tear sliding down her cheek. Her sister Selma donated the sketches to the museum.

'Message against war'

Some of the collection is less tragic but equally poignant. Mela Softic donated the ballet slippers she would dance in as a way to "disconnect from reality." When she put on the ballet shoes and played some classical music, "I was no longer in war, in Sarajevo, but in a fairy tale," she recalled. Softic, now 32, believes the museum is "the best place possible" for her cherished mementoes of that time in her life. The collection consists of around 4,000 objects, accompanied by short texts, and those on display will be rotated so that the exhibition is renewed, said Selma Tanovic, a 36-year-old anthropologist and head

of research.

Along with photos and diaries detailing the day-to-day drama, the dozens of exhibits now on display include a hat pierced with shrapnel, a makeshift stove, stuffed animals, a television and a bicycle. "We do not mean, of course, to minimize the trauma that children have suffered," Tanovic said. "But we want to emphasize the resistance of children, the way they overcame the cruel conditions of their childhood." All the stories are meant to convey "a strong message against war," she said.

Art of survival

Filip Andronik, who was 11 when war broke out, turned his months sheltering in the basement of his building into an exercise in the art of the survival. When his family received their first supplies of tinned meat, provided by aid workers, he decided to keep the empty packaging to joke about once the war was over. "But the war continued, and so did the humanitarian aid," said Andronik, now a comedian and comic book writer. He collected more than 2,000 pieces of packaging from wartime food and toiletries. "I handed over my entire collection to the War Childhood Museum," Halilovic, who has also compiled a book of children's wartime testimonies, wants to make the museum a platform for "dialogue and reconciliation" in Bosnia, which remains deeply divided along ethnic lines of Bosniak Muslims, Croats and Serbs.

'Common to all of us'

The new museum mostly displays belongings of children from Sarajevo, a predominantly Muslim city, but Halilovic also wants to tell the stories of youngsters caught up in different sides of the conflict. He is now looking for objects from places such as Banja Luka in the north, the capital of Bosnian Serbs, and the southern city of Mostar, divided between ethnic Croats and Muslims. "I think it's a wonderful idea to tell the stories of children in

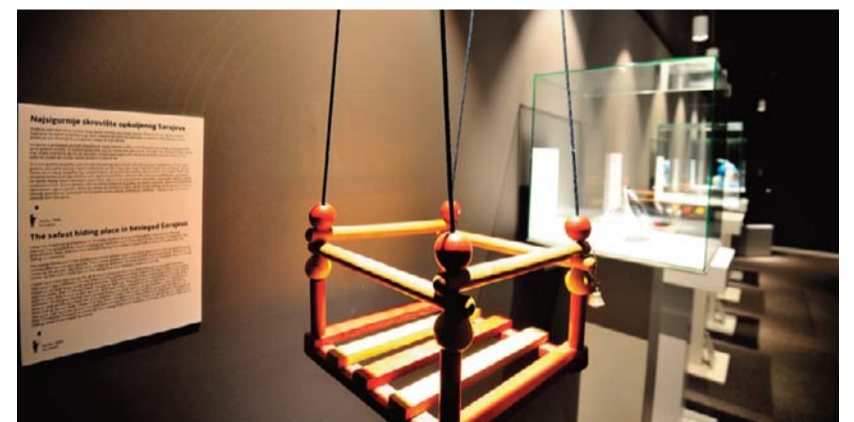


A guitar, among other items displayed at Sarajevo's newly opened "War Childhood Museum".

all the cities... regardless of which side they grew up on," said Emina Omanovic, who donated her red bicycle to the museum. "It's something common to all of us, the children who grew up during the war." — AFP



A homemade teddy bear displayed at Sarajevo's newly opened "War Childhood Museum".



A child's swing displayed at Sarajevo's newly opened "War Childhood Museum".

OSN opens doors to a new world of Disney with exclusive long-term MENA deal

The wonderful world of Disney has just got bigger on OSN, the region's leading entertainment network. Opening doors to delightful Disney experiences, OSN's subscribers in the Middle East and North Africa region can now watch amazing content from the world's leading family entertainment provider first and exclusively on their favorites network. As the home of Disney's first-pay movies and Channels in the region, OSN will continue to offer an extensive selection of blockbuster movies, popular series and coverage of the prestigious Academy Awards(r) through the renewed deal. OSN will also launch a dedicated Disney-branded HD movie channel early next year, as well as the Disney Forever On Demand service in the coming months, which will include fan favourite Disney Channel classic series.

