



**Jaber Al-Ahmad
Cultural Center,
home of culture**



**Syria rebels and
ex-Qaeda arm
in mini-war**



**Nadal wins classic
to set up 'special'
Federer final**



150 Fils

TRUMP MAKES DEBUT AS STATESMAN, HOSTS MAY

PRESIDENT PLANNING STRONGER ATTACKS ON IS POSITIONS



Min 10°
Max 22°



WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump shakes hands with British Prime Minister Theresa May in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington yesterday. — AP

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump made his debut as a statesman yesterday, welcoming British Prime Minister Theresa May as the first foreign leader to visit his White House.

Trump greeted May herself upon her arrival at the White House. The pair were to meet in the Oval Office before a joint press conference at roughly 1800 GMT before a working lunch. May's trip is part influence campaign and part charm offensive. She is expected to give Trump an engraved quich-a ceremonial cup exchanged by Scottish highland chiefs-in a nod to Trump's Scottish ancestry. His mother was born on the island of Lewis.

For First Lady Melania Trump, May will gift a hamper of apple juice, damson plum jam, marmalade, Bakewell tarts and cranberry and white chocolate shortbread cookies.

The meeting was to be a pivotal moment in trans-Atlantic relations, which have been rocked by Trump's election and his willingness to rethink NATO, the UN and other foundation blocks of the liberal world order.

Meanwhile, the president is expected to order up a new plan for defeating the Islamic State group with expanded US military involvement as he makes his first visit to the Pentagon later. Trump, who pledged to eradicate the extremist group during the presidential campaign, is reportedly preparing to direct new Defense Secretary James Mattis to more aggressively attack IS positions with the aim of defeating them more quickly.

That could mean more US forces and military hardware moving into Iraq and Syria, according to analysts. "We have to get rid of ISIS. We have no choice," Trump told Fox News's Sean Hannity in an interview broadcast Thursday, using another acronym for the jihadist group.

"This is evil. This is a level of evil that we haven't seen." After his predecessor Barack Obama took a longer term view of the anti-IS fight, with a more cautious commitment of US forces, "President Trump might be looking for something with quicker results, that could put some more options on the table," retired general David Barno told National Public Radio yesterday. The Wall Street Journal reported that Trump will give the Pentagon 30 days to come up with a new set of options for a tougher campaign against IS.

The United States currently has 5,000 troops in Iraq and 500 in Syria as "advisors"-but also US artillery and aircraft to help in the fight. They have provided substantial support to the assault led by Iraqi forces on Islamic State's hold on the key city of Mosul. The slow, steady assault has driven IS fighters out of the part of the city on the east bank of the Tigris River, and forces are now preparing an assault on IS-held Mosul neighborhoods on the river's west bank.

According to reports, an escalation of the US role could involve more US armor and helicopters involved in the assaults on IS positions together with Iraqi, Turkish and Kurdish forces. Trump "could elect to put American boots on the ground on larger numbers," Barno said. "That all entails new uses of military power ... and that opens the prospect of a deeper involvement with more casualties."

Trump promised during his presidential campaign to eliminate Islamic State, saying he had a secret plan to quickly defeat the group. Last week, General Joe Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said he would present Mattis with options to "accelerate the campaign" against IS.

"What is really important is first that we have a conversation about what we are doing today, why we are doing it, and what other things might be done and why we haven't done it to date," Dunford told reporters in Brussels. — AFP

US ENVOY TO UN WARNS ALLIES: BACK US OR WE'LL TAKE NAMES

UNITED NATIONS: Washington's new ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley, vowed yesterday to show US strength in global affairs and delivered a blunt warning to opponents of President Donald Trump's policies. "For those who don't have our backs: we're taking names," Haley told reporters at she arrived at UN headquarters for her first meeting with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

"We will make points to respond to that accordingly." "Our goal with the administration is to show value at the UN, and the way that we will show value is to show our strength, show our voice, have the backs of our allies and make sure that our allies have our back as well," she said. The former South Carolina governor made her first remarks at UN headquarters before presenting her diplomatic credentials to Guterres. Their first meeting is expected to be clouded by reports of a draft executive order being prepared at the White House that could deprive the United Nations of billions of dollars in US financial support.

The United States is by far the UN's biggest financial contributor, providing 22 percent of its operating budget and funding 28 percent of peacekeeping missions, which

currently cost \$7.8 billion annually. The 45-year-old daughter of Indian immigrants said she was ready to push for an overhaul of the United Nations and made clear there would be cuts. "This is a time of strength. This is a time of action. This is a time of getting things done," Haley said.

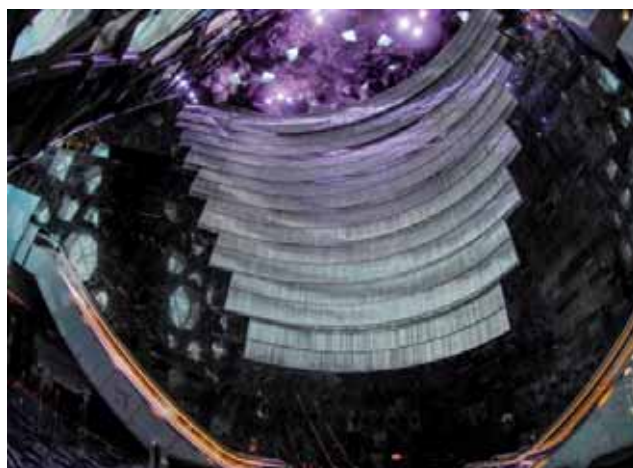
"Everything that is working, we are going to make it better. Everything that is not working we are going to try and fix. Everything that seems to be obsolete and not necessary, we're going to do away with," she said. In his pledge to pursue an "America First" foreign policy, Trump has dismissed the United Nations as "just a club for people to get together and have a good time." Relations with Trump became tense after the Security Council adopted a resolution demanding Israel end settlement construction.

The former US administration declined to use its veto to block the measure, prompting Trump to promise that "things will be different" at the United Nations under his administration. Tough-talking Haley echoed that stance. "You are going to see a change in the way we do business. It's no longer about working harder but working smarter," she said. — AFP



Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center (JACC)

JABER AL-AHMAD CULTURAL CENTER, HOME OF CREATIVITY, CULTURE, ARTS



KUWAIT: Continuing the legacy of being the GCC region's custodian of arts and culture, Kuwait took another step to solidify this reputation by constructing the Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center (JACC). Inaugurated by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on October 31, 2016, the JACC was designed as a venue to organize and hold cultural events aimed at spreading arts appreciation amongst the local masses and also help attract visitors from abroad.

According to the JACC website, the architectural marvel was designed to resemble jewels, reflecting rays of sunlight. The exterior of the JACC's headquarters - constructed on an area of 52,000 square meters - was built from titanium and reinforced concrete. Some 10,000 workers helped build the JACC. Speaking to KUNA, several individuals offered optimistic statements regarding the JACC which they deemed as a significant hub for culture and arts in Kuwait and the region.

Head of the Amiri Diwan's department for cultural centers, Sahar Al-Oqab said that the building's unique design reflected, in the most literal terms, light all over the area, making the center one of the most visually amusing attractions in the country. She commended those behind the JACC, affirming that it will put Kuwait back on the forefront of culture and arts in the region.

Speaking about the facilities structure, Al-Hani Group's CEO and Managing Director Mahmoud Abouamer said that the JACC architectural design was as a mixture of Islamic and modern architecture. The JACC consisted of four building with one housing the main stage which could accommodate some 2,000 attendees, said Abouamer, adding that the drama theater and rehearsals spaces could house some 900 people. The second, third, and fourth buildings consisted of a 1,800-capacity musical facility, a 1,072-capacity cinema and multi-purpose space, and a 354-seats conference hall, said the official.

The JACC is surrounded by water fountains and other facilities that will attract visitors to the area, said the official. On his part, former Minister of Information and media figure Mohammad Al-Sanousi said that he was very optimistic that the JACC will be a shining beacon of cultural renaissance in Kuwait. The center will help usher a new era in the cultural and artistic movement in Kuwait and would hopefully bring well-known international artists, performers, and prominent figures to the country, added Al-Sanousi.

Echoing similar statements, Poet Dr Sheikhha Suad Al-Sabah and head of the Al-Babtain Foundation for Poetic Creativity, Abdulaziz Saud Al-Babtain both affirmed that the formation of the JACC, a center named after the beloved late Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, was a sign that the country was heading in the right direction culture and arts wise. The resurgence of the cultural and arts movements in Kuwait will be helped by the ever-awesome presence of the JACC, said the poets who hoped and wished for further progress and development of their country Kuwait. — KUNA



Interior design at the ever-awesome Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center



The National Theater at Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center



Fireworks illuminating Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center



Water fountain at Jaber Al-Ahmad Cultural Center

WHO WARNS OVER BIRD FLU OUTBREAKS

HIGHLY PATHOGENIC AVIAN FLU DETECTED IN KUWAIT, UK

LONDON: The global spread of bird flu and the number of viral strains currently circulating and causing infections have reached unprecedented levels, raising the risk of a potential human outbreak, according to disease experts. Multiple outbreaks have been reported in poultry farms and wild flocks across Europe, Africa and Asia in the past three months. While most involve strains that are currently low risk for human health, the sheer number of different types, and their presence in so many parts of the world at the same time, increases the risk of viruses mixing and mutating - and possibly jumping to people.

"This is a fundamental change in the natural history of influenza viruses," Michael Osterholm, an infectious disease specialist at University of Minnesota, said of the proliferation of bird flu in terms of geography and strains - a situation he described as "unprecedented". Global health officials are worried another strain could make a jump into humans, like H5N1 did in the late 1990s. It has since caused hundreds of human infections and deaths, but has not acquired the ability to transmit easily from person to person. The greatest fear is that a deadly strain of avian flu could then mutate into a pandemic form that can be passed easily between people - something that has not yet been seen.

While avian flu has been a prominent public health issue since the 1990s, ongoing outbreaks have never been so widely spread around the world - something infectious disease experts put down to greater resilience of strains currently circulating, rather than improved detection or reporting. While there would normally be around two or three bird flu strains recorded in birds at any one time, now there are at least half a dozen, including H5N1, H5N2, H5N8 and H7N8.

The Organization for Animal Health (OIE) says the concurrent outbreaks in birds in recent months are "a global pub-

lic health concern", and the World Health Organization's director-general warned this week the world "cannot afford to miss the early signals" of a possible human flu pandemic. The precise reasons for the unusually large number and sustained nature of bird outbreaks in recent months, and the proliferation of strains, is unclear - although such developments compound the global spreading process.

Bird flu is usually spread through flocks through direct contact with an infected bird. But Osterholm said wild birds could be "shedding" more of the virus in droppings and other secretions, increasing infection risks. He added that there now appears to be "aerosol transmission from one infected barn to others, in some cases many miles away". Ian MacKay, a virologist at Australia's University of Queensland, said the current proliferation of strains means that "by definition, there is an increased risk" to humans. "You've got more exposures, to more farmers, more often, and in greater numbers, in more parts of the world - so there has to be an increased risk of spillover human cases," he told Reuters.

Britain to Bangladesh

Nearly 40 countries have reported new outbreaks of highly pathogenic avian influenza in poultry or wild birds since November, according to the WHO. In China, H7N9 strains of bird flu have been infecting both birds and people, with the of human cases rising in recent weeks due to the peak of the flu season there. According to the WHO, more than 900 people have been infected with H7N9 bird flu since it emerged in early 2013.

In birds, latest data from the OIE showed that outbreaks of highly pathogenic avian flu have been detected in Britain, Italy, Kuwait and Bangladesh in the last few days alone. Russia's agriculture watchdog issued a statement describing the situation as "extremely tense" as it reported H5N8 flu outbreaks

in another four regions. Hungarian farmers have had to cull 3 million birds, mostly geese and ducks. These come on top of epidemics across Europe and Asia which have been ongoing since late last year, leading to mass culling of poultry in many countries.

Strains currently documented as circulating in birds include H5N8 in many parts of Europe as well as in Kuwait, Egypt and elsewhere, and H5N1 in Bangladesh and India. In Africa - which experts say is especially vulnerable to missing flu outbreak warning signs due to limited local government capacities and weak animal and human health services - H5N1 outbreaks have been reported in birds in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ghana, Niger, Nigeria and Togo. H5N8 has been detected in Tunisia and Egypt, and H7N1 in Algeria.

The United States has, so far this year, largely escaped bird flu, but is on high alert after outbreaks of H5N2, a highly pathogenic bird flu, hit farms in 15 states in 2015 and led to the culling of more than 43 million poultry. David Nabarro, a former senior WHO official who has also served as U.N. system senior coordinator for avian and human influenza, says the situation is worrying. "For me the threat from avian influenza is the most serious (to public health), because you never know when," he told Reuters in Geneva.

Highly pathogenic H5N1

H5N1 is under close surveillance by health authorities around the world. It has long been seen as one to watch, feared by infectious disease experts because of its pandemic potential if it were to mutate and acquire human-to-human transmission capability. A highly pathogenic virus, it jumped into humans in Hong Kong in 1997 and then re-emerged in 2003/2004, spreading from Asia to Europe and Africa. It has caused hundreds of infections and deaths in people and prompted the culling of hundreds of millions of poultry.— Reuters

News

In brief



Minister of Health Dr. Jamal Al-Harbi visits the Kuwaiti Health office in the French capital. — KUNA

Health Minister visits Kuwaiti patients in Paris

PARIS: Kuwaiti Minister of Health Dr. Jamal Al-Harbi met yesterday with a number of Kuwaiti patients receiving medical treatment in Paris. The minister's meeting with patients is part of his two-day visit to the Kuwaiti Health office in the French capital. Speaking to KUNA, Al-Harbi said he had been briefed on problems and challenges the Kuwaiti patients faced in Paris, vowing to do his best to resolve them and streamline relevant procedures in order to ease out their sufferings and woes. He added that he would also give orders to open medical offices at several major clinics in Paris as part of efforts to alleviate the problems of Kuwaiti patients here. The minister thanked Chief of the Kuwaiti Health Office in Paris Dr. Fahad Al-Rashidi and the office's staff for their great help in solving patients' problems.

Kuwaiti students visit Albania's Logara Park

TIRANA: A delegation of Kuwaiti talented female students yesterday visited the Liogara National Park in Albania as part of their journey organized by the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED). The park lies about 40 kilometers from the coastal city of Vlore and was inaugurated by the Albanian government in 1966. In separate interviews conducted by Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) with a number of students on the sidelines of the visit, Shaima Al-Ibrahim expressed her admiration of the distinctive park presence of elm and pine trees, pointing to Albania's charming and dazzling nature. On her part, Jumana Al-Rabiah said that Albania enjoyed a stunning and impressive nature which helped it attract foreign tourists due to its lofty mountains, green plains, and vast agricultural lands which spreads all over the country in addition to its location overlooking the Ionian and Adriatic Seas.



Kuwaiti talented female students visits the Liogara National Park in Albania

New campus propels PAAET to prominence

KUWAIT: The Public Authority for Applied Education and Training's (PAAET) new building will help elevate the educational institution to the upper echelons of the academic world, Minister of Education Dr. Mohammad Al-Fares said. In a statement to the press after he toured the new campus, Al-Fares, who is also Minister of Higher Education, said that PAAET will make the move to the new facility in eight months. Meanwhile, PAAET's Deputy Director General for Academic Services Dr. Mahmoud Fakhru hailed the new edifice as a national landmark, complete with 23 floors including an office for the Minister of Education.

Photo

o f t h e d a y



KUWAIT: Photo shows a speedboat at the Kuwait Bay. Director of operations at Kuwait Ports Authority (KPA) Capitan Bader Al-Enezi said that marine navigation continues as normal since wind speed and horizontal visibility are still within safe navigation limits. However, he pointed out that weather conditions will be monitored in case they worsen. — KUNA

KUWAIT BOURSE WITNESSES PRICE INDICES' LEAPS

KUWAIT: Boursa Kuwait, throughout the passing week sessions, witnessed leaps by price indices amid speculations, profit generation and fluctuations among operating stocks. Liquidity, injected by local and Gulf financial portfolios and investment funds, played a key role in making the main indices move up, crossing psychological barriers a bullish trend unseen since 2013. Profit bagging covered stocks of "swollen prices," namely the stagnant ones, amid moves by major portfolios toward chips, prices of which ranged between 50 to 100 fils, thus contributing to lifting number of transactions in a single ses-

sion to some 14,000.

The bullish trend in the Kuwaiti stock market was also stimulated with external factors, namely calm geopolitical conditions, rising indices of some regional markets and banks' profits revelation for the past year. Earnings' collection targeted some shares in sectors such as financial services, property, banks, communications, amid selective moves by portfolios' managers to quit some shares for sake of making earnings. Coming week's sessions are forecast to witness gradual fall in the main indices with companies' scheduled financial revelations.

As to yesterday's session, it was marked with selling pressures on many chips, amid reluctance among traders, weary of risky trades. Shares of 53 companies climbed while those of 555 others dropped - out of the 155 listed ones. The bourse ended the trades on mixed boards with the price index gaining 33.21 points to stand at 6,852.3 points. Weighted index went down by 0.38 points to 428.43. The third key index, KSX 15, which reflects blue-chips' trades, shed 4.91 points dropping to 987.7. Value of trades was at KD 61 million, while turnover volume stood 783 million, done through 12,290 deals. — KUNA



Kuwaiti student's delegation visits Varadero Resort in Cuba. — KUNA

KUWAITI STUDENTS' CUBA TRIP LEAVES A POSITIVE SENTIMENT

HAVANA: In cooperation with the Ministry of Education, Kuwaiti students partaking in the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development's (KFAED) program "be among the outstanding ones" - concluded their visit to Cuba yesterday. The trip achieved its goals, especially after touring most of the developmental projects sponsored by the fund, KFAED President of Media and Public Relations Office, Ahmad Al-Sarraf, who is also the supervisor of the trip said.

The trip left a positive sentiment on students after understanding KFAED's role and efforts in supporting developing countries and financing their critical projects for a better life. Al-Sarraf also praised the role played by Kuwait Embassy in coordinating efforts and the trip touring schedules. Al-Sarraf praised Ministry of Education officials for accompanying the students on a day to day basis, hailing as well the students' cooperation and commitment during the trip.

For his part, the Director of Jassem Al-Kharafi School, Jassim Al-Tarawah expressed to KUNA, his pleasure and satisfaction for the trip and asserted the importance of such trips to raise the students' awareness and knowledge on Kuwait's developmental role and the importance of collective work. Last Tuesday, the students went to a water plant project in which KFAED provided a loan of KD 7.5 million. The project secured clean water resources to some 550,000 people living in 12 districts of the city. The students were accompanied by officials from the Cuban National Institute for Water Resources who briefed them on the inner workings of the plant. — KUNA

FOREST'S KUWAITI OWNER BIDS TO RESTORE MORALE

LONDON: Nigel Clough is being targeted by ailing two-time European Cup winners Nottingham Forest to take over as manager and evoke memories of their glory days under his father Brian, British media reported yesterday. The 50-year-old former Forest striker-whose late father oversaw the team's golden era, taking a side largely made up of cast-offs to the unlikely heights of two successive European Cup victories in 1979 and 1980 - is presently manager of their second tier rivals Burton whom he guided into the Championship last season for the first time in their history.

Clough, who played over 300 games for Forest, is said to be loathe to leave Burton as he enjoys close relations with the chairman Ben Robinson, who gave him his first start in management in 1998. However, Forest's Kuwaiti owner Fawaz Al-Hasawi is eager to improve morale both inside the club and with the fans after a £50million sale to an American consortium fell through.

He is seeking permission from Robinson to speak to Clough-Forest have been without a manager since Frenchman Philippe Montanier was sacked a fortnight ago. Both Forest and Burton are in relegation trouble with the former just five points above the relegation places-their latest reverse a 2-0 defeat to Leeds on Wednesday-and the latter has dropped to third from bottom after a bright start.

Clough, who is in his second spell at Burton having also managed Forest's bitter rivals Derby and then Sheffield United, commented on the links earlier in the week. "It's an easy link and a logical one from lots of points of view," said Clough, who won 14 caps for England. "All these sorts of allegiances you have and everything, yeah they're strong, but in football people go to rivals all the time. "It's very difficult when you've spent 18 years-I'm just over 50 years old, so a third of my life-involved with a certain club." — AFP



KUWAIT: The National Guards Undersecretary Lit General Hashim Al-Refa'ee recently visited National Guard soldier Dhari Adel Salem at Jahra hospital where he is being treated from injuries he sustained during a recent drill.



KRCS delivering relief aid to Syrian refugees in Jordan. —KUNA photos

KRCS DELIVERS RELIEF AID TO SYRIANS

ARAB YOUTH URGED TO TAKE UP VOLUNTEERISM

AMMAN: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) has continued to deliver relief aid to Syrian refugees in Jordan providing such assistance to 200 families in the capital Amman. Anwar Al-Hasawi, the KRCS Deputy Chairman, said that the society was engaged in handing over delivery of up to 14 truckloads of these necessary materials to the Syrian refugees in the country. They include food, clothes, bed sheets, cash money and dates. Al-Hasawi expressed gratitude to Kuwaiti citizens who contributed to the humanitarian activity. On Thursday, the Kuwaiti association delivered aid to a number of Syrian families at refugee camps in the Jordan Valley area, northern Jordan, in cooperation with Jordan National Red Crescent Society (IFRC).

Meanwhile, Secretary General of Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) Maha Al-Barjas said that it is imperative to instill in Arab youth a sense of volunteerism. Al-Barjas made the remarks in a statement to KUNA at the

conclusion of the ninth Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies of the Middle East and North African region, hosted by the Jordanian capital. The KRCS Secretary General spoke of the need to "develop legislation to promote volunteerism, which allows youth a chance to contribute to their societies." Moreover, she pressed social media outlets to espouse the merits of such virtues, as she heaped praise on the United Kingdom, where around 22 million people have taken up volunteerism.

Speaking on KRCS projects in the works, Al-Barjas noted that KRCS will continue to offer humanitarian aid to Syrian refugees languishing in camps in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. In a speech at the conference, the KRCS official encouraged Kuwaiti youth to look into volunteerism, as this benevolent deed will be the subject of a course to be added to Kuwaiti school curriculums. She also added that KRCS has always been eager to bring to the public's

attention how crucial volunteerism is to buoy humanitarian endeavors.

Medical aid to Iraq

In another development, Kuwait has distributed 15 tons of medical supplies to hospitals in areas that have been liberated south of Iraq's war-torn city of Mosul. Member of the Iraqi Medical Society for Relief and Development Fahad Al-Abaidi said that Kuwait continues to deliver aid to displaced people in Ninwa province, adding that more than 40 medical centers have been the recipients of 15 tons of medical necessities given by Kuwait.

Meanwhile, Director of Health in Ninwa province Mohammad Al-Hadidi said that Iraq is grateful for Kuwait's assistance, noting that truckloads of medical aid have poured into the country. Similarly, in a statement to KUNA, health official Dr Abdulmonem Al-Tabur said that the aid provided by Kuwait is adequate given the country's dire need of healthcare, with a surge in the number of displaced people. The medical supplies are part of an incessant flow of Kuwaiti medical aid that has trickled into Iraq, including the construction of medical centers in refugee camps located in Iraq's autonomous region of Kurdistan. — Agencies



KRCS Deputy Chairman Anwar Al-Hasawi is pictured with a Syrian family.

ZAIN LAUNCHES 'NEW OFFER EVERY WEEK' CAMPAIGN FOR ALL PLANS

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading telecommunications company in Kuwait, launched its latest promotional campaign entitled "New Offer Every Week" which allows postpaid and prepaid customers to 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 sub-

scribers in Kuwait, especially during this cherished time of the year.

As part of the first week's offers, prepaid customers who recharge their eeZee lines with KD 20 will immediately get KD 6 of bonus credit, while those who recharge with KD 10 will immediately get KD 2.5 of bonus credit. Additionally, customers subscribed to eeZee Internet packages can now renew their KD 9 plan with KD 6 only and renew their KD 12 plan with KD 8 only. In addition, customers who subscribe to either the KD 35 or KD 40 postpaid plans with 24 months commitment will get a FREE platinum number, while customers who subscribe to the 24 month postpaid Internet plans

will get two additional FREE months added to their subscriptions.

Zain has long considered itself a key partner of the Kuwaiti society, especially in such 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.



KUWAIT: The Capital Municipality's PR Department said that a wide scale inspection campaign was carried out on various state property, stores and restaurants. In this regard, the acting Head of the Violations Department Ahmed Al-Mutairi said that inspections resulted in filing six foodstuff-related citations, five for expired advert licenses and six warnings for state property violations.



Crime

Report

SPONSOR KILLS FILIPINA MAID

KUWAIT: A citizen was recently arrested for beating his Filipina maid to death, said security sources noting that the man initially called the police and paramedics - claiming that the maid had suddenly collapsed. However, on examining the body, forensics traced injuries showing that the woman had been brutally assaulted. The sponsor finally confessed to beating her up. He claimed that the maid was so negligent, always hurting his kids and that she tried to 'poison' his kids several times.

A practical joke?

A citizen who posted a video he made with his friend by setting him on fire has been arrested by e-crime detectives. According to security sources, the suspect claimed the video was 'a practical joke'.

KD 7500 found in jail

Central Prison security recently found KD 7500 in cash with an inmate, said security sources noting that the sum was found on a routine inspection. A case has been filed, pending further investigations.

Kissing in public

A young man and a girl were recently arrested for kissing in public near a park in Riqqa area. Security sources said that a female citizen had seen the couple and reported them to the police. Separately, another couple was arrested while fighting in a Salmiya cafe. Security sources said that the fight broke out when the girl asked her ex-boyfriend to pay her back the money he had borrowed from her. — Al-Rai, Al-Anbaa

MPS DISCUSS TAXING EXPATS REMITTANCES

KUWAIT: Well-informed sources said that the parliamentary legislative committee is scheduled to discuss a number of proposed laws on Sunday including taxing expats' financial remittances. In this regard, MP Faisal Al-Kandari suggested imposing taxes on expats remittances to their home countries. Proposal set gradual taxes starting with two percent for sums below KD 100, four percent for sums between KD 100 - KD 499 and five percent for sums over KD 500. — Al-Rai

KUWAIT EXECUTIONS 'LAWFUL'

KUWAIT: The recent executions were conducted after a lawful and transparent litigation based on the Kuwaiti penal code and its amendments, said a Foreign Ministry official. By enacting and implementing the executions, the State of Kuwait is; by no means violating any international charters, either civil, political or human rights' related, Ambassador Ghanim Al-Ghanim, Assistant Foreign Minister for Legal Affairs said in a statement.

Executions were held after each defendant had his/her day at court in "public and legally-sound" sessions, Al-Ghanim noted. On Wednesday, the central prison carried out death sentences against seven individuals who committed a number of heinous crimes, according to a statement by the public prosecution. The individuals were of Bangladeshi, Filipino, Ethiopian, Egyptian, and Kuwaiti nationalities, said the statement, adding that the death sentences were approved by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.—Agencies

International

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ALEPPO: Syrian government forces walk past a destroyed vehicle and a graffiti bearing the emblem of the Ahrar Al-Shamis Rahman Brigade of the Islamic Front (Left) in the former rebel-held Sukkari district in the northern city of Aleppo. —AFP

SYRIA REBELS AND EX-QAEDA AFFILIATE IN MINI-WAR US TO ISOLATE TERRORIST GROUP IN WIDER INSURGENCY

BEIRUT: The coming together of several factions of Syrian rebels against the country's former Al-Qaeda affiliate has upped the ante against the jihadists following their exclusion from peace talks. Six factions have joined the powerful Ahrar al-Sham group in the battle against Fateh al-Sham Front, which changed its name from Al-Nusra Front last year after breaking ties with Al-Qaeda. Analysts say this comes as Fateh al-Sham seeks to intimidate its previous allies, as it feels it is being isolated from the armed opposition amid air strikes against the jihadist group. Fateh al-Sham, which is listed internationally as a terrorist group, has been excluded from both a fragile nationwide ceasefire in force since Dec 30 and peace talks held this week in Kazakhstan.

It has been hit in recent weeks by a series of deadly air strikes, most believed to have been carried out by the US-led coalition fighting jihadists. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based monitor, has said Fateh al-Sham appears to believe that local rebels were providing coordinates for

the strikes. The infighting comes after years of Fateh al-Sham battling alongside rebels against President Bashar al-Assad's forces in Idlib province, which is the last major bastion of the armed opposition. The alliance has complicated the support of Western countries for the armed opposition.

Pre-emptive attack

Earlier this week, the jihadist group accused rebels of having brokered a deal to fight Fateh al-Sham and isolate it. Fateh al-Sham attacked a rebel base, sparking fighting between it and several factions across the northern provinces of Idlib and Aleppo. Fateh al-Sham sees its attack as pre-emptive, said Aymenn al-Tamimi, an expert in jihadist movements, as rebels come under pressure to dissociate themselves from the former Al-Qaeda affiliate. He noted the increasing frequency of US air strikes on Fateh al-Sham, which he thinks the US clearly intended in part as a message to other factions to stay away from merging with Fateh al-Sham.

The US has been intending to isolate

Fateh al-Sham in the wider insurgency, he said. He said the lack of condolences being paid to Fateh al-Sham by other factions for the loss of fighters and leaders at the hands of these air strikes could show this strategy was at play. The armed opposition has for months criticized Fateh al-Sham, accusing it of tarnishing the image of the rebellion because of its ties to Al-Qaeda despite them cutting ties to the group last year. Tensions between both sides further piqued after the army retook the whole of Aleppo from the rebels last month and they accused each other for the fall of the northern city.

Militarily costly

On Thursday, Ahrar al-Sham said in a statement it would consider all attacks against it or its bases as a declaration of war. Tamimi said it was unclear how far the factions would go in their fight, but Ahrar al-Sham did make clear it is trying to act to deter any aggressive action rather than totally eliminate and isolate Fateh al-Sham. However, if it does escalate to an existential war, then I

have no doubt Fateh al-Sham will defend its holdings to the end, he said.

Losing out in Idlib would mean the end of Fateh al-Sham as a major player in the Syrian insurgency, Syria specialist Thomas Pierret said. Fateh al-Sham was taking series of strategic positions to intimidate the factions, but both sides had no interest in continuing the fighting. The rebels know a direct confrontation with a jihadist faction of this scope would be suicidal, he said. And Ahrar al-Sham knew a fight to death with Fateh al-Sham would be militarily costly.

At the end of Astana, regime supporters Russia and Iran and rebel backer Turkey stressed their determination to fight jihadist groups and the need to dissociate rebel groups from Fateh al-Sham. Syria's conflict has killed more than 310,000 people and displaced millions since it erupted in 2011 with the brutal repression of anti-government protests.

It has since evolved into a complex war, with the rise of jihadist groups and the involvement of international powers.—AFP



SYRIA: This file photo shows Turkish troops battling IS jihadists in Syria. — AFP

TURKEY'S SYRIA OFFENSIVE STALLS AT FLASHPOINT TOWN

'TURKEY ISOLATED BY NATO ALLIES'

ISTANBUL: Turkey is enduring the biggest challenge of a five-month military campaign inside Syria as it battles to capture the town of Al-Bab from Islamic State (IS) jihadists, taking heavy casualties and testing an army stretched by post-coup purges. The ambitious "Euphrates Shield" operation-with Turkish forces backing pro-Ankara Syrian rebels in an unprecedented incursion-began in spectacular style in August as the army ousted jihadists from a succession of border towns including Jarabulus. But Al-Bab, which symbolically means "The Gate" in Arabic, has proved far tougher, with Turkish officials predicting repeatedly in the last few weeks that it will be taken imminently but with no clear end in sight.

At least 48 Turkish soldiers have been killed in the incursion so far, according to an AFP tally, the vast majority in the battle for Al-Bab since the fight for the town began on Dec 10. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan vowed yesterday that Turkey would "finish the job" in Al-Bab, but indicated it was not necessary to push any deeper inside Syria. Turkey has repeatedly complained of being isolated by its NATO allies in the operation, although Ankara has recently won some backing from its newfound ally Moscow.

But the operation has come with NATO's second largest standing army facing troubles after the failed July putsch, with more than 6,000 soldiers and 168 generals-half the entire pre-coup contingent-arrested in the crack-down. Showing the tremors from the

coup are still shaking the army, several soldiers who had been due to go on trial last week did not appear in court in Istanbul as they were waging the Al-Bab campaign.

Syria quagmire

"Euphrates Shield is under-resourced," said Aaron Stein, resident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council's Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East. "The rebels Turkey is fighting with are poorly trained and have, for years, proved incapable of taking and holding territory." Whereas Jarabulus is practically on the border, Al-Bab is 25 kilometers south of the frontier and a far tougher logistical proposition. Faruk Logoglu, a former Turkish ambassador to the United States and ex-opposition MP, said the Turkish-led campaign "is lacking final objectives and an exit strategy." "The target given is well beyond what's achievable. That's the problem," he said. "Turkey risks being drawn further into the Syria quagmire." IS in December claimed to have burned to death two Turkish soldiers-although this was never confirmed by Ankara-while the corpses of two kidnapped soldiers were returned this month.

Moved forward alone

Soner Cagaptay, director of the Turkish Research Program at The Washington Institute, said Turkey had suffered from the lack of support for the operation from the United States. "Because Ankara launched its move to

take Al-Bab from ISIS without securing concrete cooperation with the US, Turkey had to move forward alone," he said. "This naturally slowed down the operation. This is why Ankara has moved to secure Russian air support." In Nov, the Pentagon said the US-led international coalition was not backing the Al-Bab campaign because it was "independently" launched by Turkey. That prompted Ankara to turn to Moscow, even though the two countries have been on opposing sides of the Syria conflict since it erupted in 2011.

But Turkey and Russia late last year brokered a ceasefire in Syria and have stepped up cooperation since. The two countries on Jan 18 staged their first joint air strikes against IS around Al-Bab, the Russian defense ministry announced. By taking Al-Bab, Turkey is keen to prevent Syrian Kurdish militia allied to the US establishing a stronghold in the area. Ankara even wants to push northeast to Manbij, where the Kurds already ousted IS. In Jan, the US-led coalition also conducted four strikes near Al-Bab and Turkey has greater expectations from the new US administration under President Donald Trump.

Cagaptay said Turkish forces were being targeted by IS foreign fighters who had been largely encircled by offensives in Syria and Iraq and were engaged in a fight to the death, ready to employ suicide bombers. "For these foreign fighters, there are two ways out: capture by anti-ISIS forces, or death," he said. —AFP

GAMBIA PLANS FEB 18 CELEBRATION AS NEW LEADER ARRIVES HOME

BANJUL, Gambia: Billboards across Gambia's capital are declaring a Feb 18 ceremony to mark the inauguration of the country's new leader, a day after his triumphant arrival. Hundreds of thousands turned out Thursday to greet President Adama Barrow, a week after he took the oath of office in neighboring Senegal. Longtime ruler Yahya Jammeh, who clung to power despite losing December elections, finally flew into exile over the weekend after mounting international pressure.

Gambia has high hopes for Barrow, who has vowed to create greater freedoms in this tiny West African nation and reverse many of Jammeh's actions, including his declaration that the country would withdraw from the International Criminal Court. Barrow also has said the new government will look into alleged abuses under Jammeh, who has been accused of overseeing a system that tortured and even killed opponents. "Much has to be done to tell the people their vote counts," spokesman Halifa Sallah said yesterday. The first step is getting the Cabinet announced, he added.

