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IS CLAIMS RESPONSIBILITY FOR UK TERROR ATTACK

SEE PAGE 15



Local Spotlight

NO SALARY FOR MONTHS!!!



By Muna Al-Fuzai

muna@kuwaittimes.net

Volunteer work is an act of charity that someone may decide to do in their spare time. But when a person signs a work contract and works, they expect to get paid a salary. In fact, it is a requirement in religion and in law that those who do work be paid on a timely manner.

But almost daily we hear stories from across the Gulf of foreign workers who sometimes go months and months without receiving their salaries. This is a blatant abuse of human rights and shows the lopsided and unjust system that allows sponsors to treat employees thus.

How many of us would work for free for even a week? Now consider how you would feel not receiving your income for months on end and with limited, to no recourse with the authorities. We are all responsible before Allah for these abuses.

One expatriate worker recently complained: "The company requires all employees to work every day. But they do not pay out salaries for the work done. I have had seven months of delayed salaries and I do not know how I'm still surviving. My family was also in Kuwait but due to financial problems, I sent them back home and they are suffering too. And this is happening not only to me. There are a lot of my fellow Indians who are also facing the same problem. We came here to work and earn a decent living. Now we are struggling every day and our life here is like hell. We have filed cases with the labor courts, complained to our respective embassies several times but it is all a failure."

Well sir, I am ashamed that this is happening in my country and no one cares. No one at all. Why? Because you are poor and have no power to fight for your rights. Well, you might be in hell now but we will burn in hell if we continue to turn a blind eye to these injustices. Ethically, we the Kuwaitis are responsible to call for justice and fair living for all those who come to our country as guests to work and earn their living and they should be given their legal rights just as a modern and civilized country.

I wonder why the ministry of labor (shoon) is not doing more to stop these practices? That is indeed a good question and I hope some lawmaker will take up this question in parliament. Why are embassies not calling on their lawyers to file cases on behalf of all those workers citizens?

I am sorry for the situation you are suffering. Please don't think all Kuwaitis are like your company owners who think they might be protected now by the power they hold but Allah is the highest power and I hope this call will find its way to listening ears.

PHOTO OF THE DAY



A nighttime view of the new Jaber Al-Ahmed Cultural Center (JACC) in Kuwait City. — Photo by Jaber Abdulkhalik / Kuna

IMPRINT

HOW ABOUT CENSORING CENSORSHIP?



By Nejouad Al-Yagout

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This week, Disney decided to pull Beauty and the Beast from theaters across Kuwait, because our local censors, ever-ready to step up to defending antiquated beliefs of separation, decided it was best to cut what they deemed was inappropriate for the masses. Additionally, just in case once was not enough, it was also announced that Tarweek fi Beirut, a movie directed by Kuwaiti filmmaker Farah Al-Hashim, was banned at our very first Film Festival here for trivial reasons: Attire and dialogue that is offensive to what the censors perceive as an ultra-sensitive, ultra-conservative society - which is certainly not the case for every single member of our community. Interestingly enough, this movie was celebrated at film festivals in Italy, Australia and Egypt. What is more interesting about this is how the censors believe that their way of thinking should be implemented by everyone in society, regardless of others' beliefs. And one wonders how they get away with it, while many of us feel saddened by the fact that we are not permitted to enjoy art to its fullest degree in our country, especially at a time when the cultural scene is booming. It seems as though art, unless censored, is offensive to the fabric of conditioning, weaved by a patriarchy that seems to be holding on by a thread. I wonder how a concert, a nude sculpture, or a kissing scene can terrify a person? Most of us appreciate art for what it is. And it is poignantly beautiful to be able to express ourselves without worrying about others. How can we censor art? How? Though many people would argue that the majority of Kuwaitis agree with censorship, there are also many, many Kuwaitis who are opposed to censorship in any form. What happened to living in a society of live and let live? And though the censors use religion as justification, might one add that even the Koran stipulates: You have your religion, and I have mine.

Religion, or the lack of it, for that matter, is a personal journey. Whether or not one adheres is not up to a board

of men. Women here understand that they cannot wear bikinis in public beaches or "provocative" clothing anywhere. Women and men know that they cannot drink in public. All are aware that public displays of affection are not permitted. There are many codes of behavior that - though not accepted by everyone - are silently implemented. But isn't it pushing a tad too far when art is involved in the equation? Not censoring something does not mean we agree with it. It means we are strong enough in our own convictions while respecting the fact that varied convictions hold true for others. Isn't it tragic when music concerts are considered corrupt, though music is an integral part of our ancestry? Isn't it tragic that someone else has to decide what is corrupt for all of us? We have our own moral compasses and they differ from others. And labels are flexible as well. Many religious people attend concerts here too, so censorship is only creating further divisiveness. The labels of liberals and conservatives are wearing thin. Today, many people are finding a balance between their beliefs and tastes. They fast and pray but blast their radios as well. They go on pilgrimage yet visit art museums abroad where they appreciate the beauty of paintings which would certainly be banned in this region.

We cannot create clones. Only egos create clones. Only egos spread tentacles across the internet, gauging which sites can be filtered to preserve a shaky foundation. Isn't it intriguing, though, that even with the constant monitoring of online browsing, certain countries in this area, according to statistics, are most prone to visit porn sites?

It reminds us of the Arabic saying: That which is prohibited is desired. So, both the eager censors and the not-so-eager censored ones are losing here. The former is actually causing the opposite desired effect, and the latter ends up more frustrated and unhappy. So maybe it is best to censor censorship! A win-win situation for all of us!

Nejouad Al Yagout Photo by Djinane Alsuwayeh

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PARALYZED AND ABANDONED

'QUADRIPLLEGIC PATIENT AT AL-ADAN HOSPITAL NEEDS HELP'

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: A young Bangladeshi man has been paralyzed for life and is stuck in Adan hospital - unable to get home. Khurshid Allam, 36, a construction helper from Bangladesh suffered a tragic accident on 24 October 2016. He was helping a colleague move a heavy kitchen cabinet when the thing fell onto him, crushing him beneath. The accident left him a quadraplegic and according to doctors, there is no hope of him ever regaining the use of his arms or legs. He can move a bit one of his arm and can understand conversation but cannot talk or communicate easily.

But the tragedy extends further. Khurshid came to Kuwait on an illicit visa, meaning he paid a sponsor for a visa but never actually worked for him. Instead he found odd jobs and worked freelance, paying a fee to his 'kafeel' of KD 1,500, according to his brother Masoud who is also in Kuwait.



Now that he's paralyzed and unable to work, Khurshid has no way to pay for his flight back home nor any hope of supporting himself and his small family back in Chadpur, a district about 150 kilometers from Dhaka, Bangladesh.

"I am going to Bangladesh Embassy today [Thursday] to ask for any help," Masoud explained. "The doctor told us he's ready for discharge and we need some money. I hope the embassy could extend some help to us. He has a three year old son. The reason why he tried to come to Kuwait was because they want to live a decent life. But now, he cannot work again," Masoud said.

A few people have come forward to try and help Khurshid. A young medical student, Ayat Al-Duwaikhi and her mom, Kenya Purcell, have followed Khurshid's case and have tried to collect help in the form of small personal items like socks and toiletries. They are also hoping to find others who can help to pay for Khurshid's transfer back to Bangladesh and to help establish a small business there that his wife can run.

"I felt very sad about Khurshid's story. I heard from his brother Masoud that they sold a piece of land in Bangladesh just to be able to come and work in Kuwait. He will go home paralyzed," Kenya said.

Khurshid never worked for his sponsor directly but instead paid a fee for his visa and worked outside freelancing. As a consequence, it's unlikely his sponsor will help cover his flight back home. Visa trading is a common practice in Kuwait and there are tens of thousands of 'marginal' laborers who come to the country seeking work who never work directly for their sponsors. Instead they pay a fee to the 'kafeel' and search for work outside, typically for low wages.

Khurshid Allam, 36, a construction helper from Bangladesh suffered a tragic accident on 24 October 2016. He was helping a colleague move a heavy kitchen cabinet when the thing fell onto him

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Photos show some of the various church buildings around Kuwait. There are seven licensed churches and hundreds of thousands of Christians in Kuwait. — Photos by Ben Garcia

Getting to know Christians in Kuwait

‘Seven licensed churches • Hundreds of thousands of worshippers’

By Ben Garcia

Recently a controversial incident at the Catholic church in Kuwait City garnered international attention. Not everyone knows that there is a sizable, diverse Christian community in Kuwait. But Christians have been here from the earliest days and in fact there are Christian Kuwaiti families.

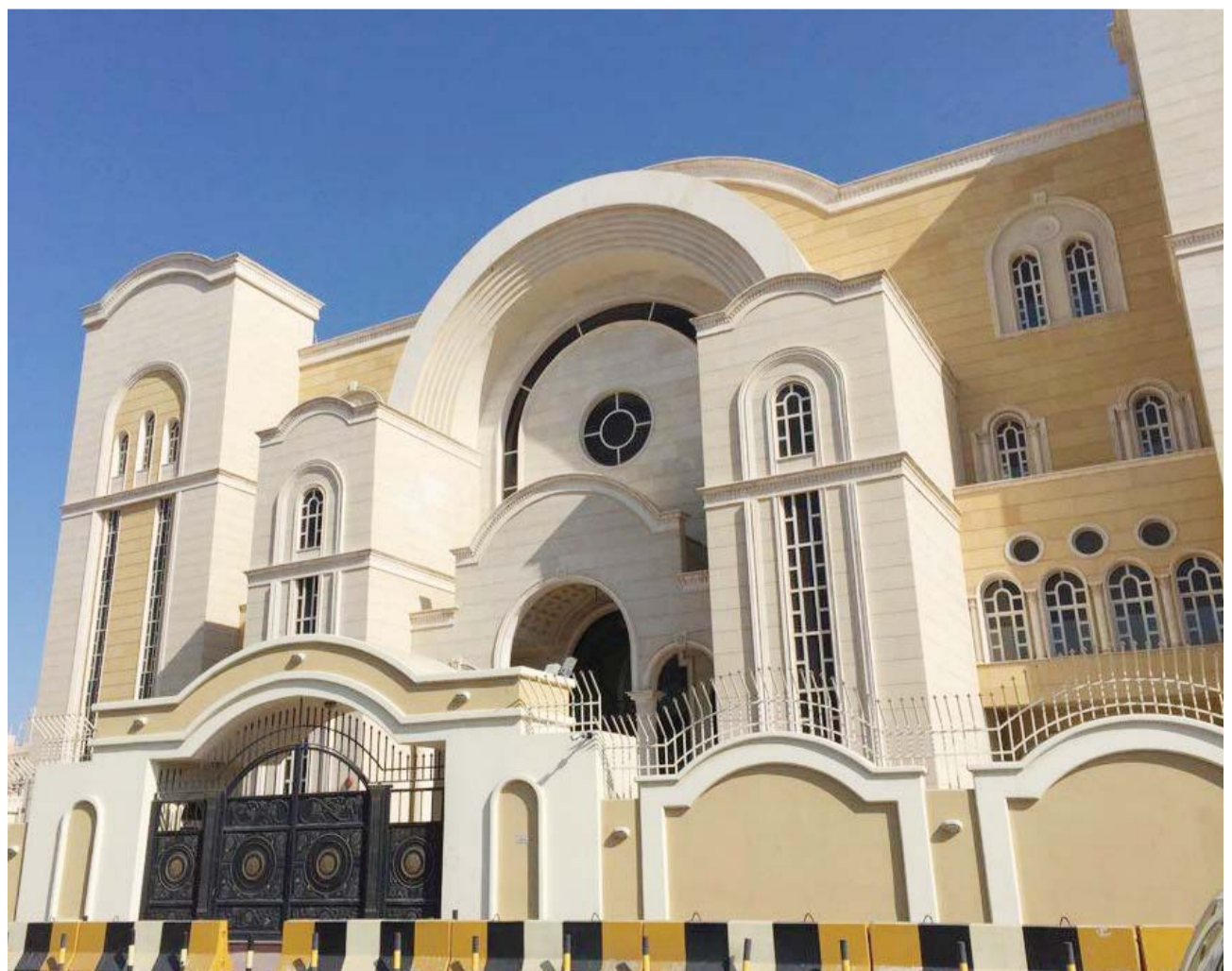
Last December MP Ahmad Al-Fahdl called on the government to declare Christmas a holiday. The gesture was welcomed by many Christians in Kuwait as ‘good’ for religious tolerance and freedom of religion in the country. The constitution declares that Islam is Kuwait’s official religion, but provides absolute freedom of belief and freedom of religious practice here. According to the latest Public Authority for Civil Information statistics, more than 822,000 Christians reside in Kuwait. The overwhelming majority of them are non-citizens, while approximately 200 plus Kuwaitis hailing from eight families declare themselves Christians.

Seven licensed churches

There are seven officially licensed Christian churches in Kuwait that are recognized by the government: The National Evangelical (Protestant), Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic (Melkite), Coptic Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox and Anglican. The Ministry of Interior provides residency permits, security and protection of places of worship of licensed churches, while the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor issues visas for clergy and other staff. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Municipality handle building permits and land issues.

The Seventh Day Adventist Church in Kuwait, a Christian congregation, has been in existence in Kuwait for the last 45 years, and according to Pastor Jonnie, the current head of the church in Salwa, it has encountered no issues with the government.

Continued on Page 6



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"Worshippers hail from various nationalities. Right now, we have around 250 active members. They come and go as we mostly comprise of migrant workers.

Most worshippers are temporary workers - after some time, they move to another country or go back to their countries of origin," he told Kuwait Times.

Smaller groups of Christians in Kuwait are part of the Greek Orthodox Church in Salwa and the Church of Christ and other Filipino Christian churches mostly affiliated with the National Evangelical Church. The Catholic Church has three major houses of worship - the Holy Family Cathedral in Kuwait City, the Ahmadi Church and the Saint Therese Parish Church in Salmiya. The Evangelical Church in Kuwait City is headed by Kuwaiti Pastor Emmanuel Gharib, and has several satellite branches in various areas including Mishref. Under it are smaller groups of community churches like the Filipino Language Christian Congregation, headed by Bishop Jun Nones.

Freedom of religion

"Christians in Kuwait can freely practice their faith as freedom of worship is enshrined in the Kuwaiti constitution. But this freedom should be enjoyed together with the obedience and observance of the laws of Kuwait. One thing that we're praying for is the awarding of more plots where churches can build bigger halls of worship, as the present

church structures can't accommodate everyone. This will also prevent the use of residential buildings as worship halls, which many a time is the cause of friction with neighboring apartments. I thank the leadership of Kuwait, especially His Highness the Amir of Kuwait, for granting this freedom," Nones said.

Bishop Massis Zobenian, Patriarchal Vicar of Kuwait, said Christians in Kuwait enjoyed religious freedom even before the Iraqi invasion in 1990. "My community here numbered around 15,000 before the Iraqi invasion. We enjoyed freedom then that every Christian enjoys now - we have schools here, we have a church here - so you can say that Kuwait is tolerant of other religions. Nowadays, we have about 4,000 Armenians in Kuwait, and we are a very well-organized community. We celebrate Mass every Friday in the church, observe feasts of the saints and celebrate Christmas too," he said.

The annual US State Department on International Religious Freedom Report describes the status of religious freedom in Kuwait as 'improving'. It says that there is no registration procedure for religious groups, although all non-Muslim religious groups must apply in writing for a license to establish an official place of worship. Applications to establish places of worship are governed by the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs. Once permitted, the group can hire its own staff, sponsor visitors and open bank accounts.





KUWAIT: Vehicles drive during a heavy dust storm in Kuwait City yesterday. Strong winds and dust caused low visibility on the main roads around Kuwait. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

UNSTABLE WEATHER DURING WEEKEND

KUWAIT: The Director of Kuwait Meteorological Department Emad Al-Sanousi said yesterday that the country will witness unstable weather conditions during the weekend. Al-Sanousi said the weather will be cloudy - with moderate to fresh southeasterly wind at speeds of 25 - 50 km/h, which caused dust and rain. Meanwhile, the

forecasted temperatures will be between 16-18 Degrees Celsius. Today's weather will be partly cloudy with moderate southeasterly winds at speeds of 15-40 km/h, causing dust with a chance for rain. Temperatures will be between 25-27 Degrees Celsius. Evening will be partially cloudy with winds at speeds of 15-38 km/h and a

chance for scattered rain. The temperatures will be between 14-16 Degrees Celsius. Tomorrow's weather will be partly cloudy with light to moderate easterly to southeasterly wind at speeds of 10-32 km/h with a chance of scattered rain. The forecasted temperature will be between 26-28 Degrees Celsius. — KUNA



DRUG SMUGGLING FOILED

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Police at the Central Prison foiled several attempts by prisoners to smuggle drugs into the prison. One prisoner attempted to bring in 12 nylon rolls he had somehow obtained during a visit to court. In another incident, authorities found a solid yellow roll hidden in the electric box of a bus that was transferring prisoners from court to prison. A total of 23 rolls were found in a cell in addition to other smuggled material, besides significant sums of money.