OSN will remain the entertainment destination for the biggest blockbusters from Lucasfilm Ltd. such as Rogue One: A Star Wars Story, Marvel titles including Doctor Strange, Disney Pixar films such as The Incredibles 2, as well as top quality ABC Studios shows including Scandal and How To Get Away With Murder, among others.

OSN's subscribers will get to watch the latest Disney movies on OSN's channels more than a year before any other pay television or subscription on-demand platform in the region. OSN will also continue to broadcast some of the top ABC Studios television series.

Emad Morcos, Chief Content Officer, OSN, said: "We are continuing to build on our strong collaboration with Disney through an even wider range of content that appeals to family and kids. The quality of Disney entertainment is unbeatable and the addition of more On Demand anytime, anywhere shows will offer added choices for our customers. Our long-term partnership with Disney is industry-defining as it raises the bar in home entertainment and brings even more value for our subscribers."

OSN will offer its subscribers more Disney movies than ever before across its channels and on-demand services, including many classic titles. Customers can also look forward to exciting pop-up channels and stunts featuring some of the biggest Disney franchise titles.



Chafic Najja, General Manager, Disney Middle East & North Africa said: "We are delighted to build on our long-standing and dynamic relationship with OSN across the MENA region. Through offering new, dedicated channels and services, families across the Middle East and North Africa can access the premium family entertainment that Disney is world-famous for. Everyone has their own Disney favorites, and they can enjoy them and more with OSN."

As the sole provider of the channels Disney XD, Disney Junior and Disney Channel HD, OSN has also enhanced the online, catch-up and On-Demand Disney programming experience for 'anytime, anywhere' access with the launch of three new digital services - Disney Channel Pop Pick Play, Disney English and Disney Channel Hindi. OSN viewers will also continue to get access to box sets of favourite series with ABC Studios on Demand and classic movies on Disney on Demand.

Further engaging the local community, Disney XD will introduce Arabic dubbing in 2018 adding to Disney Junior and Disney Channel HD are already available with Arabic dubbing or subtitles.

Explore the world of blockbusters

OSN's renewed agreement with Disney means subscribers have the widest choice of blockbuster movies at their fingertips. With access to all Lucasfilm Ltd titles as part of the deal, including Star Wars movies past and present, OSN subscribers will now have the enviable opportunity to be the first to watch on pay TV Rogue One: A Star Wars Story, which had its cinematic release in December 2016 in the region.

From Marvel Studios, viewers will be able to enjoy blockbuster movies in their Pay TV window including, Doctor Strange, Guardians of the Galaxy Vol.2, Thor: Ragnarok, Avengers: Infinity War, Black Panther and more, while the Disney Pixar Animation movies and franchises will bring kids and family favourites such as Finding Dory, Cars 3 and The Incredibles 2. Disney Buena Vista movies and franchises will offer viewers classics such as Beauty and the Beast, Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Men Tell No Tales and more, while Walt Disney Animation Studio will bring movies including the recently released musical adventure animation Moana.

An unbeatable range of series

The Disney collaboration expands OSN's series programming to a new high with a line-up of top-quality and award-winning ABC Studios shows such as: How to Get Away with Murder, Scandal, Grey's Anatomy, Criminal

Minds, Once Upon a Time, Secrets & Lies, Devious Maids, The Catch and more. OSN subscribers will also have access to hit shows Black-ish, Baby Daddy, Young & Hungry, among others. In the action adventure roster are Marvel Studios' Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D and American Crime, and variety shows include Amazing Race, The View and The Chew.



An enhanced online/catch-up experience

Disney Channel Pop Pick Play (PPP) is the definitive catch-up platform for all Disney programming. The dedicated Disney section will bring over 600 unique episodes every year, with at least 180 episodes of Disney entertainment available at any moment in time.

New to the region, Disney English is a new English learning product, which uses Disney characters to help youngsters learn and develop a passion for the English language. It will feature two modules including 52 lessons in total, and a third module will be introduced in 2018.

Disney Channel Hindi will include 200 episodes of Disney programming every year provided by Disney India. There will be 100 such episodes available at any point in time.

Disney Forever is a new On Demand service, to be launched in the coming months, which will include fan favourite Disney Channel classic series.

