

Kuwait, Turkey share deep ties, common interests



China, Saudis sign deals worth \$65bn



Real draw Bayern; Juve vs Barca in CL quarters



150 Fils

IRANIAN PILGRIMS TO JOIN THIS YEAR'S HAJJ: RIYADH

TALKS PAVE WAY FOR RESUMPTION OF PARTICIPATION



Min 17°

Max 28°



AL-JINEH, Syria: Syrian civil defense volunteers, known as the White Helmets, dig through the rubble of a mosque following a reported airstrike in this village in Aleppo province late Thursday. — AFP

US CLAIMS SYRIA STRIKE, DENIES HITTING MOSQUE

AL-JINEH, Syria: The US said it carried out an air strike in Syria against an Al-Qaeda meeting but denied deliberately targeting a mosque where a monitor said yesterday 46 people were killed. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said most of the dead in the Thursday evening raid on the village of Al-Jineh, in the northern province of Aleppo, were civilians.

"We did not target a mosque, but the building that we did target - which was where the meeting took place - is about 50 feet (15 meters) from a mosque that is still standing," said Colonel John J Thomas, spokesman for US Central Command. According to a Centcom statement: "US forces conducted an air strike on an Al-Qaeda in Syria meeting location March 16 in Idlib, Syria, killing several terrorists."

The Centcom spokesman later clarified that the precise location of the strike was unclear - but that it was the same one widely reported to have hit the village mosque in Al-Jineh, in Aleppo province. "We are going to look into any allegations of civilian casualties in relation to this strike," he added. The US-led coalition striking the Islamic State group in Iraq and Syria did not mention the raid in its daily round-up for Thursday, indicating that the strike was carried out unilaterally by the US. An AFP correspondent saw rescue workers in white helmets working under spotlights with picks and shov-

els late on Thursday to dig people out of the rubble. Much of the building, identified by a black placard outside as a mosque, had been flattened. The empty prayer hall was covered in debris, and rescue workers stepped through it carefully, deliberating how to break down a wall to search for more survivors. Fearing additional air strikes, weekly Friday prayers were cancelled in towns and villages across northern Syria, AFP's correspondent said.

Rescuers had earlier left the wreckage site but were forced to double back when they heard moaning coming from the rubble. "More than 100 people were wounded," Observatory head Rami Abdel Rahman said on Thursday, adding that many were still trapped under the collapsed mosque in Al-Jineh, just over 30 km west of Aleppo. The village is held by Islamist groups, but the Observatory said no jihadist factions are present.

Abu Muhammad, a village resident, told AFP that he "heard powerful explosions when the mosque was hit. It was right after prayers at a time when there are usually religious lessons for men in it. "I saw 15 bodies and lots of body parts in the debris when I arrived. We couldn't even recognize some of the bodies," he added. The strike was condemned by Islamist group Ahrar al-Sham, which said targeting mosques was a war crime under international law. — AFP

RIYADH: Iranian pilgrims will participate in this year's annual hajj, Saudi Arabia said yesterday, despite ruptured ties between the regional rivals. For the first time in nearly three decades Iran's pilgrims - which would have numbered about 60,000 - did not attend last year's hajj after Riyadh and Tehran failed to agree on security and logistics. Tensions remain as Saudi Arabia repeatedly accuses Iran of fuelling conflicts by supporting armed movements in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Bahrain.

But after talks between the two sides, the Iranians will join this year's ritual which takes place at the beginning of September. "The ministry of hajj and the Iranian organization have completed all the necessary measures to ensure Iranian pilgrims perform hajj 1438 according to the procedures followed by all Muslim countries," the official Saudi Press Agency said, referring to this year in the Islamic calendar. The hajj ministry said that the kingdom, home to Islam's holiest sites, welcomes "all pilgrims from all the different nationalities and backgrounds".

Although the verbal sparring continued, Saudi media reported in December that the Saudi minister in charge of pilgrimages, Mohammed Bentin, had invited Iran to discuss arrangements for this year's hajj. An Iranian delegation visited Saudi Arabia in February for talks with Bentin. In early March, Iran said there had been progress. "Most of the questions up for discussion have been resolved and a couple of issues are remaining," Iran's ISNA news agency quoted Ali Ghazi Askar, the Iranian supreme leader's representative for hajj affairs, as saying. "If those questions are resolved, we hope pilgrims will soon be sent to Saudi Arabia." Iran's Tasnim news agency said on March 5 that the country would send around 80,000 pilgrims this year. — Agencies

POPULAR SAUDI CLERIC BANNED FROM TWITTER

RIYADH: A Saudi Islamic leader with more than two million Twitter followers has been banned from writing by a court that convicted him of jeopardizing public order. Awad Al-Qarni, previously accused of links to the banned Muslim Brotherhood, was also fined 100,000 riyals (\$27,000), Okaz newspaper reported on its website late Thursday. It did not name the "famous preacher" but Qarni himself confirmed the verdict on his @awadalqarni Twitter account late Thursday. "I am prevented from writing" on the account, he wrote, before issuing a Twitter message early yesterday thanking his followers.

Qarni was "one of the key clerics of the Sahwa movement," British scholar Toby Matthieson has written. The Sahwa emerged in Saudi Arabia in the 1960s and 70s as "a modern form of Islamic activism" which had wide impact and whose founders were exiled Muslim Brothers, according to another expert, Stephane Lacroix. Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates have all declared the Muslim Brotherhood to be a "terrorist group". — AFP

KUWAIT-TURKEY RELATIONS: HISTORY OF DEEP-ROOTED TIES, COMMON INTERESTS

ANKARA: Bilateral relations and regional development as well as other issues of common concern will feature high on the agenda of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's visit to Turkey on Monday and his talks with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The relations between the two countries have been remarkably on the rise over the past years, gradually turning from the level of friendship to partnership based on mutual respect and common interests.

The two countries and their people are closely bound by deep-rooted religious, or rather Islamic, historical and cultural ties that can significantly contribute to further enhance bilateral relations. Diplomatic relations between Kuwait and Turkey date back to the year 1969; embassies were opened in both states a year later, when a transport cooperation agreement was also signed.

In 1975, the two countries signed a cultural agreement, followed by one for aviation cooperation in 1977. In 1982, an agreement followed on economic, technical and industrial cooperation, then a post service one in 1986. Then in 1988, they signed a pact for encouraging and protecting investments.

Remarkable improvement

In the wake of the Liberation of Kuwait from the Iraqi invasion in 1991, Kuwait-Turkey relations improved remarkably. His Highness the late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah visited Ankara in November 1991, where he voiced appreciation and gratitude over Turkey's support to Kuwait during the invasion.

Since the first hours of the crisis, Turkey condemned the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and considered it a violation of the International law and legitimacy, declaring solidarity with the country. Moreover, during the invasion Ankara suspended oil pumped from Iraqi wells passing through the Turkish lands and joined the international coalition to liberate Kuwait.

Then in October 1997, former Turkish President Sulaiman Demirel visited Kuwait and had talks with His Highness the late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, on bilateral ties and a multitude of issues of common concern.

During the visit, the two leaders signed a financial agreement to prevent dual taxation, and another one to boost cultural cooperation.

His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah visited Ankara in 2008 and signed seven agreements in various fields, besides other seven agreements on economic, technical, scientific and health cooperation, in addition to exchange of manpower. An agreement was then signed forming a joint higher committee on the level of foreign ministers. Then during His Highness the Amir's visit to Ankara in 2013, the two countries signed eight agreements that covered various fields of cooperation.

Agreements

Over the period 2008-14, the two sides signed a number of agreements at the ministerial level, including an MoU on the

exchange of military expertise, training and military cooperation, and joint military drills, in addition to protection of the environment, maritime transport, preservation of natural resources, promoting industrial exports. The two countries are bound by agreement totaling 41, mostly economic, signed over the decade.

In 2009, His Highness the Amir visited Istanbul, leading the Kuwaiti delegation to the 25th conference of the Standing

Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Summit, themes "Unity and Solidarity for Justice and Peace." Then in May 2016, His Highness the Amir led the Kuwaiti delegation to the first ever World Humanitarian Summit held in Istanbul.

Former Turkish leader Gul visited Kuwait three times, February 2009, February 2011 and March 2014, as part of the mutual efforts to consolidate bilateral ties. Current President Recep Tayyip

investing in Turkey, besides 387 branches of Kuveyt-Turk Bank, an affiliate of the Kuwait Finance House (KFH). Kuwait's Burgan Bank's owns shares in a Turkish bank. Last year, up to 180,000 Kuwaitis visited Turkey as tourists.

Since 1992, the two countries exchanged official visits at the level of parliament speakers, premiers and ministers. The last of these was a visit by Kuwait's National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem to Turkey in February 2016.

The Joint Higher Committee between Kuwait and Turkey held its first meeting in Kuwait on October 24, 2013. Coordination is underway by the Kuwaiti Foreign Ministry for the second meeting in Ankara over the coming period to discuss means of promoting bilateral ties on all levels.

The Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) is yet another Kuwaiti institute that is cooperating with Turkey. The fund made its first loan to Turkey in 1979 for an electricity grid. Up to November 2009, the KFAED had presented a total of 12 loans to Turkey worth KD 106 million.

In January 2016, the fund signed with the Ankara to provide Turkey with a donation worth \$20 million contributing to a rapid response plan for the Syrian refugees in the country. This was a part of Kuwait's commitment during the Third International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria to offer \$500 million to Syrian refugees.

Personal donation

His Highness the late Amir Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah had offered a personal donation of \$1 million to the victims of the 1999 Izmit earthquake that hit northwestern Turkey. Kuwaiti charities organizations also offered great donations and humanitarian aid.

Then in November 2014 the Kuwaiti funded 'Humanitarian Leader' village was inaugurated in the eastern Turkey city of Van which was hit by a destructive quake that killed 644 people, wounded 4,152 others and damaged 2,262 houses.

In March 2016, the Kuwaiti-funded "Sabah Al-Ahmad" village was opened in Kilis, southern Turkey, for the Syrian refugees. The village comprises 1,248 domiciles accommodating more than 15,000 refugees, along with a coed school, a library, a mosque, a nursery and a social center.

As part of the efforts to support Turkey that hosts up to three million Syrian refugees, Kuwait hosted the First, Second and Third International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria. It also co-chaired the fourth one in London, Britain, in February 2016.

By the same token, Kuwait-based charity organizations and societies, as well as beneficiaries have provided considerable amounts of humanitarian and relief aid from Turkey across the border into Syria. Moreover, Kuwaiti medical teams have conducted surgeries and offered due health care to many Syrian refugees in Al-Amal Hospital in the town of Reyhanli, in southern Turkey Hatay Province. —KUNA



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan are pictured during the latter's visit to Kuwait in 2015. —KUNA

Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (COMCEC). His Highness the Amir and former Turkish President Abdullah Gul then discussed means to boost bilateral relations on all levels.

OIC Summit

In April 2016, His Highness the Amir visited Istanbul where he attended the 13th

Erdogan visited Kuwait in April 2015, after two visits to the country as a prime minister in 2005 and 2011.

Bilateral trade hit \$700 million in 2016, compared to \$624 million a year earlier. Turkish firms carried out construction business worth \$6.3 billion in Kuwait, as Kuwait's direct investments in Turkey hit \$2 billion.

There were 271 Kuwaiti companies

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Photo

of the day



KUWAIT: Arabic traditional coffee remains a symbol of distinctiveness and generosity in Kuwait. — KUNA

Crime

Report

MAN ARRESTED WITH FORGED TRAFFIC STAMPS

KUWAIT: A police patrol approached the car of an Egyptian man who seemed nervous. He claimed he had forgotten his wallet at home, but when officers wanted to take his fingerprints, he drove off. Backup police searched for the car in the area and found it with the suspect inside. When the car was searched, forged traffic stamps were found. He confessed to using them to forge transactions in exchange of money. He was also found wanted on three financial cases worth KD 36,000. He was sent to concerned authorities.

Thieves caught

Farwaniya detectives arrested two bedoons and are looking for a Gulf national who formed a gang to steal cars. An interior ministry statement said after several complaints were received about the thefts, a task force was formed, and information led to the arrest of the two suspects, who confessed to committing several thefts in various areas of Kuwait. Both had many sets of keys they used to steal the cars. They said that they got rid of the stolen cars in open yards and markets and led police to them, where 26 cars were found.

KD 250,000 debts

Farwaniya detectives sent a bedoon to the civil sentences implementations department as he is wanted for debts worth KD 250,000. A security source said detectives learned about the whereabouts of the suspect in a furnished flat, so they went there and arrested him.

Fight

Competition over selling used cars started a fight between two bedoons, resulting in one of them sustaining fractures and wounds that led to bleeding. Police and paramedics rushed to the area and found the two bedoons had fought as they competed to buy a car from a man, and the dispute escalated to exchanging blows. Meanwhile, two citizens had a dispute over money and exchanged blows, leading to a gash on the head of one of them. The injured man brought a medical report from Adan Hospital to the police and lodged a complaint. Detectives are looking for the other man for questioning.

Ex-convict

Jahra detectives arrested a Kuwaiti ex-convict wanted to serve five years in jail on felony cases. He was arrested in his home following fierce resistance. He was sent to concerned authorities. — Al-Rai

CONFERENCE ON NUCLEAR MEDICINE DUE IN KUWAIT

KUWAIT: Kuwait will witness tomorrow a broad conference on nuclear medicine with participation of internationally-renowned experts and associations. Dr Fahad Abdulrahman Maarefi, the head of the Kuwaiti Association for Nuclear Medicine and Molecular Imaging, said in a statement to KUNA on Friday that the convention is the sixth to be organized by the association in the country. The association is affiliated to the Kuwait Society for Nuclear Medicine, founded on 23rd of February 2009.

Dr Maarefi affirmed that the conference would be the first to be held at the Middle Eastern West Asian levels. Conferees, during the meeting scheduled to proceed till March 22nd, will examine latest nuclear imaging innovation, studies and international protocols in the realm. Up to 40 Kuwaiti, Arab and foreign experts will address the seminars and workshops, to be held within its framework. — KUNA



MIAMI BAND CONCERT CONCLUDES GCC YOUTH FESTIVAL

KUWAIT: Miami Band hosted a concert at Shaheed Park's amphitheater Thursday night, which saw a huge turnout. The event marked the conclusion of the GCC Youth Festival which was organized in cooperation with Loyac Academy of Performing Arts (LAPA). — KUNA photos





ANKARA: Kuwait's International Islamic Charity Organization and Turkey's Red Crescent sign the memorandum of understanding. — KUNA

KUWAIT, TURKEY SIGN MOU TO AID THE NEEDY IN WAR-TORN NATIONS

ANKARA: Kuwait's International Islamic Charity Organization (IICO) signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) yesterday with Turkey's Red Crescent on building joint strategic partnership to aid the poor and needy in war-torn countries.

Meanwhile, IICO's President Dr Abdullah Al-Maatouq praised the enthusiastic and cooperative spirit shown by the Turkish Red Crescent while signing the MoU, pointing out several common

grounds between the Kuwaiti and Turkish institutions in the humanitarian action field. IICO's cooperation with the Turkish Red Crescent will contribute in providing aid and relief to the poor and needy in all around the world, particularly those who suffered severely in war and disaster-torn countries, added Maatouq.

Furthermore, IICO has a current significant cooperation with the Turkish Humanitarian Relief Foundation in Syria and Pakistan, noted the Kuwaiti official,

expressing his hope in activating the signed MoU between IICO and Turkish Red Crescent quickly in order to implement a number of relief programs in Palestine, Syria, and Africa.

Moreover, IICO has established partnerships with several UN-affiliated humanitarian and relief bodies, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and humanitarian institutions in GCC States, noted Maatouq. — KUNA



KRCS DELIVERS FUEL TO DISPLACED IRAQIS IN MOSUL

IRBIL: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) delivered 30,000 liters of fuel to displaced Iraqis in Jamkur refugee camp in Mosul, an official said yesterday.

KRCS Executive Fahad Al-Me'raj said that the fuel will cover the needs of 1,500 displaced families in the camp. This is part of the Kuwaiti ongoing efforts to help the displaced Iraqis fleeing from areas still under control of the flailing so-called

Islamic State (IS) in Mosul. Officials running refugee camps in Mosul thanked KRCS for carrying out its humanitarian efforts, saying that this gesture was not strange to the Kuwaiti people and leadership.

KRCS launched its own Mosul relief aid campaign in 2017, distributing foodstuff, necessities, and fuel to most of the displaced Iraqis in the Kurdistan region. — KUNA

KUWAIT SEEKS EDUCATIONAL COOPERATION WITH QATAR

DOHA: The visiting Kuwaiti Minister of Education on Thursday affirmed his country's concern for boosting scientific and teaching cooperation with Qatar. Dr Mohammad Al-Fares, also the Minister of Higher Education, praised in a statement after visiting Qatar University the remarkable development in the local educational field.

The minister said his current visit to Qatar partly aims at discussing prospected coordination between Qatar University and Kuwait University for mutual benefits. The two universities seek to broaden cooperation in scientific research, said minister Fares, who held talks with managers of the university. He arrived in Qatar on Monday to partake in the 2017 Teaching Conference and the National Exhibition for Research. — KUNA

KRCS DELIVERS AID TO SYRIANS IN LEBANON

BEIRUT: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) delivered on Thursday 500 food parcels to Syrian refugees in Lebanon's northernmost region of Akkar. The head of the KRCS team, Qassem Ahmad, said that each portion is sufficient for a five-member family for a month.

The team has also inspected work of teams tasked with distributing bread, baked at local bakeries, to the refugees regularly, part of the ongoing and regular Kuwaiti relief efforts for relieving the Syrian refugees, totally estimated at 1.5 million. At Al-Rihaniah refugee camp in Akkar, the Kuwaiti society held an entertainment gathering for Syrian refugee children. — KUNA



KUWAIT PARTICIPATES IN HALABJA ANNIVERSARY

IRBIL: Kuwait's Consul General in Irbil Dr Omar Al-Kanderi took part in the Halabja massacre anniversary Thursday by sponsoring a number of orphans and distributing aid to the internally displaced persons (IDP) in Halabja town. "We recall, with great pain, the victims of Halabja massacre, which was committed by the former Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein using chemical weapons against civilians," Kanderi said.

What happened in the town was a horrific catastrophe not only on Kurds or Iraq, but also on the entire world, particularly the Kuwaiti people, he noted, adding that the Kuwaitis feel Halabja residents' pain as they both suffered from the brutality of the Saddam Hussein regime.

On the anniversary of this tragic incident, Kanderi mentioned that the Kuwaiti Consulate General has launched a humanitarian campaign to sponsor 156 orphans from Halabja city as part of Kuwait's campaign to sponsor and support 4,000 orphans in Iraqi Kurdistan, which is financed by the Kuwaiti Society for Relief. The Consulate also distributed around 1,489 food baskets to displaced Iraqis from various governorates. — KUNA

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WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump meets German Chancellor Angela Merkel in the Oval Office of the White House yesterday. —AP

TRUMP WELCOMES MERKEL TO WHITE HOUSE

SIT-DOWN COULD BE A RESTART OF STRAINED RELATIONSHIP

WASHINGTON: It was all smiles as US President Donald Trump welcomed German Chancellor Angela Merkel to the White House yesterday, their first personal encounter since he frequently criticized her during the 2016 presidential campaign. Their agenda included discussions on strengthening NATO, fighting the Islamic State group and resolving Ukraine's conflict, all matters that require close cooperation between the US and Germany. The meeting, which was postponed from Tuesday because of a snowstorm, was to be capped with a joint news conference.

Trump and Merkel smiled in front of cameras in the Oval Office at the start of their meeting, with the president urging journalists to "send a good picture back to Germany, please". The new president told reporters merely that he and Merkel would be discussing "many things" in their first face-to-face exchange of his presidency. Their sit-down could be a restart of a relationship complicated by Trump's rhetoric on the campaign trail.

He spent a good part of 2016 bashing the chancellor, accusing her of "ruining" Germany for allowing an influx of refugees from Syria.

"You watch what happens to Angela Merkel, who I always thought of as a very good leader until she did this. I don't know what went wrong with her," said then-candidate Trump at an August rally in Virginia. "What went wrong? Angela, what happened?" Then, Trump seemed to care little about the potentially awkward ramifications were he to win. He invoked Merkel as a foil at his rallies, accusing his campaign rival, Hillary Clinton, of wanting to be "America's Angela Merkel." He lashed out at Time magazine when it named Merkel "Person of the Year" in 2015 instead of him.

Trump, at the time, did find ways to voice his respect. When a television station in September asked him to name a world leader he admired, he cited Merkel. In his meetings with world leaders since the inauguration, Trump has adopted a more diplomatic public persona. He recently spent a weekend bonding with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, golfing and dining with Abe at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida. He has cultivated a closer friendship with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, whom he has known for years.

But Merkel is used to an altogether different

type of American leader, having shared a strong bond with President Barack Obama. She was the last of Obama's key European allies still in power when he left office. And as the leader of Europe's biggest economy and most stable government, Merkel emerged in recent years as the leading voice for a continent struggling with slow growth, identity issues and increased security threats after a string of terrorist attacks.

Stability

Reflecting their connection, Obama and his wife called Merkel and her husband on the day before Trump's inauguration to thank her for "her strong, courageous and steady leadership". It was Obama's final call with a foreign leader, his advisers said. Merkel's first major encounter with Trump comes as she seeks a fourth term as chancellor in elections later this year. She has acknowledged the contest could be difficult and has stressed a need for stability after Britain's decision to leave the European Union.

She reportedly has studied Trump's speeches and policies in advance of her trip, eager to find areas for cooperation. Steven Keil, a fellow with The German Marshall Fund of the United

States, said Merkel has little reason to dwell on Trump's past comments. "Merkel is extremely pragmatic in her approach here, but she's also going to have some situations in which it will be tough for her to give too much," Keil said.

Trump has rattled European leaders with his "America First" mantra. He also backed Brexit and is skeptical of multilateral trade agreements. Merkel is expected to reiterate her belief that a strong EU remains in America's strategic and economic interests, a message she shared last month in Munich with Vice President Mike Pence. She was accompanied by a trade delegation that includes top executives of BMW and Siemens, employers of tens of thousands of Americans. Many live in Southern states that Trump won in the US election.

Military matters may be testy. Trump declared NATO "obsolete" before telling European leaders the alliance remains important. But he is expected to reiterate calls for NATO members to meet a minimum commitment for defense spending. Only the US and four other members currently reach the benchmark of spending 2 percent of GDP on defense. Germany lags significantly behind. —AP

31 SOMALIS KILLED IN RAID OFF YEMEN COAST

DUBAI: Thirty-one Somali refugees were killed off the coast of Yemen late on Thursday when a helicopter attacked the boat they were travelling in, a local coast guard in the Houthi-controlled Hodeidah area said. Coast guard Mohamed Al-Alay told Reuters the refugees, carrying official UNHCR documents, were on their way from Yemen to Sudan when they were attacked by an Apache helicopter near the Bab Al-Mandeb strait. UNHCR spokeswoman in Yemen, Shabia Mantoo, confirmed that a number of refugees were killed but did not confirm the numbers. "We are distressed by this incident and understand that refugees were travelling in a vessel off the coast of Hodeidah

which was reportedly impacted during the course of hostilities," she told Reuters by telephone.

Mantoo said that refugees and asylum seekers were moving out of Yemen and heading north because of deteriorating conditions. A sailor who had been operating the boat, Ibrahim Ali Zeyad, said 80 refugees had been rescued. The spokesman for the International Organization for Migration (IOM) told a media briefing in Geneva the number of deaths may be more than 31. "We just got information of a helicopter assault on a boat leaving Yemen, we believe for Sudan, full of Somalis," Joel Millman said.

He added that they were aware of 80 survivors

brought to hospitals in Hodeidah. It was not immediately clear who carried out the attack. Hodeidah on the Red Sea is controlled by Iran-allied Houthi fighters who in 2014 overran Yemen's capital Sanaa and forced the Saudi-backed government of President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi to flee into exile. A Saudi-led coalition was formed in 2015 to fight the Houthis and troops loyal to former President Ali Abdullah Saleh who have fired missiles into neighboring Saudi Arabia. The Bab Al-Mandeb is a strategic waterway at the foot of the Red Sea through which nearly 4 million barrels of oil are shipped daily to Europe, the United States and Asia.—Reuters



MOSUL: The body of a young girl is wrapped in a blanket at the site of a mass grave containing some two dozen people, many of them children, in an area recently re-taken from Islamic State militants in Mosul. —AP

IRAQI FORCES ADVANCE INTO MOSUL'S OLD CITY WITH NURI MOSQUE IN SIGHT TROOPS WARY OF ARMORED CAR SUICIDE ATTACKS

MOSUL: Iraqi forces battling Islamic State in Mosul advanced into the Old City and around the Al-Nuri mosque yesterday trying to seal off a main road to prevent militants sending in suicide bombers. Troops are meeting fierce resistance as militants retreat into the Old City, where street fighting is expected in the narrow alleyways and around the mosque where Islamic State declared its caliphate nearly three years ago.

A helicopter fired rockets into the area and heavy gunfire and mortar blasts echoed as troops fought in districts near the Nuri mosque, where Islamic State's black jihadist flag hangs from its leaning minaret. "Federal police and rapid response forces completely control the Al-Basha mosque, Al-Adala street and Bab Al-Saray market inside the Old City," a federal police spokesman said. "Forces are trying to isolate the Old City area from all sides and then start an offensive from all sides."

Five months into the campaign to liberate Mosul, Islamic State's last major

stronghold in the country, Iraqi forces backed by US-led coalition air strikes have retaken the eastern half of the city and about half of the west across the Tigris river. Losing Mosul would be a huge blow to Islamic State. It has served as the group's de facto capital since its leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi announced his self-declared caliphate spanning Iraq and Syria from the Nuri Mosque in July 2014. Troops were trying to besiege the Old City and cut off a street leading out to prevent Islamic State dispatching the armored suicide car and truck bombs that have been targeting army positions inside the city.

On Wednesday, a suicide bomber in an armored digger truck penetrated Iraqi forces lines, smashing through vehicles and barricades before detonating a blast that destroyed vehicles including Iraqi U.S. made Abrahams tanks. "A bulldozer packed with a large amount of explosives managed to reach our troops near the museum using the Old City side roads, we

lost an Abrahams tank, three Humvees and four soldiers," a spokesman for the rapid reaction forces said. Residents have been streaming out of western neighborhoods recaptured by the government, many hungry and traumatized by living under Islamic State's harsh rule. Many say food is running short and security is fragile even in liberated areas.

As many as 600,000 civilians are caught with the militants inside Mosul, which Iraqi forces sealed off from the remaining territory that Islamic State controls in Iraq and Syria. The Iraqi forces include army, special forces, Kurdish peshmerga and Shiite militias. Around 255,000 people have been displaced from Mosul and surrounding areas since October, including more than 100,000 since the latest military campaign in western Mosul began on Feb 19, United Nations figures show. The last week has seen the highest level of displacement yet, with 32,000 displaced between March 12 and 15.—Reuters

ISRAEL HITS TARGETS IN SYRIA; TENSIONS FLARE

JERUSALEM: Israeli warplanes struck several targets in Syria yesterday, prompting retaliatory missile launches, in the most serious incident between the two countries since the Syrian civil war began six years ago. Syria's military said it had downed an Israeli plane and hit another as they were carrying out pre-dawn strikes near the famed desert city of Palmyra that it recaptured from jihadists this month.

"Our air defense engaged them and shot down one warplane over occupied territory, hit another one, and forced the rest to flee," the army said in a statement carried by state news agency SANA. The Israeli army denied any planes had been struck and the Syrian government has made similar unfounded claims in the past. "The safety of Israeli civilians or the Israeli air force aircraft was at no point compromised," army spokesman Peter Lerner said. The Israeli air force said earlier that it had carried out several strikes on Syria overnight, but that none of the ground-to-air missiles fired by Syrian forces in response had hit Israeli aircraft.

It was an unusual confirmation by the Jewish state of air raids inside Syria. "Overnight... aircraft targeted several targets in Syria," an Israeli army statement said. "Several anti-aircraft missiles were launched from Syria following the mission and (army) aerial defense systems intercepted one of the missiles." None of the missiles fired from Syria hit their targets, the army added. One missile was intercepted north of Jerusalem by Israel's Arrow air defense system, Israeli media reported. It would be one of the first times the system has been used. A Jordanian military source said shrapnel from one missile struck in the north of the kingdom without causing any casualties.

Air sirens wail

Both Israeli and foreign media have reported a number of Israeli air strikes inside Syria targeting arms convoys of Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, which fought a devastating 2006 war with Israel and is now fighting alongside the Damascus regime. The Jewish state does not usually confirm or deny each raid but may have been led to do so this time by the circumstances of the incident. The missile fire prompted air raid sirens to go off in the Jordan Valley during the night, the Israeli army said. In April 2016, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu admitted for the first time that Israel had attacked dozens of convoys transporting weapons in Syria destined for Hezbollah.

Israel and Syria are still technically at war, though the border had remained largely quiet for decades until 2011 when the Syrian conflict broke out. Iranian-backed Hezbollah has been fighting inside Syria in support of President Bashar Al-Assad against the rebels. While there has been periodic stray fire into the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights that has prompted retaliatory strikes, Israel has largely avoided getting sucked into the conflict directly. Witnesses cited by the press also reported two explosions that could have been caused by the launch of the anti-missile system.

The Arrow 3 interceptor, designed to shoot down ballistic missiles, was handed to air force bases in Israel in January after successful testing by Israel and the United States. Israel seized most of the Golan Heights from Syria in the Six-Day War of 1967 and annexed it in 1981 in a move never recognized by the international community. Israel pays close attention to developments in the Syrian conflict for fear that it could be exploited by its arch-rival Iran to install allies close to the armistice line on the Golan and Israel's borders. In the summer of 2006, Israel and Hezbollah fought a devastating war that killed nearly 1,200 people in Lebanon, most of them civilians, and about 160 Israelis, most of them troops.—AFP

IN BACKING SYRIA'S PRESIDENT, RUSSIA LOOKS TO OUTDO IRAN

BEIRUT: In Aleppo, portraits of Russian President Vladimir Putin hang shoulder-to-shoulder with those of his Syrian counterpart Bashar Al-Assad, signaling Moscow's rise at the expense of Damascus's other ally, Iran. The rivalry between the two primary backers of the Syrian government is becoming increasingly palpable, according to Syrian officials and a Russian analyst. Iran is proud to have intervened early on in Syria's six-year war, bolstering the Assad regime with men, weapons, and economic aid.

But it was Russia, which entered the conflict with its first air strikes in support of Assad on September 30, 2015, that transformed its trajectory. "Although both countries support the regime, their strategies on how to defeat the uprising differ," said a Syrian member of parliament, speaking on condition of anonymity. The primary divergence is over Turkey, a years-long rebel backer with which Syria shares its long northern border.

Moscow has formed an unlikely alliance with Ankara since 2016, envisioning an end to the Syrian conflict as a compromise with Turkey. But Tehran abhors this approach. Iran has "differences of views with Turkey with regard to Syria, and they're very serious differences of views, but we have found a common ground," its

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif recently told Lebanon's Al-Mayadeen television. Tabnak, a website run by the former chief of Iran's powerful Revolutionary Guards, Mohsen Rezai, presents a less diplomatic view, suggesting in January that "the inclusion of Turkey in efforts to put an end to war in Syria" could pose "a threat" for Iran.

'Price we had to pay'

Those differences truly crystallized in December as Syrian government forces battled to retake Aleppo's devastated opposition-held east. Iran and allied militias sought total surrender from rebels encircled in the second city, a source close to the regime said in Aleppo. But, the source added, Russia had already agreed with Turkey on safe passage for east Aleppo's 34,000 residents.

The deal infuriated Iran and its allies in the Shiite Lebanese militia Hezbollah, who tried to spoil the agreement. As a consolation prize, however, Iran and its allies successfully included the evacuation of Fuaa and Kafraya, two Shiite villages besieged by rebels, in the deal. "The agreement with Turkey was indispensable for finishing with Aleppo because every time the Syrian army advanced, Ankara allowed hundreds of rebels in," a

retired Syrian officer said. "To avoid yet another failure, Moscow got Ankara to agree to close the border, strangling the rebels. Russia then secured a safe exit for them," the officer said. "It was certainly difficult for those that were fighting on the ground but it was the price we had to pay to win," he said. Tensions have only grown since, with Russia and Turkey leaving Iran out of a cessation of hostilities they brokered in late December. Tehran joined Ankara and Moscow in sponsoring the first talks between regime forces and rebels in January in Kazakhstan.

'Interests align'

After Aleppo's fall, all eyes turned to the largest remaining rebel bastion: Idlib, the northwestern province controlled by an increasingly tense alliance of rebels and jihadists. Tehran has advocated a blitz assault on Idlib, mainly to break the rebel siege of Fuaa and Kafraya, but Russia has vetoed the idea. A new front so close to the border and against Ankara-backed rebels would risk direct confrontation with Turkey, a possibility Moscow is unwilling to entertain. "Russia is wary of Turkey, but it prefers squeezing it and limiting its movement, instead of mounting a full-frontal attack," a political figure in Damascus said. —AFP

PIRATES RELEASE OIL TANKER, HOSTAGES

MOGADISHU: Somali pirates have handed over an oil tanker and eight Sri Lankan hostages captured just days ago, the Oceans Beyond Piracy NGO said, bringing to a close the first such attack since 2012. "The Puntland maritime police force freed the ship. They made (the pirates) an offer they couldn't refuse and the pirates have left," said John Steed, a former British army officer with the NGO who has spent years negotiating the release of piracy hostages in Somalia. Earlier on Thursday the Puntland coastguard had threatened to use force if the talks to convince the pirates to release the vessel failed.

Armed attackers seized the Aris 13 on Monday as it made its way from Djibouti to Mogadishu, the first hijacking of a large merchant vessel by Somali pirates since 2012. Steed said the pirates had left the Aris 13 ship, which was under control of the coast guard and on its way to the port city of Bossaso in the semi-autonomous Puntland region, on the northeastern tip of Somalia. He was not able to provide more details on the conditions for the release of the vessel.

Abdirahman Mohamud Hassan, the director general of the Puntland maritime force, said earlier that a regional governor, who was not named, had been appointed to negotiate with the pirates. The successful release came after a fierce firefight between the coast guard and armed men aboard a boat believed to be taking food and provisions to the hijacked tanker. "Our forces were doing a normal routine patrolling around the area when they came under gunfire from these gunmen who were onboard a small skiff and they returned fire," said Hassan.

Steed said an unknown number of people had been injured in the exchange of gunfire. At the time the tanker was taken it was forced to change course and head toward Puntland. The Aris 13 was about 18 kilometers off the Somali coast when it was attacked, according to Steed. He said the vessel was not following the "best practices" put in place to avoid piracy, since it was taking a cost- and time-saving route too close to Somalia's coastline, was travelling too slowly and was without an armed escort.

Illegal fishing fuels piracy

Village elders in Alula where the hijacked vessel first docked, said the pirates had not made clear demands, but claimed to be driven by anger over illegal fishing. "These are fishermen who are infuriated with the illegal fishing off their coasts. They desperately need to show their grievances by seizing the boat," said Abdiwahab Ahmed, an elder in Alula. Somali pirates began staging waves of attacks in 2005, seriously disrupting a major international shipping route and costing the global economy billions of dollars. At the peak of the piracy crisis in January 2011, 736 hostages and 32 boats were held. Though anti-piracy measures ended attacks on commercial vessels, fishing boats have continued to face attacks.

Steed says the international community had taken significant steps to improve security, boosting naval forces in the area and requiring ships to take protection measures. "Hundreds of pirates were arrested, others gave up, and we hadn't had an attack of a commercial ship for five years," he said. "But the one thing that's not really been addressed is the real root cause of this, which is poverty and the lack of jobs on the ground. There's also a drought, so there's



Masked and armed Somali pirate Hassan stands near a Taiwanese fishing vessel washed ashore after the pirates were paid a ransom and the crew were released in the once-bustling pirate den of Hobyo, Somalia. —AP

PALESTINIAN POLICE WAGE WAR ON STOLEN ISRAEL'S CAR TRAFFIC

EFFORTS TO COMBAT LARGE UNDERGROUND CAR MARKET

RAMALLAH: At the police officer's gesture, the bulldozer smashes its shovel into a blue Hyundai the latest of thousands of cars destroyed by Palestinian police every year. The car's owner and her children protest, but receive little sympathy. "This car has not been legally registered since 2007, despite its Israeli licence plates," the officer, who declines to give his name said. "I asked her to produce documents and she couldn't present any."