Corruption in residency affairs

Residency affairs detectives arrested an employee at the service centers department in Ahmadi governorate for forging several transactions. The arrest was made after several transactions were found to be suspicious. It was discovered that the employee forged the signature and seal of the center official. Corruption, bribery and fraud in government offices and departments have expanded dramatically in recent years.

FIRST KUWAIT FILM FESTIVAL TO HONOR FILMMAKING PIONEERS

KUWAIT: In recognition of their efforts to bring the art of cinema to the masses, the First Kuwait Film Festival, on March 24-28, will honor the pioneers of filmmaking in the country. The National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters (NCCAL) will be organizing this festival considered as the first event of its kind in Kuwait. Filmmakers and Directors Hashim Mohammad Al-Shakhes, Abdullah Al-Mkhyal, Khaled Al-Naserallah, Khaled Al-Saddiq, and others will be honored for their contributions to Kuwaiti cinema.

The festival will include an event aimed at launching a fund for supporting film projects in Kuwait. The event will also include Arabic and English lectures connected with film production, moviemaking, acting, and cinema critique. From today onward, the festival will screen a number of short movies, long features, documentaries, and independents films. —KUNA

News

In brief

Kuwait imposes stricter examination of imports

KUWAIT: The Municipal Department charged with imports works according to resolutions, ministerial laws and by-laws that regulate the food importation, Al-Mutairi explained. He further clarified that the tasked personnel and workers deal with the imports upon arrival by: First, visual examination, second by examination at laboratories ahead of pondering specifications of the products. Invalid ones are either discarded or exported. Each food consignment is subjected to laboratory examination and testing. Moreover, the attached validity certificates are checked, he elaborated. Some Asian nations have recently halted meat imports from Brazil, where the police reportedly searched premises of 30 meat companies amid claims about exports of spoilt stocks.

Kuwait conference recommends protecting kids against e-crimes

KUWAIT: Participants in Kuwait's first regional conference on protecting children against cyber hazards recommended issuing unified legislations among states of the region to fight cyber terrorism. The conferees in the gathering, themed "our children a liability," organized by the Ministry of Interior between March 21-23, called for establishing a court or a penal circuit to look into e-crimes. They also called at conclusion of the conference, sponsored by His Highness the premier, for tackling Child Law 21/2015 and including all penal proceedings in the new juveniles' law 111/2015. They recommended amending third term of the law 111 where the child is prone to deviate by peer groups or influence by various means.

DIHAD honors Al-Maatouq for his humanitarian role

DUBAI: The Dubai International Humanitarian Aid and Development (DIHAD) Conference and Exhibition honored Chairman of the International Islamic Charitable Organizations (IICO) Dr Abdullah Al-Maatouq for his efforts within the global humanitarian scene. In a statement to KUNA, the Kuwaiti official expressed his appreciation for the honoring, adding that it reflected the genuine image of Kuwait in the humanitarian sphere. He thanked the UAE Vice President, Prime Minister, and Dubai Ruler Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum for sponsoring of DIHAD's Conference and Exhibition, praising his noble initiative for declaring 2017 as the 'Year of Giving'.

Kuwait will continue to 'help and support Iraq'

WASHINGTON: Kuwait's First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah has affirmed that Kuwait is keen on supporting the Iraqi people on all possible levels. Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled's exclusive statement to KUNA came on the conclusion of his visit to the US capital where he headed the Kuwaiti delegation to the ministerial meeting for the global coalition efforts against the so-called Islamic State (IS). Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled also reflected Kuwait's willingness to partake in the international coalition's efforts to end the terror propagated and carried out by IS. The Kuwaiti minister took the chance to highlight Kuwait's role in the humanitarian field in Iraq and Syria, saying that these efforts aimed to ease the suffering of refugees and displaced people from both countries.

PAAFR's Director General stresses on food security

DOHA: Director General of Kuwait's Public Authority for Agriculture and Fish Resources Affairs (PAAFR) Faisal Al-Hasawi affirmed yesterday Kuwait's dedication to the issues of food security and diverse resources. Al-Hasawi made his remarks on the sidelines of the fifth Qatar International Agricultural Exhibition. He stressed that Kuwait was keen on diversifying food resources and increasing agricultural production to meet domestic food needs and export surplus. He pointed out Kuwait's role in supporting local farmers and efforts to upgrade local food industry by providing agricultural land and financial support.

Crime

Report

Man steals KD 1 million

KUWAIT: A Farwaniya prosecutor placed the name of a Pakistani expat on the wanted list as he was accused of stealing KD 1 million from the bank account of a citizen. The citizen's lawyer said his client gave the Pakistani power-of-attorney to carry out banking transactions, then he discovered that the Pakistani had withdrawn the million dinars over several days from various branches. It was not clear if the man was still in the country.

Swindler detained

Director General of Hawally security ordered the detention of a Syrian to investigate multiple reported cases of swindling, with total amount exceeding KD 100,000. The man was stopped by police and asked for his identification. But he told police he was not carrying an ID and pretended to be going to hospital, so they took his fingerprint and found he is wanted. His IDs were found on him when he was searched.

Various robberies and thefts

A Jordanian told Nugra police that a grocery store he runs was broken into and robbed of KD 260 in cash and cigarettes worth KD 40. In another case, an Egyptian told police his room was broken into and KD 1,850 and his passport were stolen. In a separate incident a citizen who works for the Interior Ministry noticed three men seeking help on the side of the road, so he stopped his car to help them. The three men pulled knives at him and stole his iPhone 6 and escaped. In another strange incident, a citizen reported to Maidan Hawally police that an Indian who works as a delivery driver took the car on March 13 and has not returned since.

Fight in Zahra

Police received a call about a fight in Zahra area, so they went to the scene and found a citizen with several injuries, and he was transferred to Mubarak hospital. He said eight men, including two he knows, attacked him. Police are investigating.



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti social media activist Thamer Al-Dakheel Bourashed puts his laptop inside his suitcase at Kuwait International Airport in Kuwait City before boarding a flight to the United States yesterday. Travelers across the Middle East have expressed frustration at a ban on large electronic devices for flights to the United States and Britain that has sparked confusion and speculation. From March 25, passengers on flights to the United States and Britain from major hubs in Turkey and the Arab world will have to check in any device larger than a smartphone, including laptops and tablets. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

KUWAITIS IN UK 'SAFE'

ARAB LEAGUE CONDEMNS LONDON ATTACK

LONDON: Kuwait Embassy said all its nationals in the United Kingdom are safe and sound after the attack near the Palace of Westminster on Wednesday. The embassy said that it contacted the British security authorities that affirmed there were no Kuwaitis among the victims. Meanwhile, head of Kuwait Cultural Office Dr Fawzan Al-Fares called on the Kuwaiti nationals and students to keep in touch with the office and dial the phone number 02075903400 if need be. He urged them to remain vigilant for their safety and follow the security instructions of the British authorities. Earlier this evening the Metropolitan Police said five people were killed, including a police officer, and 20 others were injured in the attack.

Meanwhile, Secretary General of the Arab League Ahmed Abul Al-Gheit yesterday strongly condemned the attack near the British Parliament in central London, which left at least five people dead and many others injured. Countering such acts will save the lives of many innocent people who are usually the victims of such actions, Abul Al-Gheit said in a statement.

Abul Al-Gheit emphasized the need to unify international efforts for the security and stability of communities around the world. The top Arab official sent his condolences to the victims' families and to the British people and government.

OIC decries attacks

Also, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has condemned in strong terms the attacks that occurred in the vicinity of the British parliament. OIC General Secretary Dr Yousef Al-Othaimen expressed heartfelt condolences to families of the victims and wished the injured quick recuperation. The chief of the Islamic organization expressed robust solidarity with Britain in these hard and painful circumstances, rejecting anew all acts of terrorism that target peoples' rights to live. He also called on states' governments, international organizations and civil associations worldwide to join ranks for fighting the peril of terrorism that has turned into the number-one enemy for humankind. — Agencies

WHO LAUDS KUWAIT

GENEVA: Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) Margaret Chan has lauded Kuwait's significant efforts in backing the organization's health programs around the world. Over the past 10 years, Kuwait has sponsored WHO's projects in disaster and disease-stricken countries, and exerted tireless efforts in financing general health care programs and services in a number of poorest world countries, Chan stated yesterday.

The WHO chief made her remarks after meeting earlier with Kuwait Permanent Representative to UN and international organizations Ambassador Jamal Al-Ghunaim. Such efforts and directions reflected the pioneering role of Kuwaiti decision makers, led by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, in hosting the international donors' conference annually to support health programs for victims of the Syrian crisis, said Chan.

She also commended First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah's efforts in dealing with urgent health issues regarding countries in the region and around the world, describing the Kuwaiti people as a "role model" in responding and interacting quickly with humanitarian and health crisis, especially in Syria, Yemen, and a number of countries.

For his part, Ambassador Al-Ghunaim indicated to KUNA that his meeting with Chan addressed latest updates on the health situation in crisis-stricken countries such as Iraq, Syria, and Yemen to coordinate stands in dealing with such challenges. The meeting also discussed a number of health issues that are to be discussed during upcoming donors' conferences for victims of Syrian and Yemeni crisis, including ways to prevent and control emerging diseases in these countries such as cholera, polio, and other infectious diseases, said the Kuwaiti diplomat. — KUNA

ENVOY HIGHLIGHTS KUWAIT EXEMPLARY EXPERIMENT IN TREATING WASTEWATER

ROME: As the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) marks the World Water Day, Kuwait envoy to the organization Youssef Al-Jehil highlighted his country's pioneering experiment in using treated wastewater in agriculture. The theme of this year's World Water Day is "Wastewater: the Untapped Resource." Addressing the FAO ceremony on this occasion, Eng Al-Jehil said Kuwait made remarkable efforts to overcome the problem of water scarcity and ensure improved food security and nutrition. Kuwait, located in a mainly arid region, tapped into the alternatives to freshwater provided by the latest technologies regarding treating wastewater and desalination of seawater, he said.

Kuwait's strategy in this regard is based on maximizing benefit from the available freshwater resources and using them in a sustainable way, on one hand, and using treated wastewater in filling the gap in meeting the needs of economic development, on the other. The second section of this long-term strategy takes into account the environmental factors, such as the climate change, and focuses on rationalization of use of water and promotion of the farmers' awareness about economic irrigation systems, he went on. Eng Al-Jehil reviewed the data and photos of Sheikh Zayed information center relevant to the four-stage treatment process.

On her part, FAO's Deputy-Director General Maria Helena Semedo said: "We need to use water in agriculture in a more efficient, productive, equitable and environmentally friendly way where quality is not compromised." "We should maximize the potential of wastewater as a valuable and sustainable resource," she added. Meanwhile, President of Fiji Jioji Konousi Konrote said: "There is an urgent need for greater investment and research into the management of wastewater to reduce the life-threatening impacts that wastewater pollution has on our environment. "With enough effort there is potential to turn wastewater into a valuable resource.

"The challenges in getting this done vary by country, but many challenges are shared and we need close cooperation between nations to push action on this issue," he added. "The government of Fiji is to assume the presidency of the next Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. Speaking to KUNA following the ceremony, Eng. Al-Jehil took pride in the FAO selection of Kuwait's experiment as a model example for the celebration of the World Water Day this year. "The delegates of the FAO member states attached great importance to Kuwait's successful efforts in treatment of sewage water over the last decades," he added. — KUNA

Friday Times

International

FRIDAY, MARCH 24, 2017

Two years on,
Yemen stuck
in quagmire

11



Islamic State
claims British
parliament attack

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Amid deepening
ties, Chinese
troops join
Pakistan Day
parade

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KIEV: Medical workers carry the alleged gunman wounded after he shot dead former Russian MP Denis Voronenkov in central Kiev yesterday.—AFP

UKRAINIAN PRESIDENT BLAMES RUSSIA, CALLS IT A CUNNING MURDER RUSSIA EX-MP KILLED IN KIEV, UKRAINE BLAMES 'STATE TERRORISM'

KIEV: A former Russian MP wanted by Moscow for fraud was shot dead in broad daylight in the heart of the Ukrainian capital yesterday in what Kiev branded "state terrorism". Kiev police chief Andriy Kryshchenko confirmed in televised comments that "the identity of the dead man has been established" as former Communist lawmaker Denis Voronenkov. Police were weighing the possibility that Voronenkov, a 45-year-old Kremlin critic, was targeted in a contract killing "considering the identity of the victim, his activities and how the crime was carried out," Kryshchenko said.

Voronenkov's bodyguard and the gunman were both injured in the shootout that

occurred at around 11.30 am (0930 GMT) in the centre of Kiev. They were both being treated in hospital, Kryshchenko said, adding that the gunman's identity had yet to be established. Voronenkov's murder comes as Moscow and Kiev remain locked in a bitter feud over Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and its support of a pro-Russian insurgency in eastern Ukraine.

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko blamed Russia for what he said was a "cunning murder", saying Voronenkov's killing was an "act of state terrorism", his spokesman Svyatoslav Tsegolko wrote on Facebook. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov swiftly dismissed Kiev's accusations as "absurd" in com-

ments to Russian news agencies, adding that Moscow "hopes that the killer and those behind him will be found". Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said at a briefing that Moscow was "shocked" by Voronenkov's murder and thought it indeed looked like a "planned contract killing", Russian news agencies reported.

Voronenkov and his wife Maria Maksakova, also a former lawmaker and a well-known opera singer, left Russia for Ukraine last year. Voronenkov, who had been critical of Moscow's annexation of Crimea, received Ukrainian citizenship in December after he testified against Ukraine's ex-President Viktor Yanukovich, who was ousted in February

2014 amid pro-Western protests. Voronenkov told Ukrainian media in February that he had repeatedly received threats from Russian security services.

Russia's powerful Investigative Committee is investigating Voronenkov's role in alleged fraud dating back to 2010 involving a building in Moscow. Kryshchenko said that Voronenkov had sustained "three or four gunshot wounds to the stomach and neck" but that the shooter had fired his weapon seven or eight times. Ilya Ponomarev, a former Russian opposition lawmaker who has been in exile since 2014, wrote on Facebook that Voronenkov had been killed on his way to meet him.—AFP

WORST IS YET TO COME WITH 400,000 TRAPPED IN W MOSUL

MOSUL: About 400,000 Iraqi civilians are trapped in the Islamic State-held Old City of western Mosul, short of food and basic needs as the battle between the militants and government forces rages around them, the United Nations refugee agency said yesterday. Many fear fleeing because of Islamic State snipers and landmines. But 157,000 have reached a reception and transit centre outside Mosul since the government offensive on the city's west side began a month ago, said Bruno Geddo, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) representative in Iraq.

"The worst is yet to come. Because 400,000 people trapped in the Old City in that situation of panic and penury may inevitably lead to the cork-popping somewhere, sometime, presenting us with a fresh outflow of large-scale proportions," he said. Fighting in the past week has focused on the Old City, with government forces reaching as close as 500 meters to the al-Nuri Mosque, from where Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared a caliphate spanning parts of Iraq and Syria in July 2014.

The hardline militants are now on the back foot, with their stronghold in Syria also under attack. But they still hold an estimated 40 percent of western Mosul and the campaign to recapture it could yet take weeks. The government halted offensive operations yesterday morning due to cloudy weather, which makes it difficult to bring in air support. Later, Federal Police reinforcements moved towards the Old City and the troops were preparing to storm the area and retake the mosque, a police spokesman said. "Dozens of Daesh (IS) snipers are still positioned on rooftops of the Old City high buildings, posing a threat to our soldiers," he said. "We are waiting for the weather to improve so air strikes can compromise Daesh snipers and pave the way for the imminent advance and minimize casualties among our troops." —Reuters



MOSUL: Iraqi counter-terrorism service (CTS) vehicles advance towards the Yabasat neighborhood yesterday during their ongoing offensive to push Islamic State (IS) jihadists out of Mosul. —AFP

10 EGYPTIAN SOLDIERS KILLED IN SINAI ROADSIDE BOMBINGS

CAIRO: Ten Egyptian soldiers were killed in two roadside bombings as they clashed with Islamic State group jihadists in the Sinai Peninsula, the military said yesterday. Fifteen jihadists were also killed in the fighting, the military said in a statement, without saying when the incidents took place. The military said the clashes broke out when soldiers raided "an extremely dangerous" jihadist hideout. It said soldiers found a cache of explosives and bombs ready for use as well as grenades and ammunition.

