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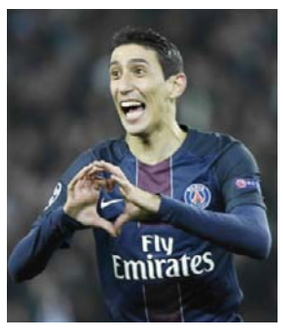

Roses make MPs see red as clashes mar session

Govt wants closed debates on Khor Abdullah, deposits scandal

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By B Izzak

KUWAIT: The National Assembly's regular session yesterday witnessed a number of arguments which took up most of the Assembly's time, preventing it from debating the sensitive issues of Khor Abdullah and the bank deposits scandal. MPs rejected a motion to extend the session beyond the normal finish time at 1400 hours, and as a result, most of the issues were moved for today.

During the session, MP Ahmad Al-Fadhl clashed several times with opposition MPs over two requests from the public prosecution to lift his immunity to be tried in two cases. He was involved in a heated argument with MPs Jamaan Al-Harbash and Mohammad Hayef and others for calling to close down a religious center in Salmiya for allegedly sowing discord and sectarian strife.

Continued on Page 13

KUWAIT: Liberal MP Ahmad Al-Fadhl distributes red roses to mark Valentine's Day at the National Assembly before the parliamentary session yesterday. (Inset) MP Safaa Al-Hashem holds a rose. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Iran urges Gulf to 'seize opportunity' of Rouhani's visit

DUBAI: A top Iranian official called on the Gulf states yesterday to seize the opportunity of a visit by Iranian President Hassan Rouhani to Kuwait and Oman to improve ties, warning that a chance like this would "pass like a cloud". Rouhani will visit Oman and Kuwait today amid efforts by Kuwait to mend relations between the Gulf states and Tehran. The six Arab members of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), especially Saudi Arabia, accuse Iran of using sectarianism to interfere in Arab countries and build its own sphere of influence in the Middle East. Iran denies the accusations.

The Iranian president will meet Oman's Sultan Qaboos in Muscat today before travelling on to Kuwait on the invitation of HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, Rouhani's deputy chief of staff for communications, Parviz Esmaeili, was quoted as saying on Monday by state-run Press TV. Iran's ambassador to Kuwait Alireza Enayati was quoted by ISNA news agency as saying that "on this one-day visit, regional issues as well as bilateral cooperation will be discussed".

"Rouhani's regional initiative to accept invitation of leaders of Oman and Kuwait signals the need for Islamic friendship and restoration of regional ties," Hamid Aboutalebi, the Iranian president's deputy chief of staff, tweeted yesterday.

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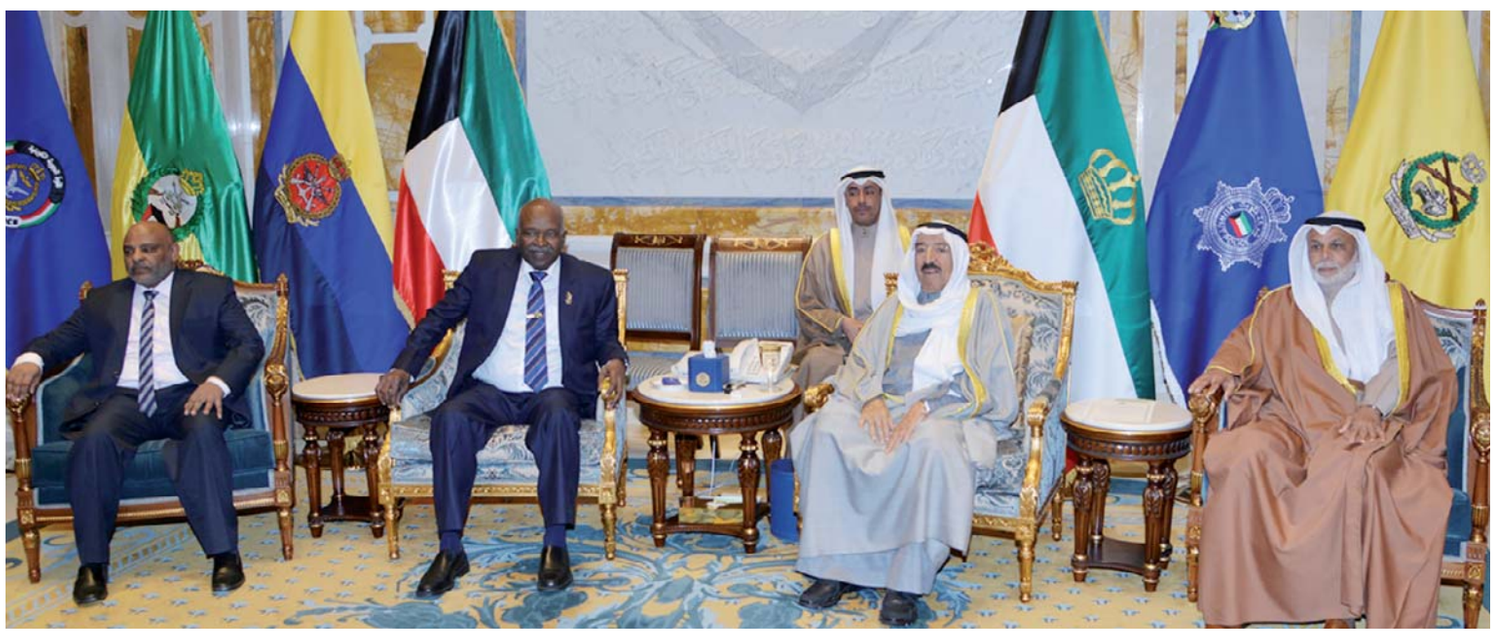
Teacher diagnosed with tuberculosis

KUWAIT: A female Kuwaiti teacher in Ahmadi has been diagnosed with pulmonary tuberculosis (TB), the Ministry of Health announced yesterday. In a statement, the ministry noted that all those who may have come in contact with the patient will undergo medical tests to prevent the spread of the disease. Moreover, the statement noted that 68 students and 18 teachers have been examined, with no one testing positive for the disease, adding that all precautionary steps will be taken to protect the health and safety of people. — KUNA



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Chief Justice of the Republic of Sudan and President of the national Supreme Court, Justice Haider Ahmed Dafalla.—KUNA

His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Ahmad Abdulmohsen Al-Mulaifi.

Amir meets Sudanese Chief Justice

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Bayan Palace yesterday Chairman of Kuwait's Supreme Judicial Council, the Cassation Court, and President of the Constitutional Court, Justice Yousef Jassem Al-Mutawaa and visiting Chief Justice of the Republic of Sudan and President of the national Supreme Court, Justice Haider Ahmed Dafalla. The meeting was attended by Deputy Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. He also received Ahmad Abdulmohsen Al-Mulaifi. Separately, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah received Chairman of the Municipal Council Mhalhel Nasser Al-Khaled. — KUNA

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

His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets with Chairman of the Municipal Council Mhalhel Nasser Al-Khaled.

KUWAIT: Deputy Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah tours a photo exhibition held during the ceremony. —KUNA

Kuwait releases book on life of Mohammad Marafi

Abdulfattah Marafi speaks during the ceremony.

KUWAIT: Under patronage and attendance of Deputy Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Ali Jarrah Al-Sabah, a ceremony was held to release a book titled "a man of humanitarian trade and politics," in celebration of the 40th anniversary of the death of Mohammad Marafi, at Radisson Blu Hotel yesterday. During the ceremony, Sheikh Ali honored a number of humanitarian activists, followed by an award presented to Sheikh Ali himself.

The ceremony also involved a photo exhibition on Marafi's charitable work. In his speech at the event, Sheikh Ali said the deceased had exerted great efforts to serve his country and people. Meanwhile, Marafi's son Abdulfattah Marafi said the book showcases different aspects of his father's life and prominent humanitarian role. —KUNA

Stoltenberg welcomes opening of regional center in Kuwait

BRUSSELS: NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg warmly re-welcomed yesterday the opening of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) - NATO regional center in Kuwait last month in January, saying it is an important platform for enhanced cooperation with the Gulf countries.

"I very much welcome that we established recently the regional center in Kuwait which provides an excellent platform for enhanced cooperation and also support capacity building for different partner countries in the region which is an important tool to fight terrorism," he told a news conference ahead of a meeting of NATO defense ministers.

He noted that the 28-member Alliance is working with countries in the Gulf region to address the challenges in the region itself. The ICI, launched in 2004, aims to boost cooperation between NATO and four Gulf countries Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and UAE.

Stoltenberg said NATO has played a key role in the fight against terrorism for many years, in particular in Afghanistan. The reason that NATO decided to stay in Afghanistan with 13,000 troops is to train assist and advise Afghan troops to enable them to fight terrorism, he said. "The best weapon to fight terrorism is to train local forces to enable them to fight terrorism," he stressed. Stoltenberg briefed media here today on the agenda of this week's meetings of NATO Defense Ministers. On Wednesday and Thursday, ministers will address the Alliance's response to a more challenging world. "We will stress the importance of fair burden-sharing and higher defense spending," he said.

The NATO chief welcomed that defense spending among European Allies and Canada has increased by 3.8 percent in real terms in 2016, higher than expected. Ministers will also focus on the fight against terrorism, and threats stemming from the Middle East and North Africa. "During this ministerial, we will also focus on the fight against terrorism, and threats stemming from the Middle East and North Africa. NATO is providing support to the Counter-IS Coalition and working to train partners like Iraq, Jordan and Tunisia. But we can and should do more," he added. — KUNA

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg

Embassy hands $30,000 to Al-Quds University

AMMAN: Kuwait's Ambassador to Jordan Dr Hamad Al-Duiaj handed yesterday a donation worth $30,000 to the Al-Quds University's Nabuls Branch as a gesture of support to the Palestinian people. The money, offered by Kuwait's Zakat House, will be used to erected a medical center in the university which has around 8,500 registered students in addition to staff, the Ambassador said in a statement.

Kuwait will support Palestine during any possible occasion and this current donation is part of the efforts to help Palestinians pursue knowledge and education, said the Ambassador. Meanwhile, head of the University's Nablus Branch Dr Yousef Awad thanked Kuwait's leadership and people for their continuous support to the Palestinians, saying that this gesture was expected from the fellow Arab country.

Massive influx

On Monday, Jordanian Minister of Planning and International Cooperation Imad Fakhoury has commended Kuwait's support for his country to address burdens arising from a massive influx of Syrian refugees.

Speaking during a joint press conference with the ambassadors of the European Union (EU), Britain, Germany and Norway, and the United Nation's (UN) Resident Representative, Fakhoury said Jordan has received about 60 per cent of the total value of pledges donors made during a 2016 conference in London.

He expressed his appreciation to donors, mainly the State of Kuwait, the United Kingdom, Germany, Norway and the United Nations, for their commitments to supporting Jordan. There are some agreements of additional commitments for 2016 amounting to $522 million that are being negotiated and will be signed during the first half of 2017, he added. He noted that his country has received an amount of $923.6 million in the form of soft loans in 2016.

He pointed out that $834.6 million of the sum is directed to support the state's budget and $89 million to finance developmental projects. This soft financing was pledged by donors and banks during the London conference, he told reporters. The minister underlined the importance of this funding to cover a gap in the budget and to take required measures so as to increase the number of male and female students of Syrian refugee.

He said Jordan is pinning its hopes on the next conference to be held in Brussels this year, as part of the continued support provided by international donors. He said the Jordan Response Plan acknowledges that the Syrian refugees deserve a decent life and it recognizes the exorbitant price Jordan and its citizens shoulder in order to provide such a global benefit so generously, according to Jordan News Agency (Petra).

Donor conferences

Meanwhile, a statement distributed by the embassy of Kuwait in Amman during the press conference said that the total value of pledges the State of Kuwait made at four donor conferences on Syria amounted to $1.6 billion, of which $1.4 billion had been already paid. The statement stressed Kuwait's commitment to fulfilling the remainder of pledges it made to Jordan to help the Kingdom cope with the burden of Syrian refugee crisis. According to official figures by Jordan, the total value of pledges made during the conference for Syrian held in London last year reached $12 billion. —KUNA

AMMAN: Kuwait's Ambassador to Jordan Dr Hamad Al-Duiaj hands in a donation to the Al-Quds University's Nabuls Branch. —KUNA

Kuwait condemns targeting of civilians, vital facilities

NEW YORK: The State of Kuwait condemns all terror attacks that targeted civilians and vital facilities, said Kuwaiti permanent delegate to the UN headquarters in New York Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi late Monday. In a speech to a UNSC meeting on protecting facilities from terrorist attacks, the Ambassador said that it was a cowardice act to target facilities aimed at serving civilians and the general populace.

Kuwait have suffered from this act of terror that targeted a public facility, said Otaibi, pointing to the 2015 bombing of a mosque in his country. He also mentioned the Iraqi army's burning of Kuwaiti oil fields during the liberation of Kuwait in 1991, affirming that the Gulf country was well acquainted with such acts of terror.

Ambassador Otaibi said that UNSC resolutions regarding the protection of the innocent and vital facilities must be respected, affirming that this was an international obligation that should be carried out by all global players. He encouraged more cooperation amongst world intelligence, security, and military agencies to fend of terrorism in all its forms, saying that such will ensure world peace.

Ambassador Mansour Al-Otaibi

The presence of the so-called Islamic State (IS), Al-Qaeda, and other terror groups required an intense collaboration between national security forces around the world to make sure that these organizations would not harm people, said the Ambassador who also called for partaking in reconstruction and peace efforts after terror attacks take place. —KUNA

KUWAIT: (Top) MP Ahmad Al-Fadhl instructs a worker to place a red rose on a fellow lawmaker's desk before yesterday's National Assembly session. (Above) a worker removes the roses based on orders from assembly officials.

— Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Road closure necessary; coordination helped ease congestions: MPW official

By Meshaal Al-Enezi

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Public Works' (MPW) decision to close part of Al-Ghazali Road was inevitable and should have been done by the end of 2012, but was postponed until the development of Jamal Abdel Nasser and Jahra roads was completed, assistant undersecretary for roads engineering affairs Ahmed Al-Hassan stressed. Speaking at a press conference held at MPW headquarters that was not attended by the Ministry of Interior (MoI), Hassan stressed that the resulting traffic congestion happened only on the first day of the closure, and that coordination with MoI's traffic department to adjust the timings of some traffic lights helped ease traffic flows on the second and third days. Hassan also noted that trucks were banned on Ghazali Road from 6:00 am till 4:00 pm, during which they are forced to pull over in special areas to help maintain easy traffic flow. Hassan said that the project contractor was instructed to create several U-turns due to be opened within the coming weeks pending further closures on the same road. "Work on the project is racing against the clock to be completed according to schedule by the end of 2018," he said. Speaking about the Fourth Ring Road, Hassan said that there is a plan being prepared to develop it all the way till Salmiya fire station.

Official reinstated

Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs and Acting Information Minister Sheikh Mohammed Al-Abdullah issued ministerial decision number 8/2017 cancelling former minister Sheikh Salman Al-Hmoud's decision referring secretary general of the National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL) for investigation over the grilling motion filed against him that eventually forced him to resign from office. The new decision cancelled the secretary general's suspension for three months, but investigations remain in place.

Former MP sentenced

The criminal court yesterday sentenced former MP Abdulhameed Dashti to a year in prison with labor over charges of slandering Chancellor Mohammed Al-Duaij in the 'Abdaly' case. Dashti fled abroad in April 2016, ostensibly to seek medical treatment in London. He was sentenced in absentia to 11 years and six months in jail for insulting Saudi Arabia and three years for insulting Bahrain in another case in July last year. In August, Kuwait initiated proceedings to extradite him via Interpol. His current whereabouts are unknown. Separately, the criminal court sentenced citizen Yasser Al-Habib to 10 years in prison with labor over state security charges of joining a banned organization and promoting unrest.

Transfer of responsibility

Following the transfer of responsibility for the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources (PAAAFR) under his jurisdiction, Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, State Minister of Municipal Affairs Mohammed Al-Jabri said that he is currently setting a future plan to organize work at PAAAFR and create a suitable environment to assess its performance and determine malfunctions in order to handle them. Jabri said PAAAFR would be put back on the right track through hard and serious work to stop all violations. He also urged all parties including MPs to support his reform plans to address the Audit Bureau's remarks on PAAAFR's performance, namely concerning agriculture. Jabri added that linking PAAAFR and the municipality would lead to more flexibility and cooperation in various projects.

Police put down enraged bull

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Police shot a bull after it ran wildly in the streets. Police received a call about a bull that escaped from the Salmiya slaughterhouse and ran towards the Fifth Ring Road. Rescue police attempted to control it, but they failed, and the beast fled into Rumaithiya.

Homicide

Farwaniya police registered a death case reported yesterday as homicide based on the coroner's report, who said the death was not normal. A citizen earlier told police that his brother was found dead in his room. Police found the body on the floor with needles and a bag with traces of powder in it. The man said his brother had been using drugs for a long time.

Officer insulted

Two Egyptian men who blocked the road and prevented others from passing attacked a traffic officer because he issued them a ticket. The incident took place in Jabriya after a call was received about a car blocking the road. The traffic police officer went to check and found an SUV parked illegally. The officer wrote a ticket and placed it on the windshield, but two Egyptians who appeared argued with him and beat him. Both were arrested by a backup patrol and taken to Jabriya police station.

Fire

Firemen dealt with a fire that broke out in a car near Sulaibkhat police station. No injuries were reported.

Municipality crackdown

Mubarak Al-Kabeer municipality branch emergency team inspected food factories in Subhan, resulting in confiscating and destroying six tons of food material. Director of the branch Samiya Al-Eenzi said campaigns will be intensified based on the instructions of the head of Capital and Mubarak Al-Kabeer sectors Faisal Sadeq to ensure the validity of foodstuff.

Coastguard

Coastguard patrols helped 24 ships, surfaced a boat, removed six floating objects, sent 20 boats away from off limits areas and took nine injured and sick persons to hospital, while 13 drowning people were rescued. The coastguard also busted 29 violations of fish resources, while 118 vessels were searched.

KUWAIT: A photo circulated on social media shows

Kuwaiti, Saudi officials discuss hajj preparations

JEDDAH: Undersecretary of Kuwaiti Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Fareed Emadi and his Saudi counterpart Hussein Al-Sherif discussed on Monday arrangements for Kuwaiti pilgrims in this year's hajj season. All preparations pertaining to Kuwaiti pilgrims since their arrival in Saudi Arabia until their departure have been dealt with Saudi officials, Emadi said in a statement.

Also air and health services for pilgrims, transportation, housing and other services in Makkah, Madinah and Al-Mashaaer Al-Muqaddassah, or sites of rituals' performance, were discussed with the officials, he said. "During the meeting, we further considered the number of Kuwaiti pilgrims during this season after Saudi Arabia had taken a decision to increase the figure," he added. "We reviewed efforts exerted by the State of Kuwait last season and its cooperation with Saudi governmental bodies during the hajj season," he noted.

Emadi lauded all services provided by the Saudi government to all pilgrims in general and the Kuwaiti ones in particular over the last seasons. The Kuwaiti official expressed his gratitude to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz and the government for their efforts to serve pilgrims.—KUNA

Kuwait Medical Association condemns doctor's assault

Chemotherapy Center physician attacked

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: A doctor working at Sheikha Badriya Al-Ahmed Chemotherapy Center was assaulted by a citizen who created a commotion at the center. The police had to be called and he was arrested. Commenting on the incident, Kuwait Medical Association Chairman Dr Mohammed Al-Mutairi condemned the assault and stressed that it was one of a series of repeated assaults on medical staff in view of the absence of legal protection by the Ministry of Health (MoH). "How much longer will this go on?" he demanded, stressing that KMA has finished preparing a bill on both doctors' and patients' rights protection and handed it over to MoH. He accordingly urged MoH to send the bill to Assembly to be passed to help stop such assaults.

Kuwaiti employees

Minister Social Affairs and Labor and Minister of State for Economic Affairs Hind Al-Sabeeh said in collaboration with relevant authorities, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor (MSAL) is currently preparing a study on increasing the numbers of Kuwaiti employees at various co-ops. Sabeeh added that a special committed would be formed to systematically achieve the increase, which will help create more job opportunities for citizens in the private sector. Notably, the current ratio of citizens in co-ops is 50 percent in managerial posts, 20 percent in professional and services posts, 17 percent as clerks, 15 percent as technicians and 6 percent as salespeople. In other news, MSAL denied reports claiming that Sabeeh was referred to the ministers' court for not implementing a court order in favor of Al-Siddiq Co-op. The ministry explained that the public prosecutor referred a complaint filed by one of the candidates in the co-op board elections to an investigation committee and not to the ministers' court.

Young entrepreneurs

Kuwait Petroleum Corporation's (KPC) Managing Director For Planning And Financial Affairs Wafa Al-Zaabi said KPC plans to have 43 gas stations run and operated by ambitious young Kuwaiti entrepreneurs. She added that the stations would initially be owned by the government. Zaabi stressed the KPC aims at setting a strategy to increase private sector participation in its activities and projects as well as create more job opportunities for Kuwaitis.

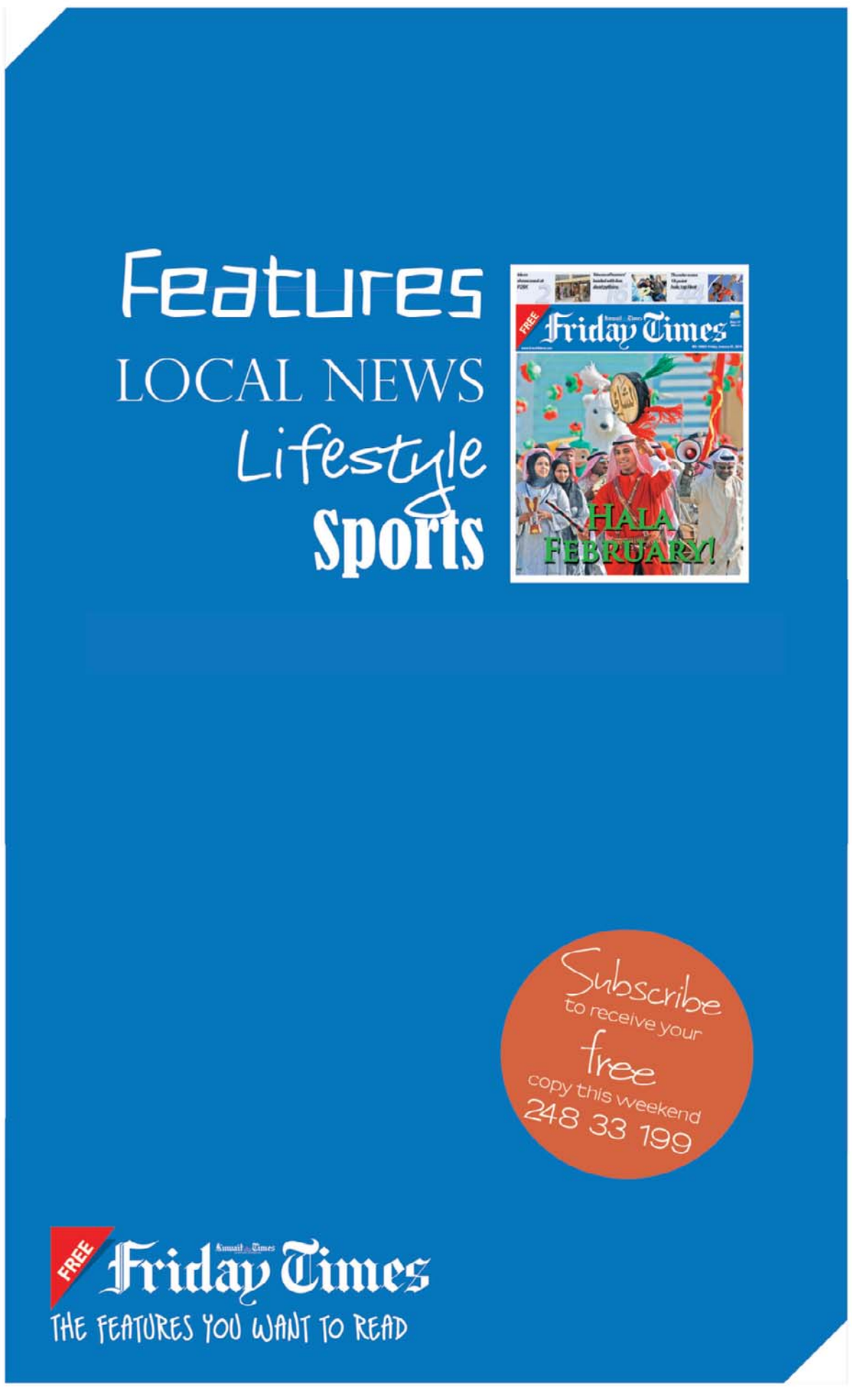
Investment opportunities

The Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW) concluded studying investment opportunities in Jaber Al-Ahmed and Sabah Al-Ahmed cities with an international company pending officially offering them to local and international companies. A memo issued by the authority pointed out that the aim of these opportunities is to encourage local, regional and international companies to build residential apartments, stores, parks, restaurants and other amenities.

KRCS delivers aid to displaced families

KUWAIT: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) said yesterday that it distributed humanitarian aid to displaced Syrians from Aleppo and rural Idlib in cooperation with Turkey's IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation. KRCS Chairman Dr Helal Al-Sayer said that "the society was continuing to offer relief aid to displaced persons from the city of Aleppo," explaining that "the aid will be distributed to 60,000 persons inside Syria particularly those with special needs, women, and children.

Sayer said the aid included food baskets, milk, and other necessities, adding KRCS campaign aimed at easing the suffering of the families as well as maintaining their personal hygiene amid the harsh conditions experienced in refugee camps. He explained that the past few days have seen the arrival of 15 trucks carrying food aid from Bab Al-Hawa Border Crossing, an entry point of Turkish aid to Syria, adding the items were distributed in cooperation with the Turkish humanitarian organization. — KUNA



In Brief

Army Chief visit lauded

KHARTOUM: Kuwait Ambassador to Sudan Bassam Al-Qabandi commended the outcome of Kuwait's Army Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Mohammad Al-Khodher's visit and talks in Sudan. The visit was successful and greatly welcomed by President Omar Al-Bashir who decorated Khodher with the prestigious Order of Two Niles, he said. Khodher has attended the graduation of 46 Kuwaiti students from Sudan's Military College where other 138 nationals are still studying. — KUNA

Live ammunition drill

KUWAIT: The Interior Ministry said yesterday that the Coast Guard will conduct a shooting drill using live ammunition in the country's territorial waters during February 19-21. The exercise will be carried out from 8:00 am to 12:00 pm near the Islands of Qaru and Umm Al-Maradem, it said in a press release. The Interior Ministry advised seagoers to refrain from approaching the identified locations during the drill. — KUNA

Kuwaitis in California warned

WASHINGTON: Kuwait's General Consulate in Los Angeles advised Kuwaitis in California to follow local instructions issued to avoid the dangers of the possible collapse of Oroville Dam, north of the state. In a statement released late Monday, the consulate said it had contacted the California authorities over the safety of Kuwaiti students, after the evacuation of about 18,800 people in the dam's surrounding areas. — KUNA

Photo of the day

KUWAIT: Birds share their meal of the day. — KUNA photo

KFH partner of Kuwait Pharmaceutical Association awareness conference

KUWAIT: Yousef Al-Ruwaieh speaks during the conference.

KUWAIT: Executive Manager Group Public Relations and Media at Kuwait Finance House (KFH), Yousef Abdullah Al-Ruwaieh affirmed the bank's commitment towards optimally shouldering the social responsibility and contributing in raising the awareness in the society, indicating KFH motivates the youth to believe in their capabilities toward development.

Speaking at Kuwait Pharmaceutical Association Awareness Conference that was attended by representatives of public and private sectors, Ruwaieh stressed the importance of supporting the youth and instilling confidence in them; thereby, creating a generation that is innovative and knowing its abilities to take right decisions. He added that KFH is keen on participating in such conferences and initiatives that emanates from its ongoing commitment towards assuming the social responsibility.

Meanwhile, Chairman of Kuwait Pharmaceutical Association Dr Hani Zakaria hailed KFH's participation in the conference as a social partner. It is worth noting that the awareness conference aims at increasing the awareness of the youth on the dangers of drugs and guide them on how to avoid drugs. Also, it raises the importance of fighting violence in general.

KIB visits American Creativity Academy

KUWAIT: In a continuation of the Bank's program of student-focused social responsibility initiatives, a team from the Corporate Communications Unit at Kuwait International Bank (KIB) recently organized a visit to the American Creativity Academy in celebration of back to school season.

On this occasion, Fahad Al-Sarhan, Team Leader of Corporate Communications at KIB, said: "This visit was a great opportunity for us to congratulate students on the beginning of a new academic semester. It also gave us the chance to engage directly with students, encouraging them to focus on their studies and their pursuit of knowledge, as education is undoubtedly the foundation on which we can build this country's future."

Sarhan said that during the visit, students were given an introductory presentation on the basics of banking and the fundamentals of savings. Additionally. At the end of the visit, the Bank's employees presented the students with a variety of gifts and mementos, wishing them a fruitful academic year and a bright future full of success.

KIB has always been dedicated to supporting students, as it considers them to be one of the main pillars of society and the key to the country's future development. Through its leading social responsibility program, the Bank adopts and sponsors various cultural activities and educational initiatives that aim to nurture youth and further their knowledge and education.

Kuwait works on increasing emergency ambulances: Minister

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Health is keen on increasing the number of ambulances in the forthcoming period, said Minister Dr Jamal Al-Harbi on Monday. In a statement to reporters on the sidelines of the inauguration of Adan hospital's ambulance center today, Dr Harbi added that air ambulance in Ahmadi district dealt with 600 cases last year.

He noted that regular ambulances dealt with 22,000 cases in the same period, indicating that the new center has 17 modern ambulances and two helicopters equipped with crews of professional paramedics and technical staff to offer urgent services to the wounded. The center serves several areas such as Mubarak Al-Kabeer, Fintas, Fahad Al-Ahmad, Eqaila, Mahboula and Jaber Al-Ali, he pointed out.

He stressed that the ministry has been evolving emergency departments at hospitals to provide developed services for patients and enhance potentials of workers periodically. The center has a department for training emergency staff on how to save lives of patients in record time in accordance with recommendations by World Health Organizations (WHO), the minister made clear. — KUNA

Health Minister Dr Jamal Al-Harbi

KUWAIT: Sheikh Sabah Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad tours the 11th Kuwait Formative Arts Gallery. —KUNA

KAA honors winners of Amir formative arts award

KUWAIT: Kuwait Arts Association (KAA) has honored the winners of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's formative arts award. The prize-giving ceremony was held under the patronage of Minister of Amiri Diwan and honoring President of Kuwait Arts Association Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Monday evening on the sidelines of the opening of 11th Kuwait Formative Arts Gallery.

Visitors observe artworks at the 11th Kuwait Formative Arts Gallery.

Artworks displayed at the 11th Kuwait Formative Arts Gallery.

Arts have been a mirror of people's civilization and the status of their nation among other nations, thus it has to be greatly supported and respected, Sheikh Sabah Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad said in a speech on behalf of Sheikh Nasser at the ceremony. Honoring those national artists are an imperative due to their crucial role in elevating the country's status in the world, he said. He praised the impressive works of the winning artists.

Meanwhile, President of Kuwait Arts Association Abdulrasool Salman echoed a similar view. He suggested that the diversity of the displayed works reflects the cultural diversity of the state. He also lauded the contributions of Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad in supporting arts, notably organization of the formative arts exhibition.

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah award was shared among three artists, namely Saad Al-Baloushi, Amira Ashkanani, and Yaacob Ibrahim. Sheikha Fatouh Al-Sabah award was shared among Saud Al-Faraj, Hashem Karam, and Suleiman Haider. Sheikha Salwa Al-Sabah award was won by Zainab Dashti, Abdullah Al-Rashed and Mariam Al-Muraikhi.

Youth Creativity award was grabbed by Abdullah Al-Otaibi, Fahad Al-Hajri, Mohammad Al-Ra'es, Sho'aa Al-Rasheedi, Farah Al-Sammak, Mariam Mourad, Abdulaziz Mirza, Abdulelah Al-Rasheed, Mariam Al-Rashed, Ahmad Al-Husseini, Fahad Al-Eid, and Hussein Al-Bannai. Artists Dhamyaa Al-Ayoubi, Ibrahim Ismail, Abdulaziz Arti were also honored during the ceremony for their contributions to the formative art movement in Kuwait. — KUNA

Kuwait TV launches 'Al-Qurain' channel

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: Concurring with the start of celebrations of Kuwait's national days, Kuwait Television announced the launch of Al-Qurain Channel. "Al-Qurain Channel is like a son KTV dreamed about," said Majid Al-Jazzaf, Assistant Undersecretary for Kuwait Television Affairs and General Manager of KTV2 Channel.

During a press conference held on Monday at the Ministry of Information, Jazzaf said KTV changed its KTV Plus channel to Al-Qurain, which will only air shows connected to Kuwaiti heritage. "We will launch Al-Qurain in celebration of National and Liberation Days on February 25," he said. He added that the channel will broadcast old programs and soap operas from the '70s and '80s. "We will mix old with the new, while preserving the heritage and originality of the shows."

Jazzaf said that the ministry of information has asked GCC countries to provide the channel with all content that was stolen during the Iraqi invasion. Popular actor Abdulhussain Abdulredha also provided Kuwait TV with 152 old plays and soap operas. "Al-Qurain will broadcast for three age categories - children, young and elderly. This is why we are trying to deliver our message to all audiences to teach them about the beautiful history of Kuwait. The main language of the channel will be Arabic, but in the Kuwaiti dialect," he explained. Jazzaf noted that they will add 50 TV breaks with old photos in 2D animation and 30 bumpers, while the music used will be classic to get along with the content.

KUWAIT: Undersecretary of the Ministry of Information Tariq Al-Mezrm speaks during the press conference. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Majid Al-Jazzaf

Preserving history

Information Ministry Undersecretary Tariq Al-Mezrm said the Al-Qurain's idea took seed seven months ago. "The aim was to preserve the history of Kuwait. We have a huge archive of unseen shows. The channel will be about the heritage of Kuwait and old shows that both Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis used to watch growing up," he said. "You will see a new design with an old Kuwaiti touch that will bring young and old people together. Veteran presenters will be paired with new faces who are experts in Kuwaiti history, and KTV is welcoming them."

Mezrm affirmed that Al-Qurain will seek feedback from the audience to learn more about its mistakes. KTV is using the services of Ipsos to reach the right audience. Around 85 percent of programs will be based on old footage and local TV archives. Meanwhile, 15 percent will be new productions of heritage and cultural shows. He added that the ministry of information has provided some of the latest outdoor broadcast solutions to the media crew at government TV channels, where two digital external broadcast vehicles will support the improvement of the media and its capabilities. He revealed that KTV is producing the old Kuwaiti soap opera "Darwaza" that was scrapped in the '90s.

Crime Report

Woman found dead after nephew's suicide

KUWAIT: A citizen from Yarmouk went to visit a relative to tell her about the death of her nephew, but found her door broken. When she checked, she found a body in a pool of blood in the kitchen with a knife by her side. The woman called police, and officers, detectives and paramedics who responded found that the woman was stabbed three times in the chest. The body was recovered by the coroner, and the case was registered as a homicide. Detectives took over investigations to find out what happened because the victim lived alone and did not hire any domestic helpers. A security source said what is intriguing is that the victim's nephew, who works for the fire department, committed suicide by jumping from a Salmiya building Monday afternoon.

Score settled

Two citizens settled a score with a friend by stabbing him in the shoulder in an Abdaly camp. The victim lodged a complaint at Qashaniya police station. The two suspects fled after the stabbing, while the injured man was taken to Jahra Hospital for treatment.

Bomb found

A citizen was shocked when his shepherd told him he found a foreign object and put it on the roof of his room, only to discover it was a bomb. The Asian man called operations, so Salmi policemen went to the pen, evacuated the site and military engineers dealt with it.

Vehicle on fire

Fire gutted a luxury car on Salem Al-Mubarak Street in Salmiya. The fire department received a call about the fire, so they responded and put out the fire without any injury. A fire source said the car's fuel tank had exploded.

Insult

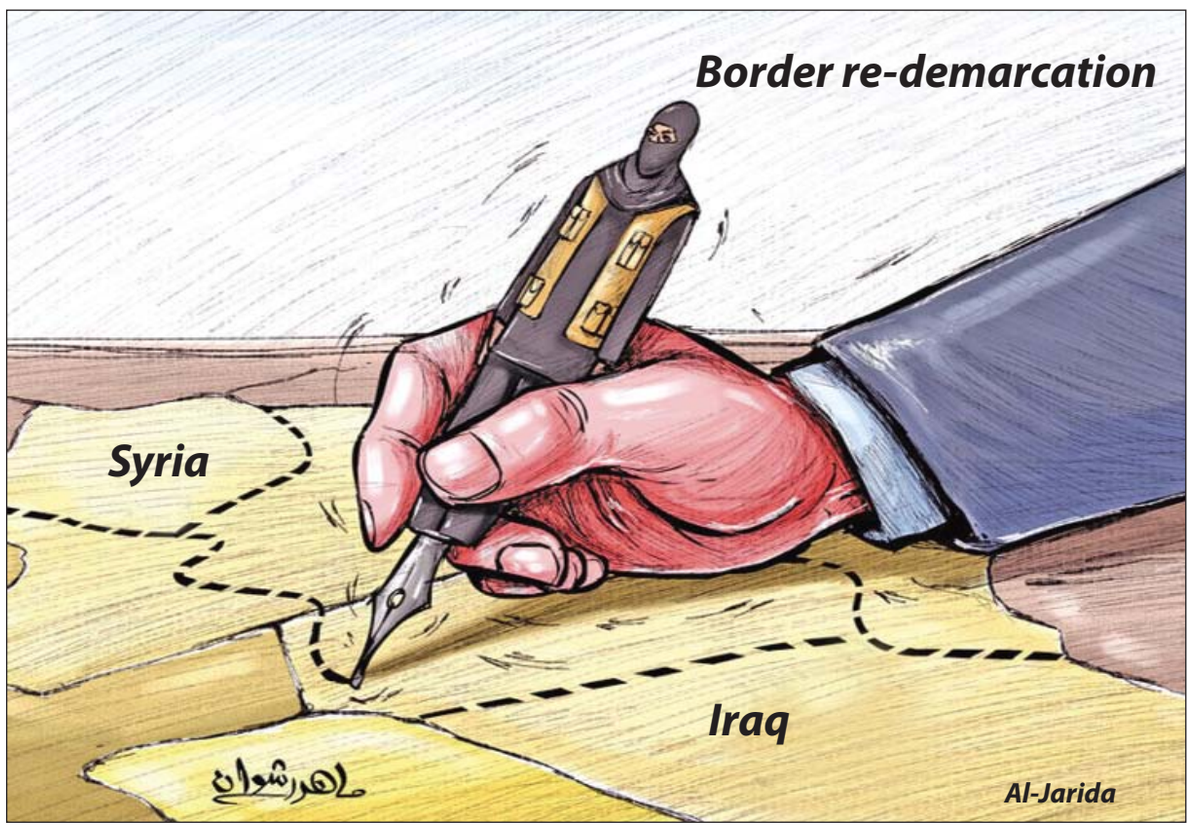
A female citizen was insulted and threatened by two of her friends, who inundated her phone with messages, so she went to Zahra police station to file a report. Police received copies of the messages and the phone numbers used, and are working on the case.

Fight

Two citizens were injured in a fight during which they used sharp objects. The first was injured in the face and the second had a wound in the head. Both were taken to Sabah Hospital, where they were treated. They then exchanged accusations. Legal action is being taken towards them.

Construction material stolen

A thief targeted a building under construction and stole material worth thousands of dinars, as the guard was not at the scene. A security source said the citizen went to Adan police station and told them about the theft in Funaitees. Adan detectives are working on the case. — *Al-Rai*



Al-Jarida

Burned bread

By Saad Al-Mo'tesh

Whenever we hear someone angrily talking about things that do not affect him, we should ask: "What is burning your bread?" In other words, we are asking what damage has been done to him to cause him to complain. It just came to me to ask some people about their burnt bread!

When people talk about dissolving the parliament, we hear certain voices warning of 'constitutional parliamentary dissolution.' I just wish we would deal with the case in terms of profits and losses, starting with us the citizens and the money everybody seeks to make during the election season.

Electoral campaigns create many job opportunities and enhance businesses, such as large electoral tents or marquees, lighting companies, steel companies that manufacture chairs, catering companies and central kitchens.

Similarly, advertising and publication companies would also flourish alongside printed press and TV ads, which are more widely used and more profitable. Even bloggers make considerable gains by such dissolution because the minimum cost of any campaign is KD 250,000.

Everybody benefits except current lawmakers who had paid all the previous beneficiaries in the elections they won. They would not want to pay the cost again. So, if the payer of those bills wants to carry on with his own schemes and protect his own interests, he may think twice when asked to reject dissolution. He may even spread rumors that it is the government that would lose, because his own bread will be burned!

Electoral campaigns create many job opportunities and enhance businesses

Other, even greater losses would be suffered. I am talking about sheep that would be slaughtered, cooked and laid on electoral campaigns' banquet tables. So, if you are one of them, I will not blame you for rejecting dissolution because then, your bread will be really burned and charred! God save constitutional solutions that would activate local markets for everybody and down with those who would pay the cost of what they have stolen!

— *Translated by Kuwait Times from*

Al-Anbaa

Different 'springs'!

By Saleh Al-Shayeji

The results of the so-called Arab Spring are nothing more than disappointment, blood, and regret suffered by the embittered people of the countries it affected. We used to be far better off when those revolutions began in Tunisia. We rejoiced and were optimistic that people were finally overthrowing those who had grabbed power in their respective countries. We cheered loudly whenever one of those dictators was toppled. Our joy did not come from gloating about those people. In fact, it was out of love for them, and out of our belief that they had been living under authoritarian dictatorships which morphed into everlasting hereditary regimes, contravening the principle of devolution of powers.

Fear dominated, security deteriorated, crime spread, economies worsened and livelihoods disappeared

Besides, the rulers of those Arab republics had been turning their countries' resources into their own possessions. As a result, their countries suffered severe poverty and bad public services, along with many other plights.

Those terrible situations made us rejoice for revolutions that were supposed to lead people to freedom, justice and psychological peace. Unfortunately, the results were unexpected and things got much worse; fear dominated, security deteriorated, crime spread, economies worsened and livelihoods disappeared!

Now since we got over the shock, we can contemplate about facts of what happened, why and how it happened. Results were unlike what happened in some European and non-Arabic countries ruled by dictators who got toppled by the people. Those countries quickly developed and adapted democracies. They are more stable, enjoying more welfare and their economies improved much more. Their people are back to life after long periods of suffering under totalitarian, blood-thirsty regimes.

Why did the Arab Spring countries not benefit from the European Revolutions and follow the same path, towards replacing totalitarian regimes with truly democratic ones? Do the Arab Spring countries need new revolutions to straighten things up and save themselves?

— *Translated by Kuwait Times*

Gulf Bank staff pose for a group photo at the completion of the training.

Gulf Bank concludes bank-wide operational risk awareness training

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank recently concluded 'Operational Risk Training' sessions for senior management at the Jumeirah Messilah Beach Hotel. The training was conducted by Fitch Learning, part of Fitch Group, over two sessions for more than 40 employees from different departments within the Bank.

The two-day workshops built an understanding of the importance of operational risk management within the Banking industry. Gulf Bank staff were trained to identify the sources of operational risk, how they arise within the context of main business activities and how to reduce this risk. Gulf Bank believes that when key staff across departments understand risk governance structures, systems, and procedures, they will be better able to manage and minimize operational risks.

Highlighting the importance of risk management, Salma Al-Hajjaj, General Manger of Human Resources at Gulf Bank said: "Operational risk management has become crucial in the banking sector today, particularly in light of the new challenges of cyber and financial crimes. As such, Gulf Bank is working to increase awareness of operational risks and integrate controls by training 'champions' from various departments within the Bank."

Hajjaj continued: "The objective of this training was to add maximum sustainable value to the Bank. By selecting and training 'champions' from each department, they were trained to manage operational risk and implement controls in their respective units and among their staff."

Raghunandan Menon, Chief Risk Officer and General Manager of Risk Management at Gulf Bank added: "In today's banking environment, better risk management provides a competitive edge as better controls translate into superior customer experience and enhances the bank's reputation. This training has focused on improving the awareness of operational risk frameworks in all areas of the bank. It will facilitate the effective implementation of Gulf Bank's operational risk management framework and strengthen the overall risk and control environment within the bank."

During the course of the workshop, trainer Christopher Pennington, focused on management tools through which Gulf Bank champions will be able to control operational risk activities such as incident reporting, root cause analysis, action plans, and key risk indicators monitoring and reporting. He also gave insights into the risk control and self-assessment frameworks to be implemented in their units.

Fitch Learning is part of Fitch Group and is a platform that provides knowledge and skills and enhances conducts. Fitch Group is a global leader in financial information services with operations in more than 30 countries. For more details about Gulf Bank initiatives, please visit the bank's website: www.e-gulfbank.com or its social media accounts.

Gulf Bank staff members during the training.

Kuwait Times 55 Years

International

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2017

Incoming leader of Tamil Nadu jailed

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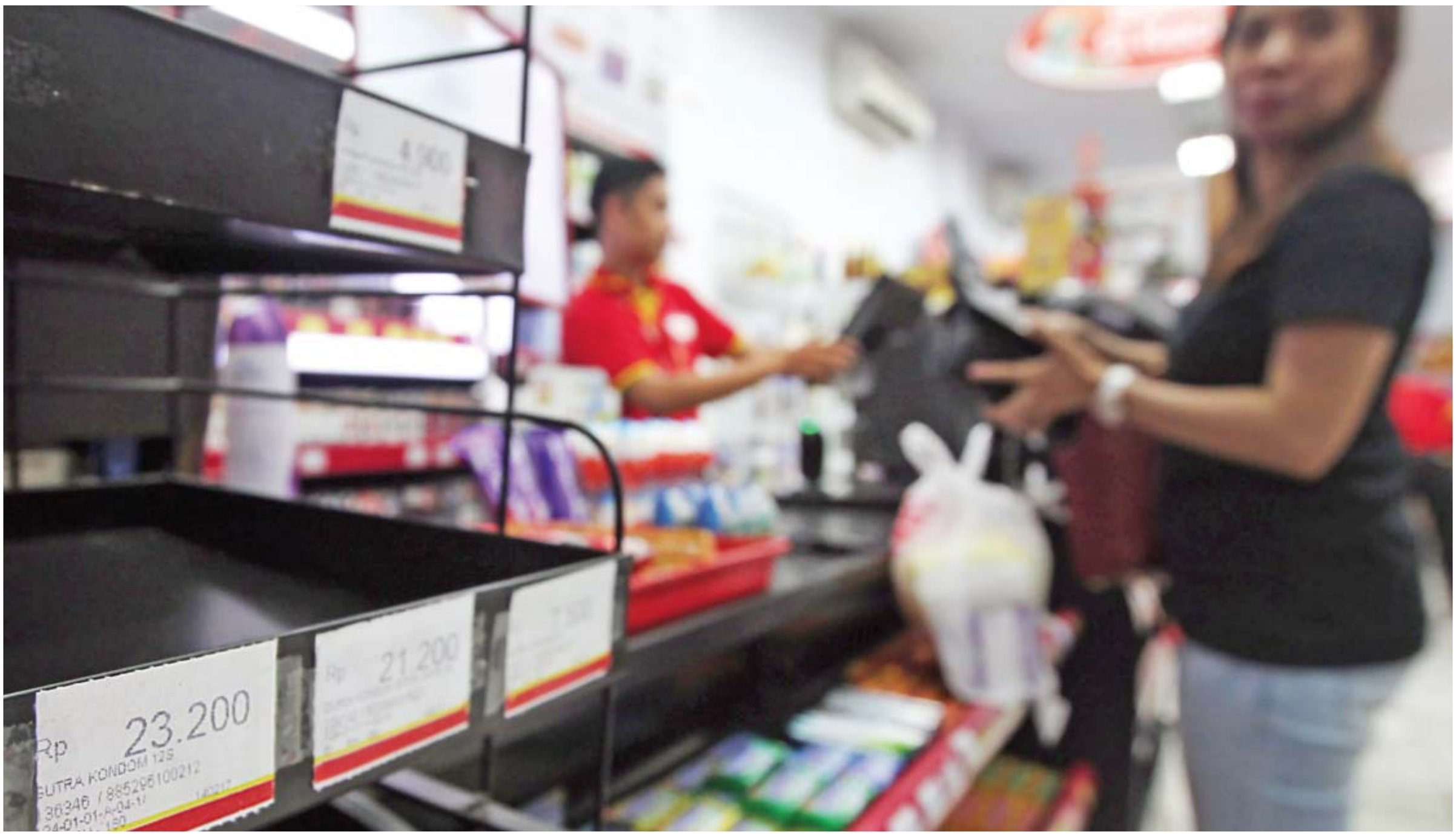
Thais in the mood for love as V-Day fever sweeps the nation

Page 12



MAKASSAR: A condom rack is left empty at a convenience store in Makassar, South Sulawesi province yesterday. Indonesian authorities raided convenience stores and seized condoms in a major city to stop teenagers having casual sex on Valentine's Day, an official said yesterday, the latest crackdown on the holiday in the Muslim-majority nation. — AFP

Indonesia launches anti-Valentine condom raids

Forbidden love: Valentine's Day ban in Indonesia

JAKARTA: Indonesian authorities in parts of the Muslim-majority nation have confiscated condoms and banned students from celebrating Valentine's Day, saying the romantic tradition encourages casual sex and runs counter to cultural norms. In the city of Makassar on Sulawesi island, police raided minimarts and seized condoms that were readily available in most parts of Indonesia, a secular country whose state ideology enshrines religious diversity.

"These raids were done after we received reports from residents that the minimarts were selling condoms in an unregulated way, especially on Valentine's Day," Makassar police official Jufri was quoted as saying in a media report. He added employees of the minimarts were told not to sell contraceptives to teenagers, the report said. Indonesia's highest Islamic clerical council declared Valentine's Day forbidden by Islamic law in 2012, saying it was contradictory to Muslim culture and teachings. But the vast majority of Indonesia's more than 220 million Muslims follow a moderate form of Islam in a country with sizeable Christian and Hindu minorities.

In Indonesia's capital, Jakarta, and other parts of the country, Valentine's Day has grown in popularity with companies looking to cash in by offering special discounts and promotions. For example, national flag carrier Garuda Indonesia is offering a 15 percent discount on air fares this week and motor bike delivery services are promoting week-long discounts to send flowers and chocolates to loved ones.

Rights groups have expressed concerns over the growing influence of Islamist groups, who have targeted how people lead their lives. A hardline group went around malls in East Java late last year to check whether outlets had ordered Muslim staff to wear Christmas apparel such as Santa hats. In Indonesia's second largest city, Surabaya, government officials ordered schools to ban students from celebrating Valentine's Day "in or outside of school" because it ran counter to "cultural and social norms", according to a copy of the letter on the city's official website.

A similar letter was also sent to public education agencies and schools in West Java province, according to a statement on the provincial government's website. West Java is the country's most populous province. West Java and other provinces, such as Aceh, which is the only province in Indonesia to follow sharia law, have issued similar bans on celebrating Valentine's Day in previous years. Under Indonesia's decentralized system of government, regional authorities are allowed to issue bylaws without approval from the central government. — Reuters

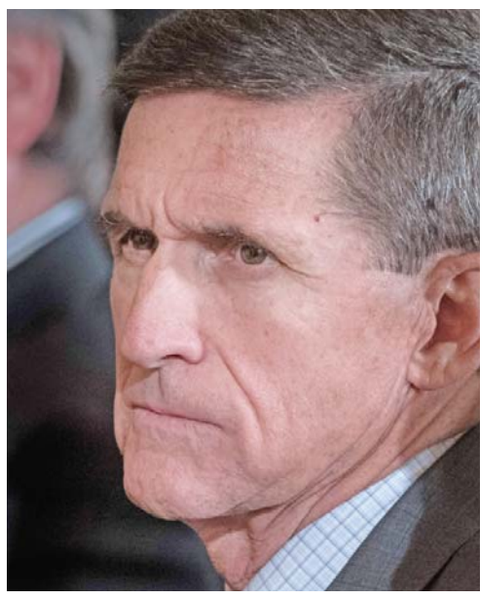
Trump top aide Flynn resigns

WASHINGTON: Donald Trump's national security advisor Michael Flynn resigned after it was revealed he misled top officials over his contacts with Russia, an unprecedented departure so early into a US president's administration. The White House late Monday said Trump had accepted Flynn's resignation amid allegations the retired three star general discussed US sanctions strategy with Russia's ambassador Sergey Kislyak before taking office. Flynn-who once headed US military intelligence-insisted he was honored to have served the American people in such a "distinguished" manner, despite the Trump presidency being less than a month old.

Flynn admitted that he "inadvertently briefed" the now Vice President Mike Pence with "incomplete information" about his calls with Kislyak. Pence had publicly defended Flynn, saying he did not discuss sanctions, putting his own credibility into question. "Regarding my phone calls with the Russian Ambassador. I have sincerely apologized to the President and the Vice President, and they have accepted my apology," read Flynn's letter, a copy of which was released by the White House. Flynn's resignation came after details of the telephone calls were made public-increasing pressure on Trump to take action.

Several US media outlets reported Monday that top Trump advisors were warned about Flynn's contacts with the Russians early this year, reopening questions about who knew about the calls and why Trump did not move earlier to replace Flynn. The resignation will also fuel calls for an independent investigation into Russia's influence during the 2016 US presidential election and throws into doubt the fledgling effort from Trump to establish ties with President Vladimir Putin. The Kremlin on Tuesday said Flynn's resignation was "not our business". "This is the internal business of the Americans, it is the internal business of President Trump's administration," spokesman Dmitry Peskov told journalists in Moscow.

On Monday, White House spokesman Sean Spicer insisted Trump was not consulted about Flynn, a former head of defense intelligence, discussing sanctions, nor did he task the retired general to do so.The Justice Department had warned the White House that Flynn had misled senior administration officials about the contents of his talks with Kislyak, and that it could make him vulnerable to Russian blackmail, US media reported. The message was delivered in the last days of Barack Obama's administration by then-acting attorney general Sally Yates-who Trump sacked after she instructed government lawyers not to defend the new president's controversial travel ban.



US National Security Advisor Michael Flynn

CNN said then director of national intelligence James Clapper and then CIA chief John Brennan agreed the White House should be told about the concerns. Until quitting, Flynn had been instrumental in Trump's inner circle.

He was an early supporter of Trump's improbable bid for the presidency and had encouraged tougher policies on Iran and a softer policy on Russia. That was a sharp break from the Obama administration, which introduced sanctions over Moscow's annexation of Ukraine's Crimea, support for separatists in eastern Ukraine, and what US intelligence says were its attempts to sway last year's election in Trump's favor.

Washington and Moscow had also clashed over alleged war crimes in Syria, where Russia is accused of aiding the bombing of hospitals and other civilian targets. Despite this, Flynn had argued for rapprochement. Several Republicans had joined their Democratic foes in urging Flynn to resign over a situation that had become an embarrassment for the ruling party. Flynn's resignation came just days before Trump's first official talks with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, discussions in which the president's national security advisor would normally have a key role.

Successor talk

The Justice Department and Congress are both investigating possible links between Trump campaign advisors and Moscow. US intelligence has concluded that Putin personally directed an operation to interfere in the election. On December 29, the Obama administration sanctioned four Russian individuals and five entities, and expelled 35 Russian diplomats in retaliation. Although the Russian foreign ministry prepared a response, Putin ruled it out. After Flynn quit, the White House said Trump had named retired lieutenant general Joseph Kellogg, a decorated Vietnam war veteran who was serving as a director on the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to be interim national security advisor.

The Washington Post, citing unnamed White House sources, reported that Vice Admiral Robert Harward, a former deputy commander of the US Central Command - in charge of US-led wars in the Middle East and Afghanistan - and a friend of Defense Secretary James Mattis, is the frontrunner to replace Flynn. — AFP

7 Saudi soldiers killed

RIYADH: At least seven Saudi soldiers have died on the southern border since late last week, according to an unusual series of official reports released as the country fights Yemeni rebels. In separate dispatches since last Thursday, the Saudi Press Agency (SPA) has carried photographs of funerals for the "martyrs" it said had died "defending the southern borders."

The most recent report, published late on Monday, named Mohammed Al-Manjahi as the latest soldier to have been killed. The report quoted Manjahi's father as saying he was proud of his son.

A Saudi-led coalition began air strikes over Yemen in March 2015 to support the internationally recognized government of President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi against Iran-backed Houthi rebels. The Houthis are allied with former members of the security forces loyal to ex-president Ali Abdullah Saleh and have carried out retaliatory rocket strikes and engaged in firefights along the border. They have also fired ballistic missiles further into the kingdom. An earlier AFP tally of reports by the Saudi interior ministry and civil defense department found that at least 115 civilians and soldiers had been killed on the southern border since coalition operations began. That total has now reached at least 122.