The operation is part of efforts to combat a large underground car market that sees vehicles stolen in Israel or deemed unfit for the roads there transported into the occupied West Bank. Palestinian author-

ities are concerned in part because crimes are often carried out using such unregistered cars still carrying their old Israeli plates. Throughout the West Bank, vacant lots covered with stacks of hundreds of cars crushed by bulldozers bearing Israeli plates are an indication of the police crackdown.

Two vehicles of armed police and two bulldozers were involved in the recent roadside demolition at Al-Ram, a Palestinian area on the outskirts of Jerusalem. The officer heading the operation said he had seized 100 vehicles lacking documents in a day. Many are crushed on the spot without a longer trial, before being taken away to landfills. In 2016,

16,000 vehicles met the same fate, Palestinian police said, with 5,000 in January and February in the small territory occupied for 50 years by Israel.

Some of the cars were stolen from Israel and illegally brought into the West Bank for resale to Palestinians. Others were declared unfit to run on Israeli roads, where annual tests check the condition of the vehicles in circulation. They are removed from Israeli registers, and their owners are supposed to scrap them. But instead they are often transported to the West Bank, where they pass into Palestinian hands at unbeatable prices, sometimes just a few hundred dollars. —AFP

FRANCE SCHOOL SHOOTING

PARIS: A 16-year-old pupil was arrested with a cache of weapons after a shooting in a high school in Grasse, southern France, on Thursday that left four people slightly injured, investigators say. This is what we know about the incident, which comes with France on high alert ahead of the first round of a presidential election on April 23, and after a string of terror attacks:

Who was the attacker?

The suspect is a 16-year-old pupil at the Alexis de Tocqueville high school in the southern town of Grasse. His name has not been disclosed as he is a minor. He was armed with a rifle and two handguns, as well as two grenades which

may have been dummies, investigators say. Police also found a home-made explosive device in his rucksack, which was made safe at the scene, they say. His head teacher is being hailed as a hero for intervening as the student pulled out his guns, preventing a worse toll.

Was this a terror attack?

Investigators said there were no indications of a terror-related attack. They described an individual who had problematic relationships with fellow students as well as an obsession with guns. He had shared pictures and videos on social media of infamous US school shootings, including the 1999 massacre in Littleton, Colorado, in

which two teens killed 13 people before committing suicide.

Who was hurt?

Three pupils and the head teacher suffered minor gunshot wounds, and another six students were treated for shock or injuries sustained during a stampede, according to an updated toll. There was panic as some pupils fled to a local supermarket and rumors spread quickly of an attack.

What was the response?

US-style school shootings are almost unheard-of in France, which has low levels of gun violence. But the country remains at its highest level of vigilance

following a string of jihadist attacks since January 2015 that killed around 230 people. Initiating a rapid-response plan, the authorities placed the other schools in Grasse on lockdown, triggered a smartphone application to warn people to stay away and elite forces moved in to secure the area. "The measures put in place by the government... in particular, training exercises for attacks on schools, have demonstrated their usefulness and effectiveness," Prime Minister Bernard Cazeneuve said in a statement later. More than 3,000 reservists were called up to help keep watch outside the country's 64,000 primary and secondary schools when pupils returned from their summer holidays last September. — AFP



In this four-picture combo a boat overturns as people try to jump in the water off the Libyan coast. The Italian navy says it recovered a few bodies from the overturned migrant ship, while some 500 migrants who were on board were rescued safely. — AP

UN: RISKY SEA CROSSINGS FUELING SHARP RISE IN MIGRANT DEATHS SMUGGLERS MAKE EVER-RISKIER ATTEMPTS

BERLIN: Migrant deaths rose sharply last year, particularly in the Mediterranean as smugglers made ever-riskier attempts to ferry asylum-seekers and refugees on increasingly unseaworthy vessels, according to United Nations statistics released yesterday. The International Organization for Migration documented 7,763 migrant deaths in 2016 worldwide, 27 percent more than the 6,107 recorded in 2015. Two-thirds of the deaths took place in the Mediterranean Sea, where 5,098 people lost their lives trying to make the trip from North Africa, Turkey and the Middle East to Europe, according to information collected by the IOM's Data Analysis Center in Berlin.

The number of Mediterranean casualties last year was 35 percent higher than in 2015, despite more organized rescue efforts and fewer people trying to make the perilous journey. Most of the 2016 deaths were in the Central Mediterranean, where 4,581 migrants died attempting the longer trip from North Africa to Italy. The migration organization cautioned that better monitoring and reporting might account for part of the increase in deaths in the Mediterranean. The area has become a greater focus as more asylum seekers streamed into Europe in recent years.

But evidence shows that along with several large shipwrecks, there also were more small fatal incidents as smugglers pursued strategies such as launching multiple boats simultaneously - making rescue operations more difficult - and taking to

rough seas during the winter, the IOM said. "This is not something completely new, but there is a reckless behavior on the part of smugglers who only want to increase their profits," Frank Laczko, director of the IOM's analysis center, said. "There are huge sums of money to be made for each of those boats that cross the Mediterranean, so the more people you can cram into a boat, the more money you make," Laczko said.

He also said the situation in Libya, a key departure point, could have deteriorated to the point that people have become increasingly desperate to get out and thus willing to take "incredible risks," although noted that it is difficult to assess what is happening inside the country. The report noted that the death count for the Mediterranean is considered a minimum figure, since it is thought that many shipwrecks go unreported. The number of migrants attempting to reach Europe via the Mediterranean declined more than 1 million in 2015 to 363,348 in 2016, largely due to the implementation of a deal between the European Union and Turkey designed to discourage sea crossings.

In North Africa itself, the report tallied 1,279 migrant deaths in 2016, up from 672 the previous year. In Western Africa, 169 migrant deaths were recorded, up from 84 in 2015. The Middle East saw 113 deaths, up from 32 the year before. In other findings, the IOM said 400 migrants died along the US border with Mexico in 2016, up from 348 in 2015. — AP

SHOOTER TACKLED BY HERO TEACHER

GRASSE: A disturbed teenager with guns and grenades opened fire in a school in southern France on Thursday, slightly wounding four people, officials said, rattling nerves in a country scarred by jihadist attacks. Investigators said the boy, a student at the Alexis de Tocqueville high school in the hillside town of Grasse, was carrying a small arsenal of weapons as well as a homemade explosive device in a bag. They said he is obsessed with guns and had relationship problems, and the incident was not apparently terror-related. The name of the suspect, a minor, has not been disclosed.

Education Minister Najat Vallaud-Belkacem said "heroic" actions by the school's head teacher appeared to have helped prevent greater bloodshed. The head teacher rushed towards the pupil as he pulled out his guns "to try to reason with him," Vallaud-Belkacem said, adding that the educator was injured in the process. "We avoided the worst," she said. Three pupils and the head teacher suffered minor gunshot injuries, and another six students were treated for shock or injuries sustained during a stampede, according to an updated toll. The assailant's age was initially given by investigators as 17, but they later amended it to 16. Local prosecutor Fabienne Atzori ruled out a terror motive and said the shooting appeared to have been motivated by the gunman's "bad relationships" with classmates.

'Fascinated by guns'

The teenager was described by Vallaud-Belkacem as "unstable and fascinated by guns" and was carrying a rifle, two handguns and grenades-which may have been dummy devices-when he was detained by police shortly after the lunchtime attack. Investigators also found a homemade explosive device in his rucksack, which was made safe on the spot. He used a pump-action firearm, but not the other weapons, and offered no resistance to his arrest, the prosecutor said.

The suspect had shared pictures and videos on social media of infamous US school shootings, including the 1999 Columbine massacre in Littleton, Colorado, in which two teens killed 13 people before committing suicide. France is still in a state of emergency after a series of terror attacks, including the November 2015 massacre in Paris and a truck attack in Nice, just 40 kilometers from Grasse, in July last year. Many feared the worst when news first filtered through of the violence, with elite police response teams immediately dispatched to the scene. The shooting comes around 40 days ahead of the first round of France's two-stage presidential election, in which security is one of the main issues on voters' minds.

'We ran for it'

Witnesses described scenes of panic as pupils fled the shooting or looked for places to hide. Fifteen-year-old Mokhtaria said she was having a cigarette in the school garage when she heard shots ring out. "We saw people coming down shouting: 'There's a nutter firing at people'. We ran for it," she said. Sonia, 42, the mother of a 16-year-old girl called Ines, said she had received a text message from her daughter at 12:30 pm that said, "We are going to die, someone has a gun, I love you, Mum. Goodbye!" All schools in Grasse were locked down after the shooting and police threw a cordon around the building in the town which is home to several perfume factories. — AFP

THREE ARRESTED FOR HELPING RAPE SUSPECT - INDIAN PRIEST

NEW DELHI: Two nuns and a priest accused of covering up the birth of a baby born to a teenage girl who was allegedly raped by another priest have been arrested in India, police said yesterday. All three handed themselves in to police in the southern state of Kerala where they were being questioned over allegations they deliberately hid the birth at a hospital run by the Catholic church and took the baby to an orphanage. Under Indian law, hospitals and orphanages must report all teenage pregnancies and births to authorities.

They surrendered two weeks after Robin Vadakkumchery was arrested on charges of raping the 16-year-old, who gave birth in February. Six more people believed to have helped the victim give birth are still on the run. The girl told investigators that the priest raped her at a church-run school last year. She and her family said they were unaware of the pregnancy until she complained of stomach pain and was taken to hospital, where she gave birth.

A child rights organization tipped off police about the secret delivery, triggering an investigation

that revealed the alleged involvement of the priest, nuns and other officials. It is not the first time the Catholic church in Kerala has faced accusations of sexual abuse. Two autobiographies by former Catholic nuns have in recent years revealed the scale of sexual exploitation by priests and the prevalence of same-sex relations in convents. Last year, a priest was sentenced to 40 years in prison by a Kerala court for raping a 12-year-old girl in 2014. Nearly one-fifth of the coastal state's 34 million people follow Christianity. —AFP

INDIAN FARMER WINS TRAIN IN LEGAL FIGHT

NEW DELHI: An Indian farmer's battle for proper compensation for land seized to build a railway reached an unexpected conclusion this week when a court awarded him a train. Sampuran Singh has been fighting for the money since 2015, when he went to court to argue that Indian Railways had underpaid him for a piece of land in the northern state of Punjab acquired to build new tracks.

He won his case, but the railway refused to pay and he filed another plea in January. Yesterday Singh's lawyer said a court in the state had awarded him an express train in lieu of the 10 million rupees (\$150,000) he was owed. "We were tired of pleading with the railways to clear the pending dues. The court asked us to identify properties for recovering our money," Rakesh Gandhi told AFP. Judge Jaspal Verma also granted Singh ownership of the station master's office in Ludhiana, a city in Punjab that the train passes through.

After the hearing on Wednesday Singh and his lawyer took the court order to Ludhiana station where they waited for the train to arrive before handing the document to the driver. Singh said he allowed the driver to carry on to its destination as stopping it "would have caused inconvenience to thousands of passengers". Railway officials later secured an interim court order giving them control of the train until the case is heard again today. "If they fail to pay the money by Saturday then the court can sanction an auction," Gandhi said of the 20-coach express train, which runs daily between New Delhi and the Sikh holy city of Amritsar in Punjab.

Several Indian courts in the past have unsuccessfully awarded trains to aggrieved farmers over unpaid dues. Last year, an express train was confiscated on court orders after a 62-year-farmer in southern Karnataka state won a compensation case over land taken in 2006. The intercity express was halted at Harihar station for two hours before officials convinced him to release it. And in 2015, railway officials handed over 3 million rupees to two farmers at a station in the northern state of Himachal Pradesh to secure the release of an express train. —AFP



LASHIO: Photo shows residents who fled from conflict areas near the Myanmar-Chinese border gathering in Lashio town and waiting to find transport to their hometowns. The UN said at least 50,000 people have fled their homes in Shan and Kachin States since September to escape some of the worst violence to grip Myanmar's restive border regions for decades. —AFP

KIDS AMONG HUNDREDS OF ROHINGYAS DETAINED

HUNDREDS ACCUSED OF CONSORTING WITH INSURGENTS

SITTWE: Children as young as 10 years old are among hundreds of Rohingya Muslims detained on charges of consorting with insurgents, according to a police document seen by Reuters that sheds new light on Myanmar's security campaign in the country's northwest. Thirteen juveniles are among more than 400 people arrested since Oct 9, when insurgents attacked three police border posts in northern Rakhine State near the frontier with Bangladesh, the March 7 dated document shows. Police said some of the children had confessed to working with insurgents and that they were being detained away from adult suspects.

A government spokesman confirmed children were detained in the operation, but said authorities had followed the law. He said he knew of only five juveniles currently being held. Myanmar's leader and Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, who took power

almost a year ago, is under international pressure over alleged abuses including killings, gang rapes and mass detentions against the stateless Rohingya, about 1.1 million of whom are prevented from travelling freely and accessing basic services in Myanmar. The government has released few details about the hundreds detained in the Rakhine operation or the charges they face.

The document seen by Reuters lists 423 people held under the colonial-era Unlawful Associations Act. All appear from their names to be male. Their average age is 34, but the youngest is 10 and the oldest 75. One has been crossed out and marked "dead". Two police captains in Maungdaw, the district at the centre of the violence, confirmed the veracity of the 11-page document. "We police have to arrest those related with the attackers, children or not, but the court will decide if they are guilty,

we cannot decide," said Police Captain Than Shwe.

Controversial law

Myanmar has ratified international conventions that require additional protections for children accused of crimes. Reuters was unable to establish whether all those provisions, such as whether they have been able to communicate with their families or have legal representation, were being followed. All 13 juveniles below the age of 18 were sent to be detained outside of prison at a Border Guard Police (BGP) facility in the town of Buthidaung, and were not shackled, said the second police captain, who did not want to be identified. "Some of the children already confessed that they are involved with the attackers group during interrogation," the police captain said. They were not beaten during questioning, he said. —Reuters



SHANGHAI: A man practice Tai Chi with a sword during sunrise at the promenade on the Bund along the Huangpu River, seen against the skyline of the Lujiazui Financial District in Pudong, Shanghai yesterday. —AFP

MISSILE ROW DRIVES KOREAN POP CULTURE UNDERGROUND IN CHINA

ADVERTISERS IN CHINA SHUN KOREAN ENTERTAINERS

SHANGHAI: Cai Yufang, 21, is a big fan of Korean television dramas like "Shopping King Louie", a show about a profligate chaebol heir who loses his memory and learns the value of love and labor from a sweet, simple country girl. The Shanghai student is one of millions of young Chinese consumers with a huge appetite for South Korean pop culture whose regular viewing habits have been disrupted by growing political tensions between the countries.

The mainland chill on Korean content that follows Seoul's decision to deploy a missile defense system, however, is driving Chinese fans to get their "K-culture" fixes on peer-to-peer platforms instead of mainstream sites such as Youku, Tencent and iQiyi where some content has been taken down. The three sites did not respond to requests for comment.

"Korean dramas, and especially variety shows, are no longer being updated, so I can't watch any more. There are no links - it's a bit annoying, really," said Cai. "For a lot of young Chinese who like Korean culture, it's a real shame." Cai added that eager viewers were already finding alternative channels. She has started following a group on a Chinese messaging service called "Watch drama together" that provides links to shows on file sharing platforms like Baidu Cloud.

The blackout reflects a wider cultural freeze, with South Korean singers and actors blocked, dozens of Korean-focused blogs suspended, tourism bans and product boycotts. South Korea's soft power, especially its dramas and music, is a hot commodity. Production values are generally smarter than those of other Asian markets and its snazzy fashion, hyper-stylized singers and well-choreographed dances have captivated audiences in the region since late 1990s. China is South Korea's sec-

ond-largest overseas market for dramas, songs and other media content. The fluid exchange of entertainment products has played a big role in strong, friendly ties between the two trade partners.

But for South Korea stars, recent tensions have hit music concerts to lucrative advertising gigs in China. SM Entertainment, a music, talent and event promoter that houses popular Korean boy-bands EXO and SHINee, is among scores of firms that say their China businesses are affected following Seoul's decision to deploy a US missile defense system within its borders to deter North Korea. "Events are being cancelled and it's impacting our business as we expected big revenue generation," said a person familiar with the company's operations who did not want to be named due to sensitivity of the subject.

"This year, our signed singers have no TV performances scheduled in China. They can't do any concerts even if they want to, because approvals will not be issued." An SM Entertainment spokesperson was not immediately available for comment. A survey by Seoul's culture ministry of 160 local media and entertainment firms that have business ties with China showed 58 respondents reported direct business impacts such as cancellations of contracts, tours or joint production, as well as delays in approvals since tensions began last year.

The diplomatic row further heightened this month after Seoul accelerated plans to set up the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense anti-missile system. South Korea argues THAAD is for defense against North Korea, but China fears its powerful radar can reach into its territory. Moon Jae-in, the South Korean politician expected to become its next president, called on China on Tuesday to stop economic retaliation against South Korean firms over deployment of the THAAD system.

Testing ties

Despite China's affection for Korean culture, geopolitical sentiment is taking an economic toll on the market for its products. "We ran away fast from South Korean talent for Chinese ads when the tensions began. We're a bit conservative and cautious," said the China head of a major US consumer goods business. He asked not to be named because of the sensitivity of the topic. South Korean stars have often been used in Chinese adverts from cars to ice cream, cosmetics and smartphones. A recent report from South Korea's parliament research service said the country's famous K-pop music, live concerts, dramas and adverts had all been hit. It added, though, that illegal downloads of TV shows had spiked.

In an area of Shanghai where many South Koreans live, one Korean barbecue outlet manager told Reuters almost all her Chinese clients had disappeared. The chill has even spread to popular South Korea-focused blogs - online platforms where millions in China follow Korean pop culture, TV shows or news about their favorite icons. An analysis by Reuters showed dozens of such blogs said they would suspend new posts this week, citing the tensions between China and South Korea. Many added pictures of the Chinese flag.

"China's interests are more important than anything else," posted the popular "South Korea me2day" blog, which boasts 6.25 million followers on Sina Weibo. It was not clear how long the suspensions would last and some of the blogs seemed to have re-started posts yesterday. K-culture fans like Cai and her peers, indeed, said they expected the impact to be short-lived, citing previous examples where Japan and France have drawn Beijing's ire. "I'm not saying that Chinese people don't remember things," said Lu Kexin, 21, a Beijing fan of Korean girl band Apink. "But you can never really sever cultural exchange." —Reuters

HOMELANDS UNDER THREAT AS TRIBES RALLY FOR LAND RIGHTS

JAKARTA: Thousands of Indonesian indigenous people gathered on Sumatra Island yesterday to call on the government to protect their land rights as fears grow some tribes could become extinct. A sprawling archipelago with more than 17,000 islands, Indonesia is home to an estimated 50 to 70 million indigenous people, but many do not have formal title to the land their families have lived on for generations. For decades they have been locked in bitter battles with logging, palm oil and mining companies that have been expanding into their homelands in the resource-rich Southeast Asian nation.

President Joko Widodo has pledged to improve their lives, but activists say his ambitious plans to boost infrastructure and energy production - including by building dams - mean more tribes are at risk of being displaced. "Even though the government has nice policies on paper, we continue to face land grabs... and forced evictions throughout Indonesia," said Rukka Sombolinggi, deputy head of the Indigenous Peoples Alliance of the Archipelago. "We are willing to share, but development has to be done with our consent," she said.

More than 5,000 people from 2,000 indigenous communities convened in Tanjung Gusta village outside North Sumatra's provincial capital Medan. The gathering is organized by the alliance and held every five years. Indonesia's Constitutional Court ruled in 2013 indigenous people have the right to manage forests where they live, in a verdict hailed as a victory for indigenous land rights. The government last December announced it would return 13,000 hectares of customary lands to nine indigenous communities, and committed to giving back a total of 12.7 million hectares - roughly the size of Greece - to local and indigenous groups.

Indonesia's environment and forestry minister reiterated yesterday the government's commitment to indigenous rights. "It was only a start and not the end of this struggle," Siti Nurbaya Bakar told the gathering, referring to the December announcement to return customary lands. Campaigner Sombolinggi, of the Sulawesi island's Toraja tribe, lauded these developments but said legal reforms have been slow. More than 230 indigenous leaders and activists are currently on trial for battling to save their homelands, she said, while at least six tribes face the threat of extinction as a result of land conflicts. "Our livelihood and our existence are being affected. When we are evicted from our land, what else do we have?" she asked. —Reuters

IMF LETTER BOMB: WHAT'S THE CONSPIRACY OF FIRE NUCLEI?

ATHENS: Investigators suspect a Greek far-left group-known as the Conspiracy of Fire Nuclei—was behind a letter bomb that wounded an IMF secretary in Paris on Thursday, the same day the group claimed responsibility for an explosive device found in Berlin. The following is a factfile on the background and activities of the elusive outfit, which is known for its letter bombs.

Who are they?

Police say they are militant youths with no proven links to other Greek extremist organizations. In contrast to other groups who have used industrial explosives and assault weaponry, Conspiracy tends to use common materials in their attacks such as gas cannisters, gunpowder extracted from firecrackers, and pressure cookers. The organization denounces capitalism, consumerism, police repression and worker exploitation. Police say the name "Conspiracy of Fire Nuclei" has been used as cover by urban militants carrying out minor arson attacks against car dealerships and police vehicles since the middle of the last decade. But their activities escalated from early 2008 onwards.

How do they operate?

The group aims for maximum effect with minimum risk. In January 2008 they carried out a late-night arson barrage against Athens luxury car dealerships and banks. Nobody was injured. At the time, gas cannister bombs were their weapon of choice, but the outfit quickly upgraded to explosives hidden in pressure cookers as well as dossiers and carved-out books. In most cases, anonymous telephone calls were used to alert authorities before the explosives went off. The device found at the Paris offices of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) where the letter bomb exploded appeared "to have been a firework or a big firecracker, according to the city's police chief, who described the device as "relatively rudimentary and nothing like a bomb". —AFP

SATURDAY, MARCH 18, 2017

TRUMP, XI EYE MAR-A-LAGO SUMMIT

WASHINGTON: The United States and China are finalizing plans for a summit between presidents Donald Trump and Xi Jinping at Mar-a-Lago this April, but diplomats are struggling to remove last-minute stumbling blocks. Officials in both countries said that Trump has tentatively agreed to host Xi to his Florida resort in early April-significant outreach after the mogul's bareknuckle anti-Chinese election rhetoric.

But according to officials, the plan is running up against differences over how to deal with issues like North Korea, what "deliverables" can come out of the talks and anger over leaks

before the meeting was finalized. The White House is pressing China to make commitments that would help curb North Korea's weapons of mass destruction programs-which may soon be capable of delivering a nuke to the western United States.

China has been reluctant to lean on its smaller neighbor, and fears the United States is trying to increase its influence on the Korean peninsula. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's visit to Beijing is being seen as a make-or-break moment in deciding whether Xi's visit goes ahead. Before his arrival there today, Tillerson warned two decades

of efforts to stop North Korea's nuclear ambitions have failed. "In the face of the ever escalating threat it is clear that a new approach is required," he said while visiting Tokyo.

Election shadow

Just weeks ago, a summit seemed a distant possibility, as the newly elected president infuriated Beijing with suggestions he might break from the US's long-standing One China Policy and threatened a trade war. But in a conciliatory phone call in mid-February, Trump walked back controversial comments on Taiwan, creating an

opening for Washington and Beijing to discuss a meeting. China quickly capitalized on the opportunity, sending its top diplomat Yang Jiechi to Washington.

There he held talks at the White House, meeting with Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, his chief strategist Steve Bannon and US National Security HR McMaster before stopping in for a brief chat with the president. During the discussions Yang suggested that Trump host Xi at Mar-a-Lago, his palatial estate in Palm Beach, according to multiple sources in both capitals with knowledge of the discussions. —AFP

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PANMUNJOM: US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson (right) stands with deputy Commander of the Combined Force Command General Leem Ho-young (2nd right) and Margaret Peterlin (2nd left), US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's Chief of Staff, as two North Korean soldiers (top) look at the south side at the border village of Panmunjom, which has separated the two Koreas since the Korean War yesterday. — AFP

MILITARY ACTION AGAINST NORTH KOREA 'AN OPTION'

WASHINGTON'S TOP DIPLOMAT TILLERSON WARNS

SEOUL: Military action by the United States against nuclear-armed North Korea is an "option on the table" if the threat from the rogue regime escalates, Washington's top diplomat Rex Tillerson said yesterday. The strong comments from the secretary of state, in Asia for his first foray into crisis management, appear to signal a sea change in American policy towards the isolated country. Tillerson's tour comes after a missile launch last week that Pyongyang described as a drill for an attack on US bases in Japan.

The US has 28,000 troops stationed in South Korea to defend it from the North, but the capital Seoul is within range of Pyongyang's artillery and analysts believe any conflict could risk rapid escalation and heavy casualties. Even so, Tillerson announced the end of United States' "strategic patience" the stance of the previous administration under Barack Obama. Under that previous policy, the US ruled out diplomatic engagement with the North until it made a tangible commitment to denuclearization, hoping that internal stresses in the isolated country would bring about change.

"We are exploring a new range of diplomatic, security, economic measures. All options are on the table," Tillerson told reporters at a joint press conference with his South Korean counterpart Yun Byung-Se. "Certainly we do not want to, for things to get to military conflict," he said. "If they elevate the threat of their weapons program to a level that we believe require action, then, that option's on the table." But Russia's deputy foreign minister called for an end to a "vicious circle" of tough US reactions to nuclear tests by Pyongyang, which in turn further escalate tensions on

the peninsula. "We suggest looking at the situation in a multi-dimensional way in order to break the vicious circle of tensions," Igor Morgulov told Japan's Jiji Press in an interview posted on the foreign ministry's site yesterday.

North Korea has a long-standing ambition to be recognized as a nuclear power, saying it needs to be able to defend itself, and conducted its first underground atomic test in 2006, in the teeth of global opposition. Four more test blasts have followed, two of them last year.

China is the key

Tillerson's remarks came a day after he said in Tokyo that 20 years of efforts to denuclearize the North had "failed" and promised a new approach, without giving specifics.

The United Nations has imposed multiple sets of sanctions on the North over its nuclear and missile programs, but Pyongyang's main diplomatic protector and trade partner China is accused of not fully enforcing them. On Saturday Tillerson will head to Beijing to press it to do more.

Beijing shares US concerns over Pyongyang's attempts to build an arsenal of nuclear devices, but has also blamed Washington for escalating tensions. The issue is also made more complicated by the deployment of the US Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) anti-missile system to South Korea.

Washington and Seoul say it is for purely defensive purposes, but Beijing fears it could undermine its own nuclear deterrent and has reacted with fury, imposing a series of measures seen as economic retaliation in the South. Its reaction was "unnecessary" and "troubling", Tillerson said.

North's gaze

Earlier, Tillerson toured the Panmunjom joint security area in the Demilitarized Zone, guarded by both North Korea and the US-led United Nations Command since the Korean War ended with an armistice in 1953. North Korean soldiers watched from their side of the demarcation line-marked by cement blocks-and at one point were only a few feet from Tillerson, with one pointing a camera towards him. US officials have been spooked by North Korea's accelerating progress towards building an inter-continental ballistic missile that could threaten US mainland cities.

Analysts said that Tillerson's comments could signal a sweeping change in Washington's stance. "It could be rhetoric to pressure both North Korea and China but considering the current atmosphere in Washington, it doesn't seem like it will end as 'just words'," said Choi Kang of the Seoul-based Asan Institute for Policy Studies. "We will have to see how far they will be willing to go with the military option," he added. "But what he is trying to show is that Washington is not interested in engaging in dialogue with North Korea."

Daniel Pinkston, a lecturer at Seoul-based Troy University, warned that while the North had antiquated equipment, and could not sustain a conventional conflict for a long period, "they would fight to defend their country if it were under attack." US President Donald Trump stirred concern in the region during his White House campaign by suggesting allies like Japan and South Korea need to do more to defend themselves.

But Tillerson has sought to reassure Tokyo and Seoul of Washington's backing in the event of an attack by the North.— AFP

KIDNAP VICTIM DESCRIBES 'HELL'; MAN GETS 40 YEARS

SACRAMENTO: A California woman who was drugged along with her boyfriend and then dragged from their home described the "hell that we have survived" in emotional testimony before her abductor was sentenced to 40 years in prison in a crime so elaborate and bizarre that police initially dismissed it as a hoax. "You treated me like an object, a toy, an animal," Denise Huskins told her kidnapper, Matthew Muller, a disbarred Harvard University-trained attorney who pleaded guilty in September.

Huskins described the two days of physical and psychological torture she endured after Muller snatched her from her and her boyfriend's San Francisco Bay Area home two years ago. "I still have nightmares every night," she said Thursday, fighting back tears. "Sleep is not rest for me. It is a trigger." Her boyfriend, Aaron Quinn, who was bound and drugged during the kidnapping, said he "cannot and will not ever be the same." US District Judge Troy Nunley called the abduction a "heinous, atrocious, horrible crime" as he sentenced Muller, 39. He had faced up to life in prison, but prosecutors agreed to recommend 40 years in exchange for his guilty plea.

'Sick with shame'

In court, Muller said he was "sick with shame" for the "pain and horror" he caused. Shackled and wearing an orange jail jumpsuit, he looked straight ahead and showed no emotion as he was sentenced. "He doesn't have empathy. I don't think he's capable of it," Quinn's mother, Marianne Quinn, said after the sentencing. She said a life sentence would have been better "because they never would have to worry about him ever again, but again, he's going to be in jail for a long, long, long time." Defense attorney Thomas Johnson argued for a 30-year sentence, saying his client has been diagnosed as manic and depressive and can be rehabilitated with proper treatment.

"They want him to be a monster to get to 40 years. Fine. Marginalize mental illness," Johnson told the judge sardonically. — AP

MAY FACES PARTY FAITHFUL AFTER A BRUISING WEEK

LONDON: British Prime Minister Theresa May will seek to rally her party faithful yesterday after a week in which her political honeymoon abruptly ended, laying bare her weaknesses over Brexit. The Scottish government's call for a second independence vote has left May fighting on two fronts as she prepares to start the process of leaving the European Union later this month. She was also forced to drop a planned tax rise after pressure from backbench MPs, revealing how she could become a hostage to factions in her Conservative Party as the complex Brexit negotiations progress.

At a party conference in Cardiff she will seek to regain the initiative, setting out plans to deliver "a brighter future" after exiting the EU. May's centre-right Conservatives are ahead by as much as 19 points in some polls, but much of the lead is because of a weak Labour opposition. And her majority in the House of Commons is slim. "Theresa May's position as prime minister is far weaker than the opinion polls suggest," said Tony Travers, a politics professor at the London School of Economics.

In a message released on a new website entitled "Plan for Britain", May said last June's referendum vote to leave the EU was "an instruction to change the way our whole country works". "I want the UK to emerge from this period of national change, stronger, fairer, more united and more outward-looking than ever before," she said. — AFP

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BEIJING: Chinese Premier Li Keqiang meets Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz at the Great Hall of the People. — AFP

CHINA, SAUDIS SIGN \$65BN DEALS

BEIJING: Saudi Arabia's King Salman met with China's premier yesterday, a day after the two nations signed a memorandum of understanding on investment cooperation valued at \$65 billion. The landmark agreement aims to boost joint efforts in fields including energy, investment, finance, culture and aerospace, part of Saudi Arabia's drive to develop a growth strategy less dependent on oil. Beijing meanwhile is rolling out a massive trade and investment initiative across Central Asia and the Middle East called "One Belt, One Road" that sees the desert kingdom as a regional linchpin.

Despite the eye-catching sum noted in the memo, the actual value of such commitments is usually much smaller once projects begin. Saudi Arabia had been China's biggest supplier of imported crude oil before being overtaken by Russia last year, and the kingdom's

state-owned oil producer, Aramco, is a partner with state-owned China Petroleum & Chemical Corp. The two operate a refinery in Fujian province along with other Chinese projects.

The signing of the agreement, which involves 35 separate projects, followed talks Thursday between Salman and President Xi Jinping, during which the Chinese leader said results of their burgeoning cooperation had already "surpassed our expectations". Security ties between the two have also grown significantly, with the Saudi air force deploying Chinese unmanned attack drones and the two militaries holding joint counter-terrorism exercises in western China. Chinese navy vessels have also visited the Saudi port of Jeddah as part of increasingly active maneuvers in the Gulf of Aden.

However, China is also a close partner of Saudi Arabia's archrival Iran, and has backed

the government of President Bashar Al-Assad in the Syrian conflict, while Saudi Arabia has insisted on Assad's ouster and has supported the Syrian opposition, including Islamic militant groups. King Salman's visit is part of a month-long swing through Asia. Accompanied by a 1,500-strong retinue of businessmen, princes and support staff in close to a dozen aircraft, he has already visited Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei.

He was to travel next to the Maldives, but postponed that visit because of the spread of swine flu in the Indian Ocean island nation, according to the president's office. Dozens of people tested positive this month for the H1N1 influenza strain, also known as swine flu, Maldivian health authorities said. Two people have died so far. The government has ordered the closure of schools in the 2.5-square-kilometre capital island of Male to

prevent the spread of the disease and has discouraged residents in neighboring islets from visiting.

The country's main opposition, the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), had protested the planned state visit, accusing President Abdulla Yameen of planning to sell an atoll to Saudi investors, a charge the government has denied. Yameen lifted a ban on foreign ownership of real estate in 2015. Land is scarce in the Maldives where 99.9 percent of its territory is sea and the nation's 1,192 tiny coral islands account for just 300 sq km of land. However, the islands are strategically located - scattered some 800 km across the equator - straddling the main East-West international shipping lanes. The country is a popular upmarket holiday destination but its image has been hit by political unrest in recent years. — Agencies

M&A 'SWEET SPOT' PUTS FLOOR UNDER VALUATIONS

LONDON: A boom in European deal-making activity - a sign better growth prospects are boosting confidence in European corporate boardrooms - is helping support stock market valuations which, on some measures, appear stretched. A brighter outlook for the global and regional economy, buoyant stock markets and low borrowing costs have underpinned merger and acquisition (M&A) activity in Europe, which is enjoying its best three-month period since 2007, Reuters calculations show.

Moreover, rising share prices of both acquirer and target companies when deals are announced suggest shareholders are willing to back mergers, a shift from recent years when they preferred dividends and cautious spending. "Doing deals in the peak of a market is also unwise as you could end up paying more - so what you want is the sweet spot where companies aren't trading on very expensive multiples," said Sharon Bell, a strategist at Goldman Sachs. "We are at that sweet spot now."

European equities trade at just under 15 times forward earnings, slightly above the long-term average of about 14 times. But they are well below peaks seen over the past 15 years, and underpinned by the best earnings outlook

for regional companies since 2010. The broad sweep of sectors involved in M&A, from global food and personal goods giants to UK industrials and oil services firms, is also seen as a healthy sign and is spurring a rethink of valuations. "There was nothing for a few years, so all the activity that was bottled up is bubbling up now," said Goldman Sachs's Bell.

The surprise \$143 billion takeover bid by Warren Buffett-backed Kraft Heinz for Unilever, while rejected, has reset some assumptions about stocks, market participants say. "The size of the proposed transaction was a wake-up call for corporations all over the world - and their investors," star UK fund manager Nick Train wrote in his latest letter to investors. Shares of large consumer staples companies have lagged the recent stock market rally as investors preferred faster growing sectors in the markets.

"Towards the end of last year there was a lot of bearish talk about rich valuations in consumer staples like Unilever," said Mark Martin, a fund manager at Neptune Investment Management, who manages a portfolio of mid-sized UK companies. "Now you've got sensible investors including Buffett

still finding as much as 20 percent upside for Unilever," he said.

Brick by Brick

While the earnings outlook in Europe has brightened significantly from the lackluster growth seen since 2010, both corporate profits and margins remain well below prior peaks and have significantly lagged those in the United States. Total annual profits for European firms, of about \$616 billion, are about half what they were in 2008, according to Thomson Reuters data. "While management waits for European earnings to catch up with the US, in a much more wholesale growth environment, M&A is likely," said Dylan Ball, a portfolio manager Templeton Global Equity Group.

Meanwhile, weaker currencies, particularly sterling, have made acquisitions in Europe more tempting for offshore buyers. "US companies with large offshore cash balances and maxed-out stock buy-back programs are looking to take advantage of the US dollar strength," Ball added. One group of companies on the radar for investors is UK industrials, on which a combination of Brexit-related wor-

ries and exposure to beaten-down oil and mining had dented sentiment.