The Islamic State group had said in a statement on Wednesday afternoon that it blew up two army vehicles during clashes south of the Sinai city of El-Arish. The jihadists have killed hundreds of soldiers and policemen since the army overthrew Islamist president Mohamed Morsi in 2013 and cracked down on his supporters. The crackdown killed hundreds of Islamist protesters who supported Morsi and left thousands in jail.

The attacks have mostly been confined to Sinai, which borders Israel and the Palestinian Gaza Strip, but the jihadists have also struck elsewhere. In October 2015, the group claimed responsibility for bombing a Russian airliner carrying holidaymakers from a south Sinai resort, killing all 224 people on board. It has also claimed responsibility for firing rockets into neighboring Israel. In January a truck bombing killed seven policemen and a civilian passerby near El-Arish. —AFP



SANAA: This file photo shows Yemenis waving national flags and hold placards during a protest against the Saudi-led coalition, commemorating one year of the alliance's military campaign against insurgents next to the Monument of the Unknown Soldier in the Yemeni capital Sanaa. — AFP

TWO YEARS ON, YEMEN STUCK IN QUAGMIRE

YEMEN'S FUTURE HARD TO IMAGINE

RIYADH: Deadly fighting, a rise in jihadism, the threat of famine—two years after Saudi Arabia intervened against Iran-backed rebels, Yemen is more unstable than ever. The chaos has also seen fighting erupt in vital Red Sea shipping lanes, and Riyadh's ally the United States stepping up its involvement. The war has become "a quagmire", Peter Salisbury, a research fellow at London's Chatham House, said ahead of the March 26 anniversary of the intervention of the Saudi-led coalition.

Yemen itself has fractured to the point where its future "as a functioning unitary state" is hard to imagine, he said. Financed and equipped by the coalition, various factions are aligned with Yemen's internationally recognized government against the Huthi rebels and their allies. But analysts warn of tensions among the anti-rebel forces that will likely lead to internal conflict even if the civil war ends, which is unlikely any time soon.

"The entire country continues to fall apart at the seams" while Yemen's elites look out for their own interests, said Adam Baron, a visiting fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations. Along with a severe humanitarian crisis, government institutions and overall security have collapsed, leaving ordinary Yemenis the greatest victims, Baron said. "And unfortunately there's no sign that there is a light at the end of the tunnel."

The United Nations warned this month that Yemen represents "the largest humanitarian crisis in the world." The conflict has killed nearly 7,700 people, more than half of them civilians, and wounded more 42,500 others, while it has displaced three million people. Seven ceasefires alongside peace efforts by the UN and former US secretary of state John Kerry failed to stop the fighting. The

Yemen focus of new US President Donald Trump has so far been on a major escalation of attacks against Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.

Trump's administration may also see Yemen as a chance to show its resolve against Iran, wrote Joost Hiltermann and April Longley Alley of the International Crisis Group. Both Washington and Riyadh accuse Tehran of stoking regional unrest, including by arming the Huthis, although Hiltermann and Alley say there has been "very little hard evidence" of such support. To send a message to Tehran, Washington may seek to increase backing for the Saudi-led coalition but that could prove to be a serious mistake, the two analysts wrote in the journal Foreign Policy last month.

"If Trump rushes headfirst into the Yemeni war, there is a very real risk that the conflict will spiral out of control," they said. Washington already supplies the coalition with weapons, aerial refueling and intelligence. The US military in October suspected Iran played a role in firing missiles towards its warships in the Red Sea, forcing the US Navy to strike back against rebel radar sites. Trump's administration has accused Shiite-dominated Iran of being the world's biggest state sponsor of terrorism, a view closely aligned with that of Riyadh's Sunni rulers.

A domino effect

With Iranian influence to Saudi Arabia's north in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, Gulf monarchies are acting in self-defense against "strategic Iranian planning to surround the Arabian Peninsula," said Mustafa Alani, a senior adviser to the Gulf Research Centre. "It's a war of necessity," he said. Rebel missiles are still fired into Saudi Arabia, and short-range rockets are killing people on the kingdom's southern

border despite two years of air strikes. Rights groups have repeatedly criticized the coalition bombing campaign in Yemen for causing civilian casualties. Not only have Saudi actions turned a large proportion of Yemenis against the kingdom, perceptions of Saudi military capability "have been considerably diminished," Salisbury says. But Yemenis, led by Emirati soldiers, have made progress along the Red Sea coast with the aim of seizing the main rebel-controlled port of Hodeida, Alani said. This would in turn threaten the rebel hold on Taz city and the capital Sanaa.

"We're expecting a domino effect," with Sanaa under pressure in about six months if progress continues, he said. The aim is not necessarily a military victory but to make the rebels realize they might lose, forcing them back to negotiations where they will make concessions. Other analysts are skeptical of this strategy. "These sort of actions... haven't really done much to hurt the Huthis" but add to civilian suffering, Baron said. Some analysts say the Saudi defense minister, Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, must be seen to win in Yemen to protect his leadership future.

But Alani said Prince Mohammed has taken a lower profile on Yemen over the past year. "It's become a state war, not a personal war." Yemen's President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi, on the other hand, remains prominent even though analysts dismiss him as unpopular and ineffective. "He's not able to understand that he's not the right man to lead this sort of crisis," Alani said. But with Hadi's "legitimacy" enshrined in a UN Security Council resolution, it would be difficult for the coalition to abandon him "without undermining the entire rationale for entering the war," Baron said. —AFP

QATAR GIVEN DEADLINE TO END ABUSE OF MIGRANT WORKERS OR FACE INVESTIGATION

NEW DELHI: Qatar has until November to implement new labor reforms designed to end abuse of migrant workers or potentially face an investigation by an international labor watchdog in the lead up to hosting the 2022 World Cup. The United Nations International Labor Organization (ILO) said it was deferring until November a decision on whether to investigate the Gulf state for forced labor violations involving migrant workers.

Around 90 percent of the Arab state's 2.5 million population are migrant workers from countries including India, Nepal and Bangladesh. Many are in low-paid construction jobs to build stadiums and infrastructure ahead of the 2022 Fifa World Cup. But Doha has come under criticism in recent years, with activists and trade unions reporting abuses such as squalid living conditions, poor health and safety standards, and migrants having their pay withheld and passports confiscated.

The ILO said late on Tuesday it had noted recent

measures by Qatar to improve the plight of migrant workers, but asked the Gulf state to provide further information on labor reforms. "The Governing Body decides to request the Government of Qatar to continue to provide information ... on further measures to effectively implement (a law) relating to the entry, exit and residence of migrant workers," the ILO said in a report.

The ILO's executive also asked Doha for details on reforms related to domestic workers and the status of committees to resolve workers' disputes by its next meeting in November - when it will decide whether to appoint a commission to probe abuses. Qatari embassy officials in Delhi were not immediately available for comment on the ILO decision. The wealthy gas-rich state's kafala sponsorship system - under which migrant workers cannot change jobs or leave the country without their employer's permission - lies at the heart of allegations of forced labor.

In December, Qatar passed a new law which

allows workers who have completed contracts to change jobs freely and imposes fines of businesses who confiscate employees' passports. But activists say the reforms do not go far enough. Workers still need their employer's permission to seek alternative employment, during the period of their contract, which can last up to five years. If they change jobs without this permission they face criminal charges for "absconding" which can lead to their arrest, detention and deportation.

Aakar Patel, executive director of Amnesty International India, called on Qatar to show it was making "serious" progress towards ending forced labor. "This means unequivocally abolishing the exit permit system so that employers have no right to interfere in a migrant worker's ability to leave the country, and amending employment laws so that employers no longer have the power to prevent migrant workers from changing jobs," Patel said. —Reuters



A general view shows a destroyed street as the Iraqi counter-terrorism service (CTS) advance towards the Yabasad neighborhood yesterday during their ongoing offensive to push Islamic State (IS) jihadists out of Mosul. — AFP

ALLIES VOW TO DESTROY IS AS ATTACKS OVERSHADOW TALKS

WASHINGTON: The US-led coalition against the Islamic State group vowed to crush the jihadists Wednesday at a meeting overshadowed by an attack in London and civilian deaths in Syria. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson welcomed his counterparts from the mainly Western and Arab 68-nation alliance to Washington with a promise to hunt down IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. But he also warned the coalition is "not in the business of nation-building or reconstruction," amid concerns President Donald Trump is preparing to slash the US foreign aid budget.

Meanwhile, even as the ministers gathered at the State Department, news was breaking of the latest coalition air strike to have reportedly killed dozens of civilians in northern Syria. Then, as the delegates talked, reports came in from London that three people had been killed in a suspected "terrorist" attack on pedestrians and police outside the

British parliament. Tillerson met with Britain's Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson after the coalition summit, but a joint press appearance at the State Department was cancelled at the last minute. In a joint statement released after the meeting, the 68 partners underlined their "determination to intensify and accelerate... efforts to eliminate ISIS" in Iraq, Syria and beyond.

They hailed progress by US-backed local forces against the group's main strongholds in the northern Iraqi city of Mosul and the Syrian capital of its so-called "caliphate," Raqqa. And, as they predicted victory on the battlefield, they vowed to prevent the group's fleeing fighters from spreading instability or from setting up a propaganda base in cyber space.

Increase pressure on IS

Tillerson said the US and its allies would help in mine clearance and estab-

lishing stability in the aftermath of the fighting, but warned Iraq must lead its own reconstruction. The strategy he outlined did not differ much from that in place under the previous US administration of president Barack Obama, but he did suggest a new plan for regional truces in Syria. He admitted that "a more defined course of action in Syria is still coming together."

But he added: "The United States will increase our pressure on ISIS and al-Qaeda and will work to establish interim zones of stability through ceasefires to allow refugees to go home." Under Trump, the United States has suspended the arrival of refugees from Syria, increasing pressure on Syria's neighbors, already all but overwhelmed by millions fleeing the carnage. Some in Washington want "safe zones" to be set up to house those fleeing both the war against the IS group and the bloodier civil conflict between rebels and Bashar al-Assad's regime. —AFP

BAHRAIN SENTENCES THREE TO DEATH FOR TERRORISM, BOMB ATTACKS

DUBAI: A Bahraini court sentenced three Shi'ite Muslim men to death yesterday after they were convicted on charges of terrorism and involvement in 2014 bomb attacks that injured a number of police officers. The High Criminal Court also sentenced 14 other people linked to the same case to prison terms ranging from 10 years to life in jail, state news agency BNA reported, quoting a state prosecution statement. At least were sentenced in absentia, the statement said.

The rulings come amid increased tensions in the Western-allied kingdom. Authorities have stepped up a crackdown on dissent by arresting activists, banning the main Shi'ite opposition al-Wefaq group and taking steps to dissolve a secular association earlier this month. The statement said the suspects were accused of forming a "dangerous terrorist cell that carried out the manufacture of explosives and local weapons which they used against security forces in the northern province".

The rulings are subject to appeal, a Bahraini lawyer with knowledge of the case told Reuters. Bahrain in January executed three Shi'ite men convicted of killing three policemen, including an officer from the United Arab Emirates, in a 2014 bomb attack. They were the first such executions in over two decades and sparked protests in the Sunni-ruled kingdom.

Bahrain had been convulsed by occasional unrest since authorities crushed 2011 protests, mainly by the Shi'ite majority demanding a bigger share in running the country. Last week, a court delayed a ruling in the trial of the spiritual leader of the Shi'ites on charges of collecting funds illegally and money laundering.

Former AFP photographer freed

Bahraini authorities yesterday released award-winning photographer Mohammed Al-Shaikh after holding him for more than 24 hours over his work for AFP, according to his family. Relatives said Al-Shaikh, who worked for AFP in Bahrain for several years until his press permit was denied renewal last August, had been detained at Manama airport late Tuesday on his return from a trip overseas. His family said he does not face charges. Bahraini authorities did not respond to AFP's requests for an explanation for his arrest. Al-Shaikh won the 2014 Bayeux-Calvados prize for his coverage of events in the tiny Gulf kingdom, rocked from 2011 onwards by an Arab Spring-inspired uprising and ensuing crackdown.

Rights groups regularly criticize the Sunni-ruled kingdom over its harsh treatment of dissenters. Last year saw a further tightening of restrictions on journalists. Authorities refused to issue visas or renew accreditations for reporters working for foreign outlets. Nazeeha Saeed, a journalist working for France 24 and Arabic radio station Monte Carlo Doualiya, is currently on trial for working "without the necessary authorization". —Agencies

TRAFFICKERS SUSPECTED OF USING MIGRANT RESCUE BOATS AS TAXIS

ROME: An Italian prosecutor has stepped up his investigation into charity-funded migrant rescue boats in the Mediterranean after claims they are acting as a de-facto taxi service for people traffickers. Vessels chartered by private organizations are in the spotlight amid accusations they not only encourage traffickers to set migrants out to sea by sailing as close to Libyan waters as possible, but also come to the rescue when the smugglers call.

Prosecutors are looking into how the rescue

vessels are funded following questions over the amount of money being spent. Rescuers say they are forced to patrol near Libya to save lives because the migrants are being loaded into overcrowded dinghies that are so flimsy they are destined to sink shortly after departure. "It is impossible to rule out direct contact" between the non-governmental rescue vessels and traffickers in Libya, said Sicilian prosecutor Carmelo Zuccaro, who has been leading the probe but has not yet opened an official judicial inquiry.

"I am convinced that it is not always the operational centre that calls on the NGOs," he told a parliamentary committee Wednesday, referring to the centre in Rome which is supposed to coordinate all rescue operations in this stretch of the Mediterranean. "It is a question that needs investigation," he said, as it would suggest traffickers either on land or onboard the migrant boats may be calling the rescue vessels directly, leaving them open to accusations of complicity.

SOS Mediterranee, which was named by the prosecutor, said it was not in contact with smugglers. "We do not have any autonomy in terms of operations, we do what we are told to do" by the Rome operations centre, spokeswoman Amelia Giordano said. Prosecutor Zuccero said his office was probing the "abnormal" level of funds that have allowed even small agencies to deploy ships. The Maltese organization Moas was the first to launch a private rescue vessel in the summer of 2014. —AFP



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US SPY AGENCIES MAY HAVE PICKED UP TRUMP COMMUNICATIONS

TRUMP: 'THE COMMUNICATIONS HAVE NO INTELLIGENCE VALUE'

WASHINGTON: Donald Trump's communications may have been swept up in intelligence gathering on suspected foreign agents, according to explosive allegations made Wednesday by the Republican head of the House intelligence committee. Devin Nunes—who worked on Trump's transition team and is now leading an investigation into possible links between that campaign team and Russia—said the now president's communications may have been intercepted late last year.

Nunes however said there was no evidence that then-president Barack Obama ordered the surveillance—as Trump has claimed—or that the president was the target. Rather, Nunes suggested, Trump's communications were picked up during court-approved targeting of suspected foreign intelligence operatives. The communications were not linked to Russia, he said, adding that they appeared to have "little or no intelligence value."

"The president himself and others in the Trump transition team were clearly put into intelligence reports," Nunes told reporters in front of the White House after briefing the billionaire president on the situation. The information collected, spanning the November-January period between Trump's election victory and his inauguration, was "widely disseminat-

ed" in US intelligence circles, he said. US intelligence community rules dictate that information on US citizens picked up incidentally in surveillance must be scrubbed or masked in intelligence reports. Nunes suggested those involved in the surveillance had violated those rules. As for Trump, he indicated he felt vindicated by the revelation. "I somewhat do. I must tell you I somewhat do," he said during a White House meeting. "I very much appreciated the fact that they found what they found. I somewhat do."

On March 4, Trump implied his predecessor had broken the law in targeting him. "Terrible! Just found out that Obama had my 'wires tapped' in Trump Tower just before the victory. Nothing found. This is McCarthyism!" he tweeted. The claim has snowballed into a political scandal that has called Trump's credibility into questions and damaged relations with foreign intelligence partners.

Reverberations

Nunes' revelation threatened to upend a bipartisan investigation into alleged Russian interference in the November election and Moscow's possible collusion with the Trump campaign. Adam Schiff, the ranking Democrat on Nunes' committee, voiced anger that the Republican had taken the information to the president—and the media—before the committee had been consulted. The chairman, he said, "shared this information with the White House before providing it to the committee, another profound irregularity," he said.

"I have expressed my grave concerns with the chairman that a credible investigation cannot be conducted this way," Schiff added "it certainly does not suggest—in any way—that the president was wiretapped by his predecessor." Bradley Moss, a leading national security lawyer, said that Nunes could be in trouble because he "released what appears to be classified information." "Disclosure of the fact that an individual's communications were collected, even incidentally... is a closely held classified fact. You can't just go around spilling that information," he said.