The coalition's spokesman could not immediately be reached for comment on the tally. The Saudi Interior Ministry regularly gives details of casualties among its border guard troops but other military services normally do not. Official media have previously reported on funerals for dead troops but the series of dispatches since last week is unusual. SPA said the director of the border guards, Awad Al-Balwi, last Wednesday paid tribute to two of his men killed in the Jazan region on the border. "They were among the best," SPA said he told the dead men's families while conveying condolences in their villages.

On Sunday and Monday, SPA reported that funeral prayers and condolences were held for five other soldiers, including a major, killed on duty in the south. There were no details of how they died. The latest losses came after Yemeni government forces claimed full control of the Red Sea coastal town of Mokha on Friday and prepared a push further north into rebel-held territory. In Yemen, the war has left thousands dead and millions struggling to feed themselves, a toll which UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said in Riyadh on Sunday left him heartbroken. — AFP

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Turkey detains 600 over alleged links to militants

Government accuses HDP of links to Kurdish militants

ISTANBUL: Turkish police have detained more than 600 people over alleged links to Kurdish militants in the past two days, state media said yesterday, a crackdown the pro-Kurdish parliamentary party said was aimed at sidelining it ahead of an April referendum. Turks will vote on April 16 on replacing the parliamentary system with the stronger presidency sought by President Tayyip Erdogan.

The referendum will be held under a state of emergency, imposed after an attempted coup last July. Tens of thousands of people have been arrested since the abortive coup over suspected ties to Fethullah Gulen, the US-based Muslim cleric accused by Ankara of organizing the putsch. Separately 5,000 members of the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) have been held, the party says.

Counter-terror police yesterday detained 86 people suspected of ties to the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) militant group in dawn raids across Turkey, in addition to 544 held a day earlier, state-run Anadolu agency reported. "The basic goal of these operations... is to hold the referendum without the HDP," a statement from the HDP's executive committee said. Its statement, released before yesterday's arrests, said more than 300 of its members and executives had been detained on Monday, bringing those held this year to around 1,200. A dozen of its lawmakers and tens of Kurdish mayors from a sister party have been jailed pending trial.

'We will never bow down'

The government accuses the HDP, parliament's second biggest opposition party, of being a political extension of the PKK. The HDP denies direct links with the PKK and says it wants a peaceful settlement in Turkey's largely Kurdish southeast. The PKK, designated a terrorist group by Turkey, the European Union and the United States, launched an armed insurgency against the Turkish state in 1984 and more than 40,000 people have been killed in the conflict.

A ceasefire between the PKK and the state broke down in July 2015 and thousands have been killed in conflict since then. "We will never bow down faced with this persecution and pressure," the HDP said. "What they are trying to prevent with the detentions and arrests is a 'no' (vote in the referendum)." Ahead of the official launch of referendum campaigning this week, Erdogan has called for Turks to vote 'yes' to the reform by saying that the PKK oppose it and that a 'no' vote means taking sides with those behind last year's putsch. — Reuters

ADANA: Two men, identified by Turkey's state-run news agency as Mahamad Laban, 45 (left) - a Danish citizen of Lebanese origin and Mohammed Tefik Saleh, 38, a Swedish citizen of Iraqi origin sit at a police station in Adana, southern Turkey. The Anadolu agency said that the arrested men are suspected of receiving Islamic State group weapons and explosives training in Syria for the past three months and of planning attacks in Europe. — AP

RAQA: Smoke rises near the village of Bir Fawaz, 20 km away from Raqa, as members of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), made up of US-backed Kurdish and Arab fighters, advance during their offensive towards the Islamic State (IS) group's Syrian stronghold as part of the third phase to retake the city and its surroundings. — AFP

In the rubble, Aleppo's citizens work to save battered heritage

'Catastrophic damage' to 30% of Old City

ALEPPO: In the rubble-strewn square outside Aleppo's ancient citadel and under the scorched vaults of its covered souk, workmen are starting to mend the destruction of a war that has shattered the Syrian city's priceless historical heritage. About 20 volunteers sorted through the debris in Khan Al-Gumruk, one of the souk's great medieval inns, piling up the stones from a fallen archway that can be used in its restoration. "I'm a son of this district. We're all from Aleppo and our priority is to work here. We've been at it for a month in this area since the fighters left," said Mohannad Hassari, a bearded 25-year-old. About 30 percent of the Old City suffered "catastrophic" damage in the fighting that ended there in December, said Maamoun Abdulkarim, Syria's director general of antiquities.

Speaking to Reuters after his first visit to the city since the rebels were forced to surrender there, he said officials were working on a plan to save what they can. The Aga Khan Development Network's cultural arm, which was behind a multi-million dollar restoration and urban development project around the Citadel and nearby souks a decade ago, said it was also looking at possible rehabilitation of the area. Aleppo is one of the Middle East's great historic centers, its ancient Citadel and medieval mosques and souks among the region's finest buildings and a source of national pride - and tourist revenue - for Syria.

Today, the lingering smell of burning is everywhere in its Old City: under collapsed domes, in the soot-blackened souk and in the cracked masonry, broken glass and discarded bullet casings that litter the famous Umayyad Mosque. A street vendor in gaudy folk costume accosted customers with paper cups of cardamom-spiced tea and coffee outside the Citadel. But the area's mood remained sombre compared with its bustling pre-war gaiety. Many of the cafes that lined the area, in old buildings with arched facades, have been wrecked but a group of soldiers sat in one, warming their hands around a stove that billowed black smoke and listening to mournful Arabic music.

However, people are returning, some to live where homes are still habitable and others to salvage possessions from their shops. Many more simply want to enjoy places that were too dangerous to visit during the fighting. In the Umayyad Mosque's courtyard a group of teenage boys huddled for a selfie in front of walls so peppered with bullets that it was hard to find a smooth patch of stone larger than the palm of one's hand. The 11th century minaret was destroyed by shelling in 2013. Under the arches inside the mosque, an old man in a bulky greatcoat, woollen scarf wrapped around his head, stood sobbing in the dark near a shrine, a barricade of oil drums and sandbags still looming behind it.

Frontline

When fighting erupted in Aleppo in 2012, a year after the rising against President Bashar Al-Assad had begun elsewhere in Syria, rebels took its eastern districts and much of the Old City. Intense clashes in 2012 and 2013 made the souks and the area around the Umayyad Mosque one of the fiercest front lines in Syria, pounded by artillery and air strikes. Under the painted cupola of the Mamlouk throne hall in the Citadel, a heavy machine gun on a stand pointed towards a window and out across a wasteland of smashed buildings. The Citadel, a dramatic fortress on a hill, stands at the centre of Aleppo, overlooking the city. It was held by the government but surrounded by rebel territory. The area to its south and west, near the Umayyad Mosque, is where the Old City suffered most damage.

One stretch of the covered souk is now a dark tunnel, pierced by beams of daylight from roof shafts, its entrance a mass of stones and its shops clogged with rubble and weeds. Oil drums and sandbags, topped by a cushion in traditional fabric, gave fighters a firing position that commanded the souk corridor leading towards the Citadel. "The memory of Aleppo is very symbolic," said Abdulkarim, Syria's antiquities director general. Restoration would meet the requirements of international bodies, he added, and no modern buildings would be put up in the Old City. He said preservation of Syria's heritage should be treated separately from the political issues surrounding the war.

Restoration

Both sides in the continuing war have accused each other of targeting or damaging historical sites, which range from ancient cities, temples, mosques and castles to the more recent relics of Ottoman rule. "Everybody realizes we are working in difficult circumstances," said Ali Esmaiel, head of the Aga Khan Cultural Service in Syria, alluding to the fighting and other obstacles to saving Aleppo's heritage.

However, he said the charity was looking at a framework for the rehabilitation of the Old City and conservation of its historic monuments "as conditions and resources allow". The charity worked from 1999 to 2012 on restoring the area around the Citadel, transforming it into a popular haunt for Aleppans and tourists and the site of concerts and other cultural activities. But the fighting caused most to flee and its shops are now closed.

At the Bab Antakia souk, Heitham Ghanam, a middle-aged trader in women's fashion accessories, was clearing rubble from his shop with his wife and daughter. "We are waiting for the electricity to come back and for others to open their stores before we do," he said.

In Baron's Hotel, where Agatha Christie and TE Lawrence stayed, the elegant tiles of the grand lobby, smoking room and bar are hard to see in the unlit interior. The only guests are three families of refugees from eastern Aleppo districts damaged in the fighting, one living in a room once occupied by Iraq's King Faisal. At the top of the sloping causeway leading up to the Citadel's entrance, wide enough for horses to ride abreast, four soldiers scrolled through their phones under posters of Assad. But many residents look forward to a time when the soldiers manning gun positions in the Citadel's museum and stringing laundry between the pillars of its Ayubid Mosque can be replaced by tourists. — Reuters

Jihadist infighting kills nearly 70 in Syria

BEIRUT: Nearly 70 fighters from two formerly allied jihadist groups have been killed during infighting over the past 24 hours in northern Syria, a monitor said yesterday. The clashes between former Al-Qaeda affiliate Fateh al-Sham and the hardline jihadist Jund Al-Aqsa faction erupted on Monday morning, after tensions over influence in the northwestern province of Idlib. The fighting reflects the growing strained relations between different factions in Idlib province that once fought alongside either other against President Bashar Al-Assad's forces.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the clashes erupted after Jund Al-Aqsa carried out a suicide bomb attack against a Fateh Al-Sham headquarters in Idlib, killing nine people. The toll has now risen to 69 dead from both sides in heavy clashes as well as executions, with the fighting spreading to the neighboring province of Hama. "There are battles between warlords, it's a war for influence," said Observatory director Rami Abdel Rahman. Jund al-Aqsa is reviled by most rebels in the region, and is designed a "terrorist group" by Washington.

Despite that, in October Fateh Al-Sham announced it had taken Jund Al-Aqsa under its wing, although clashes between the two groups erupted shortly afterwards. In January, Fateh Al-Sham also battled other rebel groups in Idlib during 10 days of clashes that killed dozens of fighters. Idlib province is held almost entirely by opposition factions, and was captured by an alliance of fighters dubbed the Army of Conquest, led by Fateh Al-Sham. More than 310,000 people have been killed in Syria since the conflict began in March 2011 with anti-government protests. The war has become a complex multi-front conflict, drawing in jihadist groups and international armies.

Al-Bab under control

Meanwhile, Turkey said yesterday that the one time jihadist bastion of Al-Bab in northern Syria was "largely" under the control of Ankara-backed Syrian rebels after months of clashes with jihadists. "Al-Bab has largely been taken under control finally," Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim told his ruling Justice and Development Party lawmakers in Ankara, without giving further details. Since December, Turkish forces supporting opposition fighters have fought jihadists from the Islamic State group (IS) to take control of Al-Bab.

Turkey launched an ambitious operation dubbed "Euphrates Shield" in Syria last August to rid its border of IS elements and halt the advance of the Kurdish militia. Yildirim said Ankara's aim was to "prevent terrorist organizations opening corridors" where they could reach Turkey. "From the start, our efforts have not been for nothing, we have reached our aim." After a lightning advance retaking several towns close to its border, the operation faced the biggest challenge in the campaign so far with dozens of Turkish soldiers killed in the space of a few weeks.

But at the weekend, Ankara-backed fighters entered the town centre and the official news agency said by Monday, they had recaptured 40 percent of the town. Hurriyet daily reported that rebels and President Bashar Al-Assad's forces created a security corridor to avoid clashes in the battle to capture the flashpoint town. Assad's forces have pushed towards the town from the south, leaving IS fighters completely encircled. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Monday the targets after Al-Bab would be Manbij-a former bastion of IS that is now under the control of US-backed, Kurdish-led militia-and the de-facto jihadist capital of Raqa, if "we take a joint step with (US-led) coalition forces". — Agencies

QAMISHLI: A Syrian man smokes water pipe outside a shop selling Valentine's day gifts in Syria's northeastern city of Qamishli. — AFP

News in brief

Congolese soldiers kill at least 101 in clashes

GENEVA: Soldiers targeting the Kamwina Nsapu militia group in central Democratic Republic of Congo killed at least 101 people between Feb 9 and Feb 13, including 39 women, the UN said yesterday. The soldiers fired indiscriminately with machine guns when they saw the militia fighters, who were armed mainly with machetes and spears, human rights spokeswoman Liz Throssell said, citing sources in the country. "We are deeply concerned at the reported high number of deaths, which if confirmed would suggest excessive and disproportionate use of force by the soldiers," she said. Hundreds have died and tens of thousands have been uprooted in central Congo in recent months in battles between security forces and the militia, who are seeking to avenge the death of their leader Kamwina Nsapu. He was killed by the Congolese armed forces last August, after vowing to rid Congo's Kasai-Central province of all state security forces, accusing them of abusing the local population.

Thai drug cops make 'cocaine lotion' bust

BANGKOK: An Ecuadorian and a Russian have been arrested for attempting to smuggle 2.3 kilograms of cocaine into Thailand mixed into bottles of skin lotion, police said yesterday. Acting after a tip-off from Interpol, Thai drug police held the Ecuadorian woman after she arrived on a flight from Peru at Bangkok's main airport on Monday. A search of her luggage uncovered six containers of body lotion laced with cocaine, said Wutthipong Phetkamnerd, the narcotics officer leading the case. "It was mixed in with the skin moisturizing lotion-a new smuggling tactic to avoid arrest," he told reporters, without detailing how the would-be traffickers intended to extract the cocaine from the lotion. After her arrest the woman led police to a Russian man who was waiting for her at a hotel. Both have been detained while officers investigate the case-the latest drug bust in a country that serves as a key transit stop for contraband. Thailand is a major drug market as well as transit route, with a particular penchant for "yaba"-meth pills produced in the notorious Golden Triangle region bordering Laos and Myanmar.

Bangladesh's police shoot dead Islamist commander

DHAKA: Bangladesh police yesterday shot dead an alleged commander of a banned Islamist outfit blamed for last year's deadly cafe attack in the capital, an official said. Police said Abu Jar was a close associate of Jahangir Alam, who was arrested last month after he allegedly led a campaign of targeted killings of religious minorities in the northern region. Acting on a tip-off police raided a town outside the northern city of Bogra where Jar was killed in a gunfight, Bogra police chief Asaduz Zaman said. "We fired back after they opened fire at our officers," Zaman said, adding Jar was wanted in connection with several murder cases. "Jar was the northwestern commander of the new Jamayetul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) and a close associate of the group's top extremist Jahangir Alam," he added. Police said Alam was one of the masterminds of the siege of Dhaka's Holey Artisan Bakery cafe where 22 hostages, mostly foreigners, were killed by suspected gunmen of a "new-JMB".

Hong Kong's police guilty of assaulting a protester

HONG KONG: Seven Hong Kong police officers were found guilty yesterday of assaulting a protester during pro-democracy rallies in 2014, in an attack that was captured on film and beamed around the world. All seven were convicted of assault causing actual bodily harm to Civic Party activist Ken Tsang, but were acquitted of a more serious charge of grievous bodily harm with intent. Video footage of the attack, filmed by a local network near the city's government headquarters, shocked residents and dented their faith in the usually trusted police fore. It showed a group of men hauling a handcuffed Tsang to a dark corner in a public park, where he was beaten. One man stood over him inflicting blows while others were seen repeatedly kicking him. Police have been criticized for their sometimes heavy-handed treatment of protesters during the 79 days of rallies and street blockades that brought parts of the city to a standstill. The demonstrators were seeking fully free elections for Hong Kong's future leaders.

Israel withdraws its Egypt ambassador over security

JERUSALEM: Israel has temporarily withdrawn its ambassador to Egypt amid ongoing security concerns, the country's intelligence service confirmed yesterday. "Due to security considerations the return of the foreign ministry embassy staff to Cairo has been restricted," the Shin Bet security agency said. The statement did not say when the withdrawal took place but Britain's Daily Telegraph said ambassador David Govrin was pulled out at the end of last year. It reported that Govrin was due to return when security conditions improved. Egypt, one of only two Arab states to have a signed a peace treaty with the Jewish state, has been rocked by ongoing violence in recent months. In December 26 people were killed when a bomb exploded in a prominent church in central Cairo. Govrin presented his credentials to Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi in August 2016. The Israeli embassy in Cairo only fully reopened in September 2015, four years after violent demonstrations.

Michael Flynn: Pro-Russia and fixated on 'Islamic extremism'

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump's national security adviser Michael Flynn, who resigned late Monday over his controversial contacts with Russia, is a former military intelligence chief who saw militant Islam as the main threat to global stability. The 58 year-old retired three-star general-a slim, energetic figure with sharp facial features-however had accommodating views on Russia and China, two countries that former president Barack Obama regarded as the main US strategic opponents.

During the 2016 presidential campaign Flynn was one of the few high-profile former military figures who advised candidate Trump, and was on the short list to be the Republican's vice presidential candidate. At the Republican convention that nominated Trump for president, Flynn delivered a fiery attack on Democrat Hillary Clinton, even leading the crowd in chants of "Lock her up!"

However Flynn's fate may have been sealed when news reports surfaced over the weekend that he discussed US sanctions with Russia's ambassador weeks before Trump was sworn in as president, and just as then-president Barack Obama was ordering new actions against Moscow over its alleged interference in the US election. Obama had named Flynn to head of the Defense Intelligence Agency in 2012, but the retired general was forced out in less than two years amid a turbulent restructuring effort and clashes with his superiors.

Flynn's paid appearance at a 2015 dinner in Russia sitting next to Russian President Vladimir Putin especially raised eyebrows, as did his accommodating statements toward Moscow that suggested a readiness to accept Russia's seizure of Crimea and its support for embattled Syrian leader Bashar Al-Assad. "We beat Hitler because of our relationship with the Russians, so anybody that looks on it as anything but a relationship that's required for mutual supporting interests, including ISIS, ... that's really where I'm at with Russia," he told the Washington Post in August. The main threat, in Flynn's view, was militant Islam. "We have a problem with radical Islamism and I actually think that we could work together with them against this enemy. They have a worse problem than we do," he told the Post.

Militant Islam 'metastasizing'

The son of a Rhode Island banker, Flynn had a professional army career mainly in intelligence units. In the 2000s he served in Iraq and then Afghanistan, where he became director of intelligence for coalition forces. After leaving the Defense Intelligence Agency, Flynn repeatedly criticized the Obama administration as inadequately focused on the Islamist threat. He even published a book titled: "The Field of Fight: How We Can Win the Global War Against Radical Islam and Its Allies." In his book Flynn argued that Muslim countries must be forced to recognize and stamp out radical Islamic beliefs, which he says are "metastasizing" around the world. "We're in a global war, facing an enemy alliance that runs from Pyongyang, North Korea, to Havana, Cuba, and Caracas, Venezuela," he wrote in the New York Post in July.

"Along the way, the alliance picks up radical Muslim countries and organizations such as Iran, Al-Qaeda, the Taliban and Islamic State." Like Trump, Flynn has also criticized US allies in NATO for not putting enough of their own effort and funding into the crucial western defense treaty. National security community critics warned that his one-dimensional views could upset well-established relationships that benefit the United States. They also questioned Flynn's willingness to take money from Russian government-backed groups, and his support for Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's harsh crackdown on dissent. —AFP

UN, Trump denounce North Korea; no sign of any action

UNITED NATIONS: The UN Security Council denounced North Korea's weekend missile launch, urging members to "redouble efforts" to enforce sanctions against the reclusive state, but gave no indications of any action it might take. Pyongyang's test of the intermediate-range ballistic missile on Sunday was its first direct challenge to the international community since US President Donald Trump took office on Jan 20.

At a news conference on Monday, Trump said: "Obviously North Korea is a big, big problem and we will deal with that very strongly." Trump did not speak of any planned response but Washington's UN ambassador Nikki Haley said in a statement: "It is time to hold North Korea accountable - not with our words, but with our actions." She issued the statement after an emergency Security Council meeting on Monday that was called by the United States, Japan and South Korea to discuss the North's missile launch.

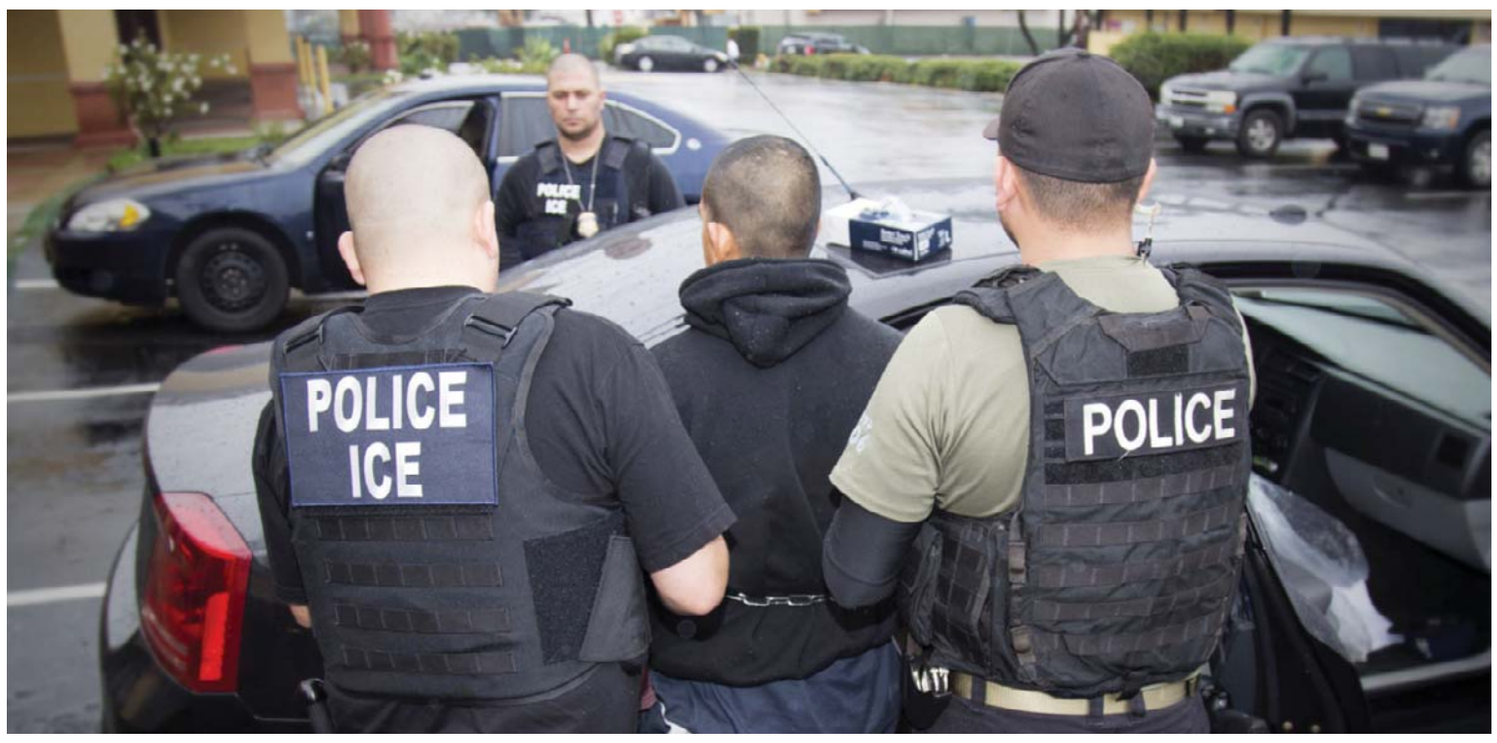
US, Japanese and South Korean military officials held a teleconference on Monday in which they condemned the launch as "a clear violation" of multiple Security Council resolutions. The United States "reaffirmed its ironclad security commitments" to South Korea and Japan, the Pentagon said. A South Korean official said the United States has planned to deploy "strategic assets" in upcoming annual military exercises with South Korea because of the increased threat from the North. The exercises usually start in March.

The official did not say what assets might be used. In the past, these have included B-2 bombers, F-22 stealth fighter jets and nuclear-powered submarines. In Beijing, China's Foreign Ministry said it hoped that under present circumstance all countries could maintain restraint and not do anything to escalate the situation. "We urge all sides to adopt a responsible attitude and make their own efforts to jointly promote the appropriate resolution of the Korean Peninsula nuclear issue," ministry spokesman Geng Shuang told a daily news briefing.

China is North Korea's main ally and trading partner but is irritated by its repeated aggressive actions, although it rejects suggestions from the United States and others that it could be doing more to rein in its neighbor. North Korea rejected the UN Security Council's statement and said its missile development was for self-defense. "The various test fires conducted by DPRK for building up self-defense capabilities are, with no exception, self-defense measures to protect national sovereignty and the safety of the people against direct threats by hostile forces," Han Tae Song, the new ambassador of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) to the United Nations in Geneva, told a conference.

South Korea's intelligence agency estimates the solid-fuel missile launched by North Korea on Sunday has a range of more than 2,000 km, according to a lawmaker briefed by the agency. That would bring large parts of China, Taiwan, Japan and Russia within range. The North has tested missiles with a range of over 3,000 km in the past, but has said it is on the verge of testing an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), which could eventually threaten the continental United States, which is about 9,000 km from North Korea. — Reuters

PAJU: South Korean army K-55 self-propelled artillery vehicles move during the annual exercise in Paju, South Korea, near the border with North Korea yesterday. — AP



LOS ANGELES: Foreign nationals are arrested during a targeted enforcement operation conducted by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) aimed at immigration fugitives, re-entrants and at-large criminal aliens in Los Angeles. — AP

Over 680 arrested in US immigration raids

Rights groups alarmed

WASHINGTON: US immigration officers last week arrested more than 680 people in the country illegally, the homeland security chief said on Monday, in a broad enforcement action that alarmed immigrant rights groups. US Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly said the operations, conducted in at least a dozen states, were routine and consistent with regular operations carried out by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE.

Immigrant rights advocates said the operations, which they describe as raids, were not business as usual, and were more sweeping than operations conducted during the administration of former Democratic President Barack Obama. Kelly said in a statement that 75 percent of the immigrants arrested have criminal records, ranging from homicide to driving under the influence of alcohol. He said the operation also targeted people who have violated immigration laws. Some had ignored final orders of deportation, according to ICE, the agency responsible for immigrant arrests and deportations. Obama was criticized for being the "deporter in chief" after he deported over 400,000 people in 2012, more than any president in a single year.

In 2014, Obama's homeland security chief issued a memo directing agents to focus on deporting a narrow slice of immigrants, namely those who had recently entered the country or committed serious felonies. Immigrants who were arrested for driving under the influence of alcohol, for example, were treated as lower priorities for deportation. Republican President Donald Trump promised to deport 2 million to 3 million migrants with criminal records on taking office. At a news conference with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Monday, Trump said his administration had "really done a great job" in its recent arrests of immigrants.

"We're actually taking people that are criminals, very, very, hardened criminals in some cases with a tremendous track record of abuse and problems," Trump said. ICE said in a statement on Monday that the operations targeted immigrants in the Midwest, Los Angeles, New York, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and San Antonio. The ICE statistics revealed regional differences in the profiles of the immigrants arrested. Of the 41 people arrested in New York City and surrounding areas, 93 percent had criminal convictions, while 45 percent of the 51 people arrested in the San Antonio, Texas area did.

Among the 190 people arrested in Georgia, North Carolina and South Carolina, were 17 people who had no criminal convictions or a prior order to leave the country, according to ICE. In a Jan 25 executive order, Trump broadened an Obama-era priority enforcement system for immigrants subject to removal from the United States. "Now it seems like anyone could be arrested," said Shiu-Ming Cheer, senior staff attorney at the National Immigration Law Center. "The level of fear and anxiety is much higher than I've ever seen it." — Reuters

Trump's White House and the takeaways

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump began his fourth week in the White House Monday by hosting Canadian leader Justin Trudeau and ended the day accepting the resignation of top aide Michael Flynn. The stunning departure of Flynn, Trump's national security advisor, was due to allegations the retired three star general discussed US sanctions strategy with Russia's ambassador Sergey Kislyak before taking office. Here are five takeaways from the day:

Flynn out

Flynn's resignation came late Monday after a day of speculation about his future, especially after the White House said Trump was "evaluating" his contacts with the Russian government. The top aide-whose past encounters with Russian President Vladimir Putin have already drawn criticism-was accused of discussing the Obama administration's election-hacking-related sanctions with Ambassador Sergey Kislyak. Flynn initially claimed he did not discuss sanctions, prompting Vice President Mike Pence to publicly come to his defense. But Flynn later admitted that he "inadvertently briefed" Pence with "incomplete information" about his calls with Kislyak.Trump named retired lieutenant general Joseph Kellogg, who was serving as a director on the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to be interim national security advisor.

The Situation (dining) Room

Social media posts of Trump and Shinzo Abe huddling with aides in a public dining room after North Korea's missile test raised questions about the US administration's handling of sensitive information. The conversation was captured on camera from close range by a member of Trump's Mar-a-Lago club in Palm Beach, Florida on Saturday. One caption of the now removed posts by Facebook user Richard DeAgazio read: "The President receiving the news about the Missile incident from North Korea on Japan with the Prime Minister sitting next to him."

When the president is away from the White House, many crisis conversations take place in what is known as a Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility or SCIF-a facility normally out of bounds for individuals without security clearance. The White House said that Trump was briefed in such a room "prior to dinner" and that no sensitive information was shared at the table." There is no one in that picture around him or whatever that isn't part of the US delegation or the Japanese delegation, they were reviewing the logistics for the press conference," said White House spokesman Sean Spicer.

Ivanka at the top table

Trump's daughter Ivanka got a plum spot at America's highest table, taking place next to the 45-year-old Canadian premier Trudeau at a White House meeting with the president, and businesswomen from both countries. The appearance by Ivanka, who opened the discussion after both leaders had spoken, comes amid questions over the separation of Trump family businesses from the official roles of the president and his relatives.

Trump is the first president in modern times to refuse to release his tax returns or divest from his business interests-choosing instead to put his sons in charge. Ivanka also has significant business interests that have become the focus of government ethics watchdogs. Trump last week tweeted that his daughter had been treated "so unfairly" by Nordstrom, an upscale department store chain that dropped her fashion brand, and a key Trump aide is facing possible investigation after pitching Ivanka's clothing on television. —AFP

California crews rush to fix dam

OROVILLE: Stormwaters receded on Monday behind the nation's tallest dam, in Northern California, as engineers raced to drain the rain-swollen reservoir and shore up a crumbling overflow channel before new storms sweep the region this week. Authorities said they had averted the immediate danger of a catastrophic failure - one capable of unleashing a wall of water three stories tall on towns below.

But evacuation orders for some 188,000 residents remained in effect indefinitely, Butte County Sheriff Kory Honea said at a midday news conference. The risk to those living in the Feather River valley below the Lake Oroville Dam, 65 miles north of Sacramento, was still being reviewed, he said. "We need to have time to make sure that before we allow people back into those areas it is safe to do so," Honea said.

Residents below the dam were ordered from their homes on Sunday when an emergency spillway that acts as an automatic overflow channel appeared on the brink of collapse from severe erosion during what is on track to be Northern California's wettest winter on record after years of drought. Environmental groups had warned for more than a decade that the dam's spillway was not safe. "Infrastructure is profoundly important, and in our complex society, whether it's electricity or gas or water or roads or bridges, there's a lot to be done," California Governor Jerry Brown told reporters during a news conference on Monday evening.

Brown on Monday sent a letter to US President Donald Trump requesting he issue an emergency declaration, which would open up federal assistance for the affected communities. Brown said he was pleased by Trump's promise to pursue a $1 trillion infrastructure program, adding, "I'll strive to make sure California gets 12 percent" referring to the state's share of the US population. Residents were stunned by the ferocity of the waters. Alfred Ybarra had gone down to the Feather River with his children on Sunday to take photographs, and they quickly found themselves in trouble.

"Within minutes the water was up to the tires on my car," Ybarra said. "I told my kids, 'You have to pray. It's the only thing that you can do'." Asked whether he thought officials had overreacted, Ybarra responded, "Absolutely not." The main spillway, a separate channel, is also damaged because part of its concrete lining fell apart last week. Both spillways are to the side of the dam itself, which has not been compromised, engineers said. The situation grew less dire later on Sunday as water levels dropped, leaving the weakened unpaved emergency spillway largely intact. By Monday, the level of the lake fell enough so that water was no longer pouring over the hill.

Repairs and drainage

Erosion caused by the hole in the side of the main spillway appeared to have abated by Monday, and it was back to more or less normal operations, officials said. The aim is to lower the reservoir's overall water level by 50 feet - and prevent further spillover down the emergency hillside channel - before more rain arrives in the coming days and snow-melt runoff begins in the spring, acting state water resources director Bill Croyle told reporters. He said he hoped to achieve that goal within two weeks. Another storm was forecast to arrive as early as today or tomorrow, though officials said they expected much of that precipitation to fall as snow rather than rain.

On Monday afternoon, crews began dropping large bags filled with rocks into a gap at the top of the emergency spillway in a bid to rebuild the eroded hillside. Meanwhile, water could be seen gushing from the main concrete spillway as dam operators for the California Department of Water Resources continued controlled releases through the paved chute into channels that route the water away from populated areas. The dam's hydropower release valves also have been shut down to prevent damage from sediment and debris carried by heavy rain. The earth-filled dam is just upstream and east of Oroville, a town of about 16,000 people. At 770 feet high, the structure, built between 1962 and 1968, is the tallest US dam, exceeding the Hoover Dam by more than 40 feet. —Reuters

CALIFORNIA: A home is seen marooned as the surrounding property is submerged in flood water in Oroville, California. Almost 200,000 people were under evacuation orders in northern California after a threat of catastrophic failure at the United States' tallest dam. —AFP

Dutch polls to test European waters for far-right

THE HAGUE: Dutch voters go to the polls next month in the first of a series of elections that will be a litmus test of European politics after Brexit and Donald Trump's shock victory in the US. All eyes are on the far-right, anti-Islam Freedom Party (PVV) and its outspoken leader, MP Geert Wilders. If the opinion polls prove right, Wilders is on track to deliver the country's establishment Liberal party of Prime Minister Mark Rutte and his Labor coalition partner a thumping on March 15.

What may prove Wilders's best polls showing ever could in turn boost the chances of his ideological allies in both France and Germany, where elections are due later in the year. Wilders, who has vowed to take his country out of the EU, has been riding high in the polls for months, propelled both by Trump's victory and the tensions triggered by Europe's worst refugee crisis since World War II. But some say the polls are unreliable, while others maintain PVV supporters among the 12.6 million eligible to vote are keeping their cards close to their chests.

Trump factor

Despite his blond, bouffant hair and political similarities, Wilders dismisses the easy moniker of being "the Dutch Donald Trump". But he has made no secret of his admiration for the new US president (he was a guest at the Republican convention) and like him has delighted in taking his message directly to voters via Twitter. He even got into hot water last week for "fake news" by tweeting a photo-shopped picture of a political foe supposedly surrounded by Islamist radicals. In recent weeks however, Rutte's Liberal VVD has narrowed the gap, and the latest survey on Sunday predicted he would win about 24 seats to 30 for Wilders.

"After Trump's election, the PVV got a boost. But the survey today shows that 25 percent of PVV voters are reacting negatively to the measures taken by President Trump," respected pollster Maurice de Hond said. Even though Wilders has been a politician for at least two decades, "I think people increasingly want to vote for him because they don't see enough change," said Leiden University political expert Geerten Waling. Former harbor master Sijmen Kaper, 70, in the PVV eastern stronghold of Volendam, agreed. "The politicians aren't listening to the people. These people aren't racists, they are people who want things done differently," he said.

Hard bargaining

Even if the PVV emerges as the largest party in parliament, it would fall far short of the 76 seats needed to form a governing coalition in the 150-seat parliament. That would herald weeks, or months, of bitter horse-trading, and perhaps bestow a kingmaker role on smaller up-and-coming parties such as environmentalists GroenLinks (GreenLeft). Many observers believe it unlikely that Wilders will end up in government. "Nobody wants to govern with him and he will never be able to get a majority," said Waling. "So he will be a huge opposition party." Rutte has already vowed not to work with Wilders, repudiating his radical anti-Islam platform and denouncing comments about Moroccans which saw the MP convicted of discrimination last year.

VOLENDAM: Photo shows tourists visiting the Dyke in Volendam. — AFP

Yet Rutte recently raised eyebrows when, in a not-so-subtle bid to drain support from Wilders, he shifted his tone more to the right demanding immigrants must adopt Dutch values or leave. Wilders himself insisted on Sunday that if his party wins the most votes, then he cannot be ignored. "You can't just push aside 2.5 million voters ... after democratic elections," he told the WNL OP Zondag television program. He predicted such a move could lead "to such an unstable political assembly... that inside of a year it would collapse." — AFP

German-Israeli govt meeting 'cancelled'

Israel, Germany at odds over settlement building

BERLIN: A meeting between the governments of Germany and Israel that was scheduled to take place in May has been cancelled amid rising frustration in Berlin with settlement activity in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. A German spokesman said the governments had agreed to "postpone" the annual meeting of leaders and ministers until next year, blaming the delay on the busy schedule of meetings surrounding Germany's presidency of the G20.

An Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman confirmed the session has been called off, citing "schedule constraints on the German side". But German officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, suggested the real reason for the cancellation was the feeling that the two governments were too far apart on the issue of Middle East peace to make such a meeting worthwhile.

"Our relations have been completely pared back," one senior German official said. "We have practically given up on making progress in the current environment." German governments have made strong relations with Israel a top priority ever since World War Two, going to great lengths to make amends for the killing of six million Jews by the Nazis. But relations have grown tense in recent years as Germany questioned Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's commitment to a two-state solution with the Palestinians.

The election of US President Donald Trump appears to have emboldened Netanyahu to step up building in settlements, which are seen by Germany and many other countries as illegal and an obstacle to peace because they reduce and fragment the territory Palestinians need for a viable state. Israel disagrees, citing biblical, historical and political connections to the West Bank and East Jerusalem, which it captured in the 1967 Middle East war and where some 2.6 million Palestinians live. It has built about 120 settlements in the West Bank. About 350,000 settlers live there, with a further 200,000 in East Jerusalem.

Since Trump took office last month, Netanyahu has approved construction of 6,000 settler homes in the two areas, drawing international condemnation which the White House did not join. In recent days, however, the Trump administration has taken a more nuanced position, saying building new settlements or expanding existing ones may not be helpful in achieving peace. Netanyahu is to meet Trump in Washington today. Before his departure he sidestepped a question about whether he still supports creation of a Palestinian state, saying he would make his position clear during the visit. — Reuters

JERUSALEM: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu chairs the weekly cabinet meeting in Jerusalem. — AFP

PARIS: French President Francois Hollande (right) gestures as he sits next to French Labor Minister Myriam El Khomri during a visit in Aubervilliers, north of Paris. — AFP

French president calls for 'justice' over police rape

PARIS: French President Francois Hollande called for "justice" yesterday over the alleged rape of a black youth with a police baton, appealing for calm after more than a week of riots. "Justice must be served," Hollande said during a visit to the working-class suburb of Aubervilliers, situated in the tough Seine-Saint-Denis region northeast of Paris where Theo, a 22-year-old youth worker, was assaulted while being arrested.

But Hollande also condemned the nightly violence after the February 2 incident in a high-rise housing estate, calling the rioting "unacceptable". He said France was determined to "show that we are capable of living together in a peaceful society, but where respect is the rule and where we must be firm towards those who diverge from this principle."

Theo's treatment by four officers during a stop-and-search operation has sparked clashes with police and arson attacks in a string of impoverished, ethnically-mixed suburbs around the French capital. Dozens of people have been arrested, including 25 overnight Monday. Theo was hospitalized with severe anal injuries after one of the officers allegedly sodomised him with a truncheon. The officer in question has been charged with rape and his three colleagues with assault. All four have been suspended.

'Fuel to the fire'

With presidential elections in April and May, the alleged assault, which follows the death of a young black man in police custody in another Paris suburb last year, has become a campaign issue. Far-right leader Marine Le Pen on Monday launched a petition "to support the police" after blaming "laxism in French society" for the problems of the restive suburbs. The head of the anti-immigration National Front party called for a "major tightening of the screws" to boost police capabilities.

The remarks prompted Socialist presidential candidate Benoit Hamon to say she was "adding fuel to the fire." "She encourages violence through her hateful rhetoric," Hamon said. On Monday, Interior Minister Bruno Le Roux made an appeal for "responsibility, calm (and) faith in the justice system."

Hollande, who visited Theo in hospital last week, decided not to seek re-election. The leftist Hamon, who won the Socialist nomination, is given little chance of getting past the first round on April 23. The latest voter surveys show Le Pen with 27 percent support for the first round-more than any other candidate-though she is currently not expected to triumph in the May 7 runoff vote. — AFP

King of university degrees is a 70-year-old Italian Baietti

VELLETRI: Boffins eat your hearts out: the world record holder for the number of university degrees is a cheery but truculent 70-year old Italian. Luciano Baietti lives in the town of Velletri in the Alban Hills near Rome and spends his days pottering around his small house and garden. But at every morning at 3 am he pulls out his textbooks and starts studying. He now holds 15 bachelors or masters degrees from universities across Italy, and is already embarking on his 16th. "Thanks to books, I feel free, dammit," he said. "After all, the words share the same root," he says, referring to the Italian words libro (book) and libero (free). The certificates proving his prowess hang on the walls of his study, framing a portrait of the 19th century French essayist, Louis-Francois Bertin, whom he cites as an influence.

Passion for a challenge

"He was a man of culture and knowledge," said Baietti, a former headmaster of a secondary school, who made it into the Guinness Book of Records in 2002 with his eighth degree, that time in motor skills. At that point he already had degrees in sociology, literature, law, political science and philosophy, most from Rome's prestigious La Sapienza University, one of the oldest in the world. Since then he's added seven others to his list, including one in criminology, a distance-learning one in military strategies from Turin, and the latest in tourism from an online university in Naples, which he was awarded at the start of this month.

"Each time I set myself a new challenge, to see how far my body and my brain can go," says Baietti, who started life as a sports teacher. His long-suffering wife, some 30 years his junior, describes Baietti affectionately as "a real character" who is known throughout their town. He got most of the qualifications under his belt while also doing his day job and volunteering with Italy's Red Cross. This ageing eternal student's first degree was in physical education in 1972 - and he fell instantly in love with the academic world. "As well as the sporting events, there were modules in theory which I liked, and which gave me a taste for studying," he says.

'I surprised myself'

The most challenging and unusual degree so far has been the military strategies one: "It was co-organized by the defense ministry and Turin University and dealt with sensitive subjects related to national security". "We had to attend the exams in uniform," he recalls, showing off the regimental garb hanging in his wardrobe. His masters in criminology, which saw him interview prisoners, also had a lasting impact.

"Listening to them, I sometimes surprised myself; I'd be convinced by their arguments, and would wonder about what was right or wrong-before realizing that I had gone off course." Baietti is back on course, and already preparing to start the next degree, this time in food science. Once again, he'll be pouring over his books by the light of his desk lamp as outside the world sleeps on. "At that time the brain is more open to assimilating knowledge, and it also allows me to keep a normal family life," he says with a grin. — AFP

VELLETRI: Luciano Baietti, awarded 'The more graduated man in the world' by the Guinness Book of World Records, poses under some of his university degrees in his house in Velletri, south of Rome. — AFP

Former boss of Nigeria state-run oil firm in $10m cash probe

LAGOS: A former head of Nigeria's state-run oil firm is under investigation after almost $10 million in cash was found at a property he owns. Anti-corruption agency the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) said it had seized $9.8 million (9.2 million euros) from a house belonging to Andrew Yakubu. A further £74,000 ($92,700, 87,300 euros) was also found at the property in the northern city of Kaduna. Images of the money-stacked in neat bundles and allegedly discovered in a safe-have featured prominently in the country's media for several days.

Nigeria is currently in recession and desperately in need of cash, having been hit hard by the slump in global oil prices since mid-2014 that has squeezed revenue and pushed up inflation. Politics watchers have pointed out the money could have financed a string of much-needed conventional and renewable power projects outlined in the 2017 federal budget. EFCC spokesman Wilson Uwujaren refused to be drawn on what would happen next. "We are still investigating the matter," he said. "At the end of our investigation we shall decide on our next line of action... Nothing is ruled out." In his defense, Yakubu has denied any wrongdoing. He admitted the money belonged to him but said it was a gift from friends.

Anti-corruption drive

Yakubu was the group managing director of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) from 2012 to 2014, having been appointed by then president Goodluck Jonathan. In early 2014 the governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, Lamido Sanusi, outraged Jonathan and his government claiming the NNPC had failed to remit $20 billion in revenue. The allegation of corruption cost Sanusi his job, officially on charges of "financial recklessness and misconduct", but his supporters saw the dismissal as politically motivated.

Jonathan and his oil minister Diezani Alison-Madueke repeatedly maintained that nothing like $20 billion was missing. Yakubu was dismissed in 2014. Critics said he did little to clean up the NNPC's reputation as one of the world's most opaque and corrupt state oil firms. Since coming to power in May 2015, Jonathan's successor, Muhammadu Buhari, has made it his mission to reclaim what he says were "mind-boggling" sums of looted public cash. One of his first moves as president was to overhaul the NNPC, by trying to introduce greater transparency and efficiency.

Alison-Madueke has been caught up in the anti-corruption drive. She is currently facing fraud charges in Nigeria and the prospect of having to forfeit $153 million to the government on suspicion of the sum having been obtained illegally. A court in Lagos was told on January 6 that the cash was allegedly siphoned from the NNPC and stashed in three bank accounts. Alison-Madueke has rejected the claim. The former OPEC president has been on police bail in London since October 2015 after being arrested in connection with a British investigation into international corruption and money laundering. Buhari's information minister Lai Mohammed on Sunday announced that some $151 million and eight billion naira ($26.3 million) in stolen state funds had been recovered from just three people. The $9.8 million found at Yakubu's house was not part of the new recoveries, he said. — AFP

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You will be responsible for developing and managing digital marketing campaigns, planning strategies to drive online traffic to the company's website, tracking conversion rates and suggesting improvements to the website, utilizing a range of techniques including SEO, PPC, etc. and overseeing the social media strategy for the company.

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Thais in the mood for love; V-Day fever sweeps the nation

BANGKOK: Babies dressed as cupids, underwater weddings and a government vitamin giveaway to encourage procreation were all part of Thailand's imaginative and bizarre events yesterday to mark Valentine's Day. The Land of Smiles embraces February 14 like few other countries in Southeast Asia, with Bangkok awash with pop-up flower stalls and a roster of romantic gestures unfurling across the country.

The junta government led the love-in, doling out heart-shaped boxes of free iron and folic acid supplements in a bid to help healthy pregnancies and stimulate the kingdom's birthrate. "In 1970, a family had an average of six children but now it's 1.6," Wachira Pengjuntr, director-general of the Department of Health said. "In the past people ate better food, more vegetables and fruits but now lifestyles have changed... so we want to encourage more births."

In the southern tourist hotspot of Trang, couples were offered the opportunity to marry underwater-in full wedding dress and diving gear-in an annual publicity stunt aimed at boosting visitor numbers. And babies at one Bangkok maternity ward were dressed up with wings to resemble the god of love. Even Thailand's fractious political arena, a stage more accustomed to the delivery of brickbats than bouquets, could not escape Cupid's arrow.

In a widely trailed "Day of Love", the junta opened reconciliation talks with some political players in an effort to bridge a decade of conflict that has seen two democratic governments upended by coups.

Thailand's normally stern Prime Minister Prayut Cha-O-Cha was also in an affectionate mood following a poll saying just over half the country wanted to give him flowers for Valentine's Day. "I have love for everyone-all 70 million Thais every day-not only on Valentine's Day. I have roses for you everyday. Thank you," he told reporters. Thai polling data is often criticized as politically slanted. Still the junta's unbridled passion for Valentine's Day was a contrast to more po-faced approaches in previous years-in 2015 the generals urged young people to have a special meal or visit temples instead of having sex. — AFP

BANGKOK: Newborn babies sleep at Rajavithi Hospital in Bangkok, Thailand. Just in time for Valentine's Day, the Thai government is distributing pills it calls 'very magical vitamins' to prospective mothers boost the country's falling birthrate. The pills are prenatal vitamins containing folic acid and iron and being handed out to women between the ages of 20-34. — AP

CHENNAI: Secretary of the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam party VK Sasikala gestures to supporters at party headquarters in Chennai yesterday. A former video cassette seller with close ties to Tamil Nadu's late leader will become the next chief minister of the Indian state, capping a remarkable rise for the political novice. — AFP

Incoming leader of Tamil Nadu jailed for four years

Sasikala ordered to surrender to prison authorities

NEW DELHI: India's Supreme Court jailed the anointed next leader of Tamil Nadu for four years for corruption yesterday, heightening the turmoil in a state still reeling from the death of its long-time matriarch. VK Sasikala was ordered to surrender to prison authorities after judges quashed her acquittal in a $10 million "disproportionate assets" case also involving her mentor, the late chief minister Jayalalithaa Jayaram.

There was no immediate reaction from Sasikala who was not present at the apex court in New Delhi and has been holed up in a resort close to Tamil Nadu's capital Chennai since last week. But the verdict brought a juddering halt to the 59-year-old's meteoric rise as she was on the cusp of becoming the leader of one of India's most populous and prosperous states.

The court ordered she immediately hand herself in to begin serving her sentence, which automatically bars her from holding public office for a decade, as well as fining her 100 million rupees ($1.5 million). The panel of judges also sentenced her nephew and niece to four years after the Karnataka High Court acquitted all of them in 2015 of any wrongdoing. "The magnitude of the nefarious gains as demonstrated by the revelations in the case are, to say the least, startling," Justice PC Ghosh and Justice A Roy wrote in their verdict.

The ruling also said there was "incriminating evidence" against Jayalalithaa, a former film star who died last December after three stints as chief minister. Sasikala had been anointed as Jayalalithaa's successor by the state's dominant All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) and was likely to be sworn in later this week. But she has been involved in a bitter battle with acting chief minister, O Panneerselvam, who has been trying to block her ascent.

Although there was no immediate response to yesterday's verdict from Sasikala herself, her party issued a statement saying Panneerselvam and 19 other senior AIADMK rebels had been sacked. Edappady Palaniswamy, a Sasikala loyalist, was appointed AIADMK leader in place of Sasikala but Panneerselvam is likely to stay on as chief minister while the infighting continues. "Let us bury the hatchets and stay united for the good of the party and continue the fine governance of Amma," Panneerselvam told reporters after the verdict, using Jayalalithaa's nickname.

Firecrackers

While the 2014 conviction sparked mass protests, Sasikala does not command anything like the same level of loyalty as Jayalalithaa and there no immediate signs of demonstrations. Few party workers were at the party headquarters and the only people outside her residence were political rivals who celebrated the verdict by bursting firecrackers and distributing sweets. "This verdict shows that individuals in public life should not indulge in corruption," opposition leader M K Stalin told reporters.

Sasikala has taken refuge since last week in a luxury resort alongside several dozen AIADMK state legislators, keeping a close eye on them over fears that Panneerselvam's camp might poach them before her investiture. The corruption case dates back to late 1990s when Jayalalithaa and Sasikala were accused of profiting from the chief minister's office and amassing wealth beyond their income. They were jointly accused of owning several bungalows, luxury cars, tea estates, eight tons of silver, nearly 30 kilograms of gold and thousands of saris which could be not accounted for.

The court put the overall value of the assets acquired illegally at 660 million rupees, equivalent to around $10 million. Sasikala was running a video parlor and Jayalalithaa was a budding politician when the two met, which marked the beginning of a decades-long friendship dogged by corruption allegations. Sasikala's meteoric rise mirrored that of Jayalalithaa who came to power following the death of her own mentor and regular movie co-star MG Ramachandran in 1987. But unlike Jayalalithaa, who inspired a devotion that verged on the religious, Sasikala is seen as lacking charisma and a solid power base. — AFP

Half-brother of N Korea leader Kim assassinated

SEOUL: The half-brother of North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un has been assassinated in Malaysia, South Korean media reported yesterday, with one TV station saying he was attacked at the country's main airport with poisoned needles. Officials in Seoul could not be reached for comment on the reported death of Kim Jong-Nam. Malaysian police said an unidentified Korean had been taken sick at Kuala Lumpur International Airport and since died.

If confirmed, Kim Jong-Nam's case would be the highest-profile death under the Kim Jong-Un regime since the execution of the leader's uncle Jang Song-Thaek in December 2013. Kim Jong-Un has been trying to strengthen his grip on power in the face of growing international pressure over his country's nuclear and missile programs. He has reportedly staged a series of executions. The latest launch on Sunday of a new intermediate-range missile brought UN Security Council condemnation and vows of a strong response from US President Donald Trump. South Korea's national news agency Yonhap quoted a Seoul government source as saying Kim Jong-Nam was killed on Monday.

Another source cited by Yonhap said agents of the North's spy agency, the Reconnaissance General Bureau, carried out the assassination by taking advantage of a security loophole between Jong-Nam's bodyguards and Malaysian police at the airport. The 45-year-old was killed by two unidentified female agents using poisoned needles at the airport, according to South Korean broadcaster TV Chosun. That report, citing what it called multiple government sources, said the two women hailed a cab and fled immediately afterwards.

In Malaysia, the police chief in charge of Kuala Lumpur International Airport, Assistant Commissioner Abdul Aziz Ali said a Korean in his forties was found sick at the airport on Monday. Airport authorities rushed him to hospital and he died on the way, the police chief said. "We do not have any other details of this Korean man. We do not know his identity," Abdul said. Kim Jong-Nam, the eldest son of Kim Jong-Il, was once seen as heir apparent but fell out of favor following an embarrassing botched attempt in 2001 to enter Japan on a forged passport and visit Disneyland. He has since lived in virtual exile, mainly in the Chinese territory of Macau. Jong-Nam's half-brother Jong-Un took over as North Korean leader when their father died in December 2011. Jong-Nam, known as an advocate of reform in the North, once told a Japanese newspaper that he opposed his country's dynastic power transfers. He was reportedly close to his uncle Jang Song-Thaek, once the North's unofficial number two and political mentor of the current leader.

Targeted in the past

Jong-Nam has been targeted in the past. In October 2012 South Korean prosecutors said a North Korean detained as a spy had admitted involvement in a plot to stage a hit-and-run car accident in China in 2010 targeting Kim Jong-Nam. In 2014 Jong-Nam was reported to be in Indonesia-sighted at an Italian restaurant run by a Japanese businessman in Jakarta-and was said to be shuttling back and forth between Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia and France. In 2012 a Moscow newspaper reported that Jong-Nam was having financial problems after being cut off by the Stalinist state for doubting its succession policy.

The Argumenty i Fakty weekly said he was kicked out of a luxury hotel in Macau over a $15,000 debt. Last year South Korea warned of possible North Korean assassination attempts in its territory. It noted previous attempts to assassinate Hwang Jang-Yop, the North's chief ideologue and former tutor to Kim Jong-Il, who defected to the South in 1997 and died of natural causes in 2010. Jong-Nam was born from his father's extra-marital relationship with Sung Hae-rim, a South Korean-born actress who died in Moscow. — AFP

MACAU: In a file picture, Kim Jong-Nam, the eldest son of North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il, waves after an interview with South Korean media representatives in Macau. Kim Jong-Nam, the half-brother of North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un has been assassinated in Malaysia. — AFP

US and Thailand kick off 'Cobra Gold' war games

BANGKOK: The US and Thailand launched annual joint 'Cobra Gold' military exercises yesterday as Asia grapples with uncertainty over the direction of American foreign policy under US President Donald Trump. The war games, typically involving days of grueling and sometimes gruesome drills in the Thai jungle, are the largest US-led military exercises in Asia. They have continued in spite of tensions over a 2014 coup in Thailand, prompting Washington to cut back on military aid and call for a return to democracy. But the US has also been wary of pushing its long-standing Southeast Asian ally into the embrace of superpower rival China.

This year Washington sent the head of the US Pacific Command Admiral Harry Harris to attend the opening of Cobra Gold yesterday-the highest ranking officer to visit Thailand since the coup. He urged the country to resume democratic rule, a hand-off the junta has repeatedly delayed. "We look forward to Thailand's reemergence as a flourishing democracy because we need Thailand to be a strong and stable partner," he said. This year's 10-day exercise kicks off under a cloud of uncertainty about the role of the US in the region.

It is unclear whether Trump will rollback on his predecessor's much-trailed 'Asia pivot', which banked on boosting security and trade ties as a counterweight to China's growing might. Trump's administration is also expected to take a softer line on human rights, potentially offering some respite for the Thai junta and other authoritarian governments in the region. Some 3,600 US personnel will descend on Thailand's Chonburi and Nakhon Ratchasima provinces for the war games, along with soldiers from Singapore, Japan, South Korea, Indonesia and Malaysia.