Residents of this country of 1.9 million, the smallest on the African mainland, have been exuberant after more than two decades of life under Jammeh. The country's political transition, chaotic but bloodless, has been the envy of many across Africa who have lived for decades under leaders accused of manipulating elections or election laws to stay in power.

Street parties continued in Banjul until the early hours yesterday. "Nothing will be the same. President Barrow has a long way to go to be able to repair the damage done by the Jammeh regime," said Amat Jeng, a shop owner. "Without unity, we will not be able to move Gambia forward." Officials with a West African regional military force of about 2,500 that secured Gambia for Barrow's arrival - and had been poised to oust Jammeh if diplomatic efforts failed - said the force will reduce its presence gradually. Barrow wants it to stay for six months to help provide security.

The new president is faced with a number of immediate challenges, including a government that appears to be broke. Jammeh left the state coffers empty, Barrow has said. The economy is small and weak. Gambia's biggest export is peanuts, though the country also has become a significant source of migrants making their way to Europe. While tourism is a vital industry, the increasingly isolationist Jammeh regime frightened away many holiday-goers, and it remained unclear how long it would take hotels and resorts to recover in a country that has promoted itself as the "smiling coast of Africa." —AP

TUNISIA'S POWERFUL UGTT UNION ELECTS NEW LEADER

GAMMARTH, Tunisia: Tunisia's UGTT labor union, which played a role in the 2011 uprising that toppled the country's longtime dictator and its post-revolt transition, on Thursday elected a new leader. Nouredine Taboubi replaces Houcine Abbassi, who took office in 2011 just months after the ouster of strongman Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. His election caps the annual congress of the Nobel Peace Prize-winning Tunisian General Labour Union. More than 550 delegates cast ballots in the vote which also elected a 13-member executive bureau-all from Taboubi's list-and which for the first time includes a woman, Naima Hammami.

Taboubi, 67, was one of two deputies along with Bouali Mbarki who had served under Abbassi. He is known for having formed good relations over the years with the various factions. With more than half a million members, the UGTT was among four civil society groups that played an important part in a 2013 national dialogue that helped salvage the country's democratic transition. The groups were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2015. Abassi, 69, has urged his successor to "continue on the same path of militancy." Political analyst Slaheddine Jouchi said he expected the new leadership to have "clear support to carry out changes". —AFP

SHABAAB ATTACKS KENYAN ARMY BASE IN SOMALIA

MOGADISHU: Islamist Shabaab fighters attacked a Kenyan military base in southern Somalia yesterday in the second assault by the Al-Qaeda linked group this week. The attack on the Kenya Defense Forces (KDF) base at Kolbiyow, close to the Kenyan border in Somalia's Lower Juba region, began with suicide truck bombers blasting their way into the camp, followed by militants attacking from different directions. Shabaab claimed in a statement to have overrun the base, captured military vehicles and equipment and to have killed 57 Kenyan soldiers.

"Fighters have taken control of the base and the overall Kolbiyow area after massacring the Kenyan infidels," the statement said. KDF spokesman Paul Njuguna denied the Shabaab claims and said Kenyan soldiers had fought back, killing many of the Islamists. Njuguna said Kenyan soldiers "fiercely engaged an Al Shabaab group which had attempted to attack the camp" before dawn. "KDF soldiers repulsed the terrorists killing scores," he said, but did not give any figure for Kenyan casualties. Shabaab frequently overstates the death toll from its attacks while Kenya commonly underplays its losses.

Anarchy and conflict

In Jan last year a Kenyan base at El-Adde was attacked and overrun by Shabaab fighters who claimed to have killed over 100 Kenyan soldiers. The government refused to give its own toll. The Shabaab, which once controlled much of Somalia, is fighting to overthrow the internationally-backed government in Mogadishu. It launches regular attacks on government, military and civilian targets and has carried out a series of deadly assaults against foreign soldiers deployed in Somalia. The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) is a 22,000-strong force comprising soldiers from Burundi, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda.

Over the last two years Shabaab has rampaged through bases manned by Burundian soldiers in Lego, Ugandan troops in Janale and the Kenyans in El-Adde, inflicting high casualties and stealing military equipment each time. The Kolbiyow raid is the second major attack this week in Somalia, coming three days after 28 people were killed when Shabaab bombers and fighters attacked a hotel in the capital. Somalia is due to hold a presidential vote in early Feb, signaling the end of a drawn-out electoral process in which a new parliament has also been selected.

Political infighting and ongoing insecurity scuppered plans for a universal vote in 2016, with lawmakers elected by specially selected delegates. Somalia has not had an effective central government since the 1991 overthrow of president Siad Barre's military regime, which ushered in more than two decades of anarchy and conflict in a country deeply divided along clan lines. —AFP



ALEPPO: This file photo shows a Syrian man walking in a damaged building in the old city of Aleppo, a month after government forces retook the city from rebel fighters. —AFP

ALEPPO TRADERS CLEAR DEBRIS FROM WAR-SCARRED SOUK 'CITY RENDERED UNRECOGNIZABLE BY VIOLENCE'

ALEPPO: In Syria's Aleppo, men throw rubble into the courtyard of a historic inn as merchants gather below to oversee the resurrection of their war-battered shops. The shopkeepers have returned for the first time to clear the debris left behind by years of fighting after their century-old trading ground became a front line. "I was so happy to see my shop still standing amid the trash despite a little damage," says Antoun Baqqal, 66, one of the traders in the Khayr Beyk Khan. Once famous for its bustling souks and old citadel, Aleppo's Old City has been rendered almost unrecognizable by some of the worst violence in Syria's nearly six-year conflict.

After years of fighting, many of the city's famed souks have been completely destroyed. But the shops of Khayr Beyk have largely survived, even if some stores inside the two-floor inn, known in the region as a khan, have seen their facades ripped off in the fighting. "I sent my friends pictures of their shops to encourage them to come back, until they all returned one by one," Baqqal says. Rebels overran east Aleppo in the summer of 2012, effectively dividing the city into a regime-held west

and opposition-controlled east. "The army was here. They used to sleep upstairs and downstairs in the shops," Baqqal says.

But after regime forces seized east Aleppo in December, retaking the whole city, he was able to return to the cloth workshop he inherited from his father. When he found his father's photo lying on the ground, he dusted it off and hung it back up on the wall. "I'm going to tidy up the workshop so my son can take over, so he can put my photo next to my father's one day and remember me fondly."

Like a family home

In the courtyard, Zakaria Aziza, 55, scrolls through his phone, comparing old pictures of the more than a dozen shops he owns to their appearance today. Customers used to flock from across the Arab region to admire the shopping venue's textiles, he says. "The khan once overflowed with material. You could hardly walk between the shops for all the customers," Aziza says. "Today it's also hard to walk around-but this time it's because of all the rubble and trash." In the courtyard, a mulberry and a lemon tree survive amid the mounds of

waste. A rusty yellow safe and gaping white fridge lie among the debris.

Tugging on a rope, two boys pull a plastic tray full of rubble, then dump its contents onto a pile. Authorities have promised to collect bags of debris and help with restoration, but Aziza says reviving the souk will take a year at least. Catching his breath on an old red sofa nearby after clambering to the site, his 35-year-old nephew Mazen says he has been playing in the old market since he was a child. "It feels like the family home," he says, as he helps his uncle supervise the clean-up.

Years of shelling have eaten away at the souk's historic black and white walls, which have been charred in the clashes. But sunlight still spills in from one of the openings in its arched roof. At the souk's entrance, Mohammed Nour Mimi, 60, rummages through his store to find surviving musical instruments in the dust. For years he has carried around the keys to the covered market's giant wooden door, determined he and other traders would one day return. "Merchants will come back to chat over coffee and shisha," he says, "whether the souk opens again or not." —AFP

TURKEY SUBMITS NEW EXTRADITION REQUEST FOR GREECE COUP SUSPECTS

ANKARA: Turkey's justice ministry yesterday submitted a new extradition request for eight suspects allegedly linked to the failed July coup, a day after the Greek Supreme Court refused to return them in a ruling that angered Ankara. The Greek court blocked the extradition of the former Turkish army officers, saying that they would not have a fair trial in Turkey. Ankara denounced the ruling, saying it was "taken with a political motive." The suspects—who landed a helicopter in Greece a day after the botched putsch and asked for asylum—were also ordered to be released from police custody.

The justice ministry swiftly sent its second request to Greece for the suspects' extradition, state-run news agency Anadolu reported. The Turkish foreign ministry said late

Thursday it would evaluate the impact of the move on ties with Athens, including cooperation in the fight against terrorism and other regional issues. In a bitter statement, the ministry said the eight individuals played "an active role" in the coup which tried to overthrow President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and accused the Greek judiciary of encouraging "impunity".

The foreign ministry added the decision "was opposed to international law norms and principles" as well as violating the rights of the victims of the coup, in a statement. Referring to Greece's own history under military rule, it said: "As a country which experienced coups in its past Greece, with this decision, has unfortunately become a country which protects coup plotters." Any failure to extradite the

suspects will likely damage relations between the two NATO countries which have enjoyed warmer ties under Erdogan, though tensions never completely disappeared.

The controversy also comes as Greece and Turkey are trying to work together to find a deal for the reunification of Cyprus in ongoing talks brokered by the UN. An Istanbul court Thursday also approved a request from prosecutors for an arrest warrant for the eight including two commanders, four captains and two sergeants. The officers deny having taken part in the attempted putsch and have claimed their lives are in danger should they return to Turkey. They have requested asylum in Greece. Their applications were originally rejected in July but the appeals are currently being processed.—AFP

UN SAYS CANNOT CONFIRM SYRIA TALKS POSTPONEMENT

GENEVA: The United Nations cannot confirm a Russian statement that talks on the Syrian conflict planned for Feb 8 in Geneva have been postponed, a spokeswoman for UN special envoy Staffan de Mistura said yesterday. "There is no confirmation that the February talks are postponed," said Yara Sharif. "We're going to be sure when the special envoy is back" from talks on the issue in New York next week with UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres. UN spokeswoman Alessandra Vellucci also said yesterday that the

list of those invited to the Geneva talks has not been finalized.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said earlier yesterday that the Geneva talks would be postponed until the end of Feb. "The date of Feb 8 has been put back until the end of next month," Lavrov told a meeting with minor Syrian opposition representatives in Moscow to discuss the peace talks in Kazakhstan. The talks in the Kazakh capital Astana wrapped up on Tuesday without any tangible progress in finding a political solu-

tion to the war in Syria, which has claimed more than 310,000 lives since it started in 2011.

Key players Russia, Turkey and Iran backed the talks and the main result was an agreement by the three sides to try to shore up a shaky ceasefire on the ground in the war-torn country. The main opposition groups stayed away from the Moscow meeting with Lavrov, as the Kremlin seeks to impose its influence as the key powerbroker in Syria on the back of its game-changing military support for leader Bashar al-Assad. —AFP



MOSCOW: Russian lawmakers vote at the State Duma (lower parliament house) in Moscow, Russia, yesterday. —AP

RUSSIAN LAWMAKERS DECRIMINALIZE SOME DOMESTIC VIOLENCE 'BILL RAISES FEAR TO SOW IMPUNITY'

MOSCOW: Soon it will no longer be a crime in Russia to beat family members - as long as you don't cause bodily harm. The lower house of the Russian parliament yesterday gave final approval to a bill decriminalizing some forms of domestic violence - a move that has sparked intense public debate. The State Duma voted 380-3 yesterday to eliminate criminal liability for battery on family members that doesn't cause bodily harm, making it punishable instead by a fine or a 15-day arrest. The law needs to be approved by the largely rubber-stamp upper chamber and signed by President Vladimir Putin, who has signaled his support.

The bill has raised fears that it could sow impunity for those who beat up their wives and children, but its supporters have argued that it retains criminal responsibility for repeat offenders. The measure is a response to conservative criticism of the current law, seen by some as a threat to parents who might spank their children. The bill stems from last year's Supreme Court ruling to decriminalize battery that doesn't inflict bodily harm, but to retain criminal charges for those accused of battery against family members. The Duma then approved the corresponding legislation only to change course now.

Andrei Isayev of the main Kremlin faction, the United Russia, said lawmakers are "heeding the public call" by cor-

recting a mistake they made last year. A survey this month by state-run pollster VTsIOM showed that 19 percent of Russians said "it can be acceptable" to hit one's wife, husband or child "in certain circumstances." The nationwide poll by phone of 1,800 people was held Jan. 13-15. The survey had a margin of error of 2.5 percentage points. Critics of the measure have warned that it would encourage domestic violence and fuel crime.

"This bill would establish violence as a norm of conduct," Communist lawmaker Yuri Sinelshchikov said during the debate. Data on domestic violence in Russia is scarce, but Interior Ministry statistics show that 40 percent of all violent crimes in Russia are committed in family surroundings. In 2013, more than 9,000 women were reported to have been killed in domestic violence. Russian police are often reluctant to react to domestic violence calls, which many regard as meddling in family affairs.

Prosecutors in November began investigating a police officer who took a call from a woman complaining about her boyfriend's aggressive behavior. Instead of offering help, the officer reportedly told the woman that the police would only come if she got killed. Shortly afterward, the man beat the woman to death. —AP

UK GIVES LAWMAKERS LIMITED TIME TO EYE BILL ON BREXIT

LONDON: As British lawmakers cried out "Disgraceful!" the Conservative government on Thursday introduced the long-awaited bill to start the country's exit from the European Union and gave the House of Commons less than two weeks to consider it. David Davis, the Cabinet secretary in charge of Brexit, unveiled the legislation just two days after a Supreme Court ruling that torpedoed the government's effort to avoid a parliamentary vote on starting the process of leaving the 28-nation bloc. The Commons will begin debate on the bill on Jan 31 and it is set to go to the House of Lords on Feb 8.

Prime Minister Theresa May is rushing to meet a self-imposed deadline of March 31 for triggering Article 50 of the EU treaty, which will launch two years of talks on Britain's future relationship with the bloc after more than 40 years of membership. Voters approved Britain's EU exit in a June 23 referendum. "I trust that Parliament, which backed the referendum by six-to-one, will respect the decision taken by the British people and pass the legislation quickly," Davis said. The text of the measure was brief. It stated that the prime minister "may notify, under Article 50 (2) of the Treaty on European Union, the United Kingdom's intention to withdraw from the EU."

Some lawmakers, mindful that the government had fought for months to keep them from scrutinizing the measure, were furious that they would get such a short time to consider what is possibly the most influential government move in generations. One pro-EU lawmaker, Chris Leslie, said the House was getting far less time "to debate the legislation that takes us out of the EU than we did previous European treaties." "This is the most significant law we've ever debated on our relationship with Europe and yet the government will only give it an eighth of the time that was spent on the Maastricht Treaty," he said.

Erika Szyszczak, a European law expert from the University of Sussex, said Maastricht was thrashed out for weeks. "This bill is yet again another example of the political ground constantly shifting when it comes to Brexit," she said. "Allowing only five days to debate the details gives MPs little room for maneuver in terms of laying opposition amendments." Lawmakers heckled House of Commons Leader David Lidington as he announced the timetable, which allows for just three days of committee debate - which is when members of Parliament from all parties will make attempts to amend the legislation. Lawmakers shouted "Disgraceful!" and said similar measures had received much more time for discussion.

Chuka Umunna of the opposition Labour Party accused the government of trying to "muzzle" the Commons. Even as it introduced the legislation, the government refused to make any promises on when it will give lawmakers a formal plan for Brexit. May has pledged to reveal the details of her negotiating objectives in a so-called White Paper. Opposition lawmakers, however, want to see the plan before they consider the bill. "I've said we will produce it as expeditiously as possible, as quickly as possible," Davis told Parliament. "What can you do faster than that?" The debate took place without a key player in the process - May. The prime minister traveled to the United States to meet Republican lawmakers on Thursday and President Donald Trump yesterday. —AP

AFGHANISTAN SEEKS MORE WOMEN TO JOIN ITS ARMY

KABUL: Afghanistan has announced fresh initiatives to bring more women into the army, weeks after the country's first female pilot sparked a national debate on insecurity and women's rights by seeking asylum in the US. The defense ministry wants to boost the proportion of women in the army to 10 percent, deputy ministry spokesman Mohammad Radmanesh said yesterday, confirming a slew of incentives including a special salary scale for female recruits. "At this stage, we have 1,575 Afghan women in our army ranks, it is mere three to four percent which is nothing," Radmanesh said.

"We are aiming to raise this percentage to 10 percent." Fifteen years after the end of the Taliban regime, gender equality remains a distant dream in Afghanistan despite claims of progress. In December Niloofar Rahmani, a 25-year-old pilot lionized widely as the "Afghan Top Gun", announced she was seeking asylum in the US, citing fears for her safety and sparking a spirited national debate. Rahmani became a symbol of hope for millions of Afghan women when she surfaced in the press in 2013 after becoming Afghanistan's first woman pilot since the Taliban era. But

with fame came death threats from insurgents and she routinely faced contempt from her male colleagues in a conservative nation where many still believe that a woman does not belong outside the home. Her shock asylum bid triggered a storm of criticism in Afghanistan for "betraying" her nation but also garnered support from activists. Radmanesh said there are 400 Afghan female recruits currently training at defense ministry institutions. Afghan forces are beginning their third year of providing security across the war-torn country after NATO moved into an advisory and train-

ing role-and the toll on the local forces has been devastating.

An estimated 5,000 were killed and another 15,000 wounded in 2015, primarily by the Taliban, while incomplete figures for 2016 show the toll was even worse. Some 5,523 Afghan service members died between Jan 1 and Aug 19 alone according to a quarterly report from the office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR). An additional 9,665 were wounded during the period. SIGAR's full report for 2016 has not yet been released.—AFP



INDIA: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses during the BJP rally at the PAP ground in Jalandhar yesterday.—AFP

INDIAN GOVERNOR RESIGNS AFTER WOMANIZING CLAIMS

'ACCUSED OF RUNNING LADIES CLUB'

NEW DELHI: The governor of an Indian state has resigned after dozens of his staff signed a petition calling for his removal, alleging that he is a serial womanizer. V Shanmuganathan, 67, handed in his notice as governor of Meghalaya late Thursday after the petition went viral on the internet and his resignation was formally accepted by President Pranab Mukherjee yesterday.

The petition, which was addressed to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and signed by 80 employees at Shanmuganathan's official residence, accused him of running a "young ladies club" at Governor's House.

"Young ladies come and go at will on direct orders of the governor, many of them have direct access to his bedroom," the petition claimed, according

to a copy of the letter posted online by local media. He reshuffled the staff and "made only all the young girls to work for him", the petition claimed, adding his "immoral activities" in the state capital Shillong were well known. Meghalaya is one of seven northeastern states which are rich in natural resources but have been blighted by lack of development.—AFP

DEATH TOLL FROM KASHMIR AVALANCHES CLIMBS TO 20

SRINAGAR: Rescuers retrieved the bodies yesterday of another four Indian soldiers buried beneath tons of snow in Kashmir, taking the death toll from a series of avalanches to 20, the military said. The disaster struck an army post and a patrol along the de facto border that divides the disputed territory with Pakistan on Wednesday. All eleven members of the patrol, that was approaching a border post along the Line of Control (LoC), were killed. "Four more bodies were recovered yesterday. No one else is missing," army spokesman Colonel Rajesh Kalia said.

Another separate torrent of snow in the same remote Gurez area buried three other troops at an army post. The bodies of ten soldiers were pulled from the snow Thursday. Dozens of Indian and Pakistani soldiers are killed by avalanches almost every winter along the LoC. Indian-administered Kashmir has been witnessing one of the most severe winters in recent decades, with heavy snow across the territory and temperatures dropping to minus seven degrees Celsius. Four members of a single family died Wednesday in the same area when the house they were sleeping in was hit by an avalanche.

A lone survivor was rescued. One soldier was also killed in northern Sonmarg area of the territory when a camp was hit by an avalanche. Authorities have issued avalanche warnings, advising residents in mountainous areas not to venture out. On Thursday a 60-year-old man died when he came under mounds of snow as he stepped out of his home on a hilly slope in northwest Uri near the LoC, a police officer said. Police last week evacuated 80 villagers from Waltengoo Nar where dozens were killed after a series of avalanches hit the area in 2005 — in the south of the territory.—AFP



SRINAGAR: Indian Army soldiers clear snow from their stranded vehicle near a base camp in Gulmarg, about 55 kilometers northwest of Srinagar, Indian controlled Kashmir, yesterday.—AP

HONG KONG RETURNS SEIZED ARMY VEHICLES TO SINGAPORE

SINGAPORE: Nine Singapore armored troop carriers impounded by Hong Kong while in transit from military exercises in Taiwan are on their way back home, the city-state's defense minister said yesterday.

The release of the Terrex vehicles closes the curtain on a diplomatic row that also involved China, which has sovereignty over Hong Kong and considers Taiwan a renegade island awaiting reunification. "Terrexes left Hong Kong port this morning at 0415hrs. Next stop, home," Defense Minister Ng Eng Hen said in a Facebook post. Ng had said on Wednesday that the journey would take a week.

Hong Kong customs authorities had impounded the vehicles in November while they were being shipped home following exercises in Taiwan, where land-starved Singapore has for decades trained its troops. Following the seizure, China lodged a diplomatic protest to Singapore over its military cooperation with Taiwan. Ties between China and Singapore were already strained over the city-state's perceived support for Southeast Asian nations disputing Beijing's extensive territorial claims in the South China Sea.

Hong Kong is semi-autonomous after being handed back by Britain to China in 1997. But Beijing controls foreign affairs issues and there are increasing fears over its interference in other matters.—AFP

INDONESIA DETAINS EX-FINANCE OFFICIAL FOR SUSPECTED IS LINKS

JAKARTA: A former Indonesian finance ministry official has been detained on his return home after being deported from Turkey for trying to cross into Syria on suspicion of intending to join Islamic State, Indonesian authorities said yesterday. Police identified the man as Triyono Utomo and said he was detained along with his wife and three children after they arrived back in the Indonesian island of Bali on Wednesday. The finance ministry issued a statement to "clarify media reports about an ex-finance ministry official" being detained, but it did not give his name.

"He was a former civil servant at the finance ministry," the ministry said, adding that the man had held a junior position and had resigned in early 2016, saying he wanted to set up an Islamic school on the outskirts of the capital, Jakarta. "No legal assistance will be provided to him," the ministry said. Utomo and his family were in detention on Friday and not available for comment. It was not clear if he had a lawyer. National police spokesman Rikwanto said Utomo and his family would be held for questioning for seven days, and it would then be decided whether or not to proceed with the investigation.

Media said Utomo had studied for a post-graduate degree in Australia. Hundreds of people from Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority country, have attempted to travel to Syria in the past few years. Some have been on humanitarian missions, some trying to join militant groups including Islamic State. Indonesia has seen a recent resurgence in militant activity, inspired in part by Islamic State. Last year, four men linked to the group mounted a gun and bomb attack in the heart of the capital and killed four people. It was the first attack in the region to be claimed by Islamic State.—Reuters

THAI COPS BUST MONK-LED GANG OF PALACE IMPOSTERS

BANGKOK: A gang of Thai con-artists, led by a monk, have been arrested after masquerading as palace officials to dupe couples into paying for bogus royal visits to their weddings, police said yesterday. Falsely claiming royal ties is a particularly grave offence in Thailand, where the monarchy carries enormous prestige and is protected by one of the world's harshest defamation laws. The three women and five men, including a monk who allegedly ran the racket, were detained on fraud charges after operating the scam for several years, reportedly raking in over \$500,000.

"The monk and his people asked some couples to pay money for special 'high-up' (royal) individuals to attend their weddings," Police Colonel Pumin Pumpunmuang, a regional commander overseeing the case, said. They faked documents from the royal household bureau to add credence to their cover story, he said, adding cops finally uncovered the scam after a victim complained. The gang has been operating out of provinces bordering Bangkok for several years, Pumin added. He declined to comment on whether the gang were also charged with royal defamation, a crime carrying to 15 years in prison per offence.

Fabricating royal connections can lead to heavy jail sentences in Thailand, where the monarchy is extolled as a beacon of virtue by state and palace propaganda. In November a 62-year-old woman was jailed for 50 years for trumping up palace ties to swindle victims out of more than \$100,000 among other offences. A year earlier, a famous Thai fortune teller was charged with improperly using his royal connections to make money. He later died in military custody under mysterious circumstances. Veneration for the Thai monarchy solidified under the reign of late King Bhumibol Adulyadej, a beloved figure who died last October at age 88 after seven decades on the throne.

His only son and successor, 64-year-old King Maha Vajiralongkorn, is now shepherding the kingdom through a new and uncertain era. The kingdom's royal defamation law was used aggressively during the final years of Bhumibol's reign, especially after a royalist junta seized power in 2014. Observers say that Vajiralongkorn's legacy will in large part rest on whether he endorses or backs away from the government's use of the law. In the first lese majeste case of 2017, an anti-junta activist was sentenced to 11 years and four months in prison on Friday for comments posted on Facebook and in a private message chat, according to legal watchdog iLaw. All media based in the country must self-censor to avoid violating the royal defamation law known as Article 112.—AFP



INDONESIA: In this photograph, a traditional fisherman prepares to fish at Tanjung Pasir, in Banten province.—AFP

PHILIPPINE TROOPS LAUNCH ASSAULTS ON TERROR BASE

MALAYSIAN AMONG 4 MILITANTS KILLED

MANILA: Philippine troops have launched airstrikes and ground assaults that reportedly wounded one of Southeast Asia's most-wanted terror suspects who is trying to establish a new base for an alliance backing the Islamic State group, officials said yesterday. Intelligence reports showed initial assaults killed at least four militants, possibly including a Malaysian, and reportedly wounded the main target, Isnilon Hapilon, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said. He said that Hapilon apparently managed to flee from an encampment in the mountainous hinterlands of Butig town in southern Lanao del Sur province.

"Army troops are still in hot pursuit," Lorenzana said. Airstrikes targeted Hapilon's group on Wednesday and Thursday. Hundreds of troops, backed by artillery fire, then began pursuing him and other militants from the so-called Maute group in Butig, military chief of staff Gen. Eduardo Ano said. Hapilon, who is on the US Department of Justice list of most-wanted terrorists worldwide with up to \$5 million bounty for his capture, moved to Butig from his stronghold on southern Basilan island a month ago to look for a base for his new militant alliance, Ano said. Lanao lies about 830 kilometers south of Manila.

President Rodrigo Duterte has repeatedly warned that the emergence of IS-influenced militant groups was fast looming as a major national security threat. While pursuing peace talks with two large Muslim rebel groups in the predominantly Roman Catholic nation,

he has ordered the military to destroy smaller but brutal extremist groups like the Abu Sayyaf, which is dreaded for cross-border kidnappings, beheadings and bombings. A wave of Abu Sayyaf kidnappings of crewmen, mostly from Indonesia and Malaysia, has sparked a regional security alarm. Hapilon, an Arabic-speaking Islamic preacher known for his expertise on commando assaults, has been indicted in the District of Columbia for his alleged role in terrorist acts against Americans and other foreigners in the southern Philippines.

The elusive Abu Sayyaf commander pledged allegiance to the IS group in 2014. He then went on to organize an

alliance called Dawlatul Islam Wilayatul Mashriq, which is now believed to include at least 10 small militant groups, including some Abu Sayyaf factions, the Maute and two other groups established by Malaysian and Indonesian militants. They all use black IS flags, according to counterterrorism officials and documents. The Maute and another group under the alliance of Ansar Al Khilafah Philippines have been linked to a Sept 2 bombing of a night market that killed 15 people and wounded 69 others in southern Davao city, the president's hometown, and a failed bombing in Manila's popular Rizal Park and the US embassy last year.—AP

THAILAND JAILS MAN FOR 11 YEARS FOR ROYAL DEFAMATION, CYBER CRIME

BANGKOK: A Thai military court yesterday jailed a man for 11 years and four months on charges of royal defamation and computer crime over his Facebook social media posts last year. The country's strict lese-majeste law makes it a crime to defame, insult or threaten the king, queen, heir to the throne or regent. Each offence is punishable with a jail term of up to 15 years. Burin Intin, 28, pleaded guilty to two charges of royal defamation and violating Thailand's Computer Crime Act over posts deemed insulting to the monarchy in a comment on Facebook and online

chat, his lawyer, Anon Numpa, said.

He was detained on April 27 last year after taking part in a peaceful protest against the country's ruling junta, and held on remand in Bangkok, the capital, since April 30. Anon said he would not appeal against Friday's decision, but would submit a petition for a royal pardon. Last month, Thailand's new King Maha Vajiralongkorn pardoned or commuted the sentences of up to 150,000 prison inmates, including some jailed under one of the world's toughest laws against royal insult.—Reuters



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CENTRAL AMERICA VIOLENCE DIRE DESPITE SECURITY CRACKDOWN

SAN SALVADOR: Central America's northern three countries-Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras-remain among the most violent in the world despite intensified security crackdowns on their lawless gangs. According to a compilation of the latest official figures, there were 15,809 murders last year in those three nations, collectively known as the Northern Triangle. "The situation remains difficult. Even though the number of murders has dropped, the pain and suffering of many families in the Northern Triangle continue," the head of El Salvador's Human Rights Commission, Miguel Montenegro, said.

The Northern Triangle is a major source of US-bound migrants fleeing gangs and poverty. The United States has allocated \$650 million to the region to try to stem the flow by improving prosperity and security. But, while governments have greatly stepped up mixed patrols and raids by police and soldiers, Montenegro said "the repression by the states has not made inroads against the violence."

El Salvador most dangerous

On average across the three countries, there were 50.6 murders per day per 100,000 inhabitants last year. That's lower than the 57.1 murders per day recorded in 2015, but still many times higher than the world average of 6.7 calculated by the World Health Organization. Per capita, El Salvador was the most dangerous, with 81.2 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants. Then came Honduras at 58.2, and Guatemala with 34.1. "The violence isn't going to go away overnight," an analyst and former El Salvador rebel, Juan Ramon Medrano, said. "It came about over several decades through social and economic conditions. To get rid of it will need many years."

The gangs blamed for much of the violence were born on the mean streets of Los Angeles in the 1980s, when Central Americans fleeing Cold War-fomented civil conflicts sought refuge in the United States and fought Mexican gangs. Deported back home, they brought the gang culture and violence back with them, and today whole neighborhoods are prey to the groups and their turf wars, with local youths forced to join or to run. "There is no solution to the gangs. Young people are looking for a family and entering a gang gives them an artificial family. There are no rehabilitation programs," said Ricardo Puerta, a Honduran sociologist.

Honduras is home to up to 36,000 gang members, according to police and international organizations. Some 70,000 are in El Salvador, and 10,000 in Guatemala. "The gang situation seems more under control in Honduras and Guatemala," Salvadoran university professor and researcher Carlos Carcach said. "In El Salvador, territorial expansion by the gangs is rapid and broad."

Weak states

With the region acting as a transit corridor for illegal drugs heading from South America to the United States, and cartels in nearby Mexico active, there are fears the gangs could become transnational outfits. That has prompted prosecutors to join forces for a cross-border strategy, while police and troops in the Northern Triangle have formed a tri-national force. But analysts believe the more effective way for the countries to handle the problem is to fix their shaky economies and institutions-to provide jobs and social participation.

"The fragility and weakness of the national democratic systems isn't allowing them to be strong states able to mount a fight against the problems causing the violence," Carcach said. The institutional shortcomings in the countries left over from the civil wars meant impunity reigned for former soldiers and rebels, he said, and that colored society afterward. An additional problem, he noted, was the lack of control in the region over the illegal sales and trafficking of weapons from those conflicts.—AFP



CUBA: People walk past a guard tower outside the fencing of Camp 5 at the US Military's Prison in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.—AFP

TRUMP'S TORTURE COMMENTS SPARK OUTRAGE

'USE OF TORTURE HARMS NATIONAL SECURITY'

CUBA: President Donald Trump has said he "absolutely" thinks torture works, but doctors, lawyers for terror suspects, and even fellow Republicans have pledged to oppose any effort to reinstate water boarding or other banned interrogation techniques. Such methods are prohibited under US law, but that has not kept the new Republican leader from saying if it were up to him, they would be reinstated-and he would authorize "much worse." His comments-first made on the campaign trail, and then again Wednesday in an interview with ABC News-came as a draft executive order allowing the revival of notorious CIA "black site" prisons abroad was circulated by US media.

The now-banned interrogation methods were used in those facilities. The White House said the document did not originate from its staff, but the backlash over the two developments was swift. "The president can sign whatever executive orders he likes," said top Republican Senator John McCain, who was tortured as a prisoner of war in Vietnam. "But the law is the law. We are not bringing back torture in the United States of America." Paul Ryan, the Republican Speaker of the House of Representatives, said Thursday: "Torture is not legal. We agree with it not being legal."

Donna McKay, executive director of Physicians for Human Rights, called enhanced interrogation "wholly immoral and ineffective" and said America would take a step backward if it attempted to reintroduce water boarding. Reviving "a debate around the use of torture and other such crimes only harms the moral standing and national security of the United States," McKay said.

Bad dudes

On Wednesday, Trump claimed it was necessary to "fight fire with fire" in the face of the beheadings of Americans and other atrocities by Islamic State jihadists. "Do I feel it works? Absolutely, I feel it works," Trump said, without citing any evidence, in an ABC interview when asked for his views on water boarding and other banned techniques. Trump did say he would defer to Pentagon chief James Mattis and CIA director Mike Pompeo for guidance on any new pro-water boarding push. The practice is banned in the US Army field manual on interrogating suspects, and Mattis and Pompeo have both said they would not support any attempt to revive water boarding-though Pompeo in recent testimony left some wiggle room, saying he could review the water boarding ban under certain circumstances.

On Thursday, Pentagon spokesman Navy Captain Jeff Davis said of Mattis's prior statements: "That thinking has not changed." At the US military prison at Guantanamo Bay, which Trump wants to load up with "bad dudes," defense attorneys for the alleged plotters of the 9/11 attacks, who are in a military court this week, condemned Trump's statements. Their case, first brought in 2008, has been beset with challenges and delays because much of the evidence first originated via "enhanced" interrogation. For instance, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the alleged mastermind of the terror strikes on New York and Washington, was water boarded 183 times. "Torture and due process are essentially mutually exclusive," said James Connell, the attorney for another defendant, Ramzi Binalshibh.

Fruit of the poisoned tree

Much of the evidence against the so-called "9/11 Five" remains hidden in a 6,700-page classified government report on torture, which defense teams are infuriated they can't see, even though the lawyers have security clearances. The defense must instead rely on the good word of prosecutors that they have provided all relevant evidence. "The torture, and the classification surrounding the torture, have caused problem after problem in the existing military commissions structure," Connell said, referring to the bespoke criminal justice system at Guantanamo where detainees-who are considered "unprivileged enemy belligerents"-are only granted some of the legal rights that US federal courts guarantee.