The lawmaker's statement came amid recriminations over spy agencies listening to phone calls between former Trump national security advisor Michael Flynn and Moscow's ambassador in Washington, which has become part of a sprawling probe into Russia's role in the US election. It also came days after the heads of the National Security Agency and the Federal Bureau of Investigation repudiated Trump's claims that his Trump Tower in New York had been wiretapped under order by Obama. —AFP



WASHINGTON: Chairman Rep. Devin Nunes (R-CA) listens to testimony during a House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence hearing concerning Russian meddling in the 2016 United States election, on Capitol Hill, in Washington, DC. —AFP

DESPITE TRUMP PUSH, HEALTH CARE VOTE GOING TO THE WIRE

WASHINGTON: Donald Trump faces a reckoning yesterday as US lawmakers vote on his presidency's biggest legislative test, the Republican plan to repeal and replace Obamacare, as conservatives vowed to kill it unless important last-minute changes are made. The Republican-controlled House of Representatives votes on the controversial measure despite challenges over whether Trump and ally House Speaker Paul Ryan have enough backing to get the measure over the finish line.

With Democrats opposed to Trump's effort to rip out his predecessor's crowning domestic policy achievement, and his own party's right flank in revolt, Trump brought in wavering lawmakers Wednesday to try to tip the scales in his favor. "Big day for healthcare. Working hard!" Trump tweeted. Insiders say Trump's meetings have been focused less on specifics than on the politics of "Trumpcare" failing—an outcome that would be a humiliating defeat for the billionaire leader at the start of his term.

But some lawmakers have emerged defiant, including Mark Meadows, chairman of the grassroots conservative Freedom Caucus. "We need changes to the underlying bill before we vote on it in the House," Meadows told reporters. "There's not enough votes to pass it tomorrow." Speaking on Fox News later Wednesday Meadows said that "to say that

we've got a deal—that wouldn't be accurate," but did say that he and Trump had come to "an agreement in principle." "There's still work to be done but I can tell you that the president is engaged."

For years, Republicans have promised to overturn Obama's reform, describing it as government overreach. But some lawmakers have balked at their own party's plan, saying it is still too costly for the government. Others worry that their constituents will no longer be able to afford health insurance. A nonpartisan congressional budget estimate says 14 million Americans would lose their coverage from next year under the Republican plan. "We'll see what happens," Trump said Wednesday during a meeting on health care and women.

Close vote expected

The House vote on the American Health Care Act (AHCA) looks tight. The Democratic minority is prepared to vote against it as a bloc, so Republican leaders need to limit defections to about 22 out of their party's 237 representatives—depending on how many members end up casting a vote. Those who are the most unhappy with "Trumpcare" are members of the Freedom Caucus—heirs apparent to the ultra-conservative Tea Party movement. —AFP



HANOI: This photograph shows Khat Thu Hong (3rd R), director of the Institute for Studies on Social Development, speaking during the workshop Silent or Speaking Up on children abuses in Hanoi. — AFP

PEDOPHILIA CASES SPARK SOCIAL MEDIA OUTCRY IN VIETNAM

HANOI: Vietnamese cops took three months to respond seriously to allegations that an eight-year-old girl had been molested, but then outrage spilled onto Facebook and they made an arrest in days—a rare win for public opinion in the communist country. The girl was sexually abused by a family friend near her aunt's house in Hanoi in January, but the complaint by her enraged mother fell on deaf ears. That was until the news spun out onto social media with Facebookers demanding to know why pleas for legal action went unanswered.

Suddenly last week, a deputy prime minister called on police to take the case seriously and the suspect was arrested—offering a window into how the wheels of justice turn in Vietnam. But the ordeal is not over for the young victim who still wails in her sleep, according to her distraught mother Nga. "Doctors said my daughter's genitals were hurt... they said there were signs of sexual violence," said Nga, whose name has been changed to protect the victim's identity. "I never thought it could happen to my girl. It's been heartbreaking seeing her cry in her sleep, still in so much fear."

Shamed and blamed'

With no independent media in Vietnam, many people turn to social media to share public opinion. But even popular sites like Facebook are closely monitored by communist authorities, ready to jail anyone veering too far into territory deemed incendiary. Last week's Facebook furor prompted a different kind of reaction from officials in a country that has made the headlines for pedophilia before. In 2006, British rocker Gary Glitter was convicted for molesting children as young as 10 in Vietnam, where he had an ocean-side home.

But the country has mostly avoided the headline-grabbing molestation cases seen in neighboring Thailand or Malaysia. According to police figures, there are about 1,000 reported cases of sexual abuse in Vietnam every year. Experts warn many more go unreported. Recent data and the publicized cases "are just the tip of the iceberg", UNICEF Vietnam's child expert Vijaya Ratnam Raman said. "They may be shamed, or blame themselves. There may be threats of violence, and sometimes they don't have faith in the situation and the system," he added. Cultural factors also discourage victims from speaking out in a country where children do not receive adequate sex education. "Everybody is hesitant to talk about rape, forced sex and sexual abuse," said Khat Thu Hong, director of the Institute for Social Development Studies. "We have to break that culture."

Sluggish law

But some who braved the cultural barriers then hit legal obstacles. One father described the pain of his unsuccessful three-year battle to persuade police to bring charges against an elderly neighbor who molested his three-year-old daughter. "I live in extreme anger," said the father, in tears, declining to be named. It is a common complaint. Last August, several parents in southern beach town Vung Tau filed complaints against a 76-year-old man, accusing him of molesting seven girls between 2012 and 2016. Police initially said they could not press charges because of lack of evidence. Finally last week, amid mounting public pressure, prosecutors said they would re-examine the case. "Pedophilia-related crimes are often handled slowly," said lawyer Le Luan, who is representing Nga's daughter. Sometimes that legal foot-dragging has devastating consequences. In February a 13-year-old girl in southern Ca Mau province committed suicide, after she was alleged to have been continuously abused by a neighbor. —AFP



TEGUCIGALPA: Members of the Military Police stand guard as students arrive for class at the Maximiliano Sagastume school in Sagastume, a neighborhood on the north side of Tegucigalpa. — AFP

SCHOOLS ON THE FRONTLINE OF HONDURAS GANG TURF BATTLES

TEGUCIGALPA: The clatter of bullets piercing the school's roof sent pupils running for safety. Four of them and their teacher were wounded. The February 27 attack on the Maximiliano Sagastume school in a northern district of Tegucigalpa was just one violent episode in a turf war between heavily armed gangs in Honduras. Such occurrences are so common, they are subsumed quickly into the country's news cycle and barely register outside its borders.

For the pupils, it meant no classes for eight days as police set up a perimeter to protect them from the local criminal outfit, part of the Mara Salvatrucha gang, or MS-13. Such protection is also afforded to other schools and colleges in the capital, stretching police and army forces that seem unable to counter the reach of the feared gangs. MS-13 and its chief rival, Barrio 18, and other smaller outfits assert control over different neighborhoods, preventing residents from freely moving between them and frequently clashing in exchanges of gunfire.

The phenomenon is the same across the so-called Northern Triangle of Central America comprising Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala—a region plagued by poverty and vicious violence where gangs dealing in drugs and weapons have supplanted the rule of law.

Mutilated girls

A spokesman for a combined national security force in Honduras known as Fusina, Lieutenant Colonel Mario Rivera, said that hundreds of personnel were involved in securing schools in Tegucigalpa and in other Honduran towns. A teacher at one school with 300 pupils said on condition he not be identified that some of the students were gang members, and their threats against classmates or teachers often meant that police protection had to be brought in.

In the case of Maximiliano Sagastume school, although the four pupils and the female teacher were slightly wounded and the police perimeter was set up, many parents subsequently transferred their children to other schools. The families' sense of panic was heightened because 14-year-old twin girls were abducted after the shooting and their mutilated bodies were found days later. "Here people sleep with one eye open," said one policeman standing guard. He was part of a deployment posted near the school. Police patrols on motorbikes and squad cars frequently nosed around the neighborhood, called Sagastume I. "If we need to, we can call in reinforcements," the officer said, indicating the radio attached to his leather belt.

Like a war zone

The school, located on a hillside, also features metal bars and a three-meter high wall topped with barbed wire. To the north of it, separated by a stony hill with no houses, is El Picachito, a district claimed by the Combo gang. Just south of the school is an area lorded over by MS-13. The school and the surrounding concrete homes sit in a sort of no-man's land often fought over by the two gangs. "We're in the middle of the firefights. At night, it's like a war zone," said Napoleon Zuniga, a 70-year-old owner of a small shop in Sagastume I. "Over there the Combos shoot, and then down there it's the MS," he said. A police officer said the February 27 shooting appeared to come from Combo gang members "to cause fear among residents and the opposing gang." He added: "All they want to do is take control of the zone to be able to sell drugs and extort the businesses." —AFP

ISLAMIC STATE CLAIMS BRITISH PARLIAMENT ATTACK

MAY: 'AN ACT OF TERRORISM TRIED TO SILENCE OUR DEMOCRACY'

LONDON: The Islamic State group yesterday claimed the deadly assault at the British parliament, as Prime Minister Theresa May identified the attacker as a British-born man known to intelligence services. "An act of terrorism tried to silence our democracy," May told a packed House of Commons, which stood for a minute's silence in remembrance of the victims of Wednesday's strike on the symbol of Britain's democracy. "We are not afraid and our resolve will never waver in the face of terrorism," May said.

Armed police have arrested eight people in raids linked to the rampage that left three people dead and sowed panic in the heart of London. The IS group said it was responsible, according to the Amaq propaganda agency linked to the jihadist organization. "The perpetrator of yesterday's attack in front of the British parliament was a soldier of the Islamic State and the operation was carried out in response to calls to target coalition countries," Amaq said citing a "security source."

Defiant British lawmakers returned to "business as usual" in the surreal silence of an area of central London normally thronged with tourists. Twenty-nine people were treated in hospital, including seven in critical condition, some with "catastrophic" injuries. Among them were French school children and foreign tourists. The attacker mowed down pedestrians with a car on Westminster bridge, killing two, and then jumped out and stabbed to death a police officer guarding parliament before being shot dead.

The carnage was unleashed on the same day Brussels was marking the anniversary of Islamic State group bombings that killed 32 people. Hundreds of extra police were on patrol in London as officers worked around the clock to piece together what happened in the deadliest attack in Britain since four suicide bombers killed 52 people on the capital's transport system in July 2005. Europe has been on high alert after a wave of deadly jihadist assaults over the past two years.

Peripheral figure

May said the attacker's identity was known to the police and the MI5 domestic intelligence service. He was British-born and some years ago had been a "peripheral figure" investigated over concerns about violent extremism. "There was no prior intelligence of his intent—or of the plot," May said. Britain's top anti-terror officer Mark Rowley said that police had arrested eight people in raids on six houses in London, the central city of Birmingham and elsewhere.

"It is still our belief... that this attacker acted alone yesterday and was inspired by international terrorism," he said. Defense Secretary Michael Fallon told BBC radio the working assumption was that the attack was linked to "Islamic terrorism in some form".

The British flag over parliament flew at half-mast in a sign of mourning while forensic officers in white suits carried out a fingertip search of the courtyard outside where 48-year-old policeman Keith Palmer was stabbed to death.

Police officers lined up outside their new headquarters nearby for a minute's silence in front of the eternal flame to officers who have given their lives in service. Queen Elizabeth II was due to open the building formally yesterday but postponed the visit. "My thoughts, prayers, and deepest sympathy are with all those who have been affected by yesterday's awful violence," she said, in a statement expressing her "enduring admiration" for the police. London Mayor Sadiq Khan called a candlelit vigil on Trafalgar Square later yesterday.

Among those in parliament was Foreign Office minister Tobias Ellwood, whose face was left smeared with blood after giving first aid to the fatally wounded police officer. US President Donald Trump and French President Francois Hollande both spoke to May and Chancellor Angela Merkel said Germany stood with Britons "against all forms of terrorism". Britain's last terror attack was the 2016 assassination of MP Jo Cox by a pro-Nazi sympathizer in her constituency in northern England shortly before the vote to leave the European Union.

That vote triggered a push in Scotland for a second referendum on seceding from the United Kingdom. The Scottish Parliament has postponed a debate and vote on the referendum following the London attack. The debate is now due to resume on Tuesday, the day before Britain is set to trigger the Article 50 two-year departure process for leaving the EU. May's spokesman said there was no intention to delay Article 50 because of Wednesday's attack.

International victims

A Spanish diplomatic source confirmed that one of the dead was 43-year-old British citizen Aysha Frade, whose mother was Spanish. Media reports said she was on her way to pick up her two daughters, aged seven and nine, from school. A man in his 50s was also killed. Several international tourists visiting one of London's most iconic sights were also caught up in the violence.

Those wounded included 12 Britons, four South Koreans, three French children, two Romanians, two Greeks and one each from China, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Poland and the United States, May said. Three police officers were among those hurt, two of them seriously, and a seriously injured woman was rescued from the River Thames after coming off the bridge. French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault travelled to London to visit three French pupils on a school trip who were among those hurt. — AFP



LONDON: Pedestrians cross Westminster Bridge in the shadow of the Houses of Parliament in central London yesterday after the bridge reopened to traffic following its closure during the March 22 terror attack. — AFP

PAKISTAN HOSTS AFGHAN TALIBAN LEADERS

ISLAMABAD: Pakistani officials have hosted seven Taliban leaders in Islamabad to try and press the insurgents into peace talks ahead of a multi-nation meeting in April in Moscow, according to two Taliban officials. Islamabad has been under international pressure to try and bring Taliban leaders, who have lived in Pakistan since their rule in Afghanistan was overthrown in the 2001 US invasion, into some form of negotiations with Kabul.

However, successive attempts have faltered and failed. Last year Pakistan, Afghanistan, China and the United States met to jumpstart the peace process but that effort faltered after a series of deadly Kabul attacks that Afghanistan blamed on militants hiding in Pakistan. China, Russia and Pakistan are behind the initiative of the April meeting in Moscow. Afghanistan will attend the meeting as will Iran and India. Washington has not said whether it would attend. The two Taliban officials said that the Taliban used the Islamabad gathering, which took place last week, to press their own demands, including that Pakistan free Taliban figures

from its jails. The two officials, who were familiar with the Islamabad meeting, spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity, fearing reprisals by Pakistani authorities who have not confirmed the meeting. The international community has stepped up efforts to find a peaceful solution to Afghanistan's protracted war with the Taliban as security across Afghanistan deteriorates and the Islamic State group threatens to expand its foothold in the region.

The Taliban have stepped up attacks across Afghanistan since the US and NATO formally concluded their combat mission at the end of 2014, leaving a smaller contingent of troops behind to focus on training and counterterrorism. The insurgents have been successful in gaining more ground across several provinces and increasingly taking their fight to urban centers. Despite their steadfast refusal to talk to the Afghan government, Taliban officials have held meetings with many others - travelling several times to China, opening talks with Russia and Iran, and also attended conferences in Japan and in Europe.

Apparently, the missions have had some success as both Moscow and Beijing have indicated they'd be willing to see names of Taliban leaders removed from the United Nations' terror list, a long-standing demand of the Taliban for participating in talks. The Taliban attending the Islamabad meeting were led by Mullah Muhammed Abbas, who took part in direct talks with the Afghan government in July 2015 in Pakistan. Those talks abruptly ended as an announcement emerged that Taliban founder, Mullah Mohammed Omar, had been dead for two years.

Others at the meeting included former Taliban higher education minister, Amir Khan Muttaqi; former vice and virtue minister Mullah Muhammed Turabi; Mullah Saaduddin from the so-called Quetta shura, or council, in Pakistan's Baluchistan province and Mullah Daud who represented the so-called Peshawar shura. A figure known by only one name, Yahya - a senior member of the notorious Haqqani network that is allied with the Taliban - also attended as did Latif Mansour, secretary of the Taliban leadership council. — AP

INDIAN MP ADMITS HITTING AIR STEWARD 25 TIMES WITH SLIPPER

MUMBAI: An Indian politician brazenly admitted yesterday that he hit a steward on an Air India flight 25 times with his slipper during a row over a seat. Ravindra Gaikwad, an MP in India's lower house for the Hindu nationalist Shiv Sena party, claimed that the attendant had insulted him first on the Pune to New Delhi flight. "What did he say, that I hit him with my hand? I hit him 25 times with a slipper," an unrepentant Gaikwad told ANI news agency in video footage posted on its Twitter page and aired on Indian news channels.

Indian media reports said Gaikwad claimed he had a business class ticket but that Air India put him in an economy seat for the Thursday morning flight to India's capital.