The drills, which have been hosted by the US and Thailand since 1980, have previously involved an array of arduous activities, including a jungle survival challenge requiring US marines to drink snake blood. US embassy spokeswoman Melissa Sweeney said this year's drills will focus on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. China and India will join for those humanitarian exercises, with more than a dozen other countries sending representatives to observe. —AFP

SATTAHIP: A Thai marching band leads troops at the opening ceremony of the Cobra Gold Thai-US military exercise yesterday in Sattahip, Thailand. — AP

Australia misses targets to improve lives of Aborigines

SYDNEY: Australia is failing to improve Aboriginal lives, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull said yesterday, as a new report showed the government missing key targets, including cutting child mortality and raising life expectancy. The ninth "Closing the Gap" report found that government and community efforts were only able to meet one of seven targets to boost health, education and employment to the level of the non-indigenous population. "Even with successive Commonwealth and state governments investing more resources, and even with tens of thousands of dedicated Australians seeks to contribute and engage, we are still not making enough progress," Turnbull told parliament.

Aborigines-who make up about three percent of the total national population of 24 million-are among the most disadvantaged Australians. Apart from lifting high school completion rates, all other targets including child mortality, life expectancy, education and employment were not on track, the report said. The mortality rate for indigenous children under four years old was at 165 per 100,000 from 2011-2015, more than double that of the rest of the population. Aborigines also have significantly shorter life expectancy than their fellow citizens, with a gap of 10.6 years for males and 9.5 years for females, according to figures from 2013. The community was also battling rising mortality rates from cancer, the report found. Turnbull said his government was investing another Aus$50 million (US$38 million) to improve the research and evaluation of policies being rolled out to try to close the gap. Efforts to implement policies featuring greater indigenous and local community involvement were also being made, he added. Former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd-who made a historic apology to Aboriginal people for centuries of injustice in 2008 - warned of a "second stolen generation" involving children being removed from their families under child protection laws.

The term "stolen generation" is used to describe children who were put in foster care with white families or institutions under an official policy that ended only in the early 1970s. "We cannot simply stand back and let the numbers of indigenous children being removed grow year by year, without other options being tested within the wider indigenous community," Rudd said Monday. He added that the annual report was "a political disaster for the government of the day, for governments of whichever political persuasion", The Australian newspaper reported. — AFP

Trump sons to launch golf course in Dubai

DUBAI: US President Donald Trump's sons are to inaugurate a branded golf course in Dubai on Saturday, the first public launch for the business empire since Trump took office in January. Donald Trump Jr and Eric Trump will attend the opening of the Trump International Golf Club Dubai, developed by luxury real estate company DAMAC Properties. The launch comes amid growing concern in Washington over the president's potential conflict of interest.

In January, Trump - at the time still president-elect - said he had rejected a $2 billion deal with DAMAC in Dubai as a personal and not official move. "I didn't have to turn it down," he told a press conference in January. "But I have a no-conflict-of-interest provision as president." Trump sparked controversy last year in the mainly Muslim United Arab Emirates when he said during his campaign that he wanted to impose a "total and complete shutdown of Muslims" entering the United States.

Dubai-based concept store Lifestyle, which has branches across the Middle East, Africa and Pakistan, announced it would no longer sell Trump-branded home decor items out of respect for its customers. DAMAC Properties at the time declined to comment on Trump's remarks, but said the golf course development would continue. The United Arab Emirates is not among the seven majority-Muslim countries listed on Trump's controversial executive order restricting travel to the United States.

Since his November victory, Trump has said he will remove himself from running his business empire and transfer corporate control to his two eldest sons. But the president has resisted divesting despite calls by ethics organizations. The Trump Organization has instead said it would no longer pursue new deals outside of the United States. The 18-hole Dubai golf course predates the pledge, with talks surrounding the project going back at least to 2015.

Critics have raised questions of conflict of interest over Trump's business ties on the grounds that while the president is no longer nominally in charge of his eponymous empire, he may continue to profit from it. Ethics lawyers in the United States are now suing Trump for alleged violation of the US constitution. Liberal watchdog group Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW) filed a lawsuit in January, arguing that Trump's business ties violate an emolument clause in the constitution which prohibits the acceptance of payments from foreign governments by US officials. US presidents are not legally required to give up business or investments while in office.— AFP

A pigeon sits on a lamppost and cleans itself as the sun rises in Frankfurt yesterday. — AP

First Saudi Comic-Con fest to wow attendees

RIYADH: Superheroes from Hollywood's Marvel studios are among the characters set to wow thousands of curious Saudis at the Islamic kingdom's first Comic-Con event from tomorrow. The three-day festival of anime, pop art, video gaming and film-related events is part of a government initiative to bring more entertainment to Saudi Arabia which bans alcohol, public cinemas and theatre. Comic-Con began in 1970 as a convention of a few dozen geeks who swapped superhero magazines in the United States.

Tens of thousands of people now descend on San Diego every July for Comic-Con International where they don costumes and get previews of films by Marvel and Warner Brothers. Other Comic-Con events occur around the world. "We see from the high number of Saudi-based attendees at Comic-Cons abroad in recent years that there is a strong demand to host these events in our own country," Amr Al-Madani, chief executive of the government's General Entertainment Authority, said in a statement yesterday. The authority said it is supporting the event organized in the Red Sea city of Jeddah by Saudi firm Time Entertainment. "Comic-Con events have a strong family appeal," Al-Madani said, as authorities move cautiously in a country where conservatives are wary of entertainment. Last month the kingdom's highest-ranking cleric, Grand Mufti Abdulaziz Al-Sheikh, warned of the "depravity" of cinemas and music concerts.

Unrelated men and women are normally separated in Saudi Arabia, where restaurants have sections for "single" men and families. In December a Saudi performance by US stand-up comedian and actor Mike Epps was cancelled, its organizers said, after complaints from hardliners. Entertainment programs began in October when New York theatrical group iLuminate performed at the Princess Noura University in Riyadh. Hundreds of men and women, side-by-side, hooted their appreciation and clapped to the hip hop beat. — AFP

Roses make MPs see red as clashes mar...

Continued from Page 1

Fadhl, the son of former MP Nabil Al-Fadhl, who died during an Assembly session about two years ago, infuriated Islamist and conservative lawmakers by bringing red roses as a symbolic gesture on the occasion of Valentine's Day. He placed one rose on the desks of all members and Cabinet ministers, besides the speaker and Assembly secretary general. But the roses were quickly removed by Assembly officials.

Fadhl protested at the removal, saying he bought the 73 roses for KD 73 and that they should not have been removed. Hayef criticized marking Valentine's Day because it is "an atheist practice that is totally prohibited under religion". He said that the committee for alien negative practices, which he heads, should study the issue. The Assembly then overwhelmingly agreed to lift Fadhl's immunity. It also voted to lift the immunity of opposition MPs Waleed Al-Tabtabaei, Harbash and Mohammad Al-Mutair to be tried for taking part in the storming of the National Assembly building in Nov 2011.

Meanwhile, Justice Minister Faleh Al-Azab said the government is open to hold a special debate on the Khor Abdullah waterway with Iraq following protests on the Iraqi side against a 2012 agreement between Kuwait and Iraq. Although a string of Iraqi official statements have assured Kuwait that the agreement is not affected by the opposition, lawmakers in Kuwait want to hear a government briefing on the issue. Azab however said he believes the government will demand the debate to be held behind closed doors.

MPs also could not push ahead with a request to debate the banking deposits scandal in which 13 former and present MPs are accused of accepting millions of dinars in bribes from the government for political reasons. MP Riyadh Al-Adasani and several other lawmakers filed a motion calling to allocate some time to debate the scandal, which was investigated by the public prosecution in 2011, but did not press charges for lack of legislation.

Adasani wants to reveal the names of the lawmakers who benefited from the bribes and the amounts they got in a public debate in the Assembly, but the government is insisting on a closed debate. The lawmaker however threatened that if the debate is either rejected or held in secret, he has other measures that he will use, but did not elaborate.

Adasani was a member of a parliamentary investigation committee that probed the issue under the opposition-dominated Assembly elected in Feb 2012. The results of the probe could not be used because that Assembly was scrapped by the constitutional court within just four months after being elected. Another probe committee was formed by the 2013 Assembly, but its findings have remained confidential. At least five MPs in the current Assembly are involved in the scandal.

Iran urges

Continued from Page 1

"This regional initiative is an opportunity that our regional friends should seize. Opportunity passes like a cloud. Take advantage of the good opportunity," he added.

Saudi Arabia and Bahrain cut diplomatic relations with Iran in Jan 2016 after protesters torched the Saudi embassy in Tehran. Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates recalled their envoys in a show of solidarity with Riyadh, but Oman only expressed regret over the attack, highlighting its better ties. Oman has traditionally resisted Gulf Arab states' efforts to close ranks against Iran. It helped to mediate secret US-Iran talks in 2013 that led to a historic nuclear deal signed in Geneva two years later.

Kuwait's foreign minister paid a rare visit to Tehran

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Focus

Few good options in Trump arsenal to counter DPRK

Despite his campaign vows to take a tougher line with North Korea, US President Donald Trump's restrained public reaction to Pyongyang's first ballistic missile launch on his watch underscores that he has few good options to curb its missile and nuclear programs. The responses under consideration - which range from additional sanctions to US shows of force to beefed-up missile defense, according to one administration official - do not seem to differ significantly so far from the North Korea playbook followed by Trump's predecessor, Barack Obama.

Even the idea of stepping up pressure on China to rein in a defiant North Korea has been tried - to little avail - by successive administrations. But Beijing is showing no signs of softening its resistance under a new US president who has bashed them on trade, currency and the contested South China Sea. More dramatic responses to North Korea's missile tests would be direct military action or negotiations. But neither appears to be on the table - the first because it would risk regional war, the latter because it would be seen as rewarding Pyongyang for bad behavior. And neither would offer certain success.

"Trump's options are limited," said Bonnie Glaser, an Asia expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies think tank in Washington. Trump's initial public comments on Saturday on the test launch of what was believed to be an intermediate-range Musudan-class missile were unexpectedly measured - and brief - compared to earlier bluster about another US adversary, Iran, since he took office on Jan 20. "I just want everybody to understand, and fully know, that the United States of America is behind Japan, our great ally, 100 percent," Trump told reporters in Palm Beach, Florida, speaking in a solemn tone alongside visiting Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

The US president did not mention North Korea or signal any retaliatory plans for what was widely seen as an early effort to test the new administration. By contrast, Trump tweeted "It won't happen!" in January after North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said the North was close to testing an intercontinental ballistic missile. White House adviser Stephen Miller insisted on ABC's "This Week" that Trump's one-sentence statement was an "important show of solidarity" with Japan. He told "Fox News Sunday" the administration was going to bolster its allies in the region against the "increasing hostility" of North Korea.

While no one can rule out that Trump might still take to Twitter with harsh rhetoric as he often does, some analysts said his relatively subdued initial statement could show that aides have convinced him not to be baited by Pyongyang into issuing threats that would be hard to carry out, especially while his North Korea strategy is still being formulated.

Vowing more assertive approach

Trump's aides have said that they will take a more assertive approach than the Obama policy dubbed "strategic patience," which involved gradually scaling up sanctions and diplomatic pressure and essentially waiting out the North Korean leadership. But the new administration has been vague about how it would do this. The Trump administration had been expecting a North Korean "provocation" and will consider a full range of options in response, but they would be calibrated to show US resolve while avoiding escalation, the US official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The stakes would be higher, however, if nuclear-capable North Korea makes good on its threat to test an ICBM of a kind that could someday hit the United States, analysts said. Trump and his aides are likely to weigh new US sanctions to tighten financial controls, an increase in naval and air assets and joint military exercises in and around the Korean peninsula and accelerated installation of new missile defense systems in South Korea, the official said.

Trump has also made clear that he believes China has not done enough to use its influence to help rein in Pyongyang's nuclear and ballistic programs. The US official told Reuters that Trump would now step up pressure on Beijing, but acknowledged that there were limits to how far China would go, especially in enforcing sanctions, because of its own interests in avoiding destabilization of North Korea.

It remains to be seen, however, whether the new administration might go a step beyond Obama's approach and focus on imposing "secondary sanctions" on firms and entities that help North Korea's weapons programs, many of which are in China. Also unclear is whether Trump's phone call last week with Chinese President Xi Jinping, in which the US president backed away from his threat to break from America's long-standing "one China" policy, would engender greater cooperation from Beijing on North Korea. — Reuters

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Duterte targets children in drug war

Before Rodrigo Duterte's bloody war on drugs had even begun, allies of the Philippines president were quietly preparing for a wider offensive. On June 30, as Duterte was sworn in, they introduced a bill into the Philippine Congress that could allow children as young as nine to be targeted in a crackdown that has since claimed more than 7,600 lives.

The bill proposes to lower the minimum age of criminal responsibility from 15 to 9 years old to prevent what it calls "the pampering of youthful offenders who commit crimes knowing they can get away with it". "You can ask any policeman or anyone connected with the law enforcement: We produce a generation of criminals," Duterte said in a speech in Manila on Dec 12. Young children, he said, were becoming drug runners, thieves and rapists, and must be "taught to understand responsibility".

The move to target children signals Duterte's determination to intensify his drug war, which faces outrage abroad and growing unease at home. The president's allies say his support in Congress will ensure the bill passes the House of Representatives by June. The House would approve the bill "within six months," said Fredenil Castro, who co-authored the legislation with the speaker of the House, Pantaleon Alvarez. It might face opposition in the Senate, but would prevail because of Duterte's allies there, added Castro.

National police chief Ronald Dela Rosa recently announced that he was suspending anti-narcotics operations, which have killed more than 2,500 people, while the force rids itself of corrupt cops. The announcement came after it emerged last month that drug squad officers had killed a South Korean businessman at national police headquarters.

The killing of drug suspects has continued, albeit at a slower pace, with most following the pattern of killings that police have blamed on vigilantes. Human rights monitors believe vigilantes have killed several thousand people and operate in league with the police - a charge the police deny. Duterte has signaled he intends to continue his drug war. In late January, he said the campaign would run until his presidency ends in 2022.

'In cahoots with drug users'

Lowering the age of criminality was justified, Castro told Reuters, because many children were "in cahoots with drug users, with drug pushers, and others who are related to the drug trade." He said he based his support for the bill on what he saw from his car and at churches - children begging and pickpocketing. "For me, there isn't any evidence more convincing than what I see in every day of my life," he said.

A controversial bill to restore the death penalty, another presidential priority, is also expected to pass the House of Representatives by mid-year, according to Duterte allies in Congress. Supporters of the bill to lower the age of criminality say holding young children liable will discourage drug traffickers from exploiting them. Opponents, including opposition lawmakers and human rights groups, are appalled at a move they say will harm children without evidence it will reduce crime.

There is also resistance inside Duterte's administration. A member of Duterte's cabinet who heads the Department of Social Welfare and Development opposes the move. And a branch of the police responsible for protecting women and children disputes the claim that children are heavily involved in the drug trade - a claim not supported by official data.

Opponents warn that lowering the age of criminality would further strain a juvenile justice system that is struggling to cope. At worst, they say, with a drug war raging nationwide, the bill could legitimize the killing of minors. "What will stop them from targeting children?" said Karina Teh, a local politician and child rights advocate in Manila. "They are using the war on drugs to criminalize children."

In the firing line

The drug-war death toll includes at least 29 minors who were either shot by unidentified gunmen or accidentally killed during police operations from July to November 2016, according to the Children's Legal Rights and Development Center (CLRDC) and the Network Against Killings in the Philippines, both Manila-based advocacy groups. Dela Rosa said the Philippine National Police "fully supports" the new bill. It is "true and supported by data" that minors are used by drug traffickers because they can't be held criminally liable, the police chief said in a submission to the House of Representatives.

Some police officers working on the streets agree with Dela Rosa. In Manila's slums, children as young as six act as lookouts for dealers, shouting "The enemy is coming!" when police approach, said Cecilio Tomas, an anti-narcotics officer in the city. By their early teens, some become delivery boys and then dealers and users, said Tomas. Salvador Panelo, Duterte's chief legal counsel, said the bill would protect children by stopping criminals from recruiting them. "They will not become targets simply because they will no longer be involved," he said.

Child rights experts say the legislation could put children in the firing line. They point to the deadly precedent set in the southern city of Davao, where Duterte pioneered his hardline tactics as mayor. The Coalition Against Summary Execution, a Davao-based rights watchdog, documented 1,424 vigilante-style killings in the city between 1998 and 2015. Of those victims, 132 were 17 or younger. For all but three years during that period, Duterte was either Davao's mayor or vice-mayor. He denied any involvement in the killings.

Contradictory evidence

Althea Barbon was one of the children killed in the current nationwide drug war. The four year old was fatally wounded in August when police in an anti-narcotics operation shot at her father, the two Manila-based advocacy groups said. Unidentified gunmen shot dead Ericka Fernandez, 17, in a Manila alley on October 26, police said. Her bloody Barbie doll was collected as evidence. And on December 28, three boys, aged 15 or 16, were killed in Manila by what police said were motorbike-riding gunmen.

If the bill passes, the Philippines won't be the only country where the age of criminality is low. In countries including England, Northern Ireland and Switzerland it is 10, according to the website of the Child Rights International Network, a research and advocacy group. In Scotland, children as young as eight can be held criminally responsible, but the government is in the process of raising the age limit to 12.

Critics of the Philippines' bill say lower age limits are largely found in countries where the legal systems, detention facilities and rehabilitation programs are more developed. Statistics from the police and the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA), the government's top anti-narcotics body, appear to contradict the Duterte camp's claim that there is a large number of young children deeply involved in the drug trade.

There were 24,000 minors among the 800,000 drug users and dealers who had registered with the authorities by November 30, according to police statistics. But less than two percent of those minors, or about 400 children, were delivering or selling drugs. Only 12 percent, or 2,815, were aged 15 or younger. Most of the 24,000 minors were listed as drug users. The number of minors involved in the drug trade is "just a small portion," said Noel Sandoval, deputy head of the Women and Children's Protection Center (WCPC), the police department that compiled the data.

The WCPC is not pushing to lower the minimum age of criminal responsibility, said Sandoval, but if the age is to be lowered, his department recommends a minimum age of 12, not 9. Between January 2011 and July 2016, 956 children aged six to 17 were "rescued nationwide from illegal drug activity," according to PDEA. They were mostly involved with marijuana and crystal methamphetamine, a highly addictive drug also known as shabu, and were handed over to the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). Of these, only 80 were under the age of 15. —Reuters

Thailand's new king shows his strength

From requiring constitutional changes to pushing for unity in the divided country and reshaping the royal household, Thailand's new king is putting an assertive stamp on his rule. King Maha Vajiralongkorn has made it clear to the generals running the country that he will not just sit in the background as a constitutional figurehead since taking the throne in December from a father treated by Thais as semi-divine.

That matters in Thailand, where relationships between monarchy, army and politicians have long determined the stability of Southeast Asia's second-biggest economy and America's oldest regional ally. Predictions by some pundits of a troubled royal transition have proven wrong - at least for now. "His majesty has proven himself to be very adept at managing the junta and the military," said academic Paul Chambers at the Institute of Southeast Asian Affairs in Chiang Mai.

None of more than two dozen serving or former officials, military officers, parliamentarians, diplomats or analysts that Reuters spoke to for this story saw any immediate threat to that balance of power. With jail facing anyone found guilty of insulting the monarchy under the nation's "lese majeste" laws, few Thais comment openly on royal matters. Asked for a response for this story, a palace official said it did not comment to the media. A government spokesman declined comment.

Relationship of obedience

King Vajiralongkorn started from a very different place to his father, King Bhumibol Adulyadej, who died on Oct 13. When the teenage Bhumibol took the throne in the late 1940s, the future of the monarchy itself looked in doubt. Building alliances, he quietly re-established the royal aura and authority - becoming ultimate arbiter during coups and spells of chaos as Thailand changed from rural backwater to middle-income country.

King Vajiralongkorn, 64, has spent years abroad, his private life complicated by three marriages, and he has yet to win the public adoration received by his father. But the king's background puts him on different terms with the generals: He went through military academies; he saw combat against insurgents in the 1970s; he can fly a fighter jet. In line with protocol, junta members prostrate themselves before the new king at audiences, as palace photos show. "The relationship is at least one of obedience," said Eugenie MÈrieau, a lecturer and researcher at Sciences Po in Paris.

Constitutional changes

The junta was quick to obey when the palace asked for constitutional changes - the first such request in decades. Changes relating to current royal powers were pushed through within days. So was the ability to make further changes to a new constitution that is in the works. Behind the palace walls, the royal household is being reshaped. Over 20 appointments and promotions have been made by the new king and published in the Royal Gazette.

This includes reshuffling senior members of the household, many of whom had held posts for decades under King Bhumibol, and promoting military officials with ties to the new king. The head of the influential Privy Council, 96-year-old Prem Tinsulanonda, remains in place, but half the other members are new. The six new appointments have increased representation of those with a background in the army's Wongthewan faction or King's Guard, where the king served.

Among other notable military promotions was Suthida Vajiralongkorn na Ayudhya within the King's Own Bodyguard. Often seen at the king's side, though not publicly designated as his consort, she became a general on the day he took the throne. Last week, the king appointed a new Buddhist supreme patriarch, ending more than a year of tussling over the position. Parliament restored the king's authority to do so after 25 years of having a council of monks make the decision. The new patriarch is from a fraternity closely tied to the monarchy rather than the one the religious council had first proposed.

Unity and reconciliation

The big question is what happens when there is a resumption of political competition, suspended after the last military coup in 2014. The king has stressed unity within the divided country, both in his New Year address and at a late night meeting with the country's leadership in January to push for more help for flood victims, Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha said. That meeting also coincided with the government's moves to set up a reconciliation committee ahead of elections expected next year.

The aim of the panel is to listen to different political factions, to establish some common ground between them and then come up with an agreement all would sign to ensure a peaceful transition to civilian-led democracy. One name above all polarizes Thais: Thaksin Shinawatra. The former "CEO prime minister" was a hero for poorer Thais loyal to his populist movement. Overthrown in 2006, he lives in Dubai to avoid a jail sentence for corruption. His sister, Yingluck Shinawatra, was prime minister from 2011 until just before the 2014 coup.

Thaksin, a self-made billionaire, is reviled by a Bangkok-based, royalist and pro-army elite. Conservative politicians voice fears in private of any unity deal that would allow Thaksin to return. Both Shinawatras have been ahead of many other Thai politicians in adopting gold framed pictures of King Vajiralongkorn as the banners on their Twitter feeds. Nobody from their political camp would comment about the monarchy. — Reuters

Heaslip signs new Irish deal for 2019 World Cup

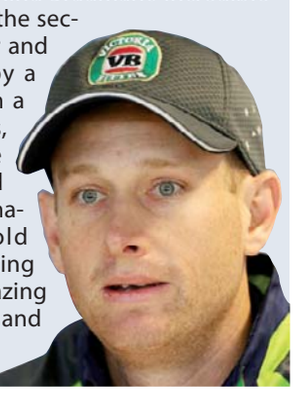
LONDON: Ireland No 8 Jamie Heaslip has signed a new Irish Rugby Football Union contract that will see him continue to play his club rugby in Ireland until the end of the 2019 World Cup in Japan. The back-row forward will remain with Dublin-based Leinster during that period and yesterday's announcement was something of a coup for the IRFU given Heaslip could have been a target for a lucrative club contract overseas. The 33-year-old has scored 13 tries in 93 Tests since making his Ireland debut in 2006 and has also been on two tours with the British Irish Lions in a career where he has so far made 227 appearances for Leinster during the past 12 years. When regular Ireland captain Rory Best withdrew because of illness from last week's Six Nations international in Rome, it was Heaslip who led the side to a record 63-10 rout of Italy. "My aim when I started my professional rugby career was to leave the jersey either the blue of Leinster or the green of Ireland-in a better place than when I first put it on, and this new contract gives me the chance to continue to chase this dream," said Heaslip in an IRFU statement.—AFP

Galatasaray boss job on line after shock loss

ISTANBUL: The manager of Istanbul football giants Galatasaray Jan Olde Riekerink is facing the sack following a shock weekend league loss, press reports said yesterday. Galatasaray's top executives held an emergency meeting about the Dutchman's future following the 1-2 home defeat to lowly Kayserispor on Sunday, the Anadolu news agency and Hurriyet dailies said. A formal board meeting to be held later yesterday will make the final decision concerning Riekerink, who has only been at the club for a year, according to the reports. The defeat left Galatasaray in third place in the Super Lig behind leaders Besiktas and surprise package Basaksehir. Only victory in the league will satisfy Galatasaray's management, which has assembled a team packed with stars including Germany's Lukas Podolski and Wesley Sneijder of the Netherlands. Riekerink told the Fatataik daily that he had not been informed of the discussions about his future. "It would be normal if the decision taken at that meeting was discussed with me first," he said. —AFP

Australia's Voges ends test career

SYDNEY: Australia's Adam Voges has retired from international cricket, signing off with a test batting average second only to the great Don Bradman. Voges became the oldest player to score a century on his test debut when he made an unbeaten 130 against West Indies two years ago, aged 35. The right-handed batsman scored 1,485 runs at an average of 61.87, ranking him second on the all time list behind Bradman's incredible 99.94. Voges lost his place in the test team after the second of two defeats to South Africa in November and was treated for concussion after being hit by a bouncer when batting for Western Australia in a Sheffield Shield match the same month. Voges, 37, will lead the Prime Minister's XI against the touring Sri Lankan team in Canberra today and has said it will be his last match against an international side. "This will be it for me," Voges told reporters. "I'm certainly looking forward to getting out there and playing this game. I've had an amazing couple of years with Australia with the Test team and I've loved every minute of it. — Reuters



OLYMPICS

Bach wants only winners in Games host battle

LAUSANNE: Olympic leader Thomas Bach does not like losers and that is why Paris and Los Angeles could this year both win the right to host the world's biggest and most complicated sporting event. The French and US mega cities are currently locked in battle to stage the 2024 Olympics, along with outsider Budapest.

There is mounting speculation however that an International Olympic Committee meeting in September could give one of the frontrunners the 2024 Games and at the same time award 2028 to the other. The double gold medal event could take some twiddling of the Olympic machinery, but Bach said in December: "We have to take into consideration that the procedure as it is now produces too many losers." The International Olympic Committee is worried that if Paris or Los Angeles miss out on 2024, they may give up on hosting at all. And in times of economic uncertainty, the IOC cannot afford to lose such quality candidates. "You can be happy about a strong field in quantity for one day but you start to regret it the next day because then the procedure starts to produce losers and it is not the purpose of an Olympic candidature procedure to produce losers," Bach said to support his call for change.

The IOC is refusing to say whether reform will be ready for the September 13 vote in Lima. "We are staying with the 2024 process, we are very clear about that," Christophe Dubi, the IOC executive director for the Olympics, told AFP. Paris and Los Angeles have both said they are only interested in 2024. However Casey Wasserman, chairman of the Los Angeles 2024 bid committee, said last month that the idea of awarding two Games at the same time was "an interesting concept".

Sources close to the IOC says a double vote has many advantages.

WIN-WIN GOLD

If Paris loses again after being beaten for 1992 (by Barcelona), 2008 (Beijing) and 2012 (London) it would almost certainly withdraw humiliated and not take part again.

Los Angeles, with its heavyweight US media backers, would almost certainly take the same view.

"I know that the idea of a double vote is on the table," one source close to the IOC told AFP.

"There is a clear procedure for 2024, that for 2028 is not yet set," added the source, speaking on condition of anonymity because of the confidentiality of discussions.

"The candidates will have to show that they agree this double campaign. If they say no it will be difficult to impose it on them." If Paris, Los Angeles and Budapest agree to the vote change then the IOC will need the back of the Association of National Olympic Committees (ANOC) and to talk to countries that have expressed an interest in 2028. Madrid has already said it could be a candidate.

An IOC executive meeting in July could formally propose the move. Then the Olympic charter will also need to be changed, another source close to the Olympic movement said.

"It's quite clever of Bach," said Patrick Nally, a sports marketing specialist who was one of the creators of the IOC's The Olympic Partner (TOP) sponsorship programme.

"Bach is aware the IOC is facing difficulties," he added. "One of the biggest concerns is what happens if LA doesn't win." The IOC cannot afford to alienate the United States which was "the saviour of the Olympic movement" when it risked financial troubles in the 1980s. Los Angeles held a landmark Games in 1984, NBC stepped in with a major television deal and Coca Cola was a huge sponsor.

Nally said "Paris is a great city, Paris lost a few times before, but it s not commercially so important for the structure of IOC." Bach "cannot afford to risk upsetting and destroying the one market IOC is totally dependent on."

Nally said the IOC president has support among key Olympic members for a double vote. "It is a very practical suggestion; let's make everybody winners and the Olympic movement a winner." — AFP

Thomas Bach

ST MORITZ: Gold medalists France's team members, center, celebrate on the podium next to second placed Slovakia's team, left, and third placed Sweden's team during the flower ceremony after after the final of the team event at the 2017 FIS Alpine Skiing World Championships in St Moritz, Switzerland, yesterday. — AP

ALPINE SKIING

France edge Slovakia for world team gold

ST MORITZ: France edged Slovakia by just eight-hundredths of a second to win the team event at the World Ski Championships yesterday.

The final finished level at 2-2 after Alexis Pinturault and Mathieu Faivre won their races for the French, and Veronika Velez Zuzulova and Petra Vlhova for the Slovaks. The tie breaking time went in favour of France, handing them a first medal of the championships.

"Every team was very strong, every heat a tooth-and-nail battle," said Pinturault, for whom gold will go some way to make up for his disappointment at finishing 10th in Monday's combined.

Tessa Worley, the only member of the France team who also won team gold at the Garmisch worlds in 2011, added: "We didn't expect it but we were ready to fight really hard until the end.

"It was a long shot, for sure. There are so many runs to do. "It was really, really tight! We're really happy we've won gold and we'll celebrate it with the whole team."

Adeline Baud Mugnier, who notched up a key victory over Swedish heavyweight Frida Hansdotter in the semi-final, made up the French quartet and was left basking after its success.

"It's my first podium ever, it's an amazing emotion," she beamed. Sweden took bronze after posting a 3-1 victory over a Switzerland team featuring two individual gold medal winners in Wendy Holdener and Luca Aerni.

AUSTRIA HOPES UP IN SMOKE

Double defending champions Austria saw their hopes of a third successive gold go up in smoke with a 4-1 defeat by Sweden in the quarter-finals. Marcel Hirscher, chasing a sixth consecutive overall World Cup title, had a shocker of an afternoon, losing both his races. First he was subject of a massive upset when edged by Dries van den Broecke in Austria's 3-1 opening win over Belgium, before losing to Sweden's Andre Myhrer. "If you train well, everything is possible!" said the Austria-based 21-year-old Belgian. First introduced into the world champs in 2005, the team event will next year be included on the programme of the 2018 Winter Olympic Games in Pyeongchang, South Korea.

The telegenic, mixed-sex event has caught the public's imagination, with skiers racing down a slalom slope side-by-side to offer a different take on the very individualistic sport of alpine skiing.

Slovakia's Velez Zuzulova summed up what the team event meant for racers. "I really enjoyed skiing with my younger teammates, especially with Petra," she said in reference to her compatriot Vlhova.

"We fight all winter: we're from the same country but not the same team!

Today we were together going for the same goal." Norway's Leif Kristin Haugen added: "I love this event. I think it's good for spectators too and I know people back home like it."

Pinturault had the final word, saying the gold "was a medal which will have more and more importance because it's an event that is growing and will be in the Olympics next year. The level was sensational". —AFP

CYCLING

Lance Armstrong loses bid to halt $100 million lawsuit

AUSTIN: A federal judge on Monday refused to block the government's $100 million lawsuit against Lance Armstrong, putting the former cyclist on course for trial in a 2010 case stemming from his performance-enhancing drug use.

The lawsuit was filed by Armstrong's former US Postal Service teammate Floyd Landis. The federal government joined in 2013 after Armstrong publicly admitted he cheated to win the Tour de France seven times from 1999-2005. Armstrong was stripped of those titles and banned from competition.

Armstrong has also taken huge hits financially, losing all his major sponsors and being forced to pay more than $10 million in damages and settlements in a series of lawsuits . The Landis lawsuit would be the biggest by far, and the ruling from US District Judge Christopher Cooper in Washington was a major setback for Armstrong with a trial most likely in the fall.

Landis, himself a former doping cheat who was stripped of his 2006 Tour de France title, sued Armstrong under the federal False Claims Act, alleging Armstrong and his team committed fraud against the government when they cheated while riding under the Postal Service banner. According to court records, the contract paid the team, which was operated by Tailwind Sports Corp., about $32 million from 2000 to 2004. Armstrong got nearly $13.5 million.

The law allows Landis and the government to sue to get that money back and for "treble" damages, or triple the amount, and Armstrong could be forced to pay all of it. Landis stands to receive up to 25 percent of any damages awarded.

Armstrong claims he and the team don't owe the Postal Service anything because the agency made far more off the sponsorship than it paid. Armstrong's lawyers have introduced internal studies for the agency that calculated benefits in media exposure topping $100 million. The government has countered that the negative fallout from the doping scandal tainted the agency because of its association with Armstrong.

PERSUASIVE CASE

Cooper's ruling said Armstrong makes a "persuasive case," but that any decision on damages should be left to a jury.

"Giving Armstrong 'credit' for the benefits he delivered while using (performance-enhancing drugs) could be viewed as an unjust reward for having successfully concealed his doping for so long," Cooper wrote. "(But) disregarding any benefits USPS received from the sponsorship could bestow the government with an undeserved windfall. The same could be said of Landis, whose role in this entire affair some would view as less than pure."

Landis attorney Paul D. Scott said he was delighted" to see the case move toward trial.

"The finish line for Mr. Armstrong ... is fast approaching," Scott said. Armstrong attorney Elliot Peters said the court's decision laid out Armstrong's case, even as it let the lawsuit proceed.

"There is no actual evidence of any quantifiable financial harm," to the Postal Service, Peters said. "So the government may now proceed to a trial that, as a practical matter, it cannot win."

Armstrong had been one of the most popular sports figures on the planet before his cheating confession. His personal story of recovering from testicular cancer that had spread to his brain, while forcefully denying persistent rumors of doping, had built his Lance Armstrong Foundation cancer charity into a $500 million global brand and turned him into a celebrity.

The foundation, which removed him from its board and renamed itself Livestrong, has struggled in the aftermath as donations and revenue plummeted.

Armstrong's team was already under the Postal Service sponsorship when he won his first Tour de France in 1999. The media frenzy that followed pushed the agency to sign the team for another five years.

Armstrong's cheating was finally uncovered in 2012 when the US Anti-Doping Agency, armed with sworn testimony from Landis and other former teammates, moved to strip Armstrong of his titles. — AP

Lance Armstrong

Soggy Napier ground stripped of South Africa one-dayer

WELLINGTON: New Zealand has moved the fourth one-day international against South Africa away from Napier's McLean Park after an investigation into an abandoned match against Australia found problems with drainage and irrigation at the venue.

New Zealand's cricket board was embarrassed two weeks ago when a one-dayer between the hosts and Australia was called off without a single ball bowled after the outfield failed to drain enough despite dry conditions that following morning rain.

An urgent investigation into the ground had found there was "an unacceptable risk of a repeat drainage failure" and the March 1 match had been switched to Hamilton's Seddon Park, New Zealand Cricket (NZC) said in a statement on Tuesday.

"An investigation into the circumstances surrounding the recently abandoned ODI against Australia at McLean Park has highlighted a need for urgent remedial work on the venue's turf, drainage, and irrigation system," NZC said. NZC said, due to drought conditions, the ground had been given "significant watering" before the match against Australia and the match-day rain had resulted in a "worst-case scenario".

McLean Park, which was dropped from the test roster five years ago, has long been renowned for its poor drainage.

In 2013, a one-day international against West Indies was called off in bright sunshine due to a water-logged outfield, which triggered a review and repairs to drainage ahead of the 2015 World Cup.

NZC added that the city council would now spend NZ$900,000 ($646,000) on a complete replacement of the playing surface, drainage and irrigation system in the latest upgrade.

"By doing this, we can look forward with confidence to McLean Park hosting next summer's ODIs between the Black Caps and England, and the Black Caps and Pakistan," NZC chief operating office Anthony Crummy said.

"This has been a difficult time for those involved with staging cricket at McLean Park and, not least, the cricket-loving public within the Hawke's Bay."

The five-match series against South Africa starts at Seddon Park on Sunday, before heading to Christchurch, Wellington, back to Hamilton and finally Auckland.

South Africa will also play a one-off Twenty20 international in Auckland on Friday and a three-match test series after the ODIs. —Reuters

CRICKET

Mumbai: Australia's Test cricket captain Steven Smith (L) and head coach Darren Lehmann listen to a question during a press conference in Mumbai yesterday. Australia will play a four-match Test series against India, with the first Test scheduled to start in Pune from February 23.— AFP

Sledging? Go for it, says Australia's Smith

MUMBAI: Australian captain Steve Smith raised the temperature yesterday ahead of the first Test against India, calling on his players to "go for it" with the verbal volleys and on-field aggression. India-Australia series are notoriously feisty affairs-the 2008 contest Down Under was almost called off following the infamous "Monkeygate" incident as animosity between the old foes threatened to boil over. There was then further bad blood during India's Test and one-day series in Australia prior to the 2015 World Cup when heated on-field exchanges led to several players being penalised.

But the day after his team landed, Smith urged his players to do whatever it takes for Australia to win their first Test match in India since 2004 when the sides clash on February 23 in Pune.

"I think each of our individuals play the way they play and if they want to get into a battle verbally then, if that gets the best out of them, go for it," he told reporters in Mumbai.

"It's all about us making sure that as individuals we're in the right mindset to go out and succeed and if guys want to get in those kind of battles then go for it.

"But in the end it's about us playing on skill and making sure that our skills are in the best place for us to succeed in these conditions," added the 27-year-old.

Relations between the old foes neared breaking point nine years ago when Indian spinner Harbhajan Singh was suspended for three matches for allegedly calling Australian all-rounder Andrew Symonds a "monkey" during the New Year's Test in Sydney.

The ban was overturned when India threatened to quit the tour, claiming Singh had been wrongly accused.

INDIA UNCHANGED

The hostility between the sides extended into India's 2014-15 tour of Australia which saw India's Virat Kohli, Ishant Sharma and Shikhar Dhawan, and the hosts' Mitchell Starc, charged with breaching the International Cricket Council's Code of Conduct.

Australia opener David Warner, who had heated on-field exchanges with India batsman Rohit Sharma with the Australian telling him to "speak English" was reported in both the Test and one-day series.

The Australians, who are coming in off a convincing Test series win against Pakistan, have not won a Test match on Indian soil in nearly 13 years but Smith urged his players to go out and achieve a career-defining victory. "I think all of the guys are really excited about what's to come in the next six weeks. It's a great challenge to play here in India. "We know that if we can pull something off and win a series here we'll look back in 10-20 years and it will be some of the best time of our lives," he said. One of the key duels of the series will be between Smith and Indian skipper Kohli who is in the form of his life after scoring four double centuries since July.

Kohli is second only to Smith in the Test batting rankings and the Australian captain said he had the utmost respect for his counterpart. "We're trying to form a game plan but I'm not going to tell you what it is," he said. "He's obviously a world class player. He's been batting extremely well. He's scored four double centuries in his last four series so he's obviously a big player for India along with a lot of their other batters." India, on a high after defeating Bangladesh this week to go 20 Test matches undefeated at home, on Tuesday named an unchanged squad for the first two Australia Tests from the one that beat their neighbours by 208 runs in Hyderabad.

Bangalore, Ranchi and Dharamsala will host the other matches in the four-Test series in March. India squad: Virat Kohli (captain), Murali Vijay, Lokesh Rahul, Cheteshwar Pujara, Ajinkya Rahane, Wriddhiman Saha, Ravichandran Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja, Ishant Sharma, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Umesh Yadav, Karun Nair, Jayant Yadav, Kuldeep Yadav, Abhinav Mukund, Hardik Pandya. —AFP

The team is made up of Indian and Pakistani expats, who share a strong bond.—Photos by Finn McHugh

Members of the Kuwait Swedish Cricket Club watch their teammates during the first innings.

Cricket flourishes in Kuwaiti desert

By Finn McHugh

KUWAIT: Despite its name, the Kuwait Swedish Cricket Club is not made up of eleven sunscreen-covered Svens and Bjorns, protecting their fair skin from the Gulf sun. Swedes don't play cricket.

The team's captain, Ali Busheri, laughs at the thought as he speeds through traffic. The club's unique name comes from its sponsor, the Kuwait Swedish Cleaning Services Company, he explains.

In fact, the situation could hardly be less Scandinavian: A team of Indian and Pakistani expats playing a Commonwealth sport in the Arab desert.

Ali, an Indian who has lived in Kuwait his whole life, has played for the Swedes for the past 18 years. "Most [of the players] come up to the veterans' leagues when age hits and we can't keep up with the younger ones," he explains. "Some of the guys have been playing together for fifteen years. We might be getting older, but we've stuck together as a team."

Next to him, Neville D'Souza nods in agreement. As the warm-up begins, he is rugged-up in a beanie to protect himself from the desert chill. He is hardly unique in this respect; the rest of the team is wearing jackets and jumpers, shivering as they wait for a practice catch. The hard ball might be stinging their palms, but this is nothing; last week was much colder, Neville says. They are used to braving harsh conditions, Ali remembering games in the summer which began at around 4am, the only way to avoid temperatures which climb into the mid-50s. Today is a big match, the semi-final. Their opponents, Shaheen, beat them in the regular season but there is an air of confidence that a good performance will see them through to the final. The championship match will be played in Doha on a turf pitch and grass outfield, quite the contrast to today's setting: a hard, arid desert broken only by a concrete pitch.

RIVALRY

There's something oddly fitting about a team named after a third country hoping to bridge a political divide. Their kit bears the Pakistani and Indian crest on its sleeves, the rivalry between the two countries non-existent in the Kuwaiti desert. Instead, it's a brotherly bond than transcends anything else. "That's the beauty of playing here," says Munawar, a right-arm spinner. "India and Pakistan have always had diplomatic problems, but here we're all together."

Zahir Mahmood, from Pakistan, agrees. "Ali's my brother," he says. "We've been playing together for fifteen years ... It's never a problem with the people, it's all created by the politicians." This unity is never more evident than during the lunch-break, the team huddled together against the freezing wind, most clutching a cup of sweet tea. A bag of parathas - a flatbread found in both countries - is passed around alongside a tin of mint yogurt and a semolina cake. The teams are generous, chatting happily in Urdu before switching to English. "Please, you're our guest. Eat more." Having finished their meal, the Swedes go out to defend 166 in 20 overs, a total Neville and Ali agree is slightly too small on this wicket. Quite what distinguishes this wicket from the six nearby, each outfield hard as rock with a coat of dust, is unclear.

As his teammates walk out, Zahir takes a seat in the front of his Toyota. For him, the weekend game is a ritual in a country that does not provide "much entertainment for the expats." He has been playing cricket since 1982, and despite not being required for the semi-final, came down to enjoy the company of his teammates wearing his full kit. "I knew I wasn't playing today, Ali told me. My body may not be made for cricket anymore," he laughs, patting his belly. "But it's a chance to get out, see my friends and joke around."

"Cricket is in my blood," he adds simply.

If anyone can make that claim, it's Zahir. His brother, Azhar, played 21 Tests for Pakistan and is now a bowling coach for the national team. Zahir would love to open a cricket academy in Australia, but works in Kuwait to provide for his parents. He has seen the growth of the sport in Kuwait over the years, but concedes "only outsiders play here." You might be able to find pick-up games in every nook and cranny across Kuwait City, there might be 250 clubs here, but it's still a sport for expats. The locals prefer soccer, with European leagues televised across the country.

DANGERMAN

Zahir is erudite and expansive, conversation drifting at will between Pakistani politics, the Kashmir conflict, the correct technique for a cover-drive, the difficulties of child rearing, a blow-by-blow-account of Pakistan's World Cup semi-final victory in 1993, and back to politics. He knows what he is talking about, adding a gentle touch on the knee for emphasis, but rarely takes his eyes off the on-field proceedings as he speaks. Neville strikes in the first over, Shaheen's opener - a dangerman, apparently - out to a loose shot. "They're not playing cricket. I am 100% sure we will win this match," Zahir says in his succinct, assured way. It's a claim he tempers with every boundary his opponents strike, but reiterates with total conviction at the fall of each wicket. On the field, Neville continues to rip through Shaheen's top-order, but once he's out of the attack, the batsmen steady the ship and score with ease. In the warmth of the car, Zahir's cricket brain is simmering away, cooking up another tactical plot. "Ali, brother," he says, winding the window down as his captain jogs past to retrieve the ball. "Time for a spinner." He nods approvingly as his plan bears fruit next over. "See? With the fast bowlers they use the pace, but now they're -"

The sentence ends abruptly as he slams his car-horn, adding a flourish to the team's on-field appeal. "Out! Out!" he yells, his head of out the window. Zahir may not be playing, but he'll do whatever he can to get his teammates over the line. They need it, too. The game comes down, implausibly, to the final ball. Shaheen have a wicket in hand and need two runs to win. One run would tie the match, sending it to a super-over. Clipping the ball through the leg-side, the batsmen are comfortably through for the first but, in the confusion over a second, both end up at the bowler's end. It's the simplest of chances, but somehow an errant throw allows them to scamper through for the win.

For the Swedish Cricket Club, it's a bitter end; Shaheen has won by the narrowest possible margin. Amidst the normal teammate bickering that follows such a tight loss, Ali is the calm head. "Mistakes are part of the game," he tells his dejected teammates. "You win some, you lose some." In the car home, he soothes the still-despondent Neville. "It was their destiny to win today."

An outfielder for the Kuwait Swedish Cricket Club watches from the boundary.

Five sporting fairytales with an unhappy sequel

LONDON: Premier League champions Leicester's shambolic defence of their title leaves them in real danger of relegation-they would not be the first to have seen a fairytale sporting success quickly decline into a nightmare.

Here AFP Sports looks at five other examples:

BOXING - BUSTER DOUGLAS

James 'Buster' Douglas tamed the fearsome 'Iron' Mike Tyson in Tokyo in 1990, the 42/1 outsider inflicting his first defeat and becoming undisputed heavyweight world champion. Douglas-whose preparation had been upset by the loss of his mother-was unable to summon up that same intensity nearly a year later as his first defence ended in defeat to Evander Holyfield, who knocked him out in the third round. The only intensity he came up with was to balloon in size till he came close to dying. That sparked him out of his lassitude but despite winning several bouts on returning to the ring there was never a likelihood he would regain the golden touch that for just one memorable night in Japan had earned him his place in the history books.

CRICKET - ENGLAND TEAM

In a bizarre piece of scheduling there were two Ashes series set for 2013.

England generally outplayed Australia in the series they hosted winning 3-0 and came close to a first ever 4-0 success. That Aussie side were labelled the worst to have toured England. Months later England were to return shellshocked as the revitalised Aussies-not far removed from the same group of players humiliated in England-had turned things round in remarkable fashion and whitewashed them 5-0 Down Under in a series that stretched into 2014. Until the recent 4-0 series loss to India it was probably the lowest point of England's fortunes under skipper Alastair Cook.

GOLF - IAN BAKER-FINCH

Debonair Australian golfer looked to be on the trajectory to greater things when he captured the 1991 British Open aged 31. However, it was to prove to be the peak as very rapidly he descended into the equivalent of Dantes Inferno in terms of his game and form. He won a couple of times on the less competitive Australia tour but in the cauldron of the PGA Tour and the Majors he played without any confidence at all. He reached his nadir in the 1997 British Open shooting an opening 92 and in despair in the locker room he cried and then announced tournament golf was over for him. "I felt like I was walking naked, like the grass was taller than me," Baker-Finch told golftoday.uk. "I tried to walk with my head high. It was really hard."

RACING - NORTON'S COIN

Fairytale win in the 1990 Cheltenham Gold Cup the 'blue riband' of steeplechasing for the unglamorous 100/1 shot, trained by Welsh dairy farmer Sirrell Griffiths, whose stable ran to just two horses and which clearly impressed avid racing fan the Queen Mother, who presented the trophy. "She said to me 'I think it's marvellous to think that you've only got two horses and you can win a race like this," recalled Griffiths in 2015. Norton's Coin won just once in 18 more starts, not even riding legend Lester Piggott could conjure some magic out of him when he ran over the flat at Royal Ascot.

FOOTBALL - NUREMBERG

Nuremberg made sporting headlines in 1968 when they captured the Bundesliga title under coach Max Merkel. However, Merkel unlike Claudio Ranieri with his Leicester squad didn't retain faith in them and sold many of the title winners — including leading scorer Franz Brungs-whilst bringing in 11 fresh faces. However, it rebounded on him catastrophically as they struggled from the start and whilst they were far from certainties to go down he was sent packing with several games remaining-internal unrest was suspected to be the final straw. His departure did not stop the trot and they were relegated at the end of the season. — AFP

FIA meets in Lebanon

JOUNIEH: Beirut will host in the 16th & 17th Feb 2017 FIA - MENA clubs and federations meeting. The meeting will be hosted by ATCL - Lebanon. Jean Todt FIA president & Nasser Al Attiyah - FIA Vice President, who arrived in Lebanon yesterday evening from Geneve after attending FIM first meeting. It's assured that most of the presidents

Nasser Al Attiyah

of FIA- MENA federations and clubs will attend the meeting. The meeting will discuss many important issues after the third meeting which was held in Algeria last March 2016. About the agenda of the meeting, Nasser Al Attiyah confirmed that the agenda of this meeting will discuss many important issues, as MENA region is considered exceptional due to the hard regional circumstances that surround the region. No doubt that motorsport is directly affected by such circumstances especially the organizational aspect and logistic one.

TARGET

Al Attiyah added that the meeting will try to find realistic solutions in order to survive the motorsport in the region, which is considered our main target. We will do our best to promote the motorsport according to a well studied approach.

Al Attiyah also said that the issue of T1-T2-T3 cars participation into the Middle East Championship for rallies will be discussed after re-naming this class to MERC 4, provided that it passes through a legal channel between the two championships. Each class results will be counted separately. We will discuss also many files related to motorsport in MENA, Karting being the most prominent one, Al Attiyah concluded.

COLUMBUS: New York Rangers' Nick Holden, right, pushes Columbus Blue Jackets' Matt Calvert to the ice during the second period of an NHL hockey game Monday,in Columbus, Ohio. — AP

TENNIS

Jankovic wins in wet and windy Qatar Open

DOHA: Former world number one Jelena Jankovic was the most notable winner on a day affected by rain and thunderstorms at the Qatar Open on Monday.

The Serb, a former US Open finalist, beat Bulgaria's Tsevtana Pironkova 6-1, 6-7 (6/8), 6-4 in a first round qualifier lasting two-and-a-half hours. It is the first time Jankovic has played in qualifiers since 2004.

It was also her seventh straight victory against Pironkova. There were also victories for Americans Christina McHale and Madison Brengle to progress to the main draw. And later on in the day, in a rain-affected match Australian Samantha Stosur, the 2011 US Open winner, won through to the second round beating Latvia's Anastasija Sevastova 7-5, 6-4.

But overall it was a day dominated by the bad weather, with several interruptions halting play. And with further rain and thunderstorms forecast for the week ahead in Doha, it could prove a headache for tournament organisers. Already the top seeds, including, Angelique Kerber and Karolina Pliskova, will not play until today at the earliest, three days into a six-day tournament.

Qatar-infamous for its hot weather which has seen the 2022 football World Cup host push the tournament back to November/December that year-has been suffering relatively poor weather for the past 10 days or so. Earlier this month the desert state recorded its lowest ever temperature, just 1.5 degrees Celsius.

TONI AND RAFA NADAL TO SPLIT

Meanwhile, Rafael Nadal's career-long coaching relationship with his uncle Toni Nadal will end this year, Toni Nadal confirmed to AFP yesterday.

"The decision has been mine," said Toni Nadal, whilst insisting he will remain in his role for the rest of the 2017 season.

Toni Nadal, 55, cited the demands of travelling on tour as the reason for the change and will oversee coaching at Rafael's tennis academy on his home island of Mallorca. "I understand that my role will be in the academy," he added. "At my age, I have travelled around the world and for a while when I have to travel it is hard.

"I have three children. The academy has given me a reason to enjoy being here (in Mallorca.)" Former world number one Carlos Moya will take over as Nadal's main coach for 2018 having joined his team back in December.

Nadal reached the Australian Open final in January, losing an epic five-set match to old rival Roger Federer, in his first Grand Slam since brining Moya on board alongside long-time coaches Toni and Francisco Roig. "What has been important to me all my life is that things go well for Rafa," continued Toni Nadal.

"Things have gone sufficiently well at the start of the year, the incorporation of Carlos has been a great success.

"I understand that Rafael is well looked after with Francisco and Carlos." The Nadals have enjoyed one of the longest and most successful coaching relationships in the history of tennis.

Nadal has won 14 Grand Slams under the tutelage of his uncle, tying Pete Sampras for the second most in history behind Federer's 18. —AFP

RIO DE JANEIRO: This file photo taken on August 2, 2016 shows Rafael Nadal of Spain (L) listening to his coach and uncle, Toni Nadal during a practice session at the Olympic Tennis Center in Rio de Janeiro ahead of the Rio 2016 Olympic Games. Rafael Nadal's career-long coaching relationship with his uncle Toni Nadal will end this year. — AFP

NHL

Smith stops 36 shots, Coyotes beat Flames

CALGARY: Christian Dvorak has clearly shaken off the rookie jitters. Dvorak had two goals and an assist and Mike Smith made 36 saves for his 32nd career shutout as the surging Arizona Coyotes beat the Calgary Flames 5-0 on Monday night. Dvorak's third multi-point effort in the last five games gave the rookie seven points (five goals and two assists) over that span. He had just 13 points in the first 45 games. "The first 20 or 30 games, he's just happy to be in the league," Arizona coach Dave Tippett said. "He recognizes that he's capable of playing here and he's doing things right and he's not in awe of people anymore. He just goes out there and plays and he's a really good player."

Dvorak, who was linemates with Toronto's Mitch Marner and Calgary's Matthew Tkachuk last season on the Ontario Hockey League's London Knights, agreed.

"I'm definitely feeling more comfortable and more confident as the season has gone on," Dvorak said. "Gelling with my linemates, forming some chemistry and we've been playing pretty well as of late."

Martin Hanzal, Ryan White and Justin Martinook also scored for the Coyotes, who have points in four straight (3-0-1) and are 6-2-1 in their last nine.

Chad Johnson had 19 saves through two periods and was replaced by Brian Elliott to start the third with the Flames trailing 4-0. Elliott stopped eight of the nine shots he faced. Dvorak's eighth goal of the season came 2:38 into the second period as he whipped a shot over Johnson's glove for the first of three Arizona goals in the second period. That was followed by a great effort from Martinook, who corralled a dump-in off the corner boards and after muscling his way past defenseman Dennis Wideman, zipped a shot under the cross bar to make it 3-0 at 4:04.

Dvorak then showcased his passing ability on an odd-man rush. Carrying the puck down the wing, he found Luke Schenn in the high slot coming late and as the defenseman cut to the net, he had it glance in off White's skate with 8:52 left in the middle period.

"If the shot is there, I'll shoot it. If the pass is there, I'll pass it. I'm just trying to make some plays out there while making sure I'm responsible defensively as well," said Dvorak, a second-round pick in 2014.

Starting his ninth consecutive game, Smith was busiest in the first period when the Coyotes were outshot 19-9 yet emerged with a 1-0 lead on a goal by Hanzal. "We were able to weather that storm and get out of that first period ahead," Tippett said. "We hadn't played our best hockey yet so it was definitely nice to come back in the second, get our feet moving, make some plays." Calgary was playing for the first time since a 3-2 win at Pittsburgh last Tuesday night. The Flames had won four of five going into their break.

RANGERS 3, BLUE JACKETS 2

Jimmy Vesey scored the go-ahead goal in the third period, and Antti Raanta stopped 30 shots as the New York Rangers beat the Columbus Blue Jackets 3-2 on Monday night.

Dan Girardi and Kevin Hayes also scored for the Rangers, who won their sixth straight game and moved into a three-way tie for second place with Columbus and Pittsburgh in the tough Metropolitan Division.

Raanta made two big saves in the final 23 seconds after the Blue Jackets pulled the goalie for a sixth skater and were swarming.

Brandon Dubinsky and Nick Foloigno scored for Columbus, and Sergei Bobrovsky finished with 20 saves. Hayes put the Rangers up 2-1 after stripping the puck from David Savard and on a breakaway 4:49 into the third period.

Foligno knotted the score again with 8:07 left in regulation. Vesey then got the game-winner less than two minutes later with a wrister from the bottom of the right circle.

Columbus got on the board 8:12 into the game, just as New York's Pavel Buchnevich was leaving the penalty box. Brandon Saad caught up with a rebound off the back board and shoveled it out to Dubinsky, who beat Raanta from 14 feet out. The Rangers tied it with a short-handed goal from Dan Girardi 12 seconds into the second period. Girardi fired a wrist shot past Bobrovsky from the top of the right circle. — Agencies

NHL results/standings

Arizona 5, Calgary 0; NY Rangers 3, Columbus 2.