Though the US government has barred information obtained under duress from being used in the commissions, questions remain about whether evidence gathered in subsequent interrogations should be admissible. Defense attorneys in the case refer to such evidence as "fruit of the poisoned tree." In the Guantanamo courtroom on Wednesday, Walter Ruiz, the lead attorney 9/11 suspect Mustapha al-Hawsawi, stood up before the session began and switched his rolling office chair for the hard, leather-bound chair his client was seated on. Hawsawi then pulled a white cushion from his box of personal possessions and placed that on the softer chair. Ruiz says Hawsawi needs the extra padding because he suffered massive damage to his rectum during aggressive CIA body searches and "rectal rehydration," which Ruiz calls sodomy.—AFP

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Britain will 'abide by EU rules' on trade deals: Hammond

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CHICAGO: Construction personnel work on a building project just south of Chicago's Loop. The US economy lost momentum in the final three months of 2016, closing out a year in which growth turned in the weakest performance in five years, according to information released yesterday. —AP

US ECONOMY LOSES GROWTH MOMENTUM

WEAK EXPORTS CURB Q4 ECONOMIC GROWTH, TRADE DROPS

WASHINGTON: US economic growth slowed sharply in the fourth quarter as a plunge in shipments of soybeans weighed on exports, but steady consumer spending and rising business investment suggested the economy would continue to expand. Gross domestic product increased at a 1.9 percent annual rate, the Commerce Department said yesterday in its first estimate of fourth-quarter GDP. That was a deceleration from the 3.5 percent growth pace logged in the third quarter.

As a result, the economy grew only 1.6 percent in 2016, the weakest pace since 2011. Growth last year was constrained by cheap oil and a strong dollar, which hurt company profits and undercut business investment. An inventory correction also eroded growth. Those impediments to growth are mostly out of the way. The economy expanded 2.6 percent in 2015.

In the fourth quarter, exports fell at a 4.3 percent rate, reversing the 10 percent increase notched in the third quarter. The fourth-quarter drop in exports was the biggest since the first quarter of 2015. Trade

sliced off 1.70 percentage points from GDP growth in the fourth quarter after adding 0.85 percentage point in the prior period. That was the biggest drag since the second quarter of 2010. Most of the hit came from soybean exports, which fired up GDP growth in the third quarter after a poor soy harvest in Argentina and Brazil.

Economists polled by Reuters had forecast GDP rising at a 2.2 percent rate in the fourth quarter. Prices for US government debt rose and US interest rates futures turned flat after the data. US stock index futures pared gains while the dollar fell against the euro and yen.

OUTLOOK FAIRLY BRIGHT

With a labor market at or near full employment starting to lift wages and supporting consumer spending, the outlook for the economy is fairly bright. Growth this year could also get a boost from President Donald Trump's pledge to increase infrastructure spending, cut taxes and reduce regulations.

Although Trump has offered little detail on his economic policy, his promises have been

embraced by consumers, businesses and investors. Consumer and business confidence have soared, while the US stock market has rallied to record highs. But uncertainty over the Trump administration's trade policy poses a risk to the economy. A stronger economy would also mean further interest rate increases from the Federal Reserve. The US central bank has forecast three rate hikes this year. It raised its benchmark overnight interest rate in December by 25 basis points to a range of 0.50 percent to 0.75 percent.

Consumer spending, which accounts for more than two-thirds of US economic activity, increased at a 2.5 percent rate in the fourth quarter. It rose at a 3.0 percent pace in the third quarter.

Income at the disposal of households increased 3.7 percent in the fourth quarter after a robust 4.1 percent rise in the prior period. Savings dipped to \$791.2 billion from \$818.1 billion in the third quarter. With domestic demand increasing steadily, businesses continued to restock. They accumulated inventories at a rate of \$48.7 billion in the last quarter, up from \$7.1 billion in the third

quarter. Inventories added 1.0 percentage point to GDP growth, double the contribution in the third quarter.

Business investment shifted into higher gear, with spending on equipment increasing at a 3.1 percent rate after four straight quarterly declines. The gain reflects a surge in gas and oil well drilling, in tandem with rising crude oil prices. Spending on mining exploration, wells and shafts increased at a 24.3 percent rate after declining at a 30.0 percent pace in the third quarter. Energy services firm Baker Hughes said last Friday that US energy companies added 29 oil rigs in the week to Jan. 20, bringing the total count to 551 - the most since November 2015.

Investment in nonresidential structures, however, fell at a 5.0 percent pace in the fourth quarter after rising at a 12.0 percent rate in the prior period. Investment in home building rebounded after two straight quarterly declines, contributing to growth. Government spending picked up as a rise in state and local government investment offset a decline in federal government expenditures. — Reuters

S SUDAN AIMS TO DOUBLE OIL OUTPUT IN 2017/18

CHINESE, MALAYSIAN, INDIAN FIRMS WORK IN OIL FIELDS

JUBA: South Sudan plans to more than double oil production to 290,000 barrels per day (bpd) in fiscal 2017/2018, the finance minister said yesterday, indicating a target higher than the level recorded shortly before conflict erupted in late 2013.

The nation, which seceded from Sudan in 2011 but plunged into civil war just over two years later, aimed to add 160,000 bpd to existing output of 130,000 bpd in the financial year starting in July, Minister Stephen Dheiu Dau told Reuters. "The resumption is underway," he said in an interview in the South Sudanese capital Juba, referring to the plan to increase output. "The conflict has affected the facilities, including the power."

Increased output would provide desperately needed revenues for a government which since independence has relied on oil for almost all income, which has plummeted as production plunged and international crude prices slid. Starved of foreign exchange, South Sudan's pound has plunged in value, inflation soared to more than 800 percent a year and the government of one of the world's poorest nations has struggled to pay state workers and soldiers.

The main oil firms involved in South Sudan, which produced about 245,000 bpd until fighting flared at the end of 2013, are China National Petroleum Company (CNPC), Malaysia's state-run oil and gas firm Petronas

and India's ONGC Videsh. South Sudanese officials have in the past said production reached as high as 350,000 bpd but fell after a row with Sudan over fees for pumping crude through an export pipeline prompted Juba to temporarily halt production in 2012. Even after resuming following that halt, it never fully recovered to those levels. It dropped to 245,000 bpd after fighting erupted in 2013, often affecting oil producing areas in the north.

Dau said inflation had slowed to 10 percent a month, and the government would help the central bank to build foreign exchange reserves. He did not give a current level for reserves. "We will ... reduce the money supply in circulation," he said. "We will stop

our borrowing from the central bank, it's one of the causes that led to inflation."

In December, the International Monetary Fund said the government's 2016/2017 budget was "an important step in the right direction", saying it cut the forecast deficit to 9 percent of gross domestic product from 30 percent in 2015/2016.

The conflict that has often followed ethnic lines pitted President Salva Kiir, an ethnic Dinka, against his former deputy and long-time political rival Riek Machar, a Nuer.

A peace deal signed in 2015 failed to hold, and sporadic fighting has continued even after Machar fled the country last year. —Reuters



TOKYO: This file photo taken on April 30, 2015 shows an All Nippon Airways (ANA) plane taking off at Tokyo's Haneda airport. Japan's All Nippon Airways (ANA) yesterday said net profit jumped in the nine months to December thanks to falling fuel prices, a pick-up in the yen and cost-cutting measures. —AFP

JAPAN'S ANA PROFIT SOARS ON CHEAPER FUEL, STRONG YEN

TOKYO: Japan's All Nippon Airways (ANA) yesterday said net profit jumped in the nine months to December thanks to falling fuel prices, a pick-up in the yen and cost-cutting measures. The positive result marked a further recovery in the fortunes of the airline, which took a hit last year on worries over terror attacks in Europe and earthquakes at home.

ANA Holdings, the carrier's parent, posted a net profit of 86.6 billion yen (\$752 million), up 18 percent from 73.3 billion yen the year before, it said in a statement. Revenue, however, edged down 2.7 percent to 1.33 trillion yen. The firm's bottom line was supported by the fall in oil prices last year that was caused by a global supply glut and overproduction. Fuel is often an airline's single-biggest expense.

ANA also said it benefitted from strength in the Japanese yen over the prior year, which helped reduce costs. Jet fuel prices are denominated in dollars so a stronger Japanese currency would make them cheaper. However, the airline said it sees the policies of new US President Donald Trump as a risk factor, with many economists fearing his protectionist slant could hurt the global economy or even spark a trade war.

"We have to consider the effect on logistics and movements if trade frictions arise as in the past, Yuji Hirako, an executive vice president at ANA, said at a news conference, Bloomberg New reported. "The possibility of a slowdown in global growth is emerging," he said. "We need to spend time observing Trump's government and policies."

ANA said the number of international passengers jumped 11.5 percent for the nine months, while that for domestic passengers edged up 0.3 percent.

"ANA continues enjoying steady income from its international flights as it has been expanding global routes," said Hiroshi Hasegawa, an analyst at SMBC Nikko Securities in Tokyo. "Its effort to cut costs is also contributing to profit," Hasegawa told AFP before the results were released. ANA's statement cited "efforts to curb expenses through steady cost management", though it did not elaborate. — AFP

ARAMCO SELECTS US FIRMS TO AUDIT ITS RESERVES FOR IPO

KINGDOM PUSHES FOR SHARE-LISTING NEXT YEAR

DUBAI/KHOBAR: State oil giant Saudi Aramco has tasked two US industry leaders in oil reserves auditing to review the content of its deposits as it pushes ahead with a share listing next year, industry sources said on Thursday. Aramco, whose fields are estimated to contain 15 percent of the world's oil, has asked a unit of oil services firm Baker Hughes - Gaffney, Cline and Associates - to carry out the review, three sources familiar with the move told Reuters.

Two separate sources said Aramco had also asked Dallas-based DeGolyer and MacNaughton, one of the world's oldest names in reserves auditing, to perform some work.

Baker Hughes and Aramco declined to comment. DeGolyer did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The listing, expected to be the world's biggest initial public offering (IPO), is a centrepiece of a Saudi Arabian government plan to transform the kingdom by enticing investment and diversifying the economy away from a reliance on oil.

Aramco, once US-based and run by Americans, has long been a Saudi state corporation. It dwarfs all others in the industry by production and reserves, with crude reserves of 265 billion barrels. The plan to list Aramco, the kingdom's crown jewel, is being championed by Deputy Crown Prince

Mohammed bin Salman, who oversees energy and economic policy in the world's top oil-exporting nation.

He is leading a reform drive, called Vision 2030, to address falling oil revenue and fiscal deficits by boosting the private sector, ending government waste and diversifying the economy. Last year, Prince Mohammed said he expected the IPO would value Aramco at a minimum of \$2 trillion, but that he thought the figure might end up higher. Any valuation would account for oil price expectations and the size of Saudi Arabia's proven crude reserves.

Industry sources say the right to own the reserves is a sovereign issue retained by the Saudi government, while Aramco is most likely to keep its concession, meaning it would have direct access to those reserves with sole rights of exploration and production.

The main question is how much of the oil reserves would be reflected in Aramco's financial books after an independent audit as a result of the concession, the sources say. "Aramco is in talks with a company to audit its reserves and another one to audit its finances," another Saudi-based industry source said. "Whether (all) the oil reserves would be IPO-ed or not, that's still being discussed." The Wall Street Journal was first to report that Aramco had hired

Gaffney, Cline & Associates to assess its oil reserves, citing sources.

MILESTONES

Saudi officials and their advisers are aiming for two key milestones in 2017 as they push ahead with the flotation. Saudi-based industry sources say 2018 remains the planned date and up to 5 percent is the stake size being considered for the offer, though this could be raised depending on oil prices and market reaction to the listing. "There are two key milestones this year. Choosing banks for the IPO and choosing an exchange," said a senior industry source familiar with the IPO plans.

"Aramco is looking at all options - ranging from North America, Europe and Asia. In terms of deadlines, 2018 is still the plan to list the company." Aramco had said it was considering several options for the flotation, including a single domestic stock exchange listing and a dual listing with a foreign market. Officials from the oil firm plan "discovery trips" to foreign exchanges in the next few months and have invited banks to pitch for an advisory position in the IPO, the sources said. Morgan Stanley and HSBC are among the banks that have received a request for proposals. The invitation was to evaluate Aramco's business and help it with measures surrounding the share sale. —Reuters

LEBANON RE-LAUNCHES FIRST OIL AND GAS LICENSING ROUND

BEIRUT: Lebanon relaunched its first oil and gas exploration and production licensing round after a three-year delay, its energy minister said on Thursday, kick-starting the development of a hydrocarbon industry stalled by national political paralysis. Lebanon has opened five offshore blocks (1,4,8,9 and 10) for bidding in a first licensing round, Minister of Energy and Water Cesar Abou Khalil told a news conference. Lebanon, along with Cyprus, Israel and Egypt, sits on the Levant Basin in the eastern Mediterranean where new gas fields have been discovered since 2009.

In 2013, 46 companies qualified to take part in bidding for oil and gas tenders in Lebanon, 12 of them as operators, including Chevron, Total and Exxon Mobil. But political paralysis, which left Lebanon without a president for more than

two years, meant the licensing process was put on hold.

Abou Khalil said these companies will remain qualified to bid and a second pre-qualification round for any more companies interested in exploration and production contracts would run between Feb. 2 and March 31. The qualifying companies will be announced on April 13, he said.

Pre-qualified companies will submit their bids to the Lebanese Petroleum Administration on Sept. 15 where they will be considered for a month before being passed to the energy minister and then to the cabinet for final approval. Three of the five blocks opened for bidding border Israeli waters. Lebanon considers Israel an enemy state and has an unresolved maritime border dispute with it over a triangular area of sea around 860 sq km that extends along the edge of the three blocks. —Reuters



MIAMI: This file photo taken on June 8, 2015 shows American Airlines passenger planes on the tarmac at Miami International Airport in Miami, Florida. — AFP

AMERICAN AIRLINES MATCHES WALL STREET FORECAST FOR Q4

FORT WORTH, Texas: Fourth-quarter profit at American Airlines fell compared with a year earlier, when the world's biggest airline received a huge tax benefit, but the results met Wall Street expectations. American's report added more evidence to show that revenue trends are improving across the airline industry.

American's so-called unit revenue - the amount it takes in for every seat flown one mile - rose for the first time since late 2014. That's an indication that average fares, which fell through 2015 and 2016, are now turning around and are likely to rise this year. The Fort Worth-based company said Friday that fourth-quarter net income fell to \$289 million from \$3.28 billion a year ago, when American recorded a \$3 billion income tax-accounting benefit. Excluding a non-cash tax set-aside and certain expenses for fleet changes and costs related to a 2013 merger, American said it would have earned 92 cents per share. That matched the average forecast of nine analysts surveyed by Zacks Investment Research. Revenue rose 2 percent to \$9.79 billion, slightly higher than the analysts in the Zacks survey expected. Operating expenses rose faster - more than 5 percent - chiefly on higher labor costs. Airline unions have been negotiating pay raises as the carriers have posted a string of profitable years.

Shares of American Airlines Group Inc. rose \$1.09, or 2.2 percent, to \$50.68 in premarket trading about an hour before yesterday's opening bell. Through Thursday, the shares had gained 6 percent since the beginning of the year and 25 percent in the last 12 months. —AP

MAINLAND CHINESE FIRMS EXPAND PROPERTY FOOTPRINT IN HONG KONG

BUYING FRENZY COMES AS PROPERTY PRICES SCALE FRESH HIGHS

HONG KONG: Mainland Chinese companies have piled into Hong Kong property in 2015-2016, outbidding some of the territory's most powerful developers to gobble up 29 percent of land sold for development in one of the world's most expensive real estate markets, according to new industry figures. That is almost a six-fold increase from their purchases of just 5 percent of the land sold in public land auctions in the years 2013 and 2014, the data from real estate broker Midland Realty shows.

The buying frenzy comes at a time when home prices in Hong Kong have reached new record highs, bucking government cooling measures, and potentially fueling discontent in a city whose population is already under strain from high living costs and a widening wealth gap. Nearly 200,000 Hong Kong residents, half of them under the age of 35, have resorted to living in wire cages, half of a bunk bed, or partitioned apartments often smaller than car park spaces.

LAND GRAB

The purchases by the likes of HNA Group and China Overseas Land & Investment drove mainland institutional investment in real estate to \$6.6 billion last year, according to DTZ/Cushman & Wakefield, compared with just \$1.46 billion in 2015.

The land grab is set to drive sky-high apartment prices up even further, realtors said. Denis Ma, head of research at real estate services firm JLL in Hong Kong, said luxury apartments to be built on HNA Group's latest plot of land, purchased for \$713 million at the former airport site of Kai Tak, could fetch HK\$25,000 (\$3,200) per square foot, almost 40 percent higher than residential units sold recently in the area.

Hong Kong's average price per square foot for luxury property, at \$3,000 is ranked second most expensive in the world, trailing just after Monaco, according to Christie's International Real Estate. By comparison, London is the third most expensive at \$1,930 while New York is at \$1,860. "There is a high chance they (mainland companies) will reset the benchmark in areas like Kai Tak," Ma said of the district overlooking the city's iconic Victoria Harbour. Hong Kong will auction a site valued at as much as \$2.2 billion in the first quarter, the first sale of commercial land in the Central business district in more than 20 years, and it is widely expected to be snapped up by a mainland Chinese developer, market participants told Reuters.

FADING INFLUENCE

The dominance of Hong Kong's wealthy property tycoons is increasingly being challenged as many are unwilling to compete with spiralling prices. Some Hong Kong developers "said they would not bid for land at the moment, because the price has gone beyond what's reasonable. We share very similar views," Ronnie Chan, chairman of one of Hong Kong's biggest real estate companies, Hang Lung Properties, said at an earnings briefing this week. Thomas Wu, the managing director of another major Hong Kong real estate company, Hopewell Holdings, told an earnings conference this week his company would not actively participate in the Hong Kong property sector as prices had "deviated from the market".

The strong rise in overseas property investment and an increase in deals for other foreign assets has alarmed Chinese authorities and they have stepped up measures to stem capital outflows in the

face of a weakening currency. The crack-down by Beijing has delayed some deals, though many mainland companies already had offshore assets and financing, property advisers said. Hong Kong is the second most favored destination for Chinese outbound deals after the US.

Stanley Wong, executive director of capital markets at CBRE Hong Kong, told Reuters three transactions that his company was advising on, involving land parcels and office space, had been held up, pending capital from mainland China. The bidders were in the property, insurance and finance sectors, he said, adding that the deal size ranged from HK\$1 billion to HK\$3 billion (\$129 million to \$387 million).

"In the past when these large companies needed to take capital here, it would take State Administration of Foreign Exchange (SAFE) two to three weeks to approve," Wong said. "But now we still have not heard back from SAFE ... it's already been two to three months."

Chinese developers listed in Hong Kong, including China Vanke, Country Garden and CIFI told Reuters their overseas investment plans had not been affected by Beijing's clampdown, as they had sufficient access to offshore funds. "While the capital control measures definitely have a certain degree of impact on the market, the impact is only limited to new capital inflows," said Marcos Chan, head of research at CBRE Hong Kong, southern China and Taiwan.

Thomas Lam, senior director at property consultancy Knight Frank, said the arrival of any new players from mainland China would make it even harder for mid- and small-sized local property developers to acquire new land. "The rules of the game have changed," he said. — Reuters



BOCHUM: Heinrich Hiesinger, chairman of German industrial group ThyssenKrupp, is displayed on a giant screen as he speaks to shareholders during his company's annual general meeting yesterday in Bochum, western Germany. — AFP

BLACK S AFRICANS STILL EARN FAR LESS THAN WHITES: SURVEY

PRETORIA: Black South Africans earned on average only about one-fifth as much as their white counterparts in 2015, according to data published by Statistics South Africa yesterday. Annual household income for blacks stood at an average of 92,893 rand (about \$7,000) compared with 444,446 for whites, according to Statistics South Africa's Living Conditions Survey, conducted once every five years. The national average income was 138,168 rand. Total household income in South Africa was 2.3 trillion rand (\$172 billion).

Black Africans account for more than 80 percent of the 55 million population and whites a little over 8 percent. Statistician General Pali Lehohla said policymakers should take note of the numbers as they showed "what we are up against". "We see inequality between population groups but also within population groups," he said.

Africa's most industrialized country has struggled to reduce poverty and inequality since the end of white minority rule in 1994. The economy grew strongly in the first years after apartheid, but growth has tapered off in the past five years to below 3 percent.

This has pushed the country to the brink of credit downgrades that would cause borrowing costs to spiral. Unemployment is at 27 percent, the highest since 2003. Protests over the cost of university education and services such as water, roads and electricity have increased, as well as crime. — Reuters

FOREIGN WORKERS IN JAPAN HIT 1M FOR THE FIRST TIME

TOKYO: The number of foreign workers in Japan surpassed 1 million for the first time last year, as the labor-strapped country struggles to find enough Japanese workers. Slightly over a million foreigners from countries such as China and Vietnam were working in Japan as of last October, labor ministry data showed yesterday.

That was up nearly 20 percent from the previous year and a new record for the fourth straight year. The figures suggest Japan is increasingly turning to workers from overseas to plug its labor shortages despite its reluctance to accept foreigners.

Japan is facing its worst labor crunch since 1991 amid a shrinking and ageing population, which has prompted calls from the International Monetary Fund to accept foreign workers to boost eco-

nomics growth. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has said the country should put more Japanese women and the elderly to work first before accepting immigrants, but policymakers are exploring ways to bring in more foreign workers without calling it "immigration".

In December, the government expanded the scope of a system for accepting trainee workers from developing countries, while also creating a new visa status for nurses and domestic helpers. It also aims to court highly skilled foreigners such as academic researchers by easing the path to permanent residency. The labor shortage is especially severe in the construction sector, where demand has spiked ahead of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and for rebuilding following the 2011 earthquake and tsunami. Over 41,000 foreign-

ers powered the construction industry as of last October, up from around 29,000 the previous year. In November, there were over eight times as many job offers for putting together steel construction frames as there were workers, separate government data showed.

"We have on-site managers through our company, but the people who actually do the work, that's where we lack skilled labor," said a manager at a major Japanese construction company.

"That's where we have to find the people, and why we are trying to open gates to immigrants." Workers from China made up over 30 percent of the foreign labor force, rising 6.9 percent from the previous year.

Vietnamese workers were in second place, accounting for around 16 percent of the total foreign workers but

up over 50 percent compared to the previous year.

A Reuters investigation last year showed how asylum seekers, some of whom are banned from working, are working on public works projects amid a shortage of Japanese construction workers. The trainee system, whose aim is to train foreign workers so they can bring skills back to their home country, is often used by labor-strapped companies to secure workers.

The program has been long dogged by cases of labor abuse including illegal overtime and unpaid wages, prompting criticism from Human Rights Watch and the US State Department. Nearly 20 percent of foreign workers were trainees as of last October, labor ministry data showed, rising by over 25 percent from the previous year. — Reuters

JAPAN LOGS FIRST ANNUAL PRICE DECLINE IN 4 YEARS

HOUSEHOLD SPENDING, WAGES EDGE HIGHER

TOKYO: Japan yesterday logged its first annual consumer price decline in four years, underscoring the challenges facing Tokyo's fight to rid the world's number three economy of deflation.

Government data showed prices dropped 0.3 percent in 2016 from a year earlier, as weak household spending and meagre wage hikes keep a lid on inflation. In December alone, core consumer prices, which exclude volatile fresh food, declined 0.2 percent from a year ago—slightly better than expectations of a 0.3 percent fall. But it was still the 10th straight month of decline, and another blow to the government and Bank of Japan's efforts to pump up the economy.

However, on Wednesday, Japan posted its first annual trade surplus since the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster sent the country's energy import bills soaring. The upbeat trade figures also showed that exports rose in December

for the first time in more than a year, as demand picked up for Japan-made auto parts and semiconductors.

Japan reports December household spending and factory output figures next week. The country has been struggling to reverse a years-long deflationary spiral of falling prices and lacklustre economic growth.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe came to office in late 2012 and launched his so-called "Abenomics" growth plan—a mix of massive monetary easing, government spending and red-tape slashing—but growth remains fragile and inflation well below target. BoJ officials have blamed external factors, such as falling energy prices and uncertainty related to emerging economies, for their failure to achieve a promised two percent inflation level.

The central bank, which holds its first meeting of the year next week, now expects to hit two percent inflation by

March 2019 — four years later than planned. "Prices may start to turn positive as energy prices recover, but inflation is unlikely to rebound strongly for now," said Hideaki Kikuchi, an economist at Japan Research Institute.

"Consumer spending is weak and wage hikes have slowed." Falling prices discourage companies from making capital investments, while also slowing production. Deflation can also discourage spending by consumers, who might postpone purchases until prices drop further or save money, creating further pressure on businesses.

The BoJ had hoped that consumers would spend more if prices were rising, persuading firms to expand operations and getting the economy humming. But wage growth has fallen below expectations, meaning workers have less money to spend. Abe's promises to cut through red tape have also been slow in coming. —AFP



TOKYO: Toshiba Corp President Satoshi Tsunakawa(L) leaves after a press conference to announce the spinning off its microchip business at the company's headquarters in Tokyo yesterday. —AFP

TOSHIBA TO SPIN OFF FLASH MEMORY UNIT TO OFFSET US NUKE LOSS

TOKYO: Toshiba Corp says it will split its lucrative flash memory business to make up for losses from its troubled US nuclear business, and is looking for a third-party capital injection. The company said its board approved the plan Friday to sell an unspecified stake in its chip operation to make up for losses from its nuclear operations in the US.

Tokyo-based Toshiba is one of the major Japanese industrial conglomerates whose nuclear sectors have struggled since the 2011 Fukushima disaster. Last year it also said it could book an impairment loss of "several billion dollars" in its US nuclear business.

Last month, Toshiba said costs for completing Westinghouse Electric Co's purchase of the US company CB&I Stone & Webster, Inc. will "far surpass" original estimates. Tokyo-based Toshiba also is enmeshed in a scandal over disclosures that company officials doctored accounting books for years after setting unrealistic earnings targets.

The Kyodo News service quoted unnamed sources as saying Toshiba will sell less than a 20 percent stake in its highly profitable chip business to ensure its net worth remains positive. In March 2016, the company sold its medical unit to Japanese camera maker Canon Inc. for 665.5 billion yen (\$5.9 billion) on Thursday. It also has spun off its refrigerator and other "white goods" business, selling it to Chinese home appliance manufacturer Midea Group. —AP

NIGERIA SEIZES \$1.2BN OIL BLOC IN SHELL, ENI SCANDAL

JOHANNESBURG: Nigeria is seizing back one of Africa's richest oil blocs and will prosecute petroleum giants Shell and Eni in a \$1.2 billion corruption scandal that has drawn investigators from the United States, Italy, France, Switzerland and Holland, according to a Nigerian Federal High Court document.

The court on Thursday ceded control of Oil Prospecting License 245 to the government while the West African country's Economic and Financial Crimes Commission investigates and prosecutes suspects in the "Malabu Oil scam," according to a statement from the commission.

The commission's petition to the court says Dutch-British corporation Shell and Italian Agip - now Eni - bought the bloc in 2011 knowing the transaction was "fraught with fraud" and that the \$1.2 billion payment to former petroleum minister Dan Etete and his allies was a bribe. The state oil company got only \$210 million from the deal.

The government is preparing further charges of "conspiracy, bribery, official corruption and money-laundering"

against Shell and Eni, the petition says. Criminal charges already have been filed against both companies and several executives in an Italian court in Milan. "This is historic. Generations of Nigerians have been robbed of life-saving services while oil men have grown rich at their expense," said Simon Taylor of the anti-corruption body Global Witness. "Companies and their investors must understand they can no longer do backdoor deals with corrupt officials without paying a hefty price."

Eni has not received notification of the court order, spokesman Roberto Carlo Albini told The Associated Press. "Eni denies any wrongdoing," he said. Shell Nigeria spokesman Bamidele Olugbenga Odugbesan said he had no comment. The oil companies paid the \$1.2 billion into a Nigerian government escrow account at the London branch of JPMorgan Chase, and former justice minister Mohammed Bello Adoke authorized its distribution. The commission last month filed charges of fraud and money laundering against Etete, Adoke and businessman Aliyu Abubakar. — AP

BRITAIN WILL 'ABIDE BY EU RULES' ON TRADE DEALS: HAMMOND

BRUSSELS: Britain will continue to obey EU rules on negotiating trade deals as long as it remains a full-fledged member of the bloc, finance minister Philip Hammond said yesterday.

The comments were made just hours before British Prime Minister Theresa May is to sit down with US President Donald Trump to begin drawing up a free trade deal linking the countries after the UK leaves the European Union. May's visit to Washington has ruffled feathers in

Europe as it would be a violation of EU treaties for a member state to negotiate trade deals independently of the bloc.

"Britain remains a fully engaged member of the European Union," Hammond said in a response to a question on May's visit as he arrived for talks with EU finance ministers in Brussels. Britain, which voted to quit the EU in June, is expected to launch two years of fraught exit negotiations in late March but will remain a bloc

member until the divorce is done.

In the meantime, May's government is keen to start talks on a US-UK free trade agreement as soon as possible, seeing bilateral trade deals as the best hope of softening the blow of leaving Europe's single market of 500 million consumers.

May's government will "continue to abide by the rules and regulations and the laws of the European Union for so long as we are members," Hammond said. Britain was "very mindful of our

obligation under the treaty and we will follow them precisely," he said.

The EU's chief Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier on Wednesday said Britain was free to "discuss" its future trade relationship with the United States but remains bound by EU treaties as long as it is a member of the bloc.

The British government has already laid the groundwork for future free trade negotiations with India, Australia and New Zealand. —AFP

BRITAIN'S TESCO BUYS WHOLESALER BOOKER FOR £3.7 BN

LONDON: Britain's biggest retailer Tesco agreed yesterday to buy wholesaler Booker for £3.7 billion in a surprise play to become the nation's top food business, slash costs and take on German-owned discounters. The purchase, worth \$4.7 billion or 4.4 billion euros, sent Tesco shares soaring and was hailed by analysts as a "crucial" moment for the supermarket giant and the broader retail sector.

Tesco, which has been troubled in recent years by an accounting scandal and fierce domestic competition from German discounters Aldi and Lidl, added yesterday that it was seeking to "enhance" its growth prospects. "Tesco has made significant progress in turning around our UK retail business," said Chief Executive Dave Lewis. "This merger with Booker will further enhance Tesco's growth prospects by creating the UK's leading food business with combined expertise in retail, wholesale, supply chain and digital.

"Wherever food is prepared and eaten-in home or out of home-we will meet this opportunity with the widest choice and best service available." Booker is the country's biggest cash-and-carry operator and sells goods to more than 503,000 customers-including grocers, pubs and restaurants. It also owns convenience store chains Budgens, Londis and Premier, as well as trade-facing Makro and Booker Wholesale. Tesco expects annual pretax synergies of at least £200 million within three years of completion. It also aims to achieve £175 million of extra cost savings in areas like distribution and procurement.

The cash-and-shares transaction will hand Booker 16 percent of the new company. Booker investors will receive 0.861 new Tesco share and 42.6 pence in cash for every share they own. "Booker is committed to improving choice, prices and service for the independent retailers, caterers and small businesses that we are proud to serve," added Booker Chief Executive Charles Wilson. "We believe that joining forces with Tesco offers the potential to bring major benefits to end consumers, our customers, suppliers, colleagues and shareholders." The deal-worth 205.3 pence per share-represents a 12 percent premium on Booker's closing share price on Thursday. It is expected to complete in late 2017 or early 2018, subject to shareholder and regulatory approvals.

"What we are doing is bringing together two very complementary businesses which have a focus on food and a focus on customers," Dave Lewis told BBC radio. — AFP



LONDON: A general view of a Booker Wholesale warehouse in London yesterday. Tesco, Britain's biggest supermarket chain, has agreed to buy food wholesaler Booker Group for 3.7 billion pounds (\$4.7 billion), as it seeks to boost growth by supplying products to rivals such as convenience stores and independent retailers. — AP



BRUSSELS: UK Finance Minister Philip Hammond (left), Luxembourg's Finance Minister Pierre Gramegna (centre) and French Finance Minister Michel Sapin take part in an Economic and Financial (ECOFIN) Affairs Council meeting at the European Council in Brussels yesterday. —AFP

EUROZONE PLEADS URGENT SOLUTION TO GREECE CRISIS

'WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY' CLOSING

BRUSSELS: Eurozone finance ministers warned on Thursday that a "window of opportunity" was closing on bridging a split over Greece's bailout program, even as they failed to heal a row with the IMF over debt relief.

The International Monetary Fund and the 19-nation single currency area are battling over how much debt relief Greece needs, and over economic targets required of Athens that the IMF says are not realistic. "The window of opportunity is still open, but will soon shut because there are elections coming," said French Finance Minister Michel Sapin after unsuccessful talks on Greece with his eurozone counterparts.

In addition by the summer "Greece faces important debt repayments, so we have to find a solution before then," Sapin said, with bailout cash blocked until a solution is found.

Months of bickering have delayed progress of Greece's 86-billion-euro (\$92.4 billion) bailout programme agreed in 2015 and officials are increasingly worried that elections this year in the Netherlands, France and Germany

could further poison any progress. A eurozone official told AFP on condition of anonymity that progress in the talks remained haltingly slow, with a break in the impasse unlikely even in February. The IMF, headed by Christine Lagarde, refuses to lend further to Greece without significant changes to the austerity requirements demanded of the government or further guarantees from Athens.

'Not correct'

Eurogroup head Jeroen Dijsselbloem insisted that the IMF remained committed to the Greek bailout program, but that its demands were indeed strict. "The IMF has been very clear and consistent on its position. They want the reform package to be credible, they want the fiscal trajectory to be feasible and economically viable and they want the debt to be sustainable," said Dijsselbloem, who is also the Dutch finance minister.

Powerful Germany, Greece's biggest creditor, says that Athens is up to the task of meeting the targets without further debt relief and has called on the Greek government to deliver on reforms.

"It's up to the Greeks to solve the problem," said German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble, the Eurogroup's most influential member.

At heart of the problem is a demand by the eurozone that Greece deliver a primary balance, or surplus on public spending before debt repayments, of 3.5 percent of GDP.

The target is very high-and most countries do not even come close-but Germany and other eurozone hardliners are insistent that Greece reach it for several years after its current program concludes in 2018. The IMF believes that hitting the long-term target will require debt relief and has also demanded extra commitments by Athens in case it falls short.

Greek Finance Minister Euclid Tsakalotos slammed these new demands as undemocratic, and was backed in the criticism by France. "It is not correct to ask a country in a program to legislate, two or three years beforehand, what it will do in 2018," Tsakalotos said. Already huge, Greece's debt hit 311 billion euros in 2016 or around 180 percent of output, according to the latest EU data. — AFP

BOE TO SIT TIGHT AS BREXIT CROSS-WINDS BLOW: CARNEY

ECONOMISTS SEE NEW, HIGHER 2017 GROWTH FORECAST

LONDON: Mark Carney, who has spent much of his time in charge of the Bank of England trying to signal what the central bank is planning, will probably say next week that he doesn't know what its next move will be. Carney and his fellow policymakers are likely to stick to their neutral stance on whether to cut or raise interest rates in future, due to the scale of uncertainty about the impact of last year's referendum decision to leave the European Union.

Economically, Britain has so far coped much better than expected with the shock vote. It was probably the world's fastest-growing big advanced economy in 2016, confounding forecasts from the BoE and almost everyone else of a swift Brexit hit. Most economists in a Reuters poll published this week said the Bank will raise its economic growth forecast for 2017 for the second consecutive time on Feb. 2, when it is due to deliver its latest thinking on the economy.