After first complaining to an air hostess Gaikwad, who represents a constituency in the western state of Maharashtra, then got into a heated argument with the senior flight attendant. "(The steward) said 'I will complain to (Indian Prime Minister Narendra) Modi', so I hit him," said Gaikwad.

"Should I have to listen to this abuse?" he added. Politicians from other political parties roundly condemned Gaikwad's actions while a spokesman for Air India said the airline was investigating the incident. Last year an Indian MP was arrested for alleging slapping an airline official at an airport in Andhra Pradesh after he and his family were prevented from boarding their flight because the gate had closed. — AFP



KATHMANDU: Nepalese Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal, right, shakes hand Chinese Defense Minister Chang Wanquan in Kathmandu, Nepal, yesterday. — AP

CHINA, NEPAL TO DISCUSS JOINT MILITARY EXERCISES

CHINA, NEPAL ARMY DRILLS TO RATTLE INDIA

KATHMANDU: China's defense minister will arrive in Nepal later yesterday for talks on joint military exercises, a meeting that will be closely watched by India as Beijing boosts its influence in the region. Chang Wanquan will be in Kathmandu for a three-day visit-the first by a Chinese defense minister in 15 years-that will include talks with his Nepali counterpart and Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal. "Both sides are working out some agreements for assistance for the Nepalese Army," defense ministry spokesman Uttam Prasad Nagila said.

"The ministry expects there might be some progress on talks over joint military exercises, but [it is] not confirmed yet." The prospect of the first army drills ever between China and Nepal will rattle India, which is often accused of playing "big brother" to its tiny neighbor. An army source, who asked not to be named, said the exercises may be dubbed "Sagarmatha Friendship"-referring to the Nepali name for Mount Everest-and would focus on disaster response.

Sandwiched between China and India, impoverished Nepal has in recent years ping-ponged between the sphere

of influence of Delhi and Beijing as the Asian giants jostle for regional supremacy. "What we are seeing this week with Chang's visit is more of a military exchange," said James Char, a China expert at Singapore's Nanyang Technological University. "It is also something that has grown under the current leadership of (China's President) Xi Jinping."

Landlocked Nepal remains dependent on India for the majority of its imports, but the previous administration aggressively courted China as part of a nationalist drive to decrease the country's reliance on Delhi. China has responded with grand infrastructure promises, including recently pledging \$8.3 billion in investment to Nepal-equivalent to nearly to 40 percent of its entire GDP.

The staggering commitment dwarfed India's investment offer of \$317 million. The current Maoist-led government in Nepal has sought to repair strained ties with Delhi while continuing to accept cash from its powerful northern neighbor. Prime Minister Dahal was due to fly to China yesterday and will meet with President Xi next week. — AFP



AFGHANISTAN: In this file photo, Afghan National Army soldiers stand in position, in the Sangin district of Kandahar province, southern Afghanistan. — AP

EMBOLDENED TALIBAN CAPTURE KEY SOUTHERN DISTRICT

KANDAHAR: Taliban fighters captured the strategic southern district of Sangin yesterday, officials said, another setback for Afghan forces in opium-rich Helmand province ahead of the spring fighting season. The capture of Sangin, where US and British forces suffered heavy casualties until it was handed over to Afghan personnel, marks the culmination of the Taliban's year-long offensive to seize the district and underscores their growing strength.

Most of Helmand is already estimated to be under Taliban control, with the capital Lashkar Gah-one of the last government-held enclaves-also at the risk of falling to the Taliban's repeated ferocious assaults. "Our forces

have retreated from government offices, including the police headquarters and the governor's office in Sangin," Helmand governor's spokesman Omar Zwak said. "But we are preparing to take it back."

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid also said that insurgents had overrun the district centre. For years Helmand was the centerpiece of the Western military intervention in Afghanistan, only for it to slip deeper into a quagmire of instability. The Taliban effectively control or contest 10 of the 14 districts in Helmand, the deadliest province for British and US troops over the past decade and blighted by a huge opium harvest that helps fund the insurgency. —AFP

POOR PATIENTS TURNED AWAY AS DOCTORS PROTEST ASSAULTS IN INDIA

MUMBAI: Poor patients in western India were unable to access care for a fourth day as doctors at state hospitals extended a strike protesting assaults by patients' families, adding pressure to an overburdened public healthcare system. The high court in Mumbai yesterday ordered doctors in Maharashtra state to resume work immediately and asked the government to ensure their security, as pregnant women and kidney dialysis patients were turned away from hospitals and surgeries postponed.

Hundreds of doctors went on strike in New Delhi as well, many wearing helmets to call attention to the violent attacks. The Indian Medical Association (IMA),

a lobbying group, supported the strike after dozens of attacks on doctors in recent years, some resulting in serious injuries, said IMA vice president R.V. Asokan. "We are only asking for security in the workplace, which every worker is entitled to. Doctors are already working under tremendous stress," he said.

India is emerging as a medical tourism destination with modern, well-equipped hospitals offering quality care at competitive rates compared to western countries, but the country's poor depend on poorly funded state hospitals. India spends less than 2 percent of its annual gross domestic product on healthcare, a fifth of the global average. Attacks on doctors

in recent years have been triggered by frustrations with the public healthcare system, analysts say. State hospitals are generally overcrowded and understaffed, with filthy, outdated facilities.

The government in its National Health Policy released last week called for restructuring the public healthcare system and increasing health spending to 2.5 percent of GDP by 2025, which is half of what the World Health Organization recommends. In addition, doctors are calling for more security personnel and strict enforcement of the Doctors' Protection Act, which provides up to three years' imprisonment for violence against doctors. —Reuters

CHINA WATCHES HONG KONG VOTE AS PROTESTS THREATENED

HONG KONG: Hong Kong will select a new leader on Sunday in a vote skewed towards Beijing that has once more opened up the city's political divisions. Pro-democracy campaigners describe the election process as a farce and predict weekend protests as the prospect of political reform in the semi-autonomous city appears more unattainable than ever. Hong Kong's next leader will be chosen by an electoral committee rather than the general public and the person selected has to be formally approved by Beijing.

The majority of the 1,194 representatives on the committee belong to pro-establishment special interest groups such as agriculture and real estate which lean towards China. Only a quarter comes from the pro-democracy camp. It is the first leadership election since mass rallies in 2014 calling for Hong Kong residents to have the right to vote for the city's highest-ranking official failed to win change, and comes as concerns grow that Chinese authorities are tightening their grip.

Former deputy leader Carrie Lam is seen as Beijing's favorite for the job, and some pro-establishment members of the electoral committee say they have come under pressure to vote for her. Lam is intensely disliked by the pro-democracy camp after promoting the Beijing-backed political reform package which prompted 2014's "Umbrella Movement" that paralyzed parts of the city for more than two months. The proposal had promised a public vote for city leader in 2017, but said candidates must be vetted. It was dismissed as "fake democracy" by opponents and rejected in parliament by pro-democracy lawmakers. Since then the political reform process has been shelved.

Selection, not election

Those opposed to Lam cast her as just another version of unpopular current leader Leung Chun-ying. Her main rival is ex-finance chief John Tsang, perceived as a more moderate establishment choice and the public's clear favorite in opinion polls. Known as "Mr Pringles" for his resemblance to the mustachioed crisp brand mascot, Tsang has cast himself as a unifying candidate. Most pro-democracy members on the electoral committee will vote for Tsang to keep Lam out and did not field their own candidate for fear it would split the anti-Lam vote. That leaves the third and most liberal nominee, former judge Woo Kwok-hing, who is unlikely to make a dent. But many young activists reject the vote outright. Pro-democracy campaigner Joshua Wong, the face of the 2014 protests, says he does not endorse any of the candidates and will join protests outside the harbor front voting venue. —AFP



HONG KONG: Hong Kong chief executive candidate, former Chief Secretary Carrie Lam, waves to supporters at an election campaign in Hong Kong, yesterday. — AP



ISLAMABAD: Pakistani troops from the Special Services Group (SSG) march during a Pakistan Day military parade in Islamabad yesterday. — AFP photos

AMID DEEPENING TIES, CHINESE TROOPS JOIN PAKISTAN DAY PARADE

ISLAMABAD CONSIDERS CHINA AN ALL-WEATHER FRIEND

ISLAMABAD: Chinese, Saudi and Turkish troops for the first time joined the Pakistan Day parade in the capital Islamabad yesterday, in a sign of deepening ties. Before Pakistan showed off long-range rockets, tanks and other military hardware, armed Chinese troops marched past Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and General Qamar Javed Bajwa, the chief of Pakistan's powerful military. Pakistan President Mamnoon Hussain said it was the first time Chinese troops participated in a parade in a foreign country, terming it a "historic event", with the two countries embarking on building vast infrastructure together.

Soldiers from Saudi Arabia, a long-time Pakistan ally, also joined the parade, as did a military band from Turkey, another largely Muslim nation that has strengthened ties with nuclear-armed Pakistan in recent years. Islamabad considers China an "all-weather friend" and in recent years the countries have grown even closer on the back of the \$57 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a Beijing-funded network of road, rail and pipelines that will link western China with Pakistan's Arabian Sea port of Gwadar.

The militaries of the two countries have in recent years also increased cooperation, with Chinese officials urging Pakistan to do more to improve security to help CPEC work. China has long pressed Pakistan to do more to rein in Islamist militants, saying they have connections with extremists and separatists in China's unruly far west-

ern region of Xinjiang. The United States also has a strategic relationship with Pakistan, but the ties appear transactional at times, with Washington periodically cutting off funding for the Pakistani military to penalize it for failing to do enough to curb Islamist militants destabilizing the region. —Reuters



ISLAMABAD: Chinese troops march during a Pakistan Day military parade in Islamabad yesterday.

JAPANESE NATIONALIST CLAIMS CASH FROM ABE AS SCANDAL DEEPENS

TOKYO: A controversial nationalist educator said under oath yesterday he had received a donation for his school from Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe despite the premier's repeated denials in an intensifying political scandal that has gripped the country. The nationally televised testimony by Yasunori Kagoike came as his reportedly shady purchase of government land at a huge discount has dominated media coverage for weeks.

Abe, whose high approval ratings have taken a hit, has repeatedly denied giving Kagoike money and on more than one occasion offered to resign if he was found to be involved in the land deal. Analysts have said that there would likely be nothing illegal in such a donation, but if proven it could damage Abe's credibility given his steadfast denials.

Kagoike operates a kindergarten in western Japan that inculcates pupils with pre-World War II nationalist and native Shinto religious values and has made insulting com-

ments about Chinese and Koreans. When the controversy erupted last month, he was preparing to open an elementary school on the land purchased from the government at a price reportedly some one-tenth the market value. The complex scandal has dominated parliamentary deliberations for weeks and his testimony prompted a media frenzy with five networks broadcasting it live.

Kagoike was summoned for questioning by lawmakers after his claim last week that Abe's wife Akie handed him one million yen (\$9,000) in cash in his office in 2015 and said the money was from her husband. Kagoike offered no proof, but told lawmakers that he vividly remembers the day when Akie Abe visited his kindergarten to deliver a speech. "She asked her aide to step outside. When it was just the two of us alone in the room, she said 'This is from Shinzo Abe' and gave me an envelope containing one million yen as a donation," he told lawmakers.

"I have heard Madame Akie has (recently)

said she absolutely does not remember it. But for us, it was such an honor and I remember it very well," he said. Abe's government quickly issued a fresh denial. "Of course, Madame Akie has said she has no recollection" of giving him money, Yoshihide Suga, the government's top spokesman, told a regular briefing. Kagoike's testimony came as newspaper opinion surveys have shown declines in support for Abe amid the scandal.

The top-selling Yomiuri Shimbun found that approval for Abe's government has recently dropped by 10 percentage points to 56 percent. Though still high, the daily said it marked the biggest monthly fall since Abe took office in December 2012. Kagoike has drawn enormous public curiosity as his kindergarten promotes eccentric, nationalistic teachings similar to what was taught through the end of the war. Pupils, for example, memorize an 1890 imperial decree on education blamed for teaching students they must die for the emperor if necessary.—AFP



TOKYO: Yasunori Kagoike, operator of a nationalistic school in Osaka, raises his hand while giving a sworn testimony to a lower house budget committee in Tokyo yesterday.—AFP



MANILA: Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte gestures as he answers questions from the press at Manila International Airport yesterday.—AFP

PHILIPPINES' PRESIDENT DUTERTE REIGNITES MARTIAL LAW FEARS

DUTERTE CONSIDERING MEASURES TO ERADICATE ILLEGAL DRUGS

MANILA: Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte warned yesterday he may impose martial law and suspend elections for tens of thousands of local posts, fuelling concerns about democracy under his rule. Duterte said he was considering both measures as part of his controversial campaign to eradicate illegal drugs in society, and that martial law would solve a range of other security threats. "If I declare martial law, I will finish all the problems, not just drugs," Duterte told reporters in a pre-dawn briefing after returning from neighboring Thailand, which is under military rule.

Duterte said that, as part of martial law, he may create military courts to hear cases against terrorists. "I will allow the military to try you and put you to death by hanging," he said, referring to Islamic militants in the south of the country. Since easily winning presidential elections last year and taking office nine months ago, Duterte has given conflicting statements on whether he intended to impose military rule.

The issue is highly sensitive in the

Philippines, which is still trying to build a strong democracy three decades after a famous "People Power" revolution ended Ferdinand Marcos's dictatorship. Duterte has previously warned he would be prepared to defy constitutional safeguards and restrictions on martial law, although he and his aides have later sought to downplay those threats. Yesterday he gave an emphatic case for martial law, saying it would stop the Philippines from "exploding". "I will be harsh," Duterte said as he described his approach to military rule.

Narco-politics

Duterte also said he was planning to appoint leaders of more than 42,000 districts, known as barangays, across the nation instead of having them elected in polls that were scheduled for October. "We are looking for a way to just appoint the barangay captains," Duterte said, adding this was necessary because 40 percent of them were involved in drug trafficking. "Narco-politics has entered the mainstream of Philippine

politics." The elections, which by law should be held every three years, are important to the Philippines' democracy because the barangays are the smallest government unit responsible for a wide range of local services. Barangay officials also help to monitor communities for illegal drugs and draw up the lists of traffickers or addicts. Police use those lists for raids that frequently lead to suspects being killed. Duterte won the presidential elections after promising during the campaign to eradicate drugs in society by killing tens of thousands of criminals.

Police have reported killing nearly 2,600 people in his drug war while rights groups say thousands more have been killed in a state-sanctioned campaign of mass murder. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have warned Duterte may be guilty of a crime against humanity. Local opponents have said they are planning to file a case against Duterte with the International Criminal Court, and a lawmaker last week filed an impeachment complaint against him in Congress.—AFP

HOPES AND FEARS MEET FOR SEWOL PARENTS AS FERRY EMERGES

JINDO: Huddled in makeshift shipping container homes on a South Korean waterfront, the relatives of the missing from the Sewol ferry disaster have endured a harrowing wait to recover their dead children. Nearly three years ago Lee Keum-Hui's daughter Eun-Hwa went on a school trip and never returned. Lee rushed to Jindo, a five-hour drive from the family home in Ansan, on the day the Sewol sank, hoping to bring her frightened daughter home. She has lived at Paengmok harbor, the closest port to accident, ever since, unable to begin mourning. "I had brought a change of clothes for my daughter... But I have been waiting for more than 1,070 days now," said Lee, recalling the night she first stared blankly out at the dark sea that had taken her 16-year-old. Eun-Hwa is one of the nine victims whose bodies could still be trapped inside the Sewol, the 6,825-tonne ferry that emerged from the murky depths yesterday. The vessel was carrying 476 people when it went down off the southwestern island of Jindo, leaving 304 people dead—almost all of them schoolchildren in one of the country's worst maritime disasters.

"Time has stopped at April 16, 2014," Lee said. Lee and her husband, along with four other relatives of missing victims, set up temporary homes on a gravel lot near Paengmok harbor. The wind rattles the stones, and their showers are ice cold even in the depths of South Korea's chilly winter. "That's nothing compared to what our daughters have to go through," said Park Eun-Mi, the mother of another missing student, Huh Da-Yun. "They're in freezing cold water."

Winter jackets, scarves and jeans hang in the shipping container where she lives with her husband Huh Hong-Hwan, a former steelworker. A sleeping bag is neatly laid out on the floor. A small caricature portrait of Da-Yun drawn by a well-wisher hangs on a wall, below her school ID card.

Let's go home

In Korean culture, family members stop mourning for the dead after three years, but the relatives at Paengmok feel that without their children's bodies, they were never given a chance even to begin. "People treat us as one of the bereaved families, but we are different," said Eun-Hwa's father Cho Nam-Seong. Walking down the harbor front towards a lighthouse painted with a giant yellow ribbon—a symbol for the victims of the disaster—Lee stopped and read out the banners hanging on each side of the path.