	W	L	OTL	GF	GA	PTS
Western Conference						
Central Division						
Minnesota	37	12	6	187	129	80
Chicago	35	17	5	166	147	75
St. Louis	29	22	5	161	165	63
Nashville	27	21	8	158	151	62
Dallas	22	25	10	158	182	54
Winnipeg	25	29	4	166	185	54
Colorado	15	36	2	107	181	32
Pacific Division						
San Jose	34	18	5	156	135	73
Anaheim	29	18	10	151	147	68
Edmonton	29	19	8	157	146	66
Los Angeles	28	23	4	138	136	60
Calgary	28	26	3	149	164	59
Vancouver	25	25	6	135	160	56
Arizona	19	28	7	129	169	45
Eastern Conference						
Atlantic Division						
Montreal	31	19	8	165	150	70
Ottawa	29	18	6	143	143	64
Boston	29	23	6	157	155	64
Toronto	25	18	11	165	161	61
Florida	24	20	10	134	153	58
Tampa Bay	25	24	7	154	160	57
Buffalo	23	23	10	138	159	56
Detroit	22	24	10	141	169	54
Metropolitan Division						
Washington	39	11	6	192	121	84
Pittsburgh	34	13	7	193	155	75
Columbus	35	15	5	177	136	75
NY Rangers	37	18	1	192	147	75
Philadelphia	27	22	7	147	168	61
NY Islanders	25	19	10	161	158	60
New Jersey	23	22	10	128	157	56
Carolina	24	22	7	140	156	55

Note: Overtime losses (OTL) are worth one point in the standings and are not included in the loss column (L)

BOXING

Boxer Wilder beats Povetkin in US trial over canceled fight

NEW YORK: Heavyweight boxing champion Deontay Wilder has won a fight with Russian boxer Alexander Povetkin - not in the ring, but in the courthouse - in a trial over a title bout that was called off after the Russian tested positive for a banned substance.

After less than an hour, a federal jury in Manhattan on Monday ruled in favor of Wilder in a civil trial, finding that Povetkin ingested meldonium after a World Anti-Doping Agency ban of the drug went into effect in January 2016.

That question had become key to dueling lawsuits the boxers had 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.

Lawyers for Wilder and promoter DiBella Entertainment Inc had argued that Povetkin's positive urine test came after three negative ones earlier in April, which meant that the Russian took the drug after passing the earlier Tests.

But lawyers for Povetkin and promoter Andrew Ryabinskiy's company, World of Boxing LLC, said he 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.

Judd Burstein, a lawyer for Wilder, said he was "extremely happy" with the verdict. Povetkin's lawyer, Kent Yalowitz, on Monday called the verdict an "outrageous miscarriage of justice" and indicated he would seek to have it thrown out.

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 Bermane Stiverne was called off after the Russian tested positive for a different banned substance, ostarine. — Reuters

SOCCER

Tudor reign at Galatasaray after Riekerink ousted

ISTANBUL: Istanbul giants Galatasaray are set to appoint former Croatian international Igor Tudor as new manager after firing Dutch manager Jan Olde Riekerink because of lacklustre results.

Galatasaray's top executives held an emergency meeting about the Dutchman's future following the 1-2 home defeat to lowly Kayserispor on Sunday, the Hurriyet daily and Dogan news agency said.

A formal board meeting later Tuesday confirmed the decision to fire Riekerink, who has only been at the club for a year, and appoint Tudor in his place, according to the reports. Tudor, who currently manages Karabukspor in Turkey, has agreed a 1.5 year deal with the Istanbul club, Dogan news agency said. The appointment is expected to be announced later in the day by Galatasaray, the reports said.

Fanatik daily said Galatasaray would pay Karabukspor a mere 150,000 euros ($160,000) in compensation.

But the reports have already prompted an angry reaction from Karabukspor chairman Ferudun Tankut, who accused the wealthy Istanbul side of stealing his coach. He said the club had discovered the news from the media and said it would protest to the Turkish football federation against the "injustice", he suggested the club was discriminated against as it was from provincial Anatolia rather than Istanbul.

"If Galatasaray has made such a move, then it's unethical," he said. A successful playing career saw Tudor, 38, notch up a decade worth of appearances as a defender for the Croatian national team and Juventus of Italy. He retired early with an ankle injury and then turned to management, first with his native Hajduk Split and then PAOK of Greece and Karabukspor who he joined in 2016.

The defeat against Kayserispor left Galatasaray in third place in the Super Lig behind leaders and defending champions Besiktas and surprise package Basaksehir.

The 2015 champions Galatasaray have a team packed with stars such as Germany's Lukas Podolski and Dutch playmaker Wesley Sneijder, and for the management the title is a must.

Riekerink told the Fanatik daily that he had not been informed of the discussions about his future. "It would be normal if the decision taken at that meeting was discussed with me first," he said.

The Turkish Super Lig is notorious for its revolving door managerial jobs but the situation at Galatasaray has been extreme even by local standards.

If Tudor's appointment is confirmed, he will be the sixth manager to take charge of the club since 2014. — AFP

PSG boss Nasser ready for intense times

DOHA: The next few days promise to be intense for Nasser Al-Khelaifi, chairman of Paris Saint-Germain and arguably the most recognisable face behind tiny Qatar's global sporting rise. Later night he will take his seat in the Presidentielle Stand at the Parc des Princes for the first leg of the crucial Champions League last 16 tie against Barcelona.

After that he will fly to his hometown of Doha to the more sedate surroundings of the Khalifa International Tennis Stadium, where five of the top-ranked seven women players in the world are vying to win the Qatar Open. A key figure in football, the dapper 43-year-old is possibly less well-known outside his own country as president of the Qatar Tennis Federation. In France, he has regularly been pictured with PSG stars such as Edinson Cavani and even once holding a first team shirt with former defender David Luiz after his transfer from Chelsea.

Like most Qataris, he maintains a discreet public profile at home, far more visible in Paris than in Doha, where he is as familiar for his role in tennis as for his ties to PSG. And it is to tennis that he owes his sporting career. On a recent power list of Qataris, he made seventh spot-below the head of Qatar Petroleum but above of the boss of Qatar Airways-and his occupation was listed as "sports". A former professional, he played in the Davis Cup and once against the 1995 French Open champion, Thomas Muster.

He may have only reached a career-high ATP ranking of 995, but those who played him say he was talented.

SPORTING POWER

And it was through tennis that he met Qatar's Emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, a path that would eventually lead to PSG. Qatar's 2011 purchase of the French champions pushed this seemingly shy man into the spotlight. One year after winning the right to host the 2022 World Cup, it was another statement of Qatar's sporting ambitions.

It also demonstrated Qatar's business acumen in raising the country's profile, which has had various knock-on effects including a huge rise in the number of French tourists to the emirate.

But PSG's stuttering form this season-they are currently second three points behind Monaco-has led to the first sustained criticism of Khelaifi. One person close to PSG said he made mistakes by giving "certain key players too much power" during the club's transition in appointing a new coach and losing star names such as Zlatan Ibrahimovic. Those closest to him though say PSG are beginning to look strong again and deny rumours that he could be replaced if they lose to Barcelona. Leaving PSG is definitely not an option, one official told AFP this week, for one of the most powerful men in football who also happens to be the head of film and television group, Miramax.

Getting locals in Qatar to speak on the record about him, or other prominent individuals can be tricky.

Despite the extraordinary wealth of Qatar, Khelaifi's family, prior to the Gulf country finding vast gas an oil riches off of its coast, were "gawas"-pearl divers. His family were involved in the industry-one of Qatar's staples before energy-for many generations.

It may sound romantic but it was a brutal job. Divers spent months away from home at sea, survived on rations and risked their lives to get enough pearls to ensure their families had money for the winter.

The Khelaifis are not alone among the now most prominent Qatari families to have worked in the industry. —AFP

Nasser Al-Khelaifi

POETLAND: Portland Trail Blazers guard Damian Lillard falls to the court as he drives to the basket during overtime of an NBA basketball game against the Atlanta Hawksin Portland, Ore., Monday. Atlanta won in overtime 109-104. — AP

BASKETBALL

Denver Nuggets stun Golden Warriors

DENVER: Nikola Jokic got his second career triple-double as the Denver Nuggets tied an NBA record with 24 3-pointers while shocking the Golden State Warriors 132-110 on Monday night. The Nuggets tied the 3-point mark set by the Rockets in December against New Orleans. They missed two 3-pointers in the final minute, and Jamal Murray passed up an uncontested 3 to dribble out the clock. They finished 24 of 40 from beyond the arc. The Warriors were just 8 of 32 from long range, including 1 of 11 by Stephen Curry. Jokic set career highs in rebounds (21) and assists (12) to go with 17 points, and rookie Juancho Hernangomez scored a season-high 27 points, including six 3s. Will Barton added 24 points and Jameer Nelson had 23.

HAWKS 109, TRAIL BLAZERS 104, OT

Tim Hardaway Jr. scored 25 points and Dennis Schroder added 22 as Atlanta scored the final 12 points of overtime to beat Portland. Dwight Howard added 19 points and 16 rebounds for the Hawks, who won their fifth straight against the Blazers. Paul Millsap made the tying basket as time expired in regulation. CJ McCollum had 26 points for the Blazers, who traded starting center Mason Plumlee to Denver a day earlier. Damian Lillard added 21.

SPURS 110, PACERS 106

Kawhi Leonard scored 32 points as San Antonio clinched its NBA-record 20th consecutive winning season with a victory over Indiana. LaMarcus Aldridge scored 10 of his 19 points during the final 6 1/2 minutes as the Spurs improved to 42-13 in the season following Tim Duncan's retirement. They have had a winning record every season since 1997-98, when Duncan was a rookie, and broke a tie with the Utah Jazz, who had 19 straight winning seasons from 1985-2004. Paul George scored 27 points and Myles Turner had 22 for the Pacers, who have lost four straight - three on their home court.

CELTICS 111, MAVERICKS 98

Isaiah Thomas had 29 points and eight assists while his backcourt mate Marcus Smart added 19 points against his hometown team as Boston beat Dallas. Kelly Olynyk scored seven of his 15 points during a 12-2 run that started with the Celtics leading by one in the fourth quarter as the Atlantic Division leaders won for the 10th time in 11 games. Boston pulled within two games of Cleveland atop the Eastern Conference. Rookie Yogi Ferrell had 20 points for the Mavericks.

WIZARDS 120, THUNDER 98

Russell Westbrook sat down for good midway through the third quarter while Oklahoma City was in the midst of missing 24 consecutive shots as Bradley Beal and John Wall carried Washington to a stunningly lopsided victory. Westbrook entered the game leading the NBA in scoring average at 31.2 and third in assists at 10.2 per game, along with a total of 26 triple-doubles, but he finished with only 17 points - equaling his second-lowest total of the season - on 5-for-19 shooting. He had four assists and four rebounds. Westbrook missed nine field-goal attempts in a row during that eye-opening, team-wide drought when the Thunder were being outscored 32-5 from late in the second quarter to late in the third. Beal scored 22 points, making 6 of 7 3-point tries. Wall had 15 points and 14 assists.

CLIPPERS 88, JAZZ 72

Blake Griffin had 26 points, 10 rebounds and six assists as Los Angeles rolled over Utah. The Clippers controlled the game for all but a short stretch of the first quarter while the Jazz had a horrific shooting night. DeAndre Jordan brought the energy early, then Austin Rivers got hot in the second quarter before Griffin had a dominant 12-point third quarter. Jordan finished with 10 points and 13 rebounds and Rivers had 15 points. Rudy Gobert had 10 points and 14 rebounds for Utah.

MAGIC 116, HEAT 107

Evan Fournier scored 24 points and Elfrid Payton added 20 off the bench as Orlando beat Miami to snap a four-game losing streak. Serge Ibaka scored 17 points and Nik Vucevic finished with 13 points and 17 rebounds for Orlando, while Dion Waiters returned from a sprained ankle and scored 23 points for Miami, whose eight-game home winning streak was snapped. Goran Dragic scored 22 points for the Heat, who have lost two straight following a 13-game winning streak.

76ERS 105, HORNETS 99

Dario Saric had 18 points and 11 rebounds off the bench as Philadelphia beat slumping Charlotte for its third straight win. Charlotte guard Nic Batum failed to make good on his guarantee that the Hornets would beat the 76ers. He had 16 points on 5-of-12 shooting, but the Hornets lost for the 10th time in 11 games. Robert Covington had 17 points for the 76ers while T.J. McConnell added 14 points and seven assists. Kemba Walker scored 29 points for the Hornets.

GRIZZLIES 112, NETS 103

Mike Conley scored 32 points while Marc Gasol had 19 points, nine rebounds and eight assists as Memphis beat hapless Brooklyn. Brandan Wright added 17 points and Vince Carter had 14 as the Grizzlies won for the fourth time in their last five games. Brook Lopez and Spencer Dinwiddie each had 17 points as the Nets lost their 13th straight overall and 15th straight at home to set a new franchise record for futility.

PELICANS 110, SUNS 108

Anthony Davis scored six consecutive points, the last two the go-ahead rebound basket with 40.3 seconds to play, as New Orleans escaped with a victory over Phoenix. The Suns missed three shots close to the basket in the final seconds, one by Eric Bledsoe and two by P.J. Tucker. Davis scored 24 points, four below his season average. Jrue Holiday added 18, and Tyreke Evans and E'Twaun Moore had 15 apiece for the Pelicans, playing a night after a loss in Sacramento. Bledsoe scored 37, the last on a 3-pointer that put the Suns ahead 108-107 with 1:12 to go.

BUCKS 102, PISTONS 89

Greg Monroe had 25 points and 13 rebounds and Michael Beasley added 23 points as Milwaukee beat Detroit, winning its first home game since star forward Jabari Parker got hurt. The Bucks led by 22 at one point and held a double-digit advantage for most of the second half. It was a confidence-building outing for a team adjusting to life again without Parker, the 20 point-a-game scorer who tore his left ACL last week for the second time in three seasons. Marcus Morris led Detroit with 26 points, while Andre Drummond added 21 points and 12 rebounds. — AP

NBA results/standings

Atlanta 109, Portland 104 (OT); Denver 132, Golden State 110; LA Clippers 88, Utah 72; New Orleans 110, Phoenix 108; Boston 111, Dallas 98; Washington 120, Oklahoma City 98; Milwaukee 102, Detroit 89; Memphis 112, Brooklyn 103; Orlando 116, Miami 107; San Antonio 110, Indiana 106; Philadelphia 105, Charlotte 99.

Eastern Conference

Atlantic Division	W	L	PCT	GB
Boston	36	19	.655	-
Toronto	32	23	.582	4
NY Knicks	23	33	.411	13.5
Philadelphia	21	34	.382	15
Brooklyn	9	46	.164	27
Central Division				
Cleveland	37	16	.698	-
Indiana	29	26	.527	9
Chicago	26	29	.473	12
Detroit	26	30	.464	12.5
Milwaukee	24	30	.444	13.5
Southeast Division				
Washington	33	21	.611	-
Atlanta	32	23	.582	1.5
Charlotte	24	31	.436	9.5
Miami	24	32	.429	10
Orlando	21	36	.368	13.5

Western Conference

Northwest Division				
Utah	34	22	.607	-
Oklahoma City	31	25	.554	3
Denver	25	30	.455	8.5
Portland	23	32	.418	10.5
Minnesota	21	34	.382	12.5
Pacific Division				
Golden State	46	9	.836	-
LA Clippers	34	21	.618	12
Sacramento	23	32	.418	23
LA Lakers	19	37	.339	27.5
Phoenix	17	39	.304	29.5
Southwest Division				
San Antonio	42	13	.764	-
Houston	40	17	.702	3
Memphis	34	23	.596	9
Dallas	22	33	.400	20
New Orleans	22	34	.393	20.5

PREVIEW

Bale left out as Madrid aim to halt Maradona-backed Napoli

MADRID: Real Madrid boss Zinedine Zidane has resisted the temptation to rush back a fit-again Gareth Bale for their Champions League clash today against an on-form Napoli backed by Diego Maradona.

Bale returned to training for the first time since suffering ankle ligament damage in November on Sunday and has been left out of Zidane's 19-man squad.

Cristiano Ronaldo has been passed fit, though, as the Portuguese has shrugged off a knock picked up in Saturday's 3-1 win at Osasuna to keep Los Blancos top of La Liga. "He has had nearly three months out and we have to go slowly with Gareth," said Zidane on Tuesday.

"Everyone wants to win the Champions League, but it is a hard and long road and we are on that path.

"The good thing is that we are in good shape. We have everyone fit, that means it will be harder to pick the squad, but I'm happy to see everyone ready and committed for the return of the Champions League."

Napoli's sensational free-scoring form that has seen them reel off an 18-game unbeaten run has seen the Italians' hopes of shocking the holders soar.

Among the expected 10,000 strong travelling support will be Napoli's greatest ever player as Maradona arrived in Madrid on Monday. "Thankfully he is not playing! We are happy about that," said Madrid midfielder Luka Modric on the presence of Maradona.

FIRST STEP

"He is one of the most important players in the history of football. It is nice he is here to see the game live." Zidane, though, insisted he is more concerned by the likes of the on-fire Dries Mertens, who has scored 14 goals in his last 11 outings, including three hat-tricks.

"He (Maradona) was one of the best players in the history of football, but I am more worried about those that are on the field." No side has managed to retain the competition in the Champions League era with AC Milan 27 years ago the last team to win back-to-back European Cups. However, Modric believes the 11-time winners are better placed than anyone else to bring that streak to an end in June's final in Bale's home city of Cardiff.

"We are Real Madrid and it has never happened, but we think we can be the first team to defend the title," added the Croatian. "Tomorrow is the first step against Napoli, that is the most important thing not looking further ahead. We want to be in Cardiff but we need to go game-by-game."

Napoli have a returning star of their own as Arkadiusz Milik has made the bench for victories over Bologna and Genoa after suffering cruciate ligament damage in October.

However, the Polish international will start on the sidelines again with Mertens partnered by Lorenzo Insigne and former Madrid winger Jose Maria Callejon.

"We are going to play an away match against the champions of the world and a really strong side," Napoli boss Maurizio Sarri told the club's website.

"They are so strong that we don't even know if we will be able to stop them. "I don't know what to expect and what it will happen. I just want to say that I want commitment, dedication and nerve in order to understand exactly who we are and where we can get to."

Napoli will be forced to abandon one lucky charm, though, as Madrid will be the ones in their famous white jerseys today. The turnaround in Napoli's fortunes in recent months coincided with superstitious president Aurelio De Laurentis's decision to replace the club's traditional sky blue colours for white back in November. — AFP

Sane, the flying winger finally shining at City

MANCHESTER: Maybe it was the pressure of a $50 million price tag and being billed as European soccer's next big thing. Maybe it was the early injury setback. Or maybe it was adjusting to a new country and culture at the age of 20.

Whatever the reason, it took Leroy Sane half a season to really stand out at Manchester City. Now, he's proving unstoppable. Sane is the lively winger with big hair - and even bigger bunch of tricks - who is proving to be a key factor behind City's resurgence as a potential Premier League title contender with three months left of the season. Starting for the fifth straight game in City's 2-0 win at Bournemouth on Monday, the Germany international gave his opponents a tough time, leaving one on his backside with a darting run and the crossbar shaking with a fierce shot after another dribble. The son of Regina Weber, who won a bronze medal in the rhythmic gymnastics all-around competition at the 1984 Olympics, the left-footed Sane was a joy to watch with his balance and graceful style. It was the latest impressive display from a player who has the qualities City manager Pep Guardiola wants in a winger - pace, strong work rate and the ability to stretch a defense.

To Guardiola, Sane is like a new signing. "The people say in the winter transfer window one guy arrived (in) Gabriel Jesus," Guardiola said. "I think we had two arrive."

That's because Sane was barely a factor for City in the first months of the season after his transfer from Schalke in August on a five-year deal for an initial 37 million pounds (then $50 million), a fee that could potentially rise by a quarter through performance-related add-ons.

Upon joining, Sane said he would "need a bit of time" to get used to English soccer. A hamstring injury initially held him back, causing him to miss the start of the season, and he was tentative in his early performances following his debut against Manchester United at Old Trafford.

LACKING SELF-BELIEF

Comments from Guardiola in November suggested Sane was lacking self-belief. "Sometimes you need a bit more time to adapt," the coach said, "to know the way that we play, to feel, 'OK, I am here, I am good enough to play.'"

The turnaround came when Sane was handed an unexpected start against Arsenal on Dec. 18, a huge call by Guardiola as City was struggling for form at that stage. He was excellent in the second half, scoring the equalizer as City recovered to win 2-1.

Sane then picked up a muscle injury but made a goal-scoring return against Tottenham on Jan. 21 and has started every game since.

"Leroy came here a little bit scared but I think after the game against Arsenal, something clicked," Guardiola said. "He has showed us a lot of things. He is so fast, his intensity helped us a lot and he helped us defensively, too.

"He is only 21 years old. I am so happy for Manchester City. We have a good player for the next years."

Sane is part of a new-generation front three - also comprising Gabriel Jesus and Raheem Sterling - that is thrilling the Premier League and has Guardiola's seal of approval, in terms of goal output, work rate and intensity. Sergio Aguero, City's star striker since 2011, has been dropped as a result and could end up leaving in the off-season.

City is reported to have beaten Real Madrid and Bayern Munich to Sane's signature, making him the club's sixth most expensive signing in its history.

Now that he's injury-free and in his best form this season, it's easy to see why. — AP

Live Matches on TV
(Local Timings)

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Real Madrid v SSC Napoli	**22:45**
beIN SPORTS 1 HD	
Bayern Munich v Arsenal	**22:45**
beIN SPORTS 1 HD	

ROME: Lazio's Senad Lulic, left, and AC Milan's Suso vie for the ball during an Italian Serie A soccer match between Lazio and Milan, at the Olympic stadium in Rome, Monday. — AP

SOCCER

Suso sizzler salvages Milan draw at Lazio

MILAN: A late equaliser from Suso secured a share of the points as AC Milan relaunched their Europa League bid with a precious 1-1 draw at Lazio on Monday.

Lazio, fighting for a top three finish in a tightly-contested Serie A, looked to be heading for a second successive win after their 6-2 romp at Pescara after Lucas Biglia put the hosts ahead on the stroke of half-time.

But Simone Inzaghi's men were stunned five minutes from the end at a near empty Stadio Olimpico when Suso cut in from the right to curl a superb shot past Tomas Strakosha in the Lazio net at the keeper's far post.

Inzaghi saw the glass half full but admitted the result should have been different.

"I'm very proud of what I saw. We should easily have won this game but sometimes you just don't hit the net," said Inzaghi.

"In the end a great goal from Suso secured a draw which, for me, wasn't deserved."

Milan had ended a recent three-game losing run with a come-from-behind win at Bologna in midweek, and this result has kept Vincenzo Montella's men in the fight for a Europa League place. Milan remain in seventh, 19 points behind leaders Juventus and 10 points behind Napoli in third. "We will do everything we can to try and qualify for the Europa League," Suso told Mediaset.

"They did well to score when they did, but we came back into it in the second half. They only got chances after we were attacking. "But it's a precious point for us."

Lazio are in sixth, three points further ahead although the Biancocelesti could have made the difference in a promising first half, that nonetheless started ominously. Goalkeeper Federico Marchetti injured his knee in the warm-up, and 21-year-old Tomas Strakosha had to step in.

PENALTY CLAIM WAVED

The first chance fell to Lazio, but Ciro Immobile flicked a nod-on from a corner wide at the back post. Teenaged Milan 'keeper Gianluigi Donnarumma did well to push Biglia's half-volley away, the 17-year-old also saving the rebound.

Immobile headed wide from a Marco Parolo cross and saw one penalty claim waved away after a challenge from Gustavo Gomez, before firing wide under pressure from Ignazio Abate.

Donnarumma then blocked Wesley Hoedt's effort from close range while at the other end Strakosha was called into action to smother a low shot from Lucas Ocampos.

Lazio took the lead in timely fashion, Immobile winning a penalty with a great touch that prompted the onrushing Donnarumma to send the Italy forward sprawling.

Donnarumma was furious but rightly the penalty stood and Biglia stepped up to beat the keeper down low to his right.

Milan thwarted efforts by Felipe Anderson, Sergej Milinkovic-Savic and Immobile in the second half and the hosts were eventually made to pay for their profligacy.

Montella's men began to find their stride and Strakosha had to be at full stretch to palm away a Jose Sosa free-kick late one.

The 'keeper was left clutching at thin air in the 85th minute when Suso collected inside the area, controlled and curled the ball into the far corner to secure a share of the points. — AFP

Ronaldo to carry the load for Madrid against Napoli

MADRID: With Gareth Bale not fully fit and Karim Benzema still struggling, it will be Cristiano Ronaldo again carrying the load for Real Madrid in the Champions League.

And that shouldn't be a problem for the defending champions - Ronaldo has scored in every last 16 game he has played with Madrid the last five seasons, with 14 goals in total.

Ronaldo didn't practice early this week because of a minor ailment, but he returned to action yesterday and was ready to face Napoli in the first leg at the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium today.

No one has been as dominant as Ronaldo in this stage of the European competition. The Portugal forward has scored in the last 10 games he played in the last 16, a streak that began with three goals in the matches against CSKA Moscow in the 2011-12 season.

He scored once in each game against former club Manchester United the following year, then netted four times against Schalke in 2013-14, and three times against the same German club the following year. His goals in each of the games against AS Roma last season were crucial to keep Madrid on track for its 11th European title.

Madrid will likely need Ronaldo to thrive again this time against Napoli, as Bale will not play despite having recovered from right-ankle surgery. He practiced with the rest of the team the last two days but coach Zinedine Zidane said it was too soon to put him back in the squad.

"He has been out for almost three months," Zidane said. "We have to take it slowly with Gareth." Benzema has been playing, but not scoring. His last goal was in a draw at Sevilla in the Copa del Rey early in January, six games ago. Criticism against him increased after an incredible close-range miss in the team's 3-1 win at Osasuna in the Spanish league on Saturday.

"Anyone can give their opinion," Zidane said. "But I see him fully committed. He is focused on what he has to do. People can always ask for more from a player like Karim, but I see him doing well and I'm happy with his work." Zidane said Benzema, the team's top scorer in the Champions League with four goals, makes up an important duo with Ronaldo. "We all know Cristiano and we know what he can bring to the team," Zidane said. "He has a good connection with Karim."— AP

MADRID: Real Madrid's Croatian midfielder Luka Modric speaks next to Real Madrid's French coach Zinedine Zidane (L) during a press conference at Valdebebas Sport City in Madrid yesterday, on the eve of the UEFA Champions League football match Real Madrid CF vs SSC Napoli. — AFP

Pressure on Wenger to break Bayern curse

MUNICH: Arsene Wenger is once again under pressure to end Arsenal's Champions League last-16 misery as the Gunners travel to bogey team Bayern Munich in today's first leg.

Bayern are riding a record 15-match home winning streak in Europe with the midweek clash marking the 11th meeting between the sides at Munich's Allianz Arena in the Champions League.

Arsenal have suffered last-16 defeats in each of the last six seasons, losing to Bayern in both 2013 and 2014, and another early exit would further ramp up the pressure on 67-year-old Wenger to quit after 20 years in charge. The teams know each other well, having met six times in the last four years, and Bayern thrashed the Gunners 5-1 in Munich in their previous meeting in November 2015.

Arsenal warmed up for their trip to Germany with a 2-0 win over Hull as Alexis Sanchez scored both goals to stop the rot following back-to-back league defeats to Chelsea and Watford.

The Gunners are confident for the Allianz Arena leg with the return in London on March 7. "If we put in our best performance, then we can beat Bayern as well," Arsenal's German defender Shkodran Mustafi told Sky. "It's down to us and it's in our hands."

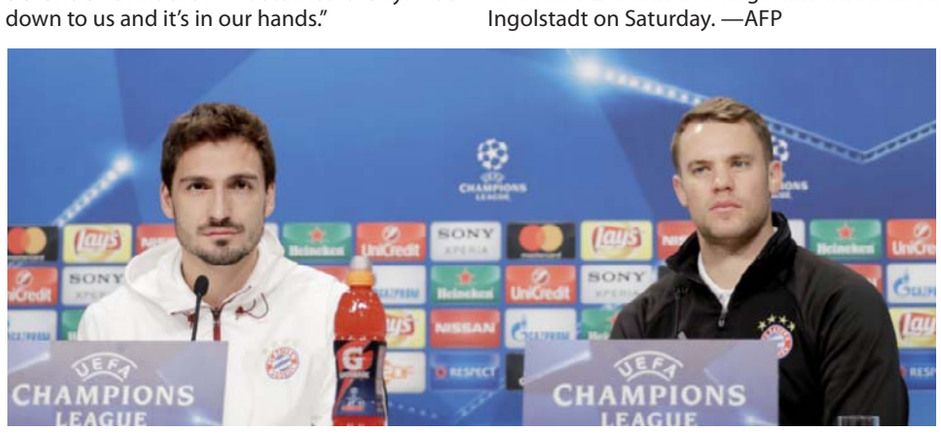
Arsenal beat Bayern 2-0 in Munich in 2013, but still lost the last-16 tie following a 3-1 defeat in the first leg in London as the Germans went on to win that year's final at Wembley. "We have already won there and I feel we have a chance to go through," said Wenger.

OZIL FORM CONCERNS

Midfielder Mesut Ozil, another Germany international, is enduring a dip in form, though, and has not scored since early December. "It's time for him to score again," said Wenger. "I felt he did not feel confident (against Hull). "It's always a problem because you think he can deliver something special."

Arsenal are third in the English Premier League, 10 points behind leaders Chelsea, while Bayern are seven clear in Germany's top flight. The Bavarians have reached the semi-final stage in Europe in each of the last three years, but Bayern are itching to go one better and reach the Cardiff final on June 3.

Despite their lead in the Bundesliga, Bayern have turned in below-par performances in recent weeks and needed two late goals to earn a 2-0 win at relegation-threatened Ingolstadt on Saturday. —AFP



MUNICH: Bayern's Mats Hummels, left, and goalkeeper Manuel Neuer attend a news conference prior to the Champions League round of 16 first leg soccer match between FC Bayern Munich and Arsenal London, in Munich, Germany, yesterday. Munich will face Arsenal today. —AP

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PARIS: Barcelona's Andre Gomes, centre, and Barcelona goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen, left, save an attempt on goal during the Champion's League round of 16, first leg soccer match between Paris Saint Germain and Barcelona at the Parc des Princes stadium in Paris, yesterday. — AP

Di Maria stars as PSG stun Barcelona

PARIS: Angel Di Maria scored a brilliant brace on his birthday as Paris Saint-Germain sensationally destroyed Barcelona 4-0 at the Parc des Princes in their Champions League last 16 first leg yesterday.

Di Maria, the former Real Madrid star, opened the scoring in the 18th minute and curled in another 10 minutes into the second half to celebrate his 29th birthday in style. January signing Julian Draxler also netted in between while Edinson Cavani marked his 30th birthday by adding his name to the scoresheet in the 71st minute in the French capital.

Barcelona were completely stunned, the defeat their biggest European humiliation since losing 7-0 on aggregate to Bayern Munich in the semi-finals in 2013.

They are now staring at a first exit from the competition before the quarter-finals in a decade, unless they can pull off a miraculous escape in the second leg at the Camp Nou next month. This was PSG's night, though, and Unai Emery's side will surely go on to secure a fifth successive appearance in the quarter-finals. PSG had twice been eliminated from the Champions League at the hands of Barcelona in the last four seasons, and the Catalans also had a fearsome record in games against sides coached by Emery, losing just one of 23 before this. But Luis Enrique's team, for all the brilliance of Lionel Messi, have recently looked more fragile than in a long time and the French champions showed no fear.

They were without injured captain Thiago Silva and the suspended Thiago Motta, meaning a start for Adrien Rabiot in midfield and a Champions League debut in defence for 21-year-old Presnel Kimpembe.

Draxler also made his European debut for the club and the German was superb as PSG pressed Barcelona high right from the off-the home side had already worked Marc-Andre ter Stegen in the Barca goal before they got the opener.

The menacing Draxler was fouled just outside the area and Di Maria bent the resulting free-kick over the wall and in for his third goal in the Champions League this season. Crocked following an early foul by Rabiot, Neymar was off the field receiving treatment as the Parc des Princes crowd erupted.

He was able to continue, but the visitors were lacklustre, Luis Suarez starved of service, Messi quiet and skipper Andres Iniesta struggling to cope.

One Neymar acceleration did lead to an Andre Gomes shot that was turned behind by Kevin Trapp, but otherwise the chances were at the other end.

Ter Stegen saved from Draxler after a counterattack, but there was nothing he could do as the German made it 2-0 five minutes from half-time, exchanging passes with Marco Verratti and rifling a shot past the goalkeeper from the right side of the area.

The expectation was that Barcelona would come out fighting after the restart but instead they fell further behind in the 55th minute to a piece of brilliance from Di Maria.

The move started with Trapp rolling a goal-kick out to Rabiot on the edge of his own box and the midfielder turning away under pressure from Messi. It ended with Di Maria curling a left-foot shot high into the top-left corner of the net from the edge of the other area.

Di Maria then came off to a standing ovation, but Paris were not finished. Thomas Meunier surged forward from right-back and set up Cavani, who thumped home his 34th goal of the season in all competitions. A miserable night for Barcelona was compounded when Samuel Umtiti hit the post late on. — AFP

Benfica sneak classic win as Aubameyang fluffs Dortmund

LISBON: Benfica pulled off a classic smash and grab job as they beat Borussia Dortmund 1-0 in their Champions League last 16 first leg yesterday.

Greek striker Kostas Mitroglou scored the only goal of the game, prodding home from close range at the second attempt just after half time after Dortmund goalkeeper Roman Burki stopped his initial effort.

Benfica goalkeeper Ederson, who has relegated former Brazil first choice shot-stopper Julio Cesar to the bench this season, was the star of the show making a slew of crucial saves. But Dortmund will have many regrets after a wasteful performance, in particular from striker Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang who had a torrid evening, missing three gilt-edged opportunities.

Dortmund had the first clear chance of the night on 10 minutes as French youngster Ousmane Dembele slipped Aubameyang in on goal, but the Gabon striker lifted his shot not only over Ederson but also the bar.

Dortmund were well on top in the early stages but poor control cost Raphael Guerreiro and Erik Durm when well placed to shoot.

The visitors then fashioned a chance with Guerreiro picking out Dembele 10 yards from goal but reported Manchester United target Victor Lindelof bravely threw himself in front of the shot to deflect the ball behind for a corner.

Dortmund should have gone in front on 38 minutes when Benfica centre-back Ljubomir Fejsa dallied allowing Guerreiro to cross from the byline. But with Ederson stranded, Aubameyang was inches away from converting the ball into an empty net from two yards out.

Moments later, Ederson was a relieved man to see Italian referee Nicola Rizzoli wave away Dortmund protests after the goalkeeper clattered into Dembele on the edge of his box.

Having produced nothing in the first half, Benfica went in front three minutes into the second after Mitroglou was left unmarked two yards out to poke home Luisao's header from a Pizzi corner.

Thereafter, the one-way traffic continued heading towards the home goal was relentless.

Ederson saved a point-blank effort from Dembele inside the six yard box before Aubameyang lifted a carbon copy of his first half chance again just over the bar. Ederson made smart stops to deny Marco Reus and then Lukasz Piszczek before Dortmund were given a lifeline when Fejsa handled a cross from Marc Bartra. But Aubameyang's miserable night continued with a woeful penalty stroked nonchalantly down the middle that the static Ederson merely punched clear. Aubameyang was put out of his misery a few minutes later as coach Thomas Turchel replaced him with Andre Schuerle just past the hour mark.

Dortmund continued to press but Reus hooked a volley wide before Ederson showed lightening reactions to save one-handed from a Christian Pulisic volley that took a wicked deflection. — AFP

LISBON: Dortmund's midfielder Julian Weigl (L) vies with Benfica's Chilean forward Andre Carillo during the UEFA Champions League round of 16 first leg football match SL Benfica vs Borussia Dortmund at the Luz stadium in Lisbon yesterday — AFP

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Fourth Kuwait Investment Forum from Feb 18 to 19
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RIO DE JANEIRO: A woman uses her 'Mumbuca' card at a pharmacy in Marica, suburb of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Mumbuca, the first virtual social currency of Brazil, was financed by the royalties of oil exploration three years ago. — AFP

HIGHER ENERGY COSTS FUEL US PRODUCER PRICES

FED HAS LIMITED VIEW ON TRUMP POLICIES AS YELLEN HEADS TO CONGRESS

WASHINGTON: US producer prices rose more than expected in January, recording their largest gain in more than four years amid increases in the cost of energy products and some services, but a strong dollar continued to keep underlying inflation tame.

The Labor Department said yesterday its producer price index for final demand jumped 0.6 percent last month. That was the largest increase since September 2012 and followed a 0.2 percent rise in December. Despite the surge, the PPI only increased 1.6 percent in the 12 months through January. That followed a similar gain in the 12 months through December. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast the PPI rising 0.3 percent last month and the year-on-year increase moderating to 1.5 percent. The US dollar pared losses against a basket of currencies after the data. Prices of US Treasuries were mixed while US stock index futures were largely flat. The rise in producer prices comes as manufacturers report paying more for raw materials.

The Institute for Supply Management's (ISM) prices index surged in January to its highest level since May 2011. The ISM index, which is closely correlated to the PPI, has increased for 11 straight months. The gains in PPI last month largely reflected increases in the prices of commodities such as crude oil, which are being boosted by a steadily growing global economy. Oil prices have risen above $50 per barrel. But with the dollar strengthening further against the currencies of the United States' main trading partners and wage growth still sluggish, the spillover to consumer inflation from rising commodity prices is likely to be limited. A government report on Friday showed import prices excluding fuels fell in January for a third straight month. Data today is expected to show the consumer price index increased 0.3 percent in January after a similar gain in December, according to a Reuters survey of economists. Last month, prices for final demand goods increased 1.0 percent, the largest rise since May 2015. The gain accounted for more than 60 percent of the increase in the PPI. Prices for final demand goods advanced 0.6 percent in December.

Tepid growth

The US economy will get a small boost in 2017 from President Donald Trump's planned deregulation and fiscal stimulus, a Reuters poll showed, but economists said the probability of achieving 4 percent growth was low. The latest results showed a wide gap between economists, who were criticized for being too optimistic late in the last economic cycle, and market expectations that have sent bond yields and the US dollar soaring and pushed Wall Street to record highs.

Trump has promised sweeping tax cuts for individuals and businesses, infrastructure spending, and deregulation to boost growth, which in the long recovery from the financial crisis has been weaker than in past expansions. Investors have taken those proposals as a green light to buy stocks since the US election, lighting a fire under financial shares in particular. But it is still not clear when the proposals will actually turn into legislation. All of the 58 economists who answered an extra question said the likelihood of the Trump administration achieving its aim of 4 percent growth this year was low.

"The markets have gone ahead of themselves," said Ethan Harris, head of global economics at Bank of America Merrill Lynch. "They have not yet fully factored in the degree of the period of uncertainty we are about to enter here, and the risk that some of the policy proposals are very growth unfriendly."

Only two economists polled on economic growth have forecasts of more than 4 percent growth, and not until in the second half. The consensus is for growth in a range of 2.1 percent to 2.5 percent in each quarter, unchanged since the January poll and barely moved since the poll taken after the US election. Since then, the S&P 500 index has rallied about 10 percent.

Federal Reserve Chair Janet Yellen goes to Congress yesterday for the first time since Republicans took control of the White House and both houses of the legislature with less clarity on the direction of US economic policy than at any time of her three-year tenure. The details of President Donald Trump's economic policies remain largely unknown. — Agencies

GREECE ECONOMY SHRINKS IN Q4 AS FARMERS PROTEST

ATHENS: Greece's economy contracted in the fourth quarter of 2016, the state statistics office said yesterday, as the debt-laden country faces stalemate in negotiations with its creditors. Gross domestic product (GDP) for October to December declined 0.4 percent compared with the previous quarter, although it grew 0.3 percent in comparison with the same quarter in 2015, Elstat said in a flash estimate. The figures followed two straight quarters of quarter-on-quarter growth after a period of recession. The news comes amid fears of a new debt crisis that could again jeopardize Greece's place in the euro after months of failed talks between Athens and its eurozone and International Monetary Fund (IMF) creditors. Top EU economic affairs official Pierre Moscovici is due in Athens for talks with Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras today in an effort to unblock bailout negotiations.

Despite the quarterly contraction, Greece's economy grew 0.3 percent as a whole last year, according to AFP calculations-only the second time annual GDP has grown since 2008. Brussels is pencilling in Greek growth of 2.7 percent for 2017 and 3.1 percent for 2018. But Athens faces debt repayments of 7.0 billion euros ($7.44 billion) this summer that it cannot afford without defusing the feud that is holding up new loans from Greece's 86 billion euro bailout.

The core of the row is whether Greece can deliver on budget targets that the IMF says are based on overly-optimistic economic forecasts. The IMF, quietly backed by Germany, insists that more pension cuts and tax hikes are necessary to reach those targets.

Unofficial deadline

The Tsipras government bitterly refuses more reforms, and the premier on Saturday warned creditors to "stop playing with fire" over his country's debt problems. An IMF report obtained by AFP last week said Greece's debt "is highly unsustainable" and "will become explosive in the long run." Talks in Brussels between Greece and its creditors on Friday ended with no breakthrough, although Eurogroup chief Jeroen Dijsselbloem said some progress had been made. The next meeting of eurozone ministers, on February 20, is seen as an unofficial deadline to end the stalemate ahead of important elections in Europe. Greek central bank chief Yannis Stournaras has warned that a quick resolution is crucial in order to avoid a replay of the chaos in 2015 when Greece defaulted and just barely survived in the eurozone. "Any later, the conditions will be much worse and it will be too late," Stournaras told lawmakers on Monday.

Meanwhile, thousands of Greek farmers were marching in central Athens yesterday to protest tax increases imposed as part of efforts to meet conditions of the country's international bailout. About 2,000 farmers from across the country headed to the Greek capital yesterday to complain about the higher taxes, some of which took effect on Jan 1. Farmers have been blocking highways sporadically as part of their protest, including at some of Greece's northern border crossings.

Addressing the crowd before the march began, protest leader Vangelis Boutas said public opinion was backing them. He said: "This is all about fewer people having more. But ordinary people support our blockades." Greece is struggling to agree with its international creditors on what further reforms might be needed as part of its bailout agreement. — Agencies

ATHENS: Cabbages lie in Central Athens as Greek farmers protest against the new taxation measures during an anti-austerity demonstration yesterday. — AFP

DAIMLER TO ELECT KUWAIT WEALTH CHIEF TO ITS BOARD

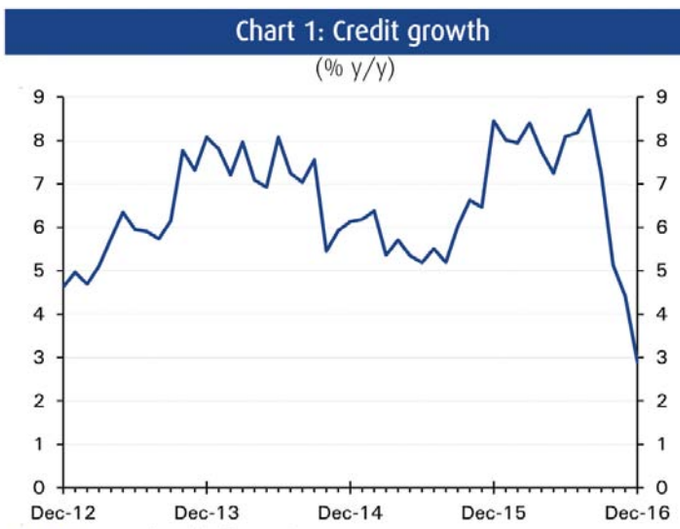
KUWAIT: The supervisory board of Daimler has proposed the election of Bader Mohammad Al-Saad, managing director of the Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA), to its board at the group's annual shareholders' meeting, sources said. Bader Mohammad Al-Saad is being nominated for election as a member representing the shareholders and a meeting to consider his nomination will be held in Berlin on 29 March, 2017. "Kuwait has been a shareholder of Daimler for more than 40 years, is our biggest shareholder, and has become our most dependable partner [in spite of] all of the highs and lows in the company's history over the past four decades," the sources said quoting Manfred Bischoff, chairman of the supervisory board.

"We are grateful to have Kuwait as a shareholder at our side who supports the strategy of the company and, together with us, aims to secure a successful future for Daimler, while Al Saad is familiar with capital markets and various industrial companies thanks to his long-standing experience as MD of KIA," sources said quoting Bischoff.

Through the Kuwait Investment Authority, Kuwait holds a 6.8 percent stake in Daimler AG. The Kuwait Investment Authority was established in 1953 and is the world's oldest sovereign wealth fund. Bader Mohammad Al-Saad would replace Dr Bernd Bohr, who has agreed that it is "in the interests of the company" for him to step down from the supervisory board at the end of the 2017 annual shareholders' meeting.

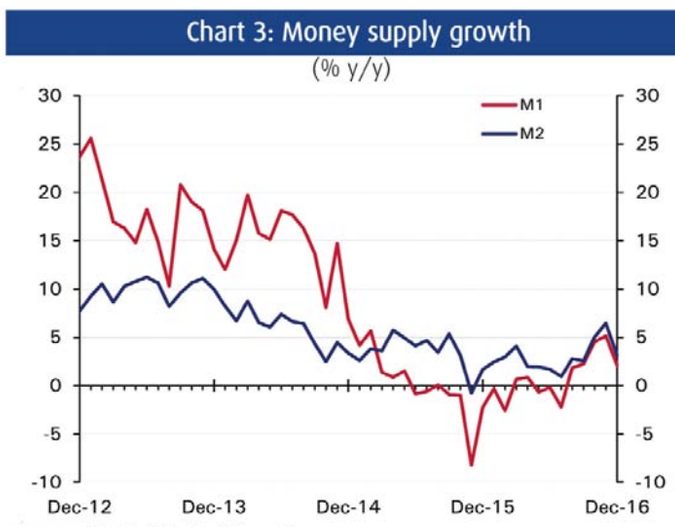
Al-Saad has previously served on the boards of both domestic and international companies, including the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation. He is currently a member of the Global Advisory Council of the Bank of America and a member of the Advisory Board of the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF). He is a founding member of the International Forum of Sovereign Wealth Funds (IFSWF) and was its Chairman and Deputy Chairman from its inception in 2009 until October 2015.

Chart 1: Credit growth



Source: Central Bank of Kuwait

Chart 3: Money supply growth



Source: Central Bank of Kuwait

Kuwait credit growth averages 7% in 2016

NBK ECONOMIC REPORT

KUWAIT: Credit growth slowed further in December, despite a healthy gain during the month, on basis effects. Growth came in at 2.9 percent year-on-year (y/y), its slowest pace in nearly five years . December's healthy net gain of KD 291 million in lending was dominated by a jump in lending for the purchase of securities and an unusually large increase in investment company debt. Lending for households and business activity was weaker in December. Total credit growth averaged 7 percent in 2016. Private deposits were down, though they were largely offset by an increase in government deposits. Interest rates were mixed on the month.

Credit growth's recent slowdown is largely explained by a large corporate debt repayment in October, though basis effects were also to blame. A single borrower is thought to have repaid nearly KD 700 million. Still, we estimate that credit growth adjusted for this repayment still slowed to 5 percent y/y in December due to basis effects, as a result of large jump in lending in December 2015.

Household lending was weaker following two months of more robust gains. Growth eased to 6.5 percent y/y, well below the 12.6 percent y/y growth recorded at the end of 2015. December's gains topped out at a modest KD 52 million, in line with the relatively weaker average recorded during the first nine months of 2016, though much smaller than the stronger gains recorded in October and November.

The weakness in household lending comes on the heels of a perceived slowdown in the consumer sector. Evidence has pointed to a decrease in household consumption. This has been visible in point-of-sale (POS) data, which shows consumer spending weakening notably in 2016. Growth in the value of local POS transactions slowed to 5.5 percent in 2016 from 13.3 percent in 2015.

Lending to nonbank financial companies saw a stronger than usual increase in December. Sector debt was up KD 85 million, as growth accelerated to 10.5 percent y/y. The sector, which ended 2016 with one of the most rapid paces of credit growth, was recording declines in debt just 12 months before and now appears to have clearly moved beyond more than six years of debt consolidation.

All remaining credit saw growth slow to 0.6 percent y/y on basis effects and the effects of the large debt repayment by a Kuwaiti company in October. The sector actually added KD 154 million in net new loans during the month, much of it in lending for the purchase of securities and the oil sector. These were partly offset by declines in real estate, industry and trade.

Private deposits were down KD 123 million in December, though mostly offset by a rise in government deposits. Broad M2 money supply growth fell to 3.1 percent y/y while growth in narrower M1 slowed to 2.1 percent y/y. The drop in deposits came largely from KD time and KD savings deposits, while KD sight deposits saw a small increase. Government deposits rose by KD 101 million during the month, offsetting much of the decline in private deposits, with growth steady at 14 percent y/y.

Banking system liquidity retreated for a second consecutive month but remained healthy nonetheless. Bank reserves (cash, deposits with the CBK and CBK bonds) lost KD 609 million to reach KD 4.7 billion or 7.75 percent of total bank assets. This coincided with a drop in foreign assets and the government continuing to tap bank liquidity through the issuance of domestic bonds. The issuance of domestic debt slowed slightly in December. Outstanding domestic public debt instruments (PDIs) rose by KD 100 million during December to KD 3.27 billion or an estimated 9.4 percent of GDP. This compares to a debt level of 4.6 percent in 2015. Meanwhile, outstanding CBK bills, used for liquidity management, decreased by KD 310 million in 2016, as the CBK reduced issuance of the 3-6 month paper to KD 8.4 billion in 2016 from KD 9.5 billion in 2015. Interest rates were mixed in December as interbank rates continued to edge lower on ample liquidity in Kuwait, while deposit rates rose following the policy rate hike. The 3-month Kuwait interbank offered rate (Kibor) edged lower in December to 1.40 percent and has held relatively steady since. The rate was apparently unfazed by the CBK's 25 basis point (bp) discount rate hike in December. Customer deposit rates, however, did benefit from the hike, rising by 8-10 bps in December.

Table 1: Monetary indicators

	Dec-16	1-month change		3-month change		12-month change	
	KD mn	KD mn	%	KD mn	%	KD mn	%
Total system liquidity (M2)	**35,613**	**-69**	**-0.2**	**-47**	**-0.1**	**1,072**	**3.1**
Currency in circulation	1,646	53	3.3	117	7.6	149	10.0
Private sector deposits	33,967	-123	-0.4	-163	-0.5	923	2.8
KD deposits	31,045	-128	-0.4	58	0.2	1,592	5.4
Sight deposits	7,944	37	0.5	-159	-2.0	48	0.6
Savings deposits	4,653	-42	-0.9	34	0.7	38	0.8
Time deposits & CDs	18,449	-123	-0.7	183	1.0	1,506	8.9
Foreign currency deposits	2,922	5	0.2	-221	-7.0	-669	-18.6

Source: Central Bank of Kuwait

Table 2: Consolidated bank balance sheets

	Dec-16	1-month change		3-month change		12-month change	
	KD mn	KD mn	%	KD mn	%	KD mn	%
Total bank assets	**60,443**	**338**	**0.6**	**-171**	**-0.3**	**1,830**	**3.1**
Core liquid assets	4,922	-594	-10.8	143	3.0	-74	-1.5
Cash and CBK deposits	1,179	-268	-18.5	188	18.9	276	30.5
CBK bonds	3,042	-5	-0.2	-46	-1.5	1,167	62.2
Time deposits with CBK	701	-320	-31.3	1	0.1	-1,517	-68.4
Public debt instruments	3,287	101	3.2	504	18.1	1,707	108.1
Interbank deposits	1,456	228	18.6	-259	-15.1	-1,145	-44.0
Credit facilities	34,308	291	0.9	-443	-1.3	973	2.9
Foreign assets	12,668	199	1.6	-311	-2.4	116	0.9
Other assets	3,803	112	3.0	195	5.4	253	7.1
Total bank liabilities	**52,488**	**332**	**0.6**	**-103**	**-0.2**	**1,670**	**3.3**
Total deposits	40,646	-21	-0.1	-299	-0.7	1,723	4.4
Private sector deposits	33,967	-123	-0.4	-163	-0.5	923	2.8
Government deposits	6,679	101	1.5	-136	-2.0	800	13.6
Interbank deposits	1,422	277	24.2	-203	-12.5	-996	-41.2
Foreign liabilities	4,364	-53	-1.2	162	3.8	-329	-7.0
Other liabilities	6,056	129	2.2	237	4.1	1,271	26.6
Shareholder equity	**7,955**	**6**	**0.1**	**-68**	**-0.9**	**161**	**2.1**

Source: Central Bank of Kuwait

EDF targets positive cash flow ahead of French, UK N-projects

PARIS: EDF pledged yesterday to deliver positive cash flow next year before it has to invest in upgrading its ageing French nuclear plants and building new reactors in Britain. The French utility, which is 85-percent state-owned, made the commitment as it posted a 6.7 percent fall in 2016 core earnings to 16.41 billion euros following the temporary closure of about a third of its French reactors last year for safety checks. EDF has been wrestling with heavy debts and has had to borrow just to pay dividends for several years. It had negative cash flow of 1.6 billion euros last year, and 2.1 billion euros in 2015.

CEO Jean-Bernard Levy said that cost savings, asset sales, lower investments and a state-funded capital injection will boost EDF's finances by next year. "The year 2018 will be the year of the rebound," he said. EDF needs to finance the 18 billion pound (21.15 billion euros) build of two nuclear reactors in Hinkley Point, Britain and a 50 billion euro upgrade of its French nuclear stations over the next decade.

It also needs to spend 5 billion euros on smart meters and billions more buying and restructuring the nuclear reactor unit of fellow state-owned company Areva. Levy declined comment on Japan's Toshiba, which yesterday said it expected to book a $6.3 billion hit to Westinghouse and postponed its 2016 results by a month as auditors try to determine its US nuclear business' liabilities.

Westinghouse's AP1000 reactor is the main competitor for the Areva EPR third-generation reactor that EDF plans in Britain. Such reactors have improved safety features, but are more costly to build. Delays mean none have yet been connected to the grid. While problems at Westinghouse ought to benefit the French nuclear industry, EDF-Areva's chances of winning new export contracts are slim due to new safety requirements following the 2011 Fukushima disaster, competition from Chinese, Russian and Korean reactor makers and ever-cheaper renewables, industry sources say.

Capital on horizon

EDF said its planned capital raising should be launched before the end of March, market conditions permitting, after its board approved a 4 billion euro increase on Monday. The French state is set to subscribe for 3 billion euros. It is planning a share dividend for the second year running, to which the state will again subscribe. By taking this option last year it left an extra 1.8 billion euros in EDF's coffers.

EDF said it plans to distribute 2.1 billion euros in dividends on its 2016 earnings, but the dividend per share will not be announced until the capital increase is launched. Shares in EDF were down 0.5 percent following the results. They have lost about 20 percent over the past six months, making them the second-worst performers in the Thomson Reuters Europe utility index.

EDF's 2016 revenues fell 5.1 percent to 71.20 billion euros, while net income rose 140 percent to 2.85 billion due to lower impairment losses in 2016, and the extension to 50 years of the accounting depreciation period of some of its nuclear plants. EDF set a core earnings target of 13.7-14.3 billion euros for 2017 and of at least 15.2 billion euros for 2018. Levy said the higher 2018 core earnings target should be achievable thanks to higher power prices, further cost cuts and the gradual return to a normal nuclear output in France.

This year, French nuclear power production will be capped by planned maintenance and the continued outages of EDF's Bugey 5, Fessenheim 2, Gravelines 5 and Paluel 2 reactors, which have been shut for months due to safety and technical problems. — Reuters

PARIS: The CEO of France's state-run utility company EDF Jean-Bernard Levy attends the presentation of the group's 2016 results in Paris yesterday. —AFP

Zimbabwe's street vendors use card payments, cars to stay ahead

HARARE: Clutching a payment terminal in one hand and a customer's debit card in the other, 34-year-old street vendor Melisa Mbiza stands on the roadside by her truck loaded with mangoes, touting for business in central Harare. "I'm in a hurry - please can you be quick," said her client, one of a sizeable queue forming as Mbiza swiped the card and packed the fruit into a plastic bag.

Mbiza hummed jovially while taking debit cards from her waiting customers and doling out mangoes. "There is very little hard cash circulating these days and if I relax, I risk going broke in business - so I have had to embrace electronic payments on the streets," she said. Business has been good since she started using the point-of-sale machine last April, she added.

With Zimbabwe's economy struggling and a shortage of cash as people hoard US dollars, the main currency, some 230 companies shut up shop in the first half of 2016, according to the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, pushing more people into an already bulging informal economy. But even in a high-tech form like Mbiza's, street vending is illegal in Zimbabwe, as stipulated in local bylaws. That doesn't put off the vendors, who have found their own ways to cope with tough conditions, including what they describe as "harassment" by the police if they set up on pavements.

"We now often choose to come into town at night when city council police have finished work for the day," said Mbiza.

Street vendors get some help to deal with daily challenges, thanks to civil society groups like the Zimbabwe Informal Sector Organization (ZISO).