HSBC economist Liz Martins expects the Bank to say the economy will grow by 1.7 percent this year, up from November's forecast of 1.4 percent and more than double the 0.8 percent it expected in August, when concerns about a Brexit slump were their

strongest. Combined with inflation that looks set to shoot above the Bank's 2 percent target soon and an 11-year low jobless rate, an upgrade like that would normally suggest the BoE ought to be turning its mind to raising its record-low interest rates. But top Bank officials have said they are bracing for a "slow-motion slowdown" as the Brexit vote eats into the value of sterling and the spending power of consumers.

Prime Minister Theresa May's speech earlier this month, signalling a potentially disruptive "hard Brexit" from the EU and its single market, may add to the cautious approach of Carney and his colleagues.

RATE HIKE OR RATE CUT?

Some economists say a creeping Brexit effect on the economy will prompt the BoE to cut rates over the next year. That is the opposite expectation to many investors who are pricing in a 50-50 chance of a rate hike by the end of 2017. "The market is desperate to get a hawkish signal," said Ross Walker, an economist with bank RBS. "But I think the Bank will be unwilling to move in either direction for the next six months or this year." Sitting on the

fence about whether to cut rates or raise them represents something of a novelty for the BoE since Carney took over as governor in 2013.

He sought to show investors that super-low rates would not rise for a long time. But his forward guidance policy struggled to cope with unexpected twists and turns of the economy.

On top of the uncertainty about Brexit, it is far from clear what the election of US President Donald Trump, and his calls to get a better deal for the United States in trade deals, means for the world economy. All of which suggests that the Bank next week will stick closely to the neutral stance it adopted in November.

Economists take it as a given that it will keep rates at 0.25 percent on Thursday and announce no new extension of its bond-buying program. "Expectations for next week's 'Super Thursday' are pretty low," analysts at Nomura said in a note to clients, referring to the combined announcement of the Bank's rate decision and publication of minutes of its meeting and its Inflation Report. "We may have to rename it 'Average Thursday' for a while." —Reuters



NEW YORK: In this file photo, electronic screens post prices of Alphabet stock at the Nasdaq MarketSite in New York. Alphabet Inc, the parent company of Google, reported earnings on Thursday. —AP

DOLLAR RECOUPS LOSSES, SHARES LOWER AS SWISS BANKS WEIGH

LONDON: The dollar regained more ground against a basket of currencies yesterday, while banks weighed on European shares following underwhelming results from Swiss major UBS.

The two-day recovery in the dollar follows its 4 percent drop in the three weeks from Jan 3 on doubts about how US President Donald Trump's policies will affect the currency, particularly after he hinted at concerns over its strength. The dollar index measuring its strength against a basket of six other major currencies rose 0.2 percent to 100.54.

Trump suggested overnight he would push ahead with a 20 percent border tax on Mexico, dragging down the peso and refocusing market expectations on his pro-business policies which, along with healthy corporate results, helped stocks on Wall Street scale new highs. Some US protectionism is seen as dollar-positive as it may bring capital back to the United States. Futures on the S&P 500 were pointing to a flat open following the previous session's rally that catapulted the Dow Jones Industrial Average above 20,000 for the first time.

"The (dollar) has experienced a powerful rebound re-establishing post-US election relationships between the performance of risk assets and US bond yields on the one hand and the (dollar) on the other hand," Morgan Stanley FX strategists led by Hans Redekker said in a note to clients.

Benchmark German bonds are headed for their weakest week since the aftermath of November's US election yesterday, as Trump's first seven days in office fuel expectations of inflation and growth-boosting policies in the world's biggest economy.

One market gauge of long-term inflation expectations in the euro zone—the five-year, five-year forward rate — climbed to its highest in over a year yesterday and is broadly in line with the ECB's target of near 2 percent. "Following the whirlwind first week of the Trump presidency, the pace of the impact on inflation is once again being revised," said Ryan McGrath, a bond strategist at Cantor Fitzgerald. Investor flows continue to point to a preference for so-called "reflation" trades, according to the latest weekly data from Bank of America-Merrill Lynch and fund tracker EPFR.

Funds investing in TIPS, which offer protection against rising inflation, high-yield bonds and Japanese equities, attracted inflows over the past week, the data showed. "But the re-positioning feels grudging and flows have yet to show big asset-allocation capitulation out of bonds into stocks," Bank of America-Merrill Lynch strategists said. European stocks were headed for a weekly gain of about 1 percent, though they were slightly lower yesterday as weakness in the banking shares weighed.

A fall in profits sent UBS shares down more than 3 percent as investors locked in some gains following a strong rally in financials stocks following the US election. The European banking index fell 1.2 percent. In the UK, the FTSE was also slightly lower but outperformed other regional benchmarks supported by merger activity as leading supermarket operator Tesco snapped a smaller wholesaler. Tesco shares surged 10 percent. In commodity markets, oil prices gave up earlier gains as rising crude output from the United States was seen offsetting efforts by OPEC and other producers to prop up the market by cutting supplies. — Reuters

THE FRENCH PONDER 'JOIE DE VIVRE' IN A WORK-FREE FUTURE

PARIS: What role will work play in our future lives populated with robots and driverless vehicles? As France prepares to elect a new president, it is wrangling with bigger issues than simple election manifestos. The catalyst for the soul-searching has been a proposal from leading Socialist party candidate Benoit Hamon to adopt a universal basic income—a state handout of around 750 euros (\$805) a month, made to everyone.

"I expect that the digital revolution is going to make work increasingly rare... and we need to prepare for that," Hamon says, underlining how advances in the welfare system have been criticized in the past. That the idea has taken hold in France, which has a minimum working week of 35 hours and a strong attachment to enjoying the pleasures of life, will likely not surprise cynics.

French satirical weekly Charlie Hebdo devoted its front page to the issue, writing "The work-shy have their candidate" alongside a cartoon depicting a man begging for money to vote for Hamon.

Yet basic income is gaining traction in other Western democracies too. Finland this month began a two-year experiment paying 2,000 unemployed workers a monthly stipend. Hamon's embrace, if he becomes the Socialist nominee this weekend, would provide another boost for a radical idea that has some high-profile business and economist supporters, as well as many critics.

It also points to what could develop into a fracture between politicians in

the rich world. The overwhelming majority continue to see a government's main role as helping to create and provide employment, viewing it not just as economically vital but of obvious social benefits.

Work and the workplace has served for centuries as a space for personal fulfilment and learning, socialising and the integration of outsiders such as immigrants. Donald Trump's successful campaign for the US presidency had one constant message: a pledge to blue-collar workers to bring back factory jobs to their communities.

"I'm for a society of work," ex-French prime minister Manuel Valls said in a debate Wednesday with Hamon, whom he hopes to defeat to clinch the Socialist nomination this weekend.

The message of universal income is one of "discouragement, of abdication," he said, adding that some jobs would be destroyed, but others would emerge.

A life of leisure?

But Hamon and others are convinced that robotisation and automation will make human toil seem old-fashioned, offering us greater leisure time. The 49-year-old also wants to encourage people to work fewer hours, below the 35-hour minimum week introduced by a Socialist government in 1998 with the logic of sharing around increasingly scarce jobs.

The short work week in reality most French workers work more than 35 hours—is still contested by French

employers for making France uncompetitive in the global workplace.

"The project that I propose is a long-term project," explains Hamon, who is tipped by polls to triumph against Valls. Hamon's prospects in the presidential election in April and May are viewed as dim by pollsters, however, but many analysts caution against making forecasts in a highly unpredictable race.

In his long-term vision, Hamon can count on the support of American business luminary Elon Musk, the head of electric vehicle group Tesla, and renowned left-leaning French economist Thomas Piketty. Musk admitted last November that "there's a pretty good chance we end up with a universal basic income due to automation. I'm not sure what else we can do".

Fertile ground

Prominent French sociologist Dominique Meda also backs the discussion about the role of work in comments that hint at why France could be fertile ground for the idea. "What's interesting in Hamon is that he's finally posing the difficult questions: what do we do if economic growth doesn't come back? Can we have jobs and good jobs with less growth?" she said.

The country is widely pessimistic about its economic prospects and has long grown accustomed to stubborn unemployment of around 10 percent, with youth unemployment more than double that. —AFP

Weekender

Kuwait Times

55
Anniversary

SATURDAY, JANUARY 28, 2017

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Filming begins
on first Marvel superhero
flick with black lead actor

SEE PAGE 22

Models present creations by Guo Pei during the 2017 spring/summer Haute Couture collection on January 25, 2017 in Paris. — AFP

'La La Land' director in 'shock' over Oscar nods

The director of hit romantic musical "La La Land" said yesterday he was jolted and honored when he learned that his film had earned a record 14 Oscar nominations. Damien Chazelle's whimsical tribute to Hollywood's Golden Age of musicals topped the Academy Award nominations list on Tuesday, tying an all-time record set by "All About Eve" and "Titanic". "It was a little bit of a shock and it was a huge honor," Chazelle told a press conference a day after the film's Japan premiere.

The movie scored nods for best picture, best director and acting nominations for its two stars, Ryan Gosling and Emma Stone. Its 10 other nominations came in nine categories. "Ryan and I were staying in the same hotel when we found the news, so we were able to celebrate together with champagne," Chazelle said. Gosling stressed the "collaborative" nature of the production. "If you're lucky



Canadian actor Ryan Gosling (left), US film director Damien Chazelle (right) and Japanese actress Ryoko Yonekura react during a photo session for the Japan premiere of the film "La La Land" in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP

enough to be recognized in this way for your film in most cases only a few people are singled out," the Canadian actor said.

"So to see so many our collaborators recognized just really made it that much more special." When asked if he had included any references to other films in the production that have gone unnoticed, Chazelle said he might have borrowed something from a Japanese yakuza movie from the 1960s. "I feel like I took a little from this Japanese movie 'Tokyo Drifter' by Seijun Suzuki and his whole kind of oeuvre of movies," Chazelle said. "His super wide frames and very pop-art colors—they feel like musicals to me, but with guns." "Maybe that's like a kind of hidden homage, at least not one that anyone in the US would get." Chazelle and Gosling also participated in a ritual ceremony and cracked open a wooden sake barrel, hoping for the movie's success in Japan. — AFP

Elton John to turn 'Devil Wears Prada' into musical

Pop superstar Elton John unveiled Thursday his return to Broadway with a musical adaptation of the blockbuster film and novel "The Devil Wears Prada." John will write the music for "The Devil Wears Prada," with lyrics to be penned by Paul Rudnick, a humorist who frequently writes for The New Yorker magazine. "Reimagining 'The Devil Wears Prada' for the musical theatre is super exciting," John said in a statement, which added that the production timeline will be announced later. "I'm a huge fan of both the book and the feature film, and a huge aficionado of the fashion world. I can't wait to sink my musical teeth into this hunk of popular culture," the English musician said.



This file photo shows Sir Elton John attending the 15th Annual Elton John AIDS Foundation An Enduring Vision Benefit at Cipriani Wall Street in New York City. — AFP

While Broadway is notoriously tough terrain even for famous names, John has a proven record of triumph with musicals. "The Lion King," his musical adaptation of the Disney animated film, set the record as the first show to gross \$1 billion on Broadway where it remains the third longest-running show in history. He also found success with a musical adaptation of Verdi's opera "Aida" as well as "Billy Elliot the Musical," which closed last year after a successful run on London's West End. Meryl Streep and Anne Hathaway starred in the 2006 film "The Devil Wears Prada" about an all-powerful fashion magazine editor who tyrannically imposes her will on an ambitious young editorial assistant.

A major international box-office success, "The Devil Wears Prada" was based on the popular novel of the same name by Lauren Weisberger. The author formerly worked for longtime Vogue editor-in-chief Anna Wintour, although she has never confirmed that Wintour was the inspiration. — AFP

Neil Young to induct Pearl Jam into Hall of Fame

Neil Young, nicknamed the Godfather of Grunge for his influence on the Seattle sound, will induct Pearl Jam into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, it announced yesterday. Pearl Jam is one of seven acts to be honored at the rock shrine's annual celebration, which will take place April 7 at the Barclays Center in New York. The artists are inducted with speeches by other top musicians—who sometimes join the honored acts in performances. Veteran folk rocker Young was introduced to a new generation of fans when he joined Pearl Jam at the MTV Video Music Awards in 1993 for an intense rendition of his "Rockin' in the Free World."

Pearl Jam later served as Young's back-up band for his album "Mirror Ball." Young will be returning a favor to Pearl Jam, whose frontman Eddie Vedder inducted the now 71-year-old Canadian into the Hall of Fame in 1995. Young has repeatedly led inductions at the Hall of Fame, previously turning out for The Everly Brothers, Woody Guthrie, Jimi Hendrix, Paul McCartney, The Pretenders and Tom Waits. But Young-known, like Pearl Jam, for his political



activism-boycotted in 1997 when he was to be inducted a second time as part of his former band Buffalo Springfield.

Young was upset that the ceremony would be broadcast on television, saying it reduced it to a "cheap awards show." The latest ceremony will be broadcast by HBO. Tickets go on sale on Monday. Young's contemporary Jackson Browne was announced to induct fellow folk singer

Joan Baez while members of Rush will introduce Yes, another classic progressive rock band. The Hall of Fame has not immediately announced who will honor this year's other entrants—slain rap legend Tupac Shakur, stadium rockers Journey and the symphonic Electric Light Orchestra. Nile Rodgers of Chic fame will receive a separate award for his contributions as a producer. — AFP

Filming begins on first Marvel superhero flick with black lead actor



Mike Connors

Marvel Studios announced on Thursday that filming had begun on its latest superhero epic which for the first time will feature a black actor, Chadwick Boseman, in the titular role. The news comes just after a record number of black actors were nominated for this year's Oscars and as Hollywood pushes for more diversity. Boseman will play the lead role in the hotly anticipated "Black Panther" alongside a star-studded cast including Michael B. Jordan, Oscar winner Lupita Nyong'o, Angela Bassett and Forest Whitaker.

The film follows the events after 2016's "Captain America: Civil War," in which Boseman appeared as Marvel's first African superhero, but not in the lead role. The movie was the year's biggest box office hit, amassing \$1.15 billion worldwide. In "Black Panther," T'Challa (Boseman) returns home to the isolated, technologically advanced African nation of Wakanda to take his place as its king, Marvel said in a statement. "However, when an old enemy reappears on the radar, T'Challa's mettle as King and Black Panther is tested when he is drawn into a conflict that puts the entire fate of Wakanda and the world at risk," it added. "Black Panther," which is being filmed in Atlanta and South Korea, is scheduled for release in February of next year. — AFP

Film Review

'Resident Evil: The Final Chapter'

Yes, the movie is called "Resident Evil: The Final Chapter," but don't let that get your hopes up. After all, "Resident Evil: Extinction" (2007) was hyped as "the third and final installment of the 'Resident Evil' trilogy," and that was three chapters ago. In fact, the last scene of this frenzied yet tedious post-apocalyptic farrago strongly suggests that the long-running, video game-inspired franchise could very easily continue. All that's missing is a climatic close-up of lead player Milla Jovovich dropping all pretense and winking at the audience, then laughing out loud.

Actually, that might have been a welcome sight for those of us who have been following the franchise since 2002, when the first "Resident Evil" movie introduced Jovovich as Alice, the most resilient of the commandos sent to the Hive, an underground laboratory of the mysterious Umbrella Corporation, after the experimental T-virus transformed several of the facility's researchers (and quite a few dogs) into flesh-eating zombies. A lot has happened to Alice since then—she has gained, lost and regained super powers, and witnessed the zombification of almost the entire human race—but very little of it has been cause for laughter, or even a wry smile.

Things continue to be grim in "The Final Chapter," which finds Alice alone amid the ruins of a devastated Washington, D.C. (evidently, that big battle foretold at the end of 2012's "Resident Evil: Retribution" didn't turn out so well) and surprisingly receptive to a summons from her long-time foe, the Red Queen, an artificial intelligence program that manifests itself as the hologram of a little girl with the voice of an autocratic schoolmarm. The Red Queen wants Alice to return to the Hive to obtain a vial of "airborne antivirus" to counteract the T-virus and, while she's in the neighborhood, lay the smackdown on Dr. Alexander Isaacs (Iain Glen), the evil Umbrella Corporation honcho who has figured out a way to benefit from wiping out most of humanity. Alice killed Dr. Isaacs a few movies ago but, evidently, he got better.

The bad doctor is not the only thing that has been recycled here by writer-director Paul W.S. Anderson, who's been involved with every film in the "Resident Evil" series and, not incidentally, is married to Milla Jovovich. In addition to repurposing situations, character types, and fight choreography from previous episodes, Anderson borrows freely from a host of other post-apocalyptic action-adventures—most notably, "Mad Max: Fury Road"—while charting Alice's progress as she and a ragtag team of like-minded heroes (including series semi-regular Ali Larter) battle zombie hordes and Umbrella Corporation minions that stand in the way of their mission.

A few individual scenes of hand-to-hand and foot-to-face combat are undeniably exciting, and Jovovich once again impresses with her kinetic athleticism. Overall, however, the repetitiveness and occasional incoherence of the nonstop action leave the audience exhausted for all the wrong reasons. And it doesn't help that the special effects—especially during the many, many fiery explosions—often appear at once expensive and unconvincing. Maybe it is time for everyone involved with the franchise to really, truly and absolutely call it a day. — Reuters

In 'The Salesman,' echoes of Arthur Miller in Tehran

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

Even as Iranian writer-director Asghar Farhadi layers his films with complexity - with characters whose intimacies are crowded by politics, society and the past - his command of narrative is utterly total. You get the impression he could direct his way out of any labyrinth, that his camera - cool and composed - could travel through a briar patch without so much as a scratch. His latest, the Oscar-nominated "The Salesman," may not quite reach the heights of his best ("About Elly," the Academy Award-winning "A Separation"). But nothing in it will dissuade you from the feeling that you're in the hands of one of the finest filmmakers on the planet: a neorealist Hitchcock whose thrillers, just as finely plotted, accrue a suspenseful force without a melodramatic score or pointed close-ups but through the accumulation of naturalistic detail.

Early in "The Salesman," a Tehran apartment building hurriedly evacuates when cracks caused by neighboring construction shoot up its walls and windows. It's an early sign of the fissures that will - as they often do in a Farhadi film - drive through the domestic lives of its characters: a young couple named Emad (Shahab Hosseini) and Rana (the tremendous Taraneh Alidoosti, who also starred in "About Elly"). Turned out from their apartment, a friend finds them a new one where one room is still filled with the possessions of the previous tenant, a young woman. Both Emad (a teacher) and Rana are starring in a production of Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman." Their neighbors, wary of the last occupant's carousing, are assured the new tenants are safer bets. "They're in culture," the friend says.

The play, bits of which we see performed, echoes through Farhadi's film in sometimes parallel, sometimes incongruous ways. Its classical drama is in stark contrast to the messier lives off stage. And its cultural connections can be strained. Rehearsing one scene, Rana wears a hijab when she's supposed to be naked, causing a co-star to break into laughter. But Miller's themes of masculine shame and humiliation course throughout "The Salesman." When Emad runs out one evening from their new apartment, Rana is assaulted while taking a shower after leaving the door ajar for her husband.

Previous tenant

The incident leaves her bloodied and too shaken to talk about it. And in Iranian society, her ability to be frank about the encounter is limited. Before fleeing, the assailant mistook her for the (never seen) previous tenant, "a woman with a lot of acquaintances." Fearful of having to describe the attack, which Farhadi shows only indirectly, she refuses to go to the police. A neighbor suggests she would have her own questions to answer if she did.

Farhadi (who has worked in theater, himself) is playing with



Canadian actor Ryan Gosling (left), US film director Damien Chazelle (right) and Japanese actress Ryoko Yonekura react during a photo session for the Japan premiere of the film "La La Land" in Tokyo yesterday. —AFP

the societal roles that confine his characters, boxing them into their own private tragedies. Emad, increasingly enraged, hunts down the attacker who in his haste to escape leaves his car behind. Eventually, "The Salesman" brings forth its own Willy Loman, a humble, elderly and guilt-ridden salesman played by an excellent Farid Sajjadi Hosseini. The steadily simmering drama leads to a chilling, protracted confrontation. As Farhadi's morality tale unwinds, though, our allegiances and sympathies bounce from one character to another.

Farhadi's previous film was the French-language "The Past," with Berenice Bejo as a Paris single-mother visited by an ex-husband. It proved his talent for mysterious, complex relationships wasn't limited to his homeland but could be conjured in any home. But "The Past" also, with its overcooked succession of reveals, showed his weakness for overly schematic plotting. That's a flaw in "The Salesman," too, with its sometimes forced refractions of Miller's play. But Farhadi remains a master not just of narrative but of empathy. He's a war correspondent constantly shifting perspective in clandestine battles. "The Salesman," an Amazon Studios/Cohen Media Group release, is rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association of America for "mature thematic elements and a brief bloody image." Running time: 125 minutes. Three and a half stars out of four. — AP

Right at home: Design meets downward dog in new yoga mats



A yoga mat resembling Italian tiles.
— AP photos



Photo shows a yoga mat the company made in 2009 that benefitted the New York Food Bank.



Photo shows their Horizon Combo Mat.



Photo shows their Tribeca Sand Combo.

While comfortable clothes and the right teacher are important, a cool mat can make yoga more enticing and enjoyable. Forget that plain, boring slab of rubber; yoga mats now come in a variety of designs. You can stretch on a faux sand beach or rippling lake, or do your cobra on a faux Persian carpet.

Here's a roundup of some of the most stylish mats (choosing a favorite may be harder than aligning your chakras): Yoga Design Lab's Horizon mat features a photo print of a sunset over gently lapping waves. The Tribeca Sand mat has a prismatic pattern in warm jewel hues. Scenic vistas are also brought to you by Yogamatic, where waterfalls, beaches and deserts are depicted in vibrant digital prints. One mat with a hypnotic image of swimming carp is by Los Angeles photographer Jennifer Cawley. Or her sepia-toned image of Edward, a teddy bear plopped on a comfy-looking bed, would help soothe a stressed-out stretcher. City dwellers might like the views of the Chicago or Manhattan skylines. A portion of sales of a mat printed with luscious orange slices goes to New York's Food Bank.

Designer Sophie Lenninger of Oakland, California, creates eye-catching mats, including one referencing Uzbek Suzani patterns in a palette of pink, green and aqua. Aztec motifs of rain clouds and cactus flowers enliven her El Nino mat. And she's got a range of mats for children too, in happy Hawaiian, Southwest and Provencal prints. Surfboard artist Drew Brophy has illustrated some kids' mats with hip '60s-style prints of suns, rainbows, turtles and

waves. Brooklynite Kyle deWoody, founder and creative director of gallery and art shop Grey Area, commissioned work from seven artists for a collection of yoga mats. Among them are Daniel Arsham's haunting tonal image of the moon in inky outer space, and Eric Cahan's sunset over East Hampton, which creates a meditative mood. Yoloha Yoga's cork mats, with simple, laser-engraved dream catcher and wildflower designs, can be personalized.

You can store your rolled-up mat in a neat bag, like the one from Brogamats that looks like a log. Or channel your inner "Hunger Games" character by toting your mat in a bag that looks like a leather quiver. Some pretty mat bags and yoga ball covers are made by the Thai and Nepali women artisans of Global Groove, a fair trade organization. There are ikat, peacock and geometric prints in low-key color palettes, all made of 100 percent cotton. — AP



A mural of a gutted body hanging upside down with blood seeping out, is painted on an apartment building in Brussels. — AFP photos

Blood and gore: Brussels asks how far street art can go

A struggling child with a blade to his neck awaiting slaughter. A gutted body hanging upside down as blood seeps out. In Brussels these days, it's called street art - and names far less flattering. "Hellish and awful," Nicole Brisard grumbled as she walked her dog, Max, past the bleeding corpse rendered in paint on seven stories of a low-rent apartment building. "And all we wish for is to have something better, out of respect for the people." The two murals that appeared last weekend have made their anonymous artist the talk of the European capital, posing a familiar question about art expressly created to provoke: how far can it go before the outrage becomes unacceptable?

Both the wall painting eliciting Brisard's ire and the companion mural across town of a child facing death are oversized adaptations of details from well-known 17th century art works, "The Corpses of the De Witt Brothers" by Dutch master Jan de Baen and Caravaggio's "Sacrifice of Isaac." The originals, respectively based on a historical, political murder and the Old Testament, are held by Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum and the equally hallowed Uffizi in Florence. Some parents in the grimy, gentrifying neighborhood where the basketball court-sized mural of Isaac howling in fear is located have complained that children are having trouble sleeping because of the terrifying sight outside their windows.

"Lots of parents would not like that," Brussels alderwoman Ans Persoons said. It is almost as shocking to think they were painted on a few bitterly cold nights in Brussels while dangling down a rope and staying out of sight of authorities. The mural depicting a lynched De Witt brother can be seen far and wide, including by hundreds of thousands of commuters on Belgium's busiest stretch of railway. Many art insiders suspect the painter behind the murals is the same one who created huge frescoes of human genitalia a few months ago.

Creative and artistic

The public outcry that greeted those in-your-face anatomical parts may have inspired the artist to try again with a historic twist, said Bjorn Van Poucke, curator of the Crystal Ship, a major European street art festival on the Belgian coast. "The artist is trying to give the public an answer to all of these people talking in the press," about the genital murals, Van Poucke said. "So he actu-

ally says with these last two works that if you still think these are shocking, please be aware that it is inspired by two historical paintings over 400 years old."

Despite the murals' many critics, they also have attracted attention due to the mystery of the artist's identity. Van Poucke said remaining anonymous is probably wise. What is art for some is trespassing and abusing and damaging property for others, infractions that could carry fines and other costs of up to 25,000 euros



A mural of a struggling child with a knife to his neck is painted on the wall of an house in Brussels.

(\$25,000.) So even if they are strictly illegal, the murals do give the city a certain amount of the street cred it craves. Brussels wants to be "this creative, artistic, urban city that people want to come and visit of course," Persoons said. But the complaints keep pouring in. "Some people say, 'Yeah, it really has to stay,' but then you ask them 'What would you think if you had the same violent image in front of the school of your children or in front of the bedroom of your children?' and they say 'Ooh, I would not like it,'" she said. "And that makes it interesting art." Caught between the love of art and the concerns of citizens, Persoons favors keeping them on show. "For now on we are going to let it be," she said. Brisard took another look at De Witt and disagreed. "The mentality of madmen," she scoffed before walking off with Max. — AP

Chinese Lunar New Year

feast begins with drums and dumplings



A waiter serves up dumplings on the eve of Chinese New Year during a '1,000 people dumpling feast' in Liuminying village on the outskirts of Beijing yesterday. — AP photos

Four men in traditional yellow costumes bang large drums to announce the start of the New Year's Eve banquet in Liuminying village. Inside the meeting hall, 100 tables are set with a dozen plates, bearing sausages, nuts and fruit. Sitting in a storage shed outside are thousands of half-moon shaped dumplings, made by hand the day before, ready to be boiled and served. Villages and cities across China are preparing this weekend to celebrate Lunar New Year, though few feasts are as elaborate as the one in Liuminying, a hamlet in Beijing's suburbs. Festivities in recent years have been more muted as China's economy has slowed down - hitting its lowest level of growth in three decades

last year - and its top political leadership has issued calls for austerity.

But in Liuminying, what began as a small lunch sponsored by the local Communist Party branch in 1980 has grown into a feast that served 1,000 people this year during a three-hour spectacle with singing and dancing. The show began at 10 am with loud music and applause. A group of children waved pompoms in a synchronized dance, followed by a raffle, the presentation of a large banner commemorating the New Year, and several other songs and speeches. As the performances grew longer, the attendees started to peel oranges and crack open nuts. A few people smoked cigarettes at their tables, a sight not often seen in

Beijing restaurants since the city enacted an indoor smoking ban two years ago. Outside, dozens of workers were preparing meat and vegetable stews in huge grills. One worker pushed coal underneath several of the grills, causing large flames to come bursting out. A few hours after the doors opened, the first dishes were brought inside. The plastic wrap came off many of the plates on the table. Diners uncorked wine bottles and, at a few tables, opened red boxes placed at the center. Inside were clear bottles of the Chinese grain liquor called baijiu, passed around for a series of toasts. After several dishes came the signature item: the dumplings, or jiaozi, which people across northern China consider a mandatory

part of celebrating the New Year. The feast ended with diners stacking their plates and bowls in a clatter that steadily grew louder as more people began to leave. They walked outside to the loud, echoing sounds of booms from fireworks, another Lunar New Year tradition. While authorities in Beijing have cracked down on the sales of fireworks, Liuminying is far enough outside for vendors to be more easily found. The sky was clear blue, offering a rare respite from the smog that blankets northern China in winter. Guo Lianhong, 55, attended her first lunch in 1984 and described the "earth-shaking changes" she's seen in her village in the last three decades. "We hope Liuminying can become even more prosperous," she said. — AP



A woman shows the photo she took of a man holding dumplings during a community gathering ahead of the Chinese lunar new year at a village on the outskirts of Beijing.



A child watches as adults make dumplings ahead of the Chinese lunar new year.



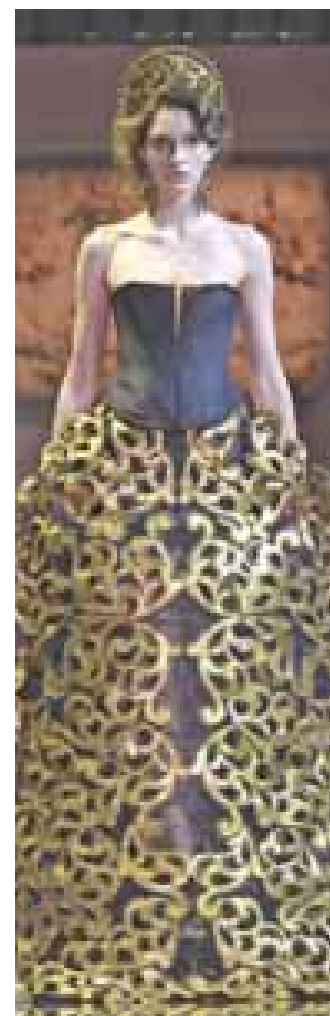
Villagers gather to make dumplings ahead of the lunar Chinese new year at a village on the outskirts of Beijing, China.



Villagers gather to make dumplings ahead of the Chinese lunar new year.



Haute Couture **SPRING-SUMMER 2017** fashion collection



Models present creations by Guo Pei during the 2017 spring/summer Haute Couture collection in Paris.

Designer joins Paris fashion elite a year after getting the sack

It was the fairytale ending to a fortnight of Paris fashion shows. A year ago Danish designer Christine Hyun Mi Nielsen was fired from her high-pressure job as the director of the studio of one of the world's top brands. Fourteen months on she has her own label-Hyun Mi Nielsen-with a show on the haute couture catwalk Thursday, the very pinnacle of the fashion tree. The creator, who was born in Korea and adopted by a Danish couple, said her first solo Paris collection wasn't just about climbing the career ladder, it was also deeply "personal".



Models present creations by Hyun Mi Nielsen during the 2017 spring/summer Haute Couture collection in Paris. — AFP photos

had been frilly tulle. The contrasts of hard and soft, darkness and light, frivolous and serious clearly a metaphor of what Nielsen has been through. One model even had a thunderously blacked-up face. Nielsen was helped to set up on her own in Paris by a "subtle and sophisticated" female investor, she said, but did not name her.

Haute couture is a purely Parisian institution limited to 15 labels, and the designer said she was thrilled to have been invited as a guest member into its elite ranks. All clothes have to be made to measure by hand, meaning couture can usually only be afforded by the richest women. "My love of fashion is not just the (visual) image but also the technique and the craft," Nielsen said. "So it's especially exciting for me to start my own company in France-this is the home of (fashion) savoir faire (know-how)." The Dane began her rise at Max Mara in Italy before returning to London, where she studied at the Royal College of Art, to join Burberry before she moved on to McQueen, whose edgy poetry she has clearly inherited. The Dutch-Vietnamese designer Xuan-Thu Nguyen also made her Paris couture debut Thursday as nearly two weeks of menswear and couture shows drew to a close.

Her Xuan label, which she founded 12 years ago, is best known for its "surprise and fragility" and her spring summer collection had avalanches of frills on otherwise plain and pure pale pastel mousseline and tulle outfits. — AFP

"It was a way to find myself after I was dismissed from my job," she told AFP. "For someone like me who puts so much effort into my work which I love so much, it was so painful. 'This is about finding my own voice to get over the grief,' said the 40-year-old, who had led the Givenchy studio and Alexander McQueen womenswear before being sacked from Balenciaga last October after the arrival of Vetements wunderkind Demna Gvasalia.

Punk princesses

All her models wore army-surplus boots-punk princesses off to a ball-with the collection kicked off by a spectacular figure-hugging white dress with intricate frills of organza on tulle. She also put a ruff of starched frills on an eye-catching three-piece leather biker outfit-and cut a long back leather dress as if





In this photo, Hotel Edoya Executive Director Yuta Tomura arranges a futon at the hotel in Tokyo. — AP photos



Hotel Edoya Executive Director Yuta Tomura cleans a bathroom at the hotel in Tokyo.

A TOURIST IN TOKYO Q&A: TOILETS, MENUS AND NAKED BATHING

Tourism to Japan is booming, with 1 million Americans among the country's more than 20 million annual visitors. But language barriers and cultural differences may seem intimidating to some travelers. Here are answers to questions you might have if you're contemplating a trip to the capital city, Tokyo.

Q: Is it true that addresses don't really exist? How will I find anything?

A: There are addresses, but the Japanese system is different. Most streets have no names and buildings are not numbered in order. Use a map or an app. That's what the natives do. Bilingual neighborhood maps are usually posted outside train stations in tourist areas. Carry a bilingual map so you can point to where you're heading if you need to ask a local for directions. Two tricks will help you pronounce Japanese destination names: Put equal emphasis on every syllable, and always pronounce the E at the end of words as a separate syllable (so "Kobe" is "ko-bay").

Q: I can't read Japanese. How will I figure out the trains?

A: Trains and stations have signs in English. Most trains also have bilingual recordings and electronic signage announcing the stations.



This Dec 11, 2016 photo shows a menu with photographs of dishes served outside a restaurant in Tokyo, Japan.

Stops are also numbered, which helps both with figuring out distance and with names that seem like a jumble of random syllables.

The bigger problem is that the system is so elaborate, a mere human can't always figure out the best route. No map can include all lines. Again, use an app. English options include the Tokyo Metro app and a version of the Japanese app Navitime. Avoid trains at rush hour if possible.

Q: Bathrooms are really different, right? Spraying water, heated seats! What do I need to know?

A: Most high-tech Japanese toilets are easy to use. Flush is sometimes labeled in English. Just don't touch the other buttons. And don't be freaked out when a fancy one opens the lid automatically for you. But be prepared for traditional squat toilets. Some public toilets have both squat and Western-style toilets, often with doors labeled for each type. If there's a line, it's fine to wait for the Western style to be available. Another small wrinkle: Toilets nearly always give an option for a big or little flush. If you want to be environmentally correct, learn the characters for those terms because they're rarely labeled in English. Not a bad idea to learn the character for "flush" also, just in case.



Photo shows a bilingual neighborhood map on the street in Yanaka, Tokyo, Japan.