Neptune's Martin, whose fund has comfortably beaten peers' performance on a three- and five-year basis, had nearly half his fund in UK industrials at the end of February. Martin, whose fund owns shares in oil services firm Amec Foster Wheeler, which recently agreed to be bought by peer Wood Group, said he would back companies buying others in a bid to grow market share. "A lot of companies are doing it (M&A) to drive down costs. So there isn't the same euphoric growth-at-all-costs mentality we saw in 2007," Martin said, playing down concerns over whether a flurry of deal-making is a harbinger of market tops.

Instead, investors see the uptick in mergers as a sign of a long-awaited revival of corporate confidence in Europe, which has been hamstrung by worries including sovereign debt crises, sluggish growth and, more recently, political risks. After four years of underperforming developed market peers, European stocks are catching up, with M&A one more prop to valuations and investor interest. "The wall of worry is being taken down brick by brick," said Neptune's Martin. —Reuters

A NEW BREED OF SWF WITHOUT THE WEALTH

INWARD FOCUS DIFFERS FROM MODEL OF INVESTMENT ABROAD

LONDON: Once the preserve of rich oil exporters or nations with trade surpluses, like Norway, Kuwait and Singapore, an unlikely new breed of sovereign wealth fund is emerging - in countries with large deficits and deep debt. Sovereign wealth funds (SWFs), which first emerged in the 1950s, are traditionally associated with huge financial firepower. They control about \$6.5 trillion, according to data provider Preqin, and have transformed the global investment landscape by snapping up stakes in multinational companies and landmark real estate in cities from London to Melbourne.

Now Turkey, Romania, India and Bangladesh are launching sovereign funds - but for very different reasons than usual, and with very different methods. Traditionally, wealthy nations use SWFs to invest their surplus billions overseas to prevent inflation at home, diversify income streams and accumu-

late savings for the day when commodity revenues run out.

In stark contrast, the countries launching the new funds, burdened by large current account deficits or external debt, are using them as vehicles to get their economies moving in the face of a global slowdown and lower trade volumes. And rather than splashing cash abroad, the plan is to attract finance from overseas and invest it at home to stimulate growth.

"Sovereign wealth fund is a term that's used very loosely in the labelling of some of these new entities, they are more like sovereign holding companies," said Elliot Hentov, head of research for official institutions at asset management firm SSGA. "They need to lever up - they need private sector co-investment to work." There are both potential benefits and risks to this strategy - and only time will tell whether it will be effective. One of the advantages

of having an SWF, apart from the cachet it bestows, is the fact it opens the door to industry associations and peer group networks that offer guidance and - crucially - contacts in the investment world.

Scrutiny

Turkey runs an annual external financing deficit of around \$30 billion, so it must attract foreign money to plug the gap. By putting the government's stakes in big companies into a sovereign fund, Turkey hopes to attract external funding, by borrowing against the companies and tapping other SWFs for money. Similarly, Romania plans to finance roads and hospitals by raising debt against the value of the government's company stakes, or selling them via public listings.

India and Bangladesh want to kick-start infrastructure projects via new sovereign funds, with India seeking co-investors amongst SWFs and pension funds for its National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF). Other funds have been mooted in countries like Lebanon Guyana, but have yet to be established. Such plans have had a varied reception depending on the country. Economists and industry experts have also warned of potential pitfalls that need to be avoided.

Critics worry that domestic-focused funds in general can fall prey to a misallocation of resources or outright corruption, citing the example of Malaysia's 1MDB, which is the focus of money-laundering probes in at least six countries. "The danger with (this model) is that in many cases normal budgetary procedures don't apply, so they are a way of getting around parliamentary oversight and ministry scrutiny of projects," said Andrew Bauer, senior economic analyst at the Natural Resource Governance Institute. — Reuters



TOKYO: People walk by an electronic stock board of a securities firm yesterday. — AP

WORLD STOCKS RALLY RUNNING OUT OF STEAM

LONDON: World stocks edged tentatively higher yesterday as a global rally ran out of steam, leaving investors reluctant to place any firm bets ahead of the weekend. Wall Street opened little changed, while London, Paris and Frankfurt stocks managed to eke out slender gains. "The stock market seems to have entered a period of consolidation without any clear direction" with investors waiting for any new driving factors to determine where the markets will go next, be it up or down, said Briefing analyst Patrick O'Hare.

The region's markets had bolted higher Thursday with London's FTSE striking a new record peak after the Federal Reserve painted a positive picture of the world's largest economy. Sentiment was buoyed also by the victory of the incumbent party in Dutch elections. And while the trend appeared to be edging higher, the rally lost momentum, analysts said. "Equity markets across the globe are positive as improved risk appetite continues into the weekend, although the pace of gains has slowed as drivers - data and corporate - are light on the ground," said Accendo Markets analyst, Henry Croft. "Investors are continuing to digest the multiple central bank monetary policy updates this week, including surprising hawkishness from the BoE."

Earlier, Asian equities had wobbled with investors concerned about a lack of detail on Trump's tax reforms and spending promises in his first budget. The underwhelming performance came a day after the Fed's rate hike and signal of a slower pace of future rises sparked a surge across equities and sent the dollar tumbling. The greenback struggled to recover from that sell-off, with the pound and euro holding onto their gains, while a stronger yen further dented Japanese exporters, in turn dragging Tokyo stocks downwards. — AP



SINGAPORE: A general view of Tanjong Pagar container terminal is seen yesterday. Singapore exports in February surged with its strongest growth in five years, with increased demand from its top 10 markets. — AFP

ENERGY CARBON EMISSIONS IN 2016 FLAT FOR 3RD YEAR

LONDON: A greener energy mix helped keep energy-related carbon dioxide emissions flat in 2016 yet more needs to be done to avert a harmful rise in global temperatures, International Energy Agency (IEA) data showed yesterday. Energy sector emissions of 32.1 gigatonnes were unchanged from 2015 and 2014 even though the global economy grew by 3.1 percent, the IEA estimated.

"These three years of flat emissions in a

growing global economy signal an emerging trend and that is certainly a cause for optimism, even if it is too soon to say that global emissions have definitely peaked," IEA Executive Director Fatih Birol said in a statement. Carbon dioxide emissions fell in the United States and China, the world's two largest energy users and emitters, and were stable in Europe. This helped to offset increases in CO2 emissions in the rest of the world, the

IEA said. US emissions fell by 3 percent to their lowest level since 1992 helped by higher use of shale gas and renewable energy displacing coal. For the first time, the United States produced more electricity from natural gas than from coal last year. Emissions in China fell by 1 percent as coal demand declined despite its economy growing by 6.7 percent.

China used more renewables, nuclear and gas in power generation and spurred a switch

to gas from coal in the industrial and building sectors. Still, the IEA said keeping emissions flat was not enough to prevent global temperatures from increasing by more than two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, the IEA said. At the Paris climate conference in December 2015, 195 countries adopted a legally binding deal aimed at avoiding dangerous climate change by limiting global warming to "well below" 2 Celsius. — Reuters

TURKEY REMOVES RUSSIAN WHEAT FROM IMPORT LIST

MOSCOW/ISTANBUL: Turkey has unexpectedly removed Russian wheat from an import license scheme, effectively disrupting Russia's shipments to its second-biggest wheat export market, according to trade and industry sources. Import licenses issued by the Turkish government no longer included Russia in a list of tax-free accepted origins as of March 15, the sources said. This would effectively close off the Turkish market to Russian wheat as exports from countries not included in the import scheme have to pay a prohibitive tariff of 130 percent, several sources said.

"There is a restriction for Russian wheat," Zekeriya Mete, head of Turkey's exporters association for grains, pulses, vegetables and oilseeds, said. "There isn't a formal note on this but Russia has been removed from the list of countries from which we could import tax-free," he said. Turkish government officials did not immediately confirm the decision. Russia's Agriculture Ministry did not respond to requests for comment.

Under the import scheme, buyers in Turkey are allowed to import certain products with no duty as long as they process and then export the same amount, Mete said. "The new import licenses do not include Russia as an origin, therefore de facto you cannot import Russian wheat," said a Turkish miller who imports wheat. Turkey bought 1.9 million tonnes of Russian wheat from July 2016 to January 2017. Russian exporters continued sending wheat and maize to Turkey on March 15-16, Russian news agency TASS reported yesterday. Mete said new shipments were unlikely.

Normalization

Turkish importers, including millers who benefit from import licenses as part of a system that supports Turkey's large flour exports, may be able to bring in wheat that was shipped from Russia before March 15 but the status of subsequent shipments was less clear, he said. The Turkish government had not explained the policy change, according to several sources, some of whom said it may be connected with a previous spat between Turkey and Russia.

Mete said the move may be related to Russia's failure to lift all restrictions on imports of Turkish fruit and vegetables despite positive governmental steps and a meeting between the two countries' presidents last week in Moscow. Russia had imposed damaging trade restrictions on Turkish goods after Turkey shot down a Russian fighter jet near the Syrian border in Nov 2015.

The two countries restored ties in August and Moscow had lifted most of the restrictions but it is yet to resume purchases of tomatoes and some other products from Turkey. A Kremlin spokesman said on Friday that the problems over wheat supplies were unlikely to affect the normalization of ties. A Russian exporters' lobby, the National Association of Agriculture Exporters, sent a letter to Russian Agriculture Minister Alexander Tkachev on Thursday asking him "to take energetic measures" to resolve the matter. — Reuters



BADEN-BADEN, Germany: Twenty activists dressed in national flags of poor countries demonstrate with balloons against the critical indebtedness of 116 states worldwide during the G20 finance ministers' meeting yesterday. — AP

G20 FINANCE MINISTERS MEET

AMERICA FIRST CASTS PALL

BADEN-BADEN, Germany: Finance ministers from the world's top nations gathered Friday in Germany, with fears of a looming trade war over US President Donald Trump's America First policy yet to be dispelled. Trump has already torn up a trans-Pacific free trade pact, threatened punitive tariffs against multinationals with factories outside the United States and attacked "currency manipulation" by export giant China.

And his stated aim of keeping jobs at home by making it costly for American companies to outsource is likely to dominate talks at the G20 gathering of finance ministers and central bankers in the western German spa town of Baden-Baden. Trump's emissary, US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, faces scrutiny from Washington's key trading partners for clues on whether the world's biggest economy fully intends to abandon its long-standing support of open markets and free trade.

A source close to the talks told AFP that sticking points remained on trade and climate change funding as the gathering got underway yesterday. The US delegation refused to include any language rejecting protectionism in a final statement to be signed by ministers today, the source said. Countries like France, Italy, China and Brazil argued - against US resistance - for keeping a reference to "rules-based" trade in the final communique, while

Germany pushed for a compromise solution referring only to "fairness".

On the eve of the meeting, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Chinese President Xi Jinping issued a rare joint pledge, saying they would "together fight for free trade and open markets". Germany's Economy Minister Brigitte Zypries ratcheted up the tone, warning that Berlin could take Washington to an international trade court if it insists on imposing punitive tariffs on German goods. Yesterday's G20 session also coincides with Merkel's first meeting with Trump in Washington, when the chancellor is expected to make a strong push for open markets.

'Buy American, hire American'

But Trump was elected on the back of voter anger over deindustrialization in vast areas of the United States. He declared in his inauguration speech that "we will follow two simple rules: Buy American and hire American". Those caught in the crosshairs include German luxury carmaker BMW, against which Trump has threatened punitive taxes of 35 percent if it does not back down on building a factory in Mexico.

On Thursday, following talks with German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble, Mnuchin said Washington had no desire to fight "trade wars" with other economic powers. "Our desire is that... when there is imbalances in trading relationships that we have a need to

address that," Mnuchin said after the pair met in Berlin. Mnuchin said Trump's administration would keep a close eye on the levels of key global currencies, but pursue policies in the interest of "economic growth that is good for the US and the rest of the world".

'US position unclear'

Schäuble told public broadcaster SWR yesterday morning that Mnuchin had told him explicitly that "of course the Americans are for free trade and also for us setting that out in Baden-Baden". "I think we'll come to an agreement," the veteran finance minister went on. For French Finance Minister Michel Sapin, the problem is that Washington did not appear to have a clear position on trade. "We don't have a well-argued position from the US and that's the main difficulty that we have today," he told AFP, adding that it's the "fear of a lack of position that's weighing on the debate".

"It's possible that the US is unable to say what they plan to do beyond the simplistic declarations in a tweet," he added. Amid the growing alarm, IMF chief Christine Lagarde urged the G20 to "collectively avoid self-inflicted injuries". "This requires steering clear of policies that would seriously undermine trade, migration, capital flows, and the sharing of technologies across borders," she wrote in a message that apparently primarily targeted Trump. — AFP



PRIVAS, France: A worker tests a scale at the world leader in the weighing industry, Precia Molen company, on March 15, 2017 in southern France. — AFP

FOREIGN HARDHATS IN FRANCE ASKED 'PARLEZ-VOUS FRANCAIS?'

JOBS LEADING CONCERN OF FRENCH VOTERS

PARIS: A new rightwing talking point has entered the political debate ahead of France's presidential elections: Should foreign workers be required to speak French on building sites? Six of France's 13 regions have adopted rules mandating French for laborers on state-funded building projects, drawing fire for trying to fan xenophobic sentiment ahead of the two round April-May vote for president. With unemployment stuck at around 10 percent for years, polls show that jobs are the leading concern of French voters, with unfair competition for French companies from abroad a perennial political interest.

Although some backers have justified it as a security issue - workers might not be able to communicate unless they share a common language - others admit its aim is to prevent laborers from eastern Europe undercutting locals. "It's an essential condition for the safety of building site workers," said Valerie Pecresse, president of the Paris region Ile de France upon approving the rule for its public works last week.

The new language rule, which does not affect private building sites, is dubbed the "Moliere clause" after the 17th-century icon of French letters. Socialist Prime Minister Bernard Cazeneuve on Wednesday said the rightwing backers of the language requirement aimed to "make election hay" out of a measure he called "openly discriminatory". The measure may run counter to European rules on public procurement, which bar discrimination on the grounds of nationality.

'Not love of language'

Of particular concern in France is a sepa-

rate EU rule allowing companies to bring in workers from eastern Europe temporarily who must be paid the French minimum wage - but are exempt from high French social charges. The measure "is not inspired by the love of our language but by the goal of impeding competition from foreign companies using foreign workers," Cazeneuve added.

Socialist lawmaker Gilles Savary said: "Don't be fooled, it's just electoral posturing with an undercurrent of xenophobia." He said there are no accident statistics to back up the safety claims, and even if it were applied across the country it would not prevent low-cost labor since French-speaking workers are available from France's many former colonies.

According to the labor ministry's policy unit, some 285,000 foreign workers are in France under a 1996 EU directive originally aimed at allowing companies to hire workers with specialised skills from other member states on a temporary basis. Though the number has grown steadily over the years, it represents only one percent of the country's overall workforce.

Polish plumbers

In practice, many companies use the program to bring in cheap labor, often from eastern Europe, in what is termed "social dumping" in France as local workers are priced out of jobs. It dates from long before 10 mostly ex-communist states joined the EU in its 2004 big bang expansion. Today, around one-sixth of France's foreign workers are from Poland. The directive is under review because of abuses such as unde-

clared workers, workers being paid far less than the minimum wage, or overstaying the maximum period allowed.

The head of the employers' federation opposes the Moliere clause, warning of a slippery slope. "You start with that and then you start to play favorites," said Medef chief Pierre Gattaz, warning against "nationalist" excesses. "Then you close the French borders and end up leaving the eurozone." These are planks in the platform of far right presidential candidate Marine Le Pen, who for her part dismissed the Moliere clause as a devious half-measure, calling for the outright scrapping of the 1996 EU directive. "When you don't want to say things clearly... you take circuitous routes," she said. Polls currently suggest Le Pen would win the first round of the election on April 23, but lose in the run-off on May 7 against independent centrist Emmanuel Macron.

'Poor Moliere'

The debate is reminiscent of the run-up to a 2005 national referendum that rejected a draft European constitution partly over fears - fanned by the far-right - of a flood of cheap labor from eastern post-communist states. Denis Bertrand, a prominent semiologist - specializing in the creation of meaning - said calling the rule the "Moliere clause" was manipulative. "Why this rule all of a sudden?" asked Bertrand, a professor of French literature at Paris University. "Asking a hardhat to speak the language of Moliere is a bit grotesque... Poor Moliere, a great genius is having his name used by people who are unworthy of him," he said. — AFP

EU REINSTATES FINE ON AIR CARGO CARTEL

BRUSSELS: The European Commission yesterday reinstated a near €800 million (\$845 million) fine against leading global airlines, including Air France-KLM and British Airways, for their role in an air cargo cartel. A top EU court threw out the penalty in 2015 but the Commission said its ruling would ensure anti-competitive behavior in a key industry did not go unpunished. "Working together in a cartel rather than competing to offer better services to customers does not fly with the Commission," EU Competition Commissioner Margrethe Vestager said in a statement.

"Today's decision ensures that companies that were part of the air cargo cartel are sanctioned for their behavior," she added. In 2010, the Commission, the European Union's executive arm, fined 11 top airlines €790 million for running a price-fixing cartel between 1999 and 2006. The companies were Air Canada, Air France-KLM, British Airways, Cargolux, Cathay Pacific Airways, Japan Airlines, LAN Chile, Martinair, Qantas, SAS and Singapore Airlines. — AFP

SWIFT SYSTEM CUTS OFF LAST N KOREA BANKS

BRUSSELS: SWIFT, the inter-bank money transfer system, said yesterday it has cut off the last North Korean banks on the network, as international pressure mounts on Pyongyang over its nuclear and ballistic missile programs. "The DPRK banks remaining on the network are no longer compliant with SWIFT's membership criteria. As a result, these entities will no longer have access to the SWIFT financial messaging service," the Brussels-based group said in a statement.

"Given the increased ongoing international attention on the DPRK, SWIFT has informed the Belgian and EU authorities," it said, referring to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the country's official name. The statement did not say how many North Korean banks were involved. The move is significant as it means North Korea no longer has access SWIFT's global financial transfer system, further isolating the already heavily-sanctioned country. — AFP

GERMAN STEEL WORKERS TO GET 4% WAGE HIKE BY 2018

DUESSELDORF, Germany: Around 72,000 German steel workers will get a 2.3 percent pay hike from April, and another 1.7 percent from next May in a deal struck overnight, one of several sectors in Europe's largest economy to give workers a solid wage rise this year. The deal, which runs until the end of 2018, was reached for steelworkers in north-western Germany after a third round of negotiations in the western city of Duesseldorf between employers' group Arbeitgeberverband Stahl and trade union IG Metall.

"With this wage result, employees are receiving a fair share of the economic success of the sector," IG Metall leader Joerg Hofmann said yesterday. IG Metall had called for employees at firms like Thyssenkrupp und Salzgitter to get 4.5 percent more wages over the course of 12 months. Employers had only agreed to a 1.3 percent rise during the last round of negotiations but thousands of steel workers have since exerted pressure by carrying out warning strikes. Andreas Goss, head of Stahl and of Thyssenkrupp Europe, said a lower increase would have been preferable, but that had not been possible due to improving prospects for the steel industry, higher pay deals in other sectors and accelerating inflation. — Reuters

US INDUSTRIAL OUTPUT FLAT AS MANUFACTURING GAINS

WASHINGTON: Manufacturing output posted its sixth straight increase in February, but unseasonably warm weather again dragged down utilities, keeping total industrial production flat in the month, the Federal Reserve reported yesterday. Multiple manufactured product lines saw increases of one percent and higher including machinery, plastic, paper and metal products, pushing total manufacturing output up 0.5 percent compared to January, the same increase as the prior month.

Motor vehicles and parts were just shy of that mark with an increase of 0.8 percent in the month, reversing the decline of the same amount in January. Manufacturing output - a key focus of President Donald Trump's administration - was 1.2 percent higher than a year ago. Meanwhile, mining output increased 2.7 percent, and was 1.8 percent higher than February 2016. However, utilities output fell 5.7 percent, nearly the same decline as in January, "as continued unseasonably warm weather further reduced demand for heating," the report said.

That decline offset the gains in manufacturing and mining, to keep the overall Industrial Production index unchanged, after a drop of 0.1 percent in the prior month, also attributed to unusually high temperatures. Economists had been expecting industrial production to rise 0.2 percent. Industrial capacity in use last month slipped to 75.4 percent, just a tenth lower than in January, and exactly as analysts forecast. — AFP



DOLGEVILLE, New York: This file photo taken on March 1, 2017 shows baseball bats on the production line at Rawlings sporting goods. — AFP



HONG KONG: A Cathay Pacific employee walks past a row of self-check-in counters at the international airport on March 15, 2017. — AFP

CATHAY PLEDGES TO SLASH STAFF COSTS AFTER LOSS

HONG KONG: Hong Kong's troubled flagship airline Cathay Pacific said yesterday it would slash staff costs by 30 percent as part of a major overhaul as it struggles to repair its bottom line. The announcement came two days after the firm posted its first annual net loss in eight years, saying it had been hit by intense competition and a drop in demand from business travellers. Cathay had already revealed its biggest shake-up in 20 years in January, saying some jobs would go but providing little detail.

Analysts had said the company need to reveal more about its restructuring plans to encourage investor confidence. Its stocks in Hong Kong closed up 1.44 percent yesterday after the latest news. Cathay said middle and senior management at its Hong Kong head office would be targeted, although it gave no further indication of how many jobs could be axed. "It is clear that there is a need for an organizational structure that will allow the Cathay Pacific Group to succeed," it said in a statement. The firm added that it was seeking to create a "leaner, simpler structure" and that management changes would be announced in June.

The move is part of a three-year "transformation program" designed to breathe new life into the airline. Cathay has been struggling despite an expansion of international air travel in the region as lower cost carriers, particularly from mainland China, eat into its market share. The airline is also losing premium travellers as it comes under pressure from Middle East rivals that are expanding into Asia and offering more luxury touches. That has led to promotional prices for Cathay's top tickets as they are sold to leisure travellers. Its \$74 million net loss in 2016 reversed a \$773 million profit in the previous year, with chairman John Slosar warning 2017 would be similarly "challenging". It was the firm's first annual loss since 2008 at the height of the financial crisis. — AFP

CHINA'S ANT CONFIDENT OF CLOSING MONEYGRAM DEAL

COMPANY KEEN TO EXPAND OVERSEAS

BEIJING: Ant Financial Services Group, the world's largest financial technology company, is confident of closing a deal for US money-transfer firm MoneyGram International Inc, a top executive told Reuters, despite a higher bid from a US rival. The proposed \$880 million deal is a first major step by Ant, the payment affiliate of Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba Group Holding, to expand its business overseas, as the firm, valued at \$60 billion, sets itself up for a public offering.

"MoneyGram we view as very attractive because it gives a global network of remittance capability and kind of an omnichannel approach that connects us," Douglas Feagin, head of Ant's international strategy, said in a phone interview. "That's why we've entered the transaction and look forward to completing the deal with them." But the plan faced a major hurdle this week as US electronic payments firm Euronet Worldwide Inc launched a higher \$1 billion bid for MoneyGram on Tuesday, arguing that its all-American deal would face less regulatory scrutiny than a lower bid by Ant.

Ant said earlier that it was making progress and on schedule to obtain all required regulatory and shareholder approvals, while MoneyGram has yet to decide whether it will recommend Euronet's higher offer to its shareholders. Feagin, who had worked at Goldman Sachs Group Inc for more than two decades before joining Ant in 2016, declined to say whether Ant would raise its offer for MoneyGram, but said the deal was important for the firm's global push. "Today with our wallets you can transfer money in a country quite easily, and we want to enable that more broadly around the world. That's what MoneyGram would help us to do," he

said. MoneyGram, which was rescued through a \$1.5 billion financing deal in which Goldman participated after the subprime mortgage crisis in 2008, has long dominated the global money transfer industry with its large network of retail locations. The Dallas-based firm has about 350,000 outlets in shops, post offices and banks in nearly 200 countries and territories. Its rivals include Euronet and Western Union Co.

A combination of Ant's technological expertise and MoneyGram's brand could be a game-changer for the global payment industry, analysts say, with scope for more consumers to use online transfer services rather than taking cash to storefronts. Feagin added Ant would look longer-term to grow its business in developed markets, though it would take a cautious approach. "We're going to be more careful about that in terms of designing the strategy and the kinds of customers we can access. We don't go in with a blind eye to the competitive nature of certain markets," he said.

Southeast Asia

Ant, which dominates China's online payment market but has been ramping up investment overseas amid fierce rivalry at home with peers such as Tencent Holding Ltd's popular WeChat Pay, is also eyeing several new deals around Southeast Asia this year, Feagin said. "We're focused on larger markets there in terms of the population and the opportunity set. So I would expect to see some other partnerships this year," Feagin said.

Ant Financial is currently in talks with Indonesian media conglomerate Emtek to launch a payment joint venture, a source with direct knowledge of the discussions told Reuters. Feagin declined to comment on specific deals. The push

underlines Ant's ambitions to create a network of financial assets around the region. Ant has made a series of investments in foreign payment firms in recent months as it looks to create an international network.

The spate of deals since the end of last year include tie-ups with Ascend Money in Thailand, Kakao Pay in South Korea and Mynt in the Philippines, following earlier investment in Indian firm PayTM. "(Southeast Asia) is quite attractive because it has the fundamental characteristics of high mobile phone usage and rising per capita income, but still has a large population that is not banked," said Feagin.

According to analysts, the competition for payment and remittance assets in the region has spiked as firms look for deals to avoid the regulatory hurdles involved in entering the markets alone. "There's pressure in these markets because there's only a limited number of quality assets," said Hong Kong-based EY Fintech analyst Lames Lloyd. "It wouldn't surprise me if other technology companies, Chinese and otherwise, are equally engaged in these markets, looking at what viable payments or remittance players they could link to a global network," he said.

Ant Financial has confirmed plans for an IPO but it is not expected until 2018 at the earliest. It raised \$4.5 billion in a record funding round in April, valuing the firm at around \$60 billion, the same as American Express Co or insurer Chubb Ltd and more than any other privately held fintech firm. Last month Reuters reported that Ant, whose hallmark payment app Alipay boasts around 450 million users, was in early talks to raise between \$2 billion and \$3 billion in debt to fund acquisitions and foreign investments. — Reuters



US aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70) transits the East China Sea with the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force Murasame-class destroyer JS Samidare (DD 106) on March 9, 2017. — AFP

MISSING FROM GRAND TRUMP NAVY PLAN: SKILLED WORKERS

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump says he wants to build dozens of new warships in one of the biggest peace-time expansions of the US Navy. But interviews with shipbuilders, unions and a review of public and internal documents show major obstacles to that plan. The initiative could cost nearly \$700 billion in government funding, take 30 years to complete and require hiring tens of thousands of skilled shipyard workers - many of whom don't exist yet because they still need to be hired and trained, according to the interviews and the documents reviewed.

Trump has vowed a huge build-up of the US military to project American power in the face of an emboldened China and Russia. That includes expanding the Navy to 350 warships from 275 today. He has provided no specifics, including how soon he wants the larger fleet. The Navy has given Defense Secretary Jim Mattis a report that explores how the country's industrial base could support higher ship production, Admiral Bill Moran, the vice chief of Naval Operations with oversight of the Navy's shipbuilding outlook, told Reuters.

He declined to give further details. But those interviewed for this story say there are clearly two big issues - there are not enough skilled workers in the market, from electricians to welders, and after years of historically low production, shipyards and their suppliers, including nuclear fuel producers, will struggle to ramp up for years. To be sure, the first, and biggest, hurdle for Trump to overcome is to persuade a cost-conscious Congress to fund the military buildup.

The White House declined to comment. A Navy spokeswoman said increases being considered beyond the current shipbuilding plan would require "sufficient time" to allow companies to ramp up capacity. The two largest US shipbuilders, General Dynamics Corp and Huntington Ingalls Industries Inc, told Reuters they are planning to hire a total of 6,000 workers in 2017 just to meet current orders, such as the Columbia class ballistic missile submarine.

General Dynamics hopes to hire 2,000 workers at Electric Boat this year. Currently projected order levels would already require the shipyard to grow from less than 15,000 workers, to nearly 20,000 by the early 2030s, company documents reviewed by Reuters show. Huntington Ingalls, the largest US military shipbuilder, plans to hire 3,000 at its Newport News shipyard in Norfolk, Virginia, and another 1,000 at the Ingalls shipyard in Mississippi this year to fulfill current orders, spokeswoman Beci Brenton said.

Companies say they are eager to work with Trump to build his bigger Navy. But expanding hiring, for now, is difficult to do until they receive new orders, officials say. "It's hard to look beyond" current orders, Brenton said. Smaller shipbuilders and suppliers are also cautious. "You can't hire people to do nothing," said Jill Mackie, spokeswoman for Portland, Oregon-based Vigor Industrial LLC, which makes combat craft for the Navy's Special Warfare units. "Until funding is there ... you can't bring on more workers."

Scaling Up Workforce

Because companies won't hire excess workers in advance, they will have a huge challenge in expanding their workforces rapidly if a shipbuilding boom materializes, said Bryan Clark, who led strategic planning for the Navy as special assistant to the chief of Naval Operations until 2013. Union and shipyard officials say finding skilled labor just for the work they already have is challenging. Demand for pipeline welders is so strong that some can make as much as \$300,000 per year, including overtime and benefits, said Danny Hendrix, the business manager at Pipeliners Local 798, a union representing 6,500 metal workers in 42 states.

Much of the work at the submarine yards also requires a security clearance that many can't get, said Jimmy Hart, president of the Metal Trades Department at the AFL-CIO union, which represents 100,000 boilermakers, machinists, and pipefitters, among others. To help grow a larger labor force from the ground up, General Dynamics' Electric Boat has partnered with seven high schools and trade schools in Connecticut and Rhode Island to develop a curriculum to train a next generation of welders and engineers. "It has historically taken five years to get someone proficient in shipbuilding," said Maura Dunn, vice president of human resources at Electric Boat.

It can take as many as seven years to train a welder skilled enough to make the most complex type of welds, radiographic structural welds needed on a nuclear-powered submarine, said Will Lennon, vice president of the shipyard's Columbia Class submarine program. The Navy envisioned by Trump could create more than 50,000 jobs, the Shipbuilders Council of America, a trade group representing US shipbuilders, repairers and suppliers, told Reuters. The US shipbuilding and repairing industry employed nearly 100,000 in 2016, Labor Department statistics show. The industry had as many as 176,000 workers at the height of the Cold War in the early 1980s as the United States built up a fleet of nearly 600 warships by the end of that decade.

Submarine Crunch

Apart from the labor shortage, there are also serious capacity and supply chain issues that would be severely strained by any plan to expand the Navy, especially its submarine fleet. Expanding the Navy to 350 ships is not as simple as just adding 75 ships. Many ships in the current 275-vessel fleet need to be replaced, which means the Navy would have to buy 321 ships between now and 2046 to reach Trump's goal, the Congressional Budget Office said in a report in February. The shipyards that make nuclear submarines - General Dynamics' Electric Boat in Groton, Connecticut, and Huntington's Newport News - produced as many as seven submarines per year between them in the early 1980s. But for more than a decade now, the yards have not built more than two per year. The nuclear-powered Virginia class and Columbia class submarines are among the largest and most complex vessels to build. The first Columbia submarine, which is set to begin construction in 2021, will take seven years to build, and two to three additional years to test. — Reuters

C AMERICANS FEAR TRUMP WILL CUT DOLLAR LIFELINE

INTIPUCA, El Salvador: Families across Central America are living in fear that US President Donald Trump's anti-immigration policies will stem the vital flow of money sent home by migrants each year. The concern is that relatives who have emigrated without authorization will be deported, suddenly ending the billions of dollars in annual remittances sent to their impoverished countries.

There are millions of Central Americans living legally in the United States - but also 1.7 million unauthorized migrants from the region, according to estimates by the Pew Research Center. Most of them come from the poorest, gang-ridden three countries known as the Northern Triangle - Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras.

Intipuca, a town south of El Salvador's capital, symbolizes the life-changing value of the US dollars sent back home. The town features big, colored houses adorned with iron-forged moldings that stand empty. Their owners live in the United States, and return only for special occasions like Christmas, weddings and family events. In the park in front of the town hall there is a statue dedicated to Sigifrido Chavez, who in 1967 became the first local to migrate to the United States.

Near the statue Jose Corpeno paces around as he speaks into a cellphone. He explains that he was talking with his daughter, who has been living in the US state of Maryland for a year and now "is living a nightmare". "We are so worried. Immigration agents went to a place close to where she lives," Corpeno said. The daughter paid a smuggler \$10,000 to lead her up north, and now she is living without authorization in the United States.

"She's working. But she's afraid that at any moment she could be found out and detained," Corpeno said. The money the woman sends goes to a small plot of corn that her family depends on to survive. "If she ends up being deported, then we'll be in a bad way. We are poor, and the money she sends helps us," Corpeno said.

'Unfair'

The same anxiety is felt in Guatemala. Victoria Flores, 70, said she relies on her 50-year-old son Estuardo, who works as a dental technician in Los Angeles and whose remittances pay the mortgage, electricity, water and telephone service where she lived. "This is a difficult situation, with worries every day because this president (Trump) has said that he will deport all the illegals from the United States," Flores told AFP.

The small woman called that policy "unfair." But she also lays part of the blame on Trump's predecessor, Barack Obama for overseeing changes in US migration law. Remittances make up a significant chunk of the economy in the Northern Triangle countries, so any decline would be felt immediately. — AFP

MCDONALD'S SORRY FOR HACKED TWEET SLAMMING TRUMP

NEW YORK: McDonald's apologized Thursday after it briefly posted on Twitter a blast criticizing US President Donald Trump, which the company blamed on a hack from an external source. The quickly deleted tweet offered an uncharitable appraisal of Trump, saying, "You are actually a disgusting excuse of a President and we would love to have Barack Obama back, also you have tiny hands." The tweet was removed mid-morning Thursday soon after being posted to one of McDonald's official Twitter feeds - but not before being retweeted more than a thousand times and garnering plenty of attention in political and media circles.