"This is my favorite," Lee says, pointing to one proclaiming: "Let's go home with mom." Heavy rain pounded on Lee's yellow umbrella and strong gusts of wind blew in her face as she walked past another poster bearing a picture of her daughter. "My only wish is to be able to hold her in my arms again," she said, her voice trembling.—AFP

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- Canon Camera PSD 30 BLUE + Camera Bag.
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- Canon Camera IXUS 180 BLACK + free Camera Bag.
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'No Scrubs' writers get added to Sheeran hit 'Shape of You'



In this combination photo, musician, songwriter and TV personality Kandi Burruss, left, appears at the OK! Magazine's So Sexy Party in June 1, 2016 in New York and musician Ed Sheeran appears at the iHeartRadio Music Awards on March 5, 2017, in Inglewood. — AP

The songwriters behind TLC's 1999 megahit "No Scrubs" are now listed as co-writers of Ed Sheeran's No. 1 hit "Shape of You." On the website for performance rights organization ASCAP, Kandi Burruss, Tameka Cottle aka Tiny and Kevin Briggs have been added as co-writers of "Shape of You," co-written by Sheeran, Steve Mac and John McDaid. "Shape of You" is currently on top of the Billboard Hot 100 chart. Representatives for Sheeran and ASCAP didn't immediately respond to emails from The Associated Press seeking comment.

Burruss and Tiny were members of the R&B girl group Xscape. Burruss, also a reality star on Bravo's "The Real Housewives of Atlanta," posted about the news Sunday on her Instagram page. "To be a part of such a great song is a blessing," Tiny, in an email to The Associated Press, said of being added to the "Shape of You" songwriters. Last year The Chainsmokers' ubiquitous No. 1 hit, the Grammy-nominated "Closer," extended writing to two members of The Fray because of similarities to the band's 2005 hit, "Over My Head (Cable Car)."

In 2015, a jury awarded Marvin Gaye's children \$7.4 million after finding Robin Thicke and Pharrell's "Blurred Lines" copied their father's hit "Got to Give It Up." A judge later cut the verdict to \$5.3 million. That was the same year Sam Smith gave Tom Petty and Jeff Lynne writing credit on his Grammy-winning hit "Stay With Me" after some said it sounded like Petty's 1989 song, "I Won't Back Down," and Mark Ronson and Bruno Mars, for their worldwide, Grammy-winning "Uptown Funk," extended credit to the five writers of Gap Band's 1979 hit "Oops Upside Your Head." "Shape of You" has spent almost two months at No. 1 on the Hot 100. The song set the record for the most one-day streams on Spotify with 10,123,630 streams. "No Scrubs" had a big pop culture moment in the late '90s. It also reached No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100 and earned a Grammy for TLC. — AP

Saudi film festival postponed after sandstorm

The launch of Saudi Arabia's main film festival has been postponed to next week due to a sandstorm, organizers said yesterday. The opening of the fourth Saudi Film Festival, slated to run from March 23-28 in the Gulf coastal city of Dhahran, was suspended after the storm hit the kingdom earlier this week. The festival will now open on Monday and run for six days. This is the third consecutive annual film festival in Saudi Arabia after a hiatus of seven years. The kingdom late last year began a cautious push to introduce entertainment, despite opposition from Muslim hardliners. Among the events on offer for Saudi spectators have been the New York theatrical group iLuminate, the Comic-Con pop culture festival, and WWE wrestling. Saudi Arabia, where public cinemas are banned, has created a government agency to support private firms organizing entertainment events, under a wide-ranging "Vision 2030" plan for economic and social reform. — AFP

CHiPs TV fans are poised to hate it the film

Hardcore "CHiPs" fans hate it and the real California Highway Patrol seems not quite sure what to make of it. But Larry Wilcox, who rode his motorcycle to everlasting fame in the old "CHiPs" TV series, says that for now, he'll give the benefit of the doubt to "CHiPs," the forthcoming film based loosely - very loosely - on the show that made him and Erik Estrada two of the biggest stars of the 1970s and early '80s.

"I have not seen the film but the trailers looked like a soft-porn version of 'Dumb and Dumber,'" Wilcox said recently. "However, I hear the actors are both very talented and funny, so maybe it all works." Fans of the original "CHiPs," still widely seen in reruns and on DVD, are far less forgiving. They've been posting angry messages all over the internet since the first trailers for the R-rated action comedy emerged, calling it garbage and disrespectful to police officers everywhere. In a lengthy "open letter" to Dax Shepard, Sue Walsh of New York accuses the film's writer, director and co-star of mocking the original show with a ridiculous remake filled with nudity, penis jokes and raunchy bathroom humor. (She left out big-breasted women but they're in there, too.) "CHiPs" was not just a '70s cop show. It wasn't Shakespeare, no, but it did and does mean a whole lot to a whole lot of people," said Walsh, who is organizing a 40th anniversary reunion of the show this fall that most of the original cast is expected to attend.

From family-friendly to raunchy

To understand why fans are so upset, one must remember what a gentle, family-oriented show "CHiPs" was. CHP Sgt Jon Baker (played by Wilcox) and his partner, Estrada's Officer Frank "Ponch" Poncherello, were hunky young straight-arrow cops cruising sun-splashed, surprisingly uncrowded LA freeways on their motorcycles when not cracking jokes or flirting harmlessly with cute female sheriff's deputies.

To the thump of a persistent disco track, Baker and Ponch kept busy rescuing people from cars, occasionally solving folks' personal problems and frequently chasing down miscreants before carting them off to jail without ever drawing their weapons. "I know that there are people that grew up watching 'CHiPs' and that was part of the reason they decided to join the department," said CHP spokeswoman Fran Clader. "I watched it when I was growing up."

In the film version, however, Shepard and Michael Mena's Baker and Ponch are anything but straight arrows. They accidentally destroy vehicles, cause fiery crashes, blow stuff up and sometimes shoot the wrong people. "I understand it's a broad comedy," said Clader, adding she hasn't seen the film and won't offer an opinion on the trailer.

She said the CHP did grant the producers some technical assistance, for which the agency was reimbursed. But there's also this disclaimer at the beginning of "CHiPs": "This film is not endorsed by the California Highway Patrol. At all."



Michael Pena, left, and Erik Estrada pose at the Los Angeles premiere of "CHiPs" at the TCL Chinese Theatre on Monday, March 20, 2017. — AP

And sharp-eyed fans will notice the title punctuation of "CHiPs" was changed from the original "CHiPs," further distancing the film from the department. Estrada, who has a cameo, did not respond to multiple phone and email

messages. But in a video clip from a recent premiere, he described it as "a movie you have to view with your adult sense of humor." As for Wilcox, he says he'll probably see it - eventually. "I think I will wait for the video," he added. — AP



Haim Saban, creator of the "Power Rangers," poses at a ceremony honoring him with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame on Wednesday, March 22, 2017, in Los Angeles. — AP



In these images released by Lionsgate, Naomi Scott, RJ Cyler, Dacre Montgomery, Ludi Lin and Becky G appear in scenes from, "Power Rangers." — AP



Elizabeth Banks appears in a scene from, "Power Rangers."

'Power Rangers'

A superhero movie too far?

A color-coded, spandex-couture smorgasbord of high camp and heroics, "Mighty Morphin Power Rangers" has stood astride popular culture for a quarter-century as one of television's most successful franchises.

The show—which premiered in 1993 and promptly became a global hit, supported by a vast range of toys, video games and comics—is on its 24th season as "Power Rangers Ninja Steel" on US children's network Nickelodeon.

Smelling a potential goldmine, Lionsgate has turned it into a \$105-million movie, but with poor early reviews and fierce competition in a market saturated by comic book characters, critics are asking whether it might be a superhero movie too far. Described by Britain's Daily Telegraph as "the most flabbergastingly misconceived reboot of recent years," the movie has an average rating of five out of 10 on online movie reviews collator Rotten Tomatoes. In an excoriating review, Telegraph critic Robbie Collin said the movie's "ugly and incomprehensible" climax appeared to have been "shot by the Hunchback of Notre Dame and edited by a monkey wearing oven gloves."

'Lame, safe pandering'

Other writers have questioned its relevance in an era that has seen the release of more than 50 Marvel and DC movies, with the hotly-anticipated "Guardians of the Galaxy 2" and "Wonder Woman" due for release in the coming weeks. "The irony is that 25 years ago, 'Mighty Morphin Power Rangers' was launched as superhero fodder for kids... but we're now so awash in superhero culture that kids no longer need the safe, lame, pandering junior-league version of it," said Variety's Owen Gleiberman.

Adapted from Japan's long-running "Super Sentai" television series, the "Power Rangers" are a group of teenagers who "morph" into superheroes in bright spandex suits and helmets, ready to combat evil. Lionsgate—whose youth-oriented blockbusters include "The Hunger Games" and the "Twilight" franchise—announced in 2014 it was partnering with Saban Brands, which owns the rights, to "re-envision" the saga. Due to hit US theaters on Friday, "Power Rangers" follows five high school teenagers—played by Dacre Montgomery, RJ Cyler, Naomi Scott, Becky G and Ludi Lin—who unite to battle



the nefarious Rita Repulsa, played by Elizabeth Banks. Scott told AFP she remembered playing make-believe "Power Rangers" with her brother as a child and was in awe of a rare depiction of female superheroes. "I think that already was a great thing and shows that it was so iconic. Whether you watched the shows or not, you wanted to be one," she said.

Social media buzz

Bad reviews are not always a portent of box office failure, according to Paul Dergarabedian, senior media analyst for comScore, voicing optimism that the movie might find its niche. "The bar has been raised so high over the years and, of late, the R-rated, harder edged superheroes have really resonated, a year ago with 'Deadpool' and now with 'Logan,'" he told AFP.

"But maybe that leaves open a space for a more teen-oriented group of superheroes." The analyst said Disney's box office phenomenon "Beauty and the Beast" would continue to dominate while there would also be strong competition from "Kong: Skull Island," "Logan" and surprise smash hit horror "Get Out."

"I would never underestimate it, though. Reviews, depending on the genre, matter at times and don't matter at other times. A more important element will be how social media reacts to the movie," he said. Shawn Robbins, chief analyst at BoxOffice.com, told AFP that based on "fairly strong" social media buzz, "Power Rangers" ought to open in the mid-to-upper \$30 million range, which would be a

respectable debut for March.

Its box office, he added, would largely be driven by the nostalgia of its older audience while themes of inclusiveness would extend its appeal to the younger generation. "The potential for counter-programming is also significant since 'Beauty and the Beast' doesn't have the same monopoly over young males as it does other demographics," he added. — AFP



Bryan Cranston, left, appears in a scene from, "Power Rangers."



†In this picture taken on March 22, 2017, Chinese investment banker Huang Xiaoshuai, 26, and his wife Wei Mengyuan chat in front of their newly acquired painting 'Fire' by Chinese artist Zeng Fangzhi, during an interview with AFP at ArttBasel in Hong Kong. — AFP photos

Young Chinese set shop at Hong Kong's Art Basel

Huang Xiaoshuai and his wife last year splashed out \$70,000 for a large painting of fish by Oscar-winning actor Adrien Brody—part of a growing clique of young, affluent Chinese art enthusiasts building their own high-end collections.

The picture now hangs in their Shanghai home and the couple, along with other mainland collectors, have flown in to attend VIP events at this week's Art Basel in Hong Kong where they are hoping to indulge their taste for contemporary Asian and European art. Each year Huang and Wei Mengyuan set aside \$1.5 million to spend on art—half from Huang's salary and the rest from family funds. Huang, an investment banker, says he and his wife first got into collecting when they were deciding how to decorate their new home. "We have friends who deal art. They gave me some advice (on how) to buy some paintings or sculptures to put in our house," says Huang. A hobby turned into a passion—now the couple says they buy art not only as decoration but also as an investment.

Wei says that, unlike jewelry or real estate, art allows her to form an emotional connection and both say they like to meet the artists who create the works they buy. This year at Art Basel, the couple will be looking out for pieces by Sweden-based sculptor Klara Kristalova and Chinese artist Sun Xun. "I want to see (the artworks) in person, otherwise I can't get the feeling," Huang said, adding that he hoped friends and family would enjoy viewing his latest purchases when they visit his home. "It's not to sell but to share," he said.

Stylish collections

China is the third-largest art-buying market in the world and leads the auction sales segment, according to a new report by Art Basel and UBS. Although sales have been dampened by an economic slowdown there have been some stellar purchases in recent years. Taxi-driver-turned-tycoon Liu Yiqian has made the biggest headlines, buying a tiny Ming Dynasty "Chicken Cup" for \$36 million at Sotheby's in 2014 before drinking tea from it.



Xiaoshuai and his wife stand in front of their newly acquired painting 'Appearance of Crosses 2016-12' by Chinese artist Ding Yi.

Liu, who founded the Long Museum in Shanghai, then branched out into Western art, bagging a Modigliani for \$170.4 million at a Christie's New York auction in 2015. But gallerists and art dealers say the growing band of well-travelled, wealthy young buyers are also now making their mark, albeit with lower budgets and sometimes using their parents' money.

With a critical eye and in-depth knowledge, they are departing from the more traditional tastes of established Chinese collectors and are building collections in their own edgier style. Hong Kong-based gallerist Pascal de Sarthe says their passion and know-how has created a "much broader market" which has impacted dealers. "Now we have more requests about Western art than we used to," thanks to young Chinese collectors, he said.

Adventurous taste

Another Hong Kong gallerist, Pearl Lam, said the market in China was generally becoming more adventurous. "Chinese collectors, as well as artists, are becoming more exposed to art from different parts of the world and are becoming more accepting of works from emerging countries or by emerging artists," she told AFP. Some contemporary artists in China are themselves also turning to collecting. Beijing-based artist and poet Wang Ai, 46, says he gathers works to document the times. He and a friend are currently building an exhibition space in the eastern Chinese province of Zhejiang so that they can share their collection with the public. The pair focus on works by Chinese contemporary artists and Wang says they prioritise the intellectual merit of the art when purchasing, while also considering their market value. They have spent from \$3,000 to more than \$70,000 on individual pieces. "Collecting... has to do with my understanding of my own culture," Wang said. "Contemporary art is a part of history—you can't buy history, but you can form a relationship with it." — AFP



Chinese mainland visitors look at 'Untitled (Smile-ism No.2)' by Chinese artist Yue Minjin.

After success, Milky Chance shapes an organic electronica

Barely out of school, two German friends calling themselves Milky Chance uploaded online a dance track from their makeshift home studio, with a folksy guitar driving an infectious electronic beat. To the duo's surprise, "Stolen Dance" became a viral hit in 2014, topping singles charts in several countries including France and Ireland and setting the stage for years of well-received live shows.

For its second album, "Blossom," the group could have worked with an enviable range of studios and producers. But Milky Chance decided to record again in its modest-sized hometown of Kassel—and the sound is even more restrained than before. "What was important was to make it intimate and to get back to just us and the music and nothing else," said singer and guitarist Clemens Rehbein, mellow in contrast to his forceful, scratchy singing voice. Despite the band's success among fans of electronic dance music, or EDM, Rehbein said that the group's heart was elsewhere. "We like this idea of this woody, sandy sound. We are not EDM people. We like house music that actually sounds organic," Rehbein told AFP before an album release show last week in New York.

Sound effects from nature

Creating that "organic" approach to dance music is a major priority for bandmate Philipp Dausch, who plays the percussion and the software. "Of course you can buy a sample pack from Native and use the snap," Dausch said, referring to a leading DJ software manufacturer. "But you can also just snap, record it and use it," he continued, snapping his own fingers. "It's an organic idea of producing. Just do it yourself."



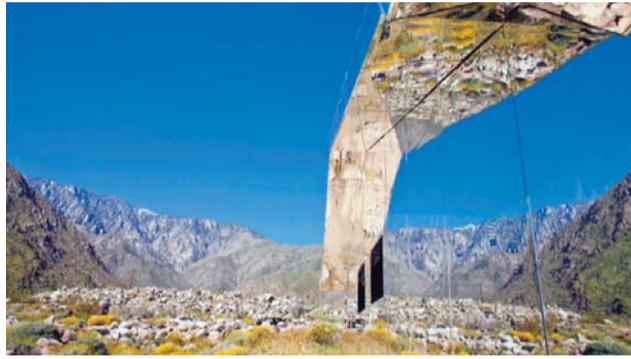
Musicians Philipp Dausch and Clemens Rehbein of Milky Chance pose backstage at Le Poisson Rouge on March 17, 2017 in New York. — AFP

For "Ego," one of the dancier tracks on the new album, Dausch taped Rehbein walking on stones—turning the sound into a repetition that is familiar to listeners of electronica, but whose novelty and imperfection begs a double-take. Another track, "Clouds," samples the crackling from opening a can of Coca-Cola. Paradoxically, Dausch suggested that the band's debut album, "Sadnecessary," was more electronic because that was simpler for novice artists. "The first (album) was quite limited because at that time an interface computer and a guitar were all we had and all we knew," he said. Milky Chance also goes in an entirely different direction on the album with a piano ballad—simply called "Piano Song." Giving a fuller live sound, the group has added a third member, the guitarist and harmonica player Antonio Greger, also from Kassel.