People walk around at Tokyo Station in Tokyo.



People walk around at Tokyo Station in Tokyo.



Hotel Edoya Executive Director Yuta Tomura cleans a bathroom at the hotel in Tokyo.



Special instructions on how to operate the toilet are shown on the wall at a public toilet in Tokyo Station in Tokyo.

Q: I'm scared of eating strange things. How will I order food?

A: Some restaurants have photo menus posted outside, and there may also be plastic food samples, so you can usually point to what you want. English menus are not unheard of, but don't expect them. And if a server doesn't come to take your order, you're not being ignored. It's typical to call one over (usually by saying "sumimasen" - basically "excuse me"). There's no tipping and usually you pay at the register on the way out.

Other options include convenience stores, where food is much better than in similar U.S. stores, from wrapped sandwiches and bento to snacks and dessert. Most Japanese department stores also have food on lower levels that you can point at and take away. For unadventurous eaters, there's always tempura and ramen. But Tokyo is also a world-class food city. In some neighborhoods it's harder to find traditional Japanese food than Italian or French. There are exquisite Western baked goods in many neighborhoods along with a version of white bread that is like your childhood supermarket loaf died and went to heaven. You'll also find Western fast food chains, although don't be surprised to find local specialties on the menu.

Q: Do I have to drink tea? I really need my coffee.

A: The Japanese are serious about coffee. You will find Starbucks, local chains and many independent shops.

Q: What do I need to know about money?

A: Japan is still very much a cash socie-

ty, partly because it's so safe that no one worries about carrying a lot of cash. Department stores, large chains like Uniqlo and hotels take credit cards, but you'll pay cash at most other places.

Q: I'm intrigued by onsens. But do I have to be naked with strangers?

A: Yes, in both onsen (natural hot-spring baths, usually at resort hotels) and sento (public baths in cities). But bathing is gender-segregated. When everyone else is doing it, it quickly seems natural. To avoid calling attention to yourself, follow the customs. Most critically, wash yourself thoroughly BEFORE getting into the bath, which is only for soaking. Also know that baths traditionally prohibit people with tattoos, which are associated with organized

crime, though this is starting to change.

Q: Will I have to sleep on the floor? Or in a drawer?

A: Not unless you want to. There are innumerable Western-style hotels in Japan. But there's nothing quite like waking up on a futon to the smell of tatami mats, so why not try it? As for the famous beds in drawers, capsule hotels are mostly for short-term business travelers, not vacationers.

Q: Do I have to take my shoes off?

A: Historic houses, fancy traditional restaurants, temples and traditional inns may require visitors to remove shoes. If you're wearing sandals, bare feet may not be allowed, so pack socks.



Special instructions on how to operate the toilet are shown on the wall at a public toilet in Tokyo Station in Tokyo.



Rolls of electrical tape used to create custom bikini, which offer crisp tan lines, sit at the Erika Bronze rooftop salon in the suburb of Realengo in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. — AP photos

Electrical tape-bikinis and sun for perfect tan lines in Rio

Electrical tape on private parts. Really? Welcome to the latest fashion fad in beauty-obsessed Rio de Janeiro, where some women are sun-baking in bikinis made of black tape in search of tan lines so perfect that they practically jump off the skin. "Here's where you get the white tan lines that make all the women jealous," said Alexandra da Silva Prazeres, tanning with about 20 other women at Erika Bronze salon, one of several using the technique in Rio. It works like this. First, a piece of gauze is placed over a woman's private parts. Next go the strips of electrical tape to mimic a bikini. Then small pieces of wet paper towels are placed over parts of the tape. Using sticky tape instead of a cloth bikini ensures crisp lines that stay just so.

Holding black electrical tape and scissors, beauty salon owner Erika Martins instructed a woman to stay still while she carefully placed tape between her buttocks where the bikini would have gone. After a few more strips, the young woman was ready to bake, Rio style. While pulling it off would normally hurt, temperatures close to 100 degrees Fahrenheit (40 Celsius) ensure plenty of sweat and a smooth removal. "You must have a lot of determination because it's tough," said 36-year-old sunbather Miriam Rodrigues of the heat. "But we can handle it."

Exposed skin

Martins said she decided to start the salon after years of experimenting with the technique on herself and friends. She said in working-class neighborhoods women often use similar techniques, as they are far from the beaches. Today, Martins' rooftop fits 30 women and is at full capacity seven days a week, as long as the sun is out. Her Facebook page has 68,000 followers. Clients must book and pay about \$20 in advance to guarantee a spot on one of her terrace lounges.

"My skin doesn't tan easily," said Hellen Marinho, who is of African descent. "I saw her doing a dark skinned girl and I liked it and decided to try." Sunscreen is applied to the exposed skin, followed by a special tanning lotion sold at the salon. Tanners who don't want sunblock or want to stay out longer than recommended must sign a disclaimer absolving the salon of liability. Depending on the sun's intensity and the customer's skin color, Martins has them lay belly up for around an hour, and then belly down for the same amount of time.

Dermatologists are more horrified than impressed with the technique, which they say can increase the chance of getting skin cancers, including melanoma. They say that applying sunblock before tanning lotion is useless. It is "like trying to put out a fire by throwing water on it while at the same time adding fuel," said Dr Egon Daxbacher, president of the Brazilian Dermatologist Society of Rio de Janeiro. Despite being sprinkled with water, some tanners feel dizzy or even faint after a rooftop session. Still, when it's over, women peel off their tape bikinis and marvel. "We look sexier, it boosts our ego, and it looks prettier," said 22-year-old Milena Carvalho. "It's the Brazilian woman's trademark." — AP

GOOGLE'S PIXEL PHONE SHINES DESPITE MISGAUGING DEMAND

PIXEL HAS BEEN A HOT ITEM SINCE ITS OCTOBER DEBUT

SAN FRANCISCO: The Pixel phone, Google's answer to Apple's iPhone and Samsung's Galaxy, is off to a promising start - but might have done even better had Google managed consumer demand as smartly as the device's sleek design. Although Google hasn't released sales figures, industry researchers say the Pixel has been a hot item since its October debut was greeted with mostly glowing reviews and the biggest marketing blitz in Google's 18-year history. But there were missed opportunities.

Google didn't have enough Pixels available to meet demand. Rather than wait several weeks, many consumers interested in the Pixel probably bought an iPhone, Galaxy or another phone instead. And these people aren't likely to need a phone replacement for another year or two. Google also struck a deal to sell it through just one wireless carrier, Verizon. Although Google's online store sold Pixels compatible with other wireless networks, most people don't shop for phones that way. Of course, it's a moot point if there weren't enough Pixels to sell, but Google likely would have produced more if it had distribution deals with other carriers.

It's not surprising that Google misjudged the market, given that this is the search company's first stab at making its own phone. Previously, it partnered with various manufacturers on a Nexus line of phones to showcase its Android operating system, but that effort barely made a dent. "This was probably a really good learning



SAN FRANCISCO: In this Tuesday, Oct 4, 2016, file photo, the new Google Pixel phone is displayed following a product event. — AP

experience for them," says Neil Doshi, an analyst with Mizhuo Securities USA.

Sticking with Google

The Pixel's success is important to Google because it wants to ensure there's a stylish Android phone to compete with the iPhone and drive more affluent consumers to its search engine, maps, YouTube videos and other services. Samsung's Galaxy and other phones also run on Android, but those devices have been de-emphasizing Google's services. Google, which is based in Mountain View,

California, can afford to make some mistakes as it tries to establish the Pixel because its internet search and advertising network brings in so much revenue.

Alphabet, Google's corporate parent, provided another reminder of its financial might with Thursday's release of its fourth-quarter earnings. The company earned \$5.3 billion on revenue of \$26 billion during the final three months of last year. Even after subtracting commissions paid to Google's ad partners, Alphabet's revenue totaled \$21 billion - a 23 percent increase from a year earlier. The company's profit rose 8 percent from the prior year. Although Pixel sales weren't disclosed, the numbers provided a clue on how the phone did. Google's "other revenue" segment, which covers all sales outside of advertising, generated \$3.4 billion in the fourth quarter, a 62 percent increase from the same time last year.

Some of those gains came from sales of Google's new internet-connected speaker, Home, and its business software services, but Doshi believes most of the increase was generated by the Pixel. He estimates Google sold 1 million to 1.5 million Pixels during the fourth quarter. That's still just a sliver of the estimated 77 million that Apple sold during the same period (Apple is scheduled to release its numbers Tuesday). Pixel sales are also well below the roughly 15 million Galaxy S7 that Samsung sold during that device's first quarter on the market.

Still, analysts say the Pixel did exceptionally well for a new phone with little brand recognition. "Without question, Google has a hit on its hands and is building a platform for success," says Jeff Moore, principal of Wave7 Research. Wave7 estimates that Pixel accounted for 12 percent of activations in December compared with 51 percent for iPhones and 26 percent for Samsung devices. Localytics, which tracks app activity on nearly 2 billion smartphones, also reported Pixel activations have steadily increased since sales began, especially around the Thanksgiving weekend and the holidays. "It looks like it has the potential to be a strong competitor to the likes of Apple and Samsung," says Josh Todd, Localytics' chief marketing officer.

ROGUE TWEETERS COULD BE PROSECUTED AS HACKERS

WASHINGTON: Who are the federal government's rogue tweeters, using official agency social media accounts to poke President Donald Trump? Are these acts of civil disobedience, or federal crimes? The online campaign began with unauthorized tweets - on subjects such as climate change inconsistent with Trump's campaign statements and policies - that have been mostly deleted from official agency accounts.

It shifted tactics Thursday as at least 40 new but unofficial "alternative" accounts for federal agencies began spreading across Twitter. It wasn't clear how many unofficial accounts were run by government employees, but there were early indications that at least some were created by federal workers using their work email addresses - and that may have exposed their identities.

The administration said the earlier Twitter actions involved tweets by unauthorized users - at least one was a former employee - who still had passwords for the agency accounts, including one case involving the account for the Redwoods National Park in California. Legal experts said the Justice Department could prosecute such tweeters under federal hacking laws, but the FBI so far was not involved.

"An unauthorized user had an old password in the San Francisco office, went in and started retweeting inappropriate things that were in violation of their policy," White House spokesman Sean Spicer said. Separately, the National Park Service said tweets published earlier this week on the account of the Badlands National Park in South Dakota were posted by a former employee not authorized to use the account.

Employees or former employees publishing unauthorized messages on official accounts could be prosecuted under the U.S. Computer Fraud and Abuse Act, which prohibits someone from exceeding authorized access to computers. "The argument would be that the authorization to use the account was only for employees and implicitly that was extinguished when the employee left government employment," said Orin Kerr, a law professor at George Washington University.

Legal jeopardy

Even employees authorized to use official agency Twitter accounts could face legal jeopardy posting messages they weren't supposed to write, said Stewart Baker, a cybersecurity lawyer and former National Security Agency and Department of Homeland Security official. "If someone says you may not tweet except in these circumstances, and you tweet in other circumstances, you're exceeding authority," Baker said. He added that some federal courts would examine the security measures in place and could throw out cases where employees weren't clearly violating them.

"It wouldn't surprise me if at this stage a criminal investigation was opened and criminal tools were used to investigate this, even if at the end of the day they decided not to pursue criminal charges," Baker said. A federal law enforcement official, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to discuss the matter by name, said he was unaware of any requests from federal agencies to investigate the rogue tweets.

The unauthorized messages posted under official accounts appeared to be dropping off, as the Trump administration regained control over its agency accounts. Over last weekend, immediately after Trump's inauguration, transition staff changed all social media passwords for the Environmental Protection Agency, said Jared Blumenfeld, a former EPA official under the Obama administration who said he was speaking regularly with former colleagues. Starting Wednesday, scores of unofficial Twitter accounts appeared purporting to represent federal agencies, mocking Trump using the same social media service the president uses daily. At least some were linked to federal employees using work email addresses who inadvertently revealed their involvement.

Twitter users can choose to allow others on the service to find them by searching for their email address. In other cases, Twitter notified users who previously shared their online address books using Twitter's "Find Friends" feature that anonymous accounts were created by federal employees whose work email addresses were already in those address books. — AP

MICROSOFT SURPASSES QUARTER FORECASTS

NEW YORK: Microsoft Corp reported yet another quarter of stronger-than-expected results on Thursday, thanks to its focus on online services and business software rather than its legacy Windows operating system. Microsoft says it earned \$5.2 billion, or 66 cents per share, in the final three months of the year, up from \$5.02 billion a year earlier.

Earnings, adjusted for non-recurring costs, came to 84 cents per share. The average estimate of 16 analysts surveyed by Zacks Investment Research was for 79 cents per share. The software maker posted revenue of \$24.1 billion

in the period. Adjusted revenue was \$26.1 billion, also topping Wall Street forecasts. Nine analysts surveyed by Zacks expected \$25.2 billion.

As sales of Windows PCs decline, CEO Satya Nadella has been pouring money and resources into remote data centers that deliver the company's services online to smartphones, tablets and other devices. Businesses and government agencies are increasingly turning to such "cloud computing" services, which again helped boost Microsoft's revenue, just as it did in the previous quarter. — AP



NEW YORK: In this Nov 10, 2016, photo, people walk near a Microsoft office. — AP

ROLLING ROBOTS COULD BE MAKING DELIVERIES

RICHMOND: Robots about the size of a beer cooler could soon be rolling down Virginia sidewalks to deliver sandwiches, groceries or packages. Supporters say proposed legislation to allow the robots would make the state the first in the nation to regulate such devices.

State lawmakers partnered with European company Starship Technologies on bills allowing Virginia cities to join two others in the US and many across Europe where the company is testing its largely autonomous earth-bound robots. Much like other tech companies' attempts at airborne drone deliveries, Starship aims to revolutionize the way people get their parcels.

Representatives from the company visited Richmond on Wednesday for a demonstration. With six wheels, a top that swings open and a flag for visibility, Starship's compact "personal delivery devices" are designed to carry goods within a 2- to 3-mile radius. They can hold up to 22 pounds, or about three shopping bags' worth of goods. Recipients can unlock them with a smartphone app. "When I first saw it, I thought, 'Oh, a cooler on wheels,'" said Del. Ron Villanueva, who's sponsoring the House bill.

But the Republican became more interested after hearing about the robot's uses. He says it could benefit consumers, who are relying more and more on e-commerce, as well as logistics management companies. Starship, led by Skype co-founders, also promotes the devices as a more environmentally friendly way to deal with local deliveries. "Big vans - stopping and starting, polluting. It's so inefficient, and our little robots are best optimized for those sort of deliveries," said Starship spokesman Henry Harris-Burland. The company says the robots could also get groceries to homebound people at a fraction of the cost of current delivery services and help expand access to healthy groceries.

Classifying robots

Although pilot programs are underway in Washington, DC, and Redwood City, California, Villanueva and company representatives say Virginia would be first with a state law governing such robots. David Catania, a lobbyist representing the company, said the current law has gray areas about whether the robots would be classified as a motor vehicle, and Starship "wanted to make sure there's no doubt about its legality."

If the legislation passes, Starship would start a pilot program in Virginia, Harris-Burland said. He declined to say which city or cities the company has in mind. The bills, one of which was approved by a Senate committee Wednesday, would allow the robots to operate on any sidewalk or shared-use path unless a local government prohibits them. They couldn't carry hazardous materials and would face speed limits.

The company hopes theft-prevention measures can help its devices avoid a fate like that of HitchBOT, a hitchhiking robot that captured worldwide attention two years ago but met an untimely demise in Philadelphia when vandals damaged it beyond repair. Starship's devices are equipped with cameras and two-way audio so operators can talk to nearby people, and they would have their lids locked during deliveries, Harris-Burland said. If someone picked one up, a car-alarm type noise would start blaring. — AP



RICHMOND: The Starship Technologies delivery robot goes through its paces during a demonstration at the Capitol. — AP

FACEBOOK TARGETS FAKE NEWS WITH NEW 'TRENDING' FORMULA

INTENDED TO MAKE FB A MORE CREDIBLE INFORMATION SOURCE

SAN FRANCISCO: Facebook is updating its "trending" feature that highlights hot topics on its social networking site, part of its effort to root out the kind of fake news stories that critics contend helped Donald Trump become president. With the changes announced Wednesday, Facebook's trending list will consist of topics being covered by several publishers. Before, it focused on subjects drawing the biggest crowds of people sharing or commenting on posts.

The switch is intended to make Facebook a more credible source of information by steering hordes of its 1.8 billion users toward topics that "reflect real world events being covered by multiple outlets," Will Cathcart, the company's vice president of product management, said in a blog post. Facebook also will stop customizing trending lists to cater to each user's personal interests. Instead, everyone located in the same region will see the same trending lists, which currently appear in the US, UK, Canada, Australia and India.

'Filter bubble'

That change could widen the scope of information Facebook's users see, instead of just topics that reinforce what they may have already heard or read elsewhere. The broader perspective might reduce the chances of Facebook's users living in a "filter bubble" - only engaging with people and ideas with which they agree. Facebook introduced its trending list in 2014 in response to the popularity of a similar feature on Twitter, the short-messaging service that competes for people's attention and advertising revenue.

Questions about Facebook's influence on what people are reading intensified last summer after a technology blog relying on an anonymous source reported that human editors



routinely suppressed conservative viewpoints on the site. Facebook fired the small group of journalists overseeing its trending items and replaced them with an algorithm that was supposed to be a more neutral judge about what to put on the list.

But the automated approach began to pick out posts that were getting the most attention, even if the information in them was bogus. Some of the fake news stories targeted Democratic presidential nominee Hilary Clinton, prompting critics to believe the falsehoods help Donald Trump overcome a large deficit in public opinion polls.

Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg ini-

tially brushed off that notion as "crazy," but in December the company announced a slew of new measures to curb the spread of fake news. To discourage the creation of fake news in the first place, Facebook also is banishing perpetual publishers of false information from its lucrative ad network. Google, which operates an even larger digital ad network, has taken a similar stand against publishers of fake news. In a report released Wednesday, Google said it had exiled about 200 publishers from its AdSense network for various misrepresentations as part of a review conducted during the six weeks of last year. —AP

ELON MUSK TWEETS ABOUT A MYSTERIOUS 'TUNNEL' PROJECT

LOS ANGELES: Elon Musk is already going high, and now he says he's going low. Subterranean, apparently. Just weeks after suddenly tweeting "Traffic is driving me nuts" and "am going to build a tunnel boring machine and just start digging," the SpaceX and Tesla founder says it's on the verge of happening. "Exciting progress on the tunnel front," he tweeted Wednesday. "Plan to start digging in a month or so."

The cryptic statements have launched speculation about another fantastic transportation idea from Musk, who builds orbital rockets at his Space Exploration Technologies company, better known as SpaceX, based in Hawthorne, California, near Los Angeles International Airport. But the equivocal tweets leave his tunnel plan completely unclear. Musk's tweets didn't hint at the tunnel's dimensions,

where it will go, whether it will be for his electric Tesla automobiles, subway trains, his futuristic "hyperloop" tube transportation gizmo or something entirely different.

In the mid-December tweets that started the fuss, Musk named his tunneling enterprise - "It shall be called 'The Boring Company' " - and gave its mission statement - "Boring, it's what we do." But he's been short on details. Another tweet indicated the starting point would be "across from my desk at SpaceX. Crenshaw (Boulevard) and the 105 Freeway, which is 5 mins from LAX."

There was no immediate response to an email from The Associated Press seeking comment from Hawthorne's interim city manager, who is also the public works director and city engineer. There's been no mention of any of the necessities of major transporta-

tion tunneling projects such as environmental impact reports, public hearings, geotechnical reports, surveys of existing underground infrastructure, noise and vibration studies.

Such projects require yearslong time horizons and boring machines that weigh hundreds of thousands of pounds. A few years ago, when contractor Traylor Brothers Inc. went to work on a downtown regional connector for Los Angeles County transit lines, the company noted that just completing the tunnel boring machine would take about eight months. Musk also didn't specify whether the "traffic" that's bothering him is the vehicular swarm on the western side of LA, local access to the SpaceX parking lot or something like an overtaxed internet that could require new cables. He did use the word "boring." Three times. —AP

SATURDAY, JANUARY 28, 2017

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TV LISTINGS

00:50 River Monsters (Best Of Series 1-5)
01:45 Bondi Vet
02:40 Deadliest Snakes Of South Africa
03:35 Tanked
04:25 Weird Creatures With Nick Baker
05:15 Gator Boys
06:02 River Monsters (Best Of Series 1-5)
06:49 Deadliest Snakes Of South Africa
07:36 Meet The Orangutans
08:00 Gorilla School
08:25 Deadliest Snakes Of South Africa
09:15 Lone Star Law
10:10 Wild Animal Rescue
11:05 The Vet Life
12:00 Treehouse Masters
12:55 Going Ape
13:50 Deadly Islands
14:45 Killer Whales
15:40 Operation Whale
17:30 Whale Wars: Viking Shores
18:25 Whale Wars
19:20 Up Close And Dangerous
20:15 Deadliest Snakes Of South Africa
21:10 Wild Animal Rescue



00:00 Campus Nightmares
01:00 The Haunting Of...
02:00 My Haunted House
03:00 The First 48
04:00 Campus Nightmares
05:00 The Haunting Of...
06:00 My Haunted House
07:00 Gangs Of Britain...
08:00 The First 48
09:00 Crime Stories
10:00 Nightmare In Suburbia
11:00 Nightmare In Suburbia
12:00 Nightmare In Suburbia
13:00 Nightmare In Suburbia
14:00 Nightmare In Suburbia
15:00 Nightmare In Suburbia
16:00 Nightmare In Suburbia
17:00 Nightmare In Suburbia
18:00 Nightmare In Suburbia
19:00 It Takes A Killer
19:30 It Takes A Killer
20:00 It Takes A Killer
20:30 It Takes A Killer
21:00 It Takes A Killer
21:30 It Takes A Killer
22:00 It Takes A Killer
22:30 It Takes A Killer
23:00 Holloway: Women Behind Bars



00:30 Nextworld
01:20 Man v Expert
02:10 The Carbonaro Effect
02:35 The Carbonaro Effect
03:00 Destroyed In Seconds
03:25 Destroyed In Seconds
03:50 Ultimate Survival
04:40 How It's Made
05:05 How It's Made
05:30 Storm Chasers
06:20 Mythbusters
07:00 Doki
07:25 Doki
07:50 Dick 'n' Dom Go Wild
08:15 Dick 'n' Dom Go Wild
08:40 K9 Cops
09:30 My Cat From Hell
10:20 My Cat From Hell
11:10 My Cat From Hell
12:00 Too Cute! Pint-Sized
12:50 Mythbusters
13:40 Mythbusters
14:30 Mythbusters
15:20 Mythbusters
16:10 Mythbusters
17:00 Nextworld
17:50 Nextworld
18:40 Space Voyages
19:30 The Carbonaro Effect
19:55 The Carbonaro Effect
20:20 Guinness World Records
Smashed UK
21:10 Troy
22:00 What Happened Next?
22:25 What Happened Next?



00:40 Mythbusters
01:30 How Do They Do It?
01:55 Food Factory
02:20 Mythbusters
03:10 Weird Or What?
04:00 Powering The Future
04:48 Mythbusters
05:36 Mythbusters
06:24 Weird Or What?
07:12 How Do They Do It?
07:36 Food Factory
08:00 How Do They Do It?
08:26 Food Factory
08:50 Food Factory
09:14 Food Factory
09:38 Food Factory
10:02 Food Factory
10:26 How Do They Do It?
10:50 How Do They Do It?
11:14 How Do They Do It?
11:38 How Do They Do It?
12:02 How Do They Do It?
12:26 Nextworld
13:14 Origins
13:38 Origins
14:02 Prototype This
14:50 The Gamechangers: Inventing The World
15:38 Powering The Future
16:26 Mythbusters
17:14 Mythbusters
18:02 Mythbusters
18:50 Mythbusters
19:40 Mythbusters
20:30 Stephen Hawking's Universe
21:20 Future Weapons
22:10 NASA's Greatest Missions
23:00 NASA's Greatest Missions
23:50 NASA's Greatest Missions



00:10 Hank Zipzer
00:35 Binny And The Ghost
01:00 Violetta
01:45 The Hive
01:50 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
02:40 Hank Zipzer
03:05 Binny And The Ghost
03:30 Violetta
04:15 The Hive
04:20 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
05:10 Hank Zipzer
05:35 Binny And The Ghost
06:00 Violetta
06:45 The Hive
06:50 Mouk
07:00 Jessie
07:25 Jessie
07:50 Tsum Tsum Shorts
07:55 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug And Cat Noir
08:20 Sunny Bunnies
08:25 Rolling To The Ronks
08:50 Crackle
08:55 Jessie
09:20 Descendants Wicked World
09:25 Elena Of Avalor
09:50 Star Darlings
09:55 Girl Meets World
10:20 Frozen: Magic Of The Northern Lights
10:25 Bizaardvark
10:50 Liv And Maddie
11:15 Disney Cookabout
11:40 High School Musical 2
13:20 The Next Step
15:25 Jessie
15:50 Jessie

16:15 Austin & Ally
17:05 Descendants Wicked World
17:10 Elena Of Avalor
17:35 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug And Cat Noir
18:00 Gravity Falls
18:25 Pocahontas
20:00 Star Darlings
20:05 Disney Cookabout
20:30 Elena Of Avalor
20:55 Liv And Maddie
21:20 Best Friends Whenever
21:45 Austin & Ally
22:10 Mako Mermaids
22:35 Dog With A Blog
23:00 Binny And The Ghost
23:25 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
23:50 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch



00:20 Henry Hugglemonster
00:35 The Hive
00:45 Loopdidoo
01:00 Henry Hugglemonster
01:15 Calimero
01:30 Art Attack
01:50 Zou
02:05 Loopdidoo
02:20 Henry Hugglemonster
02:35 Calimero
02:50 Zou
03:05 Art Attack
03:30 The Hive
03:40 Loopdidoo
03:55 Henry Hugglemonster
04:10 Art Attack
04:35 Loopdidoo
04:50 Calimero
05:05 Art Attack

05:30 Henry Hugglemonster
05:45 Zou
06:00 Art Attack
06:30 Henry Hugglemonster
06:45 Loopdidoo
07:00 Zou
07:15 Calimero
07:30 Loopdidoo
07:45 Henry Hugglemonster
08:00 Sheriff Callie's Wild West
08:25 Mickey Mouse Clubhouse
08:50 Goldie & Bear
09:15 Miles From Tomorrow
09:30 Jake And The Never Land Pirates
10:00 Sofia The First
10:30 Doc McStuffins
11:00 The Lion Guard
11:30 Goldie & Bear
12:00 Mickey Mouse Clubhouse
12:30 Miles From Tomorrow
13:00 PJ Masks
13:25 Jake And The Never Land Pirates

13:50 Sheriff Callie's Wild West
14:20 Doc McStuffins
14:45 Sofia The First
15:10 Goldie & Bear
15:40 Mickey Mouse Clubhouse
16:05 Doc McStuffins
16:30 Jake And The Never Land Pirates
17:00 The Lion Guard
17:25 PJ Masks
17:55 Doc McStuffins
18:20 Mickey Mouse Clubhouse
18:45 Sheriff Callie's Wild West
19:00 Winnie The Pooh: Springtime With Roo
20:10 Unbungalievable
20:15 Goldie & Bear
20:30 Goldie & Bear
21:00 Unbungalievable
21:05 Goldie & Bear
21:35 Miles From Tomorrow
22:00 Sheriff Callie's Wild West
22:25 Mickey Mouse Clubhouse
22:55 Minnie's Bow-Toons
23:00 The Lion Guard
23:30 The Lion Guard



06:00 Supa Strikas
06:25 Supa Strikas
06:50 Marvel's Avengers: Ultron Revolution
07:15 Future-Worm!
07:40 Kirby Buckets
08:10 Mighty Med
08:35 Lab Rats Elite Force
09:00 Lab Rats Elite Force
09:25 K.C. Undercover
09:50 K.C. Undercover
10:20 Supa Strikas
10:45 Supa Strikas
11:10 Gamer's Guide To Pretty Much Everything
11:35 Gamer's Guide To Pretty Much Everything
12:00 The Pacifier
13:45 Atomic Puppet
14:10 Disney Mickey Mouse
14:15 Supa Strikas
14:40 Gravity Falls
15:05 Supa Strikas
15:30 Supa Strikas
15:55 Supa Strikas
16:25 Supa Strikas
16:50 Supa Strikas
17:15 Supa Strikas
17:40 Lab Rats Elite Force
18:05 Disney Mickey Mouse
18:10 Gamer's Guide To Pretty Much Everything
18:35 The Pacifier
20:20 Counterfeit Cat
20:45 Mighty Med
21:10 Pickle And Peanut
21:40 Disney Mickey Mouse
21:45 Marvel's Avengers: Ultron Revolution
22:10 Ultimate Spider-Man: Web Warriors
22:35 Boyster



00:05 Famously Single
00:55 Famously Single
01:50 E! News
02:50 WAGs Miami
03:30 Celebrity Style Story
06:00 WAGs Miami
06:55 E! News

07:10 WAGs Miami
08:10 E! News
09:05 WAGs Miami
09:55 WAGs Miami
10:45 Mariah's World
13:15 E! News
13:45 Celebrity Style Story
14:15 Celebrity Style Story
14:45 Celebrity Style Story
15:15 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
16:05 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
17:00 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
18:00 Revenge Body With Khloe Kardashian
19:00 E! News
20:00 Celebrity Style Story
20:30 Celebrity Style Story
21:00 WAGs Miami
22:00 Mariah's World
23:00 E! News
23:30 Celebrity Style Story



00:00 The Universe
01:00 Patton 360
02:00 Mud Men
03:00 America's Book Of Secrets
03:50 Ancient Aliens
04:40 Engineering Disasters
05:30 The Universe
06:20 Patton 360
07:10 The Universe
08:00 Mud Men
09:00 America's Book Of Secrets
10:00 Ancient Aliens
11:00 Engineering Disasters
12:00 The Universe
13:00 Ancient Aliens
19:00 Ancient Aliens: The Ultimate Evidence
20:00 Ancient Aliens: The Ultimate Evidence
21:00 Ancient Aliens: The Ultimate Evidence
23:00 Ancient Aliens: The Ultimate Evidence



00:20 Pirate Treasure Of The Knights Templar
01:10 Leepu And Pitbull
02:00 Fifth Gear
02:50 Pawn Stars
03:15 Pawn Stars South Africa
03:40 Pawn Stars South Africa
04:05 Pawn Stars Australia
04:30 Pawn Stars Australia
05:00 Mankind The Story Of All Of Us
06:00 Storage Wars Texas
06:25 Storage Wars Texas
06:50 Pawn Stars South Africa
07:15 Pawn Stars South Africa
07:40 American Pickers
08:30 American Restoration
09:20 Leepu And Pitbull
10:10 Fifth Gear
11:00 Shipping Wars
11:25 Shipping Wars
11:50 Ice Road Truckers
12:40 Ax Men
13:30 Battle 360
14:20 Pirate Treasure Of The Knights Templar
15:10 The Curse Of Oak Island
16:00 Storage Wars Texas
16:25 Storage Wars Texas
16:50 Counting Cars
17:15 Car Hunters
17:40 Pawn Stars
18:05 Storage Wars: Best Of
18:30 Mountain Men
19:20 American Pickers
20:10 American Pickers
21:00 The Curse Of Oak Island
21:50 Hunting Hitler
22:40 America's Greatest Prison Breaks



00:35 Glamour Puds
01:00 Sara's Australia Unveiled
01:25 The Food Files
01:50 World's Biggest Festiva
02:40 Miguel's Tropical Kitchen
03:05 Grandma's Boy
03:30 Grandma's Boy
03:55 Charlie Luxton's Homes By The Sea



SURROGATES ON OSN MOVIES ACTION HD

04:45 Poh & Co
05:10 Carnival Eats
05:35 A Is For Apple
06:00 A Is For Apple
06:25 A Is For Apple
06:50 Ariana's Persian Kitchen
07:15 George Clarke's Amazing Spaces
08:05 Grandma's Boy
08:30 My Restaurant In India
08:55 My Restaurant In India
09:20 My Restaurant In India
09:45 My Restaurant In India
10:10 My Restaurant In India
10:35 My Restaurant In India
11:00 What's For Sale?
11:25 Street Food Around The World
11:50 Cesar's Recruit: Asia
12:15 Cesar's Recruit: Asia
12:40 Sara's Australia Unveiled
13:05 The Food Files
13:35 David Rocco's Dolce India
14:00 David Rocco's Dolce India
14:30 Lee Chan's World Food Tour
14:55 Lucky Chow
15:25 Miguel's Tropical Kitchen
15:50 Charlie Luxton's Homes By The Sea
16:45 Poh & Co
17:15 Carnival Eats
17:40 A Is For Apple
18:10 A Is For Apple
18:35 A Is For Apple
19:05 Lucky Chow
19:30 Grandma's Boy
20:00 Charlie Luxton's Homes By The Sea
20:50 Poh & Co
21:15 Carnival Eats
21:40 A Is For Apple
22:05 A Is For Apple
22:30 A Is For Apple
22:55 Sara's Australia Unveiled
23:20 The Food Files



00:10 The Chase
01:00 Tracey Ullman's Show
01:30 Emmerdale
03:55 Coronation Street
04:20 Coronation Street
04:45 Coronation Street
05:10 Coronation Street
05:35 Coronation Street
06:00 Endeavour
07:35 Murdoch Mysteries
08:25 Murdoch Mysteries
09:20 Grantchester
10:10 Grantchester
11:00 Doctor Thorne
11:50 Tracey Ullman's Show
12:20 The Jonathan Ross Show
13:10 Don't Tell The Bride
14:10 5 Star Family Reunion
15:00 Surprise Surprise
15:55 Endeavour
17:25 Murdoch Mysteries
18:15 Murdoch Mysteries
19:00 Don't Tell The Bride
20:00 Surprise Surprise
20:50 Doctor Thorne
21:35 Endeavour
23:05 Coronation Street



00:20 Valley Of The Wolves
01:10 Urban Jungle
02:00 Rescue Ink
02:50 Wild 24
03:45 Borneo's Secret Kingdom
04:40 Deadly Instincts
05:35 Warrior Bees
06:30 Monster Fish
07:25 Monster Fish
08:20 Unlikely Animal Friends
09:15 Ultimate Animals
10:10 World's Weirdest (2015)
11:05 Dr. Oakley: Yukon Vet
12:00 Shark Men
12:55 Rescue Ink
13:50 Wild Galapagos
14:45 Borneo's Secret Kingdom
15:40 Deadly Instincts
16:35 Monster Fish
17:30 America's Deadliest
18:25 Dangerous Encounters
19:20 Borneo's Secret Kingdom
20:10 Deadly Instincts
21:00 Monster Fish
21:50 America's Deadliest
22:40 Dangerous Encounters
23:30 Shark Men