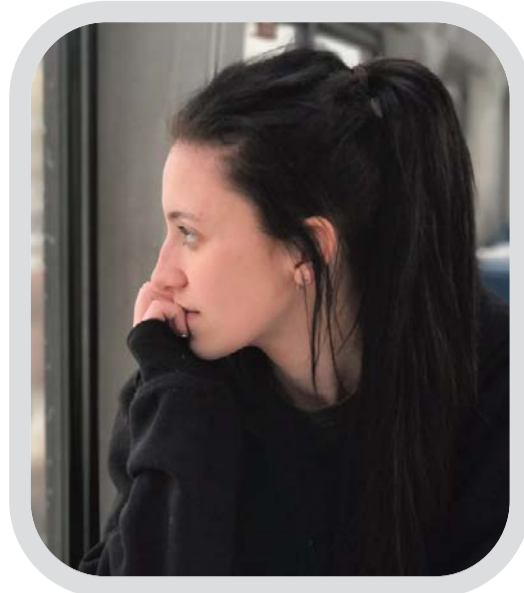
FEATURE



In this photo Tom Schultz, 68, and Joe Krueger, 60, of Watertown, Wisconsin, talk about their love of trains since boyhood along the rails. — AP photos



In this photo 22-year-old Tereseta Esqueda stands at the El Paso, Texas, train station. She was sending her grandparents on a trip.



In this photo Sabrina Feldman, 19, looks out the window and thinks about her future in California.



Machelle Lowe, 45, of Mount Pleasant Iowa, was traveling to see her daughter in Wyoming after discovering she has cancer.

Tales from a Train: Travelers tell stories of their journey

Where are you traveling on this train? And where are you traveling in life? I traveled around the US on Amtrak for two weeks - beginning in Orlando, Florida, on Jan 17 and stopping in New York, Chicago, San Francisco, El Paso and New Orleans, and many points between. I talked to dozens of people along the way - fellow travelers, friends and family waiting for loved one at stations, train workers. I generally started the conversations with these two simple questions.

Oregon: 'I stepped up. I love them'
Pam Buresh, 54, is a business owner in central Oregon. She's taking care of her great-nephews and great-niece; she says their father is a drug addict. "We're going to Disneyland. These are my kids. ... Actually, they're my great-nephews and -niece. They're with me, and I'm raising them now. "We have a farm in central Oregon. I'm raising these guys, and they're super, super great and hardworking. And super polite. They've been through a lot. Their dad is my nephew.

to get there. I hope there will be cute guys. I've heard some things about how if you go to a bigger city, people won't be as nice. Where I'm from, everyone is super nice. There's really not many rude people in Iowa. "I really want to go to L.A. That's where I want my dream to play out. I'm not scared."

New York: 'Appalachian square-dance type music'
Mike Jarboe, 63, lives in Clifton Park, New York. He retired after 40 years as a journalist. "We play old-time Appalachian square-dance type music, is the best way to describe it to people who aren't familiar with it. I play fiddle, and Paul plays banjo. "We went to New York City. I have pancreatic cancer, and my significant other couldn't come. And Paul was nice enough to come, because it's nice to have another set of ears with you

"Family means a lot, but not just family, but kids period. They're the most important thing, and things are really tough. It's hard out there. Our environment is tough. And then you have other setbacks with family. My goal is for these guys to do great. And they're doing great. People love them. They are super awesome. They love God, and that was there when they were very young.

"I didn't think my life would turn out this way, but it's great. What better thing could I possibly do. There's so many kids who need homes. And the meth epidemic is everywhere, across the United States, and it hits every type of family. Kids get stuck, they're left with it. "I work a lot; so does my husband. We're very busy. They ground me. They take me back. School gets out, I've gotta take care of the kids. It takes me away from everything else. We're always connected with our phones, now with them, because they require so much from me that I have to give my full attention and care. It's healthy. "I stepped up. I love them. I tried to help their dad out, but he couldn't make it."