"Based on our investigation, we have determined that our Twitter account was hacked by an external source," said McDonald's spokeswoman Terri Hickey in a statement. "We took swift action to secure it, and we apologize this tweet was sent through our corporate McDonald's account." Hacking has been a persistent problem in recent years with the growing influence of Twitter and other social media sites. In April 2013, a hack of the Associated Press resulted in an erroneous post that the White House had been attacked, briefly sending US stocks markets down in a panic. — AFP

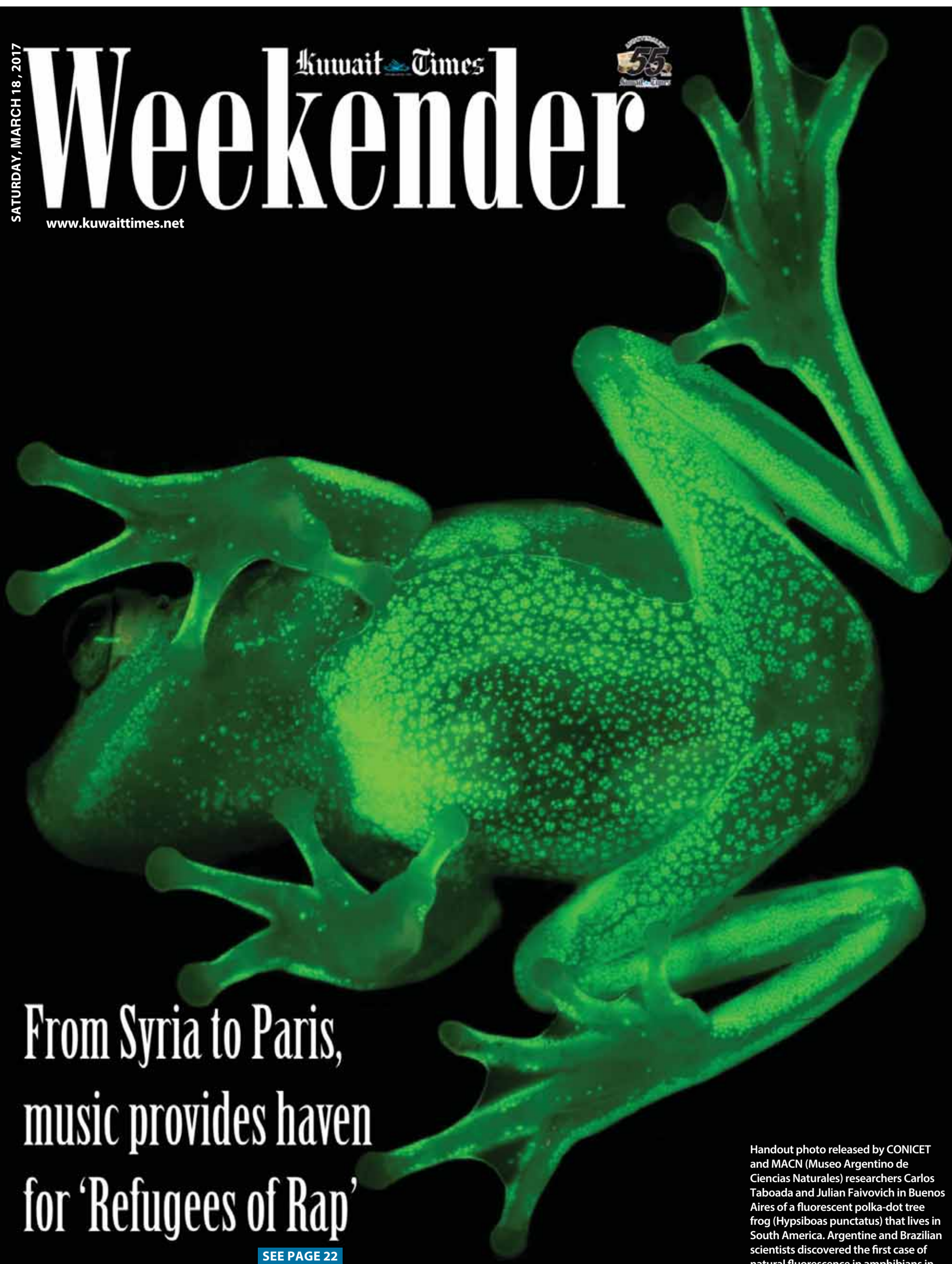
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From Syria to Paris,
music provides haven
for 'Refugees of Rap'

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Handout photo released by CONICET and MACN (Museo Argentino de Ciencias Naturales) researchers Carlos Taboada and Julian Faivovich in Buenos Aires of a fluorescent polka-dot tree frog (*Hypsiboas punctatus*) that lives in South America. Argentine and Brazilian scientists discovered the first case of natural fluorescence in amphibians in the tree-frog. —AFP (See Page 36)



Members of the Palestinian-Syrian hip hop band "Refugees of Rap", brothers Yaser (left) and Mohamed Jamous, pose in Paris. — AFP

From Syria to Paris, music provides haven for 'Refugees of Rap'

Staccato lyrics may be no match for Bashar Al-Assad's military firepower, but two brothers, who fled to Paris from Syria and perform as "Refugees of Rap", find sniping with words a liberating experience. Having grown up officially stateless in a Palestinian refugee camp in Syria, Yaser and Mohamed Jamous rap in Arabic about the war they have fled and their new life in France. "We chose the name because for us, rap represents a country where we can say what we think," Mohamed, 28, told AFP.

"And we're seeking asylum there." Over a pounding beat, solemn music blending high piano keys and low violin tones, the brothers "spit", or speak, the chorus in unison: "We have to wake up, stop dreaming. The time for silence is long gone, swept away by words." The lyrics are from their 2011 song "The Age of Silence", one of the last they sung before fleeing Syria via Lebanon.

Performing their hip-hop at a Paris community center, the brothers said the song had been the "first time we dared speak up openly against the (Assad) regime" despite the risk in doing so. "One word, and you got 20 years (in prison) or death. Here, we wanted to say that the time for silence is over." The duo were born and raised in the Yarmuk camp for Palestinian refugees on the outskirts of Damascus, which was once home to 160,000 people—including Syrians—but has been ravaged by fighting. Their grandfather fled to Syria from Haifa in 1948 when the state of Israel was created. Yaser and Mohamed left Syria in early 2013 as fighting for control of the camp intensified. The rest of their family also fled and is in Sweden.

Inspiration in revolt

The brothers created "Refugees of Rap" in 2007 with two friends, an Algerian and a Syrian, and were one of the first such groups to emerge out of Syria. It now comprises just the two of them—the Syrian member refused to leave and the Algerian went to Germany. Released in 2010, their first album recounts living in the overcrowded camp, as they advocate for the Palestinian cause. Then, after 2011, the revolt provided inspiration. They penned "The Age of Silence", "Haram" ("Forbidden"), which is about the horrors of the war, "Aysheen" meaning "We Live", and "Corruption

in the Country". They had completed eight tracks for the second album when they began receiving anonymous threats on social media.

Got touring

"We received two or three messages on Facebook," Yaser, 29, said. "The messages said 'We know you're preparing an album and if you don't stop... it's over for you. We're going to destroy your studio, we're going to stop you. We're going to kill you.'" It was not the only hurdle they faced. During fighting in Yarmuk in 2012, the group's recording studio was destroyed in bombings. Their younger brother was then jailed for 40 days for an unknown reason. "When he was released, he was in a horrible state," recalled Mohamed, who now works in a hotel. "He'd been tortured."

Shortly afterwards, they decided to leave Syria. They were granted refugee status in France, with the mention "nationality undetermined, Palestinian origin" a few months later. "When we got here, there was no housing... no aid," Yaser said. "You had to wait for months to get set up, so we chose to book some concert dates and get to work." They toured in Denmark, Sweden and France, where they completed "The Age of Silence" and released the album in 2014.

'Not from nowhere'

"In Syria, people understand (Arabic)," Yaser said. "That's what we miss here." The brothers work on their language skills by listening to French rappers. But on stage, they get around the language barrier by reading translated lyrics and then leading the audience in chants of the Arabic chorus before each track. For their upcoming third album, the group will "tell the story of our time here in France, our exile," said Yaser, who now works in a souvenir shop. But they have not forgotten Syria. They have little hope of returning but "in exile, the future is never clear," said Yaser. "We are exiles everywhere but we're not from nowhere," said Mohamed. "We are proud to be Palestinian because it's our history, and in Syria, we were made to feel like we were Palestinians. "But we also grew up feeling Syrian because we were raised there. Now, we feel Parisian." — AFP

SHEERAN TO CLOSE GLASTONBURY FESTIVAL

Ed Sheeran is to close this year's Glastonbury Festival, headlining the final night, the giant British music event said Thursday. The singer-songwriter, who is dominating the British charts by holding a record 16 singles in the top 20, has performed at the festival before but this time is topping the bill. "Ed Sheeran is Glastonbury's third 2017 headliner!"

He's gone from the Croissant Neuf tent in 2011 to topping the bill on the Pyramid Stage," said the world's biggest greenfield festival. Radiohead will headline the first night and Foo Fighters the second. Sheeran described his slot as "awesome". This year's festival, held between June 21 and June 25 in Somerset, southwest England, is expected to attract around 170,000 people. — AFP



Ed Sheeran

Blues harmonica pioneer James Cotton dead at 81

Leading blues harmonica player James Cotton, who rose from poverty to introduce his instrument to the rock world, died Thursday. He was 81. The Grammy-winning artist, who toured for more than 60 years even as throat cancer in the 1990s made him give up singing, died of pneumonia at a hospital in Austin, Texas, his publicist said in a statement. Cotton made his name in Chicago as part of the Muddy Waters Band and by the 1960s his harmonica piqued the curiosity of the hippies who sought to explore the blues roots of rock. He opened concerts for Janis Joplin and the Grateful Dead and collaborated with Led Zeppelin.

The Dead had "never seen a man play the harp like that," he said of his harmonica. "And there was nobody playin' music like they were playin'. It was a bit too loud for me, but I enjoyed it," he told the Montreal Gazette in 2015. He became a mentor to Paul Butterfield, one of the most prominent rockers to play

harmonica, a partnership that Cotton credited with giving him a window to white audiences. Cotton had grown up laboring on a plantation in Mississippi and was orphaned by age nine. But his mother had already introduced him to harmonica, using a cheap version to imitate the sounds of chickens and train. He had heard pioneering blues harmonica player Sonny Boy Williamson II on the radio and was taken by an uncle to see the master, who took him under his wing.

Cotton later told the Chicago Tribune that Williamson taught him "how to chase women, how to drink and how to play the blues." "Anything he played today, I learned it tomorrow. He never said anything," Cotton said. Cotton, who lived his final years in Austin, released his last album in 2013, "Cotton Mouth Man," a semi-autobiographical look at his roots. — AFP



In this file photo, blues legend James Cotton ferociously plays the harmonica as he entertains the crowd at the WC. — AP

Teenager finds 7.44 carat diamond in Arkansas state park

A teenager has found a 7.44 carat diamond at a state park in southwest Arkansas. Officials at Crater of Diamonds State Park at Murfreesboro say the rock found Saturday by 14-year-old Kalel Langford is the seventh largest found since the park was established in 1972. The park hasn't provided an estimate of the diamond's value.

Langford said in a statement Thursday that he spotted the diamond among rocks near a stream. He has named it "Superman's Diamond" and plans to keep hang onto it. Park interpreter Waymon Cox describes the diamond as pinto-bean sized and similar in color to coffee. The largest diamond ever discovered in the United States, the 40.23 carat "Uncle Sam," was unearthed on the land in 1924. — AP



This photo provided by the Arkansas Department of Parks & Tourism shows a 7.44 carat diamond that was found Saturday by teenager Kalel Langford at the Crater of Diamonds State Park in Murfreesboro, Ark. — AP photos



Kalel Langford holding a 7.44 carat diamond he found at Crater of Diamonds State Park in Murfreesboro, Ark.

Priceless Van Goghs or just plain art?

On a Tuesday morning last month, Steve Meadows, a 66-year-old architect, actor, inventor and dabbler in art, left his home in Venice, California, with a cargo boasting an extraordinary history. Trailed by documentary filmmakers and aided by a friend, he loaded two potentially precious paintings—once at the center of an international art scandal—into his SUV, and headed to a shipping warehouse near downtown Los Angeles. The still life artworks on paper and canvas were bound for the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, where long-awaited examinations may finally determine if the Dutch master painted them.

Their authentication would startle the art world and likely generate astronomical valuations. The canvas, measuring 68 by 52 centimeters (26.8 by 20.5 inches), would be among the largest paintings by Vincent Van Gogh confirmed genuine in recent decades. "I'm feeling relief at getting them to the museum," Meadows said. "I just want the truth." The paper study is being evaluated as a possible preliminary study by Van Gogh for his "Japanese Vase with Roses and Anemones"—currently hanging in the Musee d'Orsay in Paris. The canvas is a potential original still life by the artist entitled "Japanese Fan."

Their inspections mark another twist in the dramatic, decades-spanning story of a contested, seemingly cursed, collection of artworks. Both once belonged to controversial Dutchman Jelle de Boer, who amassed hundreds of unauthenticated pieces in the mid-20th century that he claimed were by Van Gogh. Swiss authorities confiscated many of them in 1967 on suspicion of forgery and decades of legal battles ensued.

Authentication quest

De Boer died in 1970 and his heirs sold the rights to the artworks to Dutch and Belgian investors in 1992. A decade later they

succeeded in finally reuniting the collection. Meadows acquired his two paintings from the businessmen as collateral for directing and investing in their subsequent authentication and publicity efforts in the United States. He became sole owner when that partnership ended in 2004, according to Donald Burris, his Los Angeles-based attorney. He soon began his own painstaking authentication quest, eventually spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on studies, storage and legal fees as he doggedly pursued a coveted appraisal at the Van Gogh Museum, the world's foremost authority on the artist.

Meadows commissioned experts in microscopic palette analysis and canvas threads, as well as initiating infrared imaging of the paper painting. He also ordered high-resolution X-rays and transparent overlay drawings of the canvas. The findings proved positive. Both palettes are consistent with Van Gogh. The paper study matches in size and composition alignment to the artist's authentic "Roses" in Paris—painted in June 1890, just a month before his death—and could date back to the same period. Van Gogh is known to have made many precise duplicates of paintings using different colors. Meanwhile the "Fan" canvas has similar characteristics to three of his Paris period (1886-88) paintings and some early 1880s Edouard Manet works. Scans showed it had been drawn, in landscape orientation, over a previously undetected floral image painted in portrait. Van Gogh often painted over his work, according to art historians. As the encouraging evidence mounted, Meadows hired Burris, the attorney who helped win the high-profile "Woman in Gold" US Supreme Court case in 2004 concerning looted artworks of Gustav Klimt.

Awaiting the findings

In July 2015 they sent all the paperwork to the Van Gogh

Museum, and two months later it agreed to appraise the paintings in early 2017. "All the reports point to them being Van Gogh works," Burris said. "We're gratified the museum has agreed to review them. We realize they've made no commitments as to the outcome, but we're hopeful." It could be months, even years, before researchers finish their evaluations, which might prove inconclusive. Esmee Kohler, a spokeswoman for the Van Gogh Museum, would only confirm the review is under way.

"During that period, the museum can't give any comments on its progress," she said. David Brooks, a Van Gogh catalogue specialist based in Toronto, said he would be stunned if either painting were positively verified, given the historical infamy of the de Boer collection. "But it's not outside the realm of possibility," he added. "A broken clock is right two times a day... the fact that they have made it through the door to the research department of the Van Gogh Museum is encouraging."

Meadows draws optimism from the example of Andrew Brainerd, a Chicago attorney and art collector who bought four paintings from de Boer in 1966. After decades of tortuous efforts Brainerd convinced some experts that one was an 1859 Manet study of Diego Velazquez's 17th century portrait "Infanta Margarita Teresa in a Blue Dress." Meanwhile Meadows waits in his Venice home—bought from musician Eric Clapton, with a peddled flying machine he invented hanging from the lofty ceiling—wondering if he is the owner of two priceless paintings, or just a Renaissance Man on an expensive misadventure. — AFP



Steve Meadows, an architect, actor, inventor and dabbler in art, poses in his Venice, California, home with two paintings he shipped to the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam for an authentication review as possible works by the Dutch master artist. — AFP



Steve Meadows (right) an architect, actor, inventor and dabbler in art, looks at a painting, "Japanese Fan," at a Los Angeles shipping warehouse.



China re-brands Cold War nuclear bunker as tourist draw



It was a top-secret Chinese nuclear facility with a deadly Cold War mission-to make plutonium for an atomic bomb-but these days its doors are wide open as a tourist attraction. The cavernous "816 Nuclear Military Engineering" installation was burrowed into lush green mountains in southwest China over a 17-year span by 60,000 soldiers toiling day and night in dangerous conditions. Construction on the vast site began in 1967, three years after China successfully tested its first atomic weapon, as China hurried to catch its nuclear program up with that of Cold War rivals the United States and Soviet Union. Located in the huge Chinese municipality of Chongqing, it covers 100,000 square meters (1.08 million square feet) -- the equivalent of 14 football pitches-and with a volume equal to 600 Olympic-sized pools. It has the world's largest known network of man-made tunnels, its maze-like corridors extending more than 20 kilometers (12 miles).

Surrounded by darkness and damp concrete, visitors are transported back to the Cold War. "It's very impressive and mysterious," said Pan Ya, a thirty-something tourist from a neighboring town who visited with her parents. "They had heard about this place for a long time but were never able to come in," she said while gazing at the old reactor core, now decorated with fake plutonium bars coloured a luminous green.





Built for nothing

The facility cost 80 billion yuan (11 billion euros, \$12 billion) but, ironically, no nuclear material ever passed through it due to a dramatic shift in developments above ground even as soldiers labored below. China established diplomatic ties with the US in 1979 and, later, tension with the Soviet Union also eased. Although near completion, the site was judged to have no further use and was abandoned in 1984. Declassified in 2002, it was opened to Chinese tourists in 2010 and began welcoming foreign visitors at the end of 2016.

More than 300,000 Chinese tourists have since visited, while less than 100 foreigners had done so as of last month. Just 10 percent of the corridors, massive halls and control rooms are open to the public, but visitors can view a light show projected upon a mammoth wall as music thunders, along with various exhibits, including a model of the first Chinese A-bomb. "We're not promoting nuclear weapons," explains Zheng Zhihong, 816's manager. "Quite the opposite. I hope that one day the nuclear powers will say 'Stop, let's all count to three and destroy our arsenals!'"

on the construction. It was top-secret, entry was forbidden. At the time, ordinary people in the area only knew there was some project, they did not know what was being worked on." The food was basic: rice and beans, with meat thrown in twice a week.

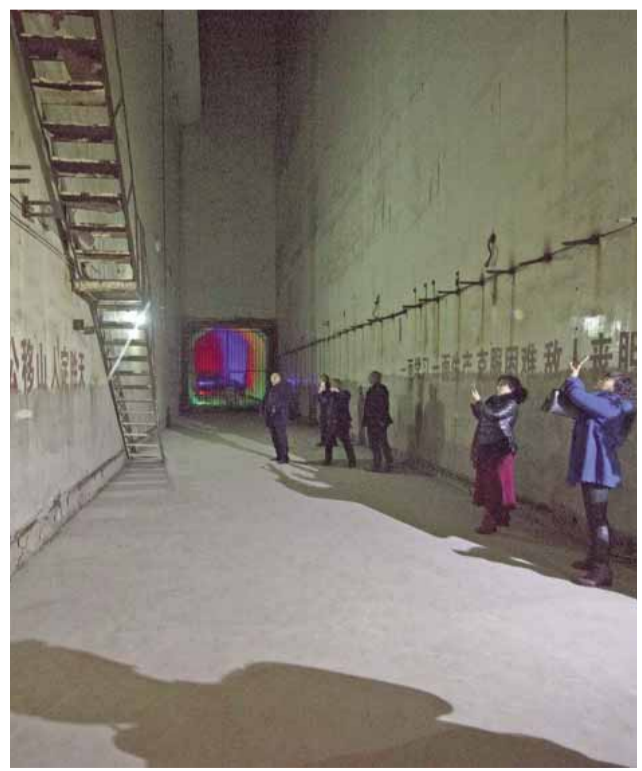
"Many got lung problems because of the dust, and that's without taking into account the toxic emissions from explosives, the machine smoke and the foul air," adds Chen. Tears welled up in the eyes of another former soldier who worked on 816, Li Gaoyun, as he viewed old photos displayed in the tunnels. It was his first visit back in 42 years. Li said many of the ex-soldiers who toiled at 816 receive no pensions or welfare benefits despite the enormous sacrifices they made for their country. "A lot of the former workers have no pension, no social security. They don't have enough to live on," Li said. "They owe us that. We gave our blood, our sweat. And our youth." — AFP



Blood, sweat and years

816's rebirth as a tourist attraction comes as little comfort to the thousands of soldiers who endured hellish conditions in blasting out the site's corridors and halls. "A colleague would detonate the explosives. Then we'd dig away at the rock with a machine. It could have collapsed at any minute," recalls former soldier Chen Huaiwen, now 70. Officially, 76 people died in the process, but tour guides and former workers insist the number is too low.

"We'd sleep several to a bed, on straw mattresses," Chen said. "It was a furnace in the summer and you wouldn't get to sleep before 1 am." "Armed police kept watch outside while we worked



These pictures show tourists visiting the "816 Nuclear Military Engineering" installation in the mountains of Fuling district, in southwest China's Chongqing Municipality. It was a top-secret Chinese nuclear facility with a deadly Cold War mission — to make plutonium for an atomic bomb — but these days its doors are wide open as a tourist attraction. — AFP photos



K-pop group SixBomb members posing for a photo during an interview with AFP in Seoul. — AFP photos



Hong Hye-Jin (So-Ah), a member of K-pop group SixBomb, posing for a photo.



Lee So-Young (Seul-Bee), a member of K-pop group SixBomb, posing for a photo.



Kim Da-Young (Da-In), a member of K-pop group SixBomb, posing for a photo.

CUTTING EDGE: K-POP BAND PRAISE PLASTIC SURGERY BEAUTY

'EVERYONE FOLLOWS ME, THEY KNOW I'M PRETTY'



Hong Hye-Jin (So-Ah), a member of K-pop group SixBomb, having her hair done at a beauty parlor.



Jung Hye-Yoon (right) and Lee So-Young (left), members of K-pop group SixBomb, having their hair done at a beauty parlor in Seoul.

Rounder eyes, narrower faces, bigger breasts: a South Korean girlband is celebrating the country's obsession with surgically-enhanced beauty by going under the knife to praise the virtues of "Becoming Pretty". All four members of obscure K-pop outfit SixBomb went through extensive plastic surgery, from nose jobs to breast implants, before releasing their new single on Thursday. A series of videos showed the four women visiting a clinic, strutting into an operating theatre and lying on the operating table. Another had them practicing dance moves in sunglasses with their heads wrapped in bandages.

"Everyone follows me, they know I'm pretty," they sing in "Becoming Pretty" an electronic dance number with a hook reminiscent of South Korean singer Psy's 2012 global phenomenon Gangnam Style. The track could be the direct antithesis to Lady Gaga's Born This Way, lyrics: "I'm beautiful in my

way/Cause God makes no mistakes/I'm on the right track, baby/I was born this way." It has raised questions over the South's ultra-competitive, looks-obsessed society, where physical features enhance social standing and can help secure jobs, with many recruitment adverts requiring a "neat appearance" and a CV with photo.

Despite a population of only 50 million, it is the world's third biggest plastic surgery market, with thousands of clinics performing an estimated 1.2 million procedures a year. Adverts showing dramatic before-and-after pictures are omnipresent on street billboards, subway trains, bus stops and toilet walls, urging women to "change" their lives or admonishing them: "Everyone but you has done it."

'Come out of the closet'

SixBomb's lead singer Dain had her breasts enlarged and her cheekbones shaved to make her face look smaller for the song. "We all wanted to get some surgeries done to look prettier... and thought, 'Why not perform a song about it instead of trying to conceal it?'" she said. "People will notice it anyway... so we wanted to be open about this reality where many women want to look pretty," she told AFP. SixBomb were founded in 2012 and have released five albums, but have yet to become major stars and with their members now in their mid-20s, time could be running out for them in a youth-driven market.

The project was funded by their management, which spent 100 million won (around \$90,000) for "almost every kind of surgery that could be done on a face" and breast implants, said head manager Kim Il-Woong. "We haven't committed any crimes. Our only crime would be talking about it in such an open manner," he said, adding many celebrities go under the knife but do not "come out of the closet".

Korean Wave

K-pop has conquered much of Asia and spread beyond it in a "Korean Wave", with top girl- and boybands, their good looks often surgically perfected and performing dance moves with military precision, enjoying huge followings. Many are tightly controlled by their managements, who dictate everything from what songs to sing, to what to eat-or not-to maintain rail-thin



Kim Da-Young (Da-In), a member of K-pop group SixBomb, with a photo of herself before her plastic surgery.



Jung Hye-Yoon (Ga-Bin), a member of K-pop group SixBomb, having her hair done.



Hong Hye-Jin (So-Ah), a member of K-pop group SixBomb, with a photo of herself before her plastic surgery.



Jung Hye-Yoon (Ga-Bin), a member of K-pop group SixBomb, with a photo of herself before her plastic surgery.

figures, and what operations to have. Their popularity has itself fuelled the surgery business, with many fans—including from overseas, particularly Chinese—having procedures in the hope of looking like their favorite stars.

A prominent Seoul clinic confirmed that SixBomb's members had gone through extensive operations "all above the waist". None of the four were forced to go through surgery, they said, although rapper Soa had to think "long and hard" before having the "double eyelid" procedure to make eyes wider and rounder. "I really liked and was satisfied with my previous eyes, so I had to think long and hard before deciding to take part in this concept," Soa said.

'Worshipped and consumed'

The stunt has raised eyebrows. "I understand that you guys are desperate for publicity... but did you really need to go this far?" asked one online commentator, while another described it "flat-out bizarre". The move is emblematic of the "plastic surgery culture" prevalent in a country which ranks at the bottom of OECD surveys on gender equality despite being Asia's fourth-largest economy, said Jung Seul-Ah, media monitor at rights group Korea Womenlink. Looks often play a key role in South Korean women's "social survival" and job prospects, Jung said.

"This culture has made plastic surgery something essential for many women deemed not pretty enough," Jung said, and an "absolute necessity for female celebrities whose looks are worshipped, consumed and capitalized on incessantly". But for her part, singer Dain had no doubts. "I really love my new face and am proud of how good I look on TV screens," she said, adding she would welcome "any kind of public attention, good or bad" for the project. — AFP

TYRA BANKS

RETURNING AS HOST OF

'AMERICA'S NEXT TOP MODEL'

Rita Ora is out and Tyra Banks is back in as the host of TV's "America's Next Top Model." VH1 announced Thursday that Banks will return to the reality show next season. Production is set to begin this summer. Banks created "America's Next Top Model" in 2003 and served as both executive producer and host until last year, when Ora was named the new host. Fellow executive producer Ken Mok said Thursday that Banks' absence was "deeply felt" by the show's fans.

Banks said they inspired her to "have a change of heart" and return as host. Banks is also the new face of "America's Got Talent." NBC announced earlier this week that she will replace former host Nick Cannon when the show returns this summer. — AP



In this file photo, Tyra Banks attends The Hollywood Reporter's Women in Entertainment Breakfast in Los Angeles. — AP

Christie's pulls Iraq painting from Dubai auction over ownership row

Christie's said Thursday it was pulling a painting by Iraqi artist Faeq Hassan from an auction later this week in Dubai because of a "dispute over ownership". "As per Christie's protocol we would not offer works of art when there might be a dispute over title of ownership," Alexandra Kindermann, senior communications director at the auction house, said. "As a result the work Untitled (Salah Al-Din, presumably Battle of Hattin) by Faeq Hassan, painted in 1968, has been withdrawn from the upcoming auction on 18 March in Dubai," she said in a statement.

The decision comes after Iraqi authorities said that the painting belongs to the Iraqi state and had been smuggled out of the country. "We believe that the painting is owned by the Iraqi state and has been smuggled out," of the country

"and according to experts and artists it was on display at the officers' club of the defense ministry," Iraqi member of parliament Maysoun Al-Damluji told AFP.

Damluji, who heads parliament's commission of culture and information, said that the auction house has requested proof of ownership. "We have witnesses who say they painting was on display at the officers' club... it is part of Iraqi heritage," she added. The oil on canvas was listed by Christie's as one of the highlights of an auction of modern and contemporary Middle Eastern art due to take place on Saturday in Dubai. Christie's estimates the painting to be worth between \$400,000 and \$500,000, according to its website. — AFP





Photo shows the interior of a ger at the Tsagaan Sum hot springs and tourist camp in Khoton Soum, Arkhangai province, Mongolia. — AP photos



Photo shows the "Golden Stupa" at Erdene Zuu Monastery located in Kharkhorin, on the northern border of the Ovorkhangai province, Mongolia.

In the wilds of Mongolia: Horses, sand dunes and stargazing

I'm a city girl. I did not grow up camping, have never pitched a tent and know nothing of the Girl Scouts beyond Thin Mints or Samoa cookies. Certainly no one would use the words "rugged" or "outdoorsy" to describe me. So I definitely had a few reservations when my husband suggested a vacation in the wilds of central Mongolia. My trepidation only grew as I binged on travel reviews bemoaning makeshift bathrooms and swarming insects. But I ended up loving every minute in Mongolia, a country steeped in history, stunning scenery and welcoming locals. I stepped outside my comfort zone and into the trip of a lifetime. And here's why you should too.

Get off the grid

Mongolia, a country of 3 million people slightly smaller than Alaska, is one of the most sparsely populated places in the world. You can go hours, even days, without seeing another human while traveling through Mongolia's countryside. Instead, you'll find a vibrant blue horizon and empty, rolling grasslands dotted with horses, cows, sheep, goats and yaks. You'll be forced to unplug as cell service and Wi-Fi is mostly non-existent outside of the larger cities. So say goodbye to Facebook rants and traffic jams and say hello to a seemingly endless untouched landscape. Your only roadblock is the occasional cow.

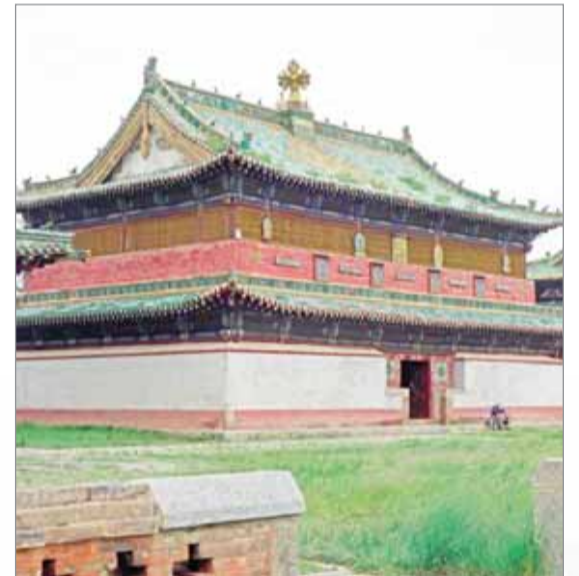
Book a guide

As avid travelers accustomed to DIY adventures, we rarely book tours. But my top tip for this wonderland is to find yourself an expert. There are few road signs and English is not widely used, so a local guide with knowledge of the routes and language is highly recommended. You will also need a four-wheel drive vehicle to navigate the mostly unpaved terrain. Our expert, good-humored guide, Munkh Bileg, whom we hired through Nomadic Discovery, tailored our private tour to our interests and time constraints to maximize our Mongolian experience. We rode camels across sand dunes and horses at sunset. We met herder families and sampled local cuisine, including fermented mare's milk and dried curds. Most of our days were spent off-roading over mountains and across rivers, simply soaking in Mongolia's other-worldly landscape.

Must-sees

For the history buff: Erdene Zuu Monastery is located in Kharkhorin, on the northern border of the Ovorkhangai Province. Get your fill of ornate Buddha statues, elaborate wall paintings and artifacts dating back to the 18th century while exploring the three remaining Chinese-style temples at one of the oldest Buddhist monasteries in Mongolia.

For the nature lover: The Orkhon waterfall (also called the Ulaan Tsutgalan waterfall) is located in Ovorkhangai Province, around 75 miles (120 kilometers) from the town of Kharkhorin. A hike to the edge of this massive, 65-foot (20-meter) waterfall



This July 8, 2016 photo shows the Erdene Zuu Monastery located in Kharkhorin, on the northern border of Ovorkhangai province.

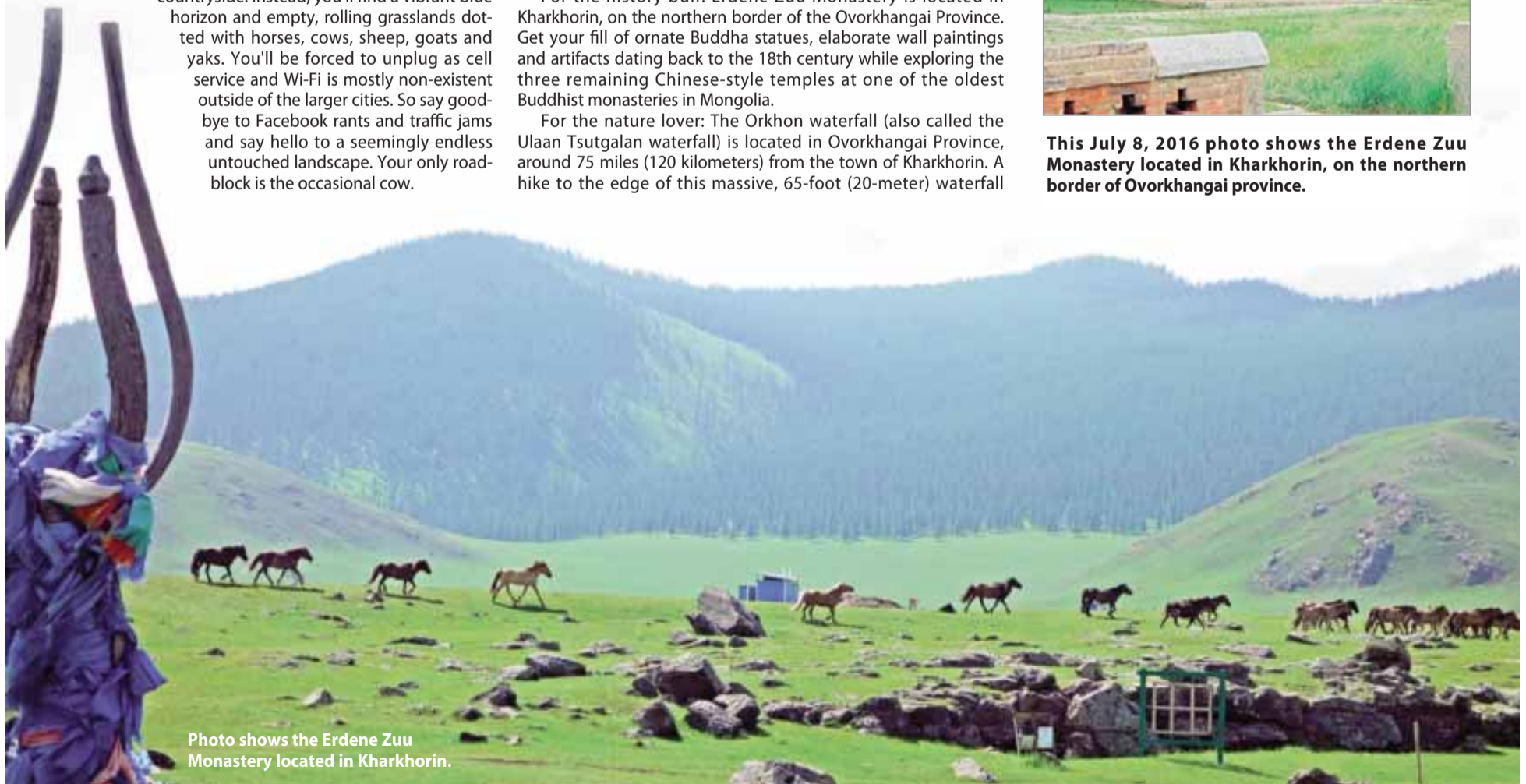


Photo shows the Erdene Zuu Monastery located in Kharkhorin.

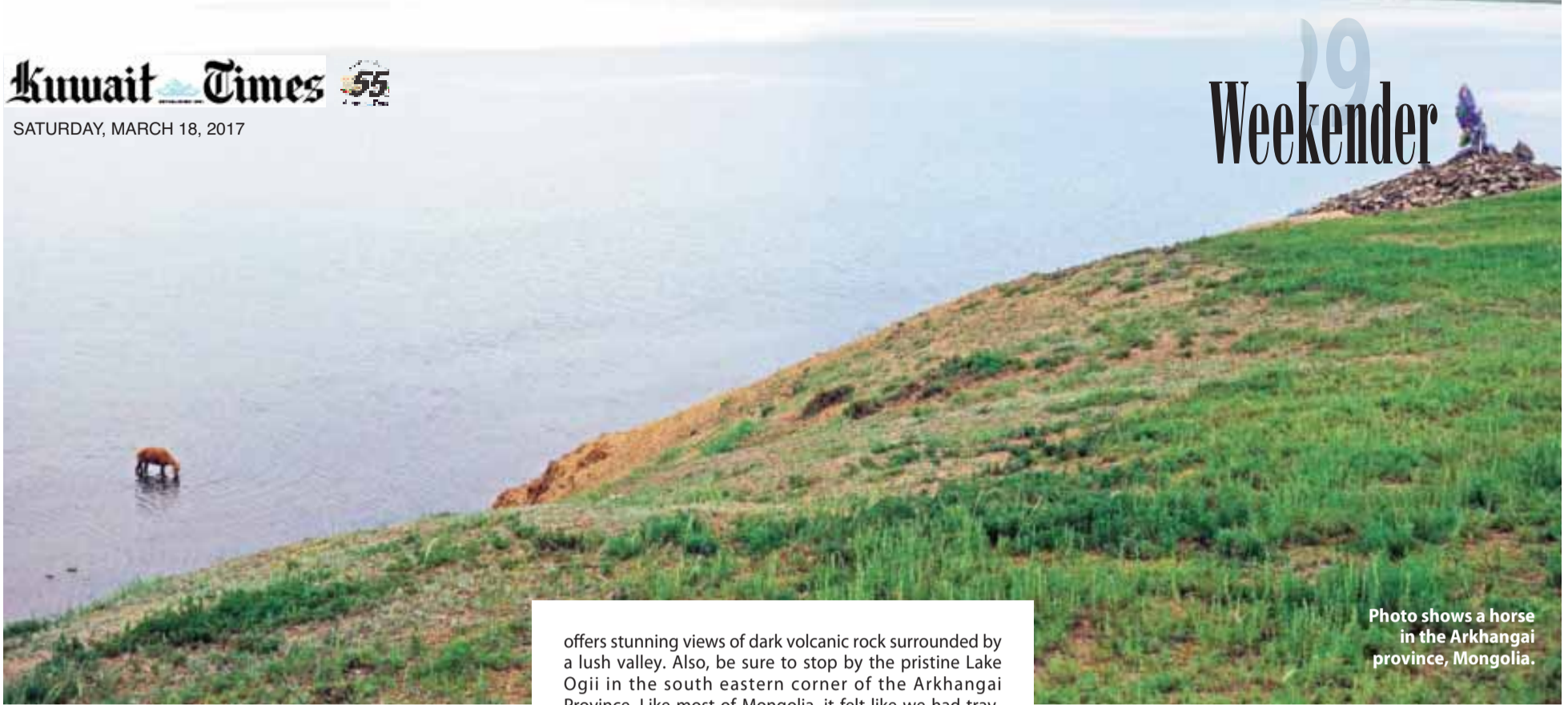


Photo shows a horse in the Arkhangai province, Mongolia.

offers stunning views of dark volcanic rock surrounded by a lush valley. Also, be sure to stop by the pristine Lake Ogii in the south eastern corner of the Arkhangai Province. Like most of Mongolia, it felt like we had traveled back to a time before humans as the only other visitors were a group of horses splashing and lounging about in the calm waters. For a glimpse of desert dunes: Elsen Tasarkhai is a sand strip located in Bulgan Province. While we didn't have time to explore Mongolia's famed Gobi Desert, we made a quick stop at this 50-mile (80-kilometer) stretch of golden hills for a relaxing tour via camels.