THE 5TH WAVE ON OSN MOVIES HD



00:30 Happy Endings
01:00 Happy Endings
01:30 Divorce
02:00 Divorce
02:30 Sex & Drugs & Rock & Roll
03:00 Black-Ish
03:30 Kevin Can Wait
04:00 Angie Tribeca
04:30 The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon
05:30 Breaking In
06:00 Til Death
06:30 Living With Fran
07:00 Late Night With Seth Meyers
08:00 Angie Tribeca
08:30 Breaking In
09:00 Black-Ish
09:30 Kevin Can Wait
10:00 Fresh Off The Boat
10:30 Living With Fran
11:00 The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon
12:00 Til Death
12:30 Angie Tribeca
13:00 Breaking In
13:30 Living With Fran
14:00 Kevin Can Wait
14:30 Kevin Can Wait
15:00 Fresh Off The Boat
15:30 Happy Endings
16:00 Happy Endings
16:30 Til Death
17:00 Late Night With Seth Meyers
18:00 2 Broke Girls
18:30 Life In Pieces
19:00 Life In Pieces
19:30 Young & Hungry
20:00 The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon
21:00 Happy Endings
21:30 Happy Endings
22:00 Saturday Night Live
23:30 Late Night With Seth Meyers



00:00 The Americans
01:00 Secrets And Lies
02:00 Timeless
03:00 American Crime
04:00 Good Morning America
06:00 Prison Break
07:00 The Amazing Race
08:00 The Night Shift
09:00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show
10:00 Prison Break
11:00 The Art Of More
12:00 The Art Of More
13:00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show
14:00 The Amazing Race
15:00 Royal Pains
16:00 Live Good Morning America - Weekend

17:00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show
18:00 The Night Shift
19:00 The Blacklist
20:00 The Blacklist
21:00 Better Call Saul
22:00 Better Call Saul
23:00 Grimm



00:00 Never Back Down: No Surrender
02:15 Surrogates
04:15 War Of The Worlds
06:30 Last Action Hero
08:45 Fast & Furious 7
11:15 Metro
13:00 War Of The Worlds
15:00 Last Action Hero
17:15 Fast & Furious 7
19:45 Sherlock Holmes
22:00 Bus 657
23:45 Payback



00:00 Army Of Darkness
02:00 Pixels
04:00 National Security
06:00 Kicking And Screaming
08:00 Caveman
10:00 National Security
12:00 Pixels
14:00 Jack
16:00 Caveman
18:00 Paul Blart: Mall Cop 2
20:00 Awful Nice
22:00 Neighbors



01:15 Eden (2015)
03:00 Rudderless
05:00 Don't Wake Mommy
07:00 Cas & Dylan
09:00 A Stranger In Paradise
11:00 Don't Wake Mommy
13:00 A Mother Betrayed
15:00 Assassin's Bullet
17:00 A Stranger In Paradise
19:00 Selma
21:15 The Silent Storm
23:00 God's Pocket



01:00 American Girl: Isabelle Dances Into The Spotlight

03:00 Snow Day
05:00 Ghost Squad
07:00 The Good Dinosaur
09:00 Hotel For Dogs
11:00 Ghost Squad
13:00 Emma's Chance
15:00 Harriet The Spy
17:00 Nancy Drew
19:00 American Girl: Saige Paints The Sky
21:00 Jem And The Holograms
23:00 Harriet The Spy



01:00 Tiger House
02:45 Concussion
04:45 Star Wars: The Force Awakens
07:00 Hail, Caesar!
09:00 Concussion
11:00 Creed
13:15 The Rewrite
15:00 The 5th Wave
17:00 Steve Jobs
19:00 Paper Towns
21:00 Tumbledown
23:00 Trainwreck



01:15 When Marnie Was There
03:00 Rugrats Go Wild
04:30 Ploddy Police Car On The Case
06:00 Yellowbird
07:45 The Heart Of The Oak
09:15 The Unbeatables
11:00 True Story Of Puss'n Boots
12:45 Rugrats Go Wild
14:30 Marco Macaco
16:00 Gladiators Of Rome
18:00 The Unbeatables
20:00 Rugrats In Paris: The Movie
22:00 Marco Macaco
23:30 Gladiators Of Rome



01:30 I Believe In Miracles
03:30 Big Fish
06:00 War Horse
08:30 The Search For Freedom
10:30 The Rainmaker
13:00 The Imitation Game
15:00 Grand Central
17:00 The Search For Freedom
19:00 Along Came A Spider
21:00 Trash
23:00 The Witch



00:15 Team Umizoomi
00:38 Louie
00:53 Olive The Ostrich
01:03 Max & Ruby
01:26 Wanda And The Alien
01:37 Ben & Holly's Little Kingdom
02:00 Blaze And The Monster Machines
02:22 Blaze And The Monster Machines
02:45 Zack & Quack
03:05 Team Umizoomi
03:28 Louie
03:48 Paw Patrol
05:10 Wanda And The Alien
05:30 Dora And Friends
05:53 Dora And Friends
06:16 Blaze And The Monster Machines
06:38 Blaze And The Monster Machines
07:00 Paw Patrol
07:37 Dora The Explorer
08:00 Wanda And The Alien
08:09 Zack & Quack
08:21 Dora And Friends: Into The City!
08:45 Blaze And The Monster Machines
09:08 Paw Patrol
09:32 Shimmer And Shine
09:55 Dora The Explorer
10:19 Paw Patrol
10:42 Little Charmers
10:55 Bubble Guppies
11:19 Fresh Beat Band Of Spies
11:41 Zack & Quack
11:53 Team Umizoomi
12:37 Louie
12:49 Olive The Ostrich
13:01 Max & Ruby
13:23 Wanda And The Alien
13:33 Ben & Holly's Little Kingdom
13:55 Blaze And The Monster Machines
14:18 Blaze And The Monster Machines
14:41 Zack & Quack
15:03 Team Umizoomi
15:26 Louie
15:44 Paw Patrol
17:08 Wanda And The Alien
17:29 Dora And Friends
18:15 Blaze And The Monster Machines
19:00 Paw Patrol
19:37 Dora The Explorer
20:00 Wanda And The Alien
20:09 Zack & Quack
20:22 Dora And Friends: Into The City!
20:46 Blaze And The Monster Machines
21:09 Team Umizoomi
21:54 Dora The Explorer
22:19 Paw Patrol
22:42 Little Charmers



00:10 Locked Up Abroad
01:00 The Border
02:00 Final Days Of Anne Frank
03:50 Megastructures
04:45 Mega Factories
05:40 Operation Sumatran Rhino
06:35 Dog Whisperer
07:30 Cesar's Recruit: Asia
07:55 Cesar's Recruit: Asia
08:25 Cesar's Recruit: Asia
08:50 Hacking The System
09:20 Wicked Tuna
10:15 Highway Thru Hell
11:10 Dirty Rotten Survival
12:05 Explorer
13:00 The Real Saddam Hussein
14:00 Mega Bridges
15:00 Air Crash Investigation
16:00 Mega Factories
17:00 Megastructures
18:00 Operation Sumatran Rhino
19:00 The Border
20:00 Mega Factories
20:50 Megastructures



I BELIEVE IN MIRACLES ON OSN MOVIES FESTI-



'Kar Chale Hum Fida' - a homage to the spirit of patriotism

Patriotism is one of the most righteous of virtues and a noble feeling. It fosters solidarity among the people of a country. On 16th January 2017, the students of ICSK Senior expressed their ardent patriotism towards their moth-

erland, India through a spectacular presentation. They spoke eloquently on their allegiance towards their country. In the power point presentation, the students highlighted Kefi Azami's poem 'Karchale hum fida' which portrays the sacrifice

of the soldiers who lost their lives while protecting the nation. The display helped in arousing the nationalistic fervor of the students under the able guidance of the teachers of the Department of Hindi, ICSK Senior, Lamba and Arora.



Santhwanam Kuwait holds 16th annual meeting

Indian voluntary organization Santhwanam Kuwait conducted its 16th annual general meeting on 20th January, 2017 at United Indian School Auditorium, Jleeb Al Shuyoukh. Indian Embassy Second Secretary (PIC) A K Srivastava was the chief guest who inaugurated the event. Members and well-wishers of the association along with many personalities from different walks of life attended the event and shared their experience and vision on compassion to fellowmen.

President, P Santhosh Kumar presided over the event and the General Secretary VD Poulse addressed the audience with detailed reports on activities carried out for the year 2016. Financial statement was tabled by Joint Treasurer K S Anilkumar in the absence of Treasurer, Santhoshkumar Swaminathan. Chief Guest Srivastava released annual souvenir for the year called 'SMARANIKA 2016'. Santhwanam started its humanitarian services in 2001.

Over the years, the organization has risen as a source of valuable support to a large number of helpless individuals afflicted by diseases, poverty and calamities in diverse ways. More than 9,000 poor patients and families benefitted from its various social welfare programs introduced all over India.

This includes special healthcare welfare programs to kidney and cancer patients, support to Pain & Palliative Care Centers, Endosulfan victims, boiled drinking water facility at medical college, support for mobile mammogram unit, medical aid to hemophilia patients, physiotherapy units in tribal areas, donating dialysis machines etc.

Every month organization reaches its medical aid to an average of 80 poor patients. In 2016 itself more than 1,200 such deserving persons benefitted for treatment. Every year Santhwanam initiates special social welfare programs in addition to its regular philanthropic activities. For the last four years, the organization has been facilitating free/subsidized accommodation at "Trida Vishram Sanketh" for patients and their bystanders coming from faraway places for treatment at Regional Cancer Centre & Medical College Hospital at Trivandrum.

Primary phase of its recently announced special welfare projects are in progress which include constructing a building for Blood Component Separation Unit at Govt General Hospital at Kozhikkode, Education support for Tribal Children in Kalpetta, financial aid for Pain & Palliative Units in various districts of Kerala etc. Its another project to pro-

vide medical aid for critically ill children in various districts of Kerala is continuing in association with well-known organization, SOLACE. Cancer Patients are being supported by the organization with a Nutritional supplement program at Kollam Cancer Care Centre since last 3 years.

Santhwanam is voluntarily supported by more than 2,700 likeminded Indians as members in Kuwait. The association supports many social organizations including Pain & Palliative Care Units in India (particularly in Kerala) with regular financial assistance. It actively involved in repatriation issues of Indians in Kuwait by providing air ticket and financial assistance to poor patients leaving Kuwait for further treatment.

Annual meeting unanimously elected M N Ravindran as president, Santhosh Joseph as general secretary, Abdul Sathar as treasurer. Advisory board members, executive committee members, auditor and working committee members were also elected in the meeting to carry out activities for the year 2017. The new governing team requested all expat Indians in Kuwait to become part of the philanthropic initiative and help the less privileged ones in the society.

Colorful rhythm glitters Indian Republic Day

The colorful rhythm flown from the talented musical stars including NSH team - whose performance were highly applauded gave a special glittering during the Indian Republic Day Celebrations held at the Indian Embassy in Kuwait.



NSH means 'Team Work'

Knowledge development and sharing are the integral part of the NSH, and supporting this value is a key fundamental for the sustainable development of our business. NSH strongly believes that an educated society translates into an innovative skilled workforce, and our goal is to build a knowledge based society within NSH Campuses and by adding value to the social development. This value centric CSR initiative is thus NSH's one of the long term strategies, targeting the overall development of the members to make a difference in their experience of learning.

This, of course, is an inspiring force to be a partner for such wonderful initiative. No doubt, NSH has been honored with the Best Employee Welfare Award - 2016, received from the KNPC's CEO. The level the employees' happiness is the level of NSH's move towards better performance. From the employees' point of view, it is a land of welfare measures. Employee engagement leads to a dedicated workplace approach resulting in the right condition for all the members of the organization to give their best each day.

NSH is not an exemption. Proactive spirit,

coupled with fuller involvement and facing challenges bring the success. The committed workforce makes several celebrations of successful completion of works that become the good sign of how this deeply etching team offers more of their capability and potential thus landing memorable recognitions.

NSH is capable of travelling to any extreme and push ourselves farther to the amount we can dream and achieve. "New powers are discovered every time you push yourself farther than you have ever gone before". Team work coupled with "no compromise in safety and quality" is the platform that carries NSH, the single largest employer in the Middle East, accommodating closely 90,000 members, majority being from India. It is realized, through on the job and off the job activities, that NSH is a home for this lot. The proven proactive spirit, fuller involvement and facing challenges bring success. The timely advice of the veterans with zest adds more feathers in our employees' cap.

More thoughts are given to the feeling of ONENESS, and our dedicated and prominent later are ready to give pleasant surprises to the clients and move for greater heights. The



strong team is second to none in its commitment to endow the projects with innovative, in-depth; happy that the clients quote NSH as the best example, with the Best Contractor of Month Awards, and the footprints should mean it, whenever and wherever land by.

The work force rejoices in their after the work activities, such as icebreaking evenings filled with fun and charismatic enthusiasm. Thanks to the moral support of the Indian Embassy in Kuwait, NSH also maintains the

value of being a good player for the corporate social responsibilities by conducting programs such as UNO's International Day against Drug Abuse, World Heart Day, Master Brain Quiz, Beach Cleaning Activities, National Essay Contest for students, Parents of Pride, Employee engagement programs, Employees' Talent Show, celebrating the cultural events, etc. The talents shown so far are only a tip of an iceberg, and there is a long way to go, says NSH Vice President Sabu.



US ANTI-ABORTION ACTIVISTS SEEK TO MAKE GAINS UNDER TRUMP

WASHINGTON: Anti-abortion activists are preparing to stage a major march in Washington yesterday to capitalize on right-wing political momentum and send an unequivocal message to their new powerful ally: Donald Trump. The annual "March for Life" is set to take place six days after millions rallied in progressive women's marches in cities across the United States and around the world to warn the new president they will oppose attacks on their freedoms, including access to abortion.

The 44th annual anti-abortion march, billed as the world's largest "pro-life" rally, is also expected to draw participants from all corners of the country exactly one week after Trump's inauguration. The Republican president predicted its turnout would be larger than the women's march in Washington the previous week. "They'll have 300, 400, 500, 600,000

people," he told Republican lawmakers on Thursday. "You won't even read about it," he added, taking a swipe at the mainstream news media that he routinely accuses of bias.

"A lot of people are expecting it to be the largest March for Life in a long time," said Chris Gast, communications director for Right to Life of Michigan. The city of Grand Rapids alone plans to send 12 busloads of people to Washington, he said. The march will take place days after the 44th anniversary of Roe v. Wade, the landmark US Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion in 1973. Trump has already cheered abortion foes just days into his presidency. On Monday, he signed a decree barring US federal funding for foreign NGOs that support abortion. Next Thursday, he is expected to announce his choice to fill an empty seat on the Supreme Court, a nominee who's widely expected to

staunchly oppose abortion rights.

Conway to speak

Featured speakers at Friday's event include Vice President Mike Pence and Trump's influential senior aide Kellyanne Conway. The mother of four with a Catholic background will share the stage with Republican lawmakers, New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan and other religious leaders. The march will end at the Capitol where Republicans hold the majority in both chambers but the activists' focus will be on the building opposite Congress: the Supreme Court. If Trump appoints a second conservative Supreme Court justice during his White House tenure, their dream of overturning Roe v. Wade could become reality even though seven of 10 Americans oppose scrapping the high court decision that established the right to an abortion in the first three months of

pregnancy, a study by the Pew Research Center found this month.

Abortion foes

Meanwhile, abortion opponents are taking action at the state and local levels, encouraged by the ascent of Pence, Trump's nominee for attorney general Jeff Sessions and other anti-abortion heavyweights. US states enacted 338 restrictions on abortion between 2010 and 2016, according to the Guttmacher Institute, a research organization that supports abortion rights. Pro-choice advocates especially oppose Trump's health secretary nominee Tom Price, who as a congressman consistently voted to block access and funding for abortion. "This looming federal onslaught against a broad spectrum of reproductive health services," the Guttmacher Institute said, "threatens a massive rollback of women's health, rights and autonomy." —AFP

NIP, TUCK, LIFT AND SHAPE: COSMETIC SURGERY THRIVES

'THE GROWTH OF NON-SURGICALS IS PRETTY MUCH EXPONENTIAL'

PARIS: Demand for cosmetic surgery is showing no sign of abating, with a boom in Asia as the procedures become more affordable and less of a taboo, experts said. The global market grew by 8.3 percent in 2016 to an estimated value of 8.5 billion euros (\$8.9 billion) — the GDP of the Bahamas, according to data released yesterday at the IMCAS aesthetic industry conference in Paris. In 2017, people are projected to spend 9.2 billion euros on face and body upgrades, growing to nearly 12 billion euros in 2020. "There's a general acceptance that doing, whether it's surgery or less invasive procedures... to make you feel better, look better, it's much more accepted," Nolan Karp, a New York surgeon and board member of the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, told AFP.

Demand in Asia is exploding, practi-

tioners say, driven by a rapidly growing middle class and a quest for more Caucasian features. Behind the United States and Brazil, South Korea was the third biggest market for aesthetic treatments in 2015, with 1.2 million procedures out of a global total of 21.7 million, according to data from the International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ISAPS). While breast augmentation and liposuction are the most popular procedures in America, Brazil, Mexico and most of Europe, demand in South Korea is for eye, nose, cheek and chin resculpting. "They (clients) will be treating areas of the face that will make them look like Europeans or Americans," Laurent Brunes, and industry expert, told AFP. IMCAS data shows the Asia Pacific region will be the fastest grower, at 12 percent in the coming four years—overtaking Europe for the first time in

2020 to represent a quarter of the global market at over three billion euros.

Machines overtaking scalpels

Less-invasive procedures such as laser treatments to tighten or "rejuvenate" skin, toxin injections to paralyze face muscles and ease frown lines, chemical peels, and freezing and killing unwanted fat, are fast overtaking traditional surgery. More and more clients opt for procedures that require no anaesthesia, less recovery time, and present fewer risks. "The growth of non-surgicals is pretty much exponential," ISAPS president Renato Saltz told AFP. "The technology, the money invested in research and development, is just mind boggling. If you look at the industry, they don't make money with a scalpel, but they do make money with machines."

In 2015, Botox injections were the most popular procedure with 4.6 million performed by plastic surgeons, followed by hyaluronic acid injections (2.9 million) to iron out wrinkles and plump up lips. Surgical breast augmentation was in third place with 1.5 million procedures, followed by liposuction with 1.4 million and operations to lift and shape eyelids at 1.3 million. Some foresee that more and more men, who make up about a tenth of clients today, will be drawn in.

Slowing or reversing hair loss, for example, "is a huge potential market," said Bernard Mole, a Paris-based plastic surgeon. Balding can be very distressing for many men, he said. Hair implantation technology has improved and there is a drug that promises to boost growth but these are expensive and take a long time—leaving a huge gap for a "miracle" hair drug. Genital resculpting is another wide open field. "The demand is not there yet, but 10/15 years ago there was also no demand for female genital rejuvenation," said Mole. Today it is among the most popular procedures, "and I believe that in five to ten years we will see the same trend in men." —AFP



ATLANTA: In this file photo, a sign marks the entrance to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta. —AP

GORE, OTHERS REVIVE CANCELED US CLIMATE AND HEALTH CONFAB

WASHINGTON: A conference on climate change and health is back on but apparently minus the US government. Several organizers including former Vice President Al Gore have resurrected the meeting set for next month in Atlanta. The government's top public health agency had planned the conference then canceled it in December without explanation. The one-day meeting is moving from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to the Carter Center. Gore will still be one of two keynote speakers, Dr Georges Benjamin, executive director of the American Public Health Association, said Thursday.

"It's going to be on climate and health and in many ways it's going to be a very different meeting," said Benjamin, the other keynote speaker. Benjamin said he doesn't know if government officials will attend; many had been scheduled to speak at the conference. An after-hours message to the CDC was not immediately returned. The decision to hold the meeting was hatched by Benjamin's group, Gore, the University of Washington and the Harvard Global Health Institute. "Climate change is here today and is already impacting our health," Benjamin said. A recent report by the US government said global warming is a national public health problem. It said climate change is increasing the risk of respiratory problems and spread of disease from insects.

"Some of these health impacts are already underway in the United States," the report said. In 2015, an international global health commission organized by the British medical journal Lancet said that hundreds of thousands of lives a year are at stake as global warming "threatens to undermine the last half century of gains in development and global health." —AP



PARIS: A picture taken at the Aesthetic science, plastic surgery and cosmetic dermatology Congress (IMACS) in Paris shows breast prosthesis and a bottom prosthesis (right). —AFP

PAST WARMING SIGNALS MAJOR SEA LEVEL RISE

ONE OF THE WARMEST PERIODS IN LAST 800,000 YEARS

MIAMI: Scientists who study patterns of natural shifts in the Earth's climate said Thursday they have uncovered a "worrisome" signal that major sea level rise could be on the way. The findings in the journal *Science* show that ocean surface temperatures during the Earth's last warm period, some 125,000 years ago, were remarkably similar to today. But what concerns scientists is that sea level back then was 20-30 feet (six to nine meters) above what it is today.

"The trend is worrisome," said the report led by researchers at Oregon State University, University College Dublin, the University of Wisconsin and the Science Museum of Virginia. "Collectively, these results may help scientists better understand how oceans will respond to modern warming." Our planet goes through periods of warm and cold that last tens of thousands of years, and are influenced by changes in Sun exposure caused by natural variations in the Earth's orbit, combined with the influence of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

These naturally occurring shifts are different than the much faster pace of warming facing the Earth today, as humans burn fossil fuels for energy and send heat-trapping carbon emissions into the air, leading to ice melt and sea level rise. The last time the climate was unusually warm-in the absence of human influence-was about between

116,000 and 129,000 years ago, during what is known as the Last Interglacial Period. It was one of the warmest periods in the last 800,000 years, according to the report.

'Humanity's rapid impact'

The basis for the study was an analysis of 83 marine sediment core sites, which can give clues to how warm the Earth and oceans were in the past. Each core site was compared to data sets from 1870-1889 and 1995-2014, respectively. The analysis showed that 129,000 years ago, the global ocean surface temperature "was already similar to the 1870-1889 average."

The temperature rose over the next 4,000 years, "reaching a temperature indistinguishable from the 1995-2014 average." The finding means that some scientific models that have been used to estimate sea levels at various temperatures could have been underestimates. Scientists have already predicted the Earth is likely to see multiple meters of sea level rise in the years to come, a development that will swallow many of the planet's coastal communities, currently home to one billion people.

No one knows how fast the seas may rise in the decades to come, but some experts say the latest study is cause for alarm. "The result that present global sea surface temperatures are indistinguishable from those at the last interglacial 125,000 years ago is extremely wor-



NEW YORK: In this July 24, 2016, file photo German tourist Guido Weber of Hanover uses his backpack to cover his head against the hot afternoon sun after forgetting to wear his hat as he walks across the Brooklyn Bridge. — AP

rying since sea levels were six to nine meters higher then compared to present," said Richard Allan, professor of climate science at the University of Reading, who was not involved in the study.

Allan said it could be thousands of years before modern sea levels catch up, and that cuts in fossil fuel use could still help. "Due to the length of time it takes to heat up the depths of our vast oceans and to melt giant ice sheets it would take thousands of years before sea level could potentially

rise to such levels, so sustained and substantive cuts in greenhouse gas emissions from energy-intensive activities remain vital and beneficial to societies."

Merik Srokosz, a marine physics and ocean climate scientist at the University of Southampton, said the study is significant because it shows that changes in temperatures which occurred over thousands of years, are now occurring in the space of a single century. "This demonstrates humanity's rapid impact on the planet and raises the possibility of

significant longer-term rises in sea level," added Srokosz. Andrew Watson, a professor at the University of Exeter, said the study's takeaways are both good and bad.

"The study suggests that in the long term, sea level will rise six meters at least in response to the warming we are causing," he said. "The good news is that with luck it will continue to rise slowly, so that we have time to adapt, but the bad news is that eventually all our present coastal city locations will be inundated." — AFP

CLINIC PAGE



Kuwait Times
THE LEADING INDEPENDENT DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF





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POBE, Benin : A nurse at the Raoul Follereau Foundation for leprosy screening removes dead skin from the mutilated foot of a man in Pobe. —AFP photos



POBE, Benin : A man lost his foot and hands to leprosy ties a bandage around his foot after receiving treatment at the Raoul Follereau Foundation for leprosy screening in Pobe.

FIGHTING LEPROSY WHEN THE WORLD THINKS IT'S ERADICATED

'IT'S THOUGHT TO BE AN ILLNESS CAUSED BY BAD LUCK'

POBE, Benin: Farmer Folahan is one of up to 200 people in the west African country of Benin who still contract leprosy every year. Her face is covered in nodules—a symptom of the condition—when she arrives at the screening center in the town of Pobe, in the east of the country. Doctors put her on medication straight away. If she takes it properly for 12 months and there are no side effects, she will be completely cured. Leprosy is officially a disease of the past, relegated to the annals of history with conditions such as smallpox and bubonic plague.

But more than 210,000 people across the globe still contract it annually. The disease, which affects the skin and nerves, causing grave damage to the hands, feet and eyes, is spread by close contact between people, particularly those living in poverty. Folahan's four-year-old son will need to be monitored closely. In 2000, the World Health Organization said that leprosy, a disease long associated with biblical times, was no longer a public health problem with a rate of less than one case per 10,000 people. "It's true that leprosy affects fewer people than malaria," said Beninese doctor Roch Christian Johnson, who is the current president of the International Leprosy Association (ILA), on a return visit to his home country.

"But here 25 percent of the cases detected already have serious and debilitating handicaps." In the tiny nation of Benin, between 150 and 200

new cases of leprosy are recorded every year, of which 10 percent are children. That number hasn't changed much in a decade.

Rural area

The screening centre in the heart of Pobe was built by the Fondation Raoul Follereau on the site of a former leper colony and has taken in about 20 patients every year since 2000. Pobe is situated near the border with Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, which every year records some 4,000 cases of leprosy. "Patients always arrive too late, when their wounds are gangrenous," said Thierry Gateau, who runs the Pobe center. People with leprosy are often farmers like Pascal Boton, who don't get a diagnosis early enough and damage their numb limbs. Boton had an accident and didn't feel anything but, as it does with most cases, the wound got infected and his foot had to be amputated. "Nurses came to give me medication and then they stopped," he told AFP. Without regular treatment, the symptoms of leprosy don't go away.

'A curse'

"It's a sensitive issue," said Annick Chauty, a French doctor, who has spent 15 years in Pobe. "Here leprosy is associated with a curse so we pretend we've come to study skin diseases."

In Benin, "it's thought to be an illness caused by bad luck", added Ambroise Adeye, a surgeon for the

foundation and the town's public hospital. "People with leprosy first go to see traditional healers and that makes things worse. They then have to save up to pay for a consultation." But treatment for leprosy, which involves a course of three antibiotics, is free and prescribed in free clinics across Benin. To spread the word, the National Programme Against Leprosy, run by the country's health ministry, broadcasts messages on community radio stations and conducts awareness programmes.

Illness of poverty

People with leprosy, many of them left disabled by the disease, have seen their houses knocked down and fields trampled. Wives have been thrown out of their homes. Oladele, a 24-year-old barber, for example has been leprosy free for three years. The only traces of the disease are his slightly clawed fingers. "I don't want to go back to the fields. The center offered me training. I chose hairdressing," he said.

Sessions with a physiotherapist mean he can hold the cutters and scissors without any problems. His boss is supportive and his family paid for his apprenticeship. When money isn't available, the Follereau foundation steps in and pays for rehabilitation. "There's better acceptance but people who've had leprosy need help," said Gateau. It's possible to make leprosy a thing of the past, he said, but on one condition: "A country needs to develop. Leprosy is still an illness of poverty." —AFP

CLINIC PAGE



Kuwait Times
THE LEADING INDEPENDENT DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF





Dr. Fahad Al-Mukhaizeem
استشاري أطفال
M.B. Bch. FRCPC. FAAP. PEM



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



KNCC PROGRAMME FROM THURSDAY TO WEDNESDAY (26/01/2017 TO 01/02/2017)

SHARQIA-1

xXx: RETURN OF XANDER CAGE	11:45 AM
xXx: RETURN OF XANDER CAGE	1:45 PM
AL ATR -Kuwaiti Film	3:45 PM
KAABIL- HINDI	5:45 PM
xXx: RETURN OF XANDER CAGE	8:30 PM
WEAPONIZED	10:30 PM
WEAPONIZED	12:30 AM

SHARQIA-2

MONSTER TRUCKS	1:00 PM
MONSTER TRUCKS	1:30 PM
FRI	
MONSTER TRUCKS	3:30 PM
MONSTER TRUCKS	5:45 PM
MONSTER TRUCKS	8:00 PM
xXx: RETURN OF XANDER CAGE	10:15 PM
xXx: RETURN OF XANDER CAGE	12:15 AM

SHARQIA-3

RESIDENT EVIL: The Final Chapter	11:30 AM
RAEES- HINDI	1:45 PM
RESIDENT EVIL: The Final Chapter	4:30 PM
RAEES- HINDI	6:45 PM
RESIDENT EVIL: The Final Chapter	9:45 PM
RESIDENT EVIL: The Final Chapter	12:05 AM

MUHALAB-1

RAEES- HINDI	12:45 PM
BALLERINA	1:45 PM
FRI	
BALLERINA	3:45 PM
RAEES- HINDI	5:45 PM
RAEES- HINDI	8:45 PM
xXx: RETURN OF XANDER CAGE	11:45 PM

MUHALAB-2

RESIDENT EVIL: The Final Chapter	12:15 PM
KAABIL- HINDI	2:30 PM
RESIDENT EVIL: The Final Chapter	5:15 PM
KAABIL- HINDI	7:30 PM
RESIDENT EVIL: The Final Chapter	10:15 PM
RESIDENT EVIL: The Final Chapter	12:30 AM

MUHALAB-3

MONSTER TRUCKS	11:45 AM
MONSTER TRUCKS	2:00 PM
MONSTER TRUCKS	4:15 PM
MONSTER TRUCKS	6:30 PM
xXx: RETURN OF XANDER CAGE	8:45 PM
xXx: RETURN OF XANDER CAGE	10:45 PM
xXx: RETURN OF XANDER CAGE	12:45 AM

FANAR-1

MONSTER TRUCKS	12:45 PM
MONSTER TRUCKS	3:00 PM
MONSTER TRUCKS	5:15 PM
MONSTER TRUCKS	7:30 PM
MONSTER TRUCKS	9:45 PM
MONSTER TRUCKS	12:05 AM

FANAR-2

RESIDENT EVIL: The Final Chapter	11:45 AM
RESIDENT EVIL: The Final Chapter	2:00 PM
AL ATR - Kwaiti Film	4:45 PM
RESIDENT EVIL: The Final Chapter	6:45 PM
RESIDENT EVIL: The Final Chapter	9:00 PM
RESIDENT EVIL: The Final Chapter	11:15 PM

FANAR-3

DANGAL -Hindi	12:00 PM
KAABIL- HINDI	3:15 PM
DANGAL -Hindi	6:15 PM
KAABIL- HINDI	9:30 PM
RESIDENT EVIL: The Final Chapter	12:30 AM

FANAR-4

xXx: RETURN OF XANDER CAGE	12:00 PM
xXx: RETURN OF XANDER CAGE	2:00 PM
xXx: RETURN OF XANDER CAGE	4:00 PM
xXx: RETURN OF XANDER CAGE	6:00 PM
xXx: RETURN OF XANDER CAGE	8:15 PM
xXx: RETURN OF XANDER CAGE	10:15 PM
xXx: RETURN OF XANDER CAGE	12:15 AM

FANAR-5

RAEES- HINDI	11:30 AM
RAEES- HINDI	2:30 PM
RAEES- HINDI	5:30 PM
RAEES- HINDI	8:30 PM
RAEES- HINDI	11:30 PM

MARINA-1

RAEES- HINDI	12:00 PM
xXx: RETURN OF XANDER CAGE	2:45 PM
RAEES- HINDI	4:45 PM
xXx: RETURN OF XANDER CAGE	7:30 PM
xXx: RETURN OF XANDER CAGE	9:30 PM
xXx: RETURN OF XANDER CAGE	11:30 PM

MARINA-2

xXx: RETURN OF XANDER CAGE	11:30 AM
MONSTER TRUCKS	1:30 PM
MONSTER TRUCKS	3:45 PM
AL ATR -Kuwaiti Film	6:00 PM
MONSTER TRUCKS	8:00 PM
MONSTER TRUCKS	10:15 PM
xXx: RETURN OF XANDER CAGE	12:30 AM

MARINA-3

RESIDENT EVIL: The Final Chapter	12:45 PM
RESIDENT EVIL: The Final Chapter	3:00 PM
RESIDENT EVIL: The Final Chapter	5:15 PM
RESIDENT EVIL: The Final Chapter	7:30 PM
RESIDENT EVIL: The Final Chapter	9:45 PM
RESIDENT EVIL: The Final Chapter	12:05 AM

AVENUES-1

KAABIL- HINDI	12:00 PM
DANGAL -Hindi	3:00 PM
KAABIL- HINDI	6:15 PM
DANGAL -Hindi	9:15 PM
KAABIL- HINDI	12:30 AM

AVENUES-2

MONSTER TRUCKS -3D -4DX	12:45 PM
MONSTER TRUCKS -3D -4DX	3:00 PM
MONSTER TRUCKS -3D -4DX	5:15 PM
MONSTER TRUCKS -3D -4DX	7:30 PM
xXx: RETURN OF XANDER CAGE -3D -4DX	10:00 PM
xXx: RETURN OF XANDER CAGE -3D -4DX	12:15 AM

AVENUES-3

RAEES- HINDI	11:30 AM
RAEES- HINDI	2:30 PM
RAEES- HINDI	5:30 PM
RAEES- HINDI	8:30 PM
RAEES- HINDI	11:30 PM

360°- 1

RESIDENT EVIL: The Final Chapter	11:30 AM
RESIDENT EVIL: The Final Chapter	1:45 PM
RESIDENT EVIL: The Final Chapter -3D	4:00 PM
RESIDENT EVIL: The Final Chapter	6:15 PM
RESIDENT EVIL: The Final Chapter	8:30 PM
RESIDENT EVIL: The Final Chapter	10:45 PM
RESIDENT EVIL: The Final Chapter	1:00 AM

360°- 2

DANGAL -Hindi	1:15 PM
MOANA	1:45 PM
FRI	
DANGAL -Hindi	4:30 PM
DANGAL -Hindi	7:45 PM
DANGAL -Hindi	11:00 PM

360°- 3

AL ATR -Kuwaiti Film	1:30 PM
SING	3:30 PM
SING	5:45 PM
AL ATR -Kuwaiti Film	8:00 PM
AL ATR -Kuwaiti Film	10:00 PM
AL ATR -Kuwaiti Film	12:05 AM

AL-KOUT.1

xXx: RETURN OF XANDER CAGE	12:30 PM
xXx: RETURN OF XANDER CAGE	2:30 PM
xXx: RETURN OF XANDER CAGE	4:30 PM
xXx: RETURN OF XANDER CAGE	6:30 PM
xXx: RETURN OF XANDER CAGE	8:30 PM
xXx: RETURN OF XANDER CAGE	10:30 PM
xXx: RETURN OF XANDER CAGE	12:45 AM

AL-KOUT.2

RESIDENT EVIL: he Final Chapter	12:45 PM
RESIDENT EVIL: he Final Chapter	3:00 PM
RESIDENT EVIL: he Final Chapter	5:15 PM
RESIDENT EVIL: he Final Chapter	7:30 PM
RESIDENT EVIL: he Final Chapter	9:45 PM
RESIDENT EVIL: he Final Chapter	12:05 AM