It helps traders whose goods are seized by police to restock so they can stay in business. "We source money from good Samaritans and the donor community, which we use to compensate vendors who lose their goods to city council police," said ZISO executive director Promise Mkwananzi.

The National Vendors Union of Zimbabwe (NAVUZ), founded in 2008, also represents street traders, who have become a common feature in towns and cities across the southern African nation in recent years. There are more than 1 million informal vendors in Zimbabwe, with over 100,000 operating in Harare, of whom some 20,000 peddle their wares on pavements in the Central Business District, according to NAVUZ statistics. — Reuters

EXCHANGE RATES

Al-Muzaini Exchange Co.

ASIAN COUNTRIES	
Japanese Yen	2.700
Indian Rupees	4.570
Pakistani Rupees	2.919
Srilankan Rupees	2.034
Nepali Rupees	2.865
Singapore Dollar	216.590
Hongkong Dollar	3.455
Bangladesh Taka	3.833
Philippine Peso	6.136
Thai Baht	8.749
GCC COUNTRIES	
Saudi Riyal	81.694
Qatari Riyal	84.142
ani Riyal	795.608
Bahraini Dinar	81.347
UAE Dirham	83.408
ARAB COUNTRIES	
Egyptian Pound - Cash	21.000
Egyptian Pound - Transfer	18.293
Yemen Riyal/for 1000	1.230
Tunisian Dinar	134.810
Jordanian Dinar	431.290
Lebanese Lira/for 1000	2.041
Syrian Lira	2.183
Morocco Dirham	30.924
EUROPEAN & AMERICAN COUNTRIES	
US Dollar Transfer	306.150
Euro	326.970
Sterling Pound	385.290
Canadian dollar	235.500
Turkish lira	84.110
Swiss Franc	306.180
Australian Dollar	236.350
US Dollar Buying	304.950
GOLD	
20 Gram	251.470
10 Gram	128.660
5 Gram	65.170

Dollarco Exchange Co. Ltd

Rate for Transfer	Selling Rate
US Dollar	305.800
Canadian Dolla	234.970
Sterling Pound	384.915
Euro	326.090
Swiss Frank	306.032
Bahrain Dinar	810.650
UAE Dirhams	83.650
Qatari Riyals	84.870
Saudi Riyals	82.475
Jordanian Dinar	432.480
Egyptian Pound	16.108
Sri Lankan Rupees	2.034
Indian Rupees	4.571
Pakistani Rupees	2.917
Bangladesh Taka	3.863
Philippines Pesso	6.137
Cyprus pound	167.935
Japanese Yen	3.695
Syrian Pound	2.425
Nepalese Rupees	3.855
Malaysian Ringgit	69.630
Chinese Yuan Renminbi	44.890
Thai Bhat	9.725
Turkish Lira	83.265

Bahrain Exchange Company WLL

CURRENCY	BUY	SELL
Europe		
British Pound	0.376973	0.386973
Czech Korune	0.003999	0.015999
Danish Krone	0.039600	0.044600
Euro	0. 319298	0.328296
Norwegian Krone	0.032457	0.037657
Romanian Leu	0.072047	0.072091
Slovakia	0.009181	0.019181
Swedish Krona	0.030235	0.035235
Swiss Franc	0.298142	0.309142
Turkish Lira	0.077429	0.087729
Australasia		
Australian Dollar	0.226463	0.238463
New Zealand Dollar	0.213405	0.222905
America		
Canadian Dollar	0.228972	0.237972
Georgina Lari	0.138275	0.138275
US Dollars	0.302050	0.306450
US Dollars Mint	0.302550	0.306450
Asia		
Bangladesh Taka	0.003624	0.004208
Chinese Yuan	0.042961	0.046461
Hong Kong Dollar	0.037363	0.040113
Indian Rupee	0.002682	0.004905
Indonesian Rupiah	0.000018	0.000024
Japanese Yen	0.002613	0.002793
Kenyan Shilling	0.002941	0.002941
Korean Won	0.000258	0.000273
Malaysian Ringgit	0.065106	0.071106
Nepalese Rupee	0.003086	0.003256
Pakistan Rupee	0.002641	0.002931
Philippine Peso	0.006031	0.006331
Sierra Leone	0.000038	0.000044
Singapore Dollar	0.210333	0.220333
South African Rand	0.016998	0.025498
Sri Lankan Rupee	0.001682	0.002262
Taiwan	0.009827	0.010007
Thai Baht	0.008405	0.008955
Arab		
Bahraini Dinar	0.805497	0.813997
Egyptian Pound	0.011680	0.020933
Iranian Riyal	0.000085	0.000086
Iraqi Dinar	0.000187	0.000247
Jordanian Dinar	0.426143	0.435143
Kuwaiti Dinar	1.000000	1.000000
Lebanese Pound	0.000152	0.000252
Moroccan Dirhams	0.020153	0.044153
Nigerian Naira	0.000403	0.001038
Omani Riyal	0.788774	0.794454
Qatar Riyal	0.083280	0.084730
Saudi Riyal	0.080553	0.081853
Syrian Pound	0.001298	0.001518
Tunisian Dinar	0.130455	0.138455
Turkish Lira	0.077429	0.087729
UAE Dirhams	0.081929	0.083629
Yemeni Riyal	0.000995	0.001075

Fourth Kuwait Investment Forum from Feb 18 to 19

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: The organizers of the Kuwait Investment Forum held a press conference yesterday to announce the launch of the 4th Kuwait Investment Forum, which will be held on Feb 18 and 19, 2017. The forum this year is titled 'Investing in Kuwait - Available and Lost Opportunities'. It will be held under the auspices of the Minister of Finance Anas Al-Saleh, and various ministers and specialists from the investment field from both the public and private sectors will be participating. In addition, MPs and directors of investment companies and banks will also attend this event.

This forum will discuss various issues that are interesting for investors in general and tools that encourage investments, in addition to reviewing the ways of providing services for companies and other investment institutions in Kuwait, including the legal aspect of encouraging investments.

Economic obstacles and the ways of eliminating it for the investors are the main topics of this forum. "We will discuss vital investment issues including the achievements and challenges of small and medium enterprises, the government's role in supporting and sponsoring small enterprises, the state's vision for the future, national view of the economy during the changes happening and a general view of the economy in Kuwait," stressed Madi Al-Khamis, CEO of Madi Media Group during the press conference.

KUWAIT: Madi Al-Khamis, CEO of Madi Media Group, addresses the press conference. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

The forum will also include workshops. "We will hold seminars and workshops to give an opportunity to investors to discuss their concerns with officials in order to reach positive results and reach solutions to the obstacles they are facing. A group of analysts and academic experts in the economic and development fields will give advice during these workshops," he added.

"The main goal of the Kuwait Investment Forum is to provide an attractive environment in Kuwait during both the present and future phases, especially that local investment is limited only to the stock exchange. This is impeding the sustainable development process of turning Kuwait into a financial center," concluded Khamis.

Tata Motors profits plummet 96% after cash ban

MUMBAI: India's largest carmaker Tata Motors yesterday reported a 96 percent fall in quarterly profits, due to a cash ban which hit domestic business and weak sales at its luxury Jaguar Land Rover unit. Consolidated net profit for the three months ending December fell to 1.12 billion rupees ($16.73 million) from 29.53 billion rupees a year earlier, the Mumbai-based company said.

Revenue fell 4.3 percent to 685.41 billion rupees. The company's commercial vehicles business saw a "demand shrinkage" owing to the Indian government's shock move in November to withdraw high-value banknotes from circulation, it said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's demonetization drive removed around 86 percent of India's cash at a stroke, triggering massive queues outside banks and a cash shortage that has hit businesses across the country. "The segment witnessed major pressure with a fall of nine percent year-on-year" in sales, the company said.

Its Jaguar Land Rover business saw "lower wholesale volumes and relatively weaker product mix... and overall higher marketing expenses," the company said in its statement. Shares in Tata Motors, part of the sprawling tea-to-steel conglomerate, fell 7.3 percent on the Bombay Stock Exchange yesterday. — AFP

Yemen's Houthis set import cap, suspend dollar buying

DUBAI: The armed Houthi movement that controls much of Yemen is setting a cap on imports and temporarily banning traders from buying dollars in an attempt to stop the decline of the local rial currency, according to a document seen by Reuters.

The moves could aggravate a food crisis in the Arab country, already ravaged by war, hunger and disease. The document was issued after a meeting on Monday in the capital Sanaa between the Houthis' deputy prime minister for economic affairs, Hussein Maqbooli, and representatives of banks, money changers and importers of wheat, flour, and fuel.

It said the trade ministry had been asked to set a ceiling on imports and to prepare a list of essential goods needed for the whole of 2017, suggesting a move to ration imports to cope with the financial crisis. The meeting agreed that importers of wheat, flour, fuel products, telecommunications equipment and tobacco will "stop buying dollars for 30 days, and to oblige money changers not to sell or speculate", according to the document.

Nearly two years of war between a Saudi-led Arab coalition and the Houthi movement, which is aligned to Riyadh's arch-rival Iran, has left four-fifths of the population in need of aid.

The war has split the country between two power centres: The southern city of Aden, controlled by the internationally recognised government of President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, and the Houthi-run capital Sanaa. Both have suffered from the unstable currency.

The Sanaa meeting came about following a sharp drop in the value of the rial, which was trading at 385 to the dollar in Aden and up to 330 in Sanaa. It had been around 310 for most of the past three months. Officials from the Houthi group could not immediately be reached for comment.

Money changers in Aden, worried by instability and speculation in the market, also suspended trading in foreign currency yesterday over the sharp drop in the value of the rial, which some said had increased since Hadi's government pumped some 200 billion rials printed in Russia into the market in January. Last week, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization said Yemen's estimated supplies of wheat would run out at the end of March.

The financial situation has become more chaotic since Hadi's government decided to move the central bank from Sanaa to Aden and name a new governor. The Houthis rejected the move, leaving two rival central banks operating in the country.

The confusion has pushed many Yemenis toward destitution after months of unpaid salaries. Officials said that the central bank under the control of Hadi's government was due to meet money changers in Aden to discuss ways to stabilize the rial. — Reuters

German investors brace for unpredictable 2017

FRANKFURT AM MAIN: German investor confidence suffered a sharper than expected tumble in February, data showed yesterday, as growing concerns over political uncertainty cast a shadow over Europe's top economy. The closely-watched index for investors' future expectations fell by 6.2 points to 10.4 points this month, the Mannheim-based ZEW institute said in a statement.

Analysts surveyed by Factset had forecast a shallower fall to 14.9 points in February from 16.6 points in January. "The downturn in expectations is likely to be the result of the recently published unfavorable figures for industrial production, retail sales and exports," ZEW president Achim Wambach said in a statement. "Political uncertainty regarding Brexit, the future US economic policy as well as the considerable number of upcoming elections in Europe further depresses expectations," he added.

Germany rounded off 2016 with a strong quarter of growth at 0.4 percent, official data released yesterday showed. But pointers towards the future outlook have become less robust as 2017 has got under way. The Munich-based Ifo institute's business confidence index fell in January, albeit less sharply than the investor survey, defying analysts' predictions of an increase.

Ifo's barometer however remains at a level indicating expansion, and a consumer survey from pollsters GfK found the public in "sparkling" mood in January.

In the light of the ZEW reading on Tuesday, "the more positive message from January's business and consumer confidence surveys may now be looking a little too optimistic," said economist Jessica Hinds of Capital Economics.

Transatlantic troubles

"Economic indicators speak for a solid start to the year 2017," the German economy ministry commented ahead of the ZEW release yesterday, pointing to solid business confidence and high levels of employment. Nevertheless, "uncertainties remain present, especially in the foreign trade environment," they acknowledged. Germany's traditional export motor-responsible for a record 253-billion-euro ($269 billion) trade surplus last year-faces headwinds as traditional free trade champions the United States and Britain hint at protectionism. US President Donald Trump is mooting border taxes to put his "America first" campaign rhetoric into action-potentially undermining business from Germany's biggest export customer.

And trade with key partner Britain could suffer if the island nation and the rest of the EU are unable to agree an amicable divorce as London moves to implement a referendum decision to quit the bloc. German exports to countries outside its European Union neighbors already fell slightly in 2016, official data released last week showed.

Berlin can look around at a eurozone in better shape than for some time, with 1.7 percent growth in 2016 — according to Eurostat data released yesterday beating growth in the US of 1.6 percent. — AFP

Toshiba head resigns over huge nuclear business loss

TOKYO: Toshiba Corp's chairman resigned yesterday after the company logged such massive losses in its nuclear business that it must sell its lucrative computer-chip business to avoid going belly-up. The company projected a 712.5 billion yen ($6.3 billion) loss for its nuclear business related to the acquisition of CB&I Stone & Webster by its US nuclear unit Westinghouse. The company also said it will not take on new projects to construct nuclear plants. President Satoshi Tsunakawa said the company also was looking for potential partners to acquire a stake in Westinghouse.

He bowed deeply at a news conference to apologize for "troubling investors and stakeholders." Earlier yesterday, Toshiba delayed reporting its official financial results by a month, citing auditing problems. That sent Toshiba stock tumbling 8 percent in Tokyo trading. After the market closed, it released unaudited numbers, warning they may change "by a wide margin."

The company said Shigenori Shiga, the chairman, will step down from the board, effective Wednesday, but stay on as a Toshiba executive. Toshiba said its net worth was in the negative, at minus 191 billion yen ($1.7 billion) by the end of last year. The company hopes to fix that by the end of March by selling its flash-memory business and other assets.

In a stunning acknowledgement, Tsunakawa told reporters the company viewed its move into the nuclear sector by acquiring Westinghouse in 2006 as a misstep that led to its present woes.

Westinghouse's purchase in 2015 of CB&I Stone & Webster, a nuclear construction and services business, was aimed at winning more business in decontamination, decommissioning and plant projects. But it just amplified that problem. Auditors questioned Toshiba's latest reporting on the acquisition of CB&I Stone & Webster after a whistleblower, an employee at Westinghouse, wrote a letter to the Westinghouse president.

TOKYO: Toshiba Corp President Satoshi Tsunakawa leaves after a press conference at the company's headquarters in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP

The company said it will reorganize its nuclear business to be directly under Tsunakawa for stricter monitoring. It will also focus on reactor maintenance, the nuclear fuel business and decommissioning of the Fukushima nuclear plant in Japan, where reactors went into multiple meltdowns after the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami. Efficiency moves expected at CB&I Stone & Webster never played out, resulting in a huge overvaluation of the company's worth that led to the huge losses. Toshiba denied it had purposely covered up the problems. In its preliminary results, Toshiba said it anticipates a group net loss of 500 billion yen ($4.4 billion) for April-December of last year, including the 712.5 billion yen hit from its nuclear business.

The company is forecasting a group net loss of 390 billion yen ($3.43 billion) for the full year through March 31, instead of the 145 billion yen profit it had anticipated earlier.

Toshiba, founded in 1875, employs about 190,000 people and used to be one of the most respected brands of Japan Inc. It still has a sprawling business spanning household appliances, railways, hydrogen energy and elevator systems. The company has been grappling in recent years with a scandal over company officials' doctoring of accounting books to meet unrealistic profit targets. "It is so unfortunate that this has happened," said Ryoji Sato, a company director, when asked by a reporter about the company's promises to come clean. "We must keep trying to do better." — AP

KUALA LUMPUR: A worker takes a break on a hanging construction platform while painting a residential building in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. — AFP

PSA Group exploring takeover of GM's unit Opel

FRANKFURT: France's PSA Group, maker of Peugeot and Citroen cars, says it's exploring a "potential acquisition" of Opel, General Motors' money-losing European business.

PSA Group said in a statement yesterday that it was considering "numerous strategic initiatives" that would expand the existing cooperation between the two companies, and that a takeover of Opel was one of them. PSA Group and GM are already involved in several joint projects in Europe. The Detroit-based automaker acknowledged the talks and cautioned that "there can be no assurance that an agreement will be reached."

A PSA-Opel combination would create the second-largest carmaker by market share in Europe, with 16.6 percent of sales according to 2016 figures. It would be second only to Volkswagen, with 23.9 percent - but would vault ahead of the Renault-Nissan alliance with 13.9 percent. GM has endured years of losses at its European business, which makes cars under the Opel and Vauxhall brands. It had hoped to reach break-even by now, but last year posted a loss of $257 million for the year even as GM as a whole turned in a robust profit of $9.4 billion. The company's earnings in Europe took a $300 million hit from the British vote to leave the European Union. The resulting plunge in the British pound shrinks the dollar value of earnings from its Vauxhall models in that market.

GM CEO Mary Barra has underlined the company's commitment to Opel several times in recent years. But the unexpected loss last year has increased pressure on the company to find a solution in Europe, and she expressed dissatisfaction with the situation there after the company's most recent earnings report. Barra said on a conference call that "without the negative impact of Brexit we would have achieved break-even in 2016."

"We aren't satisfied with these results," she said, "and the team is focused on mitigating the effect through further cost efficiencies" and new models. GM Chief Financial Officer Chuck Stevens said the company expected only a "relatively flat performance" in Europe this year. Opel has struggled to control costs due to stronger worker protections in Europe that make it harder to adjust production capacity to demand than in the US or other locations. Opel and Vauxhall also face tough competition for sales of less profitable mass-market vehicles. Opel has had success with models such as the Mokka small SUV, and sales rose 4 percent last year. Its mainstay Astra model, which competes with the Volkswagen Golf, won the European Car of the Year award at the Geneva auto show. But it lacks larger SUV models that would bring fatter profits.

GM and PSA Group formed an alliance in 2012 but in 2013 GM announced it was selling its stake. In 2009, GM agreed on a sale of a majority stake in Opel to Canadian car parts firm Magna International and Russian lender Sberbank but called the deal off as the GM's fortunes improved following its bankruptcy restructuring. — AP

Trump rally gives way to Fed-fuelled caution

LONDON: Stocks flatlined and the dollar dipped yesterday as caution set in before testimony from Federal Reserve chief Janet Yellen that may offer clues to the timing of the next US interest rate rise.

Adding to pressure on the dollar was the resignation of President Donald Trump's national security adviser Michael Flynn, who quit over revelations he had discussed US sanctions against Moscow with the Russian ambassador to the United States before Trump took office, and misled Vice President Mike Pence about the conversations.

The prospect of Trump-led economic stimulus in the United States has underpinned the dollar and stocks in recent days, powering US equity markets to record highs on Monday and helping Asian shares to hit 19-month peaks yesterday. But the buoyant mood in global markets was tempered somewhat as attention turned to semi-annual testimony by Yellen yesterday and today that could highlight the likelihood of two or more US interest rate hikes this year. Dallas Fed President Robert Kaplan on Monday argued that the Fed should move soon to avoid falling behind the curve, especially as fiscal policy could drive faster growth and inflation.

"If Yellen wants March to be a live meeting as other Fed officials have suggested it is, she will have to adopt a more hawkish tone beyond the usual reference to data dependency," said ING senior rates strategist Martin van Vliet. "Currently we calculate a market implied probability of around 17 percent for a March rate hike."

The STOXX 600, Europe's leading index of top 600 shares, dipped 0.1 percent to 369.73 points, off more than one-year highs hit on Monday. In Asia, MSCI's broadest index of Asia-Pacific shares outside Japan edged up 0.2 percent, trying for its fifth straight session of gains. Japanese shares ran into trouble after Toshiba Corp delayed an anxiously awaited earnings release.

After a day of delay and confusion, Toshiba said it would take a $6.3 billion hit to its US nuclear unit, a writedown that wipes out its shareholder equity and leaves the loss-making group scrambling for capital. There was some eye-catching data from China, where producer price inflation picked up more than expected in January to near six-year highs, while consumer price inflation neared a three-year high.

Dollar, sterling on back foot

Adding to signs of a pick-up in inflation globally, other data yesterday showed British consumer prices rose last month at the fastest pace since June 2014. US stock market futures were just a touch lower. US stock indexes hit historic peaks on Monday, with the benchmark S&P 500's market value topping $20 trillion as investors bet tax cuts promised by Trump would boost the economy. The dollar stumbled against major currencies after Flynn's resignation and as investors looked ahead to Yellen's testimony. The dollar index dipped 0.2 percent against a basket of currencies to 100.78, while the euro was 0.3 percent firmer after three sessions of losses to stand at $1.0628.

Sterling was the biggest currency mover, falling 0.5 percent against the dollar after the UK inflation numbers came in lower than expected. In commodity markets, metals were on a tear thanks to supply disruptions and strong Chinese demand. Aluminum touched its highest in 21 months on renewed concerns about potential closures of Chinese smelters to cut pollution, while copper also extended gains. — Reuters

TOKYO: People walk past an electronic stock indicator of a securities firm in Tokyo yesterday. Shares in Asia fell back after an early rally yesterday as investors awaited comments to Congress by Federal Reserve chair Janet Yellen. —AP

Daily Kuwait Stock Exchange Report

Global جلوبل

Tuesday 14 February 2017

Index		Change	Closing	Last Closing	High	Low
Price index	▲	94.52	6,751.37	6,656.85	6,751.37	6,656.62
Weighted Index	▲	5.04	424.09	419.05	424.68	417.16
KSX 15	▲	11.56	963.68	952.12	967.84	946.36

Volume	188,294,522
Value (KWD)	20,753,633
Number of Trades	4,128

Security	High	Low	Trades Volume	Value (KD)	Trades	Last		Change
MARIN	67	64	12645	809	2	67	▼	-1.0
IKARUS	41.5	41.0	175,015	7,251	6	41.0	▼	-0.5
IPG	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	365	—	0.0
NAPESCO	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	820	—	0.0
ENERGYH	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	42.5	—	0.0
GPI	45.0	42.0	11,929,989	525,179	202	45.0	▲	1.5
ABAR	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	100	—	0.0
Oil & Gas			**12,117,649**	**533,239**	**210**	**858.28**	▲	**11.10**
KFOUC	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	182	—	0.0
BPCC	495	490	111,709	54,987	10	495	▼	-5.0
ALKOUT	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	660	—	0.0
ALQURAIN	230	228	53,402	12,198	10	230	▲	2.0
Basic Materials			**165,111**	**67,185**	**20**	**1331.03**	▲	**17.94**
KCEM	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	410	—	0.0
REFRI	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	315	—	0.0
CABLE	380	375	172,500	65,325	10	380	—	0.0
SHIP	178	170	671,296	118,315	29	178	▲	10.0
PCEM	910	900	5,500	4,975	2	910	—	0.0
PAPER	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	295	—	0.0
MRC	60	60	5,000	300	1	60	—	0.0
ACICO	270	270	50,000	13,500	4	270	▼	-5.0
GGMC	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	300	—	0.0
HCC	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	118	—	0.0
KBMMC	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	190	—	0.0
NICBM	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	210	—	0.0
EQUIPMENT	61	56	7,225,792	435,264	188	61	▲	5.0
NCCI	42.5	42.5	20	1	1	42.5	▼	-2.5
GYPSUM	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	95	—	0.0
SALBOOKH	66	62	102,000	6,371	13	66	—	0.0
AGLTY	640	620	985,195	620,391	24	630	—	0.0
EDU	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	206	—	0.0
CLEANING	46.5	44.5	2,181,078	98,311	60	45.5	▼	-1.0
KGL	65	61	1,043,900	64,876	55	61	▼	-3.0
KCPC	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	172	—	0.0
HUMANSOFT	2,720	2,680	1,517,512	4,097,873	295	2,700	—	0.0
NAFAIS	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	206	—	0.0
SAFWAN	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	385	—	0.0
GFC	34.5	30.0	2	0	2	34.5	▲	2.0
MAYADEEN	27.0	26.5	666,377	17,659	20	27.0	—	0.0
CGC	560	560	20,000	11,200	2	560	▼	-40.0
MTCC	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	56	—	0.0
UPAC	730	700	33,491	24,006	12	700	▼	-20.0
ALAFCO	244	238	201,575	48,141	7	244	—	0.0
MUBARRAD	60	58	901,000	53,390	21	59	—	0.0
LOGISTICS	73	72	468,397	33,772	12	73	—	0.0
SCEM	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	86	—	0.0
GCEM	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	74	—	0.0
QIC	79	79	61,096	4,827	2	79	▲	4.0
FCEM	79	79	112,500	8,888	2	79	▼	-1.0
RKWC	92	90	129,520	11,669	4	92	▼	-1.0
SPEC	80	80	21,500	1,720	3	80	—	0.0
Industrials			**16,575,251**	**5,740,772**	**769**	**1495.70**	▲	**10.22**
KSH	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	136	—	0.0
NSH	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	64	—	0.0
PAPCO	95	95	4,999	475	1	95	—	0.0
CATTL	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	214	—	0.0
DANAH	88	86	952,202	81,921	38	86	▼	-1.0
POULT	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	196	—	0.0
FOOD	2,620	2,600	102,025	266,906	10	2,620	▲	20.0
Consumer Goods			**1,059,226**	**349,302**	**49**	**1131.58**	▼	**-9.97**
MHC	260	260	5,000	1,300	1	260	▲	10
ATC	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	920	—	0
YIACO	340	330	218,830	72,284	15	330	▼	-25
Health Care			**223,830**	**73,584**	**16**	**1225.37**	▼	**-10.12**
KCIN	1,240	1,160	3,350	3,903	6	1,180	▼	-60
KHOT	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	265	—	0
SULTAN	57	57	124,073	7,072	5	57	—	0
CABLETV	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	50	—	0
EYAS	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	385	—	0
IFAHR	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	192	—	0
OULAFUEL	118	116	8,719	1,019	7	116	▼	-2
MUNTAZAHAT	83	81	1,969,198	161,300	65	81	▼	-1
JAZEERA	750	750	47	35	1	750	—	0
SOOR	116	114	50,133	5,786	9	114	▼	-2
FUTUREKID	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	106	—	0
ALRAI	136	136	222	30	1	136	▼	-4
ZIMAH	43.0	42.0	519,777	21,973	25	42.0	▼	-1
Mezzan	930	930	152,575	141,895	11	930	—	0
Consumer Services			**2,828,094**	**343,013**	**130**	**990.09**	▲	**9.35**
ZAIN	420	415	5,122,282	2,127,260	80	415	▲	5
OOREDOO	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	1,140	—	0
HITSTELEC	43.0	42.0	6,274,841	265,115	104	42.0	▼	-1
VIVA	920	910	22,726	20,697	22	910	▼	-10
Telecommunications			**11,419,849**	**2,413,071**	**206**	**686.90**	▲	**12.76**
NBK	660	640	2,401,031	1,560,171	33	660	▲	20
GBK	238	238	1,130,000	268,940	22	238	—	0
CBK	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	410	—	0
ABK	300	295	272,807	80,483	8	300	—	0
ALMUTAHED	410	410	970	398	1	410	—	0
KIB	206	206	351,000	72,306	8	206	▲	2
BURG	305	305	347,233	105,906	15	305	—	0
KFIN	550	540	1,157,537	633,660	37	550	—	0
BOUBYAN	400	395	54,728	21,667	13	395	—	0
AUB	194	192	704,278	135,994	17	192	▼	-2
ITHMR	41.5	39.0	23,379,978	942,004	286	41.0	▲	2
WARBABANK	222	220	1,356,457	301,132	79	222	—	0
Banks			**31,156,019**	**4,122,661**	**519**	**959.08**	▲	**16.87**
KINS	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	280	—	0
GINS	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	670	—	0.0
AINS	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	455	—	0.0
WINS	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	104	—	0.0
KUWAITRE	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	180	—	0.0
FTI	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	49.0	—	0.0
WETHAQ	30.5	30.0	35,260	1,058	5	30.5	▼	-0.5
BKIKWT	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	355	—	0.0
Insurance			**35,260**	**1,058**	**5**	**1139.10**	▲	**16.77**
SOKOUK	36.0	35.0	1665010	59,089	48	36.0	▲	0.5
KRE	65	62	6,120,474	386,641	91	64	▲	2.0
URC	94	94	80,000	7,520	2	94	▼	-2.0
NRE	108	102	3,172,912	334,998	63	106	▲	2.0
SRE	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	355	—	0.0
TAM	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	470	—	0.0
AREEC	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	190	—	0.0
MASSALEH	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	40.0	—	0.0
ARABREC	30.5	30.5	702,353	21,422	17	30.5	▼	-0.5
ERESCO	40.5	38.0	8,567,823	341,020	127	40.5	▲	2.5
MABANEE	860	850	56,649	48,718	7	860	▲	10.0
INJAZZAT	76	75	160,000	12,010	4	76	▲	1.0
INVESTORS	23.0	22.0	4,050,397	91,071	50	23.0	▲	0.5
IRC	27.5	27.0	31,500	851	3	27.5	—	0.0
ALTIJARIA	80	79	1,132,665	89,545	13	80	—	0.0
SANAM	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	31.5	—	0.0
AAYANRE	64	64	256,864	16,439	7	64	—	0.0
AQAR	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	69	—	0.0
ALAQARIA	23.5	23.0	114,250	2,681	6	23.5	—	0.0
MAZAYA	110	108	55,730	6,060	8	110	—	0.0
ADNC	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	11.0	—	0.0
THEMAR	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	89	—	0.0
TIJARA	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	48.0	—	0.0
TAAMEER	22.5	21.5	4,422,600	97,645	57	21.5	—	0.0
ARKAN	90	90	40,000	3,600	4	90	—	0.0
ARGAN	176	172	107,680	18,932	9	176	▲	10.0
ABYAAR	23.0	22.5	358,000	8,058	5	23.0	—	0.0
MUNSHAAT	56	55	1,121,905	62,243	42	55	▼	-2.0
FIRSTDUBAI	68	64	4,411,258	294,230	99	68	▲	3.0
KBT	42.0	41.0	2,389,768	98,291	55	41.5	—	0.0
REAM	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	196	—	0.0
MENA	20.5	20.0	355,000	7,207	12	20.5	—	0.0
ALMUDON	41.0	39.5	5,986,159	240,713	121	40.5	▲	0.5
MARAKEZ	30.0	29.5	3,000	89	2	30.0	▲	1.0
REMAL	69	67	557,800	37,430	38	67	—	0.0
AWJ	65	65	156,625	10,181	12	65	▲	1.0
Real Estate			**46,076,422**	**2,296,683**	**902**	**1067.57**	▲	**17.75**
KINV	85	82	134,560	11,264	20	85	—	0.0
FACIL	158	158	130,000	20,480	4	158	▲	2.0
IFA	32.5	31.5	1,549,698	49,105	27	32.0	▲	0.5
NINV	96	95	1,270,367	121,433	41	96	—	0.0
KPROJ	510	500	180,500	90,600	8	500	▼	-10.0
COAST	39.5	38.5	2,223,998	86,470	56	39.0	▲	0.5
SECH	44.5	43.5	1,335,593	58,771	34	44.0	▼	-0.5
SGC	90	90	50	5	1	90	▲	1.0
ARZAN	32.0	32.0	172,000	5,504	5	32.0	▲	0.5
MARKAZ	93	91	21,100	1,932	3	92	▼	-1.0
KMEFIC	23.5	21.0	405,540	8,874	13	22.5	▼	-1.0
ALAMAN	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	49.0	—	0.0
ALOLA	48.0	46.5	1,520,669	71,582	43	48.0	▲	1.5
ALMAL	20.5	19.5	5,027,005	99,460	62	19.5	▼	-0.5
GIH	30.5	29.5	1,914,742	57,029	44	29.5	▼	-0.5
AAYAN	33.5	32.5	2,528,780	84,502	50	33.5	▲	0.5
BAYANINV	34.0	33.0	109,048	3,654	8	33.5	—	0.0
OSOUL	60	60	12,217	733	2	60	—	0.0
KFIC	40.5	38.0	79,500	3,088	13	40.5	▲	2.5
KAMCO	99	91	33,746	3,107	7	94	▼	-2.0
NIH	65	63	504,675	32,165	25	64	—	0.0
UNICAP	51	48.5	7,805,557	388,985	137	50	▲	1.5
MADAR	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	12.5	—	0.0
ALDEERA	32.0	32.0	20,000	640	1	32.0	—	0.0
ALSALAM	49.0	48.0	1,100,584	53,223	29	48.5	—	0.0
EKTTITAB	38.0	37.0	335,900	12,492	14	38.0	▲	1.0
ALMADINA	42.5	41.0	3,411,102	141,800	74	42.0	▼	-0.5
NOOR	47.0	47.0	400	19	1	47.0	▲	0.5
TAMINV	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	280	—	0.0
EXCH	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	1,500	—	0.0
TAIBA	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	75	—	0.0
KSHC	30.0	29.5	86,005	2,537	5	30.0	—	0.0
ASIYA	32.0	30.5	22,185	677	5	32.0	—	0.0
GNAHC	36.0	36.0	170,000	6,120	4	36.0	—	0.0
AMWAL	24.5	24.0	5,500	132	2	24.5	—	0.0
ALIMTIAZ	114	110	25,008,481	2,801,178	295	114	▲	8.0
MANAZEL	29.5	28.5	1,099,400	31,593	26	29.0	▼	-0.5
NIND	124	124	398,000	49,352	14	124	—	0.0
BIIHC	25.5	25.0	1,545,200	38,630	12	25.0	▲	0.5
SENERGY	34.0	34.0	16,582	564	1	34.0	—	0.0
AGHC	68	65	2,984,847	196,662	87	67	▲	2.0
KPPC	43.5	43.0	155,620	6,696	9	43.0	▼	-0.5
TAHSSILAT	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	43.0	—	0.0
JEERANH	49.0	46.5	10,100	470	2	49.0	—	0.0
EKHOLDING	178	178	5,000	890	1	178	▲	2.0
GFH	166	162	609,950	99,855	30	166	—	0.0
INOVEST	80	79	181,400	14,359	13	80	▲	2.0
Financial Services			**64,125,601**	**4,656,633**	**1,228**	**782.58**	▲	**19.40**
Investment Instruments			**0**	**0**	**0**	**1081.97**	—	**0.00**
ASC	242	242	5,000	1,210	1	242	▼	-2.0
OSOS	130	128	2,500	321	3	128	▼	-2.0
HAYATCOMM	51	48.5	394,660	19,474	22	50	▼	-2.0
Technology			**402,160**	**21,005**	**26**	**837.84**	▲	**8.07**
SANAD	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	100	—	0.0
AFAQ	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	162	—	0.0
ALSHAMEL	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	460	—	0.0
EFFECT	38.0	38.0	69,861	2,655	2	38.0	▼	-2.0
AJWAN	57	57	1,184,663	67,526	17	57	▲	5.0
MASAKEN	78	71	855,526	65,247	29	78	▲	5.0
DALQAN	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	350	—	0.0
ALEID	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	90	—	0.0
MIDAN	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	1,220	—	0.0
FLEX	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	47.0	—	0.0
THURAYA	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	158	—	0.0
AMAR	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	49.5	—	0.0
Parallel Market			**2,110,050**	**135,427**	**48**	**1201.20**	▲	**1.28**

For more information, call Global Investment House on 1 80 42 42, www.globalinv.net

National Bank of Kuwait Financial Markets Daily Report

الوطني NBK

At 02:00 PM Previous Day

Global Stock Indices

Index	Previous Close	Last Price	Change		Daily Performance %	Yearly Performance %
Dow Jones	20,269.37	20,412.16	142.79	▲	0.70	3.29
NASDAQ	5,734.13	5,763.96	29.83	▲	0.52	7.07
S&P 500	2,316.10	2,328.25	12.15	▲	0.52	3.98
Financial Times	7,278.92	7,286.47	7.55	▲	0.10	2.01
DAX	11,774.43	11,770.54	-3.89	▼	-0.03	2.52
CAC 40	4,888.19	4,887.42	-0.77	▼	-0.02	0.52
Swiss	8,462.88	8,431.90	-30.98	▼	-0.37	2.58
Nikkei 225	19,459.15	19,238.98	-220.17	▼	-1.13	0.65
Topix	1,554.20	1,539.12	-15.08	▼	-0.97	1.35
Hang Seng	23,710.98	23,703.01	-7.97	▼	-0.03	7.74
Straits Times	3,111.63	3,072.47	-39.16	▼	-1.26	6.65

MENA Stock Indices

Index	Previous Close	Last Price	Change		Daily Performance %	Yearly Performance %
Kuwait	6,656.85	6,751.37	94.52	▲	1.42	13.65
Saudi Arabia	7,059.55	7,035.20	-24.35	▼	-0.34	-2.09
Dubai	3,637.55	3,652.82	15.27	▲	0.42	3.02
Abu Dhabi	4,563.98	4,572.57	8.59	▲	0.19	0.39
Bahrain	1,307.81	1,308.49	0.68	▲	0.05	7.16
Qatar	10,663.49	10,670.51	7.02	▲	0.07	2.17
Oman	5,815.36	5,819.08	3.72	▲	0.06	0.56
Lebanon	1,225.27	1,216.61	-8.66	▼	-0.71	1.03
Jordan	2,184.19	2,187.72	3.53	▲	0.16	0.64
Egypt	12,740.05	12,623.80	-116.25	▼	-0.91	3.20
Morocco	12,367.76	12,295.59	-72.17	▼	-0.58	6.21
Tunisia	5,526.82	5,514.29	-12.53	▼	-0.23	0.69

Global Currencies Exchange Rate

Currency	Kuwaiti Dinar	Saudi Riyal	US Dollar	Euro	Sterling Pound	Swiss Franc	Japanese Yen	Australian Dollar
Kuwait Dinar		12.1744	3.2589	3.0687	2.6145	3.2736	369.53	4.2434
Saudi Riyal	0.08214		0.2677	0.2521	0.2148	0.2689	30.35	0.3486
US Dollar	0.30685	3.7357		0.9416	0.8022	1.0045	113.39	1.3021
Euro	0.32587	3.9673	1.0620		0.8522	1.0671	120.42	1.3839
Sterling Pound	0.38249	4.6566	1.2465	1.1734		1.2524	141.36	1.6236
Swiss Franc	0.30548	3.7190	0.9955	0.9371	0.7985		112.89	1.2963
Japanese Yen	0.00271	0.0329	0.0088	0.0083	0.0071	0.0089		0.0115
Australian Dollar	0.23566	2.8690	0.7680	0.7226	0.6159	0.7715	87.08	

MENA Currencies Exchange Rate

Currency	US Dollar	Kuwaiti Dollar	Saudi Riyal	Bahraini Dinar	Qatari Riyal	Omani Riyal	Emirates Dirham	Egyptian Pound
US Dollar		0.30685	3.7357	0.3741	3.6266	0.3832	3.6573	16.5400
Kuwaiti Dinar	3.2589		12.1744	1.2190	11.8188	1.2487	11.9189	53.9026
Saudi Riyal	0.2677	0.08214		0.1001	0.9708	0.1026	0.9790	4.4276
Bahraini Dinar	2.6734	0.82034	9.9872		9.6955	1.0243	9.7776	44.2187
Qatari Riyal	0.2757	0.08461	1.0301	0.1031		0.1056	1.0085	4.5607
Omani Riyal	2.6099	0.80086	9.7500	0.9762	9.4652		9.5453	43.1685
Emirates Dirham	0.2734	0.08390	1.0214	0.1023	0.9916	0.1048		4.5225
Egyptian Pound	0.0605	0.01855	0.2259	0.0226	0.2193	0.0232	0.2211	

Global Interest Rates

Currency	1-Week	1-Month	3-Month	6-Month	1-Year
Kuwaiti Dinar	0.75	1.19	1.44	1.75	2.06
US Dollar	0.71	0.77	1.03	1.33	1.71
Euro	-0.40	-0.39	-0.34	-0.24	-0.11
Sterling Pound	0.23	0.26	0.36	0.52	0.75
Swiss Franc	-0.79	-0.78	-0.72	-0.66	-0.50
Australian Dollar	1.57	1.63	1.60	1.60	1.63
Japanese Yen	-0.02	-0.02	-0.02	0.02	0.13

Global Bond Yields

Country	2-Year	5-Year	10-Year	30-Year
United States	1.20	1.92	2.44	3.04
Europe	-0.82	-0.44	0.34	1.13
United Kingdom	0.10	0.50	1.29	1.99

Commodities

Index	Previous Close	Last Price	Change		Daily Performance %	Yearly Performance %
Kuwait Oil	53.37	53.32	-0.05	▼	-0.09	0.30
Brent	53.66	54.17	0.51	▲	0.95	-1.86
West Texas	53.01	52.91	-0.10	▼	-0.19	-1.40
Gold	1225.06	1228.56	3.50	▲	0.29	5.98
Silver	17.79	17.87	0.08	▲	0.45	10.41

Source: National Bank of Kuwait

Production cut keeps oil prices steady

KAMCO oil market monthly report

KUWAIT: Oil prices remained elevated since the start of the year on the back of better than expected compliance to the agreed production cuts by OPEC and non-OPEC producers. According to the IEA, compliance by OPEC producers stood at 90 percent as larger-than-agreed cuts by Saudi Arabia was partially offset by higher production from Libya and Nigeria, which are exempt from the agreement. The production rate by OPEC during the month stood at 32.3 mb/d, lowest level in 14-months, according to Bloomberg, whereas OPEC's monthly report puts the number at 32.139 mb/d, according to secondary sources. In the non-OPEC camp, the cuts were estimated to have reached 269 tb/d during January-17 as compared to levels seen during the last quarter of 2016 for the eleven producers that have agreed to slash productions, including Russia and Kazakhstan. This is almost 50 percent of the agreed upon cuts of around 558 tb/d for the non-OPEC producers.

Meanwhile, the optimism related to lower output was almost balanced by rising oil output in the US as seen from the rising rig count. According to Baker Hughes, US oil companies added the highest number of rigs since 2012 over the past four weeks with an increase of more than 60 rigs taking the total count to 591 active rigs. This is also the highest rig count since October-15 as drillers added rigs in 14 out of 15 weeks. According to Reuters data, oil production in the US has increased by almost 528 tb/d since the last quarter of 2016 as oil firms pumped more oil to take the advantage of higher prices.

On the other hand, demand side factors are also said to have been positive over the last quarter of 2016, especially in Europe due to colder weather conditions. For 2017, oil demand is expected to benefit from higher consumption in China and other non-OECD countries coupled with expectations of higher economic growth led demand in Europe. Both IEA and the OPEC monthly reports have pointed at higher oil demand during 2017 with IEA predicting a demand growth of 1.4 mb/d (an increase of 0.1 mb/d as compared to its previous forecast) and OPEC expecting a slightly lower demand growth of 1.2 mb/d (up 35 tb/d from its previous forecast). One of the key markets for oil, India, is expected to remain strong in the long run, however, we believe that the recent policy initiatives have affected demand during the last quarter of 2016 that spilled over to 2017. According to the country's Oil Ministry, India's monthly oil demand declined the most since May-03 with fuel consumption down 4.5 percent during January-17.

The opposing forces of positive demand and higher supply resulted in oil trading within a very tight range during the month. Average OPEC crude price during January-17 stood at USD 52.4/b, a marginal increase of 1.4 percent as compared to the previous month. Brent crude and Kuwait crude also traded higher as compared to the previous month with average prices up by 1.1 percent and 1.9 percent, respectively. KAMCO Research expects oil price to remain range bound in the near term until the production cuts remain in effect. Beyond June-17, we expect additional pressure on prices as producers emerge from the temporary cuts.

Oil Prices

OPEC and Brent crude reached a new high of $54.24/b and $55.94 /b, respectively, during Feburary-17 after three consecutive sessions of gains at the start of the month as a result of reported decline of 46 tb/d in US crude production, according to EIA. According to the agency's Short Term Energy Outlook, the oil market is expected to balance sooner than previously expected after the increase in world oil inventories over the past few years comes to a halt and higher economic growth in both developed and emerging markets drive higher global oil demand over the next two years. The report included an upward revision to Chinese oil consumption and supply as well as demand outside the OECD countries. Nevertheless, the agency also expects US oil production to reach a 48-year high level of 9.53 mb/d in 2018 as domestic shale oil producers benefit from higher oil prices as a result of OPEC production cuts.

This was also reflected in the weekly rig count data by Baker Hughes that reported an increase in rig count in 14 out of 15 weeks. According to Baker Hughes, US oil companies added the highest number of rigs since 2012 over the past four weeks with an increase of more than 60 rigs taking the total count to 591 active rigs, the highest rig count since October-15. Furthermore, oil prices also got support from USD weakness that traded at a two month low level against a basket of currency, although the trend seemed to have reversed during the second week of February-17 after hopes that US tax cuts would drive corporate profits and investments in the US lifted the greenback.

Average OPEC crude price during January-17 stood at $52.4/b, a marginal increase of 1.4 percent as compared to the previous month as crude traded within a very tight range during the month. Brent crude and Kuwait crude also traded higher as compared to the previous month with average prices up by 1.1 percent and 1.9 percent, respectively, for the two grades of crude oil. The trend during the first half of February-17 was also positive with marginal increase in average prices. We expect oil price to remain range bound in the near term until the production cuts remain in effect. Beyond June-17, we expect additional pressure on prices as producers emerge from the temporary cuts.

World oil demand

Higher oil demand in OECD Europe and Asia Pacific, especially during 4Q-16, continued to positively impact OPEC's demand projections for 2016. According to its latest monthly report, OPEC raised its world oil demand growth expectations for 2016 by 70 tb/d to 1.32 mb/d on the back of colder-than-expected weather in the aforementioned regions. Demand from US was raised by 50 tb/d for 3Q-16 and 4Q-16 with growth emanating primarily from the road transportation sector triggered by the low oil price environment. According to the latest monthly data for demand in the US, growth in November-16 was led by healthy economic growth and colder weather conditions, in addition to higher demand in the road transportation sector. OECD Europe also witnessed positive revision for all the four quarter of 2016 with higher-than expected demand growth in Poland, Spain, Sweden, Turkey and the UK on the back of better economic conditions, increased vehicle sales and colder-than-expected weather conditions in Q4-16. The OECD Asia Pacific region, on the other hand, witnessed its first demand growth since 2012 after a positive adjustment of 20 tb/d to its 2016 demand projection. On the other hand, demand outlook for the non-OECD growth remained largely unchanged despite internal revisions as positive changes to demand figures for India and China were completely offset by downward revisions for LatAm and the Middle East and Africa regions. For 2017, after marginal upgrade in its previous report, OPEC raised demand growth expectations by 35 tb/d to 1.19 mb/d and full year demand is now expected to reach 95.81 mb/d. This increase is primarily expected to be driven by colder weather conditions and higher vehicle sales in OECD Europe, further supported by higher expectations for petrochemical feedstock requirements in OECD Asia Pacific that resulted in upward revision of 40 tb/d in Q1-17 and 20 tb/d for Q2-17. The colder weather conditions resulted in upward revisions of 50 tb/d for Q1-17 and 30 tb/d for Q2-17. Economic development in Europe and some of the Asian countries, including the Middle East, are expected to be the key driver of demand in 2017 that would be partially impacted by fuel substitution effect in some pockets (Japan and Mexico).

World oil supply

Non-OPEC supply predictions for 2016 was revised upward by 50 tb/d and is expected to contract by 0.66 mb/d to reach year-end supply expectation of 57.2 mb/d. The upward revision mainly reflected higher-than-expected supply growth in Q4-16 in the US, Canada, Norway, Russia and China that was partially offset by downward revisions in Kazakhstan, Australia and Malaysia. The final quarter saw m-o-m supply growth of a strong 1.08 mb/d reflecting higher production in response to strengthening oil prices. On the other hand, the overall contraction during the year was primarily on the back of lower production in OECD, China and Developing Countries, which were partially offset by higher production in Russia. The decline in the US was primarily from US onshore fields while the drop in output in China were primarily as a result of mature oil fields and lower investment by local oil companies. Non-OPEC supply forecast for 2017 were raised by 120 tb/d and is now expected to grow by 0.24 mb/d to average at 57.44 mb/d. The increase in expectations primarily reflected increased drilling activity and higher investment in the US, leading to higher onshore crude oil and NGLs production. US and Brazil are expected to make the highest contribution to supply growth during 2017, with a combined increase of almost 0.5 mb/d during the year followed by Canada (+0.18 mb/d) and Kazakhstan (0.14mb/d). That said, the expected decline in production as agreed between OPEC and non-OPEC countries would help to offset some of the oil glut. Evidently, the agreement resulted in global supply decline of 1.29 mb/d during January-17 to averaged at 95.82 mb/d.

OPEC Oil Production & Spare Capacity

OPEC production reached the lowest level in 14 months and averaged at 32.3 mb/d during January-17 after witnessing a month-on-month decline of 0.84 mb/d, according to Bloomberg. The decline was primarily on the back of 0.5 mb/d drop in production undertaken by Saudi Arabia followed by 160 tb/d decline in the UAE and 150 tb/d decline in Kuwait. Venezuela and Algeria also curbed production by a combined 140 tb/d. These declines were partially offset by higher production in Nigeria, Iran and Libya that added a combined 270 tb/d during the month. In terms of production cuts, the oil minister of Kuwait said that the compliance in OPEC was as high as 92 percent by the end of January-17. In addition, UAE has expressed hopes that the output cuts could even rise in the coming months as the impact of lower oil output reflects in higher prices. It was reportedly reiterated that Saudi Arabia has undertaken a higher than agreed share of the production cuts to below the 10 mb/d mark, although the Kingdom was touted to slash output by 486 tb/d.

Meanwhile, after two consecutive months of marginal decline totaling 30 tb/d, Iran increased production during January-17 by 70 tb/d to reach 3.8 mb/d, a level which we believe the producer intends to maintain in the near term. However, in the longer run, the country needs to attract investment in oil infrastructure as the current production comes primarily from aging fields. Moreover, it was also reported that Iran has extended the deadline for submitting bids for oil and gas projects from its original deadline of January-17 to mid-February-17 and has been working on introducing better contract terms to attract more investors in the sector. Nigeria also added 140 tb/d after two consecutive months of decline, although the production level of 1.64 mb/d still remains low as compared to the country's peak level of 2.2 mb/d. Libya also added 60 tb/d during the month to 690 tb/d (700 tb/d according to OPEC report), the highest level in 3 years as it plans to increase production to 1 mb/d by the end of the year. We believe that a production recovery in Nigeria and higher production in Libya could dampen the prospects of oil market rebalancing during 2H-17, unless larger OPEC producers and non-OPEC players take a bigger share.

S Korean prosecution again seeks Samsung chief's arrest

SEOUL: South Korea's special prosecutor's office said yesterday it would again seek a warrant to arrest Samsung Group chief Jay Y. Lee, a suspect in a graft investigation that may topple President Park Geun-hye. Lee, the third-generation leader of the country's top conglomerate, was questioned for more than 15 hours by the special prosecutor's office on Monday. The prosecutor also seeks the arrest of Samsung Electronics Co Ltd executive Park Sang-jin.

"We have filed for an arrest warrant for Vice Chairman Lee Jae-yong and President Park Sang-jin today," the prosecution office said in a statement, referring to the 48-year-old Samsung Group chief by his Korean name. Last month, the Seoul Central District Court rejected the prosecution's first request for a warrant to arrest the Samsung chief.

If Lee is arrested it would deal a serious blow to Samsung, the world's biggest maker of smartphones, memory chips and flat-screen televisions, potentially hampering strategic decision-making such as new investments and acquisitions. The prosecution office said the charges the two executives would face included bribery, embezzlement and hiding assets overseas. The prosecution also said it would also bring an additional charge of perjury against for Lee in the latest arrest warrant request. The office declined to elaborate, saying it would give a briefing on the details today. Lee and the Samsung Group have denied wrongdoing. The Samsung Group declined to make either executive available and a group spokeswoman did not immediately comment on the accusations against the executives. The Seoul court said it would hold a hearing on the arrest warrants request at 10:30 am (0130 GMT) tomorrow. The head of corporate analysis firm CEO Score, Park Ju-gun, said if Lee was arrested it would affect some long-term operating decisions as well as his plans to consolidate management control of the group. But the impact on Samsung firms' near-term earnings would be limited because they are run by professional managers.

Looking at links

In its unsuccessful attempt last month to arrest Lee, the special prosecutor accused Lee of pledging payments to a company and organizations backed by Park's confidant, Choi Soon-sil, to win support for a 2015 merger of two Samsung affiliates. Park was impeached by parliament in December after accusations that she colluded with Choi to pressure big businesses to donate to two foundations set up to back the president's policy initiatives.

Park, 65, and the daughter of a former military ruler, remains in office but has been stripped of her powers while the Constitutional Court decides whether to uphold the impeachment. If the Constitutional Court rules to uphold the impeachment vote, Park would be South Korea's first elected leader to be forced from office and a presidential election would be held.

The special prosecutor has focused on Samsung Group's relationship with Park, previously accusing Lee in his capacity as Samsung chief of pledging 43 billion won ($38 million) to win support for the 2015 merger of Samsung C&T Corp and Cheil Industries Inc. Proving illicit dealings between Park, or those linked to her, and the Samsung Group is critical for the special prosecutor's case that ultimately targets Park, analysts have said. Earlier on Tuesday, special prosecutor's spokesman Lee Kyu-chul told reporters the office had told parliament it needed to prolong its investigation. The office can seek a 30-day extension to its current deadline of Feb. 28. — Reuters

China's credit growth poses challenge, tightening gradual

BEIJING: Chinese banks kept up a strong pace of lending at the start of the year, even with signs of tightening by the central bank, highlighting the challenge Beijing faces as it tries to deflate asset bubbles without risking a blow to economic activity.

January's new yuan loans were the second-highest on record as banks stepped up lending, indicating policymakers' efforts to rein in risks have not reduced bank credit being extended to China's highly-indebted corporate sector. A spike in off-balance sheet lending also showed demand for credit remained strong, while inflation picked up to multi-year highs, though analysts expect any tightening to be gradual as China's economic recovery is fragile. "This is not across the board or broad tightening that we normally see...we think the recovery momentum is driven by the recovery in prices, especially PPI, rather than any real return of real demand," said Betty Wang, senior China economist at ANZ in Hong Kong.

"We do not think the economy is solid enough to counter broad-based or aggressive tightening." Much of the increase in consumer prices in January was due to a seasonal rise in food and travel costs ahead of the Lunar New Year holiday, while producer price gains slowed by half on-month. Analysts say the People's Bank of China (PBOC) is raising rates on some primary money rates to signal to markets that it is keeping an eye on financial risks, but will keep liquidity ample, which includes continued expansion of credit.

Chinese banks added a net 2.03 trillion yuan ($295.74 billion) in new loans in January, while credit growth including non-bank lending rose 3.74 trillion yuan. The expansion in broad M2 money supply was stable while growth in outstanding credit was also on trend at 12.8 percent, supporting views the central bank will keep monetary conditions basically stable, with some marginal tightening targeting specific sectors such as property.

LIAOCHENG: This picture taken on February 12, 2017 shows a Chinese poultry farmer loading eggs at a farm in Liaocheng, east China's Shandong province. — AFP

Indeed, to help cool the heated housing market, banks in some big Chinese cities have already started to lower discounts on lending rates for first-time home buyers, the China Securities Journal reported earlier this month. Chinese banks usually "front load" loans early in the year after the government renews their credit quotas, so data over the next few months will provide a better picture for credit growth trends this year. Higher rates and increased volatility in debt markets have curtailed corporate bond issues, with net issues negative for a second month in a row in January, pushing more firms into non-traditional lending such as trust loans, which spiked. The rapid rise in off-balance sheet lending could prompt more tightening measures, ANZ economists said in a research note, with the bank expecting the PBOC to raise the 7-day repo rate by another 15 basis points by the end of June.

Support for yuan

Analysts say the PBOC has tightened policy partly to support the yuan, which faces depreciation pressure against the dollar as the US Federal Reserve is expected to continue to raise interest rates. "They want to reign in some potential risks...as well as try to stabilise the RMB exchange rate expectation," said Nomura economist Yang Zhao. But in recognition of the caution towards further tightening, Zhao does not expect the PBOC to raise interbank rates again for the first half of this year.— Reuters

Small Brazilian town embraces universal income experiment

MARICA, Brazil: Does being handed money every month-no strings attached-sound attractive? The residents of a small town in Brazil are finding out. Governments and think-tanks around the world are increasingly fascinated by the idea of a universal basic income, where citizens are given cash to spend as they want.

In Marica, a seaside town of about 150,000 people near Rio de Janeiro, the left-wing municipal government has spent the last year finding out how it works. "We are a laboratory for the Brazilian left," says Washington Quaqua, who introduced the experiment as mayor in December 2015 before stepping down. He was replaced by another candidate from the leftist Workers' Party, Francisco Horta.

The idea of a universal basic income isn't new, but long-considered as a potential tool for social equality and redistribution of wealth. The concept has gained traction more recently among high-powered business thinkers, especially in Silicon Valley, as they ponder how society will cope with the ever-expanding role of automation-a trend some futurists believe may create mass unemployment.

In Marica-a surviving Workers' Party bastion in increasingly right-leaning Brazil-the basic income idea fits in well with the leadership's socialist fervor.

Just about every public building is decorated in socialist red and Quaqua's office sports portraits of communist revolutionary Che Guevara, whose name is also soon to be given to a new hospital.

"The world lacks creativity and Marica is giving the example of a town that knows how to redistribute its riches," Quaqua says with pride about his pet project.