Ger life

As the sun sets there is little else to do besides stargazing and cozying in your ger (pronounced "gare"), a traditional nomad home. Apparently we were right on trend as an \$8,000 version of the circular tent, or yurt, was featured in the holiday gift guide from Gwyneth Paltrow's lifestyle website, goop. Our home base was the Tsagaan Sum hot springs and tourist camp in Khoton Soum, Arkhangai Province (approximately 280 miles or 460 kilometers west of Ulaanbaatar). The hustle and bustle of city life was but a distant memory as we fell asleep to the crackle of a wood-burning stove and woke to the sounds of horses neighing outside our ger.

Good to know

The flies will swarm as soon as you step outside, as will the mosquitoes. So pack bug spray and long-sleeved layers. Western-style bathrooms are few and far between outside of Ulaanbaatar. Be prepared to cop a squat when nature calls. Ulaanbaatar is Mongolia's bustling, traffic-jammed capital city, but tourist attractions are few. Stop by a grocery store to load up on water, snacks and essentials. Then head to the countryside.

Speaking of food, get ready for meat- mostly lamb_and lots of it. Mongolian cuisine is about as "farm to fork" as it gets. Refrigeration in the countryside isn't common so your dinner was likely plucked from the pasture that very day. — AP



Photo shows the Orkhon waterfall located in the Ovorkhangai province, Mongolia.



Photo shows a group of horses near the Orkhon waterfall located in the Ovorkhangai province.



Photo shows a horse in the Arkhangai province, Mongolia.

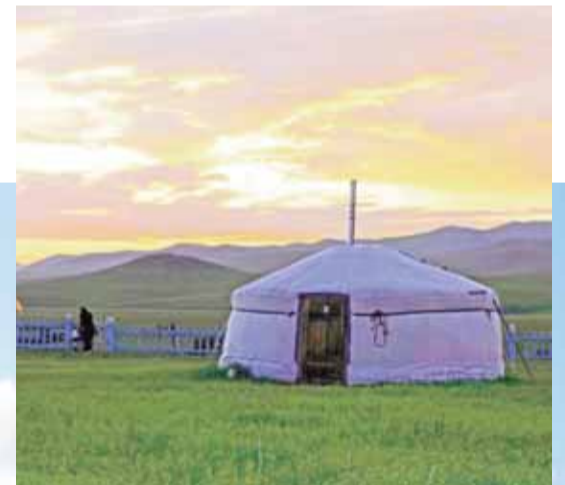


Photo shows the sunset over a ger at the Tsagaan Sum hot springs and tourist camp.



Photo shows animals grazing in the Arkhangai province, Mongolia.



JERUSALEM: Mobileye cofounders Ziv Aviram, left, and Amnon Shashua give a press conference at the Prime Minister's Office in Jerusalem. — AFP

INTEL DEAL MAY FUEL ISRAEL'S RISE AS BUILDER OF CAR BRAINS

DRIVERLESS CARS OPEN SPACE FOR TECH-SAVVY COUNTRY TO EXCEL

JERUSALEM: Intel's \$15-billion purchase of Israeli firm Mobileye could help fuel the country's rise in the driverless car industry—not as a builder of vehicles, but as the brains behind them. Monday's deal, the largest ever in Israel's tech sector, could help boost trade despite the fact no commercial cars are assembled in the country. The self-styled "startup nation" has no real tradition of auto manufacturing: an ignoble previous stint in the 1960s and 70s produced the fiber glass Sussita car, parts of which, according to legend, were edible for camels.

But the rise of new technology including driverless cars has opened space for the tech-savvy country to excel. In 2013, Google paid more than \$1 billion (900 million euros) for Waze, an Israeli crowd-sourced app that plots

the quickest journeys in real time, followed by Monday's \$15 billion Mobileye deal. The company makes advanced driver assistance and accident avoidance systems for car manufacturers, and has already collaborated with Intel and BMW on self-driving car technology.

It was founded in 1999 but Yossi Vardi—considered one of the fathers of Israel's high-tech startup scene—said the automobile industry's growth in Israel really began in 2007 when General Motors established a research and development centre. "It surprised everybody that a company like General Motors would go to Israel to source innovation and technology."

In the last three years, Vardi said, Honda, Ford, Volkswagen, Volvo and others have followed suit. Most Israeli companies in the field don't involve

production, but ways to make driving more efficient. Among them are Otonomo, which provides in-depth data on car usage; Argus, one of the market leaders in protecting cars from cyber hacking; and VocalZoom, dubbed "Siri for cars."

Elan Zivotofsky, general partner at the OurCrowd equity platform that invests in a number of companies working on autonomous cars, compared it to smartphones, laptops and other sectors where Israeli technology is heavily used but the final products are still made elsewhere. "Israel is not going to be in the business of building cars," he said. "Israel is in the business of building some of the most important core elements that will enable autonomous driving."

Vardi said the country's military experience, with some of the world's most advanced monitoring, laser-guiding and other technologies, place it in a good position. "When you drive a car, you cannot stop the car and wait 15 minutes for the computer to process. It has to be immediate," Vardi said. "This kind of talent you find in the military-in airplanes etc." The impact of Mobileye could be significant, said Yaniv Feldman, editor-in-chief of the Israeli Geektime tech blog.

There are dozens of companies in the sector and Feldman reckons Israel is already one of the leading players in autonomous driving behind the United States and China. In 2016, around \$70 million was invested in automotive tech in Israel, he said, but that will increase by "somewhere between 25 to 40 percent." "We will probably start seeing much more activity in the space and investor interest rising," he said. None of the other companies were as advanced as Mobileye, though, he added. —AFP

DIGITAL SHADOWS EXPANDS VISIBILITY INTO EVOLVING MOBILE DRIVEN RISKS

DUBAI: Digital Shadows yesterday announced new enhancements to its Search Light digital risk management service helping organizations detect and respond to mobile application threats against their employees and consumers. Search Light now offers identification of malicious and unsanctioned applications in official and third-party application stores. This new capability also identifies impersonated or spoofed mobile applications that could damage organizations' brands or compromise sensitive information.

The new capability around mobile application protection extends the capabilities of Digital Shadows' flagship service which monitors the Internet to identify digital risks to organizations, including cyber threats, data leakage, and reputational risks. "Mobile is no longer a niche or isolated part of an organizations' digital footprint. New devices and applications are the status quo and organizations must be able to identify the digital risks associated with them," said Alastair Paterson, CEO and co-founder of Digital Shadows.

"But we know that a large percentage of mobile applications will fail basic security tests and this digital risk presents enterprises everywhere with brand protection and data risk threats. In an increasingly mobile-first world, our customers now have the ability to precisely account for evolving threats jeopardizing irreplaceable reputations and information."

Digital Shadows has been trialing the new service with some key clients and within one week, for just one financial services client, we identified 39 incidents of mobile applications posing a risk to their organization. This included mobile apps with malicious code, impersonation and unauthorized use of the company brand. While many of these came from third party application stores, some were from official stores.

With Digital Shadows' mobile application monitoring, customers can detect a wide range of threats including: Suspect application behavior and code, such as self-signed certificates or the presence of malware; versions of application that have been modified by a third party; copies of application on stores that are not actively managed; impersonating or spoof application that mimic brands and affiliate links that mislead or confuse users. Monitoring even extends beyond customer mobile application, to internal company mobile apps.

Last year, the US Federal Trade Commission warned that 'as more consumers are shopping with mobile apps, fraudsters are following the money. There are fake phone apps popping up that impersonate well-known retailers to steal your personal information. Their names were like well-known brands, and their descriptions promise enticing deals or features.

Updates to Search Light and Digital Shadows' capabilities include these enhanced features:

Mobile App Monitoring; Identifies malicious mobile apps and analyzes the application's code to classify the level and type of threat it poses - including intellectual property infringement, malware delivery and phishing. New Asset Registration of Mobile Apps; Ensures an application is accounted for and actively managed, including company-specific recommendations.



Alastair Paterson, CEO and Co-Founder of Digital Shadows

CHINA BLOCKS PINTEREST

BEIJING: Image-curation website Pinterest has become the latest social media service blocked in China, checks on censorship monitoring websites indicated yesterday. According to greatfire.org and blockedinchina.net, the popular virtual bulletin board service has been unavailable in mainland China since last Thursday. The San Francisco-headquartered service joins rival photo-sharing firm Instagram—which has a much larger user base—as well as Twitter and Facebook on the list of social media platforms inaccessible in mainland China.

The ruling Communist party restricts access to many foreign websites including Google, with a vast network of controls dubbed the Great Firewall of China. While China user numbers are not available, Pinterest is a

hit particularly among women, who tend to pin images about non-political subjects such as food, fashion and travel. However, some Pinterest users maintain public boards on subjects that are deemed politically sensitive in China—such as human rights issues.

There is a Pinterest board devoted to jailed dissident Liu Xiaobo, for example, and another on the Senkakus, an archipelago controlled by Japan, which China claims as the Diaoyus. "It will be very hard to do my homework later because I had collected the works of a designer there," a student wrote on Weibo, China's native version of Twitter. Another Weibo user, who described herself as an e-commerce designer, wrote that Pinterest was a key tool in her job and it will be "hard to work effectively without it". —AFP



HIGH-TECH BACKPACKS OPEN WORLD OF WHALES TO DEAF STUDENTS

SAMANA: Every winter, whale-watching excursions take tourists to ride alongside humpbacks frolicking in the Caribbean. One voyage this week pursued whales for their mysterious, multi-octave songs, but with passengers who didn't hear the grunting and squealing. The dozens of deaf students wore high-tech backpacks that turn whale songs into vibrations, opening the world of whales to children who gasped and marveled at feeling the sounds for the first time.

"When I first felt the vibration, I felt it in my heart," said Nicole Duran, 15, a student at the St. Rose Institute for Deaf Assistance in Santo Domingo. "It reminded me of a heartbeat," she said through a sign language interpreter. Nicole was among 47 students on the field trip from Santo Domingo, the capital on the south coast, to Samana province on the north coast, a three-hour bus ride. In grades 7 through 12, the children used their hands to express the thumps, pings and gentle massage they felt on their skin.

Stretching their arms high and low to follow the varying tones they sensed, the students opened and closed their hands rapidly to express strong impacts. "I feel the pulses - it's like boom, boom, boom!" Melissa Castillos, 18, said aboard a 48-foot, power catamaran in the Bay of Samana. "I've seen photos and videos of whales, but this is the real thing." The migration of several thousand humpbacks from the northern Gulf of Maine to the Dominican coast brings some 50,000 tourists to the area from January through March annually, the Tourism Ministry says.

Music: An educational tool

For three consecutive years, the visitors have included children and teachers from several Dominican schools. Introducing deaf and hearing-impaired students to the whales and their music was the vision of Dominican artist and musician Maria Batlle, 34, who in 2013 founded the Muse Seek Project. Her nonprofit's goals include using music as an educational tool for deaf children. Batlle said she learned in 2014 of the Subpac technology, developed for music producers and aficionados by a Los Angeles company, and a year later incorporated the devices into a music program she launched for the 500-student National School for the Deaf in Santo Domingo.

The annual whale migration to the Dominican Republic made it a natural learning opportunity for students interested in marine life, Batlle said. "They learn about whale behavior, anatomy, the environment," she said. "They learn why the whales come here, what they do when they're here. They learn to appreciate why whale watching is important and why whale hunting should stop." Passengers aboard this year's voyage included teachers, students and guests from four academic institutions.

Silent disco

Eric Quinlan, originally from Brockton, Massachusetts, and teacher of English and sign language at the 200-student St. Rose school, served as interpreter for the deaf passengers. "Being deaf, the students are never really going to know what sound is, but to experience it this way is just awesome," Quinlan said as the boat trailed a pod of six adult whales through choppy waters. Quinlan also interpreted in February when Batlle took 40 deaf students to see the hit musical "La La Land." Instead of high-tech gear, each child held a simple balloon, which vibrated to the music and dialogue. It was the first sign-language interpretation at a Dominican cinema, Batlle said.

In 2016, ornithologist Richard Prum, a hearing-impaired professor at Yale University, lectured deaf students about birds and their melodies in another blending of education and music, Batlle added. And just for fun in 2016, she organized a beachfront silent disco, where deaf students danced to the rhythms they felt through the wearable technology. In another first for deaf services, the Popular Savings and Loan Association, a Muse Seek partner, has a bilingual (Spanish-sign language) employee in each branch, Batlle said. While the whale excursions in 2015 and 2016 picked up clear melodies from the humpbacks, the hydrophone lowered from the boat Tuesday mostly transmitted the static of rough seas. Ready with Plan B, Batlle used a recording of last year's robust melodies instead. —AP



MICROSOFT TEAMS ROLLS OUT TO OFFICE 365 CUSTOMERS WORLDWIDE

KUWAIT CITY: Microsoft Corp. on Tuesday announced the general availability of Microsoft Teams, the company's new chat-based workspace in Office 365. The new tool for team collaboration is now available to Office 365 business customers in 181 markets and 19 languages. Customers worldwide are choosing Microsoft Teams to enable collaboration within their organizations. Since announcing the preview in November, more than 50,000 organizations have started using Microsoft Teams, including Alaska Airlines, ConocoPhillips, Deloitte, Expedia, J B Hunt, J Walter Thompson, Hendrick Motorsports, Sage, Trek Bicycle and Three UK.

"In a world where information is abundant and human time and attention remain scarce, we aspire to help people and groups of people be more productive, wherever they are," said Satya Nadella, CEO, Microsoft. "Office 365 is the broadest platform and universal toolkit for creation, collaboration and communication. Today we are adding a new tool to Office 365 with Microsoft Teams, a chat-based workspace designed to empower the art of teams."

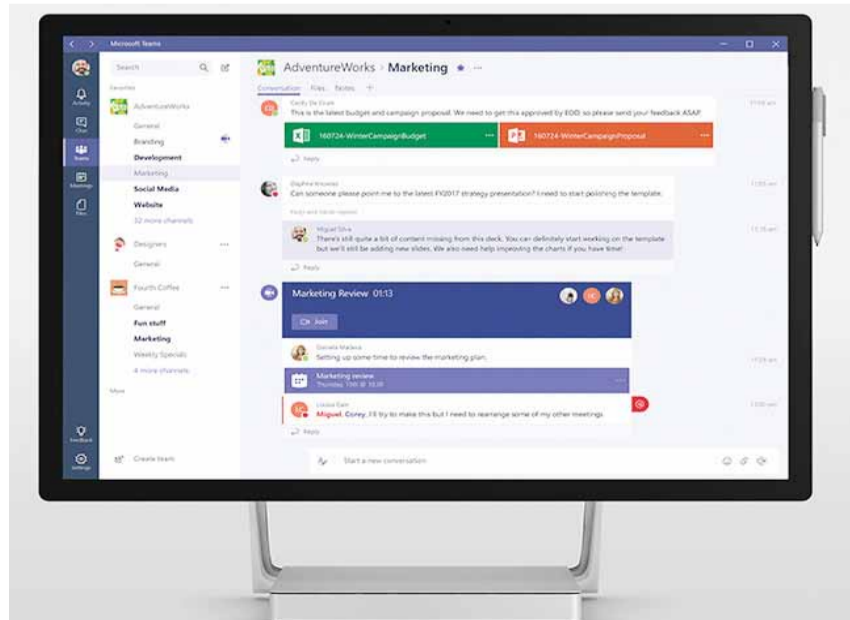
Office 365 is designed to meet the unique work style of every group with purpose-built, integrated applications: Outlook for enterprise-grade email; SharePoint for intelligent content management; Yammer for networking across the organization; Skype for Business as the backbone for enterprise voice and video; and now, Microsoft Teams.

According to Laurie Koch, vice president of global customer service at Trek Bicycle, Microsoft Teams is already streamlining the company's work by providing assets and tasks in context: "Across Trek's global teams, the integrated collection of Office 365 apps serves up a common toolset to collaboratively drive the business forward. We see Microsoft Teams as the project hub of Office 365 where everybody knows where to find the latest documents, notes and tasks, all in line with team

conversations for complete context. Teams is quickly becoming a key part of Trek's get-things-done-fast culture."

Microsoft has introduced more than 100 new features to Teams since November, including: an enhanced meeting experience, with scheduling capabilities; mobile audio calling, with video calling on Android and coming soon to iOS and Windows Phone; email

integration; and new security and compliance capabilities. The company has also delivered new features to make Microsoft Teams accessible, such as support for screen readers, high contrast and keyboard-only navigation. Guest access capabilities and deeper integration with Outlook, and a richer developer platform are targeted for June of this year.



SATURDAY, MARCH 18, 2017

OSN MOVIES HD
ACTION

- 00:15 The Taking Of Deborah Logan
- 02:00 Harlock: Space Pirate
- 04:00 Big Game
- 06:00 Run All Night
- 08:00 Beverly Hills Cop 3
- 10:00 Last Action Hero
- 12:15 Blown Away
- 14:15 Run All Night
- 16:15 Bad Company
- 18:15 Survivor
- 20:00 King Arthur
- 22:15 No Tears For The Dead

ANIMAL PLANET HD

- 00:50 Venom Hunter
- 01:45 Bondi Vet
- 02:40 Biggest And Baddest
- 03:35 Tanked
- 04:25 Escape To Chimp Eden
- 04:50 Escape To Chimp Eden
- 05:15 Gator Boys
- 06:02 Venom Hunter
- 06:49 Biggest And Baddest
- 07:36 Call Of The Wildman
- 08:00 Call Of The Wildman
- 08:25 Biggest And Baddest
- 09:15 Rugged Justice
- 10:10 Restoration Wild
- 11:05 Gangland Killers
- 12:00 Life At Vet University
- 12:55 Bondi Vet
- 13:50 The Beauty Of Snakes
- 14:45 Ten Deadliest Snakes With Nigel Marven
- 15:40 Ten Deadliest Snakes With Nigel Marven
- 16:35 Venom In Vegas
- 18:25 The Beauty Of Snakes
- 19:20 Village Vets
- 19:45 Village Vets
- 20:15 Biggest And Baddest
- 21:10 Restoration Wild
- 22:05 Catching Monsters
- 23:00 Village Vets
- 23:25 Village Vets
- 23:55 Gator Boys

BBC FIRST

- 00:00 Mum
- 00:30 Uncle
- 01:00 Doctors
- 01:30 Doctors
- 02:00 Line Of Duty
- 03:05 Line Of Duty
- 04:10 Doctors
- 04:40 Doctors
- 05:10 Father Brown
- 06:00 Doctors
- 06:30 Doctors
- 07:00 Doctors
- 07:30 Doctors
- 08:00 Doctors
- 08:30 Doctors
- 09:00 Doctors
- 09:30 Eastenders
- 10:00 Me & Mrs Jones
- 10:30 Me & Mrs Jones
- 11:00 The Durrells
- 11:50 The Durrells
- 12:40 The Durrells
- 13:30 Doctor Who: The Husbands Of River Song
- 14:25 Doctors
- 14:55 Doctors
- 15:30 The Durrells
- 16:20 The Durrells
- 17:10 The Durrells
- 18:00 Doctors
- 18:30 Eastenders
- 19:00 Father Brown
- 20:00 Last Tango In Halifax
- 21:00 Poldark
- 21:55 Silk
- 22:50 Line Of Duty
- 23:55 Line Of Duty

ci crime & investigation network

- 00:00 The Jersey Slayings
- 01:00 50 Ways To Kill Your Lover
- 02:00 My Haunted House

- 03:00 The First 48
- 04:00 The Jersey Slayings
- 05:00 50 Ways To Kill Your Lover
- 06:00 My Haunted House
- 07:00 Crime Stories
- 08:00 The First 48
- 09:00 Killers
- 10:00 Evil Up Close
- 11:00 Evil Up Close
- 12:00 Evil Up Close
- 13:00 Evil Up Close
- 14:00 Evil Up Close
- 15:00 Evil Up Close
- 16:00 Evil Up Close
- 17:00 Evil Up Close
- 18:00 Evil Up Close
- 19:00 It Takes A Killer
- 19:30 It Takes A Killer
- 20:00 I Didn't Do It
- 21:00 The First 48
- 22:00 Killers
- 23:00 Hatton Garden Heist: One Last Job

Discovery Family

- 00:30 Prototype This
- 01:20 Battle Bots
- 02:10 Breaking Magic
- 02:35 Breaking Magic
- 03:00 What Happened Next?
- 03:25 What Happened Next?
- 03:50 Bear Grylls: Born Survivor
- 04:40 How It's Made
- 05:05 How It's Made
- 05:30 Dirty Jobs
- 06:20 Mythbusters
- 07:00 Dick 'n' Dom Go Wild
- 07:25 Dick 'n' Dom Go Wild
- 07:50 Awesome Adventures
- 08:15 Awesome Adventures
- 08:40 Bondi Vet
- 09:30 Bondi Vet
- 10:20 Bondi Vet
- 11:10 Bondi Vet
- 12:00 Bondi Vet
- 12:50 Mythbusters
- 13:40 Mythbusters
- 14:30 Mythbusters
- 15:20 Mythbusters
- 16:10 Mythbusters
- 17:00 Prototype This

- 17:50 Prototype This
- 18:40 Battle Bots
- 19:30 Kids Do The Craziest Things
- 19:55 Kids Do The Craziest Things
- 20:20 Now That's Funny
- 21:10 Breaking Magic
- 21:35 Breaking Magic
- 22:00 Destroyed In Seconds
- 22:25 Destroyed In Seconds
- 22:50 What Happened Next?
- 23:15 What Happened Next?
- 23:40 Kids Do The Craziest Things



- 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
- 02:15 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
- 04:45 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 The 7D
- 07:00 Jessie
- 07:25 Jessie
- 07:50 Eco Club
- 07:55 Austin & Ally
- 08:20 Rolling To The Ronks
- 08:45 The Zhuzhus
- 09:10 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug And Cat Noir
- 09:35 Elena Of Avalor
- 10:00 Stuck In The Middle
- 10:25 Disney The Lodge
- 10:50 Bunk'd
- 11:15 Disney Cookabout
- 11:40 Sky High
- 13:15 Star Darlings
- 13:20 Bunk'd
- 13:45 Bunk'd
- 14:10 Bunk'd
- 14:35 Bunk'd

- 15:00 Bunk'd
- 15:25 Jessie
- 15:50 Jessie
- 16:15 Austin & Ally
- 16:40 Austin & Ally
- 17:05 Descendants Wicked World
- 17:10 Elena Of Avalor
- 17:35 Stuck In The Middle
- 18:00 Disney The Lodge
- 18:25 Little Mermaid 2
- 19:45 The 7D
- 20:00 Eco Club
- 20:05 Disney Cookabout
- 20:30 Bizaardvark
- 20:55 Bunk'd
- 21:20 Shake It Up
- 21:45 Disney The Lodge
- 22:10 Best Friends Whenever
- 22:35 Kirby Buckets
- 23:00 Kirby Buckets
- 23:25 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
- 23:50 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch

Disney Junior

- 00:20 Henry Hugglemonster
- 00:35 The Hive
- 00:45 Loopdidoo
- 01:00 Henry Hugglemonster
- 01:15 Calimero
- 01:30 Art Attack
- 01:55 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 My Friends Tigger & Pooh
- 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 PJ Masks
- 13:50 PJ Masks
- 14:20 PJ Masks
- 20:00 Doc McStuffins
- 20:30 Doc McStuffins
- 21:00 Unbungalievable
- 21:05 Goldie & Bear
- 21:35 Miles From Tomorrow
- 22:00 My Friends Tigger & Pooh
- 22:25 Mickey Mouse Clubhouse
- 22:55 Minnie's Bow-Toons
- 23:00 Jake And The Never Land Pirates
- 23:30 Jake And The Never Land Pirates
- 23:55 PJ Masks

Discovery Channel HD

- 00:20 Snaketacular
- 01:10 Wheeler Dealers
- 02:00 Diesel Brothers
- 02:50 Deals, Wheels And Steals
- 03:15 Deals, Wheels And Steals
- 03:40 How Do They Do It?
- 06:00 Storage Wars Canada
- 06:25 Storage Hunters
- 06:50 Storage Hunters
- 07:15 Storage Hunters
- 07:40 Storage Wars Canada
- 08:05 How Do They Do It?
- 10:10 Gold Rush
- 11:00 Everest Rescue
- 11:50 Made By Destruction
- 12:15 Made By Destruction
- 12:40 Fast N' Loud
- 13:30 Fast N' Loud
- 14:20 Fast N' Loud
- 15:10 Fast N' Loud

- 16:00 Fast N' Loud
- 16:50 The Wheel: Survival Games
- 17:40 Running Wild With Bear Grylls
- 18:30 Impossible Engineering
- 19:20 Treasure Quest: Snake Island
- 20:10 Manhunt With Joel Lambert
- 21:00 Fukushima: On The Frontline With Joel Lambert
- 21:50 Dark Woods Justice
- 22:40 Alaskan Bush People
- 23:30 Gold Rush



- 06:00 Supa Strikas
- 06:25 Supa Strikas
- 06:50 Marvel Ultimate Spider-Man vs The Sinister 6
- 07:15 Right Now Kapow
- 07:40 Star vs The Forces Of Evil
- 08:10 K.C. Undercover
- 08:35 Milo Murphy's Law
- 09:00 Supa Strikas
- 09:25 Lab Rats
- 09:50 Counterfeit Cat
- 10:20 Gamer's Guide To Pretty Much Everything
- 10:45 Atomic Puppet
- 11:10 Lab Rats Elite Force
- 11:35 Gravity Falls
- 12:00 The Jungle Book
- 13:20 Star vs The Forces Of Evil
- 13:45 Supa Strikas
- 14:10 Disney Mickey Mouse
- 14:15 Milo Murphy's Law
- 14:40 K.C. Undercover
- 15:05 Atomic Puppet
- 17:15 Kickin' It
- 17:40 Lab Rats Elite Force
- 18:05 Disney Mickey Mouse
- 18:10 Star Wars Rebels
- 18:35 The Jungle Book
- 19:55 Danger Mouse
- 20:20 Star vs The Forces Of Evil
- 20:45 Mighty Med
- 21:10 Star Wars Rebels
- 21:40 Disney Mickey Mouse
- 21:45 Marvel's Avengers Assemble
- 22:10 Marvel Ultimate Spider-Man vs The Sinister 6
- 22:35 Boyster
- 23:00 Programmes Start At 6:00am KSA

EHD

- 00:05 Hollywood Medium With Tyler Henry
- 00:55 Hollywood Medium With Tyler Henry
- 01:50 E! News
- 02:50 Catching Kelce
- 03:45 Catching Kelce
- 04:40 Catching Kelce
- 05:30 Celebrity Style Story
- 06:00 LA Clippers Dance Squad
- 06:55 E! News
- 07:10 LA Clippers Dance Squad
- 08:10 E! News
- 09:05 Botched
- 09:55 Botched
- 10:45 Mariah's World
- 11:35 Mariah's World
- 12:25 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
- 16:10 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
- 17:05 Revenge Body With Khloe Kardashian
- 18:00 Revenge Body With Khloe Kardashian
- 19:00 E! News
- 20:00 Celebrity Style Story
- 20:30 Celebrity Style Story
- 21:00 So Cosmo
- 22:00 So Cosmo
- 23:00 E! News
- 23:30 Celebrity Style Story

food network

- 00:00 Follow Donal... To Europe
- 00:30 Follow Donal... To Europe
- 01:00 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
- 01:30 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
- 02:00 Man Fire Food
- 02:30 Man Fire Food
- 03:00 Chopped
- 04:00 Guy's Grocery Games
- 05:00 Barefoot Contessa: Back To Basics
- 05:30 Barefoot Contessa: Back To Basics



BIG GAME ON OSN MOVIES ACTION HD

SATURDAY, MARCH 18, 2017

- 06:00 Chopped
- 07:00 Barefoot Contessa: Back To Basics
- 07:30 Barefoot Contessa: Back To Basics
- 08:00 The Pioneer Woman
- 08:30 The Pioneer Woman
- 09:00 Siba's Table: Fast Feasts
- 09:30 Siba's Table: Fast Feasts
- 10:00 Anna Olson: Bake
- 10:30 Anna Olson: Bake
- 11:00 Man Fire Food
- 11:30 Man Fire Food
- 12:00 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
- 12:30 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
- 13:00 Chopped
- 14:00 Barefoot Contessa: Back To Basics
- 14:30 Barefoot Contessa: Back To Basics
- 15:00 The Pioneer Woman
- 15:30 The Pioneer Woman
- 16:00 Siba's Table
- 16:30 Siba's Table
- 17:00 Anna Olson: Bake
- 17:30 Anna Olson: Bake
- 18:00 Man Fire Food
- 18:30 Man Fire Food
- 19:00 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
- 19:30 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
- 20:00 Restaurant Stakeout
- 21:00 Mystery Diners
- 21:30 Mystery Diners
- 22:00 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
- 22:30 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
- 23:00 Man Fire Food
- 23:30 Man Fire Food



FASTER ON OSN MOVIES HD

- itv CHOICE**
- 00:10 The Chase
 - 01:00 Emmerdale
 - 03:25 Coronation Street
 - 05:30 Midsomer Murders
 - 07:05 Murdoch Mysteries
 - 08:00 Ant & Dec's Saturday Night Takeaway
 - 09:20 Broadchurch
 - 10:15 Broadchurch
 - 11:10 Paul O'Grady: The Sally Army And Me
 - 11:40 Paul O'Grady: The Sally Army And Me
 - 12:10 Don't Tell The Bride
 - 13:10 Don't Tell The Bride
 - 14:05 The Jonathan Ross Show
 - 15:00 Ant & Dec's Saturday Night Takeaway
 - 16:15 Paul O'Grady: The Sally Army And Me
 - 16:45 Paul O'Grady: The Sally Army And Me
 - 17:15 Murdoch Mysteries
 - 18:10 Tonight At The London Palladium
 - 19:00 Don't Tell The Bride
 - 20:00 Ant & Dec's Saturday Night Takeaway
 - 21:10 Paul O'Grady: The Sally Army And Me
 - 21:40 Paul O'Grady: The Sally Army And Me
 - 22:10 The Jonathan Ross Show
 - 23:05 Coronation Street
 - 23:35 Coronation Street



- 00:00 The Universe
- 01:00 WWII: Europe's Secret Army
- 02:00 Cities Of The Underworld
- 03:00 America's Book Of Secrets
- 03:50 Ancient Aliens
- 04:40 Engineering Disasters
- 05:30 The Universe
- 06:20 WWII: Europe's Secret Army
- 07:10 The Universe
- 08:00 Cities Of The Underworld
- 09:00 The Universe
- 10:00 Ancient Aliens
- 11:00 Engineering Disasters
- 12:00 The Universe
- 13:00 Ancient Aliens
- 14:00 Ancient Aliens
- 15:00 Ancient Aliens
- 16:00 Ancient Aliens
- 17:00 Ancient Aliens
- 18:00 Ancient Aliens
- 19:00 The Human Calculator
- 20:00 The Human Calculator
- 21:00 The Human Calculator
- 22:00 The Human Calculator
- 23:00 How 2 Win



- 00:20 Football: A Brief History By Alfie Allen
- 01:10 Ultimate Wheels
- 02:00 Lost In Transmission
- 02:50 Pawn Stars
- 03:15 Pawn Stars UK
- 03:40 Pawn Stars UK
- 04:05 Pawn Stars UK

- 04:30 Pawn Stars UK
- 05:00 Mankind The Story Of All Of Us
- 06:00 Storage Wars Miami
- 06:25 Storage Wars Miami
- 06:50 Pawn Stars Australia
- 07:15 Pawn Stars Australia
- 07:40 American Pickers
- 08:30 American Restoration
- 09:20 Ultimate Wheels
- 10:10 Lost In Transmission
- 11:00 Shipping Wars
- 11:25 Shipping Wars
- 11:50 Ice Road Truckers
- 12:40 Ax Men
- 13:30 Lost Worlds
- 14:20 Hunting Hitler
- 15:10 The Curse Of Oak Island
- 16:00 Storage Wars Miami
- 16:25 Storage Wars Miami
- 16:50 Counting Cars
- 17:15 Car Hunters
- 17:40 Pawn Stars
- 18:05 Pawn Stars Best Of
- 18:30 Ice Road Truckers
- 19:20 American Pickers
- 20:10 Forged In Fire
- 21:00 The Curse Of Oak Island
- 21:50 Hunting Hitler
- 22:40 Outlaw Chronicles: Hells Angels
- 23:30 Gold Hunters: Legend Of The Superstition...