Wisconsin: 'We're train geeks'
Tom Schultz, 68, of Watertown, Wisconsin, was fascinated by trains from an early age. "We're headed to Glenwood Springs, Colorado. It's a very special stop for us. I hate to use the word, but it's kind of a yuppie place. It's very, very nice. You get off the train, and walk 100 feet, and the hotel is there. They've got a microbrewery. They've got this huge pool that's heated with water from the earth. "I'm with two good friends. Once a year in January, when it gets to be the doldrums, especially after the Packers lose, we usually take a three- or four-day trip just to rejuvenate our lives. We always go on a train for this trip. I love training. Time is the issue. If you've got time, a train is the best.



when you're getting doctor's opinions. And all the opinions are good, which is rare for my cancer. So I'm pretty happy. My doctor is in Albany, and this was a second opinion. So all's good. Today I got information on upcoming surgery. It is rare with my illness that you can actually have surgery. I'm extremely lucky.

"This has been a happy day. I'm so happy that Paul came to be my ears. When you're dealing with something like cancer and talking to a doctor, your mind goes a million miles an hour. They recommend you have somebody to take notes. Also chemotherapy tends to fog your brain. Paul was just great. He's not only a great musical partner but a great friend. "I'm having a great time. I retired at the end of 2015, I found out I had cancer nine months later, and I am fully intent on beating it. And I am enjoying my life."

Paul Draper, 59, of Voorheesville, NY, left, and 63-year-old Mike Jarboe of Clifton Park, play music on the train north of New York City.

"I guess we're train geeks. You have to be one to know what it is to be a train geek. I was born and raised ... about three blocks away from the train station in Watertown, Wisconsin. It was kind of a weird deal, back in those days, that was almost like our park. We'd go up and meet the station agent, and we'd have fun and we'd take the train when they'd turn it around. At night you'd go to sleep and in the middle of the night, the train would go by and the horn and the noise and everything, you'd never hear it, because you got so used to it. But it became ingrained in us. I've always been a train fan.

"The station agent that took care of the place back when they had station agents - he died some years ago. And I went to his funeral, and his wife cried with me: 'You were the guys that he talked about.' We were there all the time as kids. "Getting on the train, it's just a chance to get away from the rat race. You just sit back and enjoy life."

California: 'I want my dream to play out'
Sabrina Feldman is a 19-year-old from Clive, Iowa. She graduated from high school last year. "We're going to Chico, California. Me and my friend are wanting to move there, and we're going to look at cosmetology schools. I want to own my own salon. For school I want to go to L.A. But we're going to Chico because my friend's aunt lives there. We're only staying for a week, and then I'm going back home, and then I'm going to work really hard to get some money for an apartment.

"I like making people feel pretty, so I want to just do good in school so then I can have a lot of clients and my own business. Whenever I go get my hair done, I'm always really excited. I want to have people leave feeling like they have new hair. I always feel good when I get my hair done.

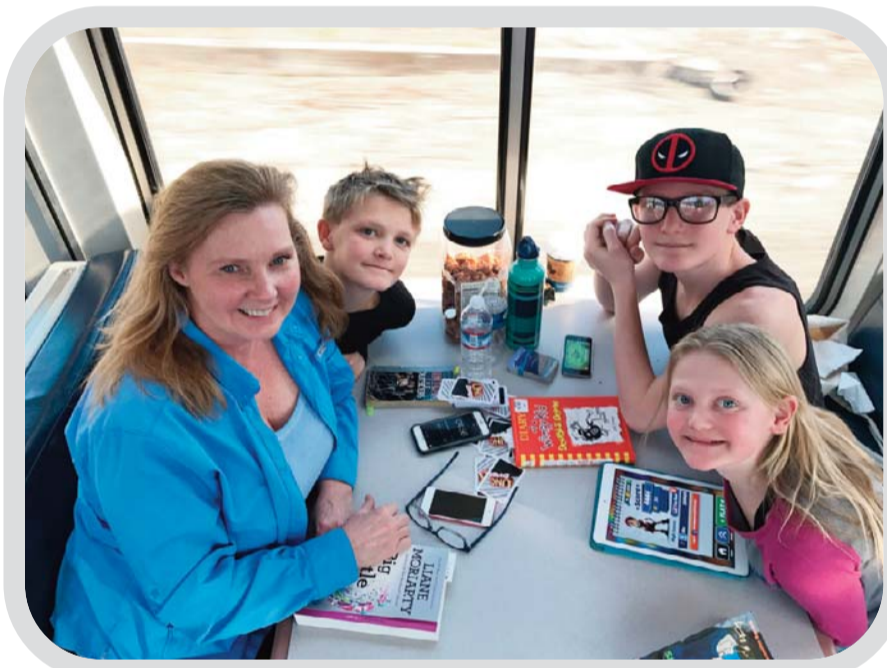
"I think it will be a lot different in California. Where I live, we have a bunch of cornfields and livestock everywhere. In California, it's a lot busier. I don't know, I've never been to California. This is my first time going. So I'm pretty excited to see what the environment change will be like.