AL-KOUT.3

MONSTER TRUCKS	12:15 PM
MONSTER TRUCKS	2:45 PM

REQUIRED

We are looking for a
Young Male Secretary
for a newly established Company
• Excellent in Microsoft Office especially word and excel
• Bilingual Arabic and English

Please send your CV to
info@lamande.com

CHANGE OF NAME

I, **Joseph Lourito Michael** Fernandes, holder of Indian Passport No. K-4651486 and Civil ID 251011600403, issued at Kuwait on 16-03-2012, hereby confirm that I am also known by the following names Lawrie Fernandes, Joseph L M Fernandes, Joseph Laurito Michael Fernandes.
(C 5261)
26-1-2017

I, **Iddin Kunhi Pallibali Abbas** S/o Abbas Pallibali, Passport No. L1458495 & Civil ID No. 281060107647. have changed my name as Aboobakkar Siddiq vide affidavit dated 14.12.2016 before notary Sirajuddin, Mangalore (C 5259)

I, **Jamil Lobo** wife of Patrick Lobo holder of Indian Passport No. G3196491 and Civil ID No. 282062803579 has changed my name to Jamil Avelino Fernandes hereinafter in all my dealings and documents, I will be known by name of Jamil Avelino Fernandes. (C 5260)
23-1-2017

SITUATION VACANT

Lady maid is needed to work in the capacity of part timer for two or three days a week in a house located in Salmiya. Time and salary are negotiable. Call 66417504.
(C 5262)
26-1-2017

EMERGENCY 112

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr:	05:18
Shorook	06:40
Duhr:	12:01
Asr:	15:02
Maghrib:	17:23
Isha:	18:42

Hospitals

Sabah Hospital	24812000
Amiri Hospital	22450005
Maternity Hospital	24843100
Mubarak Al-Kabir Hospital	25312700
Chest Hospital	24849400
Farwaniya Hospital	24892010
Adan Hospital	23940620
Ibn Sina Hospital	24840300
Al-Razi Hospital	24846000
Physiotherapy Hospital	24874330/9

Clinics

Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
Khaldiya	24848075
Kaifan	24849807
Shamiya	24848913
Shuwaikh	24814507
Abdullah Salem	22549134
Nuzha	22526804
Industrial Shuwaikh	24814764
Qadsiya	22515088
Dasmah	22532265
Bneid Al-Gar	22531908
Shaab	22518752
Qibla	22459381



DIAL 161 FOR AIRPORT INFORMATION

Arrival Flights on Saturday 28/1/2017

Airlines	Flt	Route	Time
KLM	413	Amsterdam/Dammam	00:25
JZR	267	Beirut	00:30
CLX	852	Luxembourg	00:35
JZR	539	Cairo	00:40
THY	772	Istanbul	00:55
RJA	642	Amman	01:05
QTR	1086	Doha	01:15
SAI	441	Lahore	01:30
THY	764	Istanbul	01:50
DLH	635	Doha	01:55
MSC	511	Alexandria	02:00
PGT	858	Istanbul	02:00
ETH	620	Addis Ababa	02:05
GFA	211	Bahrain	02:30
UAE	853	Dubai	02:30
KAC	412	Bangkok	02:50
OMA	643	Muscat	02:55
KKK	6506	Istanbul	02:55
FDB	069	Dubai	03:05
ETD	305	Abu Dhabi	03:10
MSR	612	Cairo	03:10
KAC	358	Kochi	03:30
QTR	1076	Doha	03:30
KAC	206	Islamabad	03:45
KAC	546	Cairo	03:55
KAC	784	Jeddah	03:55
FEG	931	Alexandria	04:00
KAC	418	Manila	04:25
UAE	873	Dubai	04:55
JZR	503	Luxor	05:10
JZR	529	Asyut	05:15
DHX	170	Bahrain	05:20
KAC	344	Chennai	05:35
KAC	332	Trivandrum	05:45
THY	770	Istanbul	05:55
KAC	384	Delhi	06:05
KAC	364	Colombo	06:05
KAC	346	Ahmedabad	06:25
BAW	157	London	06:40
PAL	668	Manila/Dubai	07:00
KAC	204	Lahore	07:15
FDB	5061	Dubai	07:15
FDB	053	Dubai	07:50
KAC	302	Mumbai	08:20
JZR	1333	Al Najaf	08:20
UAE	855	Dubai	08:40
KAC	382	Delhi	08:45
ABY	125	Sharjah	09:05
ETD	301	Abu Dhabi	09:05
KAC	352	Kochi	09:10
IAW	157A	Al Najaf	09:15
JZR	327	Al Najaf	09:20
QTR	1070	Doha	09:30
FDB	055	Dubai	09:40
SVA	512	Riyadh	10:00
AVV	653	Sohag	10:10
GFA	213	Bahrain	10:40
JZR	1331	Al Najaf	11:00
KAC	774	Riyadh	11:05
RBG	553	Alexandria	11:15
IRM	1188	Mashhad	11:15
JZR	165	Dubai	11:30
FDK	801	Damascus	11:45
JZR	563	Sohag	12:00
MSC	401	Alexandria	12:30
JZR	239	Amman	12:45
UAE	871	Dubai	12:50
FDB	075	Dubai	12:50
MSR	610	Cairo	13:00
IAW	157	Al Najaf	13:25
BON	101	Sarajevo	13:30
JZR	779	Jeddah	13:35
KAC	564	Amman	13:40
KAC	788	Jeddah	13:45
KNE	231	Riyadh	13:55
KAC	672	Dubai	14:00
QTR	1078	Doha	14:10
FDB	059	Dubai	14:20
KAC	692	Muscat	14:30
GFA	221	Bahrain	14:40
KAC	542	Cairo	14:45
KNE	529	Jeddah	14:55
KAC	618	Doha	15:00
KNE	683	Madinah	15:05
ETD	303	Abu Dhabi	15:15
KAC	286	Dhaka	15:20
OMA	645	Muscat	15:35
UAE	857	Dubai	15:45
ABY	127	Sharjah	15:50
MSR	575	Sharm el-Sheikh	15:50
KAC	154	Istanbul	15:55
SAW	705	Damascus	16:00
SVA	504	Madinah	16:00
KNE	531	Jeddah	16:05
JZR	535	Cairo	16:10
QTR	1072	Doha	16:10
FDB	051	Dubai	16:25
JZR	357	Mashhad	16:25
JZR	787	Riyadh	16:25
KAC	662	Abu Dhabi	16:35
RJA	640	Amman	16:55

KAC	118	New York	17:00
SVA	510	Riyadh	17:15
GFA	215	Bahrain	17:30
JZR	777	Jeddah	17:45
JZR	325	Al Najaf	17:50
NIA	251	Alexandria	17:55
SVA	500	Jeddah	18:00
UAE	875	Dubai	18:00
FDB	063	Dubai	18:10
JZR	177	Dubai	18:20
MSR	620	Cairo	18:30
QTR	1080	Doha	18:50
IRA	669	Mashhad	18:55
SYR	341	Damascus	19:00
KAC	512	Mashhad	19:20
ABY	123	Sharjah	19:25
GFA	217	Bahrain	19:30
KAC	502	Beirut	19:30
CLX	856	Luxembourg	19:35
KAC	674	Dubai	19:45
FDB	057	Dubai	19:50
KAC	104	London	19:50
KNE	381	Taif	19:55
KAC	166	Rome	19:55
OMA	647	Muscat	20:10
JZR	189	Dubai	20:15
QTR	1088	Doha	20:35
KAC	562	Amman	20:40
DLH	634	Frankfurt	20:45
KAC	174	Munich	20:45
FDB	5053	Dubai	20:50
KAC	616	Bahrain	20:50
KAC	786	Jeddah	21:15
ETD	307	Abu Dhabi	21:20
MEA	402	Beirut	21:20
ALK	229	Colombo	21:25
UAE	859	Dubai	21:40
GFA	219	Bahrain	21:45
KAC	676	Dubai	21:45
QTR	1082	Doha	22:00
KLM	415	Amsterdam	22:05
JZR	125	Bahrain	22:05
NIA	151	Cairo	22:10
ETD	309	Abu Dhabi	22:15
AIC	987	Chennai/Hyderabad	22:25
KNE	533	Jeddah	22:45
JZR	241	Amman	22:45
KAC	1544	Cairo	22:55
KAC	164	Paris	22:55
JAI	574	Mumbai	23:00
JZR	185	Dubai	23:15
FDB	071	Dubai	23:45

Departure Flights on Saturday 28/1/2017

Airlines	Flt	Route	Time
AIC	976	Goa/Chennai	00:05
JAI	573	Mumbai	00:30
PIA	240	Sialkot	00:40
FDB	072	Dubai	00:40
BBC	044	Doha	01:30
KLM	413	Amsterdam	01:50
KAC	417	Manila	02:00
CLX	868	NBO	02:05
THY	773	Istanbul	02:25
KAC	285	Dhaka	02:25
SAI	442	Lahore	02:30
DLH	635	Frankfurt	02:55
MSC	512	Alexandria	03:05
ETH	621	Addis Ababa	03:05
PGT	859	Istanbul	03:35
KAC	103	London	03:40
UAE	854	Dubai	03:45
KKK	6505	Istanbul	03:55
OMA	644	Muscat	03:55
THY	765	Istanbul	04:00
MSR	613	Cairo	04:10
ETD	306	Abu Dhabi	04:10
QTR	1077	Doha	04:40
JZR	1332	Al Najaf	04:55
FEG	938	Sohag	05:00
JZR	562	Sohag	05:25
QTR	1087	Doha	05:50
JZR	326	Al Najaf	05:55
FDB	070	Dubai	06:30
UAE	874	Dubai	06:50
THY	771	Istanbul	06:50
KAC	153	Istanbul	06:50
JZR	164	Dubai	06:55
KAC	165	Rome	06:55
RJA	643	Amman	07:05
JZR	238	Amman	07:10
GFA	212	Bahrain	07:15
KAC	541	Cairo	07:15
KAC	163	Paris	07:25
KAC	773	Riyadh	07:30
JZR	1330	Al Najaf	07:35
KAC	173	Munich	07:35
KAC	787	Jeddah	07:45
FDB	5062	Dubai	07:55
JZR	778	Jeddah	07:55
KAC	563	Amman	08:00
BAW	156	London	08:40
FDB	054	Dubai	08:55

KAC	691	Muscat	09:00
KAC	117	New York	09:00
JZR	534	Cairo	09:15
KAC	671	Dubai	09:15
KAC	101	London	09:35
ABY	126	Sharjah	09:45
UAE	856	Dubai	09:55
ETD	302	Abu Dhabi	10:10
IAW	158A	Al Najaf	10:15
JZR	356	Mashhad	10:25
KAC	411	Bangkok	10:30
FDB	056	Dubai	10:35
QTR	1071	Doha	10:40
SVA	513	Riyadh	11:00
AVV	654	Asyut	11:10
KAC	617	Doha	11:10
GFA	214	Bahrain	11:25
RBG	554	Alexandria	11:55
KAC	501	Beirut	11:55
JZR	776	Jeddah	12:05
KAC	661	Abu Dhabi	12:05
IRM	1189	Mashhad	12:30
FDK	802	Damascus	12:45
JZR	786	Riyadh	13:10
KAC	511	Mashhad	13:15
MSC	402	Alexandria	13:30
JZR	176	Dubai	13:45
MSR	611	Cairo	14:00
FDB	076	Dubai	14:05
UAE	872	Dubai	14:15
IAW	158	Al Najaf	14:25
JZR	324	Al Najaf	14:25
KNE	382	Taif	14:50
BON	102	Sarajevo	14:55
KAC	561	Amman	15:00
KAC	673	Dubai	15:00
FDB	060	Dubai	15:10
KAC	785	Jeddah	15:15
PAL	669	Dubai/Manila	15:20
GFA	222	Bahrain	15:25
QTR	1079	Doha	15:40
JZR	188	Dubai	15:40
KNE	530	Jeddah	15:55
KAC	1543	Cairo	15:55
KNE	684	Madinah	16:00
ETD	304	Abu Dhabi	16:20
KAC	357	Kochi	16:20
ABY	128	Sharjah	16:30
OMA	646	Muscat	16:35
MSR	576	Sharm el-Sheikh	16:50
SAW	706	Damascus	16:55
KNE	532	Jeddah	16:55
SVA	505	Madinah	17:00
KAC	675	Dubai	17:00
JZR	266	Beirut	17:05
JZR	240	Amman	17:15
FDB	052	Dubai	17:25
KAC	615	Bahrain	17:35
QTR	1073	Doha	17:40
UAE	858	Dubai	17:45
JZR	538	Cairo	17:45
RJA	641	Amman	17:55
KAC	353	BLR	18:15
SVA	511	Riyadh	18:15
GFA	216	Bahrain	18:20
KAC	205	Islamabad	18:25
JZR	184	Dubai	18:40
JZR	554	Alexandria	18:55
NIA	252	Alexandria	18:55
FDB	064	Dubai	19:05
JZR	124	Bahrain	19:15
UAE	876	Dubai	19:30
SVA	501	Jeddah	19:30
MSR	621	Cairo	19:30
QTR	1081	Doha	19:50
IRA	666	Esfahan	19:55
SYR	342	Damascus	20:00
ABY	124	Sharjah	20:05
GFA	218	Bahrain	20:15
KAC	383	Delhi	20:30
KAC	361	Colombo	20:35
FDB	058	Dubai	20:35
KAC	775	Riyadh	20:45
KNE	232	Riyadh	20:55
JZR	1334	Al Najaf	21:05
CLX	856	Hong Kong	21:05
OMA	648	Muscat	21:10
KAC	345	Ahmedabad	21:30
QTR	1089	Doha	21:35
DLH	634	Doha	21:35
KAC	741	Dammam	21:45
DHX	171	Bahrain	21:50
FDB	5054	Dubai	21:50
KAC	351	Kochi	22:00
ETD	308	Abu Dhabi	22:15
MEA	403	Beirut	22:20
ALK	230	Colombo	22:25
GFA	220	Bahrain	22:30
KAC	381	Delhi	22:45
KAC	301	Mumbai	22:45
UAE	860	Dubai	22:55
KLM	415	Dammam/Amsterdam	23:05
ETD	310	Abu Dhabi	23:05
NIA	152	Cairo	23:10
QTR	1083	Doha	23:20
KNE	534	Jeddah	23:35

WORDSEARCH PUZZLE

Halloween

Find and circle all of the words that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell an activity played on Halloween.

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

APPLES COSTUME JACK O LANTERN SKELETON
BATS DRACULA MASK SKULL
BLACK CAT FRIGHTENING MUMMY SPIDERS
BROOMSTICK FULL MOON NIGHT TOMBSTONE
CANDLE GHOSTS PUMPKIN VAMPIRE
CANDY GHOULS SCARECROW WEREWOLF
CEMETERY GOBLINS SCARY WITCHES
COFFIN GRAVEYARD SCREAM ZOMBIE

Yesterday's Solution

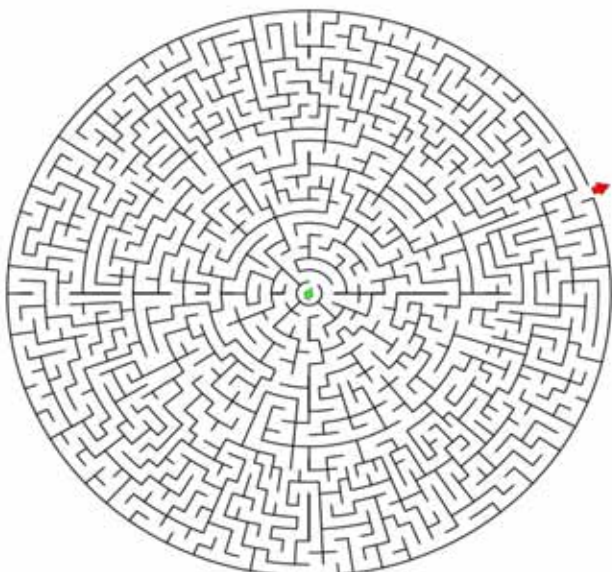
Golf

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

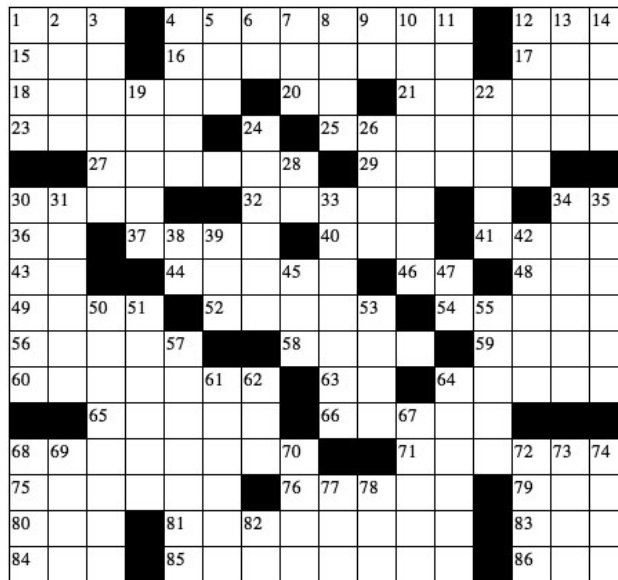
ALBATROSS CLUBHOUSE GREEN ROUGH
APPROACH CLUBS GRIP RULES
BACK NINE CONDOR GROSS SCORE SHOT
BACKSPIN COURSE HANDICAP SLICE
BALL DIVOT HOLE IN ONE STROKE
BIRDIE DRIVER HOLES SWING
BOGEY DRIVING RANGE HOOK TEE OFF
BUNKER EAGLE IRON TREES
CADDIE FAIRWAY NET SCORE WATER HAZARD
CART FLAGSTICK PAR WEDGE
CHIP FORE PUTTER WOOD

The hidden message is: GOLF IS A GOOD WALK SPOILED

CHALLENGING MAZE



CROSSWORD 1504



ACROSS

- Greenwich Mean Time updated with leap seconds.
- (British) The side of a vehicle nearest the kerb.
- A master's degree in business.
- (used as a combining form) Recent or new.
- A mountain peak in the Andes in Peru (21,709 feet high).
- Someone who engages in arbitrage (who purchases securities in one market for immediate resale in another in the hope of profiting from the price differential).
- A high-crowned black cap (usually made of felt or sheepskin) worn by men in Turkey and Iran and the Caucasus.
- A light strong brittle gray toxic bivalent metallic element.
- At or near the north pole.
- A projecting bay window corbeled or cantilevered out from a wall.
- (of sleep) Deep and complete.
- (trademark) An antacid.
- Type genus of the Gadidae.
- Drought-tolerant herb grown for forage and for its seed which yield a gum used as a thickening agent or sizing material.
- A member of a Turkic people of Chinese Turkestan and neighboring areas (formerly of Mongolia and eastern Turkestan).
- A white soft metallic element that tarnishes readily.
- Made of or resembling lace.
- Any of various long-tailed rodents similar to but larger than a mouse.
- Preparatory school work done outside school (especially at home).
- (informal) Being satisfactory or in satisfactory condition.
- Fleshy spore-bearing inner mass of e.g. a puffball or stinkhorn.
- A radioactive element of the actinide series.
- A lyric poem with complex stanza forms.
- An unofficial association of people or groups.
- A choice or delicious dish.
- Resembling or characteristic of a prophet or prophecy.
- (botany) Relating to a plant of the family Araceae.
- (Babylonian) God of storms and wind.
- A South American shrub whose leaves are chewed by natives of the Andes.
- Consisting of or related to language.
- The blood group whose red cells carry both the A and B antigens.
- Joint capital (with Riyadh) of Saudi Arabia.
- The capital and chief port and largest city of Senegal.
- A member of the North American Indian people (related to the Aztecs) of the south-western United States.
- A gradual decline (in size or strength or power or number).
- A salt used especially in baking powder.
- Tropical American trees with palmately compound leaves and showy bell-shaped flowers.
- The longer of the two telegraphic signals used in Morse code.
- A flat wing-shaped process or winglike part of an organism.
- A recognition of meritorious service.
- A benevolent aspect of Devi.
- A logarithmic unit of sound intensity equal to 10 decibels.
- A river in northeastern Brazil that flows generally northward to the Atlantic Ocean.
- Remaining after all deductions.

DOWN

- Beyond what is natural.
- A drop of the clear salty saline solution secreted by the lacrimal glands.
- An active volcano in southwestern Mexico.
- City in Sudan.
- An international organization of European countries formed after World War II to reduce trade barriers and increase cooperation among its members.
- A colorless and odorless inert gas.
- An unforeseen obstacle.
- Expel or eject (saliva or phlegm or sputum) from the mouth.
- A state in midwestern United States.
- Capital and largest city of Indonesia.
- Worn or shabby from overuse or (of pages) from having corners turned down.
- A pair of people who live together.
- The Jewish rite of circumcision performed on a male child on the eighth day of his life.
- The elementary stages of any subject (usually plural).
- Relating to or resembling or made of or adorned with pearls or mother-of-pearl.
- A grouping of a number of similar things.
- A branch of the Tai languages.
- Largest known toad species.
- Being one more than ten.
- Medium-sized tree-dwelling monkey of the Amazon basin.
- The father of your father or mother.
- Aristocratic Italian family of powerful merchants and bankers who ruled Florence in the 15th century.
- The medicinal drug used to evoke vomiting (especially in cases of drug overdose or poisoning).
- A soft white precious univalent metallic element having the highest electrical and thermal conductivity of any metal.
- Being five more than one hundred fifty.
- The rotating armature of a motor or generator.
- The cry made by sheep.
- Being five more than one hundred.
- Lying outside the bounds of morals or ethics.
- A periodical that summarizes the news.
- A Chadic language spoken south of Lake Chad.
- Sour or bitter in taste.
- French artist who immigrated to the United States.
- Absence of the pupil in an eye.
- A local computer network for communication between computers.
- An esoteric or occult matter that is traditionally secret.
- Cubes of meat marinated and cooked on a skewer usually with vegetables.
- Exhibiting or restored to vigorous good health.
- (computer science) A graphic symbol (usually a simple picture) that denotes a program or a command or a data file or a concept in a graphical user interface.
- Goddess of spring and wife of Bragi.
- A language unit by which a person or thing is known.
- Stairway in India leading down to a landing on the water.
- A period marked by distinctive character or reckoned from a fixed point or event.
- Being one more than two.
- A form of address for a man.

Yesterday's Solution

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

Daily SuDoku

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

Yesterday's Solution

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

STORIED HISTORY BEHIND THE FOOTBALLS OF THE NFL

CHICAGO: Skip Horween's great-grandmother wanted nothing to do with football. In fact, her two sons were so petrified she would find out they were messing around with the barbaric-looking game that they decided to play under assumed names. That's how it came to be that Arnold and Ralph "McMahon," both standouts on the Harvard football team a century ago, managed to play for the Chicago Cardinals in the early days of professional football. And in a roundabout way, it's how their family, immigrants from the Ukraine who opened a Chicago tannery in 1905, would come to provide the leather for NFL game balls used today.

Including those used by the Patriots and Falcons in the Super Bowl on Feb 5. "The story is really astounding," said Mike Halpert, whose Philadelphia Hide Brokerage Corp. has provided the Horween Leather Co with raw material for years. Not just astounding, but quintessentially American. The story begins in earnest in the late 1930s, when the Horween brothers - whose family by that point had become well-known for producing fine leathers, including Shell Cordovan used in upscale shoes, gloves and wallets - got to know a local businessman named George S Halas.

Gentleman's fraternity

Papa Bear, as he was known, owned the rival Chicago Bears in the days when the NFL was little more than a gentleman's fraternity. He cornered the Horween boys one day and they got to discussing the balls they were using in Cardinals games. The conversation turned to how they could make the best possible product for a sport that was beginning to break into the national consciousness.

"We're talking the foundation of the National Football League," explained Skip Horween, whose son, Nick, will be the fifth generation to run their factory on the North Branch of the Chicago River. About the same time, a sporting goods manufacturer with roots in meatpacking and also based in Chicago had begun to produce hand-sewn footballs. It had been renamed a few years earlier and would grow to become synonymous with every ball used by the NFL: Wilson Sporting Goods Co. "The Horween angle is really cool because we've been with them longer than the NFL," said Kevin Murphy, general manager of team sports at Wilson. "Halas already had a relationship with Wilson, which in fact went back even further than the 1940s. 'We've really grown up with the sport,' Murphy said. 'We've grown up with the NFL.' These days, the NFL is a business that last year took in \$13 billion in revenue. More than 100 million people will watch on Fox when the Patriots and Falcons square off in Houston.

Yet the process of making the ball that will be kicked off that night is still at its heart a mom-and-pop operation. Leather brokers like Halpert acquire raw product from livestock producers, mostly in the Midwest, and those hides - in this case heavy native steer hide - are shipped to Chicago. There, the Horween family begins turning it into the supple leather of the NFL's exacting specifications, a laborious process that takes place at their historic, nondescript factory on North Elston Avenue.

Deep roots

"We have deep roots here," Skip Horween said with a hint of pride. For good reason: When he started at the factory in 1978, there were about 250 tanneries in the US. But many of them have moved overseas, where regulations were fewer and labor cheaper. Others consolidated and still more closed entirely. Now, there are about two dozen tanneries left. "Lots of people aren't around anymore," Horween said. "We're one of the last ones."

Once the leather is stamped with a unique pebble texture, it is loaded on a truck bound for Ada, Ohio, population 5,900, about 130 of who work in the Wilson plant. Their only job there is to make footballs. Thousands of them. "The people who make our footballs in Ohio, like the people who tan the leather for us at Horween, there's been one thread of consistency in craftsmanship and attention to detail," Murphy explained, "and knowing who your customer is and what they want. They want consistency and performance. They want the ball to perform like it did yesterday and three years ago."

That's why plant workers use turn-of-last-century sewing machines and other vintage equipment to make about 3,000 footballs per day, cutting, stitching and lacing each by hand. The 25-step process takes about three days to complete, but the pride in craftsmanship is evident in those who work there. The average worker at the Ada plant has been there two decades. Half of those balls will be designated game balls, and one of them will end up on the tee at NRG Stadium for the kickoff. — AP



FOXBOROUGH: New England Patriots cornerback Malcolm Butler faces reporters in the team's locker room following an NFL football team practice. — AP photos



FOXBOROUGH: In this Oct 21, 2012 file photo, New England Patriots owner Robert Kraft, left, and businessman Donald Trump, right, applaud on the field before an NFL football game between the Patriots and the New York Jets.

POLITICAL FOOTBALL: FOR SOME, SUPER BOWL REFLECTS US DIVIDE

BOSTON: Not even the grandest of American sports spectacles is immune to the nation's deep political divisions. Patriots fans have spent nearly two full seasons being reminded of the close friendship between President Donald Trump and their team's three top figures - owner Robert Kraft, star quarterback Tom Brady and coach Bill Belichick. As the Super Bowl approaches, that has put the typically united Patriots Nation at odds over how hard to celebrate a team chasing its fifth Super Bowl win under Brady and Belichick. New England faces the Atlanta Falcons on Feb 5.

Some fans in the northeastern states that backed Democrat Hillary Clinton in the November presidential election say they're struggling to reconcile their football loyalties with their distaste for Trump. Many other fans - more than 1 million people voted for Trump in Massachusetts alone, Clinton won by less than 3,000 votes in New Hampshire and Trump picked up one of four electoral votes in Maine - say critics are simply injecting politics where it doesn't belong.

Symbolic foils

"It's pathetic. We have a double standard where if you admit you like Trump, you get blasted by the media," said Brian Craig, a Lowell, Massachusetts, Republican who voted for Trump. "If Brady endorsed Hillary, no one would care." Plenty of people put politics aside completely when they root for their teams. But after an election that magnified the country's deep differences of opinion, the Super Bowl matchup offers easy symbolic foils for anyone inclined to play politics.

Trump's friendship with Brady has been fodder for sports talk radio and local news in New England since September 2015, when one of Trump's trademark red "Make America Great Again" hats was spotted in Brady's locker and the quarterback said it would be "great" if the GOP hopeful in a crowded primary field won it all. Most of

Atlanta is represented by longtime Democratic US Rep John Lewis, who has been excoriated by Trump because he boycotted the inauguration and doesn't consider Trump a "legitimate" president because of intelligence reports of Russian involvement in the election. Trump won Georgia in November with more than 2 million votes.

"It's been very tough," said Segun Idowu, a Boston civil rights activist who grew up in Massachusetts, went to college in Atlanta, voted for Clinton and will likely be rooting for the Patriots. "The Trump versus Lewis metaphor seems apt to me." Patrick Dugan, a Clinton voter from West Hartford, Connecticut, said his Patriots fandom has become "increasingly lukewarm" because of the team's Trump connections.

"You can't put that genie back in the bottle," he said. "It's out there at this point. And once it's out there, it colors how you look at them, whether you want it to or not." Trump drew attention to his relationships with the Patriots several times throughout his campaign and leading up to his inauguration, including an election eve rally where he read a glowing letter from Belichick and claimed Brady voted for him, prompting a denial from the quarterback's supermodel wife, Gisele Bündchen.

Brady, for his part, hasn't revealed his vote and questioned this week why his long friendship with Trump is "such a big deal" after being asked whether he called the Republican to congratulate him, as Trump claimed in a speech attended by Kraft the night before his inauguration. "If you know someone, it doesn't mean that you agree with everything they say or do," Brady said.

Hand-wringing

Indeed, few recent marriages of sports and politics have caused this much hand-wringing. There was relatively little furor when basketball megastar LeBron James - fresh off winning a title for the Cleveland Cavaliers - endorsed and stumped for Clinton in his home state of Ohio, which

Trump won anyway; or when now-ousted Bills coach Rex Ryan introduced Trump at a campaign rally in Buffalo last year.

As president, Trump drew on his sports connections when he tapped New York Jets owner Woody Johnson as the next US ambassador to Britain. And Peyton Manning, the retired Denver Broncos quarterback who won the Super Bowl last year, joined Trump and other leaders in Philadelphia on Thursday night as Republican lawmakers gathered to map out their congressional agenda. Conversations on Twitter, Facebook and other social networks show the Patriots have certainly won over some new fans because of the Trump ties.

And many in Patriots Nation are certainly dreaming of sweet revenge if NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell has to hand the championship trophy to Brady. Goodell suspended Brady for four games at the start of this season for using under-inflated footballs in a playoff game, a case that wound through two federal courts and spurred lots of disdain for Goodell among Patriots fans.

For plenty of others, the Trump association is just another reason to dislike a franchise that's enjoyed unprecedented success but has also been the part of two high profile cheating scandals ("Spygate" and "Deflategate") and whose coach cultivates a gruff, stand-offish persona. "I want the Falcons to win for normal sports fan reasons, but I want the Patriots to lose in embarrassing fashion for political reasons," said Todd Moyer, who grew up in Atlanta and now lives in Fort Worth, Texas.

As the Super Bowl approaches, some skeptical New Englanders say they've made their peace with politics and, for now, are just focused on the game. "I have family members who support Trump. I'm not going to write them off, either," said Clinton voter Jack Peterson of Fairhaven, Massachusetts. "You just try to compartmentalize." — AP



CHICAGO: In this Sept 24, 2016, file photo, St Louis Cardinals' Yadier Molina hits a two-run double against the Chicago Cubs during the first inning of a baseball game. — AP

CARDINALS DEBATING RESTING MOLINA MORE BEHIND PLATE

ST LOUIS: The offseason discussion surrounding Yadier Molina has long centered on whether the St Louis catcher should rest more during the season. After Molina played in a career-high 147 games last year, that consideration is in the forefront more than ever for the 34-year-old winner of eight Gold Gloves. So is the awareness that his time as one of the dominant backstops in baseball might soon start winding down.

The discussion about Molina's playing time hasn't been limited to only fans, with Cardinals general manager John Mozeliak recently saying he feels Molina would be "better off" with more rest. This after a season in which the Puerto Rican star didn't win the Gold Glove for the first time since 2007. It's not an opinion shared by St. Louis manager Mike Matheny.

"My job description is to win games," Matheny said. "And if I've got a player I feel is going to help us win games, and that I feel is able to answer the bell, he's going to be in the lineup." Matheny knows more than most about the grueling demands of catching over the course of a 162-game season, having won four Gold Gloves of his own for his work behind the plate.

He's managed Molina since 2012, during which time the catcher - who has been a part of nine playoff appearances and two World Series titles since debuting in 2004 - has played in an average of 133 games per season. And while Matheny understands the long-term concerns about Molina's ability to continue playing at a high level, he's also aware that last season was the first time the Cardinals have missed the playoffs over that stretch - with much of the prior success coming in large part to Molina.

Big-picture feel

"It's frustrating, frustrating for me because I remember the years when I was able to play a lot," Matheny said. "There were

times I felt good, and it just made no sense. And for whatever reason, sometimes you can feel a lot of pressure of the outside influences saying that you shouldn't be playing." Mozeliak's comments about resting Molina more weren't his first on the topic. However, his interest has likely taken on more of a big-picture feel as the five-year contract extension Molina signed in 2012 nears its end.

The catcher is under contract for \$14 million in 2017, and there is a \$15 million mutual option for 2018, with a \$2 million buyout. Molina has said in the past he prefers to remain in St. Louis for the remainder of his career, and the idea of him in another team's uniform is upsetting for many fans. For Mozeliak, it's about balancing what Molina is now with what he hopes to be in the years to come.

"I do feel like, from a general manager's seat, that you would want to balance that and try to protect him better than we have," Mozeliak said. "But, the guy loves to play. He trains extremely hard to prepare himself in the offseason for that 162 (games), and he's not an easy guy to talk to get out of that lineup."

Despite turning 34 during the middle of last season, Molina was at his best offensively over the last few months of the season. He hit .365 after the All-Star break, and his .307 batting average for the season was the third best in his career.

Matheny said Molina is better than most about telling him when he needs a day off to rest, and the manager said he plans to continue watching the catcher for signs of wear and tear. All the while, though, he's well aware there's only one Yadier Molina behind the plate. "There's a shelf life to this gig and eventually there's going to be a finger to point of why this, that or the other, but right now this guy works really hard to continue to answer the bell," Matheny said. "And he's doing it well." — AP

PONTING PREDICTS AUSTRALIA WILL STRUGGLE IN INDIA

MELBOURNE: Australia will struggle on their tour of India where they will play four tests against the world's top-ranked side in spin-friendly conditions, former captain Ricky Ponting has predicted. Steve Smith's men will travel to India next month having been beaten 4-0 four years ago. They were also whitewashed 3-0 in Sri Lanka last August in similar conditions prompting Ponting to issue a grim outlook for the team.

"I think they'll struggle," the 42-year-old, who played 168 tests for Australia told Sky Sports Radio. "Every team that goes there struggles. It's become harder and harder for visiting teams to go to India. They probably make wickets to suit them more than ever before." The last time India lost a test at home was against England at the end of 2012 and Virat Kohli's side have won their last five series to climb to the top of the test rankings.

South Africa, New Zealand and England have all lost series in India in the last 15 months and Australia's last success in the country was in 2004 when they won a four-test series 2-1. "I went there for a lot of tours and we obviously played in some tough conditions," added Ponting. "But the wickets were good for the first couple of days of the game and then they started to turn. But now, even looking at what happened in Sri Lanka, whenever the Australian team tours anywhere on the subcontinent you can guarantee the wicket is going to turn, and turn quite a bit, from day one of the game."