Modest reality

Despite his claims, Marica is only taking baby steps. Inconclusively tried around the world for decades, the experiment is currently getting a high-profile rollout in Finland. The left-wing French presidential candidate Benoit Hamon, backed by the star economist Thomas Piketty, has also made the basic income part of his platform. However, if Finland is handing out payments of about $590 a month-and only to a test group of unemployed people for now-the amount in Marica is a measly 10 reais, or about $3.20. The new mayor hopes to raise the amount to $32 in 2017.

Only the town's 14,000 poorest families are currently being given the income, which is denominated in Mumbucas, a virtual currency created to pay welfare under Quaqua three years ago. The 10 reais is added to the 85 reais ($27) monthly welfare check for families whose income doesn't top three times the minimum wage. The extra money is also given to poorer people aged between 14 and 29 and pregnant women already receiving other benefits. There's another limitation: only 131 local businesses-less than 10 percent of the total-accept payment in Mumbucas, the mayor's office says. The currency, which physically exists only on specially issued red magnetic cards, is unpopular with business owners because they must wait more than a month after purchases are completed for the government to convert payments into reals.

Feasible or fantasy?

Opposition politician Filippe Poubel denounces what he calls an attempt to addict the people of Marica to welfare. Handing out an income, he says, will backfire. "People want to work, they want to earn their income with dignity. They would be a lot happier if the mayor would create jobs and offer them decent hospital care." Horta dismisses such criticism saying a basic income will in fact create jobs, "stimulating the local economy." And he says that the town, which draws revenues from offshore oil exploitation, can afford to boost the program "in an exponential way over the next 10 years." "The rich love it when they get millions in tax breaks," Quaqua says of his project's opponents. "But they are furious when we give a few hundred reais to the poor." — AFP

Takaud investment strategies deliver solid growth in 2016

Net returns of up to 11.60%

MANAMA: TAKAUD, the specialist provider of savings, investment and pension solutions for the MENA region, announced yesterday that the company's nine investment strategies saw up to double-digit growth in 2016. That was fantastic news for people saving with TAKAUD for retirement, their children's education and other important goals, in Bahrain and elsewhere throughout the Middle East.

Among TAKAUD's nine Investment Strategies the three Global Strategies produced the highest returns for investors this year, with the following net cumulative annual returns:

- Global Growth Strategy: 11.58%
- Global Balanced Strategy: 10.50%
- Global Cautious Strategy: 7.89 %

These returns are comparable to the 11.90 percent and the 9.39 percent that Morningstar, an independent research provider, reports were posted by the S&P 500 and the MSCI World Index, two leading international indexes of the world's largest and strongest companies. TAKAUD's Regional and Sharia-Compliant investment strategies saw returns of up to 5.71 percent.

"We are very pleased with our 2016 results and are confident that the way we actively monitor and manage these investment strategies will continue to produce good returns for our customers next year and beyond," said Luc Metivier, TAKAUD's CEO.

Luc Metivier

"Our customers are saving for important reasons-to have a secure retirement, to ensure their children receive a high-quality education, and to provide economic stability for their families-and we always strive to give them the best possible investment solutions. When people are saving for the long-term well-being of their families it is essential to have investments that beat inflation over time. That's the key feature differentiating TAKAUD from other savings accounts. Not only do TAKAUD's Investment Strategies protect investments against inflation, they also deliver superior growth potential compared to other traditional investment options."

"Our approach is paying off," said Johannes van der Dong, TAKAUD's Chief Investment Officer. "Our strong commitment to diversification coupled with constant monitoring and fine tuning where necessary has made the most of market conditions."

TAKAUD offers, directly or through financial partners, savings plans for individuals and employee savings plans for corporations and SMEs. It operates an open-architecture investment platform with wide options, catering both to the needs of individuals requiring wealth management services and to institutions seeking placement solutions.

Gulf Bank announces Visa Jumeirah credit cards offer

KUWAIT: Gulf Bank launched yesterday its Visa Jumeirah offer enabling its Visa credit card holders to stretch their vacations instead of their budgets.

Gulf Bank Visa credit card holders will get 25 percent off on best available room rates across Jumeirah hotels in Dubai, Kuwait, and Maldives. In addition to that, customers will get the chance to enjoy complimentary buffet breakfast, free access to the hotel and resorts' facilities, complimentary high-speed wireless internet for the duration of their stay, exclusive access to the beach, complimentary access to kids club, and complimentary unlimited access to Wild Wadi Waterpark for hotels in Dubai only.

Gulf Bank's offer is valid until 31 March 2017, and all bookings must be made prior to this date for a three-night minimum stay. Take a break now and indulge yourselves with Gulf Bank Visa offer by booking your stay online at: www.jumeirah.com. Select Visa Offers page and use the following promo code: VISAWINTER. The website page also provides a full list of all the participating hotels from each country.

Gulf Bank has always prided itself in delivering customers exceptional value as well as a wide choice of exciting offers that meet their daily needs. To find out more about Gulf Bank's promotions and offers, visit one of Gulf Bank's 56 branches, call the Customer Contact Center on 1805805, or log on to www.e-gulfbank.com, Gulf Bank's bilingual website.

Burgan Bank customers can update Civil ID info through ATMs

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced yesterday that its customers can update their Civil ID information through Burgan Bank's branch ATMs on the spot. Burgan Bank has made the process of updating Civil ID details at the bank much easier. Customers can visit any Burgan Bank branch ATM outlets and insert their Civil Id into the machine slot and follow up the steps on the screen and complete the updates.

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Burgan Bank's addition of this service to its bundle of customer banking services further builds on its existing portfolio of services and is a clear demonstration of its constant efforts to deliver innovative banking solutions through embracing top notch technology. It is also yet another clear indication of the bank's strong position in the regional banking sector and its commitment to being a financial institution that truly cares about its community and the diverse needs of its people.

Established in 1977, Burgan Bank is the youngest commercial Bank and second largest by assets in Kuwait, with a significant focus on the corporate and financial institutions sectors, as well as having a growing retail, and private bank customer base. Burgan Bank has majority owned subsidiaries in the MENAT region supported by one of the largest regional branch networks.

The Bank has continuously improved its performance over the years through an expanded revenue structure, diversified funding sources, and a strong capital base. The adoption of state-of-the-art services and technology has positioned it as a trendsetter in the domestic market and within the MENA region. Burgan Bank's brand has been created on a foundation of real values - of trust, commitment, excellence and progression, to remind us of the high standards to which we aspire. 'People come first' is the foundation on which its products and services are developed.

Zain announces 'New Offer Every Week' campaign

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading telecommunications company in Kuwait, announced the latest offers of its promotional campaign entitled "New Offer Every Week". Postpaid and prepaid customers can enjoy and for the first time new and exciting offers on all plans every week on the occasion of Kuwait's national celebrations.

Zain launched the new campaign to share the joys of Kuwait's national festivities with all its customers, who can now enjoy an exclusive new offer on all postpaid, prepaid, and Internet plans on a weekly basis and for a limited time only. The company is keen on meeting the expectations and aspirations of the largest family of subscribers in Kuwait, especially during this cherished time of the year.

As part of the latest offers, eeZee Internet subscribers will get DOUBLE the caps for the same price when subscribing or renewing their subscription in prepaid Internet plans. Postpaid customers who subscribe to the KD 40 plan with 24 months commitment will get a FREE Platinum number, and will have the option to get an)additional handset device or entertainment device) and an Internet device. In addition, customers subscribed to postpaid Internet plans will get a 50 percent discount on entertainment devices that come with the plan, including gaming consoles, tablets, and more.

Zain has long considered itself a key partner of the Kuwaiti society, especially in such cherished national celebrations. The company launched this exciting campaign to show its commitment in sharing the joys of Kuwait as a leading national company, and will spare no efforts in being an integral part of the many occasions that are of interest to the society.

By launching this exciting limited time promotional campaign, Zain continues to reinforce its leadership position and its pledge in offering the best services and offers to meet customers' professional and personal telecommunications needs.

EU gets wake-up call as Gazprom eyes TAP

BRUSSELS/MILAN: Gazprom's bid to tap into a pipeline meant to wean Europe off Russian gas threatens to undermine a pillar of European energy policy and slow plans to develop rival deposits in the east Mediterranean.

As the European Union struggles against the "iron embrace" of Russian pipelines, it has made opening a new Southern Gas Corridor to carry gas from Azerbaijan by 2020 a priority. The 10 billion cubic metre (bcm)-capacity Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) is the project's end piece, joining up with the Trans Anatolian Pipeline at the Turkish border, then crossing Greece and Albania to reach Italy.

Construction work on TAP gives EU officials the first non-Russian gas pipeline to supply Europe since Algeria's Medgaz link nearly a decade ago, paving the way for diluting Gazprom's large one-third share of Europe's gas market. That at least was the plan, until Gazprom's deputy head Alexander Medvedev last month said the company was considering pumping gas through the link under an auction system giving equal access to any would-be supplier.

Medvedev questioned Azerbaijan's ability to fill the pipeline, saying Russia could step in to plug any shortfalls once the link is expanded. "It won't lie empty," he said.

"That would be very bad," one EU official said. "It would be totally contrary to everything we have agreed with partners." The EU worries Gazprom has abused its dominant position to overcharge central and eastern European states, some of which are nearly wholly reliant on Russian gas.

It foiled Russia's South Stream project to pump gas to south-eastern Europe under the Black Sea by insisting on antitrust rules banning suppliers from owning pipelines, without giving other vendors access. Taken together with separate Russian plans to double its Nord Stream pipeline to Germany, EU nations must fend off "this iron embrace from the North and from the South," another EU official said.

While the first phase of TAP's capacity will be filled by the BP-led consortium developing Azerbaijan's Shah Deniz II gasfield, TAP says any gas supplier can bid for another 10 bcm of capacity through so-called Open Season auctions.

Some of TAP's shareholders - including Italy's Snam and Belgium's Fluxys - said they would welcome Gazprom's entry, and EU sources admitted there may be little they can do to keep Gazprom from bidding when the pipeline is expanded after 2020. "We see the Southern Gas Corridor foremost as a major source of diversification: new gas, new route, new supplier," European Commission Vice President Maros Sefcovic told Reuters.

EU sources said Russian gas flows via TAP may jar with the terms set by its financial backers, such as the European Investment Bank. The bank said it is carrying out due diligence.

At most, officials say they could extend an exemption from EU anti-trust rules to TAP in order to keep Gazprom out, but Brussels would require the firms and governments concerned to initiate the move. Intervening may also run counter to the bloc's goals of promoting an unregulated gas market. And it risks triggering a backlash from Moscow, whose plan to join TAP still hinges upon the construction and expansion of a major gas link to Turkey.

'Clever strategy'

By accessing TAP, Gazprom is seeking to defend market share by flooding Europe with cheaper piped gas than would-be challengers, including from the east Mediterranean and North Africa, industry sources say. "The hub around Israel, Cyprus, Egypt could compete, but if Russia can saturate the TAP, it won't be easy," a senior Italian industry source said. Last year Gazprom pursued another pipeline scheme - the Interconnector Turkey Greece Italy (ITGI) Poseidon, first backed by the EU as an alternative to Russian imports - for its own use. — Reuters

Ukraine's economy grows by nearly 5%

KIEV: Ukraine said yesterday its economy expanded at a surprisingly fast pace of nearly five percent in the fourth quarter as it continued its steady climb out of a two-year recession. The State Statistics Service said gross domestic product (GDP) growth reached 4.7 percent between October and December 2016 compared to the same period a year earlier.

It provided no other comment. But analysts said they were taken aback by such a large jump in the war-scarred former Soviet republic.

"I was surprised," Olena Bilan of the Dragon Capital investment company in Kiev told AFP. "My estimate was 3.3 percent."

She attributed the figure primarily to greater housing demand and construction. "That made up about half the figure-maybe a little more," she said. Bilan said other sectors contributing the most were industrial output and consumer demand.

Another factor was agriculture-a vital industry that once gave Ukraine the nickname "the breadbasket of Europe". The State Statistics Service did not provide a growth figure for all of 2016 but government officials expect it to be about one percent.

Analysts said it is relatively easy for Ukraine to achieve a short-term economic boom because growth contracted by about 17 percent between 2014 and 2015 when its nearly three-year war with Russian-backed insurgents was at its worst.

This means that it is building from a very low base and that the economy will not continue to grow as quickly going forward. Central bank officials believe any expansion will probably be limited to about two percent in 2017. Ukraine has undergone some urgent economic restructuring and belt-tightening measures to secure a $17.5-billion (16.5-billion-euro) loan from the International Monetary Fund in 2015.

That money was supported by additional funds from Kiev allies such such as the European Union and the United States. Unpopular measures like steep hikes for once-subsidized utility bills have drawn periodic street protests.

Pro-Western Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko has withstood the pressure and picked a government that could push the IMF's prescriptions through parliament.

But his government has had to move more slowly than the IMF would have liked because of populist and nationalist deputies' resistance to changes that put a burden on the population.

Bilan said growth will slow down in the first quarter of this year because Ukraine's harvest will be taken out of the equation in the January through March stretch. — AFP

Get a great holiday deal with ABK and Agoda

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) has launched an exciting deal for its customers which gives them up to 12 percent discount off their holiday booking anywhere in the world. This latest unbeatable offer from ABK is in partnership with Agoda, one of the world's leading online travel companies, and gives customers access to over 1,000,000 hotels and vacation rentals globally.

Customers booking holidays and paying using either an ABK Visa Infinite, Visa Signature, Visa Gold Prepaid, as well as Al-Raed and Prestige account holders can avail 12 percent discount off their bill for all holidays booked in March, June, September and December 2017 and 10 percent discount off all holidays booked in February, April, May, July, August, October and November 2017.

To get this exclusive holiday discount, ABK customers first need to register online with Agoda at www.agoda.com and then visit www.agoda.com/visamena to book their holiday and pay with their eligible ABK card. Bookings can be made throughout 2017.

For more information about Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) please eahli.com or contact a customer service agent via 'Ahlan Ahli' at 1899899.

Nevada lawmaker seeks ban on human microchips

CARSON CITY: Computer chips that store personal information and could be used to pinpoint someone's location could not be implanted in humans without consent under a bill Nevada state lawmakers weighed yesterday. Lawmakers on a judicial panel considered whether Nevada should join at least four other states in banning mandatory identification markers in people as a precaution to keep the emerging technology from creeping into workplaces, prisons or hospitals. Republican Sen. Becky Harris of Las Vegas, sponsor of the legislation, said she's worried computer chips could pose serious risks to human rights and public health.

"This is a completely new issue," Harris said. "I just want a safety measure in place until we better understand the technology and the reasoning behind people's desire to require implanting chips." ACLU of Nevada Policy Director Holly Welborn said there's no impending need to protect people against mandatory micro chipping, but there's no question the technology would violate rights to personal autonomy and privacy. "There really aren't, under any circumstance, any justifications for that type of a tracking device on a human being," Welborn said. The chips are currently used to track goods, find lost pets and make no-swipe credit card purchases.

Sean Sullivan, Washoe County deputy public defender, said the bill may also prohibit radiologists from using tattoos as permanent identifiers of where on patients to aim treatment. Others voiced concerns that it would forbid families and legal guardians of Alzheimer's patients from deciding to put computer chips in those patients, who often wander in later stages of the disease. The Senate Committee on Judiciary did not vote Monday on Senate Bill 109. Radio frequency identification or RFID technology can be encapsulated in glass tubes roughly the size of two grains of rice and can be injected under skin.

The US Food and Drug Administration approved the chips for use in humans in 2004. Two employees at an Ohio-based surveillance company stirred public debate in 2006 when they embedded the chips in their forearms to access protected vaults and police images. Wisconsin, North Dakota, California and Oklahoma subsequently enacted legislation banning any required implantations, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. Welborn said municipalities in Canada, Sweden and Australia have considered, but not enacted, laws mandating the chips for certain groups, such as criminals considered a potential threat to society. —AP

Attacks on drivers in Brazil force Uber to rethink cash strategy

SAO PAULO: On a Thursday night last September, Uber driver Osvaldo Luis Modolo Filho accepted a ride request from a teenage couple on the eastern edge of Sao Paulo, to be paid in cash. A few blocks from their destination, the passengers - who hailed the ride on the Uber app with a false name - drew two blue-handled kitchen knives. They repeatedly stabbed the 52-year-old driver and drove away with his black SUV as he lay bleeding in the road. Two of his fatal wounds were so deep police would first mistake them for bullet holes.

Police later found the car, arrested the couple and accused them of murder in the service of car theft. They are awaiting sentencing and lawyers for both have vowed to appeal. Uber said Modolo Filho was its first driver to be murdered in Brazil. He would not be the last. Police have confirmed six murders since his death, with local press reporting more than a dozen.

A Reuters analysis of crime data obtained by public information request from Sao Paulo's state security secretariat showed a spike in robberies involving Uber drivers since July, when the company started accepting cash payments in the city, raising questions inside the company as to why it did not act faster to address the problem. Traditionally, Uber has charged rides to credit cards registered by users, offering an easy way to verify passengers and track them down if needed. It changed that policy across Brazil last year, allowing customers to pay with cash to turbo-charge growth in a crucial new market.

Demand took off, but so did crime. In Sao Paulo, robberies involving Uber drivers rose ten-fold, the data shows. Attacks rose from an average of 13 per month in the first seven months of 2016, reflecting some degree of danger even before the cash option took effect, to 141 per month in the rest of the year, the data shows. Assaults involving regular taxi drivers in the city rose by just a third in the same period, according to crime data obtained by a separate freedom of information request filed with same security officials, as a deep economic downturn lifted all robberies in the city about six percent.

Safety incidents

The crime data obtained by Reuters covers Jan 1 to Dec 31 2016 and shows all incidents of robberies involving taxi and Uber drivers. It contains some margin for error as it potentially includes attacks on passengers. Police told Reuters the number of attacks on Uber drivers could be much higher given it is a new service and many incidents were likely registered in the system without mentioning the app by name. Drivers and police told Reuters the cash policy has provided easy targets for criminals, allowing them to open accounts under fake names, without credit cards to verify, and lure drivers into ambushes.

Presented with the findings, Uber declined to give monthly details of ride growth in Sao Paulo but acknowledged it has seen an increase in "safety incidents" without saying by how much. Uber said it was not clear if rising crime was due to the cash policy or the surge in business, which was boosted by the cash option. Uber added its Sao Paulo operations grew by 15 times over the course of 2016. The company said it is now taking steps to make cash rides safer, such as verifying users with a commonly used social security number.

Getting cash payments right in Brazil is a crucial test for Uber as it pushes beyond developed markets, seeking faster growth in poorer countries, where credit cards are less common and public safety more precarious. Drivers around the country have staged protests threatening to quit if Uber does not reduce the risk of crime, while taxi drivers and elected officials have pounced on isolated incidents as evidence of a need for more restrictive legislation.

So far, Uber's business in Brazil is booming. At least 30 percent of its rides in the country are now paid in cash and the rate is far higher in poor areas where credit cards are less common, according to two company sources. In Sao Paulo, cash accounts for most trips in outer boroughs, and the sources said it helped the city overtake New York and Tokyo in recent months to become Uber's biggest market by rides.

But a dozen current and former managers and drivers criticized how Uber introduced cash in Brazil, saying the San Francisco-based tech giant overlooked high levels of violent crime as it rushed to grow in an unfamiliar market. Senior executives now admit publicly that the company was slow to introduce simple fixes once the dangers in Brazil were clear.

Slow to respond

As recently as October, Uber denied there was a problem with cash payments in Brazil. Andrew Macdonald, general manager for the region, said that the company had studied if cash endangered drivers and found it did not. "If they're worried, it's a bit emotional," he said in an interview with Bloomberg at the time. One source involved in the cash roll out at Uber told Reuters the internal study was conducted too soon after cash was introduced, undermining its conclusions.

"With the numbers that cash was bringing in, no one wanted to see that there might be a problem," the person said, asking not to be named given the sensitivity of the matter. Macdonald acknowledged to Reuters on Friday his statement was "a mistake" and said Uber had been working on ways to improve safety around cash payments since fall last year. —Reuters

CAIRO: In this file photo, Egyptian activist Samira Ibrahim, left, and Mona Eltahawy, a prominent Egyptian-born US columnist, center, march in downtown Cairo, Egypt to mark International Women's Day. — AP

Cyber spies target American-Egyptian writer

Hackers have bypassed two-factor authentication

PARIS: American-Egyptian author Mona Eltahawy is one of many activists and human rights advocates targeted in a sweeping cyberespionage campaign blamed on Egypt's government, The Associated Press has found. A booby-trapped email sent to Eltahawy and examined by the AP shows that she was targeted by the same password-stealing technique used to try to compromise staff at more than half a dozen Egyptian human rights organizations. Digital clues such as matching email addresses employed to send the malicious messages and the use of the same credential-harvesting website proved the same actor were involved.

Eltahawy, a fierce critic of Egypt's government who has frequently complained about state surveillance, said she felt violated but not surprised. "I'm used to this from the Egyptian regime," she said in a series of telephone conversations with the AP. "I'm not trying to belittle what they've done, but I'm used to this." Officials in Cairo have yet to speak publicly about the barrage of malicious messages, also known as phishing emails, sent to civil society figures in recent months. The campaign, exposed by internet watchdog group Citizen Lab earlier this month, prompted Eltahawy to tweet that she was among its targets.

Eltahawy's partner later forwarded copies of the emails to the AP. The message itself was closely tailored to Eltahawy's concerns. An outspoken commentator on feminism, the Arab world and Egypt, Eltahawy was a constant media presence during the country's 2011 uprising. She also has a sizeable following on Twitter, where she regularly shares news about activists caught up in Egypt' grinding crackdown on dissent. Ever since Egypt's 2013 military takeover, local rights groups have had their assets frozen, their staff detained and their leaders banned from traveling abroad.

On Dec. 7, women's rights attorney Azza Soliman was arrested. In the following week, Eltahawy fielded social media messages about the lawyer's upcoming court date. So when she received an email labeled "an important document about Azza Soliman," she opened it right away. "I usually never go and click on documents that are sent to me by people I don't know," she said. "But because this was Azza and I was very upset about what had happened to her, I immediately went and clicked." Eltahawy said she realized she had been fooled, especially after she received additional suspicious emails the next day and realized there was activity on her account she didn't recognize.

"Someone logged onto my computer from another neighborhood in Cairo!" she wrote to her partner via WhatsApp at the time. "Those (expletive) bastards!" Eltahawy and other activists blame the government for the break-in. An Egyptian Interior Ministry official insisted to AP - on condition of anonymity - that officials weren't involved. Circumstantial evidence such as bits of Arabic slang in the malicious sites' code isn't conclusive. The AP sent a message seeking comment to the email address used by Eltahawy's hacker earlier this month, but the message went unanswered. Hours later, the email account was deleted.

Eltahawy's experience demonstrates the power of phishing, which consists of deploying bogus emails to entice people to give up their passwords. It's the Swiss Army knife of electronic espionage - ubiquitous, cheap and, done well, it can break in almost anywhere. Eltahawy's hackers even appear to have bypassed an additional security measure known as two-factor authentication by sending out a second round of malicious messages. Eltahawy paid them a grudging compliment. "This is a testament to how good they are with these phishing things," Eltahawy said. "They know how to get you."—AP

US senators try to speed up deployment of self-driving cars

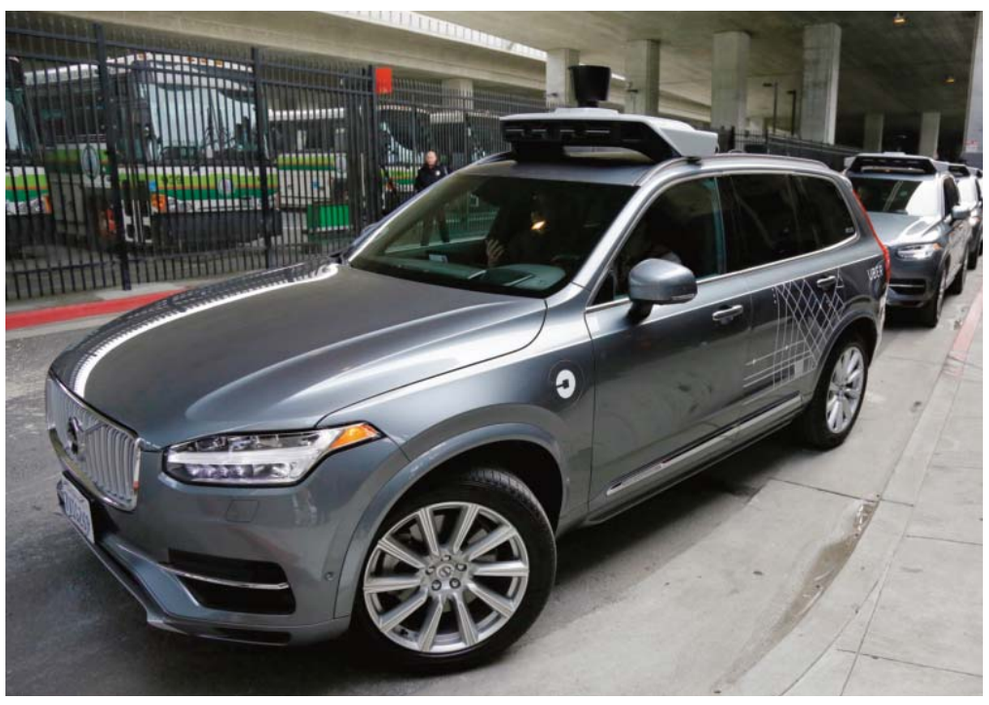
WASHINGTON: In the first major congressional attempt to address the advent of self-driving cars, two senators said yesterday they're launching a bipartisan effort to help to speed up the deployment of the vehicles on the nation's roads. Republican John Thune of South Dakota, the chairman of the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee, and Democrat Gary Peters of Michigan, said they're exploring legislation that "clears hurdles and advances innovation in self-driving vehicle technology." The senators' counterparts in the House are also gearing up to address the new technology, with a hearing scheduled for today.

Automakers cite federal requirements that all vehicles must have steering wheels and brake pedals as examples of regulations that presume there will be a human driver and might inhibit the introduction of self-driving cars. Congressional action may be needed to make changes. "Without changes to those regulations, it may be years before the promise of today's technology can be realized and thousands of preventable deaths that could have been avoided will happen," Michael Ableson, General Motors' vice president of global strategy, plans to tell the House Energy and Commerce Committee, according to prepared testimony.

Proponents of self-driving cars say they hold the potential to dramatically reduce traffic deaths by eliminating human error, which the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration says is a factor in 94 percent of all fatal crashes. More than 35,000 people were killed on the nation's roads in 2015, up over 7 percent from the previous year. Traffic deaths surged an additional 8 percent in the first nine months of last year. Automakers also complain that states are moving ahead with their own regulations, creating the potential for a confusing "patchwork" of laws.

"Our effort will also include a discussion on the existing patchwork of laws and regulations and the traditional roles of federal and state regulators," Thune and Peters said in a joint statement. Safety advocates have urged the government to set standards that specifically address the safety of self-driving cars. The Obama administration last year issued a voluntary set of safety goals for makers of self-driving cars to meet with the understanding that enforceable regulations could follow.

The Trump administration hasn't yet indicated what approach it will take to the technology. Some people may first experience riding in a self-driving car by hailing an on-demand, ride-sharing service like Uber or Lyft. Uber began offering passengers rides in autonomous cars with a human as a backup driver last year in Pittsburgh. Joseph Okpaku, Lyft's vice president of government relations, says in prepared testimony for the House hearing that the company's goal is "to operate a pilot in a major city this year that will permit consumers to enjoy, for the first time, a Lyft in an autonomous vehicle." —AP



SAN FRANCISCO: In this file photo, an Uber driverless car heads out for a test drive in San Francisco. — AP

MASSACHUSETTS: This file photo shows signage in a Verizon store in North Andover, Massachusetts. —AP

Verizon pulled back into unlimited data game

NEW YORK: Verizon, in a major reversal, has joined other carriers in offering an unlimited data plan. As recently as Jan, Verizon's chief financial officer said unlimited plans were "not something we feel the need to do" even though rivals had made inroads against Verizon by offering them. Verizon stopped offering such plans to new customers in 2012 and has been trying to push long-time customers off those old plans through rate hikes. The arrival of the iPhone and other smartphones made unlimited plans more of a rarity as carriers saw opportunities to make money by charging customers based on how much data they use.

But Sprint and T-Mobile recognized in unlimited data an opportunity to snare customers from heavyweights Verizon and AT&T. Because carriers must poach each other's customers to grow, the competition has intensified. AT&T also started offering unlimited plans after discontinuing them, but they are available only to customers who also subscribe to DirecTV, which AT&T owns. Its prices are similar to Verizon's for a family; Verizon is cheaper for an individual.

Verizon's new unlimited plan replaces several higher-data plans and starts at $80 for one person, not counting fees and taxes. (Existing customers can keep their plans.) For a family of four, unlimited costs $180 at Verizon. To compare, Sprint just launched a new promotion for new customers that costs $90 a month for four lines, and T-Mobile, which includes taxes and fees in its total price, is $160. AT&T costs $180 for four but also requires a TV subscription. Verizon is trying to differentiate itself by letting customers watch high-definition video with the unlimited plan, while competitors run streaming video at DVD-level quality. —AP

Fearing pollution, N China residents protest plant

BEIJING: Fearing pollution, hundreds of residents in a northeastern Chinese city yesterday protested the building of an aluminum processing plant, ignoring warnings from authorities against disturbing social order. Urban Chinese residents, angry about environmental degradation and hazardous smog, have become increasingly concerned about living near polluting factories, occasionally protesting against new projects. Tens of thousands of "mass incidents" - the usual euphemism for protests - take place each year in China, triggered by corruption, pollution, illegal land grabs and other grievances.

In Daqing, residents took part in a protest against the planned building of an aluminum plant by a subsidiary of Zhongwang Holdings Ltd. Photos and videos of a large crowd gathering in the car park outside the city government were circulated on Weibo yesterday, along with a hashtag asking Zhongwang to "please leave Daqing". Protesters shown in the photos held signs saying "Reject pollution, resist Zhongwang" and "Protect our homes". Two eyewitnesses confirmed the protests had taken place. "There are about 800 to 1,000 people protesting still against the aluminum plant," said one eyewitness who gave his family name as Zhang, speaking by telephone from Daqing. The protests took place despite a call by city officials for residents to "rationally" convey demands, warning that "illegal gatherings, defamation, rumors and other acts that disrupt social order" would be dealt by law. "Everyone please be assured, if Daqing Zhongwang Aluminium's project does not pass muster on environmental issues, then it absolutely will not advance further," the city government said in a post late Monday on its official microblog. Public concern about pollution from the plant would be met with a "scientific" assessment of the plant's environmental impact, the post said. A spokeswoman for Zhongwang Holdings said the company was surprised by the protests and did not know why local residents were opposing the project now. The company bought the land five years ago but building has not yet started, with a feasibility study still underway. "We're still having internal discussions on the next step and will keep an open dialogue with the government and people there," she said, adding environmental protection was a "priority" for the company.

The protests come as the company, one of the world's top aluminum fabricators, is embroiled in a dispute over US import duties and subsidiary Zhongwang International Group Ltd pursues a $2.3 billion takeover of US aluminum products maker Aleris Corp.

US lawmakers have called on regulators to reject the takeover. The Daqing city government in frigid Heilongjiang province did not answer calls seeking comment. An official reached by telephone at the Daqing police declined to comment. — Reuters

Cheap solar ambulances to speed into service in rural Bangladesh

DHAKA: An inexpensive, solar-powered ambulance that can fit down narrow laneways is set to hit the road in rural Bangladesh this year, its manufacturers say. The three-wheeled van, as well-equipped as ambulances used in Bangladesh's cities, runs entirely on solar power - including solar battery power at night - and can be used in rural areas with no grid electricity, according to the developers. A Bangladeshi university, a government organization and a local vehicle manufacturer who are collaborating on the vehicle say it should for the first time bring ambulance service to rural areas without it. The vehicle is in the field testing stage and there are plans to launch it by the end of 2017.

In many rural areas, emergency patients are often taken to hospital in hand-pulled rickshaw vans. But the new, small three-wheeler ambulance will fit along narrow roads in rural areas where it is difficult for larger ambulances to run. Zahidul Islam, a farmer in Saturia in Manikgonj district, said that when his first child was born his wife had a difficult delivery and was taken to the nearby clinic in a hand-pulled rickshaw - a trip that took too much time. "If I had taken her to hospital a little earlier, she would have had fewer complications," he said. But larger vehicles could not reach his house, he said. He believes that faster, smaller ambulances would be helpful for rural people.

Safe and comfortable

Kamal Hossain, a driver who has tested a prototype of the ambulance, said that it was safe and comfortable to drive on both smooth and rough surfaces, and went at a good speed. A K M Abdul Malek Azad, the project's team leader and a professor at BRAC University in Dhaka, said that most rural community health clinics cannot afford conventional ambulance services, but that the new ambulance would be cheap to buy and to run.

"I thought a low-cost ambulance service would be a good idea for these rural clinics. And by using solar power we can reduce operational costs and save the environment," he said. The ambulance is expected to cost $1,900 to $2,500, a fraction of the price of conventional ambulances, which can cost at least $30,000 in Bangladesh. BRAC University's Control and Applications Research Centre is running the project in association with vehicle manufacturer Beevatech. Financing comes from the World Bank through Bangladesh's Infrastructure Development Company Limited, with seed funding from the U.S. Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers.

Race car inspiration

Azad said that, as far as he is aware, there is no equivalent elsewhere in the world of the solar-powered three-wheeler ambulance his team is developing. The inspiration for it came from solar racing cars in Australia. "I thought if researchers can develop a solar racing car, there is potential to develop a solar ambulance," he said. A vehicle that would not be reliant for power on Bangladesh's overburned national power grid would be a bonus, he explained. The new ambulance can accommodate three people. It has a maximum speed of 15-20 km per hour, and a range of up to 50 km. By day it is powered by four 100-watt solar panels on the roof. At night it runs on four 12-volt batteries, which are charged from the solar panels.

"The last layer of the development includes installation of a battery charging station (at a hospital or other site close by) that is completely fuelled by a solar canopy," Azad said. "This step is taken to ensure complete independence of these electrically assisted rickshaws from the national grid." The ambulance's battery can recharge in three to four hours, he said. Azad said his team has built and tested five prototypes over the past year. The new ambulances are expected to hit the roads at the end of 2017. — Reuters

NEW DELHI: This file photo shows Indian protesters wearing protective masks taking part in a rally urging immediate action to curb air pollution in New Delhi. — AFP

Deaths from India air pollution rivals China

India's poor air quality causes premature deaths

NEW DELHI: India's air now rivals China's as the world's deadliest, according to a new study published yesterday amid warnings that efforts to curb pollution from coal won't yield results any time soon. India's notoriously poor air quality causes nearly 1.1 million premature deaths every year, almost on par with China, concluded a joint report by two US-based health research institutes. But where deaths linked to air pollution in China have steadied in recent years, the rate has soared in India where smog readings in major cities routinely eclipse safe exposure levels.

India has recorded a nearly 50 percent increase in premature deaths linked to PM2.5 — fine particles that lodge deep in the lungs- between 1990 and 2015, the report found. "India now approaches China in the number of deaths attributable to PM2.5," said the report by the Health Effects Institute and the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation. Anti-pollution steps in China-which jostles with India for the unenviable title of world's most polluted country-has seen the number of smog-related deaths largely stabilize since 2005.

In India that number has steadily climbed from an estimated 737,400 deaths a year in 1990 to 1.09 million in 2015. India and neighboring Bangladesh have experienced the steepest increases in pollution since 2010 "and now have the highest PM2.5 concentrations" in the world, the report said. Pollution in New Delhi in November reached crisis levels, with crop burning, car exhaust, dust and coal plants blamed for the record smog. The government shuttered schools and temporarily closed a coal-fired power plant as a stop gap, but experts say the energy-hungry nation will need to do more if it's to clean the air for India's 1.25 billion people.

"Coal isn't going to go away very fast. Coal-based pollution in the environment will always be very significant in India," Sumant Sinha, the chairman of Indian clean energy firm ReNew Power said. "Renewables are not going to be expanding fast enough for us to be able to impact that particular problem. Unless all of those (factors) are also brought under control, I don't think it's going to come anywhere close to really solving the problem." — AFP

KAILAHUN: This file photo shows an MSF medical worker checking their protective clothing in a mirror at an MSF facility in Kailahun. — AFP

Small percentage of people spread most Ebola cases

MIAMI: Most of the people infected with Ebola in the West Africa epidemic that began in 2014 got sick through contact with a small number of "superspreaders" with the disease, researchers said Monday. The study in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences shows such "superspreaders" can be extremely dangerous when it comes to infectious disease outbreaks. The West African Ebola epidemic was the largest in history and killed more than 11,300 people, with many of the cases involving people infected while caring for a sick person or burying a body.

"We now see the role of superspreaders as larger than initially suspected," said co-author Benjamin Dalziel, an assistant professor of population biology in the College of Science at Oregon State University. "It was the cases you didn't see that really drove the epidemic, particularly people who died at home, without making it to a care center." At the time, researchers counted cases according to those seen in medical centers, but they later realized these were a small fraction of the total.

"There wasn't a lot of transmission once people reached hospitals and care centers," said Dalziel. "In our analysis we were able to see a web of transmission that would often track back to a community-based superspreader." In fact, 61 percent of those infected with the disease caught it from people accounting for just three percent of those who got sick, the researchers said.

The study included researchers from Princeton University, Oregon State University, the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the Imperial College London, and the US National Institutes of Health. If superspreading had been completely under control about two-thirds of Ebola cases could have been avoided, the report said. Superspreaders have also played a role in the epidemic of severe acute respiratory syndrome, or SARS, in 2003 and Middle East respiratory syndrome in 2012. — AFP

Climate change impact on animals under-appreciated

PARIS: Nearly half of endangered land mammals and a quarter of birds are already harmed by climate change-a much higher segment than previously thought, researchers have found. Endangered primates and elephants are among the groups squeezed hardest by global warming, partly because they reproduce slowly and take longer to adapt to rapid environmental changes, they reported. While most studies seek to predict global warming's future impact on animal survival, the new analysis found that for "large numbers" of threatened species, the damage was already being done.

The data suggests that "the impact of climate change on mammals and birds in the recent past is currently greatly under-appreciated," according to a study in the journal Nature Climate Change this week. Researchers had amassed data from 136 previous studies looking at 120 mammal and 569 bird species. They compared documented changes in climate with growth or decline in population size, geographic range, reproductive and survival rates and body mass. The team then extrapolated the data to all land mammals and birds listed as threatened by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Of the 873 listed mammal species, 414 (47 percent) have likely "responded negatively" to climate change, and 298 (just over 23 percent) of 1,272 birds, the researchers found. Climate change can affect animals by limiting food and water, spreading disease and shrinking living space. Only seven percent of mammals and four percent of birds identified by the study were coded on the IUCN Red List as threatened by "climate change and severe weather", the authors said. "We recommend that research and conservation efforts give greater attention to the 'here and now' of climate change impacts on life on Earth," the researchers said.

"Conservation managers, planners and policy makers must take this into account in efforts to safeguard the future of biodiversity." In Dec 2015, 195 nations adopted the Paris Agreement to limit average global warming to "well below" two degrees Celsius over pre-Industrial Revolution levels.

This would be achieved by curbing planet-heating greenhouse gases from burning coal, oil and gas. But scientists warn that 2C is already too high and that the world is on track for warming even beyond that, with disastrous consequences for life as we know it. — AFP

KENYA: This file photo shows a herd of elephants walking in Amboseli National Park. — AFP

Emergency UN meeting over armyworm outbreak in Harare

HARARE: International experts hold emergency talks in Harare yesterday to tackle an outbreak of crop-eating "armyworm" caterpillars advancing across several African countries. The armyworm has already caused damage to staple crops in Zambia, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Ghana, with reports also suggesting Malawi, Mozambique and Namibia are affected. Experts say it appears to be the first time that the "fall armyworm" species from the Americas has caused widespread damage in Africa.

"So, farmers do not know really how to treat it," said David Phiri, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization's coordinator for southern Africa. "Nobody seems to know how it reached Africa," he said, adding that it started in places like Nigeria and Togo, which had it last year. One theory is that the caterpillars arrived in Africa on commercial flights from South America or in plants imported from the region. The caterpillars eat maize, wheat, millet and rice-key food sources in southern and eastern Africa, where many areas are already struggling with shortages after the most severe drought in recent years.

Could be catastrophic

Experts from 13 countries will spend three days at the summit in the Zimbabwean capital forming a battle plan to defeat the pests. The armyworm is "spreading rapidly" in Africa and could threaten farming worldwide, the Centre for Agriculture and Bioscience International (CABI) warned last week. It said maize is particularly vulnerable to the larvae, which attack the crop's growing points and burrow into the cobs. Unlike the native African armyworm, the fall armyworm does not "march" along the ground in huge numbers seeking more food, the FAO said.

"This sequence of outbreaks began in mid-December 2016 in Zambia," Kenneth Wilson, professor at Lancaster University in Britain, wrote in a briefing paper Monday. "It is now as far south as South Africa. Because armyworms feed on many of the staple food crops they have the potential to create food shortages in the region." The fall armyworm also attacks cotton, soybean, potato and tobacco fields. Chemical pesticides can be effective, but fall armyworms have developed resistance in their native Americas.

"You use different methods. One of them is pesticides, another is to use biological control. Another is to use natural control, like digging trenches around the farm (or) natural predators, like birds, to eat those worms," said Phiri. "If it is a small level of the worms, it's easy to control, using pesticides.

Otherwise, it's very difficult to control it, so they will have to use different methods-including sometimes burning the crops."

Zimbabwe's deputy agriculture minister Davis Marapira confirmed to AFP that the pest had been detected in all of the country's 10 provinces. "The government is helping farmers with chemicals and spraying equipment," Marapira said. The FAO, which is hosting the Harare meeting, said armyworm outbreaks combined with current locust problems "could be catastrophic" as southern Africa has yet to recover from droughts caused by the El Nino climate phenomenon. In Dec, Zambia deployed its national air force to transport pesticides across the country so that fields could be sprayed. — AFP

India to launch 104 satellites in record mission

NEW DELHI: India hopes to make history by launching a record 104 satellites from a single rocket today as its famously frugal space agency looks to zoom ahead in the commercial space race.

The rocket is set to blast off from the southern spaceport of Sriharikota, India's Space Research Organization (ISRO) said in a statement yesterday.

The Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle would be carrying a 714 kilogram main satellite for earth observation and 103 smaller "nano satellites" which would weigh a combined 664 kilograms.

Nearly all of the nano satellites are from other countries, including Israel, Kazakhstan, The Netherlands, Switzerland, United Arab Emirates and 96 from United States, said the state-run ISRO. If successful, India will set a world record as the first country to launch the most satellites in one go, surpassing Russia which launched 39 satellites in a single mission in June 2014. The business of putting commercial satellites into space for a fee is growing as phone, Internet and other companies, as well as countries, seek greater and more high-tech communications. India is competing with other international players for a greater share of that launch market, and is known for its low-cost space program.

Last June, India set a national record after it successfully launched a rocket carrying 20 satellites, including 13 from the US. It sent an unmanned rocket to orbit Mars in 2013 at a cost of just $73 million, compared with NASA's Maven Mars mission which had a $671 million price tag. ISRO is also mulling the idea of missions to Jupiter and Venus. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has often hailed India's budget space technology, quipping in 2014 that a rocket that launched four foreign satellites into orbit had cost less to make than Hollywood film "Gravity". — AFP

WWII shipwrecks off Malaysia broken for scrap

KUALA LUMPUR: Three World War II shipwrecks off the coast of Malaysia-the final resting place of dozens of seamen-have almost disappeared, local divers say, with the finger pointing at possible scrap metal scavengers. The Japanese cargo vessels, which went down with their crews off the coast of Sabah in 1944, had become popular dive sites, teeming with fish and coral. But local operators say the wrecks have been reduced to rumps, stripped of valuable metals that they believe are being sold on for profit.

Mark Hedger, owner of a diving centre in Sabah and a frequent visitor to the sites, said they had now almost disappeared. "The Usukan and Upside Down wrecks are 98 percent and 99 percent gone. The Rice Bowl wreck is a heap of metal piled up into a ball," he said, referring to the wrecks' local names. There are scores of WWII shipwrecks littered throughout Southeast Asia, the result of fierce naval battles between Japanese and Allied forces. The wrecks, some of which have never been properly documented, are treated as war graves because the bodies of the crews were never recovered.

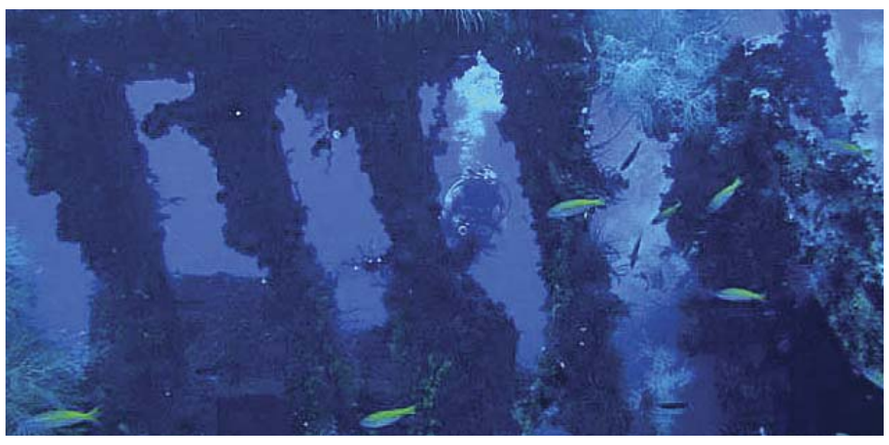
But there have been growing reports in recent years of scavengers stripping off saleable materials, with several cases reported off the coast of Indonesia.

While some scavenging is done by low-tech outfits where divers rip off chunks of metal and haul them to the surface, there are also believed to be more sophisticated large-scale operations using cranes and platforms. Sabah scuba diver Monica Chin said: "We need to know who did this and must bring them to justice. All of us are concerned and we suspect that someone is stealing the parts for scrap metal."

"We have to conserve our history. It is really very sad," she added. She shared a photograph with AFP given to her by local fishermen apparently showing a vessel carrying off metal from the wrecks. AFP has been unable to verify the photo but images shared on social media showed a large vessel and crane apparently near the sites, all within a kilometer of each other and known collectively as the Usukan wrecks.

Abdul Nasar Abdul Hadi, director of Sabah Marine Department, said that Sabah Malaysia University (UMS) was granted permission by the Sabah Marine Department and the Sabah Museum to carry out exploration and salvage works at the shipwreck sites. He said they had used a Chinese-flagged vessel and added Sabah Marine Department issued a stop-work order late Jan. Sabah's state tourism minister Masidi Manjun said he was due to meet with university officials Thursday to find out what had happened. "We will give the university an opportunity to explain," he said.

Last year it was revealed that the wrecks of Dutch and British warships sunk in 1942 in Indonesian waters had vanished. An inquiry in The Hague this week confirmed its three WWII vessels had been stripped from the seabed. Naval warships and war graves are protected under international law that makes the desecration of such shipwrecks illegal, but Indonesia struggles to police its sprawling archipelago of more than 17,000 islands.—AFP



KAULA LUMPUR: This photo shows Japanese cargo vessels, which went down with their crews off the coast of Sabah in 1944. — AFP photos

PORT HARCOURT CITY: Traders cover their wares with umbrellas of different shapes and sizes along the railway line in Port Harcourt city, Rivers State, yesterday. — AFP

Strange black soot blankets Nigeria oil hub

Clothes, floors turn black in Garden city

PORT HARCOURT: The Nigerian city of Port Harcourt used to be known as "The Garden City" because of its soaring palm trees and green open spaces. But since late last year, black soot has been falling from the sky, scaring and angering residents of the oil hub who claim nothing is being done to protect their health. "You hang your clothes and before you know it, they become black. You step on your floor, everywhere is black," Steven Obodekwe, a Port Harcourt resident and environmentalist, said.

The soot appeared in Nov last year, clouds became a hazy grey and more people were seen wearing protective face masks, said resident Tamuno Alobari. "It (the soot) is mostly pronounced in the morning hours, especially when you run your hands across your car," he said. Timi Isiayei said there's no escape from the fine black dust. "When I brush my teeth in the morning and try to clear my throat, I normally notice a dark phlegm and the same applies when I try to clear my nostrils," he added.

Toxic smog is a phenomenon that has more often been associated with populous developing economies such as India and China. The government in Rivers state, of which Port Harcourt is the capital, in Dec urged the public not to panic but last week set up a taskforce to investigate the matter.

The federal environment ministry in the national capital Abuja on Monday declared the air pollution an "emergency situation" and warned residents to shut doors and windows.

Mystery origins

The hashtag #StopTheSoot has appeared on Twitter, people are sharing photographs of their hands and feet covered in the dust, and protest marches are being organized. Burning tyres for scrap copper and illegal oil refineries have both been blamed for the residue. Oil revenue is central to Nigeria's economy, accounting for some 70 percent of government earnings and 90 per cent of foreign exchange. But decades of exploration and spills has polluted the farmlands and fish stocks in the maze of creeks around Port Harcourt and across the Niger Delta region.

Theft of crude oil from pipelines-or "bunkering" as it is called locally sees raw fuel regularly diverted to illegal refineries set up in the bush for conversion into petrol and diesel.

"From investigations carried out so far, we have noticed that it is as a result of years of exploration activities especially from illegal oil bunkering activities," said environment regulation official Emeka Aniamaka.

But the environment ministry suggested another cause after ordering the shutdown of an asphalt-processing plant, saying it was "belching out thick smoke from its operations".

Health problems

In 2015 the World Bank said 94 percent of Nigerians were exposed to air pollution levels that exceed World Health Organization guidelines. Air quality is worsened by the use of generators to make up for the gaps in supply from the national electricity grid, as well as petrol containing high levels of sulphur. Toxic smoke also comes from the burning of rubbish-a legacy of the absence of municipal waste services. The city of Onitsha, nearly 200 kilometers north of Port Harcourt, was in May last year named as having the world's worst levels of PM10 particles.

PM10 are microscopic particles in the air measuring between 2.5 and 10 thousands of a millimeter or micrometers. They can come from smoke, dust, soot, vehicle exhausts and industries. Doctors in Port Harcourt say they are seeing the health effects of the soot already, with an increase in consultations for breathing difficulties, including asthma.

Children and the elderly are most at risk. The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) estimates some 600,000 people die in Africa every year as a result of air pollution.

Environmentalists are also sounding the alarm, as the soot has been found to contain sulphur dioxide and nitrogen dioxide, which cause acid rain when combined with moisture. Yet Obodekwe, who works at the non-profit Centre for Environment, Human Rights and Development, says it is unlikely any new regulations will be implemented. "Many environmental policies are not enforced. There is a lack of political will," he said.

"It's not too important as far as they (the government) are concerned. They don't understand the implications of the attack on the environment, so they don't take it seriously."—AFP

Kuwait National English School holds Friendship music concert

The Early Years Children recently held two evening concerts of music and dance to entertain family and friends. The concerts were the first held in the newly renovated school theatre and were a great success. The themes of the evenings were "Friendship," building on the schools long held mission of being part of a "Human Family" and building positive relationships, which will last a lifetime. KNES is very proud of our Early Years children and the positive roles they have developed with their friends and classmates. We hope they will continue throughout their lives to be good Global Citizens.

Free medical camp held in Farwaniya

A free medical camp was organized at Metro Medical Care Clinic in Farwaniya on Feb 10, 2017 by Human Care Society under the auspices of Dr S M Hyder Ali, Chairman, TVS Travels and Cargo, a noted Indian philanthropist and business tycoon. The camp was organized for Asian expatriates who are not able to afford consultation fees of private clinics, ranging from KD 10 to 25.

Around 800 expatriates attended the free camp, 90 percent of them Telugu-speaking patients. They were examined by general practitioners, orthopedics and gynecologists including Dr Dinesh Yadhav Marka, Dr Davis Sygal and Dr Biji Basheer.

Greetings

Happy 6th Birthday to our sweet daughter Aisha Syed on Feb 14, 2017. Best wishes from mom, dad, brother Syed Danial and sister Yasmin Syed. We love you so much and wish you all the happiness and success in your life.

Indian Poet K Sethu's book release at Kuwait National Library

Prominent Indian poet Sembonmari K Sethu author of many books, launches his eighteenth book in Tamil language entitled 'Towards the Peak' which is scheduled on February 17, 2017, 5.30 pm at Kuwait National Library, near Kuwait Parliament, Arabian Gulf street, Kuwait. Poet Sembonmari K Sethu is residing in Kuwait from past three decades and is presently working in Kuwait Airways. He is the founder and president of Valaikuda Vanambadi Poet's Association in Kuwait. Famous Tamil orators and literary Icons from all community will show their artistic talents. Cultural dances and musical concert are also arranged to entertain the Indian community on the day of the launch.

Al Mulla Exchange concludes the Philippines 'Bike a week' offer

Al Mulla Exchange, Kuwait's leading money exchange company, concluded the very exciting offer that gave away a mountain bike every week to customers from the Philippines community. The closing date of the 3-month long offer was Jan 22, 2017. The promotion gave customers who conducted transactions to the Philippines during the offer period, either from any of Al Mulla Exchange branches or using the company's online services, a chance to enter an electronic draw. A total of 11 winners won bikes and a grand winner got a gift voucher worth KD 600 from Decathlon.

The list of winners include: Mohammad Abdullah Alyaqoub, Jerelyn Andal Dorimon, Amera Asico Rallos, Domingo G Buenaobra, Karla Joy Alta Martinez, Ritchel Dalumpines Tabilla, Shamma Marzouq Meadhed Almutairi, Sarona A Delacruz, Majed Awwadh Mohamed, Lerma Varquez Davis and Robin Andrew Clubb. The grand prize winner was Donna Michelle Ebora Ranon

Speaking to the media on the concluding day, Rakesh Joshi, General Manager Al Mulla Exchange said he is extremely happy for the winners of the draw and congratulated them. "We hope the bikes you have won will help you in spending your free-time and weekends more productively and keep you active in leading a healthy lifestyle." He said that the initiative was part of an ongoing scheme aimed at rewarding our customers from the Philippines community. "We also run parallel promotions for the Indian and the Jordanian communities in Kuwait."

Further he noted, "We thought of giving away mountain bikes as prizes based on the adventurous mindset of the Philippines community. They are fun-loving, cheerful and a physically active community, who are open to new ideas and technologies. They are innovative and adapt well to their environment, and make the best of the situation to enrich their lifestyles, so we believe that this promotion will sit well with their fitness goals.

The harshest phase of the winter will soon come to an end and the weather would become more pleasant, when biking would be a great outdoor activity to indulge in, he added. Joshi thanked all the staff and the Philippines community for making the promotion a great success, and promised to keep the surprises coming in future.

Al Mulla Exchange has a reputation for running exceptional promotions to not only achieve business objectives, but also as a token of gratitude to the customers. "We look at our growth as the result of the trust and support that our customers have given us, and are extremely indebted to them. This is our way of sharing a part of our success and happiness with them for their lasting loyalty," Rakesh concluded.

AAW hosts US Ambassador to Kuwait, HE Lawrence Silverman

Chairman and CEO of Ali Abdulwahab Al Mutawa Commercial Co. (AAW), Faisal Ali Abdulwahab Al Mutawa, yesterday received the United States Ambassador to Kuwait, HE Lawrence Silverman to discuss the company's relations with US retail and wholesale brands which it represents in Kuwait and the bilateral collaboration between AAW and the US retail and wholesale corporations. During the visit, the parties discussed the long-standing business relationships between AAW and various US companies operating in retail and wholesale sectors in Kuwait, which have been undergoing continuous growth.

AAW Chairman and CEO, Faisal Ali Al Mutawa said: "Kuwait's private sector has proven to be the best way to strengthen economic and trade relations between Kuwait and the world. AAW is an example of that through our ability to create and maintain excellent trade relations with several companies in the US in various sectors making American brands part of the Kuwaiti consumers' everyday life. I would like to thank Silverman for his visit, and look forward to welcoming him once again at AAW." AAW is one of the oldest, largest retail and distribution companies in Kuwait with world-class operations in diverse retail divisions, representing over 100 global brands including US brands such as Procter and Gamble, Pfizer, Clorex, Nike, Hershey's, The North Face, Eastpak and more.

Nissan Al Babtain renews its sponsorship of the Ultimate Soccer Academy

Abdulmohsen Abdulaziz Al Babtain Company (AABC), the authorized agent of Nissan in the State of Kuwait, announced yesterday its sponsorship of the Ultimate Soccer Academy, one of the most reputable sports academies in Kuwait that provides football training to kids between 5-18 years of age. Nissan Al Babtain, for the second consecutive year, will provide financial support and assistance to various local and international tournaments throughout the year.

The Ultimate Soccer Academy, known for its top quality football coaching, hosts various activities and events year around, including field trips in Kuwait and abroad, as well as world-class soccer training programs under the supervision of well reputed coaches. Nissan Al Babtain is proud to support aspiring local soccer-players by giving them the opportunity to grow, partake in competitive matches and instill in them a love for sports and healthy living.