"I've never been to a big city before, so I'm kind of anxious

Chicago: 'I'm going to propose to her'
Everett Grant is a 34-year-old crane engineer from New York. He traveled to Chicago to see his girlfriend. "She thought I wasn't coming, but I'm going to surprise her. I love to prank her. I like to see her squirm a little. I met her on Facebook. She was a friend of a friend of a friend. I pressed 'like' on her picture.

"I've got my own space; she's got her own space. We've both got our own houses, and I get the chance to travel. It's less stressful. I've been in relationships before where I've lived in a house with a woman. It's just like chaos. The distance has brought the balance. I can focus on my work, focus on going to church and praying, and getting in tune with myself. There's not too much bickering. You know, women bicker. And I can be a bickerer too.

"I'm more introverted. I don't talk that much. This interview is like a gift. I don't give too much of myself away. I don't allow myself to be accessible. But I'm trying something new every day. We've got a new year; we've got a new president. Trump is here, and I hope he spreads some of his wallet with us. "I'm staying in Chicago five days. I'm going to propose to her. I'm going to move to Chicago. I have a job offer. She doesn't know. I'm not worried, because it's time for a change. It's a new year. I gave us a year, with us being apart, and it worked, so I'm trying something different. A relationship, any relationship, you have to have something different each year. Every stage is different each year." — AP



In this photo Pam Buresh, 54, of Oregon sits with her three children: Tyson, Ethan and Riley, from left. They were going to Disneyland.

Tereseta, a 22-year-old from Texas, worries that a border wall will separate her from her Mexican grandparents. Pam is raising the children of her nephew, a drug addict. And Machelle, who just found out about her cancer, knows this month might be her only real chance to hold her 3-week old grandbaby. The people I've met are folks who hate to fly or somehow can't fly, people from the heartland and from cities. Each person is aggressively pursuing happiness and trying to live life to the fullest. Here are a few of their stories, in their own words.

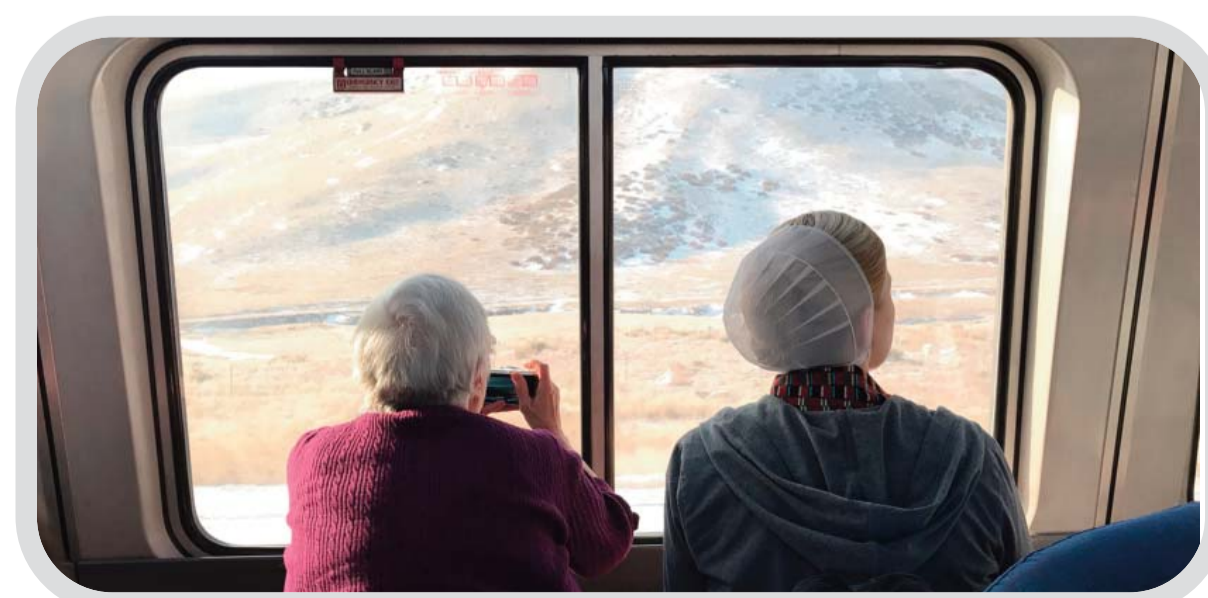
Editor's note: Associated Press Tampa, Florida, correspondent Tamara Lush spent 15 days traveling via train across the US as part of Amtrak's residency program, designed for creative professionals to spend time writing on the rails. She worked on her next romance novel and filed occasional dispatches for the AP in the Tales from a Train project.