- 00:15 World's Best Beaches
- 01:05 Sara's Australia Unveiled
- 01:30 David Rocco's Dolce India
- 01:55 Confucius Was A Foodie
- 02:45 Testing The Menu With Nic Watt
- 03:10 Testing The Menu With Nic Watt
- 03:35 Testing The Menu With Nic Watt
- 04:00 The Food Files
- 04:25 The Food Files
- 04:50 Poh & Co
- 05:20 Grandma's Boy
- 05:45 Grandma's Boy
- 06:15 Charlie Luxton's Homes By The Med
- 07:10 Carnival Eats
- 07:35 Valentine Warner Eats Scandinavia
- 08:05 Eat Street
- 08:30 Eat Street
- 09:00 The Wine Show
- 09:55 Croatia's Finest
- 10:20 The Food Files
- 10:50 The Food Files
- 11:15 Andy And Ben Eat The World
- 11:45 Dog Whisperer
- 12:40 Bangkok Airport
- 13:35 Confucius Was A Foodie
- 14:30 Testing The Menu With Nic Watt
- 14:55 Testing The Menu With Nic Watt
- 15:25 Testing The Menu With Nic Watt
- 15:50 The Food Files
- 16:20 The Food Files
- 16:45 Poh & Co
- 17:15 Grandma's Boy
- 17:40 Grandma's Boy
- 18:10 Tripping Out With Alie & Georgia
- 18:35 Food Lover's Guide To The Planet

- 19:05 Testing The Menu With Nic Watt
- 19:30 Testing The Menu With Nic Watt
- 20:00 The Food Files
- 20:25 The Food Files
- 20:55 Poh & Co
- 21:20 Grandma's Boy
- 21:45 Grandma's Boy
- 22:10 Tripping Out With Alie & Georgia
- 22:35 Food Lover's Guide To The Planet
- 23:00 Bangkok Airport
- 23:50 Confucius Was A Foodie



- 00:10 Locked Up Abroad
- 01:00 The Border
- 02:00 Hitler's G.I. Death Camp
- 02:55 Japan's Secret Weapon
- 03:50 Crimes Against Nature
- 04:45 Locked Up Abroad
- 05:40 Air Crash Investigation
- 06:35 Mega Factories: Supercars
- 07:30 Megastructures
- 08:25 Dog Whisperer
- 09:20 Dog Whisperer
- 10:15 Miracle Hospital
- 10:40 Miracle Hospital
- 11:10 On Thin Ice: Jade's Polar Dream
- 12:05 Map Of Hell
- 14:00 Route Awakening
- 14:30 Route Awakening
- 15:00 Air Crash Investigation
- 16:00 Mega Factories: Supercars
- 17:00 Megastructures
- 18:00 Ultimate Airport Dubai
- 19:00 The Border
- 20:00 Mega Factories: Supercars
- 20:50 Megastructures
- 21:40 Ultimate Airport Dubai
- 22:30 The Border
- 23:20 Nazi Underworld



- 00:20 Super Predators
- 01:10 Ultimate Animal Countdown
- 02:00 World's Deadliest Animals
- 02:50 The Invaders
- 03:45 Urban Jungle: Wilderness Rising
- 04:40 Survive The Wild
- 05:35 Safari Brothers
- 06:30 Monster Fish
- 07:25 Monster Fish
- 08:20 Unlikely Animal Friends
- 09:15 Snakes In The City
- 10:10 Wild Australia
- 11:05 Dr. K's Exotic Animal ER
- 12:00 Shark Men
- 12:55 World's Deadliest Animals
- 13:50 The Invaders
- 14:45 Nature's Greatest Talents
- 15:40 Survive The Wild
- 16:35 Savage Kingdom
- 17:30 Africa's Hunters

- 18:25 Dangerous Encounters
- 19:20 Nature's Greatest Talents
- 20:10 Survive The Wild
- 21:00 Savage Kingdom
- 21:50 Africa's Hunters
- 22:40 Dangerous Encounters
- 23:30 Shark Men



- 00:00 Diary Of A Wimpy Kid: Rodrick Rules
- 02:00 Lilo & Stitch
- 04:00 Lilo & Stitch 2
- 05:30 Scooby-Doo! Moon Monster Madness
- 07:15 Lilo & Stitch
- 09:00 Ratatouille
- 11:00 Stitch! The Movie
- 12:00 Lilo & Stitch 2
- 13:15 Ratatouille
- 15:15 Up
- 17:00 Paddington
- 19:00 Jem And The Holograms
- 21:00 High School Musical 3: Senior Year
- 23:00 Up



- 00:00 Tales Of Halloween
- 02:00 The Grand Seduction
- 04:00 Overboard
- 06:00 National Security
- 08:00 The Grand Seduction
- 10:00 Overboard
- 12:00 National Security
- 14:00 Outside Bet
- 16:00 Love, Rosie
- 18:00 Lovesick
- 19:45 Spanglish
- 22:00 Top Five



- 00:15 1984
- 02:15 Unbroken
- 04:30 Ironweed
- 07:00 Gone With The Bullets
- 09:15 The Theory Of Everything
- 11:45 Escobar: Paradise Lost
- 14:00 Rosewater
- 16:00 Listen To Me Marlon
- 18:00 Touched With Fire
- 20:00 The Zero Theorem
- 22:00 Black Swan



- 01:00 Hotel For Dogs
- 02:45 Baby Geniuses And The Space Baby
- 04:15 Gladiators Of Rome
- 06:00 The Boxcar Children

- 07:30 Bee Movie
- 09:00 Capture The Flag
- 10:45 Hotel For Dogs
- 12:30 Baby Geniuses And The Space Baby
- 14:00 Thumbelina
- 16:00 Capture The Flag
- 18:00 Oops Noah Is Gone
- 20:00 Baby Geniuses And The Treasures Of Egypt
- 21:30 Thumbelina
- 23:15 Bee Movie



- 02:00 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
- 04:00 Goosebumps
- 05:45 Ghostbusters
- 07:30 Ghostbusters II
- 09:30 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
- 11:15 A Civil Action
- 13:15 War Horse
- 15:45 Independence Day
- 18:15 Amelia
- 20:15 Erin Brockovich
- 22:30 Faster



- 00:40 Mythbusters
- 01:30 How Do They Do It?
- 01:55 Food Factory
- 02:20 The Unexplained Files
- 03:10 Strangest Weather On Earth
- 04:00 What Could Possibly Go Wrong?
- 04:48 Mythbusters
- 05:36 How Do They Do It?
- 06:00 Food Factory
- 06:24 The Unexplained Files
- 07:12 Strangest Weather On Earth
- 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 Strangest Weather On Earth
- 13:14 Strangest Weather On Earth
- 16:26 Mythbusters
- 17:14 Mythbusters
- 18:02 Mythbusters
- 18:50 Mythbusters
- 19:40 Mythbusters
- 20:30 NASA's Unexplained Files
- 21:20 Sport Science
- 22:10 How The Earth Works
- 23:00 Food Factory USA
- 23:25 Food Factory USA
- 23:50 The Unexplained Files



- 00:20 The Day I Almost Died
- 01:10 Alaskan Women Looking For Love
- 02:00 Married By Mum And Dad
- 02:50 Monsters Inside Me
- 03:35 Little People, Big World
- 04:20 Toddlers & Tiaras
- 05:10 Toddlers & Tiaras
- 06:00 Kate Plus 8
- 06:50 Kate Plus 8
- 07:40 Kate Plus 8
- 08:30 Toddlers & Tiaras: Coach Wars
- 09:20 Too Ugly For Love?
- 10:10 Ultimate Shopper
- 11:00 Ultimate Shopper
- 11:50 Say Yes To The Dress: Bridesmaids
- 12:15 Say Yes To The Dress: Bridesmaids
- 13:55 Say Yes To The Dress UK
- 14:20 Say Yes To The Dress UK
- 14:45 Designer Darlings
- 15:35 My Big Fat Fabulous Life
- 16:25 My Big Fat Fabulous Life
- 16:50 My Big Fat Fabulous Life
- 17:15 My Big Fat Fabulous Life
- 17:40 Oprah: Where Are They Now?
- 18:30 Iyanla: Fix My Life
- 19:20 Toddlers & Tiaras: Coach Wars
- 20:10 Cake Boss
- 20:35 Cake Boss
- 21:00 Oprah: Where Are They Now?
- 21:50 Iyanla: Fix My Life
- 22:40 An Hour To Save Your Life
- 23:30 Botched Up Bodies

LAUNCH OF AUSTRALIA UNLIMITED MENA: AUSTRALIA'S PREMIER BUSINESS PROMOTION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

In its fifth year, Australia Unlimited MENA (AU MENA), the Australian Government's annual promotional campaign in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, brings together a comprehensive program of events focusing on initiatives that link regional priorities with Australian capabilities. AU MENA aims at raising Australia's profile in the region by highlighting Australian achievements and advancements that are relevant to market opportunities in trade, education, tourism and investment.

One of the core components of AU MENA 2017 will be on Health Research and Innovation, which will bring together Australian educational institutions and organizations to showcase Australian capabilities in the critical areas of cardiovascular diseases and diabetes, shed light on the region's

healthcare needs and exciting research programs, which would ultimately foster bilateral collaboration and generate commercial opportunities for Australian institutions and innovators.

Government, academia and industry representatives will visit Kuwait from 16-19 March 2017 to discuss the current challenges around cardiovascular diseases and diabetes, explore programs and funding mechanisms, as well as the role the private sector and industry can play in driving and supporting the developments of new solutions to address these medical disorders. An essential component of this year's AU MENA campaign is our consumer engagement activities around Australian food and tourism.

Dairy Australia with Celebrity Chef Tim Hollands will

participate in Taste of Q8 to showcase Australian dairy products. Master Chef Tarek Ibrahim will also be representing Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA). There is strong demand for Australian meat in Kuwait due to its high quality," said Australian Counselor Commercial Jack Hajjar.

"Australia's has a reputation as a clean, fresh and a reliable supplier of food. There is a genuine interest and respect for our products among consumers, retailers and distributors in Kuwait", said Australian Ambassador Warren Hauck. During the same period, the Australian Government will also be supporting an investment delegation. With 26 years of uninterrupted annual economic growth, a AAA sovereign risk profile, globally competitive industries, there is no better place than Australia to do business.

EPA, EQUATE, GPCA CONCLUDE ANNUAL WASTE FREE ENVIRONMENT PROGRAM

Increasing awareness and actively contributing to protecting and preserving the environment, Kuwait's Environment Public Authority (EPA), EQUATE Petrochemical Company, a global producer of petrochemicals, and Gulf Petrochemical & Chemicals Association (GPCA) concluded the annual Waste Free Environment (WFE) program, lifting over 120 kilograms of waste from Kuwait's beaches. EQUATE's participation in the global WFE event is part of its sustainability strategy to reduce waste, as well as protect the environment.

The program was held for the fifth consecutive year in partnership with Kuwait Municipality, the Touristic Enterprises Company, K's Path, Omniya, the Kuwait Dive Team and a number of schools with the participation of over 230 individuals. EQUATE's President and CEO Mohammad Husain said, "Sustainability and the protection of the environment are today crucial challenges that we need to address. Solutions can only be effective when industry leaders, authorities and societies come together to raise awareness and take action."

"Our strategy at EQUATE has been focused on making a change in the way we treat our environment, and we have started from within our organization, ensuring we act responsibly and helping bring regulations and standards that support our efforts. Since launching WFE in Kuwait, we are extremely delighted with the increasing number of participating organizations and individuals with us every year."

"I extend my deepest gratitude to the efforts of EPA and Kuwait Municipality in leading change in our home country. I also extend utmost appreciation to the GPCA, the Touristic Enterprises Company, K's Path, Omniya, Kuwait Dive Team, participating schools, members of the media and our employees for being ambassadors of this great cause."

GPCA Secretary-General, Dr. Abdulwahab Al-Sadoun said, "WFE is today supported by 17 companies partnering with local authorities and thousands of volunteers across 14 nations. Our industry is the second largest manufacturing industry in this region and the products the chemical industry produces here in the Arabian Gulf, plastics in particular, con-



tribute significantly to our quality of life, resource preservation and innovation.

These products should be responsibly disposed of, either via recycling or energy recovery. GPCA's educational campaign WFE provides an excellent opportunity to work alongside the community to show that littering is not acceptable and help spread knowledge about eco-efficient waste management in general."

The EQUATE Group is a global producer of petrochemicals that creates a better world. The Group combines EQUATE Petrochemical Company (EQUATE), its subsidiaries and The Kuwait Olefins Company (TKOC). The EQUATE Group is the world's second largest producer of Ethylene Glycol (EG) with industrial complexes in Kuwait, North America and Europe

that produce Ethylene, EG, Polyethylene (PE) and Polyethylene Terephthalate (PET). The products are marketed throughout Asia, the Americas, Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

As a leading global enterprise, the EQUATE Group strongly pursues sustainability principles and best practices wherever it operates through partnerships with various stakeholders including employees and customers as well as societies as a whole in fields that includes human development, environment, education, health and public awareness. The EQUATE Group's shareholders include Petrochemical Industries Company (PIC), The Dow Chemical Company (Dow), Boubyan Petrochemical Company (BPC) and Qurain Petrochemical Industries Company (QPIC). The Group provides reliable services and solutions that enables global customers and stakeholders to grow and attain the success they seek by being "Partners in Success."

With EQUATE as one of its founding members, the Gulf Petrochemicals and Chemicals Association (GPCA) represents the downstream hydrocarbon industry in the Arabian Gulf. Established in 2006, the association voices the common interests of more than 240 member companies from the chemical and allied industries, accounting for over 95 percent of chemical output in the Gulf region. The industry makes up the second largest manufacturing sector in the region, producing up to US\$108 billion worth of products a year.

Waste Free Environment (WFE) is a global event and an important environmental campaign launched by the Gulf Petrochemicals and Chemicals Association (GPCA) in 2013. WFE promotes recycling and encourages a more responsible attitude toward litter disposal and the need for the community to respond to environmental issues. Each clean-up has a strong educational component and stresses how we can give waste, in particular plastics, a useful second life.





KHALIFA AL-QATTAN ARTS WORKSHOP BEGINS AT ABDELAZIZ HUSSEIN CULTURAL CENTER

Children draw their creative drawings to express 'our Gulf is one slogan' in Mejob Al-Dousary hall at Abdelaziz Hussein Cultural Center, as the activities of Khalifa Al-Qattan arts workshop began.



BUFFALO SOLDIERS HELP THAI KIDS COMBAT AUTISM

ANIMAL THERAPY COURSE HELP AUTISTIC KIDS INTERACT

LOPBURI, Thailand: They may not be the most advanced pieces of kit in Thailand's military arsenal, but "buffalo soldiers" are being deployed to help autistic children come out of their shells. Under sweltering skies in central Thailand's Lopburi province this week, some two dozen children took rides on the backs of buffaloes. The gentle bovines are owned by the Thai military, an organization better known for coups than cuddles.

But this animal therapy is part of the military's softer side, one of hundreds of projects up and down the country the army is using to build support among civilians. Recent research has shown that some autistic children—who often struggle with human interactions—respond well to animals, helping them learn key skills like being more patient and sharing.

Pimporn Thongmee said she had seen a major improvement since her five-year-old autistic grandson-nick-

named Shogun-enrolled in the military's three-month animal therapy course which sees children interact with buffaloes twice a week. "My grandson never stayed still, never concentrated, and screamed but now he can socialize," she said. "He used to be afraid of the doctor but now he runs to him and leaves his grandma behind instead," she added.

Karma-ing influence

Those with disabilities or behavioral problems often find themselves stigmatized in Thailand where the concept of karma—that good or bad deeds will be rewarded and punished in the next life—is central. Karma makes Thailand a famously generous country, with one of the highest charitable donation rates per household in the world. But many Thais also believe those who suffer are being punished for sins in past lives, a view which can result in a sympathy deficit for the unfortunate and vulnerable.

Manit Kaewmanee said her 11-year-

old son Captain was often bullied as he struggled to settle in schools, eventually forcing him to leave education. "Many people said it was our past karma," she said. "They said he was crazy, couldn't speak, so how could he be in society, that it was shameful for him." The buffalo therapy, she said, helped him conquer tasks he once had trouble with. "Now he can cook instant noodles—and ride a bicycle very well," she said.

Sergeant Major Kajohnsak Junpeng, the lead trainer, explained that the gentle and slow nature of buffaloes made them ideal animals to work with autistic children. "If children grab their tails, they won't kick like horses so there won't be an accident," he said. Training animals and dealing with autistic children was not a job he imagined a soldier having to do, adding that it was often quite emotionally draining. "But when I see the children progress I am proud of myself and the tiredness is gone," he said.—AFP



HAWAII: In this undated photo provided by NOAA, an endangered Hawaiian monk seal known as RB18 lies on the shore of Hawaii's Big Island.—AP

RARE MONK SEAL DIES IN FISH FARM OFF HAWAII

HONOLULU: An endangered Hawaiian monk seal has died after wandering into a net pen and becoming trapped at a fish farm that was partially funded by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in Hawaii. Officials with NOAA said Thursday the death of the 10-year-old monk seal happened at Blue Ocean Mariculture, the same fish farm that NOAA's National Marine Fishery Service has been using for research in conjunction with a plan to expand aquaculture into federal waters around the Pacific.

Ann Garrett, the service's assistant regional administrator for protected resources, confirmed the farm was the same one used for the NOAA-funded research, but could not comment further on the agency's involvement. NOAA is working on a plan to expand aquaculture into federal waters despite concerns by some environmental groups who say the industrial-scale farms could do more harm than good to overall fish stocks and ocean health. The NOAA plan would create a regulatory and permitting scheme for the industry. The plan includes federal permitting and management of commercial fish farms in federal waters, the area of ocean from 3 to 200 miles offshore, around Hawaii and other Pacific islands. The agency funded three rounds of research at Blue Ocean Mariculture operation. NOAA officials said at a news conference Thursday that they believe the seal drowned after the farm operators opened one panel of a net pen to release a shark that had gotten inside. The seal died on March 5. "We did not see any signs of trauma or entanglement or any gashes or lacerations. We also saw no gross signs, meaning obvious signs, of disease," said NOAA's National Marine Fishery Service's David Schofield, the marine mammal response coordinator for the region. "The seal, B18, had a stomach full of fish and otherwise appeared in good body condition so we can draw no other conclusion than that the animal did die in the fish pen likely due to drowning or suffocation."

Aquaculture

Schofield said it was unclear if the fish that were found in the monk seal's stomach were farmed fish from the net pen, but further testing should help determine that. Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources Chair Suzanne Case said in a statement the death is a tragedy and the state will work with federal officials to prevent future problems with aquaculture operations. There are only about 1400 Hawaiian monk seals left in the wild, according to official estimates.

Fish farming has been practiced for centuries in Hawaii and around the world. But modern aquaculture, some environmentalists say, carries pollution risks and the potential for non-native farmed fish to escape and enter the natural ecosystem. Former NOAA chief scientist and founder of ocean advocacy group Mission Blue Sylvia Earle said in an interview in December there are more environmentally sustainable and economically viable options than open-ocean aquaculture, which uses floating net-pens or submerged cages.

"We have to make a choice with aquaculture," she said. "Is our goal to feed a large number of people? Or is our goal to create or to serve a luxury market?" New technologies are being developed for open-ocean aquaculture, and many US companies are sending their crews overseas to farm, according to NOAA officials. NOAA says the research being conducted at the farm is designed to better understand ways to make open ocean farming safe and efficient. "The US's view is we'd rather have these US companies pursuing these opportunities in a sustainable, environmentally sound way in the US," said Michael Tosatto, NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service regional administrator, in a 2016 interview. A request for comment from Blue Ocean Mariculture was not immediately returned.—AP



MICHIGAN: In this photo Dr. Ruth Marcec looks over an amphibian holding tank at the Detroit Zoo in Royal Oak, Michigan.—AP

DETROIT ZOO'S OWN DR RUTH ENCOURAGES AMOROUS AMPHIBIANS

ROYAL OAK: Dr. Ruth is bringing her sex-pertise to the Detroit Zoo. Not to be confused with famed human sex therapist Dr. Ruth Westheimer, Dr. Ruth Marcec is the new director of the zoo's National Amphibian Conservation Center. She is tasked with inducing frogs and salamanders to make a love connection - something the little critters aren't doing enough of these days. Experts estimate that around half of the world's 7,600 known species of amphibians is threatened.

"It's very much a crisis," said Marcec. "If you combine all the endangered mammals and birds, that still doesn't add up to the percentage of amphibians that are threatened and endangered." Among her responsibilities, which include overseeing amphibian care and welfare as well as conservation and research programs, Marcec is tasked with encouraging the cold-blooded vertebrates in her care to get down.

"Amphibians are very difficult to breed in captivity. You need to get the mood just right. They need some Marvin Gaye," she said, laughing. "No. They need specific barometric pressure. They need specific rainfall. Things like that." In lieu of Motown classics, Marcec will rest a tablet computer playing tree-frog mating calls on top of the animals' storage tank.

A veterinarian and reproductive physiologist, Marcec has developed a grading scale for amphibian ultrasound procedures used at zoos and aquariums across the globe, and she travels to other institutions to assist with their amphibian breeding efforts.—AP

FIRST FLUORESCENT FROG FOUND IN ARGENTINA

BUENOS AIRES: The first naturally fluorescent frog was discovered recently in Argentina—almost by chance, a member of the team of researchers said Thursday. Argentine and Brazilian scientists at the Bernardino Rivadavia Natural Sciences Museum made the discovery while studying the metabolic origin of pigments in a tree-frog species common to South America.

Under normal light the frog's translucent skin is a muted yellowish-brown color with red dots, but when the scientists shone an ultraviolet light on it, it turned a celestial green. According to one of them, Carlos Taboada, the case is "the first scientific record of a fluorescent frog." "We were very excited," said his fellow researcher Julian Faivovich. "It was quite disconcerting."

He said the discovery "radically modifies what is known about fluorescence in terrestrial environments, allowing the discovery of new fluorescent compounds that may have scientific or technological applications." It also "generates new questions about visual communication in amphibians," he said. The team studied some 200 more examples to ensure the phenomenon was not due to the frog's captivity, and detected the fluorescent properties in all the specimens.

Maria Lagorio—an independent researcher and expert in fluorescence, who the research team contacted after the discovery—told AFP that the trait is common in aquatic species and seen in some insects, "but has never been scientifically reported in amphibians." The finding was recently published in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.—AFP



BUENOS AIRES: Handout photo released by CONICET and MACN researchers Carlos Taboada and Julian Faivovich in Buenos Aires of a fluorescent polka-dot tree frog (*Hypsiboas punctatus*) that lives in South America.—AFP

SPRING IN THE AIR, CHINA'S PIGEON RACERS GIVE BIRDS THEIR MEDS

BEIJING: Guarding against avian flu, which has forced a mass cull of birds in China, pigeon fancier Wang Jincang paid out nearly \$400 to get his 200 racing pigeons vaccinated and fortified for the onset of the spring racing season. "I normally choose imported medicines, which are several times more expensive than some local brands," Wang told Reuters as he lined up to enter birds for contests that begin this month. The cost of vaccination is small change compared with how much pigeon enthusiasts can pay to buy prized breeds.

An egg can cost a few hundred dollars, while the price for a full-grown bird with a coveted bloodline can run into hundreds of thousands of dollars. In 2013, a Chinese businessman paid 310,000 euros (nearly \$334,000) for a Belgian-bred racing pigeon, whereas local birds can be bought for less than \$100. Wang doesn't want to say how much he has invested in his birds, though he spends almost \$1,500 a month looking after their health, and describes his pastime as wagering time and money.

"Pigeon racing is essentially gambling. We are betting our time and fortune on the birds, similar to horse-betting," Wang said. Any form of gambling is banned in China, but pigeon races, which are flown over hundreds of kilometers, fall under the grey category of social sports. China hosts more than 100,000 pigeon races annually, some of them organized by corporate-backed professional pigeon clubs like Huashunde, supported by Beijing Huashunde Power Engineering Ltd, and Hongjin Pigeon Club, backed by PetroChina Huabei Oil Field Co.

Prize money has been rising. A club in Beijing is set to award 70 million yuan (over \$10 million) in total prize money at its autumn championship. Ge, a 39-year-old pigeon owner in Fujian, has 80 pigeons. So far, they have helped him win 150,000 yuan (nearly \$22,000). "We aim for good scores and big rewards at contests," said Ge. "Otherwise, why raise pigeons?"—Reuters

JAPAN LAUNCHES LATEST N KOREA SPY SATELLITE

TOKYO: Japan launched a new spy satellite yesterday, the country's space agency said, as the region grows increasingly uneasy over North Korea's quickening missile program. The Radar 5 unit was carried into space on Japan's mainstay H-2A rocket from a launch site in the country's southwest. It is meant to replace an existing satellite that is coming to the end of its mission. Japan started putting spy satellites into orbit in 2003 after North Korea fired a mid-range ballistic missile over the Japanese mainland and into the western Pacific in 1998.

The threat has steadily accelerated and just last week Pyongyang fired four ballistic missiles, with three landing provocatively close to Japan. Tokyo currently maintains three optical satellites for daytime surveillance and three radar satellites for nighttime monitoring. Two of those are backups. The new satellite will succeed one of the three radar satellites that were launched in 2011. The satellites are officially for "information-gathering"—a euphemism for spying—but are also used to monitor damage in the wake of natural disasters.—AFP



TOKYO: Japan's main H-2A rocket lifts off from its launching pad to carry an information-gathering satellite, Radar 5 onto orbit at the Tanegashima Space Center in Tanegashima island, Kagoshima prefecture yesterday.—AFP

THAI ELEPHANT HOSPITAL, SHORT OF MONEY, AT RISK OF CLOSING

BANGKOK: What is believed to be the world's first elephant hospital says it may have to close because of budgetary problems after a decade of declining contributions. The Friends of the Asian Elephant foundation, which operates the hospital in Lampang in Thailand's hilly north, says it is facing bankruptcy unless it receives financial assistance from the Thai government.

The hospital has cared for more than 4,600 elephants in 25 years of operation and currently has five animals. The hospital drew worldwide attention in 2008 when it developed the world's first prosthetic elephant leg. At least 15 of its patients have been land mine victims. Foundation head Soraida Salwala said yesterday that the group has barely enough money to continue operating until the end of the year.—AP

CLINIC PAGE



Kuwait Times
THE LEADING INDEPENDENT DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF

Dr. Fahad Al-Mukhaizeem
فهد علي المخيزيم

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KNCC PROGRAMME FROM THURSDAY TO WEDNESDAY (16/03/2017 TO 22/03/2017)

| Category | Movie | Time | Category | Movie | Time | | |
|-----------|-------------------------|----------|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------------|----------|
| SHARQIA-1 | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 12:00 PM | KONG: SKULL ISLAND | 2:45 PM | AL-KOUT.1 | | |
| | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 2:30 PM | | 5:15 PM | | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 11:30 AM |
| | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 5:00 PM | | 7:45 PM | | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 2:00 PM |
| | KONG: SKULL ISLAND | 7:30 PM | | 10:15 PM | | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 4:30 PM |
| | KONG: SKULL ISLAND | 10:00 PM | | 12:45 AM | | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 7:00 PM |
| SHARQIA-2 | VENGEANCE: A LOVE STORY | 11:30 AM | MARINA-1 | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 1:00 PM | | |
| | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 1:30 PM | | SLEEPLESS | 1:30 PM | AL-KOUT.2 | |
| | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 4:00 PM | | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 3:30 PM | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 12:00 PM |
| | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 6:30 PM | | SLEEPLESS | 6:00 PM | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 3:00 PM |
| | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 9:00 PM | | LOGAN | 8:00 PM | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 5:30 PM |
| SHARQIA-3 | SLEEPLESS | 12:45 PM | MARINA-2 | KONG: SKULL ISLAND | 11:45 AM | | |
| | VENGEANCE: A LOVE STORY | 2:45 PM | | KONG: SKULL ISLAND | 2:15 PM | AL-KOUT.3 | |
| | SLEEPLESS | 4:45 PM | | KONG: SKULL ISLAND | 4:45 PM | KONG: SKULL ISLAND | 12:00 PM |
| | SLEEPLESS | 6:45 PM | | KONG: SKULL ISLAND | 7:15 PM | KONG: SKULL ISLAND | 2:30 PM |
| | VENGEANCE: A LOVE STORY | 8:45 PM | | KONG: SKULL ISLAND | 9:45 PM | KONG: SKULL ISLAND | 5:00 PM |
| MUHALAB-1 | SLEEPLESS | 11:45 AM | MARINA-3 | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 11:30 AM | | |
| | KONG: SKULL ISLAND | 1:45 PM | | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 2:00 PM | AL-KOUT.4 | |
| | KONG: SKULL ISLAND | 4:15 PM | | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 4:30 PM | VENGEANCE: A LOVE STORY | 12:45 PM |
| | KONG: SKULL ISLAND | 6:45 PM | | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 7:00 PM | VENGEANCE: A LOVE STORY | 2:45 PM |
| | KONG: SKULL ISLAND | 9:15 PM | | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 9:30 PM | VENGEANCE: A LOVE STORY | 4:45 PM |
| MUHALAB-2 | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 12:30 PM | AVENUES-1 | VENGEANCE: A LOVE STORY | 11:45 AM | | |
| | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 3:00 PM | | VENGEANCE: A LOVE STORY | 1:45 PM | BAIRAQ-1 | |
| | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 5:30 PM | | VENGEANCE: A LOVE STORY | 3:45 PM | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 1:00 PM |
| | SLEEPLESS | 8:00 PM | | VENGEANCE: A LOVE STORY | 5:45 PM | KIKORIKI. Legend of the Golden Dragon | 1:45 PM |
| | SLEEPLESS | 10:15 PM | | VENGEANCE: A LOVE STORY | 7:45 PM | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST -3D | 3:30 PM |
| MUHALAB-3 | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 11:30 AM | AVENUES-2 | KONG: SKULL ISLAND -3D-4DX | 11:30 AM | | |
| | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 2:00 PM | | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST-3D-4DX | 2:00 PM | BAIRAQ-2 | |
| | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 4:30 PM | | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST-3D-4DX | 4:30 PM | KONG: SKULL ISLAND | 11:45 AM |
| | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 7:00 PM | | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST-3D-4DX | 7:00 PM | KONG: SKULL ISLAND | 2:15 PM |
| | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 9:30 PM | | KONG: SKULL ISLAND -3D-4DX | 12:30 AM | KONG: SKULL ISLAND | 4:45 PM |
| FANAR-1 | VENGEANCE: A LOVE STORY | 11:45 AM | AVENUES-3 | SLEEPLESS | 12:45 PM | | |
| | VENGEANCE: A LOVE STORY | 1:45 PM | | SLEEPLESS | 2:45 PM | BAIRAQ-3 | |
| | VENGEANCE: A LOVE STORY | 3:45 PM | | SLEEPLESS | 4:45 PM | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 12:00 PM |
| | VENGEANCE: A LOVE STORY | 5:45 PM | | SLEEPLESS | 6:45 PM | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 2:30 PM |
| | HAMAH - Kuwaiti Film | 7:45 PM | | SLEEPLESS | 8:45 PM | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 5:00 PM |
| FANAR-2 | SLEEPLESS | 12:15 PM | 360°-1 | VENGEANCE: A LOVE STORY | 11:30 AM | | |
| | SLEEPLESS | 2:15 PM | | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 1:30 PM | BAIRAQ-1 | |
| | SLEEPLESS | 4:15 PM | | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST -3D | 4:15 PM | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 1:00 PM |
| | SLEEPLESS | 6:15 PM | | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 7:00 PM | KIKORIKI. Legend of the Golden Dragon | 1:45 PM |
| | SLEEPLESS | 8:15 PM | | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 9:45 PM | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 3:30 PM |
| FANAR-3 | KONG: SKULL ISLAND | 1:30 PM | 360°-2 | LOGAN | 1:15 PM | | |
| | KONG: SKULL ISLAND | 4:00 PM | | KIKORIKI. Legend of the Golden Dragon | 12:00 PM | BAIRAQ-2 | |
| | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 6:30 PM | | KIKORIKI. Legend of the Golden Dragon | 2:00 PM | KONG: SKULL ISLAND | 11:45 AM |
| | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 9:00 PM | | FRI+SAT | | KONG: SKULL ISLAND | 2:15 PM |
| | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 11:30 PM | | LOGAN | 4:00 PM | KONG: SKULL ISLAND | 4:45 PM |
| FANAR-4 | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 12:00 PM | 360°-3 | HAMAH - Kuwaiti Film | 1:15 PM | | |
| | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 2:30 PM | | HAMAH - Kuwaiti Film | 1:30 PM | BAIRAQ-3 | |
| | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 5:00 PM | | HAMAH - Kuwaiti Film | 3:00 PM | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 12:00 PM |
| | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 7:30 PM | | HAMAH - Kuwaiti Film | 4:45 PM | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 2:30 PM |
| | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 10:00 PM | | HAMAH - Kuwaiti Film | 6:30 PM | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 5:00 PM |
| FANAR-5 | KONG: SKULL ISLAND | 12:15 PM | HAMAHA - Kuwaiti Film | HAMAHA - Kuwaiti Film | 8:15 PM | | |
| | | | | HAMAHA - Kuwaiti Film | 10:00 PM | BAIRAQ-1 | |
| | | | | HAMAHA - Kuwaiti Film | 11:45 PM | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 1:00 PM |
| | | | | HAMAHA - Kuwaiti Film | | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 7:30 PM |
| | | | | HAMAHA - Kuwaiti Film | | BEAUTY AND THE BEAST | 10:00 PM |

SITUATION VACANT

Lady maid is needed to work as a part-timer in a house located in Salmiya. Salary is KD 100 and total working hours (20-24 HRS). Call 66417504. (C 5283) 17-3-2017

CHANGE OF NAME

I, FRANK CORNELIUS GONSALVES holder of Indian Passport No. G3303149, hereby change my Father name JOSEPH to JOSE SANTANA ARQUIMEDES GONSALVES and Mother name ROSE to ROSARIA GONSALVES. (C 5284)

I, Dadi Setty Venkata Ramana S/o Subbaiah, Passport No. N8640361 and Civil ID No. 271081603624 has changed my name to Gobburu Sivaiah S/o Chinna Subbarayudu, hereinafter in all my dealings and documents I will be known by name of Gobburu Sivaiah.

I, Dadi Setty Nagarathamma W/o Dadi Setty Venkata Ramana, Passport No. P1092521 and Civil ID No. 274061210819 has changed my name to Gobburu Nagarathamma wife of Gobburu Sivaiah, hereinafter in all my dealings and documents I will be known by name of Gobburu Nagarathamma. (C 5285) 17-3-2017

EMERGENCY

112

Automated enquiry about the Civil ID card is **1889988**

PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr: 04:36
Shorook: 05:55
Duhr: 11:56
Asr: 15:23
Maghrib: 17:58
Isha: 19:15



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 |

SATURDAY, MARCH 18, 2017



Flight Schedule

DIAL 161 FOR AIRPORT INFORMATION

Arrival Flights on Saturday 18/3/2017

| Airlines | Flt | Route | Time |
|----------|------|-------------------|-------|
| KLM | 413 | Amsterdam/Dammam | 00:25 |
| JZR | 267 | Beirut | 00:30 |
| JZR | 539 | Cairo | 00:40 |
| THY | 772 | Istanbul | 00:55 |
| RJA | 642 | Amman | 01:05 |
| QTR | 1086 | Doha | 01:15 |
| MSR | 1618 | Alexandria | 01:20 |
| SAI | 441 | Lahore | 01:30 |
| THY | 764 | Istanbul | 01:50 |
| DLH | 635 | Doha | 01:55 |
| 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 | 546 | Cairo | 03:55 |
| KAC | 418 | Manila | 04:25 |
| 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 | 364 | Colombo | 06:05 |
| KAC | 384 | Delhi | 06:05 |
| KAC | 206 | Islamabad | 06:20 |
| KAC | 346 | Ahmedabad | 06:25 |
| BAW | 157 | London | 06:40 |
| PAL | 668 | Manila/Dubai | 07:00 |
| FDB | 5061 | Dubai | 07:15 |
| KAC | 204 | Lahore | 07:15 |
| KAC | 284 | Dhaka | 07:35 |
| FDB | 053 | Dubai | 07:50 |
| KAC | 302 | Mumbai | 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 |
| 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 |
| KAC | 774 | Riyadh | 11:05 |
| IRM | 1188 | Mashhad | 11:15 |
| RBG | 553 | Alexandria | 11:15 |
| JZR | 165 | Dubai | 11:30 |
| FDK | 801 | Damascus | 11:45 |
| KAC | 286 | Dhaka | 12:25 |
| JZR | 239 | Amman | 12:45 |
| FDB | 075 | Dubai | 12:50 |
| UAE | 871 | Dubai | 12:50 |
| MSR | 610 | Cairo | 13:00 |
| IAW | 157 | Al Najaf | 13:25 |
| 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 |
| MSC | 452 | Alexandria/Jeddah | 15:30 |
| OMA | 645 | Muscat | 15:35 |
| UAE | 857 | Dubai | 15:45 |
| ABY | 127 | Sharjah | 15:50 |
| KAC | 154 | Istanbul | 15:55 |
| SAW | 705 | Damascus | 16:00 |
| SVA | 504 | Madinah | 16:00 |
| KNE | 531 | Jeddah | 16:05 |
| QTR | 1072 | Doha | 16:10 |
| JZR | 535 | Cairo | 16:10 |
| JZR | 787 | Riyadh | 16:25 |
| JZR | 357 | Mashhad | 16:25 |
| FDB | 051 | Dubai | 16:25 |
| KAC | 662 | Abu Dhabi | 16:35 |
| RJA | 640 | Amman | 16:55 |
| KAC | 118 | New York | 17:00 |
| SVA | 510 | Riyadh | 17:15 |
| GFA | 215 | Bahrain | 17:30 |
| JZR | 777 | Jeddah | 17:45 |
| 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 |
| 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 |
| KAC | 104 | London | 19:50 |
| FDB | 057 | Dubai | 19:50 |
| KNE | 381 | Taif | 19:55 |
| KAC | 166 | Rome | 19:55 |
| MSR | 618 | Alexandria | 20:05 |
| 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 |
| FDB | 5053 | Dubai | 20:50 |
| KAC | 616 | Bahrain | 20:50 |
| FDB | 8053 | Dubai | 20:55 |
| 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 |
| KAC | 676 | Dubai | 21:45 |
| GFA | 219 | Bahrain | 21:45 |
| KAC | 174 | Munich | 22:00 |
| QTR | 1082 | Doha | 22:00 |
| JZR | 125 | Bahrain | 22:05 |
| KLM | 415 | Amsterdam | 22:10 |
| NIA | 151 | Cairo | 22:10 |
| ETD | 309 | Abu Dhabi | 22:15 |
| AIC | 987 | Chennai/Hyderabad | 22:25 |
| JZR | 241 | Amman | 22:45 |
| KNE | 533 | Jeddah | 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 |

| | | | |
|-----|------|------------------|-------|
| ETD | 302 | Abu Dhabi | 10:10 |
| 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 |
| KAC | 501 | Beirut | 11:55 |
| RBG | 554 | Alexandria | 11:55 |
| VIZ | 201 | Baghdad | 12:00 |
| 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 |
| JZR | 176 | Dubai | 13:45 |
| MSR | 611 | Cairo | 14:00 |
| FDB | 076 | Dubai | 14:05 |
| UAE | 872 | Dubai | 14:15 |
| JZR | 324 | Al Najaf | 14:25 |
| IAW | 158 | Al Najaf | 14:25 |
| KNE | 382 | Taif | 14:50 |
| KAC | 673 | Dubai | 15:00 |
| KAC | 561 | Amman | 15:00 |
| FDB | 060 | Dubai | 15:10 |
| KAC | 785 | Jeddah | 15:15 |
| PAL | 669 | Dubai/Manila | 15:20 |
| GFA | 222 | Bahrain | 15:25 |
| JZR | 188 | Dubai | 15:40 |
| QTR | 1079 | Doha | 15:40 |
| KAC | 1543 | Cairo | 15:55 |
| KNE | 530 | Jeddah | 15:55 |
| KNE | 684 | Madinah | 16:00 |
| KAC | 357 | Kochi | 16:20 |
| ETD | 304 | Abu Dhabi | 16:20 |
| MSC | 402 | Alexandria | 16:30 |
| ABY | 128 | Sharjah | 16:30 |
| OMA | 646 | Muscat | 16:35 |
| 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 |
| JZR | 538 | Cairo | 17:45 |
| UAE | 858 | Dubai | 17:45 |
| RJA | 641 | Amman | 17:55 |
| KAC | 353 | BLR | 18:15 |
| SVA | 511 | Riyadh | 18:15 |
| GFA | 216 | Bahrain | 18:20 |
| KAC | 283 | Dhaka | 18:30 |
| 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 |
| ABY | 124 | Sharjah | 20:05 |
| GFA | 218 | Bahrain | 20:15 |
| KAC | 383 | Delhi | 20:30 |
| FDB | 058 | Dubai | 20:35 |
| KAC | 361 | Colombo | 20:35 |
| KAC | 775 | Riyadh | 20:45 |
| KNE | 232 | Riyadh | 20:55 |
| CLX | 856 | Hong Kong | 21:05 |
| MSR | 607 | Luxor | 21:05 |
| OMA | 648 | Muscat | 21:10 |
| KAC | 205 | Islamabad | 21:25 |
| KAC | 345 | Ahmedabad | 21:30 |
| QTR | 1089 | Doha | 21:35 |
| DLH | 634 | Doha | 21:35 |
| KAC | 741 | Dammam | 21:45 |
| DHX | 171 | Bahrain | 21:50 |
| FDB | 5054 | Dubai | 21:50 |
| FDB | 8054 | Dubai | 21:55 |
| 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 |
| ETD | 310 | Abu Dhabi | 23:05 |
| NIA | 152 | Cairo | 23:10 |
| QTR | 1083 | Doha | 23:20 |
| KLM | 415 | Dammam/Amsterdam | 23:20 |
| KNE | 534 | Jeddah | 23:35 |

WORDSEARCH PUZZLE

Real Estate 2

Find and circle all of the words that are hidden in the grid. The remaining 22 letters spell a common Real Estate phrase.