In addition, all this while they are having fun and learning about the importance of teamwork from a young age. This sponsorship is a clear indication of Nissan Al Babtain's dedication to advance the quality of sports in Kuwait by helping build a generation that leads a healthy life style. Nissan Al Babtain's latest sponsorships is part of its Corporate Social Responsibility strategy that emphasizes the importance of promoting sportsmanship within the younger generations.

With a strong focus on sports and youth activities. It is worth mentioning that the trainees in the Ultimate Soccer Academy receive world-class training programs under the supervision of renowned experts in this field. In addition, youngsters are engaged in field trips and camps held abroad to teach them abidance and teamwork as well as programs consisting of different training classes.

ASSE organizes IOSH certified course H2S safety in the oil field

Worldwide Catering Company W.L.L (Silver sponsor of ASSE KC) at Al-Murgan Hann, Crowne Plaza Kuwait. The trainer for the program was Muhammad Alamgir, CSP, CRSP, CMIOSH. 30 participants participated in this training and got benefited. ASSE- Kuwait Chapter lead by Chairman Fadhel-Al Ali and is a non- profit organization which always strives to excel in providing quality trainings and consultation in the field of health safety and environment all across different public and private sectors in Kuwait.

"H2S is one of the most dangerous gases found in the oil and gas industry. The goal of the Hydrogen Sulfide (H2S) course was to make the participants aware on "how to recognize when H2S is present in your work area, properties and characteristics, effects of exposure to human, air monitoring for detection, personal protective equipment, first aid and rescue procedures, contingency plan. CH. Rama Krushna Chary, Presidentof ASSE Kuwait chapter welcomed the participants. He briefed about the significance of the training seminar and the importance of conducting the training program to help the people get certification in the field of health, safety and environment. He introduced the trainer Muhammad Alamgir.

Muhammad Alamgir is a Canadian Registered Safety Professional (CRSP) by BCRSP Canada, Certified Safety Professional (CSP) by BCSP USA, Chartered Safety and Health Practitioner (CMIOSH) by IOSH UK, Professional Member of American Society of Safety Engineers-USA, Full Member of IIRSM UK, Lead Auditor of OHSAS 18001, ISO 14001 and obtained many other International HSE certifications. Alamgir is a chemical engineer and has served more than a decade in the field of HSE including Oil and Gas, Petrochemical, Chemical and Construction industries. He is currently Vice-President of American Society of Safety Engineers Kuwait Chapter (Term 2016/17).

The training was meticulously carried on by the trainer with the required aiding tools. ASSE Kuwait Chapter would continue to do their best for the progress of the society and its members in particular, by organizing such important and also remarkable events in future. Details about the future events would be available to Chapter members and community members through email assekuwait@hotmail.com or phone line: - 66846040. For more details, visitwww.assekuwait.org

OSN MOVIES ACTION

00:45 Jurassic Hunters
02:15 AWOL 72
04:00 Dracula Untold
06:00 Hudson Hawk
08:00 Blunt Force Trauma
09:45 Code Of Silence
11:30 Dracula Untold
13:15 Hudson Hawk
15:00 Blunt Force Trauma
17:00 Reign Of Fire
18:45 Real Steel
21:00 San Andreas
23:00 Hitman: Agent 47

ANIMAL PLANET HD

00:00 Catching Monsters
00:55 Gator Boys
01:50 River Monsters
02:45 Bondi Vet
03:40 Catching Monsters
04:35 Tanked
05:25 Call Of The Wildman
06:15 Gator Boys
07:02 River Monsters
07:49 Catching Monsters
08:36 Going Ape
09:00 Going Ape
09:25 Groomer Has It
10:15 Catching Monsters
11:10 Call Of The Wildman
12:05 Tanked
13:00 Groomer Has It
13:55 Bondi Vet
14:50 Catching Monsters
15:45 Gator Boys
16:40 Call Of The Wildman
17:35 Tanked
18:30 River Monsters
19:25 Australia Doesn't Just Want To Kill You
20:20 Insane Pools: Off The Deep End
21:15 Tanked
22:10 Call Of The Wildman
22:35 Call Of The Wildman
23:05 Australia Doesn't Just Want To Kill You

BBC FIRST

00:10 Orphan Black
00:55 Doctors
01:25 Call The Midwife
02:20 Silent Witness

REAL STEEL ON OSN MOVIES ACTION

03:20 Silent Witness
04:20 Orphan Black
05:05 Doctors
05:35 Doctors
06:05 New Tricks
07:00 Doctors
07:30 Doctors
08:00 Holby City
08:55 Death In Paradise
09:50 Stella
10:35 New Tricks
11:30 Doctors
12:00 Doctors
12:30 Death In Paradise
13:25 Stella
14:20 New Tricks
15:15 Doctors
15:45 Doctors
16:15 Death In Paradise
17:10 Stella
18:05 New Tricks
19:00 Doctors
19:30 Eastenders
20:05 Death In Paradise
21:00 Poldark
22:00 Poldark
22:55 Ripper Street
23:50 Orphan Black

crime & investigation network

00:00 The First 48
01:00 It Takes A Killer
01:30 It Takes A Killer
02:00 Deadly Wives
03:00 Killer Kids
04:00 The First 48
05:00 It Takes A Killer
05:30 It Takes A Killer
06:00 Deadly Wives
07:00 Killer Kids
08:00 Evil Up Close
09:00 Evil Up Close
10:00 Crimes That Shook Britain
11:00 It Takes A Killer
11:30 It Takes A Killer
12:00 Crime Stories
13:00 Crime Stories
14:00 Crime Stories
15:00 Crime Stories
16:00 Evil Up Close
17:00 Crimes That Shook Britain
18:00 It Takes A Killer
18:30 It Takes A Killer
19:00 Nightmare In Suburbia
20:00 The First 48
21:00 The First 48
22:00 Crimes That Shook Britain
23:00 Evil Up Close

COMEDY CENTRAL

00:05 South Park
00:30 South Park
01:00 South Park
01:25 South Park
01:50 Important Things With Demitri Martin
02:15 Tosh.0
02:40 Inside Amy Schumer
03:05 South Park
03:30 South Park
04:00 The Daily Show With Trevor Noah
04:25 Catch A Contractor
05:15 Lip Sync Battle
05:40 Ridiculousness
06:05 Ridiculousness
06:30 Urban Tarzan
06:55 Urban Tarzan
07:20 Life Or Debt
08:15 Catch A Contractor
09:05 Disaster Date
09:30 Ridiculousness
09:55 Ridiculousness
10:20 Workaholics
10:45 Disaster Date
11:10 Ridiculousness
11:35 The It Crowd
12:00 Hungry Investors
12:50 Workaholics
13:15 Lip Sync Battle
13:40 The It Crowd
14:05 Catch A Contractor
14:55 Ridiculousness
15:20 Sweat Inc.
16:10 Workaholics
16:35 Ridiculousness
17:00 Ridiculousness
17:30 Disaster Date
17:55 Lip Sync Battle
18:25 Workaholics
18:50 Urban Tarzan
19:15 Urban Tarzan
19:39 The It Crowd
20:03 Life Or Debt
20:50 Disaster Date
21:13 Ridiculousness
21:37 Workaholics
22:00 The Daily Show With Trevor Noah
22:30 The Meltdown With Jonah And Kumail
22:54 Key And Peele
23:18 Another Period
23:42 Another Period

Discovery Family

00:15 Destroyed In Seconds
00:40 Ultimate Survival
01:30 Science Of The Movies
02:20 Australia Smashes Guinness World Records
02:45 Australia Smashes Guinness World Records
03:10 Guinness World Records Smashed UK
04:00 Destroyed In Seconds
04:25 Destroyed In Seconds
04:50 Ultimate Survival
05:40 How It's Made
06:05 How It's Made
06:30 Dirty Jobs
07:20 Mythbusters
08:00 Kids vs Film
08:25 Bear Grylls Survival School
08:50 Too Cute! Pint-Sized
09:40 How It's Made
10:05 How It's Made
10:30 Science Of The Movies
11:20 Mythbusters
12:10 Too Cute! Pint-Sized
13:00 Ultimate Survival
13:50 How It's Made
14:15 How It's Made
14:40 Dirty Jobs
15:30 Mythbusters
16:20 Science Of The Movies
17:10 Kids vs Film
17:35 Bear Grylls Survival School
18:00 Wildest Africa
18:50 Lost & Found With Mike & Jesse
19:40 Destroyed In Seconds
20:05 Destroyed In Seconds
20:30 How It's Made
20:55 How It's Made
21:20 Mythbusters
22:10 Wildest Africa
23:00 Lost & Found With Mike & Jesse
23:50 Destroyed In Seconds

Disney Channel HD

00:00 Kirby Buckets
00:25 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
00:50 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
01:10 Hank Zipzer
01:35 Binny And The Ghost
02:00 Violetta
02:45 The Hive
02:50 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
03:15 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
03:40 Hank Zipzer
04:05 Binny And The Ghost
04:30 Violetta
05:15 The Hive
05:20 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
05:45 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
06:10 Hank Zipzer
06:35 Binny And The Ghost
07:00 Violetta
07:45 The Hive
07:50 The 7D
08:00 Jessie
08:25 Jessie
08:50 Rolling To The Ronks
09:15 Tsum Tsum Shorts
09:20 Elena Of Avalor
09:45 Bunk'd
10:10 Stuck In The Middle
10:35 Wizards Of Waverly Place
11:00 Wizards Of Waverly Place
11:25 A.N.T. Farm
11:50 A.N.T. Farm
12:15 Good Luck Charlie
12:40 Good Luck Charlie
13:05 Shake It Up
13:30 Shake It Up
13:55 Disney Mickey Mouse
14:00 Welcome To The Ronks
14:15 Gravity Falls
14:40 Hank Zipzer
15:05 Star Darlings
15:10 Austin & Ally
15:35 Jessie
16:00 Bunk'd
16:25 Kirby Buckets
16:50 Rolling To The Ronks
17:15 Sunny Bunnies
17:20 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug And Cat Noir
17:45 Elena Of Avalor
18:10 Stuck In The Middle
18:35 Descendants Wicked World
18:40 Girl Meets World
19:05 Bizaardvark
19:30 Bunk'd
19:55 Best Friends Whenever
20:20 Disney Mickey Mouse
20:25 The Next Step
20:50 Austin & Ally
21:15 Star Darlings
21:20 Shake It Up
21:45 Backstage
22:10 Liv And Maddie
22:35 Cracke
22:40 The Next Step
23:05 Best Friends Whenever
23:30 Jessie
23:55 Tsum Tsum Shorts

Disney Junior

00:00 Doc McStuffins
00:30 Doc McStuffins
00:55 PJ Masks
01:20 Henry Hugglemonster
01:35 The Hive
01:45 Loopdidoo
02:00 Henry Hugglemonster
02:15 Calimero
02:30 Art Attack
02:55 Zou
03:05 Loopdidoo
03:20 Henry Hugglemonster
03:35 Calimero
03:50 Zou
04:05 Art Attack
04:30 The Hive
04:40 Loopdidoo
04:55 Henry Hugglemonster
05:10 Art Attack
05:35 Loopdidoo
05:50 Calimero
06:05 Art Attack
06:30 Henry Hugglemonster
06:45 Zou
07:00 Art Attack
07:30 Henry Hugglemonster
07:45 Loopdidoo
08:00 Zou
08:15 Calimero
08:30 Loopdidoo
08:45 Henry Hugglemonster
09:00 Minnie's Bow-Toons
09:05 Sheriff Callie's Wild West
09:15 Jake And The Neverland Pirates
09:30 Miles From Tomorrow
09:45 Goldie & Bear
09:55 The Lion Guard
10:20 PJ Masks
10:35 Jake And The Neverland Pirates
10:50 Doc McStuffins
11:00 Goldie & Bear
11:15 PJ Masks
11:30 Minnie's Bow-Toons
11:35 The Lion Guard
12:00 Sofia The First
12:30 Doc McStuffins
12:55 Mickey Mouse Clubhouse
13:20 My Friends Tigger & Pooh
13:50 Sheriff Callie's Wild West
14:15 Gummi Bears
14:40 Sofia The First
15:10 Little Mermaid
15:35 PJ Masks
16:00 My Friends Tigger & Pooh
16:30 The Lion Guard
16:55 Unbungalievable
17:00 Miles From Tomorrow
17:30 Jake And The Never Land Pirates
17:55 The Lion Guard
18:20 Goldie & Bear
18:50 PJ Masks
19:15 Sofia The First
19:40 Doc McStuffins
20:05 Jake And The Never Land Pirates
20:30 Little Mermaid
21:00 Doc McStuffins
21:30 Doc McStuffins
22:00 Unbungalievable
22:05 Goldie & Bear
22:35 Miles From Tomorrow
23:00 My Friends Tigger & Pooh
23:25 Gummi Bears
23:55 Minnie's Bow-Toons

Discovery Channel HD

00:30 Fast N' Loud
01:20 Misfit Garage
02:10 The Island With Bear Grylls
03:00 Bear Grylls: Mission Survive
03:50 Ed Stafford: Into The Unknown
04:40 Fast N' Loud
05:30 Auction Hunters
06:00 How Do They Do It?
06:30 How Do They Do It?
07:00 Deadliest Catch
07:50 Misfit Garage
08:40 Fast N' Loud
09:30 Running Wild With Bear Grylls
10:20 Auction Hunters
10:45 How Do They Do It?
11:10 How Do They Do It?
11:35 The Island With Bear Grylls
12:25 Bear Grylls: Mission Survive
13:15 Ed Stafford: Into The Unknown
14:05 How Do They Do It?
14:30 Auction Hunters
14:55 Auction Hunters
15:20 Alaska: The Last Frontier
16:10 Running Wild With Bear Grylls
17:00 Deadliest Catch
17:50 Fast N' Loud
18:40 Misfit Garage
19:30 How Do They Do It?
19:55 How Do They Do It?
20:20 Running Wild With Bear Grylls
21:10 Auction Hunters
21:35 Auction Hunters
22:00 Blowing Up History
22:50 How Do They Do It?
23:15 How Do They Do It?
23:40 Impossible Engineering

Disney XD

00:00 Programmes Start At 6:00am KSA
07:00 Danger Mouse
07:25 Gravity Falls
07:50 Atomic Puppet
08:15 Star vs The Forces Of Evil
08:25 Counterfeit Cat
08:40 Supa Strikas
09:10 K.C. Undercover
09:35 Star Wars Freemaker Adventures
10:00 Lab Rats Elite Force
10:25 Lab Rats Elite Force
10:50 Danger Mouse
11:20 Supa Strikas
11:45 Supa Strikas
12:10 Counterfeit Cat
12:35 Pair Of Kings
13:00 Pair Of Kings
13:30 Future-Worm!
13:55 Lab Rats
14:20 Lab Rats
14:45 Atomic Puppet
15:10 Disney Mickey Mouse
15:15 Marvel's Avengers: Ultron Revolution
15:40 Supa Strikas
16:05 Lab Rats
16:30 Gamer's Guide To Pretty Much Everything
16:55 Danger Mouse
17:25 K.C. Undercover
17:50 Future-Worm!
18:15 Gravity Falls
18:40 Lab Rats Elite Force
19:05 Disney Mickey Mouse
19:10 Supa Strikas
19:35 Star vs The Forces Of Evil
20:00 Atomic Puppet
20:25 Gamer's Guide To Pretty Much Everything
20:55 K.C. Undercover
21:20 Counterfeit Cat
21:45 Mighty Med
22:10 Pickle And Peanut
22:40 Disney Mickey Mouse
22:45 Marvel's Avengers: Ultron Revolution
23:10 Ultimate Spider-Man: Web Warriors
23:35 Boyster

E! HD

00:00 E! News
00:15 Botched
01:05 Botched
01:55 Fashion Police
02:50 E! News
03:50 WAGs
04:45 WAGs
05:40 WAGs
06:30 Botched
07:00 Hollywood Medium With Tyler Henry
07:55 E! News
08:10 Hollywood Medium With Tyler Henry
09:10 E! News
10:10 Live From The Red Carpet
12:00 Fashion Police
13:00 E! News
13:15 WAGs Miami
14:10 WAGs Miami
15:05 WAGs Miami
16:00 E! News
16:15 Celebrity Style Story
16:45 Celebrity Style Story
17:15 Mariah's World
18:10 Live From The Red Carpet
20:00 E! News
21:00 Fashion Bloggers
21:30 Fashion Bloggers
22:00 Fashion Bloggers
22:30 Fashion Bloggers
23:00 So Cosmo

Food Network

00:00 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
00:30 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
01:00 Man Fire Food
01:30 Man Fire Food
02:00 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
02:30 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
03:00 Man Fire Food
03:30 Man Fire Food
04:00 Chopped
05:00 Guy's Grocery Games
06:00 Barefoot Contessa: Back To Basics
06:30 Barefoot Contessa: Back To Basics
07:00 The Kitchen
08:00 The Pioneer Woman
08:30 The Pioneer Woman
09:00 Siba's Table
09:30 Siba's Table
10:00 Anna Olson: Bake
10:30 Anna Olson: Bake
11:00 The Kitchen
12:00 The Pioneer Woman
12:30 The Pioneer Woman
13:00 Siba's Table
13:30 Siba's Table
14:00 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
14:30 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
15:00 Chopped
16:00 The Kitchen
17:00 Anna Olson: Bake
17:30 Anna Olson: Bake
18:00 Chopped
19:00 Guy's Grocery Games
20:00 Chopped
21:00 Food Network Star
22:00 Kitchen Casino
23:00 Iron Chef America

ITV HD CHOICE

00:15 Coronation Street
00:40 Coronation Street
01:10 The Chase
02:00 Emmerdale
02:30 Coronation Street
03:00 Coronation Street
03:30 Couples Come Dine With Me
04:25 Murdoch Mysteries
05:15 Together
05:45 Together
06:15 Grantchester
07:10 The Chase
08:05 Couples Come Dine With Me
09:00 Murdoch Mysteries
10:00 Together
10:30 Together
11:00 Grantchester
11:55 The Chase
12:50 Couples Come Dine With Me
13:45 Emmerdale
14:15 Coronation Street
14:45 Coronation Street
15:15 The Chase
16:10 Couples Come Dine With Me
17:00 Tina & Bobby
17:50 Shetland
18:50 The Trials Of Jimmy Rose
19:45 Emmerdale
20:15 Coronation Street
20:45 Coronation Street
21:10 Couples Come Dine With Me
22:00 Tina & Bobby
22:50 Shetland
23:50 Emmerdale

H2 HD

00:00 Ancient Aliens
01:00 The Universe
02:00 Warriors
03:00 Ancient Discoveries
04:00 Brad Meltzer's Decoded
04:50 Ancient Aliens
05:40 Ancient Aliens
06:30 The Universe
07:20 America: The Story Of The U.S.
08:10 The Universe
09:00 Ancient Discoveries
10:00 Brad Meltzer's Decoded
11:00 Ancient Aliens
12:00 Ancient Aliens
13:00 The Universe
14:00 America: The Story Of The U.S.
15:00 Ancient Discoveries
16:00 Brad Meltzer's Decoded
17:00 Ancient Aliens
18:00 Ancient Aliens
19:00 The Universe
20:00 America: The Story Of The U.S.
21:00 Ancient Discoveries
22:00 Brad Meltzer's Decoded
23:00 Ancient Aliens

History HD

00:30 American Pickers
01:20 Forged In Fire
02:10 Mountain Men
03:00 Swamp People
03:50 Storage Wars
04:15 American Pickers
05:05 Pawn Stars
05:30 Pawn Stars
06:00 Billion Dollar Wreck
07:00 Ice Road Truckers
07:50 Shipping Wars
08:15 Shipping Wars
08:40 Counting Cars
09:05 Counting Cars
09:30 Pawn Stars
09:55 Pawn Stars
10:20 Storage Wars
10:45 Storage Wars
11:10 American Pickers
12:00 Hunting Hitler
12:50 Time Team
13:40 Swamp People
14:30 Ax Men
15:20 Mountain Men
16:10 Shipping Wars
16:35 Shipping Wars
17:00 Counting Cars
17:25 Counting Cars
17:50 Pawn Stars
18:15 Pawn Stars
18:40 Mountain Men
19:30 Aussie Pickers
20:20 Ax Men
21:10 American Pickers
22:00 Counting Cars
22:25 Car Hunters
22:50 Forged In Fire
23:40 Forged In Fire

THE BEST OF ME ON OSN MOVIES HD

HOW DO YOU KNOW ON OSN MOVIES COMEDY HD

NAT GEO people HD

00:20 Cesar's Recruit: Asia
00:45 The Shelbourne
01:10 Chocolate Covered
01:35 Poh & Co
02:00 Poh & Co
02:25 Places We Go
02:50 Delinquent Gourmet
03:15 Chocolate Covered
03:40 Food Lover's Guide To The Planet
04:05 Sara's Australia Unveiled
04:30 Tom's Istanbul Delight
04:55 Cesar's Recruit: Asia
05:20 Carnival Eats
05:45 Eat Street
06:10 Confucius Was A Foodie
07:00 Chocolate Covered
07:25 Food Lover's Guide To The Planet
07:50 Poh & Co
08:15 Places We Go
08:40 Delinquent Gourmet
09:05 Chocolate Covered
09:30 Food Lover's Guide To The Planet
09:55 Sara's Australia Unveiled
10:20 Tom's Istanbul Delight
10:45 Cesar's Recruit: Asia
11:10 Carnival Eats
11:35 Eat Street
12:00 Confucius Was A Foodie
12:50 Chocolate Covered
13:15 Food Lover's Guide To The Planet
13:40 Poh & Co
14:05 Sara's Australia Unveiled
14:35 Delinquent Gourmet
15:00 Chocolate Covered
15:30 Eat: The Story Of Food
16:25 Valentine Warner's Wild Table
17:00 Cesar's Recruit: Asia
17:25 Carnival Eats
17:50 Eat Street
18:15 Confucius Was A Foodie
19:10 Chocolate Covered
19:35 Testing The Menu With Nic Watt
20:05 Chocolate Covered
20:30 Valentine Warner's Wild Table
21:00 Cesar's Recruit: Asia
21:25 Carnival Eats
21:50 Eat Street
22:15 Confucius Was A Foodie
23:05 Chocolate Covered
23:30 Testing The Menu With Nic Watt
23:55 Poh & Co

National Geographic Channel HD

00:20 Access 360 World Heritage
01:10 Monster Fish
02:00 Wicked Tuna
03:00 Air Crash Investigation
03:55 Live Free Or Die
04:50 Monster Fish
05:45 The Great Food Revolution
06:40 Paranatural
07:35 Dog Whisperer
08:30 Jurassic C.S.I.
09:25 Seconds From Disaster
10:20 Gok's Chinese Takeaway
11:15 Cesar's Recruit: Asia
11:40 Desperate Hours
12:10 On The Brink: Unchartered Waters
13:05 Human Inferno
14:00 Seconds From Disaster
15:00 Jurassic C.S.I.
16:00 Dog Whisperer
17:00 Cesar's Recruit: Asia
17:30 Desperate Hours
18:00 Miracle Hospital
18:30 Miracle Hospital
19:00 Return From The Dead
20:00 Startalk
21:00 Cesar's Recruit: Asia
21:25 Desperate Hours
21:50 Miracle Hospital
22:15 Miracle Hospital
22:40 Return From The Dead
23:30 Startalk

Nat Geo Wild HD

00:30 Alpine Lakes
01:20 Big Cats: An Amazing Animal Family
02:10 South Africa
03:00 Anaconda: Silent Killer
03:50 Dangerous Encounters
04:45 Dangerous Encounters
05:40 World's Deadliest
06:35 Anaconda: Silent Killer
07:30 Dangerous Encounters
08:25 Dangerous Encounters
09:20 World's Deadliest
10:15 Super Pride
11:10 Deadly Instincts
12:05 Man And The Wild
13:00 Mega Hammerhead
13:55 Secrets Of The King Cobra
14:50 Dangerous Encounters
15:45 Storm Cats
16:40 World's Deadliest
17:35 Little Killers
18:30 Deadly Instincts
19:25 Storm Cats
20:20 I, Predator
21:10 World's Deadliest
22:00 Little Killers
22:50 Deadly Instincts
23:40 Storm Cats

OSN MOVIES DRAMA

00:00 Third Person
02:15 Cas & Dylan
04:00 The Purge
06:00 Pay The Ghost
08:00 The Forger
10:00 The Outsider
12:00 Dangerous Lessons
14:00 The Two Faces Of January
16:00 Project Almanac
17:45 Blackhat
20:00 Dark Places
22:00 Panic Room

OSN MOVIES HD FAMILY

00:00 Ratatouille
02:00 Storm Rider
04:00 Tom And Huck
05:45 Race To Witch Mountain
07:45 The Tale Of Despereaux
09:30 Ratatouille
11:30 Race To Witch Mountain
13:15 Ducktales: The Movie
14:30 The Tale Of Despereaux
16:00 It Takes Two
18:00 Oliver & Company
20:00 Step Dogs
22:00 Black Beauty

OSN MOVIES HD

00:00 How To Be Single
02:00 The Meddler
04:00 Big Stone Gap
06:00 Miss You Already
08:00 The Dressmaker
10:00 The Age Of Adaline
12:00 The Best Of Me
14:00 Far From The Madding Crowd
16:00 Zootropolis
18:00 Daddy's Home
19:45 Mission: Impossible - Rogue Nation
22:00 London Has Fallen
23:45 Vacation

OSN MOVIES HD COMEDY

01:15 It's Complicated
04:00 Caveman
05:45 Accidental Love
07:30 How Do You Know
09:30 Caveman
11:00 Accidental Love
13:00 How Do You Know
15:00 Norbit
17:00 Crazy On The Outside
19:00 Hanging Up
21:00 The Invention Of Lying
23:00 Neighbors
01:45 Miller's Crossing

OSN MOVIES FESTIVAL

04:00 Beyond The Edge
06:00 Quiz Show
08:30 Searching For Bobby Fischer
10:30 Finding Forrester
12:45 Pele: Birth Of A Legend
14:30 Hail, Caesar!
16:30 The Blind Side
19:00 Whiplash
20:45 The Theory Of Everything
23:00 Carol

OSN MOVIES HD KIDS

00:15 Blackie And Kanuto
02:00 Thumbelina
04:00 Blue Elephant 2
05:45 Cher Ami
07:15 Jock The Hero Dog

CLASSIFIEDS

Kuwait Times

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2017

Kuwait CINEMA

KNCC PROGRAMME FROM THURSDAY TO WEDNESDAY (09/02/2017 TO 15/02/2017)

SHARQIA-1

RINGS	12:45 PM
RAEES- HINDI	3:15 PM
KAABIL- HINDI	6:00 PM
AL MOKHAYAM (Kuwaiti Film)	8:45 PM
AL MOKHAYAM (Kuwaiti Film)	10:45 PM
SPLIT	12:45 AM

SHARQIA-2

SPLIT	12:15 PM
THE LEGO BATMAN MOVIE	2:45 PM
THE LEGO BATMAN MOVIE	5:00 PM
THE LEGO BATMAN MOVIE	7:15 PM
KUNG-FU YOGA	9:30 PM
SPLIT	11:45 PM

SHARQIA-3

JOHN WICK: CHAPTER 2	12:15 PM
JOHN WICK: CHAPTER 2	2:45 PM
RINGS	5:15 PM
JOHN WICK: CHAPTER 2	7:30 PM
RINGS	10:00 PM
JOHN WICK: CHAPTER 2	12:05 AM

MUHALAB-1

RINGS	11:45 AM
THE LEGO BATMAN MOVIE	2:00 PM
THE LEGO BATMAN MOVIE	4:15 PM
THE LEGO BATMAN MOVIE	6:30 PM
RINGS	8:45 PM
RINGS	10:45 PM
RINGS	12:45 AM

MUHALAB-2

SPLIT	1:30 PM
RAEES- HINDI	3:45 PM
KAABIL- HINDI	6:45 PM
SPLIT	9:45 PM
SPLIT	12:15 AM

MUHALAB-3

JOHN WICK: CHAPTER 2	12:00 PM
JOHN WICK: CHAPTER 2	2:30 PM
JOHN WICK: CHAPTER 2	5:00 PM
JOHN WICK: CHAPTER 2	7:30 PM
JOHN WICK: CHAPTER 2	10:00 PM
JOHN WICK: CHAPTER 2	12:30 AM

FANAR-1

SPLIT	12:00 PM
SPLIT	2:30 PM
AL MOKHAYAM 5:00 PM	(Kuwaiti Film)
KUNG-FU YOGA	7:00 PM
SPLIT	9:15 PM
SPLIT	11:45 PM

FANAR-2

RINGS	11:30 AM
THE LEGO BATMAN MOVIE	1:30 PM
THE LEGO BATMAN MOVIE	3:45 PM
THE LEGO BATMAN MOVIE	6:00 PM
RINGS	8:15 PM
RINGS	10:30 PM
RINGS	12:45 AM

FANAR-3

KAABIL- HINDI	12:30 PM
AL MOKHAYAM (Kuwaiti Film)	1:30 PM
DANGAL -Hindi	3:30 PM
KAABIL- HINDI	6:45 PM
JOLLY LLB 2 -Hindi	9:30 PM
AL MOKHAYAM (Kuwaiti Film)	12:15 AM

FANAR-4

JOHN WICK: CHAPTER 2	11:30 AM
JOHN WICK: CHAPTER 2	2:00 PM
JOHN WICK: CHAPTER 2	4:30 PM
JOHN WICK: CHAPTER 2	7:00 PM
JOHN WICK: CHAPTER 2	9:30 PM
JOHN WICK: CHAPTER 2	12:05 AM

FANAR-5

THE SPACE BETWEEN US	11:45 AM
THE SPACE BETWEEN US	2:00 PM
HEARTBEATS	4:15 PM
THE SPACE BETWEEN US	6:30 PM
RAEES- HINDI	8:45 PM
HEARTBEATS	11:30 PM

MARINA-1

RINGS	11:30 AM
SPLIT	1:30 PM
RINGS	3:45 PM
RINGS	6:00 PM
KUNG-FU YOGA	8:15 PM
SPLIT	10:30 PM
SPLIT	12:45 AM

MARINA-2

RINGS	1:00 PM
THE LEGO BATMAN MOVIE SAT+MON	1:00 PM
THE LEGO BATMAN MOVIE	3:15 PM
THE LEGO BATMAN MOVIE	5:30 PM
THE LEGO BATMAN MOVIE	7:45 PM
RINGS	10:00 PM
RINGS	12:15 AM

MARINA-3

JOHN WICK: CHAPTER 2	12:00 PM
JOHN WICK: CHAPTER 2	2:30 PM
JOHN WICK: CHAPTER 2	5:00 PM
JOHN WICK: CHAPTER 2	7:30 PM
JOHN WICK: CHAPTER 2	10:00 PM
JOHN WICK: CHAPTER 2	12:30 AM

AVENUES-1

DANGAL -Hindi	12:45 PM
AL MOKHAYAM (Kuwaiti Film)	2:00 PM
AL MOKHAYAM (Kuwaiti Film)	4:00 PM
AL MOKHAYAM (Kuwaiti Film)	6:00 PM
AL MOKHAYAM 8:00 PM	(Kuwaiti Film)
AL MOKHAYAM (Kuwaiti Film)	10:00 PM
AL MOKHAYAM (Kuwaiti Film)	12:05 AM

AVENUES-2

THE LEGO BATMAN MOVIE -3D -4DX	1:00 PM
THE LEGO BATMAN MOVIE -3D -4DX	3:15 PM
THE LEGO BATMAN MOVIE -3D -4DX	5:30 PM
JOHN WICK: CHAPTER 2 -2D -4DX	7:45 PM
JOHN WICK: CHAPTER 2 -2D -4DX	10:15 PM
JOHN WICK: CHAPTER 2 -2D -4DX	12:45 AM

AVENUES-3

SPLIT	11:30 AM
SPLIT	1:45 PM
SINGAM III -Tamil	4:00 PM
SINGAM III -Tamil	7:00 PM
SINGAM III -Tamil	10:00 PM
SPLIT	1:00 AM

360º- 1

RINGS	12:15 PM
RINGS	2:30 PM
RINGS	4:45 PM
RINGS	7:00 PM
RINGS	9:15 PM
RINGS	11:30 PM

360º 2

KAABIL- HINDI	1:15 PM
KAABIL- HINDI FRI	1:30 PM
DANGAL -Hindi	4:30 PM
KAABIL- HINDI	7:45 PM
DANGAL -Hindi	11:00 PM

360º 3

RINGS	1:00 PM
AL MOKHAYAM (Kuwaiti Film)	3:15 PM
AL MOKHAYAM (Kuwaiti Film)	5:15 PM
AL MOKHAYAM (Kuwaiti Film)	7:15 PM
AL MOKHAYAM (Kuwaiti Film)	9:15 PM
AL MOKHAYAM (Kuwaiti Film)	11:15 PM
RINGS	1:15 AM

JOB OPPORTUNITIES

Accountant
Minimum B.Com Graduate with 5+ years experience in all accounts related jobs up to finalization. Must be proficient in Microsoft Excel & Word. Experience in Focus accounting Software will be an added advantage.

Store Keeper & Inventory Controller
Must be a Commerce graduate / Electro mechanical or electronics engineering diploma holder, above 35 years age & minimum 5 years experience with computerized inventory & accounting system

Senior Sales Executive
Must have at least 8+ years experience in Kuwait market in the sale of technology solutions and turnkey projects

Field Sales Executive
Must have a minimum of 5 years field experience in selling technology products and systems in Kuwait

Driver
Must have at least 3 years experience in Kuwait with knowledge of Kuwaiti areas and should be able to drive manual vehicles like vans, pickups, etc.

Structured Cabling Technician
Minimum 5 years experience in Kuwait installing & testing structured cabling systems for networks. Experience with CAT6/6A & MDF terminations, telephony, patch panels, rack assembly etc. is a must. Optical fiber & AV experience will be a plus.

Technician
Minimum 5 years field experience specializing in fire alarm, security& low voltage systems and audio visual (stage & lighting systems)

Draftsman
Minimum 10 years experience with at least 3+ years in Kuwait.

Please forward your resume to careers2017kwt@gmail.com

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Sonu son of Halasha Ram, holder of Indian Passport No. M4637344 & Civil ID No. 280101012966 has changed my name Som Nath Halasha Ram hereinafter in all my dealings and documents I will be known by name of Som Nath Halasha Ram. **(C 5273) 15-2-2017**

I, NR Rockie Rodgers S/o Noel Rodgers, holder of Indian Passport No. K4263817 & Civil ID No. 274112305085 has changed my name to Jahangir hereinafter in all my dealings and documents I will be known by name of Jahangir. **(C 5271) 14-2-2017**

TRANSPORT

Transport required from Dhajeej to Hawally Qutaiba street, from 5 pm. Friday & Saturday off. Contact: **99878317.**
15-2-2017

ACCOMMODATION

2 big rooms with balcony + central AC, Jabriya B-10. St 9, near Indian School & Farah Jamiya, start from February. Mobile: 55706900, 55983570.
(C 5272) 14-2-2017

FOR SALE

For sale 2008 model GMC ENVOY, good condition, full option, no accident, 186000 km. Contact: 97470947.
(C 5270)
12-2-2017

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr:	05:07
Shorook:	06:28
Duhr:	12:02
Asr:	15:13
Maghrib:	17:37
Isha:	18:55

Automated enquiry about the Civil ID card is 1889988

Flight Schedule

Directorate General of Civil Aviation Home Page (www.kuwait-airport.com.kw)

DIAL161 FOR AIRPORT INFORMATION

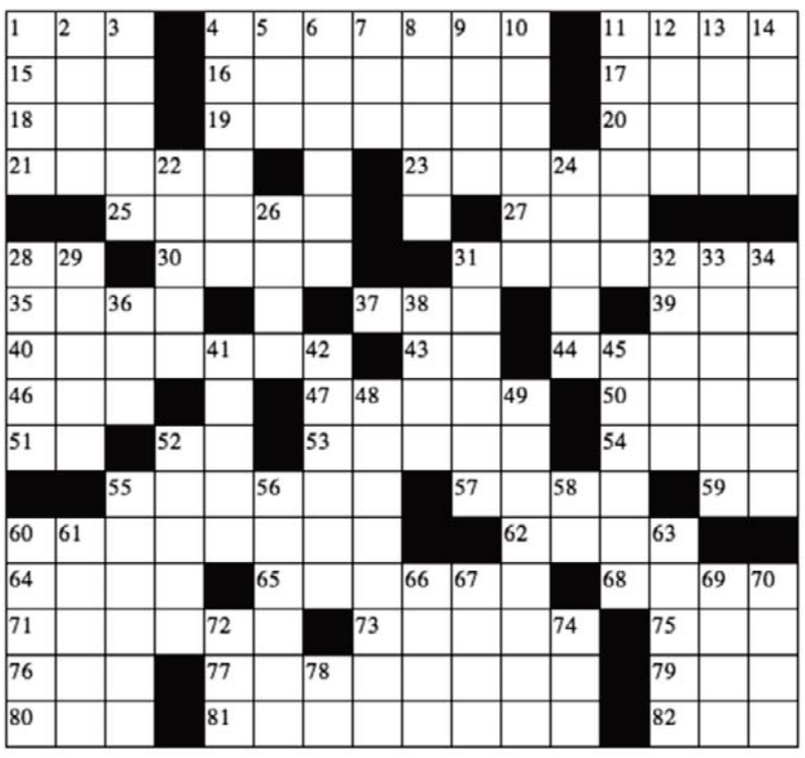
Arrival Flights on Wednesday 15/2/2017

Airlines	Flt	Route	Time
JZR	267	Beirut	00:30
JZR	539	Cairo	00:40
THY	772	Istanbul	00:55
KAC	102	London	00:55
FDK	803	Damascus	01:00
QTR	1086	Doha	01:15
THY	764	Istanbul	01:50
DLH	635	Doha	01:55
PGT	858	Istanbul	02:00
MSC	405	Sohag	02:30
GFA	211	Bahrain	02:30
UAE	853	Dubai	02:30
OMA	643	Muscat	02:55
KKK	6506	Istanbul	02:55
FDB	069	Dubai	03:05
RJA	644	Amman	03:05
MSR	612	Cairo	03:10
ETD	305	Abu Dhabi	03:10
CEB	0018	Manila	03:15
KAC	358	Kochi	03:30
QTR	1076	Doha	03:30
KAC	1544	Cairo	03:55
KAC	418	Manila	04:25
DHX	170	Bahrain	05:20
KAC	344	Chennai	05:35
KAC	332	Trivandrum	05:45
KAC	206	Islamabad	06:20
KAC	346	Ahmedabad	06:25
BAW	157	London	06:40
KAC	204	Lahore	07:15
FDB	5061	Dubai	07:15
FDB	053	Dubai	07:45
KAC	302	Mumbai	08:20
UAE	855	Dubai	08:40
KAC	382	Delhi	08:45
KAC	362	Colombo	09:05
ETD	301	Abu Dhabi	09:05
ABY	125	Sharjah	09:05
KAC	352	Kochi	09:10
QTR	1070	Doha	09:30
FDB	055	Dubai	09:40
IRC	6511	ABD	09:55
MSC	415	Sohag	10:15
IRA	665	Shiraz	10:40
GFA	213	Bahrain	10:40
AXB	889	Mangalore/Bahrain	11:10
IRM	1188	Mashhad	11:15
JZR	165	Dubai	11:30
MEA	404	Beirut	11:55
IAW	157	Al Najaf	12:00
KAC	744	Dammam	12:10
JZR	561	Sohag	12:40
FDB	075	Dubai	12:50
UAE	871	Dubai	12:50
MSR	610	Cairo	13:00
KAC	614	Bahrain	13:30
KAC	564	Amman	13:40
KAC	514	Tehran	13:55
KNE	231	Riyadh	13:55
QTR	1078	Doha	14:10
SVA	500	Jeddah	14:15
FDB	059	Dubai	14:20
KAC	414	Bangkok	14:35
GFA	221	Bahrain	14:40
IRC	6521	Lamerd	14:40
KAC	542	Cairo	14:45
KAC	672	Dubai	14:50
KNE	529	Jeddah	14:55
KNE	683	Madinah	15:05
ETD	303	Abu Dhabi	15:15
KAC	286	Dhaka	15:20
OMA	645	Muscat	15:35
UAE	857	Dubai	15:45
ABY	127	Sharjah	15:50
KAC	154	Istanbul	15:55
SAW	705	Damascus	16:00
SVA	504	Madinah	16:00
JZR	535	Cairo	16:10
QTR	1072	Doha	16:10
KAC	788	Jeddah	16:20
JZR	787	Riyadh	16:25
JZR	357	Mashhad	16:25
FDB	051	Dubai	16:25
KAC	662	Abu Dhabi	16:35
RJA	640	Amman	16:55
KAC	118	New York	17:00
SVA	510	Riyadh	17:15
GFA	215	Bahrain	17:30
JZR	777	Jeddah	17:45
UAE	875	Dubai	18:00
FDB	063	Dubai	18:10
JZR	177	Dubai	18:20
MSR	620	Cairo	18:30
KAC	502	Beirut	18:30
JZR	483	Istanbul	18:40
QTR	1080	Doha	18:50
TXC	1625	BSR	19:00
KAC	512	Mashhad	19:20
ABY	123	Sharjah	19:25
GFA	217	Bahrain	19:30
KAC	778	Riyadh	19:35
KAC	674	Dubai	19:45
FDB	057	Dubai	19:50
KAC	620	Doha	19:50
KAC	104	London	19:50
KNE	381	Taif	19:55
KAC	694	Muscat	20:00
OMA	647	Muscat	20:10
QTR	1088	Doha	20:35
KAC	562	Amman	20:40
MSR	606	Luxor	20:45
DLH	634	Frankfurt	20:45
FDB	5053	Dubai	20:50
KAC	172	Frankfurt	21:15
KAC	786	Jeddah	21:15
MEA	402	Beirut	21:20
ETD	307	Abu Dhabi	21:20
ALK	229	Colombo	21:25
UAE	859	Dubai	21:40
GFA	219	Bahrain	21:45
QTR	1082	Doha	22:00
JZR	125	Bahrain	22:05
ETD	309	Abu Dhabi	22:15
AIC	975	Chennai/Goa	22:25
JZR	241	Amman	22:45
JAI	574	Mumbai	23:00
JZR	185	Dubai	23:15
JZR	555	Alexandria	23:20
PIA	239	Sialkot	23:40
FDB	071	Dubai	23:45
KAC	162	Geneva	23:50
BBC	043	Dhaka	23:55

Departure Flights on Wednesday 15/2/2017

Airlines	Flt	Route	Time
AIC	988	Hyderabad/Chennai	00:05
JAI	573	Mumbai	00:30
FDB	072	Dubai	00:40
FDK	804	Damascus	01:55
KAC	417	Manila	02:00
KAC	285	Dhaka	02:25
THY	773	Istanbul	02:25
DLH	635	Frankfurt	02:55
MSC	406	Sohag	03:30
PGT	859	Istanbul	03:35
UAE	854	Dubai	03:45
KKK	6505	Istanbul	03:55
OMA	644	Muscat	03:55
THY	765	Istanbul	04:00
ETD	306	Abu Dhabi	04:10
MSR	613	Cairo	04:10
QTR	1077	Doha	04:40
KAC	103	London	04:45
CEB	0019	Manila	05:20
QTR	1087	Doha	05:50
JZR	560	Sohag	06:05
FDB	070	Dubai	06:30
KAC	153	Istanbul	06:50
JZR	164	Dubai	06:55
RJA	645	Amman	07:05
KAC	171	Frankfurt	07:05
GFA	212	Bahrain	07:15
KAC	541	Cairo	07:15
FDB	5062	Dubai	07:55
KAC	563	Amman	08:00
BAW	156	London	08:40
FDB	054	Dubai	08:55
KAC	743	Dammam	09:00
KAC	117	New York	09:00
JZR	534	Cairo	09:15
KAC	513	Tehran	09:30
KAC	101	London	09:35
ABY	126	Sharjah	09:45
UAE	856	Dubai	09:55
JZR	482	Istanbul	10:00
KAC	671	Dubai	10:05
ETD	302	Abu Dhabi	10:10
KAC	613	Bahrain	10:10
KAC	787	Jeddah	10:15
JZR	356	Mashhad	10:25
FDB	056	Dubai	10:35
KAC	161	Geneva	10:35
QTR	1071	Doha	10:40
KAC	501	Beirut	10:55
IRC	6522	Lamerd	11:00
MSC	416	Sohag	11:15
GFA	214	Bahrain	11:25
IRA	664	Shiraz	11:40
JZR	776	Jeddah	12:05
KAC	661	Abu Dhabi	12:05
AXB	890	Mangalore	12:10
IRM	1189	Mashhad	12:30
MEA	405	Beirut	12:55
IAW	158	Al Najaf	13:00
JZR	786	Riyadh	13:10
KAC	511	Mashhad	13:15
JZR	176	Dubai	13:45
MSR	611	Cairo	14:00
FDB	076	Dubai	14:05
UAE	872	Dubai	14:15
KAC	693	Muscat	14:30
KNE	382	Taif	14:50
KAC	673	Dubai	15:00
KAC	561	Amman	15:00
FDB	060	Dubai	15:05
KAC	785	Jeddah	15:15
GFA	222	Bahrain	15:25
IRC	6512	ABD	15:30
QTR	1079	Doha	15:40
SVA	501	Jeddah	15:45
KNE	530	Jeddah	15:55
KNE	684	Madinah	16:00
KAC	619	Doha	16:00
KAC	777	Riyadh	16:00
ETD	304	Abu Dhabi	16:20
ABY	128	Sharjah	16:30
OMA	646	Muscat	16:35
SAW	706	Damascus	16:55
SVA	505	Madinah	17:00
JZR	266	Beirut	17:05
JZR	240	Amman	17:15
FDB	052	Dubai	17:25
QTR	1073	Doha	17:40
KAC	363	Colombo	17:40
UAE	858	Dubai	17:45
JZR	538	Cairo	17:45
RJA	641	Amman	17:55
KAC	331	Trivandrum	18:00
SVA	511	Riyadh	18:15
KAC	353	BLR	18:15
GFA	216	Bahrain	18:20
JZR	184	Dubai	18:40
FDB	064	Dubai	19:05
JZR	554	Alexandria	19:10
JZR	124	Bahrain	19:15
UAE	876	Dubai	19:30
MSR	621	Cairo	19:30
QTR	1081	Doha	19:50
ABY	124	Sharjah	20:05
GFA	218	Bahrain	20:15
FDB	058	Dubai	20:35
KNE	232	Riyadh	20:55
KAC	545	Cairo	21:00
OMA	648	Muscat	21:10
KAC	205	Islamabad	21:25
KAC	345	Ahmedabad	21:30
QTR	1089	Doha	21:35
DLH	634	Doha	21:35
MSR	619	Alexandria	21:45
DHX	171	Bahrain	21:50
FDB	5054	Dubai	21:50
KAC	351	Kochi	22:00
KAC	413	Bangkok	22:15
ETD	308	Abu Dhabi	22:15
KAC	203	Lahore	22:15
MEA	403	Beirut	22:20
ALK	230	Colombo	22:25
GFA	220	Bahrain	22:30
KAC	381	Delhi	22:45
KAC	301	Mumbai	22:45
JZR	502	Luxor	22:55
UAE	860	Dubai	22:55
ETD	310	Abu Dhabi	23:05
QTR	1083	Doha	23:20
JZR	528	Asyut	23:30

CROSSWORD 1522



ACROSS

1. Type genus of the Suidae.
4. (anatomy) A small structure resembling a rootlet (such as a fibril of a nerve).
11. A bachelor's degree in library science.
15. A vacuum tube in which a hot cathode emits a beam of electrons that pass through a high voltage anode and are focused or deflected before hitting a phosphorescent screen.
16. Highly significant or important especially bringing about or marking the beginning of a new development or era.
17. Characteristic of false pride.
18. A sweetened beverage of diluted fruit juice.
19. A marketplace where groceries are sold.
20. A particular geographical region of indefinite boundary (usually serving some special purpose or distinguished by its people or culture or geography).
21. A Russian prison camp for political prisoners.
23. Showing or feeling admiration.
25. Jordan's port.
27. Fiddler crabs.
28. A white trivalent metallic element.
30. Having been read.
35. (prefix) Indicating difference or variation.
37. A humorous anecdote or remark.
39. (British) Your grandmother.
40. A small cloth bag filled with dried beans.
43. An uproarious party.
44. Large long-armed ape of Borneo and Sumatra having arboreal habits.
46. Gone by.
47. A city in southern Turkey on the Seyhan River.
50. (Sumerian) Water god and god of wisdom.
51. A heavy silvery toxic univalent and bivalent metallic element.
53. English theoretical physicist who applied relativity theory to quantum mechanics and predicted the existence of antimatter and the positron (1902-1984).
54. The part of a hammerhead opposite the flat striking surface (may have various shapes).
57. A Tibetan or Mongolian priest of Lamaism.
59. (Akkadian) God of wisdom.
60. A river in northeastern Brazil that flows generally northward to the Atlantic Ocean.
62. (Irish) Mother of the Tuatha De Danann.
64. A fee charged for exchanging currencies.
65. Covered with dense cottony hairs or hair-like filaments.
68. A collection of facts from which conclusions may be drawn.
71. Ancient city is southeastern Italy where Hannibal defeated the Romans in 216 BC.
73. An evergreen tree of the family Ulmaceae that grows in tropical America and Africa and Asia.
75. A unit of absorbed ionizing radiation equal to 100 ergs per gram of irradiated material.
76. A graphical record of electric currents associated with muscle contractions.
77. Inflammation of a blood vessel or lymph duct.
79. A Turkish unit of weight equal to about 2.75 pounds.
80. A column of light (as from a beacon).
81. French writer whose novels were the first to feature psychological analysis of the character (1783-1842).
82. A coenzyme derived from the B vitamin nicotinic acid.

DOWN

1. A narcotic that is considered a hard drug.
2. Relating to the Urdu language.
3. An ancient upright stone slab bearing markings.
4. Popular music originating in the West Indies.
5. The month following March and preceding May.
6. Something whose name is either forgotten or not known.
7. A federal agency that supervises carriers that transport goods and people between states.
8. Relatively low in price or charging low prices.
9. Soft white semisolid fat obtained by rendering the fatty tissue of the hog v 1.
10. Tall tufted perennial grasses (such as lyme grass or wild rye).
11. Evergreen Indian shrub with vivid yellow flowers whose bark is used in tanning.
12. Capital city of the Apulia region on the Adriatic coast.
13. The right to take another's property if an obligation is not discharged.
14. An unforeseen obstacle.
22. A city in northeastern Ohio.
24. Small tropical American tree bearing edible plumlike fruit.
26. A small cake leavened with yeast.
29. Large swift fly the female of which sucks blood of various animals.
31. Pertaining to or associated with agony (especially death agonies).
32. Complacently or inanely foolish.
33. Used by southerners for an inhabitant of a northern state in the United States (especially a Union soldier).
34. Any disease of the throat or fauces marked by spasmodic attacks of intense suffocative pain.
36. Of or relating to a member of the Buddhist people inhabiting the Mekong river in Laos and Thailand.
38. The sixth month of the civil year.
41. Soviet chief of secret police under Joseph Stalin.
42. A member of an agricultural people in southeastern India.
45. Having a slightly undulating margin.
48. An anticonvulsant drug (trade name Dilantin) used to treat epilepsy and that is not a sedative.
49. The academic world.
52. A rule or especially body of rules or principles generally established as valid and fundamental in a field or art or philosophy.
55. At or constituting a border or edge.
56. Marked by absence of sound.
58. Informal terms for a mother.
61. Small terrestrial lizard of warm regions of the Old World.
63. American professional baseball player who hit more home runs than Babe Ruth (born in 1934).
66. Lacking sufficient water or rainfall.
67. The 9th letter of the Hebrew alphabet.
69. The basic unit of money in Bangladesh.
70. (Babylonian) God of storms and wind.
72. An associate degree in applied science.
74. The sign language used in the United States.
78. A brittle gray crystalline element that is a semiconducting metalloid (resembling silicon) used in transistors.

Yesterday's Solution

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

STAR TRACK

Aries (March 21-April 19)

Recognize the signs of stress and do what you can to take on a mindset that is much more productive. Your thoughts may move toward ways in which you can improve your working conditions so as not to put stress on family life. This may take the decision to speak up and be heard. Stay within the rules and keep practical, not emotional-you will find continued support and acceptance. You will have to let some of your outside activities and interests go for now. There are outside forces or temptations interfering with your productivity. After today, your energy quota will gently return and you will be able to accomplish much more in a day than is possible now. You will find that this evening is a good time for romance.

Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Today and tomorrow are good times to obtain a loan, if this is a concern. This could involve all matters of subjects such as business accounts, apparel, investments, etc. Problems are valued for the lessons they represent. Perceiving problems as obstacles could mean a loss of money. You have an enhanced appreciation for responsibilities and duty. Ambition and achievement can be tough taskmasters. You will win rewards, recognition and authority through hard work and knowing the score; otherwise, you may find that someone hungrier and with more savvy could overtake you. Some people make large demands on your time and energies just now-make a determined effort to balance your activities each day.

Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Work responsibilities will come first today and may find you working a bit of overtime this afternoon. Difficulties, blocks and all manner of hot spots may be discovered. This could mean playing a go-between for a couple of people at work that cannot see eye to eye. You will be smart in allowing a higher-up to feel he or she solved the problem. Although this time can be intense at work, you will actually be able to look back on this juncture and see that there was much progress. Many people you come into contact with now, unlike the past, will be in your life for some time to come. Be wise and listen to your inner voice when it comes to spending large amounts of money. A love affair or love relationship may be able to grow more meaningful now.

Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Check and recheck your bank statement this tuesday in order to catch any mistakes you or the bank may have made. You get through the challenges of this day without too many difficulties. You can work up the ladder of success and achieve whatever you want to achieve. Owning your own business is not out of the question. Be sure you choose a business partner that you feel will follow through on what that person says will be done. Check out his or her bookkeeping skills. You will be able to finish your home project now. Through the end of this month much can be accomplished in many areas of your life. Money will come to you through a government program or an older person. Make an effort to practice relaxation, especially before bed.

Leo (July 23-August 22)

It is important that you keep working on the current projects. Someone is watching and evaluating your development. It is a good thing that this workday is conducive to completing projects. It is a good day to get things accomplished. You have good eye-hand coordination and a sustained effort makes any task run well. A proposition to make money may be as good as it seems-check it out first. Always better to be safe than sorry! Expect a sense of support and goodwill from those around you. You may be visiting with friends this evening. An old friend from school or from another neighborhood may be in town, and talks of old times and catching up with each other's latest adventure fill the afternoon and evening.

Virgo (August 23-September 22)

An authority figure will probably help you with some information that you can use to help increase your income. This person may also remind you that the sky is the limit when you set your mind toward the goal. There are energies and people working in your favor now to help you make some positive changes in your life. Good surprises are in sight. New breakthroughs regarding some confusing problems are also possible this afternoon. Take what you hear with a grain of salt and stay clear of arguments. If you feel someone is wrong and you think that person will not listen-he or she will find out soon enough. Some people do not like changes but you may be elated over some new discoveries-do not let anyone hijack your emotional thermometer.

Libra (September 23-October 22)

Loyalty is the number one asset that higher-ups appreciate about you. There is a lot of work to be done and you are the one that can do it. Think as a manager and allocate some of the work so that a time schedule can be created. You will see some excellent opportunities for advancement with your company. You could write your ideas down as a proposal and submit it to higher channels. You may find yourself looking for a little romance this afternoon or at least enjoying some emotional release. You can appreciate feelings and movement. You may want to just get out and walk or exercise. There is optimism and patience when it comes to love. If you are bored, try walking quickly backwards-for exercise. Put more smiles in your day.

Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Fuzzy thinking could lead to some misleading ideas. Be aware that there is a lot of nervous energy this morning. Arguments are possible with an authority figure. Do you prefer that you be right or happyuntil you are asked your opinion, this is a great time to show your helpfulness through the art of listening. Respect, status and achievement are central goals that you will find achievable. Staying as close as possible to your own work is most important today. This afternoon music seems to take a turn your way and you find yourself with more music in your life. It is interesting that when you pick relationships and pets, not only behavior and looks but also voice is an important factor. Enjoy the musical investigation that happens all afternoon.

Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

Your emotions may be high some of the time and melancholy at other times this day. The fun comes in communicating clear thoughts among a group of people that may have never been where you have been. Poetry may be better understood; however, curiously enough, this is a very productive day. You are on the right track at work and you may find yourself working into the late hours. You are so close to the end of a project or success of a business that your hard work will soon be visible. Stay objective and retain your sense of humor. This will save you and others from discouragement and slowdowns. This evening you can work on some stress relief techniques, especially laughter. Create lighthearted times for yourself and others.

Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

This is a time for coming to grips with your shadow and for taking control of the forces within you that slow your progress of success. Learning that your own self is the only thing one truly can control is probably the biggest step up the ladder of life. Perhaps also, looking at your career may give you insight to your life path. It is time to share your special talents and trust that your uniqueness will work to your advantage. A meeting with someone older or in authority may take place later today, but all will go well. Financial opportunities are again available to you. Pay attention to this opportunity, ask questions and invest. There is a chance to understand those around you and to have a special time with someone you love this evening.

Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

Every year it gets more exciting to conduct business. There is plenty of new technology that goes along with becoming organized, efficient and in-the-know. Others may envy your ability to use your new gizmos efficiently. Unfortunately, you still have to feed the information into the equipment and find the information in an instant. If you have more than two pieces of equipment at your beck and call in any one business moment, you are still taking just about as much time to answer a question as you would have in any other circumstance without the new equipment. The secret here is, if you have the stuff, enjoy it. If you do not have the stuff, know where your calendar is and practice the art of memorization; it keeps you young.

Pisces (February 19-March 20)

There is a lot of energy available for disciplined work, but push too hard and you could break something. It's important to gather all the facts necessary to give you a realistic idea of how work is progressing. The openness and honesty that has been the hallmark of your relationship with a friend may be weakened a bit. If an event raises your body's thermostat, deep breathing should normalize your mood. Even though you have been thinking of real estate, this is not a time for action. Social relationships are a special focus this evening. You will be listening and concerning yourself with the lifestyle and problems of others just now-you may need your mental strength as well as a dose of healthy patience. It may be time to adjust your friendships.

WORD SEARCH

More 70's Songs

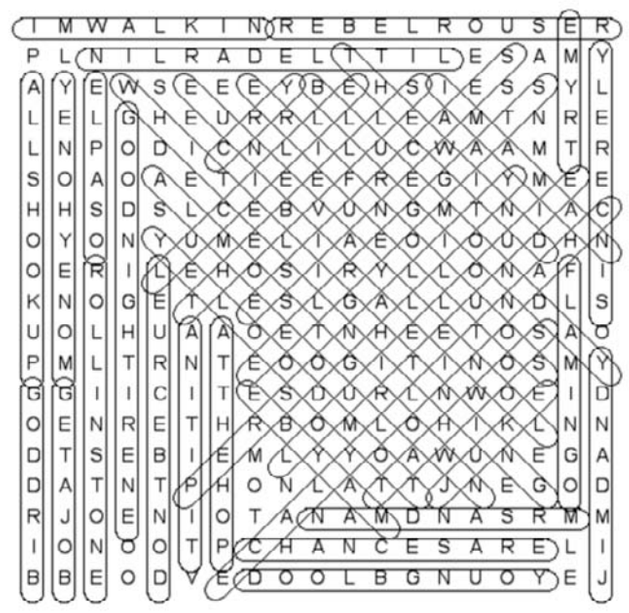
Find and circle all of these songs from the 1970's that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters will spell the names of ten music groups from the 70's.

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

AFTERNOON DELIGHT
AMERICAN PIE
AMERICAN WOMAN
ANNIE'S SONG
BAD GIRLS
BARRACUDA
BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY
BROTHER LOUIE
CRAZY ON YOU
DELTA DAWN
DON'T STOP
DREAM ON
DREAM WEAVER
DRIFT AWAY
EBONY EYES
FIRE AND RAIN
HELP ME
IMAGINE
LAST DANCE
LET IT BE
LOVE HURTS
LOW RIDER
MAGIC MAN
MAIN STREET
MARGARITAVILLE
MY LOVE
MY SHARONA
NIGHT FEVER
PHOTOGRAPH
PIANO MAN
REUNITED
ROSE GARDEN
SHADOW DANCING
SHE'S GONE
SIGNS
SOUTHERN NIGHTS
SUMMER NIGHTS
SUNDOWN
SUPERSTAR
THE GAMBLER
WITHOUT YOU
WOODSTOCK
Y.M.C.A.
YOU'RE SIXTEEN

Yesterday's Solution

More 1950's Songs



ALL SHOOK UP
ALMOST GROWN
AT THE HOP
BIRD DOG
BLUE MONDAY
CHANCES ARE
CHANTILLY LACE
CRY
DON'T BE CRUEL
EL PASO
FLAMINGO
GET A JOB
GOODNIGHT IRENE
I'M A MAN
I'M WALKIN'
JIM DANDY
JUKE
LITTLE DARLIN'
LONELY AVENUE
LOUIE LOUIE
LUCILLE
MAYBE
MONEY HONEY
MR SANDMAN
PERSONALITY
REBEL ROUSER
ROLLIN' STONE
SEA CRUISE
SINCERELY
SO WHAT
SOUL ON FIRE
STAGGER LEE
THE BELLS
THE WIND
TIPITINA
TOM DOOLEY
TRY ME
WHITE LIGHTNING
YOUNG BLOOD

The hidden sentence is: PLEASE SEND ME SOMEONE TO LOVE

Daily SuDoku

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

Yesterday's Solution

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

MUSIC & MOVIES

RIDING HIGH, BEYONCE FAILS TO BREAK GRAMMY CURSE

File photo shows singer Beyonce poses with her Grammy trophies in the press room during the 59th Annual Grammy music Awards on February 12, 2017, in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

Is Beyonce too edgy for the music industry? Or do the Grammy Awards suffer from an underlying racial bias? The superstar's failure to win top prizes is vexing her many admirers-among them the night's big winner Adele. Beyonce had led the Grammy nominations with nine for "Lemonade," her most daring album to date, which she crafted as a celebration of the resilience of African American women. But Beyonce, whose tour was one of the industry's most lucrative in 2016, took only two awards Sunday, again losing in the leading categories of Album and Record of the Year.

Adele, whose blockbuster album "25" stuck to her trusted style of wrenching ballads, for the second time swept three top Grammys-and she earned praise from Beyonce's fans for saying that "Lemonade" deserved to win. "My view is, kind of, what the fuck does she have to do to win Album of the Year?" Adele told reporters at the Los Angeles gala. The English singer said that her black friends found "Lemonade" to be "empowering" and hailed Beyonce's creativity for intertwining the album with a film. "Obviously the visual is very new and the Grammys are very traditional, but I just thought that this year would be the year that they would kind of go with the tide," Adele said.

Adele's triumph comes a year after Kendrick Lamar's "To Pimp A Butterfly," hailed as a hip-hop landmark and whose song "Alright" became an anthem of the Black Lives Matter movement, also lost to a best-seller, Taylor Swift's "1989." Frank Ocean, the introspective hip-hop trailblazer whose debut album was edged out by in 2013 by English folk revivalists Mumford & Sons, chose not to even submit his follow-up, "Blonde," for Grammy consideration. After Sunday's awards, Ocean wrote an open letter asking the Grammy organizers to discuss the "cultural bias and general nerve damage" caused by the show.

Ocean, who defiantly released "Blonde" independently, said he initially wanted to take part in the Grammys for the tribute to late pop icon Prince. "But then I figured my best tribute to that man's legacy would be to continue to be myself out here and to be successful," he wrote. "Winning a TV award doesn't christen me successful. It took me some time to learn that."

By and for black women

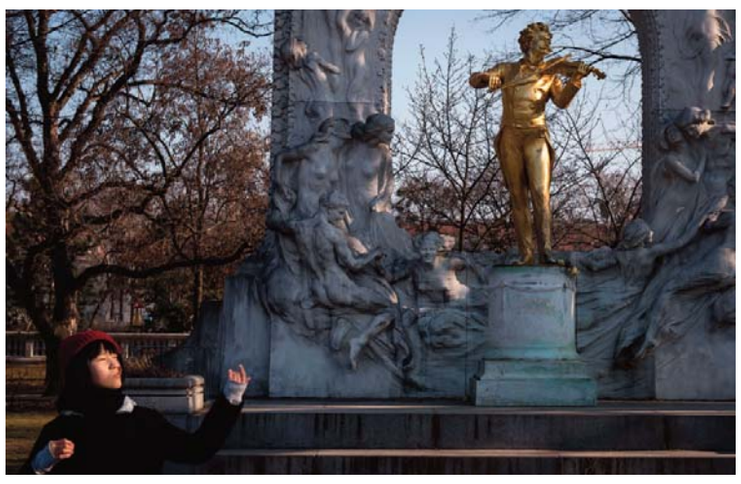
The Grammys-determined through voting by some 13,000 music professionals in the Recording Academy-have hardly ignored Beyonce. With 22 career Grammys, she is among the most recognized artists in history. Stevie Wonder is tied for the record of winning Album of the Year three times but the top prize has been especially elusive for black women. Only three Natalie Cole, Lauryn Hill and Whitney Houston-have won it. On "Lemonade," the film blurs present and past with flashbacks to slavery in the Deep South, where African American women are shown as proudly self-sufficient. "Lemonade" draws a link to 21st century America, taking on police brutality as well as marital infidelity as the music spans influences and culminates in hip-hop.

"'Lemonade' is really about how black women are treated in society historically, and in the contemporary moment, and it's about loving ourselves through all of that," said LaKisha Simmons, an assistant professor of history and women's studies at the University of Michigan. "So in some ways, it's kind of fitting that she was left standing there," she said. "Beyonce will be fine," she said. "But I think for the rest of us, it stings because of that-it's almost like, 'Get back in your place.'"

Challenging industry

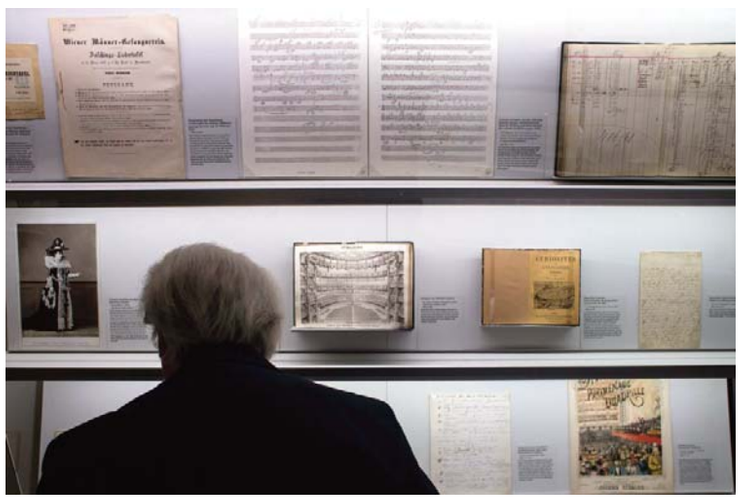
The Grammys marked Beyonce's first public appearance since she revealed she was pregnant with twins. Her performance returned to the theme of matriarchy as she donned a crown and her female troupe glided beneath her on a sea of flowers. Yet Beyonce is hard to pigeon-hole as an experimental artist. When she last was passed over for Album of the Year in 2014, it went to alternative rock icon Beck who is far less commercial.

But one constant is Beyonce's innovations on selling albums. Her self-titled 2013 album was also a surprise accompanied by videos. "She really challenges the people in the Recording Academy and the music industry," said Kevin Allred, who has lectured on Beyonce at Rutgers University. Beyonce is "breaking the rules and succeeding, and is also a very powerful black woman who has achieved a level of power that few do." — AFP



A tourist poses for a photo in front of a statue of composer Johann Strauss by sculptor Edmund Hellmer at the Stadtpark in Vienna.

A statue of composer Johann Strauss by sculptor Edmund Hellmer is pictured at the Stadtpark in Vienna. — AFP photos



Visitors look at scores of the Blue Danube waltz by Johann Strauss and other exhibits during the opening of the exhibition "Donau, so blau" at the Wienbibliothek im Rathaus in Vienna.

'The Blue Danube' keeps waltzing at 150

Born out of defeat, initially not that popular and dedicated to a river that's more greeny-grey, the beginnings of "The Blue Danube" 150 years ago this week were inauspicious. But Johann Strauss Junior's rousing waltz, first performed on February 15, 1867, is now one of the world's most famous and catchiest pieces of classical music. It features in movies galore and is being performed and danced to still. "An der schoenen blauen Donau", as it is known in the original German, began life as a choral work commissioned by the Vienna Men's Choral Society.

The main aim was to cheer people up after Austria had lost an important and bloody battle against Prussia, at Koniggratz, the previous summer. The title was said to have been inspired by a poem but the words were penned by the society's own lyricist, a policeman who humorously bemoaned the state of the defeated country. It was not an immediate runaway success, although an exhibition marking the anniversary at Vienna City Hall seeks to refute the belief that it was a total flop.

One glowing contemporary account even calls it a "schlager" (German for "hit") -- supposedly the first recorded use of the term. But the piece only really took off once an orchestral version was performed in Paris later in 1867, to a rapturous reception, and soon afterwards in London. In a tour of the United States in 1872, Strauss conducted a performance by a 2,000-piece orchestra and a 20,000-strong choir to 100,000 people. "How am I supposed to conduct this mess?" the composer reputedly said.

The rest is history

Today "The Blue Danube" evokes like no other waltz the elegance of Vienna's 19th-century heyday-which lives on in the city's ball season, currently in full swing. It also takes pride of place in the Vienna New Year's Concert every January 1, and is Austria's unofficial national anthem. When Austria declared its independence from Nazi Germany in April 1945, it was "The Blue Danube" that was performed since at the time the country had no official national anthem of its own.

The national airline Austrian Airlines plays the music to passengers before takeoff and after landing. A survey in 2016 of customers found 72 percent in favor of the practice continuing. It is also a perennial favorite on the silver screen, most famously in Stanley Kubrick's "2001: A Space Odyssey" but also in "Cool Runnings" and "Titanic", to name but a few. More irreverently, a sketch by British comedy troupe Monty Python showed members of an orchestra exploding one by one as they played the piece in a field.

It has also featured in madcap animated series "SpongeBob SquarePants" while in "The Simpsons", Homer, in homage to Kubrick, floats around a spaceship eating potato chips. But apart from it simply being a nice tune, how to explain the popularity, particularly considering that Strauss wrote almost 500 other waltzes? "There is no definitive answer," Thomas Aigner, curator at the City Hall exhibition, told AFP. "It's a patriotic song, but not too much. Everyone can project their own memory linked to the river, to a visit to Vienna." — AFP

Debbie Harry crowned Style Icon at Elle Style Awards

Debbie Harry, frontwoman of rock band Blondie, was crowned a fashion icon at London's Elle Style Awards, and she thanked her punk influences for defining her style. "Coming from the punk point of view, which was very deconstructionist, destructive, and disrespectful, you have to find something in yourself that makes you feel a lot of different ways," she told Reuters at the red carpet event late Monday. "So you have to feel beautiful, you have to feel comfortable. I have to feel sexy."

Harry, who attended the event with Blondie co-founder Chris Stein, playfully wore a crown designed by Vivienne Westwood, while posing for photographers. Harry also wore a Westwood red suit with a black-and-white shirt and shoes. Blondie, an American punk band famous for hits like "Heart of Glass" and "Call Me" in the late 1970s and early 1980s, is expected to release their 11th studio album, "Pollinator", in May.

"It's about the ongoing circle of culture and how we all feed off of each other and I think at this particular time...it's very important to remember that. That we're all so deeply connected," Harry said about the new album. British actress and United Nations Women Global Goodwill Ambassador Emma Watson was given the Woman of the Year award in recognition of her acting career and work for gender equality. Other winners included French singer-songwriter Christine and the Queens, who won Album of the Year, and Christopher Bailey took home British Brand of the Year for Burberry. Erdem Moralioglu won British Designer of the Year. — Reuters

Singer Debbie Harry poses for photographers upon arrival at the Elle Style Awards in London on Monday. — AP

Music Review

Ryan Adams delivers fresh songs and heartaches

From the days when he exploded out of North Carolina with the alt-country band Whiskey town to his steady growth into one of America's great songwriters, Ryan Adams has always floated just below superstar status. If it's possible to be underrated through years of sustained excellence, he has pulled it off. But the excellence continues on "Prisoner," a fine collection of fresh songs and new takes on heartache that demonstrates as much mastery as anything Adams has done. It matches surprising melodies with brilliant arrangements and affecting, urgent lyrics, reminding listeners that this is a craftsman who turns just about everything he touches into gold.

Adams' fans will recognize the vibe. There are the fingerpicked electric guitar trills set against a backdrop of jangly acoustic power-chord strumming. There's the same harmonica he's been carrying around at least since "Cold Roses," now more than a decade old. His familiar blend of muscle and vulnerability sparkles on "Do You Still Love Me?" And when Adams, on "Shiver and Shake," sings, "I reach out for your hand but I know it isn't there," it feels like he's practically bleeding.

If there is a flaw here it lies in familiarity - Adams is hardly venturing beyond his comfort zone. But when you are this good that's not a significant problem. Better to sit back and appreciate a songwriter at the peak of his evocative power, with plenty to sing about and the command to bring it home with authority. — AP

Ryan Adams

Cambodian king to open Jolie's film on Khmer Rouge survivor

Cambodia's King Norodom Sihamoni will preside over the premiere Saturday of Angelina Jolie's film based on a memoir from a Khmer Rouge survivor. Queen Mother Norodom Monineath Sihanouk and senior government officials will also attend the showing of "First They Killed My Father" at the centuries-old Angkor Wat temple complex, a spokesman for the government agency that oversees the archaeological site said yesterday.

Jolie, who directed the Khmer-language film on location in 2015-16, is also scheduled to attend. Two free public screens are planned at the site near Siem Reap in northwestern Cambodia. The film is based on Loung Ung's account of her survival as a child under the 1975-79 communist Khmer Rouge regime, believed to be responsible for the deaths of 1.7 million Cambodians from starvation, disease and execution. Jolie has had an affinity for Cambodia since she began goodwill work for the U.N.'s refugee agency in 2001, and her eldest son, Maddox, was adopted from the country. She also has established a foundation to promote social development in rural Cambodia.

King Sihamoni's late father, Norodom Sihanouk, produced, wrote, directed and sometimes even acted in more than two dozen films made when he was in and out of power. Sihamoni has a deep interest in art and culture, focused on dance, both ballet and classical Cambodian dance. Long Kosal, the spokesman for Apsara Authority, the agency that oversees the temple complex, said he is pleased that the movie will have its premiere at Angkor Wat. "As a Khmer Rouge survivor, I am very proud that this movie is to be screened here, as the film will recall how the atrocities and harm caused to the Cambodian people under the Khmer Rouge regime," he said, explaining that it would be a good lesson to younger generations not to let such a brutal type of regime take power. —AP

This file photo shows Maddox Jolie-Pitt, with Angelina Jolie on the red carpet at the 2013 Board of Governors of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences' Governor Awards, in Los Angeles. — AP

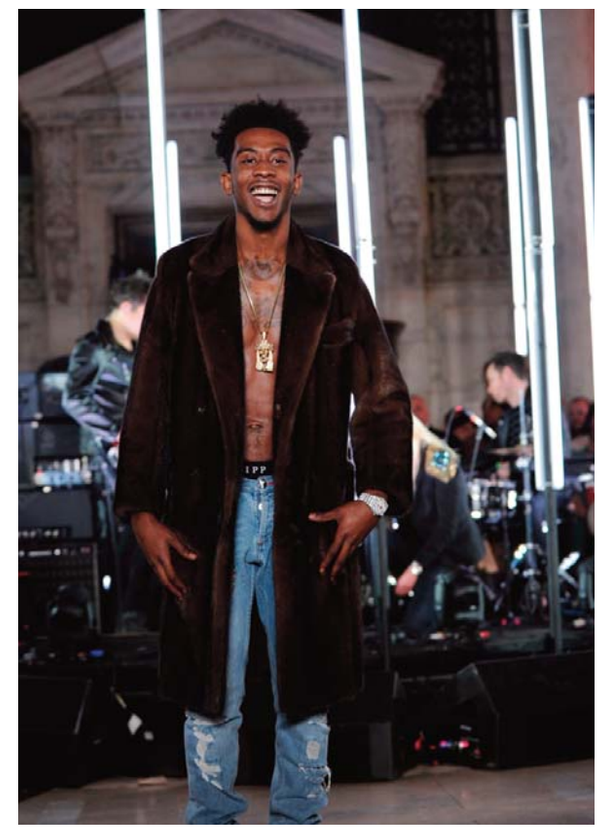
British singer Tinie Tempah speaks on stage at the MTV headquarters, yesterday, following the announcement that the 2017 MTV European Music Awards are to be held in London. — AP

2017 MTV Europe Music Awards to be held in 'musical epicentre' London

The MTV Europe Music Awards will take place in London this year, more than 20 years since the ceremony was last held in the British capital, channel MTV said yesterday.

The awards show is hosted in a different European city each year. Last year's edition took place in Rotterdam.

"London is arguably the world's musical epicentre," David Lynn, chief executive of MTV's parent company Viacom International Media Networks, said in a statement. "The (awards ceremony) creates an incredible buzz wherever it lands it; that will be amplified tenfold in London." The awards show was last held in London in 1996. The 2017 edition will take place in November. — Reuters



Philipp Plein hits town, Oscar de la Renta, Monse team up

The Philipp Plein fashion collection is modeled during Fashion Week in New York, Monday. — AP/AFP photos

Philipp Plein promised something different for his first turn at New York Fashion Week and delivered with a huge crowd packed into the monolithic main branch of the public library, live music courtesy of Nas and The Kills - and Madonna turning up last minute on his front row. Dynamic designing duo Laura Kim and Fernando Garcia, meanwhile, performed a high-wire act, presenting not one but both of their fashion lines - Oscar de la Renta and Monse - simultaneously. Carolina Herrera called her show her "white shirt" moment, a celebration of her favorite garment. And Proenza Schouler said adieu to New York for now as it prepares to show in Paris. Some of Monday's highlights:

The Plein circus in town

Plein, reveling in his disruptor status and usually a mainstay in Milan, didn't disappoint. Social media viral sensation Jeremy Meeks, the "hot felon," was on his runway alongside rappers and an army of people dressed as Statues of Liberty entertained his guests, along with Times Square's Naked Cowboy. The German designer promised and delivered something different, with a hashtag rallying cry of his very own launched days in advance on Instagram: "Let's Make NYFW Great Again." Did his giant black and silver puffer coats and luxe sportwear deliver? It was a tad hard to see the clothes from the cheap seats, but Plein the businessman is making a retail push into the US market, coveting consumers here as his discerning next step.

"This dream came true for me tonight," Plein said, making the unusual move of addressing the crowd before the show after Nas performed to help get everyone all warmed up. "Even my girlfriend is here and she didn't have a seat." The point? "It's all about having fun," the affable Plein told the horde. And you know what? It kinda was. Madonna was accompanied by photographer Steven Klein and joined in the crowd by Kylie Jenner, Tiffany Trump (Secret Service in tow) and Paris Hilton. The handsome, blue-eyed California con Meeks, with the teardrop tattoo on his face, was joined on the meandering runway by rapper Desiigner and graffiti artist Alec Monopoly, who goes anonymous by covering his face with a bandanna.

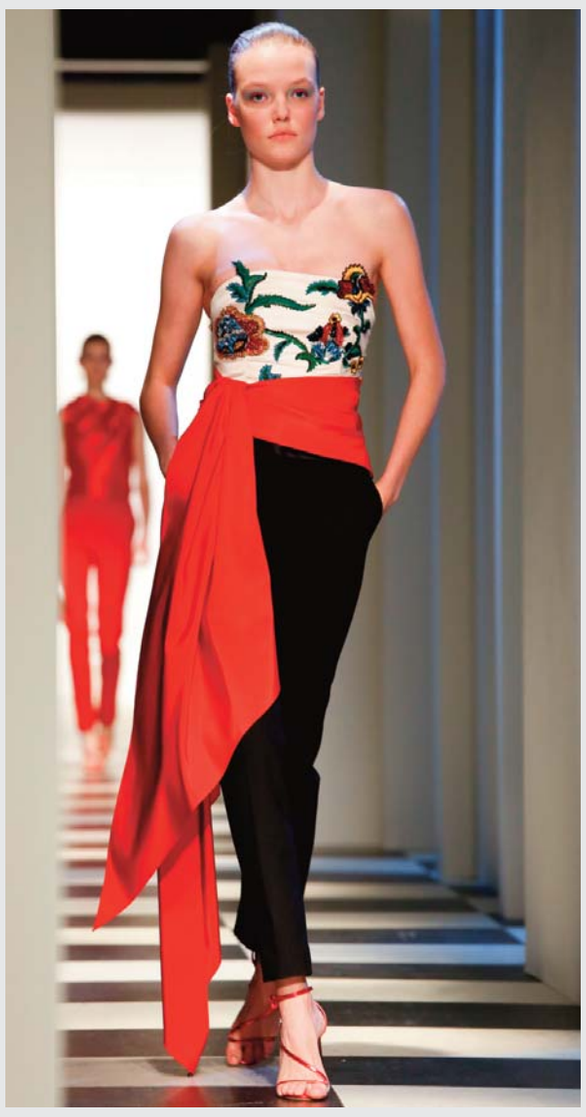
So why New York?

"I killed Milan. I did the biggest shows ever in Milan. There was nobody who could really compete with us anymore, so the next step was to come over to New York. America is one of the biggest economies in the world. We're coming to America, and the people that ask all these questions tonight, 'Who the (bleep) is Philipp Plein?' You know, I'm here to answer the question," Plein said in an interview backstage before the show. "It will take a while before they get to know us, but that's why we're here." Meeks' searing blue eyes and perfect cheekbones lit up the runway after doing the same on the internet in 2014, after his arrest for gun possession in a gang sweep in Stockton, California. Police there posted his mugshot on Facebook and women went wild. He had a record for auto theft and has served time in both state and federal prisons, so why put him in a fashion show? "We're all bad boys," Plein said. "I'm a bad boy."

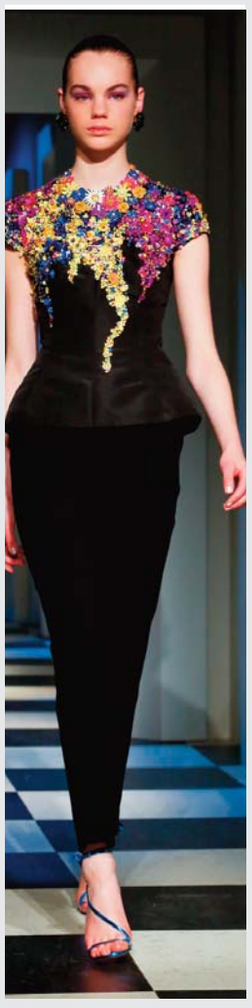
Seeing double, at Oscar de la Renta

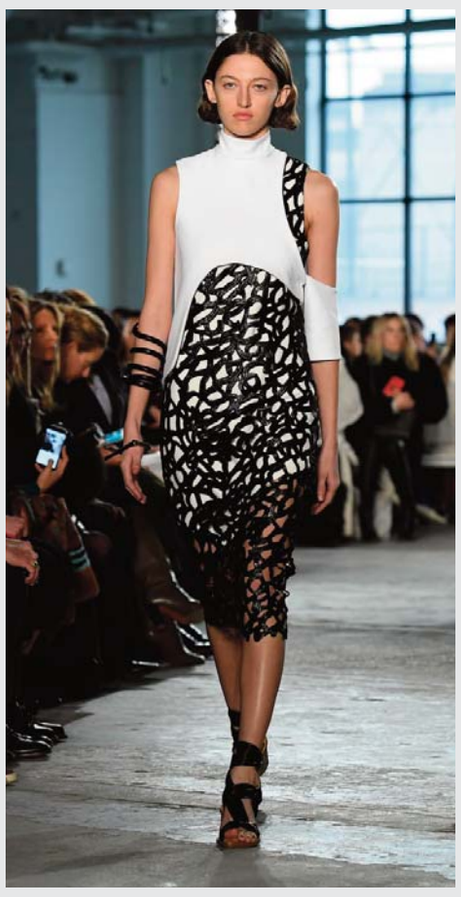
It was a highly unique fashion show, born of highly unique circumstances. In September, Laura Kim and Fernando Garcia were named co-creative directors at Oscar de la Renta, replacing Peter Copping at the venerable luxury label. It was a return to the company where they'd both begun their careers. In the meantime, they'd launched their own fledgling label, Monse, which fast became a celebrity favorite (and Kim had worked briefly at Carolina Herrera). On Monday evening, they pulled off the feat of showing their two, quite different lines together in one big show. It did not go entirely as planned: A huge silver curtain, meant to pull back dramatically for the de la Renta section, got stuck and stayed stubbornly put on one side.

But the clothes themselves definitely impressed. The first item down the runway for Monse was a ruffled white shirt with oversized, cascading sleeves and bared shoulders. Exposed shoulders were a theme; dresses or sweaters, as in a roomy black turtleneck, often had one



Models walk the runway for the Carolina Herrera collection during, New York Fashion Week.





Models walk as they show fashion collections by Oscar de la Renta.

shoulder covered and one not. Casual tops and dresses led to fancier outfits, in velvet or satin - or covered in sequins, as in a red-and-blue sequined tunic worn over black velvet cargo pants, and paired with red sequin pumps. The Monse vibe was decidedly younger and edgier than the classic de la Renta ethos, but those clothes, too, seemed to have taken on a new vibe.

An example: A pale pink pantsuit revealed a huge silver sequined corset underneath. A classically shaped strapless cocktail dress was cleverly modernized with colorful "abstract brushstroke" embroidery, and with black suede thigh-high boots underneath, rather than strappy heels. Similarly, an elegant black velvet cocktail dress was freshened with a "one-shoulder" look - only one strap - and especially by the striking, crystal-embroidered black thigh-high boots underneath.Bella Hadid closed out the show in a sleek, strapless black gown with a bejeweled border. Among those watching from the sidelines as the two sets of models converged: Paris and Nicky Hilton.

Proenza Schouler sends a goodbye kiss to New York

Asked by someone backstage to define their collection in three words, designers Lazaro Hernandez and Jack McCollough of Proenza Schouler had an easy answer: New York City. The duo is moving to Paris next season - not moving their company or home, but showing at Paris Fashion Week rather than New York. So they were in the mood to say a nice goodbye. Especially with the energy - political energy, that is - that they've been feeling. "It's really our idea of New York," Hernandez explained. "The energy of the last few weeks really has been inspiring to us. Everyone getting together and standing up for what they believe in. For us, it's not a time for sitting at home in a bathrobe and slippers and being comfortable, it's a time to put on a flat shoe and a leather jacket and you go out there and you stand for what you believe in and you fight for the things you want."

Besides, he added, "We're going to Paris next season, and so it for us was a celebration of everything we love about New York." McCollough explained that the label wants to show their collection earlier - starting during Paris couture season in July- to give it more time to "live" on store shelves. "Now it lives on racks for six weeks," he said. "This is what we pour our heart and soul into, so why not do it earlier and have it last longer in stores?"

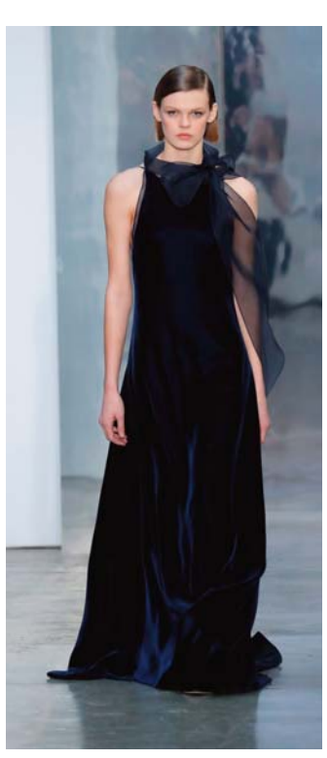
The show began with roomy menswear-style coats, with the label's logo represented on straps. There were dresses in a shiny leather, but coated with a plastic finish, "so it's sort of a trashbag feeling," McCollough said. "Asymmetry was a big thing for us this time," he said. "Also lots of sheer knits, a mix of opaque and sheer knitwear." "We wanted everything to feel off to one side," added Hernandez. "All the cutting came from the idea of a brushstroke." A standout was a striking fire-engine red-and-black knit dress with one shoulder entirely exposed and a diagonal swath of midriff showing.

Carolina Herrera: Loving the white shirt

Few women rock a white blouse like Carolina Herrera - it's her personal signature garment. But there are lots of ways to make a white blouse, and the veteran designer presented a variety of those, in a collection she called "my white shirt moment." Her aim, she said backstage, was "to show the white shirt and how to wear it, and also it's all about calm elegance. Very calm, uncomplicated silhouettes and effortless looks." This Herrera collection seemed to have a more relaxed vibe, with a number of models wearing flat granny boots, for example, as they strolled the runway.

"I think it's a very feminine collection, but not complicated at all," Herrera said. "I call it uncomplicated because they're simple lines but they all have sort of an extravagant detail that's unique." Herrera was in the news lately for designing Ivanka Trump's inaugural gown - a sparkling, long-sleeved, blush pink number. "Well I know Ivanka since she was a little one," Herrera noted. "She has been a friend always, and she is very loyal to the house of Herrera. She always comes to me, and I think she looked fabulous because she's a beautiful girl."

Herrera's white shirts were all crisp, of course, but they came in different styles, and many of them sported bows: at the collar, around the waist, or on the puffs of sleeves. As the show transitioned away from shirts, the bows reappeared everywhere: at the pockets of a coat or on filmy gowns, at the shoulders or around the neck, on the back or at the front. Standouts were a stunning sleeveless teal gown with a V-neck and a black strip around the waist; a burgundy crocheted dress; and a gown with a black bodice and a tiered, black-and-white skirt. — AP



Models walk the runway for the Proenza Schouler collection during, New York Fashion Week.

This photo shows a heart-shaped display (left) on the counter at a floor prepared specially for Valentine's Day gift sales at a department store in Tokyo. — AFP photos

Customers shopping for chocolates at a floor prepared specially for Valentine's Day gifts at a department store in Tokyo.

Chocs away as Japan cashes in on Valentine's Day

A billion-dollar Valentine's Day bounty is on the cards for Japan's retailers as women celebrate the festival of romance by stocking up on 'obligation chocolates' for men. February 14 is a huge money-spinner for the country's confectioners, with women traditionally expected to fork out for chocolates and gift them to boyfriends, husbands, colleagues and bosses. This year's Valentine's Day haul is estimated at 138.5 billion yen ($1.22 billion), up three percent from 2016, according to Kinenbi Culture Laboratory, an organization that researches Japanese holidays and other annual events.

Part of the growth, according to the organization, is due to Valentine's Day falling on a weekday for the first time in three years, meaning more women will buy "giri choco"-or obligation chocolates-for the men they work with or for. On Monday, 27-year-old Maika Suzuki visited a floor dedicated to Valentine's Day at the Mitsukoshi department store in Tokyo's Nihonbashi area to buy more than 30 boxes of chocolates for her male co-workers.

Such chocolates "are for expressing gratitude to men," she explained as she surveyed products on offer from 110 manufacturers. "Japanese men are happy to get chocolates" as there is a culture in Japan that women give them to men, she said. "We can also boost their pride" by giving them chocolates on Valentine's Day, she added. Although Japan is one of the world's most efficient and high-tech societies, marketeers have exploited the country's rigid gender roles and social pressures to conform. Valentine's Day first appeared in Japan in the late 1950s when a firm called Mary Chocolate advertised February 14 as "the only day of the year a woman professes her love through presenting chocolate"-establishing it as Japan's currency of romance.

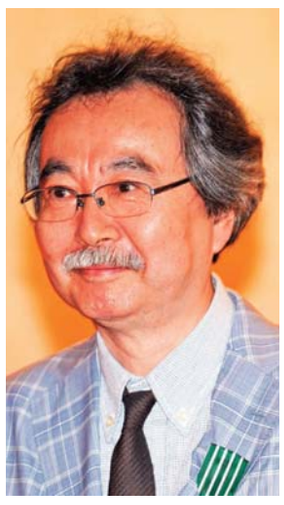
But confectionery maker Ezaki Glico said in its 2016 report that only 8.7 percent of 312 female respondents gave chocolates to the men they love. In a sign of equality, however, the country next month celebrates White Day, a Japanese event confectioners cooked up in the 1980s to keep the cash tills ringing that sees men buy a white gift such as vanilla cookies, marshmallows and handkerchiefs for the women in their lives. Marie Kondo, 24, bought nearly 30 boxes of chocolates for the men in her office, forking out a total of 10,000 yen. "But I'm going to spend more for myself," she said, adding that she plans to buy chocolates from Sadaharu Aoki, a high-end Japanese chocolatier. "To me, Valentine's Day is not a day to confess love." — AFP

A customer shopping for chocolates at a floor prepared specially for Valentine's Day gifts at a department store in Tokyo.

A woman looking for chocolates at a floor prepared specially for Valentine's Day gifts at a department store in Tokyo.

A customer (right) test-tasting some chocolates at a floor prepared specially for Valentine's Day gifts at a department store in Tokyo.

This file picture shows Japanese comic artist Jiro Taniguchi drawing in his studio in Tokyo.



This file picture shows Japanese comic artist Jiro Taniguchi at an awards ceremony at the French embassy in Tokyo.

Japanese manga legend Jiro Taniguchi dies at 69

Jiro Taniguchi, a legend in Japan's comic art of manga, died in Tokyo on Saturday at the age of 69, leaving behind an international following for his exquisite line drawing of scenes from everyday life. The artist's French publisher Casterman announced his death on its website, adding that he had been seriously ill, as it expressed its deep condolences to his family. Taniguchi first shot to fame in Japan at the end of the 1980s with the first volume of "The Times of Botchan", which centers around Natsume Soseki, one of Japan's greatest writers.

Just over a decade later, he hit the international manga scene with "A Distant Neighborhood", about a Japanese salaryman who travels back to his childhood-widely seen to this day as his masterpiece. Taniguchi's work is hailed for its delicate line drawing and intricately-constructed landscapes.

Critics have also praised his gentle subject matter for standing in stark contrast to the usual fare of high school romance or sometimes violent pornography consumed by some of Japan's manga fans. In works such as "The Walking Man", the protagonist is occupied less by any specific action as with a fascination with aspects of everyday life-the things he finds, the scenes he sees and the people he meets on his strolls through suburban neighborhoods.

'Extraordinarily kind'

Taniguchi's detailed landscapes populated by vaguely cartoonish characters drew comparisons in the West with some of the better-known European comic heroes, such as Tintin. Born in 1947 to a modest family in the city of Tottori, 100 kilometers (60 miles) northwest of the old imperial capital Kyoto, Taniguchi had his first cartoon published in 1970. He became especially popular in France, one of the biggest markets for graphic art. "He was seen by French readers, illustrators and publishers as a god, while he presented himself as a regular guy," fellow manga artist Tori Miki said on Twitter.

In 2011, the French government awarded Taniguchi the Knight of the Order of Arts and Letters-one of the country's most prestigious prizes. Four years later, the annual cartoon festival in the French city of Angouleme held a retrospective of his work. "He was preparing a new work intended for family readership, a story in three volumes, 'The Millennium Forest,' in full color, a new approach to manga," his agent and translator Corinne Quentin told AFP in Tokyo.

Taniguchi "really did bridge the two worlds of cartoon art-Japan and France," said Sebastien Langevin, a graphic art specialist and Canal BD Manga Mag chief editor. Casterman, his publisher, also praised Taniguchi's character, describing him as an "extraordinarily kind and gentle" person. "The humanism that imbued all his work is familiar to his readers, but the man himself was much less well-known, naturally reserved in character and more inclined to let his work speak on his behalf," it said.

Hand-drawn Cambodian king to open Jolie's film on Khmer Rouge survivor

Taniguchi's panels were painstakingly hand-drawn, using paper, pen, and a craft knife. "I do not use a computer because I don't know how, I don't have that skill," he told AFP in an interview in Tokyo in 2012. "I don't know why I am also known outside Japan. Perhaps it is because my work is similar to Western comics, which I've followed for 30 years and they have influenced my subconscious," he said.

He was deeply affected by Japan's devastating 2011 tsunami and nuclear accident at Fukushima and even considered abandoning his work as useless in the face of such destruction. But he said he drew inspiration from how his fellow Japanese people dealt with the aftermath of the disaster and carried on. "I continued thanks to my readers, thanks to the voice of the survivors that made me realize that they still wanted to read my work," he said. — AFP

Pompeii unveils Roman kiss for Valentine's day

The lava may have cooled 2,000 years ago but Pompeii is a hot destination this Valentine's day with a special opening of the exceptionally preserved House of the Chaste Lovers. This rich baker's dwelling, complete with garden, stables, mill and a sumptuous fresco of a tender kiss, stands on via dell'Abbondanza, the once-bustling thoroughfare of this ancient Roman city. It also boasts the grinning skeletons of petrified mules caught in the 79AD eruption of Mount Vesuvius.

Visitors will be able to snatch a rare glimpse this weekend of the 1500-square meter (16,000 square foot) site. After February 14 it will close its doors again for a four-year restoration as part of a multi-million euro Pompeii preservation project. "The complex encapsulates both the beauty and the challenges of Pompeii," archaeologist Alberta Mattelone, 40, told AFP. "There is the archaeological heritage - the houses and frescoes - as well as the traces of the eruption, the volcanic deposits. Then there are the conservation problems; roofing, escarpments, preserving the frescoes," she said.

Ghosts of mules past

The kiss decorates one of the walls of the triclinium, the small dining room where ancient Romans would have lounged on couches to eat and drink. Whether the menu was cheese and honey or dormice, it will have been accompanied by freshly baked bread. Next to the triclinium sits the bakery, with its stones used to ground the grain and a large oven where flat, round loaves scored across the top were prepared and sold at a little shop next door. Just inside the shop's doorway are the scribbled running tabs of customers who still owe the baker money for bread they likely munched on with dried fruits and olives sold at the food stall opposite.

The stone mill was driven by six mules and a donkey kept in the stable-and trapped inside when the molten rock and ash hit. "They were analyzed by an archaeozoologist: they suffocated, all apart from one killed by a blow to the head as the building collapsed," Mattelone said, adding that the unfortunate four-legged creatures were "in an excellent state of conservation".

Behind the stable lies the House of the Painters at Work, where interior decorators were half-way through sprucing up a room when the volcano erupted, as well as a garden which is being re-created exactly as it was thanks to archaeo-botanists. The complex was first explored in 1912, unveiling a balcony later damaged by Allied bombs in the Second World War. It was not until 1982 that serious digs began. They ran until 2004 and the site opened briefly in 2010, only to close again.

'Great impact'

"We are opening it for Saint Valentine's because we wanted the public to be able to get in before we close the site to refurbish the roof and supporting structure," said Michele Granatiero, 61, the project's head architect. "It is an opportunity to create an architectural, structural and technological work of great impact," he said.

Pompeii, the second most visited attraction in Italy after the Colosseum in Rome, with a record 3.2 million visitors in 2016, has been plagued in recent years by a series of collapses due to lack of maintenance and bad weather. The rusting poles holding up the walls at the House of the Chaste Lovers will be replaced with a few external braces and dozens of underground struts. Visitors will explore the site from a new raised walkway under an aluminum and plexiglass roof. Those lucky enough to get in now will tour in groups of up to 20 around an enchanting area with mosaics of coloured marble, storerooms of ceramic pots and frescoes of birds, plants and one of the softest smooches of the Roman era. — AFP

A picture shows a fresco with a couple kissing in the House of the Chaste Lovers at the archeological site of Pompeii, near Naples.—AFP

Temple of the Great Jaguar, is seen during a sunny day in northern Guatemala's Tikal National Park. — AP photos

A painter works underneath the Santa Catalina arch in Antigua Guatemala, Guatemala.

Two indigenous women stroll through the central plaza of Antigua Guatemala, Guatemala, with the San Jose cathedral behind them.

ON A TRIP HOME, SEEING GUATEMALA'S GRIT AND GRANDEUR

By Manuel Valdes

My childhood home is gone and so is the Chinese restaurant next to it. But my street in the urban center of Guatemala City remains its bustling old self. Buses growl and spit exhaust. Cars race down the narrow one-way street. Stores sell everything from wedding gowns to candy. But the paint is worn away from some of the buildings, a sign that the years have taken a toll.

I left this street in the gritty Zona 1 neighborhood more than 20 years ago as my family moved north to the US. Eventually we settled in Seattle, the city I now happily call home. A recent trip back - my first in five years - was to see relatives and show my girlfriend the country where I spent my first decade. I wanted to show her Guatemala's contrasts: its chaotic center, its poverty and misery, as well as the beauty of its people, its historic grandeur and natural splendor. I needed to see it again too.

An indigenous woman walks on the street where the Santa Catalina arch is located in Antigua Guatemala, Guatemala.

Antigua Guatemala

We visited my childhood street just long enough to snap pictures, then headed out. While a pilgrimage to my hometown was important for me, I usually tell first-time visitors to Guatemala to skip the capital city and head straight to Antigua Guatemala. It's reachable from the Guatemala City airport by shuttle (about $30) or taxi (prices vary but we paid $50). The ride is 45 minutes to two hours depending on traffic.

A man wearing a torito, a bull-shaped harness equipped with fireworks, dances in front of a procession celebrating the Virgin of Guadalupe in Antigua Guatemala, Guatemala.

Antigua was established in 1543 as the Spanish territorial capital. After a series of earthquakes, it was largely abandoned, then rebuilt. Its charms include grand colonial buildings and churches, large markets, cobblestone streets, vibrantly painted buildings, traditional and high-end restaurants, bars and even a microbrewery, perfect for visitors like me. Visitors can also arrange for shuttles and guided tours to nearby coffee farms and the volcanoes that tower above the city. Volcano tours can range from a six-hour trip to two-day excursions. Two volcanoes are active and travelers can often get close to the lava flow.

There are hotels in every price range. We splurged on Porta Hotel ($140 a night), where old colonial homes have been converted into a sprawling estate with a restaurant, pool and small workout room. The city fills up for celebrations of Catholic holidays, including elaborate processions during Holy Week between Palm Sunday and Easter.

The beach

Guatemala has just a sliver of coast on the Caribbean. But on the Pacific side, there are miles of black sand beaches that fade into powerful surf. Among the closest beaches to Antigua is Monterrico, a small and sleepy town about 2.5 hours away. Daily shuttles from Antigua are around $20. We rented a small automatic car for $40 a day.

The beach was lined with homes, medium-sized hotels, hostels and restaurants. Our hotel, Cafe Del Sol, was split into a beachfront building with some small rooms, a restaurant and bar, and a larger complex with bigger rooms and two pools. Our room ($60 a night) was simple, spacious and air-conditioned. We mostly lounged in hammocks and braved the waters, though they are rough and best suited for experienced swimmers.

Tikal National Park

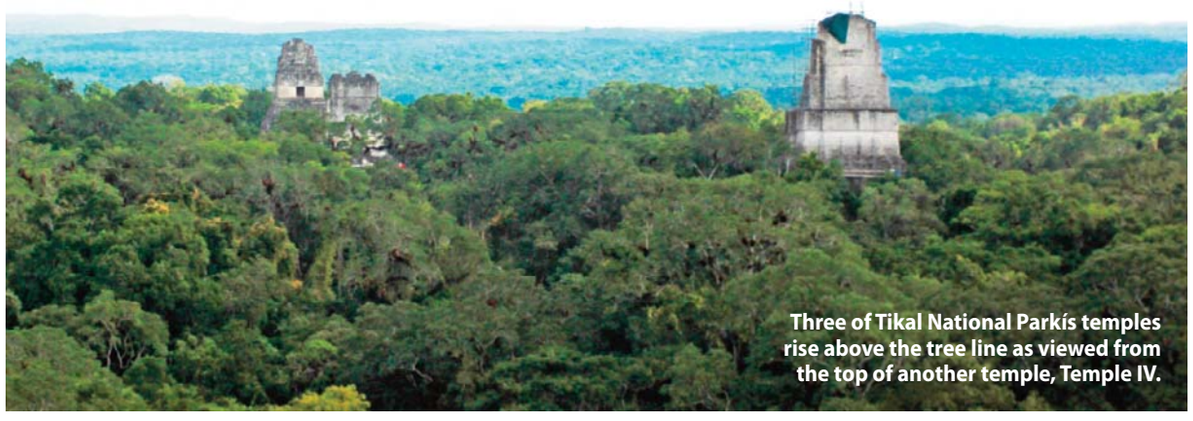
I wanted my return to Guatemala to jumpstart a new chapter in my life. I knew the place for it, too: Tikal National Park in northern Guatemala. We opted for a 40-minute flight there for $230. The bus from Guatemala City is cheaper but takes over eight hours.

There are group tours and private tours. We hired a private guide for about $90. The site is in the jungle, so visitors should bring water, though various stands sell water and snacks. Guatemala is also in the zone for mosquitoes carrying the Zika-virus, and insect repellent didn't completely ward them off in Tikal or at the beach. Among the sights we witnessed was a chicken sacrifice performed by an indigenous group.

As the excavated ruins of a once-grand Mayan city-state, Tikal displays the brilliance of my ancestors, with towering temples, government buildings, housing for the ruling class. Its leaders maintained power through violence and by keeping its people well-fed. Our guide explained that deforestation likely contributed to the disappearance of this mighty civilization, because Tikal's rulers razed the forest to build the stone temples.

The park's central plaza is flanked by two temples. You can climb wooden steps to the tops of two of them, one at the grand plaza and another, called Temple IV. A shot from "Star Wars: A New Hope" was filmed here, depicting the planet where the Rebellion is based.

From the top of the temple, we could see the jungle, seemingly endless, stretching to the horizon, with the temple tops visible above the green canopy of trees. The sounds of birds and other critters filled the air. The setting sun painted the nearly cloudless sky a light pink. I chugged the last of my lukewarm drink and decided this was the place - as a tourist in the motherland - to ask my girlfriend to marry me. She said yes, and a new chapter began. — AP



Three of Tikal National Parkís temples rise above the tree line as viewed from the top of another temple, Temple IV.

What foreign students can teach host families about America

Miaofan Chen, left, works her way through the serving line with Thandi Glick during a potluck meal for Chinese exchange students and their host families at a school in Denver.

Foreign exchange student Miaofan Chen, left, of Hefei, China, chats with Thandi Glick during a potluck meal for Chinese exchange students and their families at a school in Denver. — AP photos

It was Miaofan Chen's first trip away from her native China. At lunch with us in Denver, she looked so bemused that I had to ask: "Is this the first time you've had a hamburger?" "No," said the 15-year-old. "It's the first time I've had such a BIG hamburger." That encounter with supersized American portions was one of many observations that students from abroad have shared with us. Miaofan, from Hefei in eastern China, was the latest of a half-dozen young people from around the world who've called our guest room home. Needless to say, we learn as much from them as they do from us.

Our interest in hosting international visitors comes from our own experiences abroad. My husband, daughter and I returned to the U.S. in 2012 following my two decades as an Associated Press correspondent on three continents. People welcomed us in their hometowns around the world. Even now when we vacation, we meet strangers who offer menu recommendations in Brazil or Slovenia, or who help us navigate subways in Moscow or Tokyo. Hosting foreign students lets us pay those debts forward.

Seeing the US through their eyes

It's also a way to connect with the world from our front door and see our country through another's eyes. An Iraqi student who stayed with us for two weeks was surprised to see people in wheelchairs going to work or school in Denver. Not that her own country, wracked by decades of war, doesn't have people disabled by injury or disease. But in Baghdad, she said, they're hidden away. She helped me see that I'd taken for granted the progress here for Americans with disabilities. The State Department-backed Iraqi Young Leaders Exchange Program and local partner WorldDenver kept this Iraqi teen busy meeting with local development groups. Other organizations have taken our visitors to basketball games, to mountain retreats and downtown for scavenger hunts. Often our visitors go to school with our daughter.

But I sometimes think our main contribution as hosts is giving them time to rest and reflect. We share meals and show off Denver, including my favorite view of the Rockies, which happens to be from soccer fields near my house. Guests help make pancakes on Sunday mornings. We've sent a French student to work out with our daughter's swim team and a Brazilian to her piano practice. Miaofan went ice skating with us, and handled her first time on the ice with as much aplomb as she'd shown eating a hamburger the size of her face.

English, food and logistics

All our guests knew English well enough for daily interactions. Any young person willing to embark on these trips has the pluck and flexibility to meet us more than halfway when it comes to navigating cultural differences. But these are teenagers. The one place where courage has failed a guest or two has been at the table. I once Googled "hunger strike" to reassure myself that a particularly picky eater could survive the week on only blueberries and coconut water. And pancakes.

Hosting opportunities have been easy for us to arrange through our daughter's public magnet school, the Denver Center for International Studies. Students there can study Chinese, French, Italian, Japanese (my daughter's choice), Lakota or Spanish and have rich opportunities to experience the world through classes, clubs, travel and hosting. A school staff member helps connect organizations with host families. We just check her calendar to see whether we can fit in a visitor. Organizers have accommodated our preferences for girls around our daughter's age and for one guest at a time. So far, we've opted to host stays of just a few weeks to fit our busy schedules. Also, if my pancakes fail, at least the guest won't be hungry for long.

If you'd like to host

Contact your child's school or one nearby. They might have, or be willing to establish, ties with an organization that recruits host families through schools. Among them are the Ameson Education and Cultural Exchange Foundation, which focuses on US-China relations, and Global Ties US, which connects Americans with people around the world. Organizations you can approach directly include Adolesco, which matches families but lets them work out their own schedules for visiting.

Among the best-known organizations that bring young people to the United States are AFS-USA and Rotary International. Groups offer deep and broad support. Rotary, for example, provides a list of questions in English and in two dozen languages ranging from Afrikaans to Turkish that they suggest hosts and guests answer together the first night. I suppose it's too late to go over Rotary's expectation-setting - including bedtimes - with my own child.

Education First brings young international travelers together in New York for orientation before dispersing them to families across the country. The group orientation eases culture shock as they try new foods together and get used to hearing English. Organizations say these small interactions can have outsized results. Alyssa Fox, a homestay manager for Sister Cities International, which emerged from an Eisenhower White House conference on citizen diplomacy, describes their goals this way: "Achieving peace and creating connections, one person, one community at a time."— AP

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Lifestyle

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On a trip home, seeing Guatemala's grit and grandeur

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This photo taken on February 13, 2017 shows a Chinese couple posing for photographs with a rooster lantern display in Ningbo, east China's Zhejiang province. — AFP

Free hairdos to boost confidence of displaced Iraqi women

A displaced Iraqi woman who fled the violence in the northern city of Mosul has her hair cut by Chenoor, a hairdresser from Arbil who offers beauty treatments to women living in camps for displaced people. — AFP photos

Twice a month, beautician Chnoor Khezri takes her equipment to a camp near Mosul and gives displaced Iraqi women who have lost everything a proper pampering and some fresh confidence. In a small room inside the camp, the young Iranian Kurd takes out her brushes and scissors and puts blue wax to heat up in a pot. "It's not much but I work miracles with this," she says. More than 3,600 women have endured freezing temperatures and the most rudimentary comfort levels in this camp's tents since they fled the fighting between Iraqi forces and the Islamic State group in Mosul.

Some of them arrived days earlier, others have been there months but nearly all had to leave almost everything behind them. They were initially reluctant to follow a stranger in the sprawling camp and be separated from their husbands but a dozen of them eventually gave in to Khezri's efforts to bring them into her improvised beauty salon. "I offer them a haircut, eyebrow and upper lip threading. They don't ask for anything specific really. They just want me to pamper them," said Khezri, a 31-year-old Iranian Kurd who runs a beauty parlor in Arbil, the nearby capital of Iraq's Kurdish region.

One of her "clients" that day is Mervet, a 30-year-old mother who watches attentively as Khezri's fingers knead the wax, apply it on the wincing face of another young lady and peel it off sharply. "In Mosul, before the Islamic State, I used to work in a beauty salon. I find it moving to see this routine again," she says. Azhar, 34, arrived to the Hasansham camp just days ago, after risking her life to flee the IS-held west bank of Mosul, cross the Tigris River and escape through the liberated eastern side of the city. "For weeks now people have been lacking everything and prices have gone through the roof. The only thing you can find there now is potatoes, wheat and lentils," she said.

No place for women

Recounting her experiences in Mosul put her in a state of rage but a look in the mirror put a smile back on her face. "I never thought a haircut would make me so happy," she said. The word got out somehow and now a queue of women giggling at the thought of removing their hijab and getting a haircut has formed outside her temporary salon. "There is no space for women in this camp. There are plenty of hair dressers for men. There are games for the children, but nothing for us," said one of them, 23-year-old mother of two Ghada.

"Our faces are burnt by the sun, we need creams, and basic hygiene kits. We don't even have bras," said Safa, another women standing next to her.Khezri vindicated them: "There is no shame in wanting to recover your femininity. Especially in such rough living conditions, your well-being and your dignity are at stake." Ghada, who settled in the displacement camp six weeks earlier, came "to have a look" at the salon but she does not dare take a seat. "Since we got here, I've been suffering from anxiety attacks. I have nightmares. I see Daesh spies everywhere," she says, using an Arabic acronym for the Islamic State group.

"I think I need to talk to someone... a psychologist," she whispers with an embarrassed grin. Those who fled Mosul may have lived next to IS supporters or have relatives living in jihadist-controlled areas and often still feel the fear that pervaded their lives under the "caliphate". As the sun sets on Hasansham, Khezri finally packs up her beauty tools after seven hours of non-stop work, exhausted but happy. "Look at their faces, how they have transformed. They came here suspicious and all tightened up. They leave this place relaxed and proud for having made a moment for nobody else but themselves," she says. — AFP