Iowa: 'I need to hold that baby'
Machelle Lowe is a 45-year-old hospice worker in Mount Pleasant, Iowa. She just learned she has cancer. "I'm going to spend a week with my daughter in Wyoming before I get treatment. Melanoma. My daughter has a 3-week-old baby. So we're going to go cuddle. "I had a mole on my arm, and at Christmas I was here with my daughter. They just moved here six weeks ago and then had the baby three weeks ago. So she was really harping at me about this mole on my arm. It was flat, I had it for all my life. But in the last year, it got bigger.

"It's advanced. Probably in the lymph nodes. Possibly my lungs. I don't know a whole lot yet. ... It may be irrational, but I hopped on a train. "This trip means everything to me. I need to hold that baby. "The other kicker is, I work for hospice. I know a lot. Maybe sometimes too much. It can be a good thing; it can be a bad thing. I'm just going to hold the baby for a week. I can't think of a better way to spend the week."

Texas: 'The issue of a wall, it's really complicated'
Tereseta Esqueda, 22, is a student at the University of Texas at El Paso. Her grandparents live in Mexico; she was at the station to send them off. "I'm here to say goodbye to my grandmother and grandfather. I live in El Paso, and my grandparents live in Juarez. They're taking the train to visit my aunt in another part of Texas. "I have pride in my ancestry. Even if we are not physically close, they are part of me. My grandparents will be gone now for three months. It will be really sad to me. I'm sad today to see them go. ... I'm in classes now, but probably during spring break I'll go to visit them. "My whole family is here today because we care about my grandmother and grandfather, and we've come to say goodbye and make sure all will be fine.

"I just want to reach my goals in life. I want to be a graphic designer. I really enjoy all the arts. I want to have my own business here in El Paso. My biggest obstacle in reaching my goals is myself. Sometimes I'm really shy. "I think the future of America is a big issue. It's really scary. For example, my grandmother and grandfather and other family in Juarez. The issue of a wall, it's really complicated to me. It's my family. I don't want to be separated from them. I'm scared about it. For everybody. A wall means the division of the world. It's not just Mexico or the United States."