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

- | | | | |
|------------|---------------|----------------|--------------|
| ACREAGE | DEBT | LANDLORD | SELLER |
| AMENITIES | DEFAULT | LEASE | SHOW HOME |
| APARTMENT | DOWN PAYMENT | LISTING | SOLD SIGN |
| APPRAISER | EQUITY | MARKET | SUBDIVISION |
| ASSESSOR | EVICTON | MORTGAGE | SUBLET |
| BANK | FLIP | PARCEL | SURVEY |
| BROKER | FLOOR SPACE | PHOTOS | TENANT |
| BUYER | FOR SALE SIGN | PRINCIPAL | TITLE |
| CLOSING | FORECLOSURE | PROPERTY TAX | TOWNHOUSE |
| COMMISSION | HIGH RISE | PUBLIC AUCTION | VALUE |
| CONDO FEES | INSPECTION | RENT | VIRTUAL TOUR |
| CONTRACTOR | INTEREST RATE | ROW HOUSE | ZONING |

Yesterday's Solution

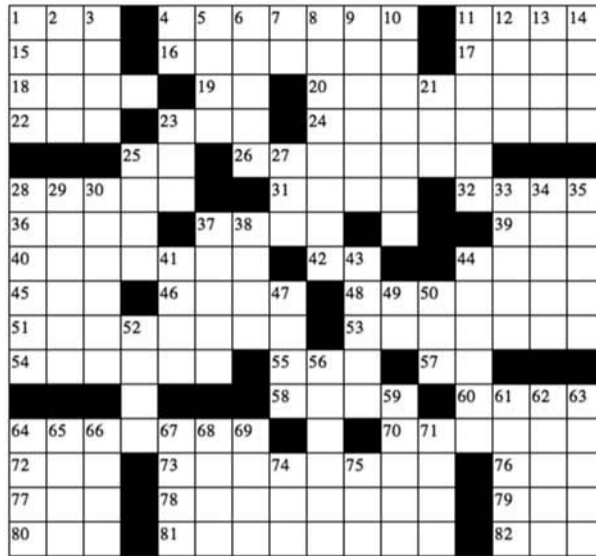
Real Estate 1

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

- | | | | |
|--------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|
| AGENT | CONTRACT | INTERIOR | REALTOR |
| AMORTIZATION | CREDITOR | LAND | SELL |
| APPRAISAL | DEED | LAWYER | SKYSCRAPER |
| ASSESSMENT | DEPOSIT | LENDER | SOLD |
| ASSET | DEPRECIATION | LIEN | SQUARE FOOTAGE |
| BUILDING | DUPLEX | LOAN | TAXES |
| BUNGALOW | EXTERIOR | LOFT | TIMESHARE |
| BUYING | FLIPPING | MARKET VALUE | TOUR |
| CLOSER | FOR SALE | OFFER | TRIPLEX |
| COLLATERAL | HOUSE | PAYMENT | VACANCY |
| CONDEMNED | INSPECTOR | PLOT | VALUATION |
| CONDO | INSURANCE | PROPERTY | ZONE |

The hidden message is: MULTIPLE LISTING SERVICE

CROSSWORD 1551



ACROSS

- (Irish) Mother of the ancient Irish gods.
- A small flat triangular bone in front of the knee that protects the knee joint.
- Employed in accomplishing something.
- Light informal conversation for social occasions.
- A poem consisting of 3 stanzas and an envoy.
- A collection of objects laid on top of each other.
- An organization of countries formed in 1961 to agree on a common policy for the sale of petroleum.
- A metric unit of volume equal to one tenth of a liter.
- Foot pain.
- An anxiety disorder characterized by chronic free-floating anxiety and such symptoms as tension or sweating or trembling of light-headedness or irritability etc that has lasted for more than six months.
- Preceding all others in time or being as first made or performed.
- Of or relating to or like or in the manner of the Roman Seneca.
- A Nilotic language.
- The capital and chief port of Qatar.
- God of love and erotic desire.
- Toward the mouth or oral region.
- Cooking utensil consisting of a wide metal vessel.
- Covered with paving material.
- (Akkadian) God of wisdom.
- Antibacterial drug (trade name Nydravid) used to treat tuberculosis.
- A woman hired to suckle a child of someone else.
- Having no parts resembling rays.
- Any time of new development.
- A genus of the family Droseraceae.
- American and Asiatic trees having edible one-seeded fruit.
- (informal) Of the highest quality.
- A heavy brittle diamagnetic trivalent metallic element (resembles arsenic and antimony chemically).
- A Chadic language spoken south of Lake Chad.
- Open-heart surgery in which the rib cage is opened and a section of a blood vessel is grafted from the aorta to the coronary artery to bypass the blocked section of the coronary artery and improve the blood supply to the heart.
- A Native American who lived in what is now southern Colorado and Utah and northern Arizona and New Mexico and who built cliff dwellings.
- Submerged freshwater perennials.
- An ugly evil-looking old woman.
- Pearl oysters.
- An antiviral drug used in the treatment of AIDS.
- A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.
- Not carved.
- (meaning literally 'born') Used to indicate the maiden or family name of a married woman.
- Seed vessel having hooks or prickles.
- An informal conversation.
- Thickening of tissue in the motor tracts of the lateral columns and anterior horns of the spinal cord.

DOWN

- Highly excited.
- Plant with an elongated head of broad stalked leaves resembling celery.
- In bed.
- A unit of information equal to 1024 bytes.
- A quantity of no importance.
- A republic in southeastern Europe on the southern part of the Balkan peninsula.
- Angular distance above the horizon (especially of a celestial object).
- Convert a cock into a capon.
- Regarded with deep or rapturous love (especially as if for a god).
- A tricycle (usually propelled by pedalling).
- A transmission from Earth to a spacecraft or the path of such a transmission.
- Used of the language of the deaf.
- English essayist (1775-1834).
- Made of fir or pine.
- Title for a civil or military leader (especially in Turkey).
- The Tibeto-Burman language spoken in the Dali region of Yunnan.
- An informal term for a father.
- The compass point that is one point north of due east.
- A genus of orb-weaving spiders including common garden spiders and barn spiders.
- A political leader (especially of Tammany Hall).
- Transient cessation of respiration.
- A large and imposing house.
- Squash bugs.
- (folklore) A corpse that rises at night to drink the blood of the living.
- (Islam) The man who leads prayers in a mosque.
- The specified day of the month.
- A unit of dry measure used in Egypt.
- Trade name for an alloy used to make high-energy permanent magnets.
- (of persons) Highest in rank or authority or office.
- The branch of computer science that deal with writing computer programs that can solve problems creatively.
- A cruel and brutal fellow.
- A doctor's degree in music.
- Cuban socialist leader who overthrew a dictator in 1959 and established a socialist state in Cuba (born in 1927).
- Yellow-fever mosquitos.
- A city in southern Turkey on the Seyhan River.
- A sloping edge on a cutting tool.
- United States computer entrepreneur whose software company made him the youngest multi-billionaire in the history of the United States (born in 1955).
- (Babylonian) God of wisdom and agriculture and patron of scribes and schools.
- Any culture medium that uses agar as the gelling agent.
- A constellation in the polar region of the southern hemisphere near Octans.
- A bluish-white lustrous metallic element.
- A unit of length (in United States and Britain) equal to one twelfth of a foot.
- Remove with or as if with a ladle.
- A rotating disk shaped to convert circular into linear motion.
- 100 avos equal 1 pataca.

Feel free to print out this crossword puzzle for your personal use. You may also link to it. However, this web page and puzzle are copyrighted and may not be distributed without prior written consent.

Yesterday's Solution

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

Daily SuDoku

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FREEDIVER NORDBLAD: A MERMAID IN ICY WATER

SOMERO: As a young girl she dreamt of becoming a lion tamer. Johanna Nordblad became a freediving sensation, capable of incredible exploits under the ice. No woman has ever before managed to swim over 50 meters under the ice in freezing temperatures wearing just a swimsuit. The 41-year-old set a new world record at Lake Paijanne in her native Finland in March 2015, braving the tenebrous depths to swim 55 seconds between two small holes drilled in the thick ice.

"If someone had said to me ten years ago that one day I would dive under the ice I would have said 'no never,'" Nordblad told AFP. "I like the idea of constantly testing myself. I like to really know where my limits are. I tell myself I can't do something but then when I do I find it's quite easy. I was just scared." Nordblad tried freediving for the first time aged 25. Four years later she was a world record holder after covering 158 meters underwater with flippers.

Capable of holding her breath for over six minutes, she could have continued to push the limits solely in snorkeling. But a serious biking accident in 2010 that almost took her leg opened another door. The only relief for the shattered bones in her leg was cold water treatment. "Little by little I got used to it and after several months I wanted to put the two legs in cold water. And then I dived. I'm a freediver, it's normal for me to dive in the water. Even if it's cold."

'Beautiful, scary'

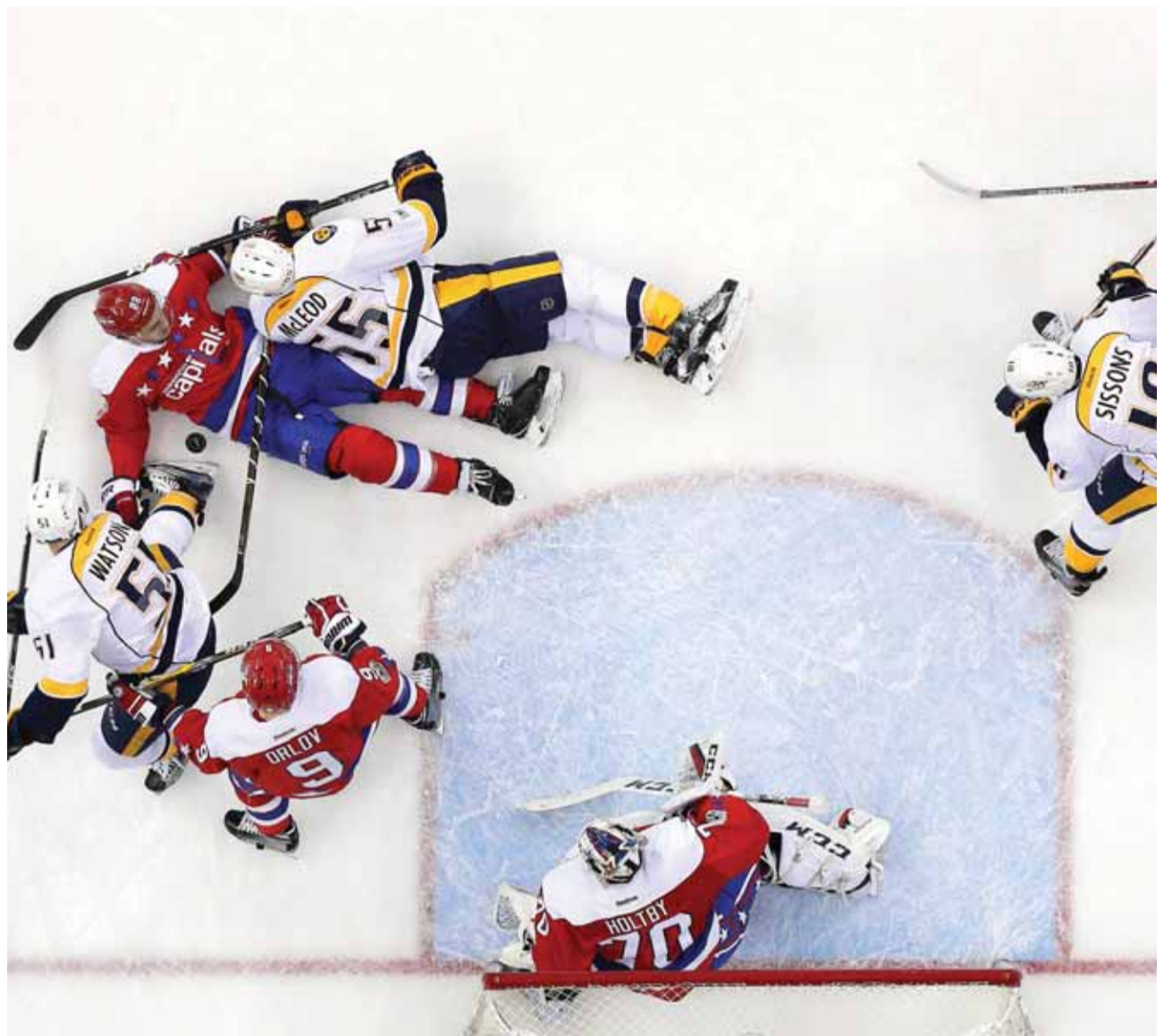
She's aware that she is doing something different, but for her nothing extraordinary, the result of training and self awareness. "Most people are convinced they would panic. So they are fascinated because I'm very relaxed. "People think it's so cold, it's so scary and it's so dark but it's not like that, for me it's beautiful. "I like to dive, it makes me happy. I don't have to go to the other side of the world," she said. In two months she will participate in the Finnish freediving national championships before bidding to break her own world record in 2018 and the record of Dane Stig Avall Severinsen, who swam 76.2 meters under the ice on April 17, 2013.

Living in Helsinki with her 15-year-old son Kasper - who prefers computers Nordblad divides her time between training, her job as an animation artist and her shared activities with her photographer sister Elina Manninen, "I'm just a normal person even if I don't have many friends who do the same as I do," she explained. "I have to eat, I have to sleep, I have to work and I have to take care of many things, and then I have free time for me." But Nordblad sees herself foremost as an artist. "I like to design. I want to make drawings that make people happier. "When I was young I loved art and water. Maybe I've never grown up," she laughs. — AFP

N KOREA HOCKEY TEAM ASKS TO PLAY IN SOUTH

PYEONGCHANG: North Korea's women's ice hockey team has asked for permission to play in South Korea, an official said yesterday, in what appears a positive sign ahead of next year's Pyeongchang Olympics. The team wants to play next month's Division II Women's World Championship in Gangneung, the ice hockey venue for next year's Olympics, a spokeswoman for the Games organizers told AFP. North Korea are scheduled to play the championship's opening game against Australia on April 2 but they will first need permission from South Korea's Ministry of Unification.

"Right now the Ministry of Unification is reviewing whether to grant their approval," Nancy Park of Games organizing body POCOG said. "All of this is a good sign. We always encourage participation of all the countries in the Olympics." North Korea's women have already missed qualifying for the Olympics, but the rare trip south by athletes from the country augurs well for next year's Games. Relations between the two Koreas, who remain technically at war, have plummeted in recent months and in 1988, the North boycotted the Summer Games held in Seoul. — AFP



WASHINGTON DC: Kevin Shattenkirk #22 of the Washington Capitals and Cody McLeod #55 of the Nashville Predators battle for the puck during the second period at Verizon Center. — AFP

ARVIDSSON LIFTS PREDATORS OVER CAPITALS WITH 2-1 WIN

WASHINGTON: Viktor Arvidsson scored 1:05 into overtime and the Nashville Predators bucked their season-long trend of OT struggles by beating the Washington Capitals 2-1 in the NHL on Thursday night. Arvidsson's goal improved the Predators to 4-7 in the 3-on-3 period this season and 7-19 over the past two years. Pekka Rinne made 22 saves but didn't face a shot in overtime from the Capitals, who lost for just the eighth time in 36 home games. James Neal also scored his 21st goal for Nashville, which extended its winning streak to three and its point streak to five. Brett Connolly scored the Capitals' regulation goal, and Braden Holtby stopped 22 of the 24 shots he faced. Washington fell to 7-3 in overtime this season.

BLACKHAWKS 2, SENATORS 1

Richard Panik scored the tiebreaking goal late in the third period, lifting Chicago over Ottawa. Panik scored on the power play off a pass from Patrick Kane with 3:01 remaining. Duncan Keith also scored and Scott Darling made 33 saves to help the Blackhawks get their second straight win. Kyle Turris scored for Ottawa, and Mike Condon finished with 26 saves as the Senators squandered a chance to move in to first place in the Atlantic Division. The Blackhawks took a 1-0 lead at 8:04 of the third as Keith's shot eventually found its way across the goal line.

BLUE JACKETS 2, PANTHERS 1

Zach Werenski and Josh Anderson scored 3:26 apart in the second period to lead Columbus over Florida. Sergei Bobrovsky finished with 33 saves for his NHL-leading 38th win to help Columbus pull two points behind Washington in the Presidents' Trophy race for the best record in the league. The Blue Jackets have won six of their last eight games.

Jonathan Marchessault scored with 1:45 left in the first period for Florida, which lost for the ninth time in 11 games. Columbus tied it with 4:05 left in the second when Werenski's shot from the far left side of the ice caught goalie James Reimer looking for his 11th. Anderson, who had an assist on Werenski's goal, then put the Blue Jackets ahead with 39 seconds remaining in the second when he knocked Jack Johnson's blue-line shot down and into the net for his 15th.

MAPLE LEAFS 5, LIGHTNING 0

Morgan Rielly and Matt Martin scored 15 seconds apart during Toronto's four-goal second period and Frederik Andersen made 33 saves as the Maple Leafs moved into the lead for the second Eastern Conference wild-card spot. Roman Polak, Connor Brown and James van Riemsdyk also scored for Toronto, which was coming off a 7-2

loss Tuesday night at Florida. With 13 games left of their regular season, the Maple Leafs hold a one-point advantage over their closest wild card rivals Tampa Bay and the New York Islanders. Tampa Bay, 12-3-3 over its last 18 games, pulled Andrei Vasilevskiy six minutes into the second after he allowed four goals on 15 shots. The goalie had gone 6-0-1 over his previous seven games. After Rielly scored 2:24 into the second, Martin made it 3-0 on the next shift. Brown, on the power play, and van Riemsdyk added goals later in the period.

KINGS 2, SABRES 0

Jarome Iginla and rookie Adrian Kempe scored in the third period and Jonathan Quick earned his first shutout of the season in Los Angeles' victory. Dustin Brown had two assists for the Kings, who haven't given up on their playoff hopes despite sitting four points behind St. Louis for the final wild card spot in the Western Conference.

Los Angeles wrapped up its seven-game homestand with four victories, but back-to-back losses earlier in the week allowed the Blues to surge ahead with just 11 games to play. Robin Lehner stopped 34 shots for the Sabres, who have lost six of seven and 10 of 12. Buffalo was shut out for the first time since Nov. 7 at Boston. — AP

NO RATINGS DISASTER IF WOODS MISSES MASTERS

MIAMI: The Masters, with its famed azaleas, precisely manicured greens and towering trees is bigger than any one golfer, even Tiger Woods. With the first major of the year three weeks away, Woods is still nursing an ailing back and his chances of teeing it up at Augusta National, where he is a four-time winner, do not look promising.

Even if Woods does play, his chances of making the halfway cut and playing on the weekend appear bleak. But sports industry analysts say an absence of Woods from Augusta National will not have nearly as much of an impact as in 2014 when, as the world's top-ranked golfer, he missed the Masters for the first time.

"Everybody knows the course. It's just so gorgeous and there's so many famous holes there that people can't wait to see," Bob Dorfman, a sports

marketing expert at Baker Street Advertising in San Francisco, told Reuters. "So as long as it's competitive and you've got a couple of big-name players in there on the weekend I think they are going to get solid ratings."

The absence of Woods from the Masters would once have been a ratings disaster but it appears the golf world, helped by some likeable players atop the world rankings and the continuing competitiveness of gallery favorite Phil Mickelson, has grown accustomed to him missing majors. When Woods, as world number one, missed the 2014 Masters while recovering from back surgery, ratings for CBS's weekend coverage was 8.6 million viewers, the lowest since 1993 when 7.9 million viewers in the United States tuned in before Woods burst onto the scene.

Now ranked 734th in the world and a creaking shadow of his former self, Woods, who has missed the last four majors and six of the last 12, no longer strikes fear in fellow golfers but still has the potential to generate healthy ratings. "The thing is he still bumps the ratings. If he's playing, and if he's in the final group on the weekend he definitely still makes a difference," said Dorfman.

"People are maybe not expecting him to win anymore but there is still an excitement and hope that he is going to do well on one side. One the other side it's 'gee let's watch and see what happened to this guy.' There's a curiosity about how far he's fallen off." Woods made his return to the PGA Tour in January after an absence of 17 months and promptly missed the cut at the Farmers Insurance Open. — Reuters



INDIAN WELLS: Elena Vesnina of Russia returns a shot to Venus Williams during the BNP Paribas Open at the Indian Wells Tennis Garden. — AFP

VESNINA VANQUISHES VENUS, SETS SEMI WITH MLADENOVIC

INDIAN WELLS: Elena Vesnina denied Venus Williams another great escape, beating the seven-time Grand Slam champion 6-2, 4-6, 6-3 Thursday to reach the semi-finals at Indian Wells. As Williams shook off a lethargic start and began to apply some pressure, Vesnina kept her poise, finishing off the contest on her fourth match point after fending off six break points in the final game. She'll play Kristina Mladenovic for a place in the final after the French player's 3-6, 7-6 (7/4), 6-2 victory over former world number one Caroline Wozniacki.

"When I was up three-love in the first set she was missing some easy shots," Vesnina said of Williams. "She looked tired and slow on the court. Then, all of a sudden, she started moving around, hitting great shots, winners from all over the place. I kind of lost my rhythm, because I didn't know what to expect." After the match Williams acknowledged some physical "issues" that had troubled her throughout the tournament, although she declined to elaborate.

"I had some issues," said the American, who played Thursday with one thigh bandaged, but without the right arm bandage she sported in previous rounds. "It's great to know that I can try to play through what I'm going through and be very competitive," she said. "I will try my best to be closer to 100 percent in the next tournament."

Whatever her troubles, when Williams leveled the match at a set apiece, Vesnina couldn't help recalling that the

American had saved three match points in her second-round victory over Jelena Jankovic. "I was like, 'Uh-Oh, it's coming back again. I'm going to be another victim of Venus,'" Vesnina said. Williams, who ended a 15-year boycott of the event last year but lost her opening match, was in pursuit of a first Indian Wells title.

The 36-year-old star did indeed save three match points against her own serve in the eighth game of the third set—a game that went to deuce six times before Williams held with a blistering forehand winner. She appeared poised to pull back a service break when she raced to a 0-40 lead on Vesnina's serve in the next game, but Vesnina dug in. A lucky net cord bounce and two backhand errors from Williams got it to deuce, but she would have three more break chances before an ecstatic Vesnina sealed it with a forehand winner.

"I was actually very proud of myself, how I held my nerve," Vesnina said. "I was 0-40 down, but I didn't even think about that it's 0-40. It was point by point, trying to create a good rally, trying to move her around. I stuck to this game—I was really fighting like it's the last game of my life." Vesnina, a Wimbledon semi-finalist last year, reached the semi-finals of an elite Premier Mandatory level tournament for the first time, as did the in-form Mladenovic-whose season so far has included a first career title in St Petersburg and a runner-up finish in Acapulco this month. — AFP

CARRENO BUSTA REACHES INDIAN WELLS SEMI-FINALS

INDIAN WELLS: Three-time Grand Slam champion Stan Wawrinka reached the semi-finals of the ATP Indian Wells Masters for the first time on Thursday with a hard-fought three-set victory over eighth-seeded Dominic Thiem. Switzerland's third-seeded Wawrinka, playing his first tournament in the United States since his US Open victory last year, battled for two and a half hours to get past the rising Austrian star 6-4, 4-6, 7-6 (7/2) and book a meeting with Spain's Pablo Carreno Busta.

Carreno Busta saved two match points en route to a 6-1, 3-6, 7-6 (7/4) victory over Uruguay's Pablo Cuevas. Wawrinka, 31, posted the 450th ATP win of his career and kept alive his bid for a second elite Masters title to go with his 2014 Monte Carlo triumph. "The level was really high tonight," Wawrinka said. "I'm really happy the way I was playing, the way I found a way to win it. "He's a strong player, really tough to play. I think in general we played both really high level, and the match was only one, two points."

After dropping his serve to open the match, Wawrinka broke Thiem twice to seize the first set, but Thiem grabbed the break he needed in the third game of the second to level the match. After withstanding two break points in the first game of the third set, Wawrinka broke the Austrian en route to a quick 3-0 lead. But Thiem, riding high after a victory in Rio de Janeiro this season, wasn't about to go quietly, winning the next three games.

But Thiem was unable to convert a break chance in the ninth game, and he found himself facing a match point against his own serve in the 12th—saving it with a booming forehand that Wawrinka could do nothing with as he forced a tiebreaker that Wawrinka controlled. "I think in the third-set tiebreak I served really well," said Wawrinka, who also beat lucky loser Yoshihito Nishioka in a third-set tiebreaker in the fourth round. "I was really focused to not give him anything. And, again, it's a great win for me," he said.

Carreno Busta also battled through a tense third set in which Cuevas was unable to convert match points against the Spaniard's serve in both the 10th and 12th games as they took the contest to the tiebreaker. The drama was heightened by Cuevas's tumble on the first of those match points as he lunged for a backhand—necessitating a mid-game medical timeout for treatment on his scraped right hand after Carreno Busta had polished off the point with an overhead. Things stayed tight in the tiebreaker, Carreno Busta gaining a match point at 6-4 when Cuevas sent a backhand long, and sealing it with a backhand volley to reach the first Masters semi-final of his career.

"It's an amazing feeling," said Carreno Busta. "It's my first time in the semi-final in a Masters 1000, but here in Indian Wells is—you know, for me, this tournament is one of the best, not just the Masters 1000, one of the best tournaments in the year and maybe one of the tougher, because all the people is playing here, all the top 20." — AFP

SHAKIB GIVES BANGLADESH HEALTHY LEAD

COLOMBO: Shakib Al Hasan struck his fifth hundred and combined in a seventh-wicket stand of 131 with debutant Mosaddek Hossain to give Bangladesh a handy first-innings lead on the third day of the second and final test against Sri Lanka yesterday. Playing their 100th test, Bangladesh, were bowled out for 467 in the final session, leading Sri Lanka by 129 runs, after the 21-year-old Mosaddek became the final wicket to fall for 75.

Sri Lanka reached 54 without loss in their second

innings at stumps, reducing the deficit to 75, with openers Dimuth Karunaratne and Upul Tharanga both unbeaten on 25 each. After resuming on 214-5, all-rounder Shakib, who made 116, and Captain Mushfiqur Rahim steadied the innings for Bangladesh with a stand of 92 before the latter was bowled by paceman Suranga Lakmal with the new ball for 52.

That brought Shakib and Mosaddek together and the duo stubbed out Sri Lanka hopes of getting

a lead with their resolute partnership. After Shakib fell to Lakshan Sandakan, Mosaddek and Mehedi Hasan Miraz continued to frustrate the hosts, who lead the two-match series 1-0, with another stand of 33. Sri Lanka captain and spinner Rangana Herath, 38, then restricted the lead with two wickets in as many balls to finish with 4-82, which also saw the left-arm spinner bring up 1,000 first-class wickets. Sandakan picked up four wickets for 140. — Reuters

PAKISTAN SUSPEND ANOTHER PLAYER IN SPOT-FIXING CASE

KARACHI: Pakistan cricket authorities yesterday charged and suspended international player Shahzaib Hasan in an ongoing case over spotfixing during a recent Twenty20 league. The widening scandal, which has so far ensnared four other current or former national stars, has tainted the recently completed Pakistan Super League (PSL), hailed as a step towards restoring international cricket in the militancy-plagued country after the final in Lahore passed without incident.

A guilty verdict for the players would prove disastrous for Pakistan cricket, which was last rocked by a match-fixing scandal in 2010 that deprived it of three top players including pacer Mohammad Amir, who has since made a comeback. The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) said Hasan was charged on three counts from during the PSL. "Hasan is given notice of charge and provisionally suspended with immediate effect from participating in all forms of cricket. He has 14 days to respond to (the) charges," said a PCB release.

The scandal surfaced on February 10 when Islamabad United players Sharjeel Khan and Khalid Latif were suspended and expelled from the PSL on charges of receiving offers from a suspicious man linked to an international betting syndicate. A third Islamabad United player, Mohammad Irfan, was also suspended on Tuesday for not reporting offers from bookmakers.

While former Pakistan opener Nasir Jamshed was also provisionally suspended on charges of being a "go between" in the spot-fixing incident. Jamshed and another unnamed person were arrested in Britain last month but were bailed until April. Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar said Thursday the players could face jail terms. Meanwhile, Pakistan's one-day and Twenty20 captain Sarfraz Ahmed said fast-rising Sharjeel will be missed on the team's tour of West Indies. They are set to fly out Monday. "Sharjeel was not only settled in the team but was exactly the one who we needed in opening slot," said Ahmed of the dashing left-handed opener who has played one Test, 25 one-day and 15 Twenty20 internationals.

Sharjeel hit three consecutive half centuries in the one-day series in Australia earlier this year and was also contracted by Leicestershire to play in England in July. The county has now replaced him with New Zealand's Luke Ronchi. "Sharjeel was the kind of batsman who was matching the modern-day cricket. His ouster will affect but whoever comes in as replacement will also be outstanding and can also put up his best," Ahmed continued. Pakistan play the first of four Twenty20s in Barbados on March 26. The Twenty20s will be followed by three one-day internationals and as many Tests. — AFP



LAHORE: In this photograph taken on March 15, 2017, Pakistani cricketer Shahzaib Hasan (L) arrives at Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) headquarters. — AFP



RANCHI: Australia's captain Steven Smith, right, plays a shot during the second day of their third test cricket match against India. — AP

INDIA RESPONDS WELL AFTER SMITH AND MAXWELL TONS

RANCHI: India mounted a positive reply after Steve Smith's unbeaten 178 and Glenn Maxwell's maiden century powered Australia to a series-high 451 on day two of the third test yesterday. Lokesh Rahul made an elegant 67, his fourth half-century in five innings, before Pat Cummins dismissed him in the pacer's first test after more than five years in the wilderness.

India were 120 for one at close, still 331 behind, with Murali Vijay unbeaten on 42 and Cheteshwar Pujara on 10. Home skipper Virat Kohli, who did not take the field since sustaining a shoulder injury in Thursday's second session, is expected to bat. Earlier, lion-hearted left-arm spinner Ravindra Jadeja bowled the bulk of the overs to claim 5-124 and effected a spectacular run-out to wrap up Australia's first innings.

After Australia had resumed on 299-4, pacer Umesh Yadav broke Maxwell's bat in two with the very first delivery but could not really unsettle the batsman. The normally swash-buckling Maxwell assiduously inched his way to become the second Australian cricketer after Shane Watson to score a century in all three formats. After reaching his hundred with a fierce cut that flew through the slips for his ninth boundary, Maxwell looked quite overwhelmed by the achievement as he embraced Smith with a huge bear hug, took off his helmet and kissed the badge.

He added four more runs to his score before edging Jadeja to wicketkeeper Wriddhiman Saha for 104. Maxwell also hit two sixes and faced 185 balls in his four-hour vigil, the longest he has spent at the crease in an international match. Better known for his exploits in the shorter formats, the 28-year-old grasped his chance in his first test outing in more

than two years to build a series-high 191-run partnership with his skipper.

Smith, who crossed 5,000 test runs in Australia's 800th test, the first ever at the Jharkhand State Cricket Association Stadium, was in complete control at the other end. His 19th test century, which contained 17 boundaries, is the highest score by an Australia captain in India, eclipsing predecessor Michael Clarke's 130 in Chennai four years ago.

Easy singles

Yadav admitted bowling to Smith was quite a challenge on a batting-friendly wicket. "Singles are coming easily and the outfield is so fast that you just need to place it in the gap and it would race to the boundary," he said. The pacer also expected his team to benefit from the track. "It's a 100-run-a-session wicket. We also made 120 today. Plus minus 20-30 runs, but we'll try to get there."

Jadeja, who bowled more than a third of the overs in the Australia innings, kept India in the game, dismissing Matthew Wade for 37 and the scoreless Cummins in the same over. Smith missed his double century when he sprinted for a risky second run and bowler Jadeja, his back to the stumps, collected a throw and flicked the ball onto the wickets to run out Josh Hazlewood. Maxwell predicted Cummins would trouble India when the third day's play resumes. "He's a guy who can get that variable bounce with the way he digs the ball into the wicket," he said of his team mate. "Hopefully, he's extremely effective for us tomorrow. That extra pace is hard to adjust..." The four-test series is all square at 1-1. — Reuters

THOMPSON LEADS WARRIORS PAST MAGIC

OAKLAND: Klay Thompson scored 21 of his 29 points in the first quarter and the Golden State Warriors cruised past the Orlando Magic 122-92 in the NBA on Thursday night. Stephen Curry added 25 points and nine assists after appearing to injure his right foot in the opening minutes, Andre Iguodala scored 14 and Zaza Pachulia had 10 points and 10 rebounds to help the Warriors improve to an NBA-best 54-14 and clinch their third straight Pacific Division title. Thompson, who owns the NBA record for most points in one quarter with 37 against Sacramento on Jan. 23, 2015, was almost perfect in the opening period against Orlando. The three-time All-Star made his first five shots beyond the arc and shot 8 of 11 overall while helping the Warriors to an early double-digit lead. Elfrid Payton and Jeff Green scored 13 points apiece for Orlando.