Shying from spotlight

Milky Chance remains comparatively anonymous considering the heavy airplay of the band's songs. The group's relationship to fame seemed to be summed up with the video for "Stolen Dance," seen more than 300 million times on YouTube, in which Rehbein simply sits and sings to his guitar as varied landscapes from the world drift by.

A few hours before the sold-out concert at Greenwich Village club (Le) Poisson Rouge, a famished Rehbein walked the streets undetected to fetch a slice of pepperoni pizza, as two nearby bars coincidentally were playing Milky Chance. Both Rehbein and Dausch are now 24 and acknowledged that "Blossom" was partially a metaphor. The album's title track speaks of maturing and seeking trust with the world.—AFP



Doug Aitken's Mirage house from the Desert X land art exhibit in the Coachella Valley of California. — AFP photos

DESERT X EXHIBITION REFLECTS EARTH, SKY, STATE OF WORLD

A house clad in mirrors pops out of the California desert. It blends into the landscape, reflecting a kaleidoscope of the urban grid and arid valley of Palm Springs—to the delight of photographers and selfie-seekers.

This is Doug Aitken's "Mirage," one of the showstoppers of Desert X, an exhibition of 16 site-specific monumental works by international artists that spans southern California's Coachella Valley. The works are mostly "land art," massive installations in nature. The exhibition includes a replica of assassinated president John F. Kennedy's nuclear shelter, a mirrored fence, a wall of optical effects, a traditional earthen shelter... and an antisocial robot.

Desert X runs through April—with "Mirage" set to remain in place for six months. The show has attracted tens of thousands of people since its opening four weeks ago, including hipsters, art lovers and residents of the region not normally attracted to museums. "We had 5,000 people per weekend," close to twice the number expected, Desert X artistic director Neville Wakefield told AFP.

Heading west

The success of the exhibition highlights the growing creative clout of Los Angeles and Palm Springs, where new galleries and museums, prestigious fashion shows and trendy tourism destinations offer a counterweight to New York on the other side of the country. "There's been a steady drift west, away from Manhattan," Wakefield said. Economic factors are driving the shift, with many artists fleeing the exorbitant rents of New York. But the trend also has philosophical underpinnings in the historic campaign to settle the West. "Mirage," which is shaped like an ordinary ranch-style suburban house, symbolizes the cult of real estate, a central tenet of the American Dream. It is also a nod to the "mid-century modern" architectural masterpieces of Palm Springs.

"I'm interested in seeing artwork as something that can be alive on its own and continuously in flux," Aitken, a top contemporary American artist, said in an email to AFP. The location of "Mirage," which reflects the surrounding sky and landscape, was "very important." "I wanted to have a perspective as looking from a desert hillside towards the suburbs and that vista extending past the suburbs and reclaimed by the raw desert continuing on undeveloped into the horizon," he said.

The organizers of Desert X give only the latitude and longitude coordinates of the works and not their addresses, forcing visitors to search for them and discover little-known places along the way, like the Whitewater Preserve where art-seekers can find "One I Call," Sherin Guirguis's sculpture, an ode to migration, is built from bags of earth and is modeled after traditional homing pigeon towers in the desert villages of her native Egypt.

Getting lost

Several other works also focus on the theme of migration, a timely and important topic in this region close to the Mexican bor-

der where President Donald Trump has vowed to build a "big, beautiful wall" to curb illegal immigration. Swiss artist Claudia Comte created a wall in the desert, "Curves and Zigzags," with undulating black lines that give the effect of an optical illusion. Californian Phillip K Smith planted a circular installation of 300 angled, vertical mirrored posts in the ground, called "The Circle of Land and Sky."

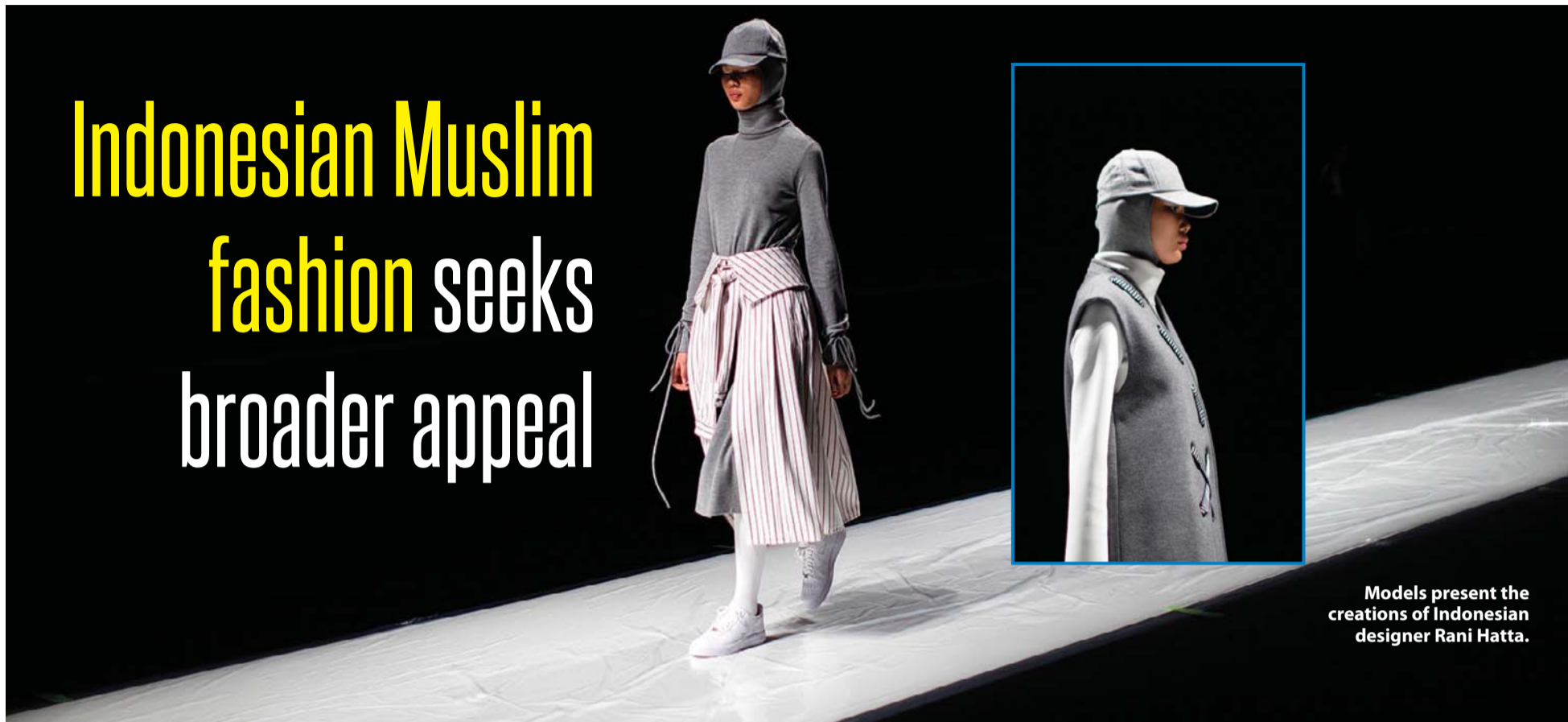
"It's a sort of a perimeter. I don't think he necessarily conceived it that way but it is part of a conversation on boundaries," said Wakefield. "The idea of border has resonated a lot with the artists in a number of ways." "Monument," by Texan artist Will Boone, reproduces the underground nuclear shelter of former US president Kennedy during the Cold War era. Visitors descend to find a painted, larger-than-life statue of the leader, assassinated in 1963.

The bunker "speaks to many things that have become particularly pressing since the election of the current president," said Wakefield, citing nuclear fears and "preppers"—members of a subculture preparing for apocalypse. Since the beginning of time, he noted, the desert has exerted its pull on those who want to withdraw from the world—and in southern California, that includes stars from Hollywood's golden age who flocked to Palm Springs to lose themselves in excess far from the paparazzi. Norma Jeane's "ShyBot," an autonomous robotic vehicle, was designed to roam the desert while avoiding human contact. It has taken its mission seriously: it has gone missing. — AFP



Sherin Guirguis' One I Call from the Desert X land art exhibit.

Indonesian Muslim fashion seeks broader appeal



Models present the creations of Indonesian designer Rani Hatta.

Loose-fitting "modest wear" combines with monotone sporty minimalism in the unconventional motifs of Rani Hatta's Muslim-influenced collection. Eschewing the hijab, her female models cover their hair with a baseball-like cap worn over a tight hood and stylish big turtle-neck collar. The up-and-coming Indonesian designer is working to prove that fashionable Islamic style can remain faithful to religious teachings while also appealing to non-believers.

"Because I am an Indonesian, I make clothes for Muslims," Hatta told AFP after showing off her fall/winter 2017 collection at Tokyo Fashion Week. "But my design is very universal, so anybody can wear it." Her contemporary style owes much to her signature straight cuts and eye-catching wide red bands running across tops like gigantic stitches, adding a touch of color to the mostly black, grey and white lineups.

The material, mainly cotton polyester and bonded fabrics, provide a non-traditional look, while loose-fitting pants and tops as well as long layered vests assure modesty. Hatta said religious requirements do not bar wearers from dressing stylishly. Young Indonesian Muslims in particular are finding ways to stay faithful to the teachings of their religion while exploring progressive fashion trends, she said.

'Very stylish'

"I want to show to the world that, actually, modest wear can be very cool, and can be very universal, not just a black long dress or something like that," Hatta said. "In my country, the younger

generation think that wearing the hijab is really old fashioned and they don't want to wear it. So I made something more for us so the younger generation would be proud to wear hijab."

The Muslim fashion industry is rapidly expanding in the global market, with world brands like Italian fashion house Dolce & Gabbana and Japan's Uniqlo offering Islamic style products. Uniqlo in 2015 enlisted British designer Hana Tajima to design a range aimed at Muslim women in the run up to the fasting month of Ramadan, a big shopping holiday season.

Muslim fashion in Indonesia differs significantly from Saudi Arabia and some Gulf countries, where many women wear the niqab, which covers the face except for the eyes. Muslims are expected to make up nearly 30 percent of the world's population by 2050, according to Pew Research Center, and Indonesia is aiming to become a leader in global fashion with its budding modest wear trend. "We have 250 million people in Indonesia, and 70 to 80 percent are Muslim," said Lenni Tedja, director of Jakarta Fashion Week.

"The modest wear fashion is now very creative, very fashionable, very stylish, so that is why more and more young ones start wearing modest wear," she told AFP. She added that the Indonesian fashion business sees potential beyond Muslim consumers. "Our modest wear could also be worn by non-Muslim(s)... without the cover... so actually the market is very wide." — AFP



Indonesian designer Rani Hatta (2nd R) checks the clothing of a model backstage.



In this picture taken on March 22, 2017, a model adjusts her cap backstage as she prepares for a rehearsal walk on the runway.



In this picture taken on March 22, 2017, Indonesian designer Rani Hatta greets guests at the end of her Autumn/Winter 2017 collection during Tokyo Fashion Week in Tokyo. — AFP photos



Models present the creations from Japanese designers during the 2017 Autumn/Winter Collection show of the Tokyo Fashion Week in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP photos



Putting Tokyo fashion week on the map

For years headquartered in dull but convenient shopping malls, Tokyo Fashion Week has always been a poor cousin to the artistry of Paris or the commercial dynamism of New York. But this season a growing number of designers are branching out in search of new pastures, consciously or sub-consciously taking tips from the more seasoned fashion weeks where location can be everything.

When Alexander Wang made the international fashion glitterati decamp from Manhattan to Brooklyn on a cold February night in 2014, it was considered not only daringly innovative but drove headlines for days. Likewise when Hedi Slimane brought a full-blown Saint Laurent runway show to Los Angeles in 2016, or Raf Simons covered walls in more than a million flowers for his Christian Dior debut in 2012.

While not scaling such dizzying heights of extravagance, designers in Tokyo are starting to cotton onto the concept that the architectural wealth of their capital could be a more atmospheric backdrop to their style offerings than the ninth floor of Shibuya's Hikarie mall. With that in mind, one label-support surface-invited hundreds of guests to a new indoor running stadium, built as a training ground ahead of the 2020 Olympics in Toyosu, an area of reclaimed land in southern Tokyo.

Designer Norio Surikabe said he chose the site for the aesthetics of its curved, mesh-effect ceiling and wooden beams, and its novelty value in having only recently become available for hire. "I just felt intuitively that this place would be nice," he said. "I thought doing the show somewhere not urban like Shibuya with a wide sky could be good for refreshing the mind."

'More stylish'

To invigorate the audience of buyers, fashion press and fashionistas, live musicians performed original zen-like music and a lighting expert was selected to bathe the runway in

bright light. It was a beautiful collection, deploying Japanese techniques to present a loose, minimal look for the professional woman with floral silks, blue leather and dusky rose shearing that bobbed like clouds.

But there was one drawback: the early Spring chill that permeated the cavernous structure left guests shivering in coats and models deserving a prize for gliding obliviously down the runway. "It's quite far, but the show was really good so I'm fine with it now," said one elderly male guest after what was a 50-minute ride one-way on public transport from Shibuya. "It was also cold, but I think that it made the show more stylish!"

The weather put more of a dampener on matohu's show at a Buddhist temple, where the original hope was that a 16th century gate and Tokyo's iconic telecommunications tower would illuminate the runway for a meditation on the symbiosis between past and present aesthetics. Tokyo's famed cherry blossom season may have officially kicked off that morning, but it poured with rain and the audience was forced to sit under a concrete walkway, view obscured.

Keeping it fresh

It was left to free-flowing sake, dry ice and space heaters to conjure up an atmosphere more esoteric than the sobriety and near silence of the ninth floor of the Hikarie mall. "When we came here... we passed through the gate, we saw its black silhouette and Tokyo Tower and it was like the confluence of the past and the future," said Hiroyuki Horiata, one of matohu's two designers. "We felt transported through time," he explained. Name. followed with a runway show at Earth Studio—a huge recording complex underneath Tokyo Tower, a self-supported steel communications structure and local landmark modelled after the Eiffel Tower in Paris. - AFP



Cauliflower and chickpeas make a tasty side dish

By Melissa D'arabian

The produce aisle is a healthy budget cook's best place to start a supermarket shopping trip. By loading up the cart with bulky, nutrient-filled produce, you'll visually make the cart smaller, and you'll spend be less likely to fill up the cart with (less healthy) impulse buys from the more processed middle aisles. Plus, if you focus on in-season produce, you'll be getting some of the lowest cost nutrients in the store.

Buy a combination of softer, more perishable veggies, like leafy greens, to eat right away, as well as hardier veggies, such as carrots, broccoli, cauliflower that can last longer in the crisper drawer. On a weekday night, you can open up that mini "veggie pantry" and roast up a tasty and healthy side dish in a snap. One of my favorite

combinations is cauliflower and onion. I add in a drained, rinsed can of chickpeas to boost the protein and fiber (and filling factor).

The basic ingredients are easy, cheap and can be swapped out easily according to what you have in the fridge - try broccoli if you are out of cauliflower. To jazz up the flavor, I use a bit of red pepper flake, lemon and tiny touch of zaatar, which is a terrific herb

and spice blend that is worth having in your pantry. (But if you don't, just use a mixture of dried oregano, dried thyme, lemon zest, sesame seed and harder-to-find spice sumac - if you have it - instead.) The mild spiciness of red pepper-infused olive oil complements the sweetness of the roasted onions, and zaatar and lemon contribute to the overall freshness and tang of the dish.

The prep can be done in minutes, making this a great week-night option. I like to serve it as a side with white fish and summer veggies, but it's flavorful enough to be served alongside a cut of toothsome meat. Or, serve over quinoa or brown rice for a meatless main dish. Bonus: leftovers make a great salad topping.