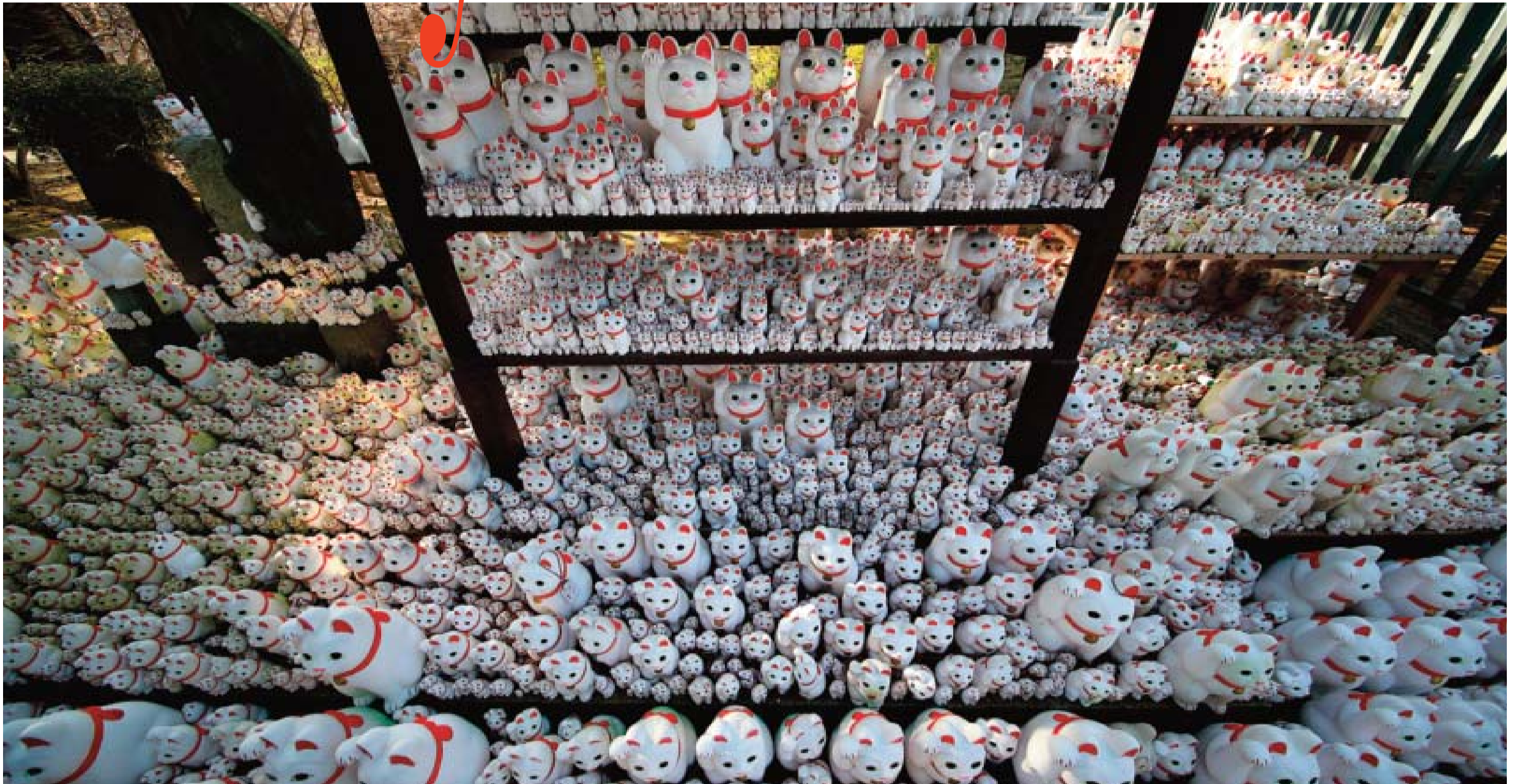
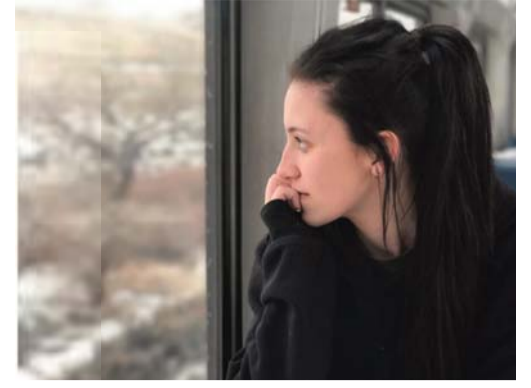
Two women take photos of the Sierra Nevada mountains on the California Zephyr train.

Lifestyle

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2017

Tales from a Train: Travelers tell stories of their journey

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Thousands of 'Maneki-neko,' or beckoning cat, figurines are placed at the Goutokuji Temple in Tokyo, yesterday. The figurines believed to bring good luck dedicated by visitors are placed around a statue of the goddess of mercy. — AP



One of the largest and most unusual paintings by surrealist master Rene Magritte is shown at New York's Christie's auction house, Monday Feb 6, 2017. — AP

UNUSUAL MAGRITTE COULD HIT \$17.5M AT AUCTION

One of the largest paintings by surrealist master Rene Magritte could set a record for the artist when it goes up for sale with an estimated price of 14 million pounds (\$17.5 million). Christie's auction house told The Associated Press Monday that it will offer "La Corde Sensible" ("Heartstrings") in London on Feb 28. It will go on display at Christie's London showroom Feb 23.

The Belgian artist painted the image of a crystal Champagne glass topped with a frothy crown of clouds in a mountainous landscape in 1960 and gave it to his wife as a gift. The couple later sold it, and it has been in a private Belgian collection since 1990.