Following the 3-0 drubbing in Sri Lanka, Australia's test team plunged into a crisis with successive home defeats to South Africa. After a national outcry forced wholesale changes, they recovered by winning the final test against South Africa in Adelaide before beating Pakistan 3-0. "The challenges are going to be there for the Aussie team," Ponting said. "Unlike what happened in Sri Lanka, as long as they can find a way to be competitive in the test series. Even if we don't win, I don't think it'd be that big of a deal. It's a real learning curve for our guys now to find a balance between playing the Australian way but (also) adapting that to Indian conditions." The first test starts in Pune on Feb. 23 and is followed by matches in Bangalore, Ranchi and Dharamsala. — Reuters

WADE REPLACES INJURED SMITH

SYDNEY: Australian wicketkeeper Matthew Wade has assumed captaincy duties for the upcoming New Zealand tour after injury ruled out Steve Smith, with youngster Sam Heazlett called up as his replacement, Cricket Australia said yesterday.

Smith's deputy David Warner was already due to be rested for the three one-day games in New Zealand starting Monday. Smith was fielding in the fifth one-day international against Pakistan at the Adelaide Oval on Thursday when he injured his left ankle, CA said. "He came off the field and had his ankle strapped and was able to return to the field for the remainder of the match," sports science and sports medicine manager Alex Kountouris said in a statement.

"Following further assessment this morning we believe Steve has sustained a medial ligament injury to his ankle. He will return to Sydney today to undergo scans to confirm the diagnosis. Early indications suggest this will likely take seven to 10 days to recover, meaning Steve will be unable to (participate) in the Qantas Tour of New Zealand."

Wade said he was surprised but "very excited" to be chosen as Australia's 24th ODI captain by the national selection panel. "With Steve Smith and David Warner absent it's an opportunity for me to captain the side for three matches," Wade said. "But I'm not about to change too much and it's a case of trying to continue the disciplines that have earned us success in the recent past."

Heazlett, 21, is a left-handed batsman who has played for Brisbane Heat in this season's Twenty20 Big Bash League. "Sam showed last summer what a talented player he is by averaging over 40 in his debut season at first-class level," CA interim selector Trevor Hohns said. "He impressed again when playing for the National Performance Squad against A teams from Australia, South Africa and India in Townsville and Mackay during this past winter." — AFP

CAVALIERS SLUMP SPARKS DRAMA FOR CHAMPIONS

LOS ANGELES: The NBA champion Cleveland Cavaliers once again find themselves involved in a mid-season soap opera and coach Tyronn Lue, trying to get his slumping squad back on track, could do without it. "It makes it tough and I hate it," Lue said of media reports of tension between superstar LeBron James and club management.

ESPN.com's report on Thursday claiming James and Cavs owner Dan Gilbert were at odds over payroll spending followed reports that the team had nixed a New York Knicks proposal to send Carmelo Anthony to Cleveland in a trade. "I've always been a man and I don't like it when people come out and say 'sources say,'" Lue told reporters at a team practice on Thursday. "Listen, if you can't put your name behind it, then don't say it. I don't believe in that. It's just a lot of distractions. We've got to focus on basketball, getting back to winning. We're the third-best team in the NBA right now. We're a great team, we're the champs, so we've just got to get back to playing championship basketball, that's it."

James notched his second triple-double in as many games on Wednesday but the Cavs fell 116-112 in overtime to the Sacramento Kings in Cleveland. It was the champions' third straight defeat and their sixth in eight games. After an upset loss to New Orleans on Monday, James—who had already expressed his opinion that the team needs to add a backup "playmaker" to the mix—indicated that foot-dragging on that matter might mean team leadership isn't committed to roster moves needed to retain the title.

"I just hope we're not satisfied as an organization," James said, later tweeting: "I'm not mad or upset at management ... I just feel we still need to improve in order to repeat if that's what we wanna do." General manager David Griffin, who met with James in the wake of those comments, said Wednesday that the suggestion that Cavaliers management are complacent was "really misguided." "Anyone insinuating that this organization is about anything other than (winning) would deeply upset me because ownership has invested in this at an absolutely historic level," he said. —AFP

WESTBROOK HEADLINES ALL-STAR RESERVES LIST

LOS ANGELES: One day after he posted his 60th career triple-double, and his 23rd of the season, Oklahoma City Thunder star Russell Westbrook headed the list of NBA All-Star reserves selected by the league's coaches. Despite his prolific output this season, Westbrook wasn't voted into the Western Conference starting lineup in polling of fans, media and players. But Westbrook, who earned Most Valuable Player honors in the past two editions of the mid-season showcase, got the nod as expected from coaches for the February 19 event in New Orleans.

First-time All-Stars Gordon Hayward of the Utah Jazz, DeAndre Jordan of the Los Angeles Clippers and Kemba Walker of the Charlotte Hornets were also named. Joining Westbrook, Hayward and Jordan in the West are DeMarcus Cousins of the Sacramento Kings, Marc Gasol of the Memphis Grizzlies and Draymond Green and Klay Thompson of the Golden State Warriors.

Green and Thompson join teammates Stephen Curry and Kevin Durant who were named starters for the West, the Warriors matching a league record with four All-Star selections. Durant will be teaming with Westbrook again after departing Oklahoma City as a free agent to join the Warriors this season. In addition to Walker, the East reserves are Paul George of the Indiana Pacers, Kevin Love of the Cleveland Cavaliers, Kyle Lowry of the Toronto Raptors, Paul Millsap of the Atlanta Hawks, Isaiah Thomas of the Boston Celtics and John Wall of the Washington Wizards.

Love joins East starters Kyrie Irving and LeBron James to give the conference-leading Cavaliers three All-Stars. New York Knicks forward Carmelo Anthony, who played in the past seven All-Star Games and nine of the past 10, was not chosen. Dwyane Wade's run of 12 straight All-Star selections also ended and the West will be without two-time All-Star Damian Lillard of the Portland Trail Blazers. San Antonio Spurs forward LaMarcus Aldridge also missed the cut. —AFP



OKLAHOMA CITY: Oklahoma City Thunder guard Russell Westbrook (0) shoots in front of Dallas Mavericks forward Dorian Finney-Smith (10) during the third quarter of an NBA basketball game. — AFP

THUNDER TOP MAVS, KANTER BREAKS ARM

LOS ANGELES: The Oklahoma City Thunder beat the Dallas Mavericks 109-98 late Thursday, but the victory proved costly as Thunder forward Enes Kanter broke his right arm after losing his cool. Kanter, Oklahoma City's third-leading scorer and top candidate for the NBA's Sixth Man of the Year Award, fractured his right forearm while punching a chair during a timeout in the second quarter. Russell Westbrook scored 45 points, Victor Oladipo scored 17 points while Steven Adams added 15 points and seven rebounds for the Thunder.

"We were a little more physical," Westbrook said. "We came out in the second half more aggressive on both sides of the ball." Harrison Barnes paced the short-handed Mavericks with 31 points on 13-of-26 shooting. Justin Anderson came off the bench to post 17 points for Dallas, who played without four of their top six players including Dirk Nowitzki, Deron Williams and Wesley Matthews.

Point guard Devin Harris said the Mavericks learned from this loss. "I think we are understanding how we need to play to be successful to win," Harris said. "Experience helps. Expectations are growing." Kanter went for X-rays at halftime and following the

game coach Billy Donovan confirmed the fracture. Kanter tried to take out his frustrations on a folding chair on the Thunder bench.

"It's tough man," Westbrook said, "especially doing it the way he did it. I think it's unfortunate, but he's a strong man and he will be back better." The Thunder did not indicate when he would be able to return. The 6-foot-11 center entered the game averaging 14.6 points and 6.8 rebounds this season. He had four points and four rebounds in nine minutes of playing time against the Mavericks.

'Frustrating times'

"He hit the seat, but the seat was a little up," center Adams said. "He didn't mean to do it, obviously. It's just one of those really frustrating times. I feel bad for him." Elsewhere, Paul George scored 32 points and Myles Turner added 23 as the Indiana Pacers snapped a three game losing skid with a 109-103 win over the Minnesota Timberwolves. George, who added five rebounds and four assists, was 12 of 22 from the floor and three for four from beyond the arc.

Karl-Anthony Towns led the Timberwolves with a game-high 33 points and 10 rebounds for his 35th

double-double of the season. Zach LaVine scored 23. In Denver, Nikola Jokic had 29 points and 14 rebounds before exiting the contest in the fourth quarter with an injury as the Denver Nuggets toppled the Phoenix Suns 127-120. Danilo Gallinari scored 23 points and Will Barton scored 16 off the bench for Denver, which won its fifth straight at home. Jokic limped off the court with 1:47 left after a hard fall.

Eric Bledsoe had 28 points and Devin Booker scored 22 for the Suns. TJ Warren added 21 but Phoenix couldn't keep pace in the final quarter. In Salt Lake City, Gordon Hayward tallied 24 points in his first game since being picked an all-star, as the Utah Jazz added to the Los Angeles Lakers miserable season with a 96-88 win.

George Hill added 12 points and Rudy Gobert finished with nine points, 13 rebounds and a season-high six blocked shots for the Jazz. Utah improved to 30-18 on the season and snapped a two-game losing streak. They also swept the four-game season series with the hapless Lakers. Los Angeles dropped to 16-34 and lost for the eighth time in the past nine games. Lou Williams led their offense with 20 points. — AFP

LAY-OFF PUTS FEDERER QUEST BACK ON TRACK

MELBOURNE: Resurgent Roger Federer said a long period of rest when he took six months out with injury had fuelled his incredible shot at more Grand Slam glory at the Australian Open. The 35-year-old Swiss veteran is wowing the tennis world with his wholly unexpected run through to Sunday's final, raising the prospect of an unprecedented 18th major title.

Federer, whose ranking has dipped to 17 after a knee problem ended last season following Wimbledon, has defied the doubters by reaching his 28th Grand Slam title match. After a fighting, five-set semi-final win over fellow Swiss Stan Wawrinka, he became the oldest man to reach a major final since Australia's Ken Rosewall (39 years 310 days) at the 1974 US Open.

Federer said much of his rejuvenation stemmed from his injury break, the longest of his career, which followed surgery on his knee earlier in the season. "It was a good thing to do. You can only ever do so much treatment to feel decent," said Federer, whose 19-year playing career has been largely injury-free. "What I've come to realize is when you don't feel well, you have too many problems going on, you just won't beat top-10 players. "All the time all you're doing is fighting the fire. From that standpoint, yeah, the six months definitely gave me something in return."

The Swiss marvel has spent a total of 13 hours 40 minutes on court in his six matches to get to his sixth Australian final, but he says he feels in good shape. "I just wanted to get healthy again. I'm happy this week has been a good one," he said. "So I will leave it all out here in Australia and (even) if I cannot walk for another five months, I will give it all I have."

'Just relax, man'

Federer, a staunch tennis traditionalist, said it meant a great deal to be linked with a record set by Rosewall, an eight-time Grand Slam-winner, by reaching the final. "We don't speak about him enough. I think he's a wonderful man," he said. "He wrote me a letter again this week to wish me well again. He does it every year at the Australian Open. Still haven't seen him, unfortunately. I know he's around."

"I love that generation of players with Tony Roche, Rod Laver, Ken Rosewall, Roy Emerson. "I know he's a few years older, but I know he had a tremendous career. So to be in the same breath like these guys, it's a great feeling. "I love these guys. It means a lot to me to have equalled something like this since a long time."

Federer said his charge through the top half of the men's draw, aided by the shock exit of world number one Andy Murray, had surprised even him. All the same, he needed to give himself a talking-to before completing Thursday's three-hour, 7-5, 6-3, 1-6, 4-6, 6-3 win over Wawrinka. "It's gone much better than I thought it would. That's what I was telling myself in the fifth set," he said.

"I was saying like, just relax, man. The comeback is so great already. Let it fly off your racquet and just see what happens. "I think that's the mindset I got to have, as well, in the finals. Sort of a nothing-to-lose mentality. "It's been nice these last six matches to have that mentality. It worked very well so I'll keep that up." —AFP



MELBOURNE: Switzerland's Roger Federer celebrates after defeating compatriot Stan Wawrinka during their semifinal at the Australian Open tennis championships. — AP



MELBOURNE: United States' Serena Williams serves to Croatia's Mirjana Lucic-Baroni during their semifinal at the Australian Open tennis championships. — AP

SIS VENUS STANDS BETWEEN SERENA AND TENNIS HISTORY

MELBOURNE: Serena Williams is on the cusp of making Grand Slam history, 19 years after her first appearance at the Australian Open—with only her greatest rival, sister Venus, able to stop her. The 35-year-old American made her Grand Slam debut in Melbourne way back in 1998 and won the first of her major titles at the US Open a year later.

She has since accumulated 22 over an astonishing career, matching Steffi Graf's Open-era record. One more today—her seventh in Australia—and she will hold the record outright, with only Margaret Court's all-time mark of 24 left to achieve. Williams has refused to talk about the possibility of finally surpassing the German, after intense pressure over the long-standing record took its toll at last year's US Open, when she lost in the semi-finals. But she now has a golden chance of further cementing her place in history, and at the same time reclaiming the top world ranking that Angelique Kerber seized from her last year.

"It is what it is. Like I said from the beginning, I don't really talk about that any more," Serena said when pressed on what breaking the Graf record would mean. Intriguingly, it is her older sister who could ruin her day, with Venus, 36, turning back the clock to make her first Grand Slam final since Wimbledon in 2009. It was Venus who knocked Serena out in round two on her Grand Slam debut 19 years ago, and they have since played eight major finals against each other.

Serena leads 6-2 in those finals, and has an overall 16-11 win-loss record against her sibling. While reluctant to speak about making history, she is happy to dwell on another all-Williams final, heaping praise on Venus. The elder Williams has beaten injuries and overcome Sjogren's syndrome, a rare, energy-sapping autoimmune disorder, to reach a 15th Grand Slam final, nearly eight years after her last.

"After everything that Venus has been

through with her illness and stuff, I just can't help but feel like it's a win-win situation for me," she said. "I was there for the whole time. We lived together. I know what she went through. "It's the one time that I really genuinely feel like no matter what happens, I can't lose, she can't lose. It's going to be a great situation."

'Chump change'

Serena said she never lost hope of meeting her sister again in a major final. "This probably is the moment of our careers so far," she said. "I never lost hope of us being able to play each other in a final, although it was hard because we're usually on the same side of the draw." Venus, who has won seven Grand Slam finals and lost another seven, will be the oldest finalist at Melbourne Park in the Open era, joining a select list of 30-somethings including Chris Evert,

Martina Navratilova and her sister. The 13th seed also takes the record for the longest wait between major finals, at seven-and-a-half years since her last appearance at Wimbledon in 2009.

Venus admits her sister doesn't have many weaknesses in her game to exploit, but she is up for the challenge. "When I'm playing on the court with her, I think I'm playing the best competitor in the game. I don't think I'm chump change either, you know," she said. "I can compete against any odds. No matter what, I get out there and I compete. "So it's like two players who really, really can compete, then also they can play tennis." "Okay, it won't be an easy match," she added. "You have to control yourself, then you also have to hopefully put your opponent in a box. This opponent is your sister, and she's super-awesome." — AFP

MRS FEDERER IN THE PINK

MELBOURNE: Brief stories from the Australian Open yesterday:

In the pink

Roger Federer's wife, Mirka, set tongues wagging with her eye-catching hot pink jumper during her husband's semi-final against Stan Wawrinka. Much of the commentary wasn't complimentary but it turns out that the garish item, with bright green collar and cuffs and emblazoned with a picture of a tiger, has cachet: it's a Gucci design, with a price tag of about \$1,500. That's a lot for a jumper but it probably won't concern Federer, who has earned about \$1.4 million by reaching Sunday's final.

Name that grunt

The Australian Open has been blessedly quiet this year as champion grunter Maria Sharapova is serving a drugs ban and the equally shriek-prone Victoria

Azarenka is taking time off after the birth of her first child. Grunting has previously been so loud that it was audible from outside Melbourne Park and TV viewers have phoned in to complain. But for anyone who's missing the screaming, one betting company has launched a 'Guess the Grunt' game on its website.

Name-dropping

Australian legend Evonne Goolagong-Cawley accidentally let slip who will be presenting the trophy to the winner of the women's singles final, the Herald Sun reported. As Goolagong-Cawley delivered the Daphne Akhurst Memorial Cup to an on-court ceremony, she told the crowd: "I'm looking forward to handing it over to Hana." An hour later, two-time Australian Open winner Hana Mandlikova was formally revealed as the woman who will present the trophy today. — AFP



(From right) Hazim Hosni-Duaij, Al-Otaibi-Alaa Jabr and Ahmad Rushdi.



Shooters practicing for the tournament.

SIXTH GRAND PRIX TOURNAMENT BEGINS TODAY

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sixth Grand Prix Tournament will start today at Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Olympic Shooting Complex. The competition will have 650 shooters representing 47 countries participating. The 13th Arab Shooting tournament will also begin its competitions as well. The opening ceremony will be under the patronage of HH The Amir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad Al-Jabar Al-Sabah who will be represented by Information Minister, State Minister for Youth Affairs and heads of participated federations.

The first day of the tournament will witness a pre-event training for 10 meter Air rifle for men, 50 m pistol for men and trap training for men and women. The technical meeting will be held at 11:00 am, while the official opening ceremony will be held a little later at 6:30 pm. President of the Arab and Kuwait Shooting Federations Eng Duaij Khalaf Al-Otaibi thanked HH The Amir for his generous care and support of the sport of shooting and

the tournament in particular.

Al-Otaibi said "if it was not for HH The Amir's support of Kuwait Shooting, we would not have seen such major achievements by the shooters in various tournaments, the latest of which the winnings of Fuhaid Al-Daihani and Abdallah Al-Rashidi of the Olympic Gold and bronze medals in the Rio 2016 Olympics. Al-Otaibi welcomed the shooters participating in the tournament as well as heads of delegations in Kuwait and wished them all success in the competitions that are expected to be heated to win medals.

Meanwhile secretary General of the Egyptian Olympic Committee, and President of Egyptian and African Archery Federations, ISSF Member Dr Alaa Jabr, and Vice President of the Arab Shooting Federation Colonel Hazim Hosni Ahmad, and CEO of Archery Federation Dr Ahmad Rushdi arrived in Kuwait yesterday, and were received by Deputy Chairman of Kuwait Olympic Committee, President of KSF and ASF Eng Duaij Al-Otaibi who wished them a pleasant stay in Kuwait.



STYLE-CONSCIOUS CONGOLESE ADD ELEGANT TOUCH TO CUP

OYEM: Stadiums may not be full at the Africa Cup of Nations but the supporters who do turn out create a noisy and colorful atmosphere-and in the case of DR Congo the government is giving a helping hand. The DRC's capital Kinshasa is the home of "Sape", a French acronym short for the Society of Ambiance-Makers and Elegant People, and one such group add a classy touch to their team's matches.

While men's Fashion Week has just come to an end in Paris, 7,500 kilometers away in

the Gabonese town of Oyem around 100 Congolese fans are putting the finest designers in the shade with their own distinctive outfits. Their striking shirts, sarongs and trousers in blue fabric with yellow and red flowers-the colors of the national flag-are dotted with little leopards on the chest and down the side and carry patriotic slogans in red letters. "The government have made a big effort to try to help the Leopards win the Cup of Nations," sports minister Willy Bakonga told AFP. "Their transport, accommodation, their

get-up... everything has been taken into account not only for the team but also for the supporters because we know the supporters can influence the performances of the players and therefore the results."

And it seems to be working: DR Congo beat Togo 3-1 on Tuesday to clinch a Cup of Nations quarter-finals spot. Dickson Yala, a Congolese journalist wearing the outfit, says that fashion "plays an integral part" in the culture of the war-weary country. "Every time the DRC takes part in an international competition the government puts down money to pay for the supporters' outfits. It is a kind of uniform," he says.

Antoine-Pierre Loji Kazadi, a 50-year-old teacher, wore the same "uniform" as he attended the Leopards' 2-2 draw with the Ivory Coast in Oyem along with his son. He said: "When our opponents see us looking elegant like this, psychologically it scores us a point! "We are already beating them in terms of elegance and so we expect the same outcome on the field."

'In our blood'

The Malian fans may have been the noisiest to visit Oyem so far, while the Togolese may have provided more of a carnival-style atmosphere than anyone else, and the Ivorians are the most ingenious with their costumes. But everyone agrees it is the

Congolese who come out top.

"They are classy! Whatever the circumstances and wherever they are, they feel they need to have a certain presence," says Redouane Behache, a 32-year-old actor known for his role parodying an exuberant Congolese "sapeur". "It is a party, it never stops. It is a joyful country. For them, makeup and face paint is frightening. To support the Leopards you can't make them afraid," he tells AFP with a smile.

"Sape", a kind of African dandyism, is a movement that originated in Congo-Brazzaville, then a French colony, after the Second World War. It took off on both sides of the Congo river in the 1960s, after colonialism ended. In the DRC "Sape" was popularised and personified by stars of the music scene like the legendary Papa Wemba, who died in April last year.

"Everywhere you go in Kinshasa you will find a designer, a stylist. Dressing well is the most normal thing a Congolese person can do," says the journalist Yala. "From 5:00pm onwards, you say to yourself: 'Is it Kinshasa Fashion Week or what?'" None of this is lost on the players. "It is in our blood, it has been like that since the dawn of time. I grew up surrounded by it and so I am used to it," says Neeskens Kebano. Coach Florent Ibenge agrees. "Football, music and religion, that's the Congo," he told AFP. — AFP



GABON: Congo's players celebrates at the end of a soccer match during the African Cup of Nations Group C soccer match between Congo and Togo at the Stade de Port-Gentil. — AP

NEW-LOOK JUVE SEEK TO IMPRESS

MILAN: Juventus coach Massimiliano Allegri is expected to ring the changes but hinted his new-look tactical formation could be deployed again when the champions travel to Sassuolo tomorrow. Allegri has regularly had to choose whether to pair Paulo Dybala or Mario Mandzukic with Argentine striker Gonzalo Higuain as his side target a record sixth consecutive scudetto. But the Juve handler deployed all three in the past two outings to keep the league and Cup champions in the hunt for a third consecutive double.

Juventus traditionally play a 3-5-2 but a switch to a 4-2-3-1 saw Dybala and Higuain seal a 2-0 win over Lazio by the 17th minute last week. Wednesday's 2-1 Italian Cup quarter-final win over AC Milan was virtually wrapped up by the 21st minute after goals by Dybala and Miralem Pjanic. With a trip to Porto in the last 16 of the Champions League on the horizon next month, Allegri was quick to underline: "I haven't said we will always use a formation like this." But his new-look side has appeared impressive, and he added: "I wanted to give some continuity to how we played last weekend. The lads worked very well."

Allegri is set to ring the changes, meaning a return to his tried and trusted formation remains a possibility. Gianluigi Buffon is set to take the goalkeeper's gloves from Norberto Neto, who played in midweek, while Giorgio Chiellini, Dani Alves and Stephan Lichtsteiner, all rested, are expected to start. Kwadwo Asamoah, though, is hoping his top performance in midweek is enough to keep him in Allegri's good books.

Rivals on tail

The Ghanaian midfielder/defender is usually a bit-part player for the Italian champions, but said: "The new formation suits us really well, it has made us better going forward and defensively." With title rivals Roma just one point behind and an impressive Napoli only three points further adrift, Allegri is unlikely to take any chances. But Roma will be taking nothing for granted when they visit Sampdoria looking to maintain their title charge in what is expected to be emblematic captain Francesco Totti's 25th and final season at the club.

Coach Luciano Spalletti watched nervously as Roma held on to a 1-0 lead at home to Cagliari last week, when Edin Dzeko hit his 14th goal of the campaign, but is expected to keep faith with his starting eleven. Diego Perotti and Radja Nainggolan should start behind Dzeko, who would be leading the Serie A goal scoring charts instead of Inter Milan striker Mauro Icardi had the Bosnian been even more clinical this season.

But Dzeko told lMessaggero.it: "I don't think about it (criticism). If someone criticises me, that's fine. I always try my best to score goals, that's my job." Juventus face Napoli in the two-leg semi-finals of the Italian Cup after Maurizio Sarri's men edged Fiorentina on Tuesday thanks to Jose Callejon's 71st minute winner. Sarri should welcome back Faouzi Ghoulam to his back line after the Algerian's early return from the Africa Cup of Nations.

Dries Mertens, with 12 goals this season in the absence of Polish striker Arkadiusz Milik, should start alongside Callejon and Lorenzo Insigne against a crisis-hit Palermo side that is 11 points from the safety zone. Palermo on Thursday appointed their fourth coach of a troubled season, tasking former Uruguay defender Diego Lopez with saving the Serie A strugglers from the drop. Lopez took over from Eugenio Corini following his resignation on Wednesday. Palermo started the season with Davide Ballardini, who was replaced by Roberto De Zerbi only two weeks into the campaign. —AFP



VIGO: Real Madrid's Cristiano Ronaldo reacts during a Copa del Rey, quarter final, 2nd leg soccer match between Celta and Real Madrid at the Balaidos stadium.— AP

RATTLED MADRID AIMING TO HALT SUDDEN SLUMP

MADRID: Real Madrid host high-flying Real Sociedad tomorrow aiming to reverse an alarming dip in form that has seen Zinedine Zidane's seemingly unbeatable squad just two weeks ago fail to win in three of their last four matches. The European champions bowed out of the Copa del Rey to Celta Vigo in midweek with a 2-2 draw at Balaidos not enough to overturn a 2-1 first leg deficit. Zidane's men still enjoy a one point lead over Sevilla, with Barcelona a point further adrift in third, and a game in hand over their title rivals.

However, the visit of Sociedad, who are level on points with fourth-placed Atletico Madrid, kicks off a daunting run of fixtures for Real with four away league games to follow in February. "I prefer it to happen now than in a month's time with La Liga or the Champions League on the line," protested Madrid captain Sergio Ramos on Real's slump.

Madrid's dip in form has coincided with a series of injury problems with seven first-team regulars missing the trip to Vigo.

Only Raphael Varane is expected to return for the weekend with Gareth Bale, James Rodriguez, Luka Modric, Marcelo, Dani Carvajal and Pepe again unavailable. Zidane has particular problems at full-back as the much-criticised Danilo suffered another harrowing night in scoring an own goal in midweek, whilst Marcelo's understudy Fabio Coentrao has made just one previous La Liga appearance this season. Sociedad are also suffering a Copa del Rey hangover as they were thumped 5-2 by Barcelona on Thursday to bow out 6-2 on aggregate.

Barca hit form

That victory extended Barca's winning streak to five games—their longest of the season so far. Luis Enrique's men have the chance to leapfrog Madrid and Sevilla to the top of the table for at least a few hours as they are the first of the top three in action on Sunday away at Real Betis. "We wanted a good performance to keep the positive run we are on since the start of 2017 going," said Barca midfielder Denis

Suarez after netting twice against Sociedad.

"Now we have to think about the game at Betis, win it, and put pressure on those at the top." There is another Sevilla against Barcelona clash as La Liga's most in-form side Sevilla travel to Espanyol looking for a sixth straight win. Jorge Sampaoli's men have registered Sevilla's best ever points tally for the first half of the season and can also go top ahead of kick-off at the Bernabeu with another victory. Spanish international Vitolo remains out injured, but Samir Nasri should return after missing last weekend's 4-2 win at Osasuna.

The other two Copa del Rey semi-finalists go head-to-head in Vitoria as Alaves host Atletico Madrid today. Villarreal's poor start to the year has seen them fall behind in the chase for the top four, but the visit of lowly Granada provides the Yellow Submarine a great chance for their first win of 2017. And Valencia's recent revival will be tested as they try to inflict Las Palmas' first home league defeat of the season on Monday. —AFP

BAYERN CAN WIN TRIPLE: ROBBEN

BERLIN: Arjen Robben says Bayern Munich have the quality to repeat their 2013 triple of Champions League, Bundesliga and German Cup titles, but admits the Bavarian giants need to improve. Bayern, who play Werder Bremen away today, are three points clear in Germany's top flight and face Arsenal next month in the last 16 of Europe. Robben scored the winner when Bayern lifted the 2013 Champions League—their fifth European Cup title—with a 2-1 victory over Borussia Dortmund at London's Wembley.

Bayern became the first German club to win the treble of European, league and cup titles in 2012/13 — no other German rival has repeated the feat—and the 33-year-old Robben says they can do it again in 2017. "To win the Champions League again is a great attraction and a driving force for us," Robben told sports daily FussballBild. "We'll also give it all we have in the league and German Cup to try and win everything. "We have the quality to do it." But Robben knows Bayern must raise their game to threaten the likes of

Arsenal, holders Real Madrid and fellow giants Barcelona in Europe. Bayern needed two Robert Lewandowski goals to seal last Friday's 2-1 comeback win at Freiburg during a below-par performance in sub-zero temperatures. Having claimed a record fourth straight Bundesliga title last season, Bayern are again in pole position to win the German league. However, second-placed rivals RB Leipzig have a clear advantage over Carlo Ancelotti's Munich as the German league is their sole focus since their first round German Cup exit

last August. "The Bundesliga will be tight until the end—also because we're involved in three different competitions," said Robben. "Leipzig are only involved in the league - they are fit and in good shape."

Robben admits Bayern need to up their tempo, especially in league matches. Carlo Ancelotti's side are not dominating the Bundesliga like they did under predecessor Pep Guardiola after draws against Cologne, Eintracht Frankfurt and Hoffenheim, plus November's 1-0 defeat at Borussia Dortmund.—AFP



Liverpool's head coach Juergen Klopp



Manchester United manager Jose Mourinho

Matches on TV
(Local Timings)

SPANISH LEAGUE

Villarreal v Granada

beIN SPORTS

15:00

Alaves v Atletico de Madrid

beIN SPORTS 3 HD

18:15

Eibar v Deportivo La Coruna

beIN SPORTS

20:30

Leganes v Vigo

beIN SPORTS

22:45

ITALIAN LEAGUE

Lazio v Chievo Verona

beIN SPORTS

20:00

Inter Milano v Pescara

beIN SPORTS

22:45

GERMAN BUNDESLIGA

Werder Bremen v Bayern Munich

beIN SPORTS

17:30

Wolfsburg v Augsburg

beIN SPORTS

17:30

Ingolstadt v Hamburger

beIN SPORTS

17:30

Darmstadt v Koln

beIN SPORTS

17:30

Leipzig v Hoffenheim

beIN SPORTS

17:30

Leverkusen v Monchengladbach

beIN SPORTS

20:30

FRENCH LEAGUE

Lyonnais v Lille

beIN SPORTS

19:00

Nancy Lorraine v Bordeaux

beIN SPORTS

22:00

Lorient v Dijon

beIN SPORTS

22:00

Bastia v Caen

beIN SPORTS

22:00

Angers v Metz

beIN SPORTS

22:00

Stade Rennes v Nantes

beIN SPORTS

22:00

AFRICAN NATIONS CUP 2017

Burkina Faso v Tunisia

beIN SPORTS MAX 1 HD AR

19:00

Senegal v Cameroon

beIN SPORTS MAX 1 HD AR

22:00

MOURINHO MOCKS KLOPP AS MAN UTD REACH FINAL

KINGSTON UPON HULL: Manchester United manager Jose Mourinho took a sarcastic swipe at his Liverpool counterpart Jurgen Klopp after his side booked their place in the League Cup final. A day after Liverpool had been bundled out of the competition by Southampton, United progressed with a 3-2 aggregate win over Hull City despite losing 2-1 in Thursday's second leg.

Klopp said the wind had made conditions difficult in Liverpool's 1-0 loss to Southampton on Wednesday and Mourinho made an acerbic reference to that remark when he was asked if United were the favorites for the trophy. "I don't think we are favorites against nobody," he said. "It doesn't matter where we play, against who, we are never favorites. Normally the stadium is windy and it's difficult."

Mourinho also tried to claim that his team's unbeaten record remained intact despite their defeat at Hull, who prevailed on the night courtesy of Oumar Niasse's 85th-minute goal. It was United's first loss in 18 matches, but having disagreed with the decision that led to Tom Huddlestone putting Hull ahead from the penalty spot, Mourinho claimed the outcome had been invalid. "We didn't lose. It was 1-1. I only saw two goals," the United manager told his post-match press conference at a chilly KCOM Stadium. "I saw (Paul) Pogba's goal and their (second) goal was a fantastic goal."

Great action, great cross and the guy in the far post coming. 1-1." Huddlestone put Hull in front in the 35th minute after Marcos Rojo was adjudged by referee Jon Moss to have tugged Harry Maguire's shirt. Mourinho refused to divulge his thoughts on the penalty, but suggested United's control of the tie had been unfairly taken away by Moss. "I don't want to speak about the penalty, but I don't want also to speak about the performance," said the

Portuguese, whose side will tackle Southampton at Wembley on February 26. "Because to speak about the performance again, I have to say the game was in the pocket, the game was under control and something happened to open the game."

Snodgrass nears exit

Hull had shown greater enterprise up to that point and although Pogba levelled, stabbing home after Huddlestone had inadvertently toed the ball into his path, Niasse's goal gave them a Pyrrhic victory. The Senegalese forward converted David Meyler's volleyed cross to score his first Hull goal since signing on loan from Everton and give the club a first victory over United since November 1974. Hull have won three of the five games they have played since Marco Silva succeeded Mike Phelan as manager earlier this month and he is confident they are on the right track. "I see progress. Always I see progress in our

last games," said Silva. "Game by game I see progress and it's important. Game by game I see the players take more confidence."

"Our organization in this moment is better, I'm sure about this. It's obvious, it's clear. We need to continue to do our work." But while Silva is confident his side can bridge the two-point gap currently separating them from safety in the Premier League, his team is being pulled apart before his eyes. Jake Livermore has joined West Bromwich Albion and top scorer Robert Snodgrass is reported to be on the verge of signing for West Ham United, prompting Silva to admit he is powerless to intervene. "My work always is to try to keep our players," he said. "But sometimes the club wants one thing, the manager wants one thing and sometimes the players don't want (to stay) also. "The last 10 days, the player (Snodgrass) wasn't available to work with us. The player wanted to leave the club." —AFP

'SEXY' LEIPZIG FLAUNTS FUTURE

BERLIN: Ralf Rangnick says the Bundesliga will flaunt its future today when his "sexy" second-placed RB Leipzig face unbeaten Hoffenheim with both aiming to chase down leaders Bayern Munich. "We are proud, modern and attractive, sexy even," Leipzig's director of sport, who has taken the Red Bull-backed upstarts from the fourth division to Germany's top tier, told daily FussballBild. "The size of the city, the number of fans, sponsors and media interest means Leipzig has a big dimension. "We can be more than just a regional team in the long term," he added, with RB—who enjoyed a record start to their first Bundesliga season with 13 games

unbeaten-on course for next season's Champions League.

They are three points behind Carlo Ancelotti's Bayern, but eight ahead of Hoffenheim in third. Hoffenheim earned a 1-1 draw at Bayern in November and are the only team in Germany's top flight still with an unbeaten record after seven wins and 10 draws this season. Their emergence has not gone unnoticed at Bayern, who snapped up burly centre-back Niklas Suele and defensive midfielder Sebastian Rudy for next season. Under Julian Nagelsmann, 29, the youngest coach in Bundesliga history, Hoffenheim are a tough team to crack.—AFP