CAVALIERS 91, JAZZ 83

Kevin Love returned from knee surgery, but Kyrie Irving made an early exit with knee problems of his own as the Cleveland Cavaliers toppled the Utah Jazz 91-83 on Thursday. The Cavaliers can thank their lucky stars they still have a healthy four-time NBA MVP LeBron James, who was more than happy to pick up the slack. As soon as Irving realized his wonky left knee was acting up again he went to James and asked "have you got this?" James, of course said "Yes", and responded by pumping in 17 of his game-high 33 points in the fourth quarter. Love, who hadn't played since February 11 and underwent knee surgery three days later, scored 10 points and grabbed nine rebounds in 20 minutes. Irving scored 21 points, but he did not play in the fourth quarter because of left knee tightness.

Cavaliers guard Iman Shumpert also left in the third quarter due to a left arm injury. "You're going to get some knick-knacks, you're going to get banged up," Cavs coach Tyrone Lue said. "But fortunately for us, our guys are ok. It's nothing serious, so we're fine with those two guys." Lue said Shumpert was "day-to-day" and Irving was "fine," though Irving suggested there was a chance he'd miss at least the first game of an upcoming, four-game trip that starts Saturday in Los Angeles. "I'm hoping that I don't have to miss any days, but if it really comes down to that and the bigger picture is way more important than a few days, then that's what it's going to be," Irving said. Utah was led by Rudy Gobert, who had 20 points and 19 rebounds. Gordon Hayward scored 13 points and Joe Ingles added 12.

THUNDER 123, RAPTORS 102

Russell Westbrook had 24 points, 16 assists and 10 rebounds in three quarters for his 34th triple-double of the NBA season as the Oklahoma City Thunder registered their fourth consecutive win with a victory over the Toronto Raptors. The league's leading scorer moved closer to the NBA's single-season record for triple-doubles, 41 set by Oscar Robertson in the 1961-62 season. Oklahoma has 14 regular season games left. Victor Oladipo added 23 points as the Thunder split the season series with the Raptors, the fourth straight year the teams have done so. DeMar DeRozan had 22 points for the Raptors, while Serge Ibaka had 10 points against his former team.

RIZZLIES 103, HAWKS 91

Marc Gasol had 18 points as part of his triple-double to help resurgent Memphis topped Atlanta. Gasol, who had 10 rebounds



OAKLAND: Golden State Warriors' David West, left, steals the ball from Orlando Magic's Mario Hezonja (8) as Warriors' Matt Barnes, right, defends during the first half. — AP

and 10 assists, reached the triple-double with his assist on JaMychal Green's 3-pointer with 3:10 remaining. The Grizzlies have won three straight - including road games at Chicago and Atlanta on back-to-back nights - following a five-game losing streak. Mike Conley had 22 points and 12 assists, while Green added 14 points and 12 rebounds. Tim Hardaway Jr led Atlanta with 18 points.

NETS 121, KNICKS 110

Brook Lopez scored 24 points as the Brooklyn Nets dominated the second half to beat the Knicks for their second victory over their New York rivals in five days. The Nets made five straight 3-pointers during a 38-point third quarter, turning around the game after they were just 2 for 16 behind the arc in the first half. Rondae Hollis-Jefferson added 20 points and 10 rebounds for Brooklyn, which beat New York 120-112 at home on Sunday and earned a split of the city series after the Knicks won the first two meetings. Former Knicks star Jeremy Lin had 15 points and eight assists in his first game at Madison Square Garden this season. Kyle O'Quinn came off the bench to score 23 points for the Knicks, who still haven't won consecutive games in 2017.

NUGGETS 129, CLIPPERS 114

Will Barton scored a career-high 35 points, Nikola Jokic recorded his fifth triple-double of the season and Denver beat Los Angeles to win its fourth straight. Jokic finished with 17

points, 14 rebounds and 11 assists to help lead Denver to a win in a matchup of short-handed teams.

The Clippers played without Blake Griffin and DeAndre Jordan, who were left back in Los Angeles for the one-game trip. Denver forwards Wilson Chandler (right groin) and

Danilo Gallinari (left knee bone bruise) also sat, but Kenneth Faried returned after missing nine games with lower back spasms. Faried had 12 points in 18 minutes. Chris Paul had 18 points and 14 assists, JJ Redick scored a team-high 22 and Austin Rivers had 17 for the Clippers, who have lost three straight. — AP

NBA results/standings

Golden State 122, Orlando 92; Denver 129, LA Clippers 114; Brooklyn 121, NY Knicks 110; Memphis 103, Atlanta 91; Cleveland 91, Utah 83; Oklahoma City 123, Toronto 102.

| Eastern Conference | | | | Western Conference | | | | |
|--------------------|----|----|------|--------------------|---------------|----|----|------|
| Atlantic Division | | | | Northwest Division | | | | |
| | W | L | PCT | GB | | | | |
| Boston | 43 | 25 | .632 | - | Utah | 43 | 26 | .623 |
| Toronto | 39 | 29 | .574 | 4 | Oklahoma City | 39 | 29 | .574 |
| NY Knicks | 27 | 42 | .391 | 16.5 | Denver | 33 | 35 | .485 |
| Philadelphia | 24 | 43 | .358 | 18.5 | Portland | 30 | 37 | .448 |
| Brooklyn | 13 | 54 | .194 | 29.5 | Minnesota | 28 | 39 | .418 |
| Central Division | | | | Pacific Division | | | | |
| Cleveland | 45 | 22 | .672 | - | Golden State | 54 | 14 | .794 |
| Indiana | 35 | 33 | .515 | 10.5 | LA Clippers | 40 | 29 | .580 |
| Milwaukee | 33 | 34 | .493 | 12 | Sacramento | 27 | 41 | .397 |
| Detroit | 33 | 35 | .485 | 12.5 | Phoenix | 22 | 46 | .324 |
| Chicago | 32 | 36 | .471 | 13.5 | LA Lakers | 20 | 48 | .294 |
| Southeast Division | | | | Southwest Division | | | | |
| Washington | 41 | 26 | .612 | - | San Antonio | 52 | 15 | .776 |
| Atlanta | 37 | 31 | .544 | 4.5 | Houston | 47 | 21 | .691 |
| Miami | 33 | 35 | .485 | 8.5 | Memphis | 39 | 30 | .565 |
| Charlotte | 29 | 39 | .426 | 12.5 | Dallas | 29 | 38 | .433 |
| Orlando | 24 | 45 | .348 | 18 | New Orleans | 27 | 41 | .397 |

BALOTELLI BACKS MONACO IN TUSSELE FOR FRENCH TITLE

PARIS: Mario Balotelli says Manchester City's mid-week slayers Monaco have the stars and the spirit to edge a reeling Paris Saint Germain in a tight French title race. With nine games to go it is a three-way tussle between Balotelli's Nice, PSG and Monaco, with the latter underlining their rich promise by ejecting Pep Guardiola's City in the Champions League last 16.

Free-scoring Monaco are top with 68 points, with PSG on 65 points and Nice 63 points. Monaco travel north to Caen tomorrow, the same day PSG face a showdown with fourth-placed Lyon in Paris. "Paris Saint Germain have phenomenal players but no team, while Monaco have one phenomenal player in Falcao and then a strong group with great team

spirit," Italian striker Balotelli told RMC sport radio on Wednesday.

His Nice team, who go to Nantes on Saturday, were the league pacesetters and even though they have fallen to third Balotelli predicts a great future. "This is a young side, even younger than me, and next season will be a special one," said the former Milan, Manchester City and Liverpool striker, 26, whose side should at least qualify for the Champions League next season. Balotelli will sit out the last game of his latest suspension.

His dig at PSG could prove prophetic as the capital club face a Lyon side in a real purple patch at the Parc des Princes. Alexandre Lacazette failed to make Didier Deschamps' France squad this week but he

has 22 league goals this season. PSG are still trying to re-galvanize themselves after a gut-wrenching collapse at Barcelona a week ago sent a shockwave through the club.

"The Parisian" daily newspaper asked Thursday if it was time to strip Thiago Silva of the captaincy and hand it to Edinson Cavani, their stand-out player so far this season with 38 goals in 38 games. Monaco have scored an astronomical 84 goals in the league with 18-year-old prodigy Kylian Mbappe notching 11 in his last 11, earning a call-up for France. "Quality and talent don't have an age," Deschamps said. "I find Kylian very mature. His strength is his serenity, his calmness when one-on-one with a goalkeeper. For a youngster of his age, it's very rare." — AFP

TORINO'S HART IN INTER'S FIRING LINE

MILAN: The attacking threat of Inter Milan should present a severe test to Serie A-loving England goalkeeper Joe Hart as his side Torino host on form visitors tomorrow. With 15 goals from their past three league outings, Inter's bid for a top three finish and a return to the Champions League for the first time since 2012 is taking shape.

But Stefano Pioli's men remain six points behind Napoli in the third and last Champions League qualifying spot and the coach said Thursday: "Torino have some top class players, so we have to be wary. We have to take things one game at a time and try to keep winning until the end of the season." Hart joined Torino on a season-long loan deal from Manchester City after being rejected by coach Pep Guardiola and has conceded 42 of the 46 goals shipped so far this campaign.

Yet the 29-year-old remains a hugely popular figure in the former Italian capital and seems in no hurry to return to England, despite Guardiola affirming Hart "remains a City player" earlier this week. "I'm truly grateful to the fans for everything they're giving me," Hart told media at a sponsors' event in Turin on Wednesday. "There's nothing I don't like about Italian football, from the fans to the coach, Serie A and the culture. I like all of it. I will take that into account when it comes to considering my future, but for now I'm focused on Toro and what I need to do."

Spanner in the works

At 31 points behind leaders Juventus and 15 points off the closest Europa League place, Torino have little to play for over the remaining 10 fixtures. But the 'Granata' could throw a spanner in the works for Inter, who after a five-year absence are desperate to contend the competition they won in 2010 as part of a memorable treble under Jose Mourinho. Even before kick-off, emotions will be running high. A former free-kick specialist with Lazio, Mihajlovic played out his career with Inter before beginning his coaching career as an assistant to Roberto Mancini with the Nerazzurri. Mihajlovic also coached Inter's city rivals AC Milan before being sacked by the Rossoneri in April 2016. There's also the small matter of Maxi Lopez and Mauro Icardi. Formerly best friends while playing at Sampdoria, the Argentinians have been at war since Icardi ran off with Lopez's wife Wanda Nara, and the couple's two children.

On previous meetings, Torino striker Lopez has refused to even look at Icardi at the pre-match handshake, let alone shake his hand. Although Icardi hit a hat-trick in a 7-1 rout of Atalanta last week to take his season tally to 20, a slimline Lopez hit one in a 3-1 reverse at Lazio last time out and Torino striker Andrea Belotti is leading the league on 22 strikes. "Since he (Lopez) has lost weight, he's scored twice. Thankfully he's starting to come into some good form," said the Serbian. With Inter away, injury-ravaged Milan host Genoa at the San Siro looking to maintain their bid for a Europa League place. Vincenzo Montella's men are seventh, four points behind Inter and desperate not to suffer a second consecutive defeat to Genoa after a 3-0 upset last October. Montella will be without inspirational Spanish playmaker Suso, striker Carlos Bacca and defender Ignazio Abate, all through injury. — AFP

KIMMICH: GERMANY STAR, BAYERN BENCHWARMER

BERLIN: Joshua Kimmich started the season as Germany's first-choice right-back after making the Team of the Tournament at Euro 2016 — yet now cuts a dejected figure warming Bayern Munich's bench. Should he face Borussia Moenchengladbach in Sunday's Bundesliga clash, it would be his first Bayern start since January, yet Kimmich could still face England for Germany in next Wednesday's friendly.

The 22-year-old rocketed into the Germany team last season after his career took off when he made his Bayern debut in August 2015 after signing a five-year contract from RB Leipzig. His Bayern debut sparked a meteoric rise over the next 12 months. The shy youngster caught the attention of Bayern's then coach Pep Guardiola, who played the versatile Kimmich in midfield or defense.

"He's perhaps one of the best centre-backs in the world," Guardiola said after Kimmich played the full 120 minutes of last May's German Cup final when Bayern beat Borussia Dortmund on penalties. "He's got the desire, the will, the passion. He's got absolutely everything." Kimmich started 15 times in 23 appearances for Bayern last season and outstanding appearances put him on the radar of Germany's head coach Joachim Loew.

Kimmich made his Germany debut in a Euro 2016 warm-up match, then took World Cup winner Benedikt Hoewedes' place at right-back for the final group stage game. Kimmich kept his place throughout the knock-out stages as Germany lost to hosts France in the semi-finals. Along with Jerome Boateng and Toni Kroos, he was one of the three Germans included in UEFA's Team of the Tournament.

Winds of autumn

When Carlo Ancelotti replaced Guardiola as Bayern's head coach for 2016/17, Kimmich started with a bang, netting seven goals in his first seven games. But when the winds of autumn blew, Kimmich found himself being used more and more as a replacement by Ancelotti. Since December he has made just one appearance over the 90 minutes in any competition.

Last Saturday, Kimmich was again a dejected figure on the bench over 90



BERLIN: This file photo taken on February 18, 2017 shows Bayern Munich's midfielder Joshua Kimmich plays the ball during the German First division Bundesliga football match Hertha Berlin vs Bayern Munich. — AFP

minutes in Bayern's 3-0 home win against Eintracht Frankfurt. "I'm not happy about it. I know I have no right to a starting place, but I want to chance the situation," Kimmich told magazine Kicker. "I know things can't always go well, but I know what I can do. There will be other occasions." Like his predecessors before him, Ancelotti is simply unable to give all of Bayern's squad starting places.

Certainly there will be chances by next season at the latest as both captain Philipp Lahm and Xabi Alonso will retire in June. Kimmich can slot into either Alonso's defensive midfield role or take Lahm's place at right-back. "Josh has shown at which level he can play football. It is just a matter of time before he plays again," insisted Lahm.

Certainly Kimmich's versatility and youth counted against him when 31-

year-old Rafinha was picked to play at right-back in the 5-1 Champions League quarter-final, second-leg, mauling of Arsenal in London. "Rafinha plays, because he's old," quipped Ancelotti. But Kimmich's situation is no laughing matter and he needs to know whether Bayern have long-term plans for him.

Especially as Germany centre-back Niklas Suele and defensive midfielder Sebastian Rudy will arrive from Hoffenheim next season. Kimmich needs to position himself as Alonso's successor, according to ex-Germany and Bayern midfielder Stefan Effenberg. "Joshua Kimmich must have a future at Bayern Munich," said Effenberg. "You can't sell or send on loan such a young player who already has a lot of experience. He will grow into a big role and also expects that from himself. He needs to make that clear." — AFP

MAN UTD DRAW ANDERLECHT IN EUROPA

NYON: Manchester United will face Belgian club Anderlecht in the Europa League quarter-finals after Friday's draw in Nyon, which saw France's Lyon land Turkish champions Besiktas. Jose Mourinho's side are the only English club left in the competition after laboring to a 2-1 aggregate win over Russian side FC Rostov in the last 16.

United are favorites to win the competition for the first time in Solna, Sweden on May 24 which could earn them a passage into next season's Champions League. It will be the fourth meeting between the sides, with United winning the three previous ones. Their record European victory was against Anderlecht, a 10-0 rout at Old Trafford in the

European Cup preliminary round in 1956. Spanish sides have won seven of the last eleven second-tier European titles and hopes of further domination rest on Celta Vigo's shoulders as they take on Belgian club Genk. Two former winners were pitched together as Dutch giants and 1992 champions Ajax face Germany's Schalke 04, who won in 1999, in home and away ties to be played on April 13 and 20.

Schalke's Dutch striker Klass-Jan Huntelaar, formerly of PSV Eindhoven, tweeted "Amsterdam, Amsterdam, Amsterdam," to show his delight at landing his former rivals. Lyon are seen as second favourites after United to lift the trophy after overcoming Roma and were upset despite a tough

draw. "They're a great team and there'll be an amazing atmosphere," said Lyon advisor Bernard Lacombe. Besiktas director Ali Naibi felt the same way. "Playing the second leg in front of our own crowd will help. Lyon have experienced and talented players, so it'll be difficult," he warned.

Draw

Anderlecht (BEL) v Manchester United (ENG)
Celta Vigo (ESP) v Genk (BEL)
Ajax (NED) v Schalke (GER)
Lyon (FRA) v Besiktas (TUR)
Ties to be played on April 13 and 20
Semi-finals: May 4 and 11
Final: May 24 at Solna, Sweden —AFP

REAL DRAW BAYERN, JUVE V BARCA WHILE ATLETICO GET LEICESTER IN CL

NYON: Holders Real Madrid will face their former coach Carlo Ancelotti's Bayern Munich in the Champions League quarter-finals as Juventus were drawn yesterday against comeback kings Barcelona. English champions Leicester play their first quarter-finals in the top-tier European competition against Atletico Madrid as France's Monaco clash with Borussia Dortmund over two legs in April. Ancelotti, who led 11-time winners Real to their tenth Champions League title in 2014, was looking forward to a special tie.

"It is going to be exciting to play against them. We are very confident and want to win the Champions League this season," said Ancelotti, who also won the European title twice with AC Milan. "I think we have the ability to beat Real Madrid." Bayern chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge was relishing a 'classic' as his five-time winners target more than just a sixth straight semi-final appearance.

"This is a classic, which is probably the absolute top draw that lay in the pot," said the former Germany striker. "All football fans in the world can look forward to it." Real Madrid director Emilio Butragueno, however, appeared downcast. "It is one of the worst draws we could have got without a doubt but it is also for them," said Butragueno.

"We would have liked to have faced them further on in the competition," the former Spanish international said. "It is not the best draw, but we too have top quality players with a lot of experience and it is a great tie. For sure the whole world will be watching these two games." Italian giants Juventus can avenge their narrow 2015 final defeat against Barcelona, but face the daunting task of muting the competition's top marksman Lionel Messi.

Massive Leicester challenge

Barcelona's dramatic comeback from 4-0 down in the last 16 first leg, crushing Paris Saint-Germain 6-1 in a Neymar-inspired rout, was ample warning for any rival. Juventus vice-president Pavel Nedved hinted at the size of the task ahead of them. "You need to be at your best for 180 minutes or more to overcome Barca," said former midfielder Nedved. "It's a fascinating tie. Juve have improved a lot since 2015 and this team can play without fear against Barcelona."

Leicester landed last year's beaten finalists Atletico Madrid, a draw which prompted British bookmakers to slash



NYON, Switzerland: Former Welsh soccer player Ian Rush, and ambassador for the UEFA Champions League final in Cardiff, shows a ticket with England's soccer team Leicester City FC during the quarterfinal draw of the UEFA Champions League 2016/17 at the UEFA headquarters, in Nyon, Switzerland, yesterday. —AFP

the odds making Atletico third favourites to lift the trophy in the June 3 final at Cardiff behind Barcelona and Bayern. The Foxes will travel to the Spanish capital for the first leg in the week beginning April 10, with the second match the following week.

Leicester are England's sole representatives following the elimination in the last 16 of Manchester City and Arsenal. Diego Simeone's Atletico have reached the Champions League final in two of the last three seasons, losing to city rivals Real on both occasions, last year on penalties. "Facing a team who have reached the final in two of the last three seasons is a massive challenge but it's just the kind of tie you expect in the quarter-finals of the Champions League," said Leicester replacement manager Craig Shakespeare.

"Atletico Madrid are a very good team with some fantastic individuals with experience in the competition, but we'll be ready to give everything to progress. "It will be a brilliant occasion for our supporters and for everyone at the club but, before the players can begin to think about these games, we have Premier League matches to come that are of huge significance to our season. They will be our sole focus."

France's free scoring Monaco were drawn to meet Thomas Tuchel's Borussia Dortmund meaning goal king Pierre Emerick Aubameyang goes back to his old club. "I saw Monaco's match against Manchester City and I am aware that they have a goal difference of +58 in the league. It's a difficult match," said Dortmund chairman Hans Watzke. —AFP



Matches on TV
(Local Timings)

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

| | |
|----------------------------|-------|
| West Bromwich v Arsenal | 15:30 |
| BeIN SPORTS | |
| Everton FC Hull City | 18:00 |
| BeIN SPORTS | |
| Sunderland v Burnley FC | 18:00 |
| BeIN SPORTS | |
| West Ham v Leicester City | 18:00 |
| BeIN SPORTS | |
| Crystal Palace v Watford | 18:00 |
| BeIN SPORTS | |
| Stoke City v Chelsea FC | 18:00 |
| BeIN SPORTS | |
| Bournemouth v Swansea City | 20:30 |
| BeIN SPORTS | |

SPANISH LEAGUE

| | |
|---------------------------|-------|
| SD Eibar v RCD Espanyol | 15:00 |
| BeIN SPORTS | |
| Bilbao v Real Madrid | 8:15 |
| BeIN SPORTS | |
| Deportivo v Real Sociedad | 20:30 |
| BeIN SPORTS | |
| Real Betis v Osasuna | 22:45 |
| BeIN SPORTS | |

ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE

| | |
|-------------------------|-------|
| Torino v Internazionale | 20:30 |
| BeIN SPORTS | |
| AC Milan v Genoa CFC | 22:45 |
| BeIN SPORTS | |

GERMAN BUNDESLIGA

| | |
|----------------------------|-------|
| Werder Bremen v RB Leipzig | 17:30 |
| BeIN SPORTS | |
| FC Koln v Hertha Berlin | 17:30 |
| BeIN SPORTS | |
| Wolfsburg v SV Darmstadt | 17:30 |
| BeIN SPORTS | |
| FC Augsburg v SC Freiburg | 17:30 |
| BeIN SPORTS | |
| Hoffenheim v Bayer 04 | 17:30 |
| BeIN SPORTS | |
| Eintracht v Hamburger | 20:30 |
| BeIN SPORTS | |

FRENCH LEAGUE

| | |
|--------------------------|------|
| Nantes v OGC Nice | 9:00 |
| BeIN SPORTS | |
| Toulouse v Stade Rennes | 2:00 |
| BeIN SPORTS | |
| Nancy Lorraine v Lorient | 2:00 |
| BeIN SPORTS | |
| Girondins v Montpellier | 2:00 |
| BeIN SPORTS | |
| Angers v Guingamp | 2:00 |
| BeIN SPORTS | |

FIVE THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR IN LA LIGA

MADRID: Ahead of a huge round of La Liga action at both ends of the table, AFP Sports looks at five things to watch out for this weekend:

Valverde's Barca audition

Real Madrid's trip north to the Basque country to face Athletic Bilbao is always a fixture laced with tension based on decades of political divide. However, there is even more on the line than normal today. Victory would move Madrid five points clear of Barcelona at the top of the table, whilst Athletic are also in need of the points as they sit just four points off the European places. Moreover, with Bilbao boss Ernesto Valverde the favorite to take charge of Barcelona next season, what better way for the former Barca player to prove his credentials than helping out his old and potentially future club in the title race.

Battle for third

A disastrous two weeks for Sevilla has seen them slip out of contention for the title and dumped out the Champions League by Leicester City in midweek. Now the Andalusians must concentrate on holding off a resurgent Atletico Madrid to seal third and a direct route back into the Champions League next season. Sevilla hold a five-point lead over Atletico, but visit the Vicente Calderon for the final time on Sunday needing an immediate reaction from their Leicester debacle.

Last chance for Sporting, Granada

For Sporting Gijon and Granada to have any chance of beating relegation a win when they face off on Sunday looks imperative. Granada in 18th are six points adrift of safety with Sporting one place and point even worse off. Sporting haven't won at home since December, whilst Granada have failed to win on the road all season. Neither side will have a better chance to end those unwanted runs than at El Molinon.

Barcelona backlash

After the euphoria of the biggest Champions League comeback of all time against Paris Saint-Germain, Barcelona were quickly brought back to earth with a bang in a 2-1 defeat at Deportivo la Coruna last weekend. With Neymar fit again, though, the Catalans will be expecting to add to the 25 goals they have scored in winning their last six La Liga games at home when a struggling Valencia visit Camp Nou on Sunday. Amidst a desperately disappointing season, Valencia have though tended to save their best for the big occasion. Last month Los Che beat Real Madrid, whilst Barca needed a stoppage time penalty from Lionel Messi to secure all three points when they visited Mestalla in a bad-tempered encounter in October.

Galician pride on the line

Deportivo's first win over Barca since 2008 moved Pepe Mel's men eight points clear of the relegation zone and to within eight points of Galician rivals Celta Vigo. Celta enjoyed a great week themselves by booking their place in the quarter-finals of the Europa League. But with Celta boss Eduardo Berizzo prioritising Europe over La Liga, Deportivo have a great chance to keep rising up the table and avenge a 4-1 thrashing at the hands of Celta earlier in the season. —AFP



LONDON: Chelsea's Italian head coach Antonio Conte (L) shakes hands with Chelsea's Brazilian defender David Luiz on the pitch after the English FA Cup quarter final football match between Chelsea and Manchester United at Stamford Bridge. —AFP

CHELSEA ON TITLE MARCH, SAGNA URGES RESPONSE

LONDON: Bacary Sagna insists Manchester City will make amends for their Champions League misery by securing a crucial win against Liverpool, while leaders Chelsea aim to move a step closer to the Premier League title this weekend. Pep Guardiola's side were eliminated from Europe's elite club competition in stunning fashion on Wednesday as they blew a 5-3 first leg advantage to go out on away goals following a 3-1 defeat at Monaco.

It was another major setback for City manager Guardiola, who had never before seen one of his teams knocked out before the Champions League quarter-finals. Former Barcelona and Bayern Munich boss Guardiola was heavily criticised for his tactics and team selection in Monaco, but City defender Sagna is adamant the blame lies with the players for failing to show enough fight.

With third placed City just one point ahead of fourth placed Liverpool in the battle for a top four finish, Guardiola needs a lift and Sagna called on his team-mates to get back on track with a vital three points at Eastlands on Sunday. "We forgot to fight as a team," Sagna said. "We are out and we have to recover because on Sunday we have an important game."

"I expect a reaction from the team. I expect more desire, to show more passion. "We have to recover because it was quite a difficult game and then we have to think about Liverpool." Having won three of their last four games, Liverpool have opened up a five-

point gap on fifth placed Arsenal as the race for Champions League qualification heats up.

Arsenal travel to West Bromwich Albion with Gunners boss Arsene Wenger hoping last weekend's FA Cup win over minnows Lincoln has lifted his players' shattered morale. Rocked by the humiliation of a 10-2 aggregate defeat against Bayern Munich in the Champions League last 16, Wenger has endured calls for his resignation from angry fans and failing to finish in the top four might convince the Frenchman to step down. "When you care about results and they are not what you want it's not a happy place," Wenger said. "Our job is to do as we well can. We want to play Champions League next season. Six or seven fighting for the places. "Nothing is good enough anymore so you try to do as well as you can."

Dirty work

With a 10-point lead over second placed Tottenham, Chelsea look odds on to regain the title two years after they were last crowned champions, but it will be intriguing to see how they fare at Stoke following an emotional FA Cup quarter-final victory over Manchester United on Monday. A fiercely-contested clash was tilted Chelsea's way by N'Golo Kante's fine winner, while Blues boss Antonio Conte and United manager Jose Mourinho almost came to blows on the touchline. —AFP

LEICESTER LOOK TO BOOST SURVIVAL HOPES

LONDON: Leicester will feed off the momentum from their dramatic Champions League victory over Sevilla as they return to the battle for Premier League survival at West Ham today. After overseeing Premier League victories over Liverpool and Hull following the shock sacking of Claudio Ranieri, Leicester boss Craig Shakespeare led the Foxes into the Champions League quarter-finals on Tuesday as their campaign of wildly contrasting fortunes continued.

Such was the euphoria surrounding their 2-0 victory over Sevilla in the last 16, their perilous position just three points above the Premier League relegation zone was forgotten, for a few hours at least. But Shakespeare is preparing to bring his players back down to earth by preventing them watching the quarter-final draw,

which could see them pitted against European giants including Real Madrid, Barcelona or Bayern Munich.

"We will be training. We will find out when we go back in after training," Shakespeare said. "We want to train as normal and the preparation has to be for the West Ham game. "Depending how long it goes on for, we will be out training because we are travelling down to West Ham afterwards. There will be plenty of time for us afterwards to get word of who we are playing."

Shakespeare also defended Leicester striker Jamie Vardy against allegations of cheating from Sevilla's Samir Nasri. Nasri was dismissed for a second bookable offence after the pair went head to head and later accused Vardy of cheating by exaggerating the clash.

Naive

But Shakespeare said: "Jamie's not a cheat and never has been, never will be. I think Jamie responded well to the comment and we have to put it to bed. "The game has gone, the referee made his decision and we have to move on." Leicester have lost the services of Molla Wague, with the on-loan Udinese defender ruled out for the rest of the season with a dislocated shoulder.

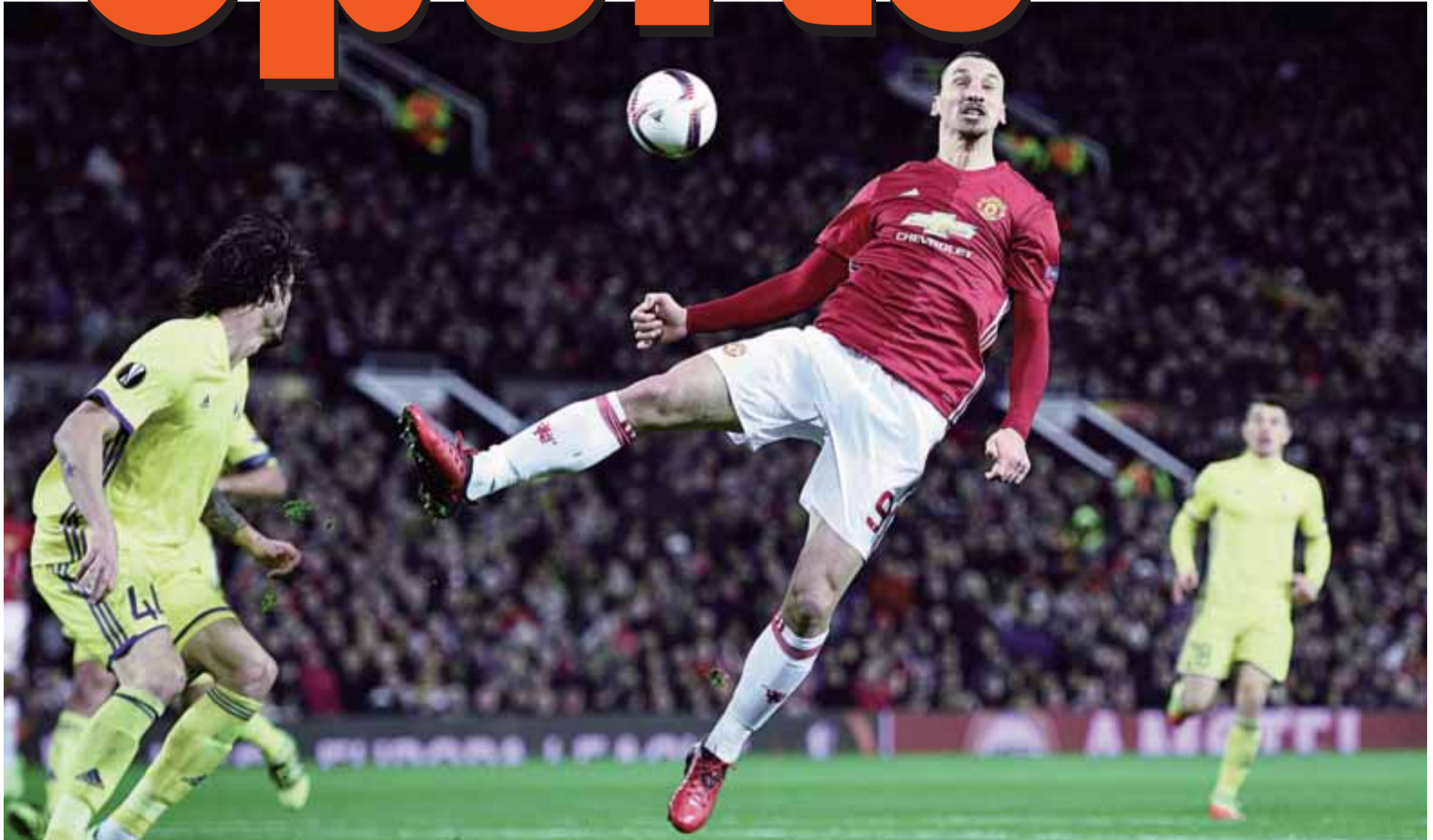
Meanwhile, West Ham manager Slaven Bilic said he had been impressed with Vardy's performance against Sevilla as the striker continues his resurgence after a lacklustre first half of the season. "It was Vardy from last year," Bilic said. "It was like a copy and paste performance. "It was not only him, but the strikers set the tempo with pressing and timing. It was not only against Sevilla. It was also straight away against Liverpool. —AFP

Sports



Champs
League
draw results

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MANCHESTER: Manchester United's Swedish striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic (C) jumps for the ball during the UEFA Europa League round of 16 second-leg football match between Manchester United and FC Rostov at Old Trafford stadium. —AFP

MAN UNITED LABOR TO ROSTOV WIN

POGBA INJURED IN HARD FOUGHT EUROPA VICTORY

MANCHESTER: Juan Mata scored the only goal as Manchester United recorded an underwhelming 1-0 victory over FC Rostov on Thursday to reach the Europa League quarter-finals. Mata struck 20 minutes from the end of a subdued game, completing a 2-1 aggregate win that sent United into the last eight of Europe's second-tier club competition for the first time since 1985. But victory came at the cost of an injury to world-record signing Paul Pogba, who left the fray with an apparent hamstring injury early in the second half at an unseasonably cold Old Trafford.

United manager Jose Mourinho said Pogba's injury was due to "fatigue" and hit out at unnamed "enemies" in an apparent reference to his side's jam-packed fixture schedule. "Normally the enemies should be Rostov, but we have a lot of enemies," Mourinho told BT Sport. "It's difficult to play Monday with 10 men (against Chelsea). It's difficult to play now. It's difficult to play 12 o'clock on Sunday (against Middlesbrough). We have a lot of enemies."

Mourinho's men are seeking to add the Europa League trophy to the League Cup they won last month and have the extra incentive of knowing it will yield a place in next season's Champions League. Mourinho kept faith with the back three he had deployed in Monday's 1-0 FA Cup defeat at Chelsea, but whereas it was a

defensive tactic at Stamford Bridge, there was very little defending to do against Rostov.

Decried for a below-par display at Chelsea, Pogba was able to spray diagonal passes around to his heart's content, such as the Russian side's stubborn determination to defend the edge of their own box. Marcos Rojo had an early header swatted away by visiting goalkeeper Nikita Medvedev, with Zlatan Ibrahimovic putting the rebound against the post from a tight angle.

Jones wing-back

Henrikh Mkhitaryan ran through and chipped wide from Mata's pass and might have won a penalty in the 27th minute following a push by Medvedev, but Lithuanian referee Gediminas Mazaika said no. Ibrahimovic also saw a shot deflected over by Medvedev and later left the right-hand post quaking with a thunderous shot, while Pogba's left-foot curler drew a full-length save from Medvedev.

Pogba departed in the 47th minute, Marouane Fellaini taking his place, and Rostov briefly threatened to take the upper hand, Sergio Romero saving from Sardar Azmoun and Christian Noboa. United also lost Daley Blind after he took a bang to the head,

which resulted in the curious sight of Phil Jones coming on as a jobbing left wing-back. The hosts finally made the breakthrough in the 70th minute after Mata intercepted a loose pass in midfield and spread the ball wide to Mkhitaryan on the United right.

The Armenian's low cross was back-heeled towards goal by Ibrahimovic and Mata charged in at the back post to slam home from close range. Aleksandr Bukharov, Rostov's scorer in the first leg, threatened to peg United back in the 79th minute, but Romero was equal to both his glancing header and Noboa's dangerous stoppage-time free-kick.

A major threat to United in the next round could be Schalke, who grabbed a 2-2 draw at fellow German side Borussia Muenchengladbach to sneak through 3-3 on away goals. Also narrowly through are in-form Lyon, who went down 2-1 at Roma on the night but held on to progress 5-4 over the two legs. Genk advanced to the quarter-finals as expected after they held Belgian compatriots Gent 1-1 at home, easing through 6-3 on aggregate. Completing the last-eight line-up are Celta Vigo, Anderlecht, Ajax and Besiktas, who had Cameroon striker and goal-scorer Vincent Aboubakar sent off in the first half but still smashed Olympiakos 4-1 at home. —AFP