At 114 centimeters by 146 centimeters (almost 4 feet by 5

feet) it's one of Magritte's largest oil paintings. It features a playful visual juxtaposition shared by his more famous images of bowler hats and pipes. But Christie's deputy chairman of Impressionist and modern art, Olivier Camu, said the painting's composition of cloud and glass is unique in Magritte's work. He said the painting "is the most striking painting by Magritte that we have sold at auction" since the 2002 sale of "The Dominion of Lights." That sold for almost \$12.7 million, then a record for the artist. In 2014, rival auctioneer Sotheby's sold Magritte's "Le Beau Monde" for 7.9 million pounds - \$12.9 million at the time. — AP

Brinkley, 63, back in swimsuit in Sports Illustrated

Supermodel Christie Brinkley, 63, has become the oldest woman to appear in the famous Swimsuit edition of Sports Illustrated, posing in a red bikini and black one-piece alongside her daughters. The annual magazine, which typically features young women with the impossible-to-attain perfections of fashion models, is legendary in the United States, where it sold 785,000 copies in 2014 on its 50th anniversary. Over the years, it has nevertheless sought to challenge the often criticized monopoly of young, white models projected by the fashion industry in general.

Model Tyra Banks became the first black woman to appear on the cover in 1997. Athletes such as tennis champion Serena Williams and mixed martial artist Ronda Rousey have also been photographed for the magazine.

First spotted in a post office in Paris aged 19, Michigan-born Brinkley appeared in the magazine eight times between 1975 to 2004, and a record three consecutive times on its cover in 1979, 1980 and 1981.

For the February 15 edition, which comes out days after Brinkley celebrated her 63rd birthday, she is joined by her daughters Sailor Brinkley Cook, 18, and Alexa Ray Joel, 31, whose father is singer Billy Joel. "Thank you Sports Illustrated for sending the powerful message that good things come in packages of every size and we do not come with an expiration date!" she wrote on her Instagram page. The magazine said on its website that the four-times married Brinkley proved that "age is nothing more than a number." "My first thought was, 'At my age? No way!'" the model told People magazine. "When I turned 30, I was like, 'This is the last time I'm posing in a bathing suit!' When this issue comes out, I'll be 63. I thought, 'Those days are over.'" "But to get to do it with my girls, I thought, 'One last go!'" — AFP

Supermodel Christie Brinkley



A visitor looks at the art work 'live continues' made by Indian artist Venkat Bothsa at the India Art Fair in New Delhi. — AFP

Michael Kors 3Q revenue declines; cuts fiscal 2017 outlook

Michael Kors' third-quarter revenue was driven lower by weak sales in Europe and the Americas, comparable store sales fell and the luxury retailer lowered its outlook for all of 2017. The company's expectations for the current quarter also disappointed investors and shares tumbled 7 percent before the opening bell Tuesday, seemingly headed for a 52-week low. It has been a rough start to the year for luxury sector. Tiffany & Co. announced the departure of its CEO on Sunday after a dreary holiday season. Ralph Lauren Corp. and CEO Stefan Larsson, who took over top job less than two years ago in hopes of revitalizing the iconic brand, mutually agreed to part ways last week.

For the three months ended Dec 31, Michael Kors' revenue fell to \$1.35 billion from \$1.4 billion, though that was in line with the expectations of industry analysts that follow the company, according to a survey by Zacks Investment Research. Revenue declined in Europe and the Americas. While revenue surged 89.1 percent in Asia, it was



File photo shows a Michael Kors purse in New York. — AP

due largely to recent acquisitions of previously licensed operations in China and South Korea.

Sales at stores open at least a year, a key indicator of a retailer's health, dropped 6.9 percent. Michael Kors Holdings Ltd. earned \$271.3 million, or \$1.64 per share, in the quarter. A year earlier the

luxury handbag and clothing company earned \$294.6 million, or \$1.59 per share. There were fewer shares outstanding in the current quarter. The performance topped the \$1.62 per share that analysts polled by Zacks were calling for. Yet the conservative outlook overshadowed quarterly profit and revenue figures.

Michael Kors said that it now foresees fiscal 2017 adjusted profit in a range of \$4.15 to \$4.19 per share on revenue of about \$4.48 billion. Its prior outlook was for an adjusted profit between \$4.37 and \$4.43 per share on revenue of about \$4.55 billion. Analysts polled by FactSet expect earnings of \$4.37 per share on revenue of \$4.55 billion. For the fourth quarter, the London company anticipates earnings between 68 and 72 cents per share on revenue between approximately \$1.04 billion and \$1.06 billion. That's well off the per-share projections from analysts, who were also looking for revenue of \$1.11 billion, according to a FactSet survey. — AP