ROASTED CAULIFLOWER WITH CHICKPEAS AND ONION

Ingredients

Start to finish: 25 minutes
Servings: 4
1 tablespoon olive oil
1/8 teaspoon red pepper flakes (or more for more heat)
3/4 teaspoon (or more) za'atar (herb blend)
1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
1/4 teaspoon black pepper
1 small cauliflower, cut into bite-sized florets, about 2 1/2 cups
1 small yellow onion, chopped, about 3/4 cup
1 1/4 cup cooked chickpeas
2 tablespoons lemon juice

Preparation

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees F. In a large bowl, mix together the olive oil, red

pepper flakes, za'atar, salt and pepper. Place the vegetables and chickpeas in the bowl, and toss to coat. Cover a baking sheet with parchment paper and spread out the vegetables on the paper. Roast until cauliflower is tender and golden, about 20 minutes, stirring once halfway through. Squeeze lemon juice onto the mixture, stir, and serve.

Cook's note: If you can't find za'atar, substitute: 1/4 teaspoon dried oregano or thyme, 1 teaspoon sesame seeds and 1/4 teaspoon sumac (if available).

Nutrition information per serving:

204 calories; 58 calories from fat; 7 g fat (1 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 0 mg cholesterol; 522 mg sodium; 30 g carbohydrate; 9 g fiber; 6 g sugar; 9 g protein. — AP

Enchiladas don't sound healthy, unless you do these tricks

Melissa D'arabian

The weather we've been having this winter has me craving some stick-to-your-ribs comfort food. Since I grew up in Tucson, Arizona, comfort food was always something Mexican or southwestern, involving tortillas, rice, beans, cheese and a tasty sauce to drown it all in. Which is a long way of saying: enchiladas are pretty much my dream food. So it became my goal to create a version of enchiladas that mimicked the flavors and comfort of my childhood but didn't make me feel weighed down and searching for my elastic waist-band sweatpants.

I swapped out white rice for brown rice to boost the nutrient profile, and used black beans without added fat (I almost don't miss the lard). While cheese enchiladas are honestly my flavor of choice, I added chicken to give heft and protein, which enabled me to reduce drastically the amount of cheese.

Without the extra fat, I needed some moisture to keep the filling luscious and tasty. Surprisingly, finely chopped baby spinach worked great, adding nary a calorie but a little boost of vitamins (A, C, folate) and iron. Win-win.

I whipped up a simple enchilada sauce using canned whole tomatoes. And my final victory? I used large chard leaves instead of tortillas. Chard is an incredible source of vitamin K (one cup has 4 times your daily requirement), while also providing vitamin C and A. And, one cup of chard has, get ready: seven calories. Using chard as a casserole-wrapper is way easier than it sounds. Trim away the thick stem and then boil the leaves for two minutes, which softens them just enough to fill and roll without falling apart. Try today's recipe for enchiladas, and once you master the roll-up technique, try swapping chard leaves for pasta in Italian dishes like manicotti.

CHARD-WRAPPED ENCHILADAS

Ingredients

Start to finish: 1 hour
Servings: 8

For the sauce

1 28-ounce can of whole peeled tomatoes
1/2 large yellow onion, roughly chopped
3 cloves garlic, smashed
2 teaspoons chili powder
1 teaspoon olive oil

For the filling

1/2 cup cooked brown rice
3/4 cup cooked black beans, rinsed and drained if canned
3/4 cup cubed or shredded cooked chicken breast
3/4 cup baby spinach leaves, chopped
3/4 cup shredded cheddar cheese
1 teaspoon ground cumin
1 teaspoon dried oregano
1 teaspoon granulated garlic
1/2 teaspoon salt
8 large chard leaves
1/4 cup shredded cheddar cheese
1/4 cup cilantro leaves
1/4 cup plain low fat Greek yogurt

Preparation

Heat the oven to 375 degrees F. Make the sauce: place all the sauce ingredients in a medium saucepan and simmer over medium-low heat, partially covered with a lid, for 20 minutes, gently smashing open the tomatoes with a wooden spoon as it cooks. Turn off heat, allow to cool a little.

Carefully blend sauce with an immersion blender or in a regular blender (be very careful of steam if using a regular blender). Prepare the chard leaves: cut away the stems below the leaves (you can chop and saute stems for another side dish). Then, if the stems are tough, gently cut out the first inch or so of stem within the leaf, cutting it out in a "V" shape with a knife.

Parboil the leaves in a large pan of simmering water over medium-low heat until tender, but not falling apart, about 2 minutes. (Err on undercooking; not overcooking.) Make the filling: combine all the filling ingredients (through cayenne) in a large bowl and stir. Roll the enchiladas: Place the softened chard leaf on a cutting board with the stem end closest to you. Place about 1/4-1/3 cup of filling on the leaf, about 1 inch from the bottom of the leaf. Gently fold the sides of the leaf inward and then roll up the leaf from the bottom. (Note: if the stem is still a little tough,

go ahead and let it "break" as you roll; it will be in the center of the rollup, so it won't be visible.)

You should have a nicely-shaped enchilada-like packet. Repeat with remaining leaves. Spray a 9-by-9 or 2-quart baking dish with nonstick spray. Spread about 1/4 cup of the sauce on the bottom of the pan and then lay the 8

enchiladas in pan. Pour the sauce on top, tightly cover with foil and bake until hot throughout, about 20 minutes. Remove the foil, top with remaining 1/4 cup of cheese and bake uncovered for 10 more minutes. Top with yogurt and cilantro and serve. — AP

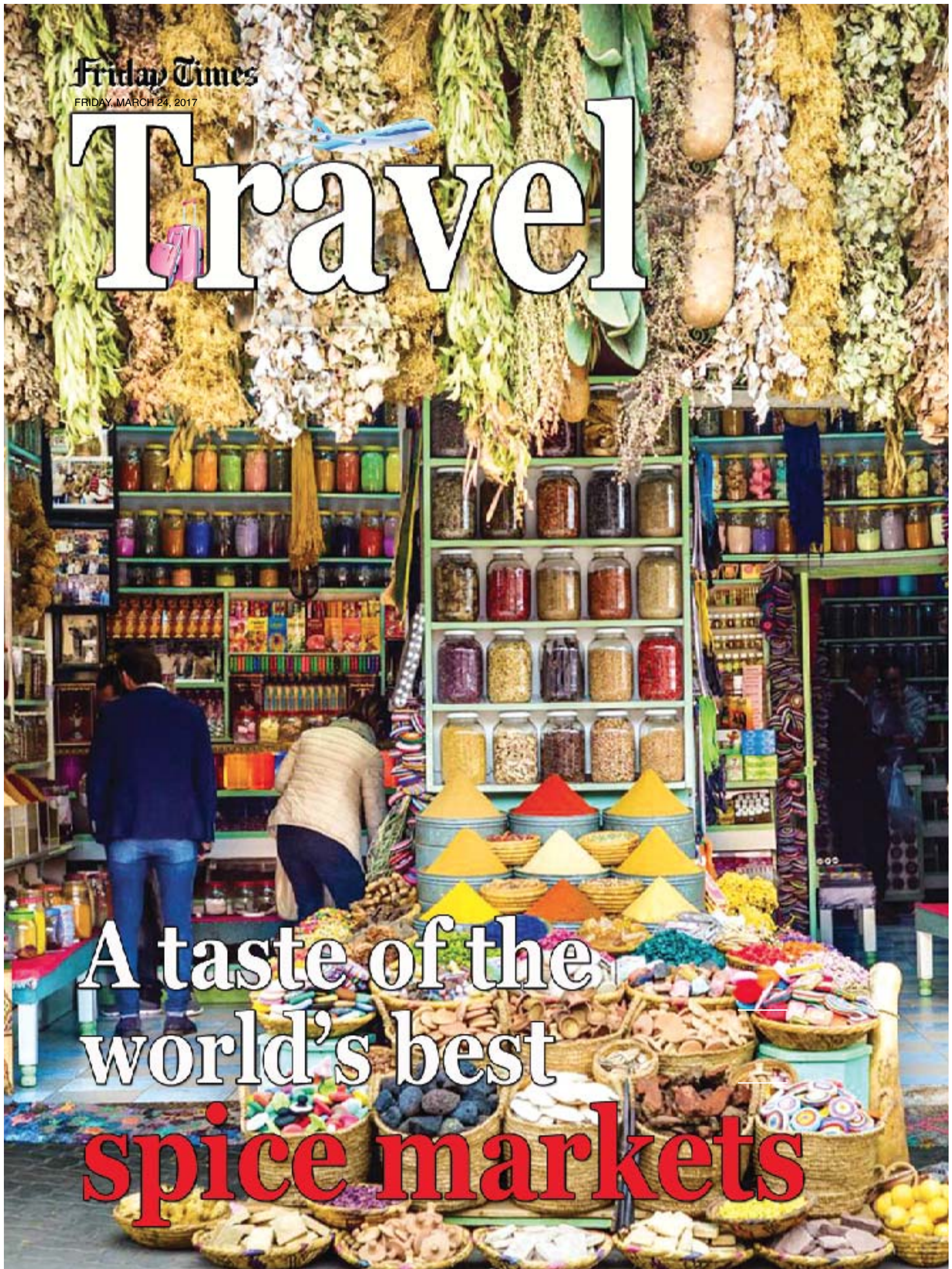


Friday Times

FRIDAY, MARCH 24, 2017

Travel

A taste of the
world's best
spice markets





Get a belly full of spiced treats in Delhi

Colorful, fragrant sacks stacked high in narrow alleyways. Boisterous vendors. And of course, delicious snacks for when it all gets too much. Spice markets are a window onto the history and culture of a place; here's a taste of the world's very best.

Rahba Kedima, Marrakesh, Morocco

Rahba Kedima, also known as Spice Square, is the obvious place to head to for brash, bright and brilliant flavorings when in Marrakesh. The mixed spices for flavoring fish and meat are a must for adventurous cooks, while you can also snap up anise, mace and fresh cinnamon for a snip of the cost back home. If you want good saffron, don't buy the ground stuff - ask to see the fresh strands. It can get pricey, so make sure you shop around before parting with your cash.

Try before you buy: Take a break from the busy crowds at Cafe des Epices. The mint tea here is particularly good.

Long Bien Market, Hanoi, Vietnam

Hanoi's labyrinthine Old Quarter is home to a wide variety of spice stalls. But for something a lot more visceral, set your alarm for 4am and head to Long Bien Market on the banks of the Red River. This pre-dawn, wholesale spot is the place to buy the freshest mint, lemongrass, cinnamon, coriander and ginger. This is a working market, meaning tourists are few and far between, so be respectful when taking pictures.

Try before you buy: Vendors selling steaming bowls of pho (noodle soup) are easy to find. All use fresh spices and herbs, perfect for a pep up after an early start.

Grand Bazaar, Tehran, Iran

Tehran's Grand Bazaar can feel like a daunting warren, especially as the day wears on and business becomes frantic. While its carpet shops and mosques are alluring, it's the spice lanes that are the most evocative.

You can buy spices, nuts and dried fruit by the weight or pre-bagged. The best deal is on saffron, which owing to its abundance is much cheaper here than in western countries.

Try before you buy: Take a break from the chaos at Moslem Restaurant, a bazaar institution serving tah chin - rice cakes with saffron and chicken.

Benito Juarez market, Oaxaca, Mexico

Oaxaca's oldest market is sprawled over an entire block in the centre of the city. While tourists flock here, this remains a busy, working market, selling a huge array of produce. Dive in and you'll find a mind-boggling variety of dried chilli peppers in all shapes and sizes, including

ancho and chilhuacle. You can also buy ready-made mole paste, a fiery chilli concoction used to create the best Mexican dishes. Just be sure to check import restrictions in your home country before you buy a suitcase load of the latter.

Try before you buy: Graze on a few spicy grasshoppers, known as chapulines, while you decide which chillies to buy.



Bag a bargain or two in Dubai's famous spice souk

30
Travel

Friday Times

FRIDAY, MARCH 24, 2017



Tehran's Grand Bazaar
is an intoxicating fusion of
sights and smells

Khari Baoli, Delhi, India

Home to the largest wholesale spice market in Asia, Khari Baoli sits near the Red Fort in Old Delhi. Dating back to the 16th century, the stalls here sell spices, nuts and dried fruits from across northern India and Afghanistan. You'll find everything from dried mulberries to khoya, a milk solid used in cakes and desserts, as well as classics like turmeric and allspice. The alleyways here are narrow and the pace frenetic, so be sure not to dawdle.

Try before you buy: You'll easily come across jaggery cake, a sweet, nutty treat designed to give you an energy boost.

Darajani market, Zanzibar

Zanzibar's importance in the spice trade cannot be overestimated. To many it's known simply as 'Spice Island' and today it continues to produce huge quantities of ginger, saffron, anise and pepper. At Darajani market, in the heart of historic Stone Town, you'll find sellers offering these local spices by the sack load, making it the perfect place to stock up. If you want to cut a deal, avoid tourist shops and get ready to barter.

Try before you buy: Munch on dates sold on the edges of the market before braving the crowds.

Dubai spice souk, UAE

Dubai's futuristic cityscape can feel alien to its Middle Eastern roots. Not so in its traditional spice souk, where produce from around the region is sold from overflowing baskets and plastic sacks. The air here is pungent with the aromas of cloves, cumin, cardamom, turmeric, pepper, saffron and nutmeg. If you're buying remember you're expected to haggle rather than accept the first price you're offered. The souk is open daily, so there's no excuse not to visit.

Try before you buy: Grab some lemon lamb tikka, flavored with dried black limes from the souk.

Egyptian Bazaar, Istanbul, Turkey

Istanbul's Egyptian Bazaar is unquestionably the best place to buy spices in Turkey, and arguably the whole Middle East. Built in 1660 alongside the New Mosque, the bazaar was given its name thanks to most of its wares being imported from Egypt. Today it remains Istanbul's main spice hub, with 86 shops selling everything from garam masala to green peppercorns. You can also pick up special herb blends and teas. Be sure to bring plenty of ziplock bags, as once you start shopping you'll struggle to stop.

Try before you buy: Buy a bag of Turkish Delight to munch on while you trawl the stalls.

Mombasa spice market, Kenya

Kenya's link to Asia, Mombasa has long been a cultural melting pot thanks to its location on the Indian Ocean. Its spice market, just west of the Old Town, is a hectic experience, but an essential stop-off for intrepid travelers. Expect to find unique curry powders, bright yellow turmeric, masala and cardamom, all nodding towards the area's cultural ties with the subcontinent, as well as local Mombasa pepper.

Try before you buy: Sit down to a fragrant curry at Singh Restaurant, made using spices from the market.

— www.lonelyplanet.com



A look inside Benito Juarez
market in Mexico



Aries (March 21-April 19)

Some project that has been on your mind lately may get its final polish. Now it is time to create ways to sell your product. This may mean you have a plan or a sample that you want to submit to the higher-ups in your company or to the city, the newspaper or some other avenue that will back you in your efforts to grow. It is possible that your company has rules about employees being inventive, so if you have forgotten or do not know, this may be a good time to check out the rules. There is no failing with you; you are determined and full of the energy it takes to move forward with your plans. A phone call from a relative or two makes the afternoon fun, but don't hang around too long as friends are waiting to join you in another celebration.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

You may be of tremendous help to an associate or stranger at this time because of your compassionate nature. Perhaps a customer will benefit from your insightful vision. You are apt to obtain financial gains through the power of attraction. Do not become careless in your business dealings with others as there could be some problems in getting what you want. You are full of energy and your health is at its best. You could be most persuasive with others and eloquent in communications; however, this could all be lost if you forget your patience. This is a time for getting ahead, combining business and pleasure and savoring the rewards. You will make gains through a home show, lecture or a social gathering with friends.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

You have a high desire for self-expression and originality. If you are living true to your ideals, then this is a time of great satisfaction. If not, then you could feel depressed and frustrated. Get a grasp on the path you are taking because business and all sorts of relationships and financial ventures are at the ready for you to enjoy. You may have doubts about the direction your life is moving but all is good-focus. This is the time for you to set aside your doubts and initiate the changes that are necessary. Get rid of the things that do not serve the end result. This is a most rewarding day-much is accomplished, realized and understood. Accept any social invitation as it will be favorable to business-network. This evening favors music and romance!



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

You may be working through this day until the late afternoon. All this study or work may create the need to take some time to get into the habit of stretching or rotating muscles to relieve whatever stress accumulates. You will be happy to know that all this hard work will bring you much success. Your hobby could be a topic of conversation with other hobbyists this evening. You light up with talk, talk and more talk. You enjoy learning more and expressing your thoughts. Perhaps this evening, at home, you will have a bit of time for catching up on mail and news. You may find yourself enjoying a long conversation, writing a letter or making a special phone call this evening. You make a list to follow for tomorrow.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

Life seems to flow in a smooth direction now and you may find yourself more creative as well. Today will bring positive, successful times to be with others and to work together. You may be pleased with the results of your efforts. Things are opening up for you and new job opportunities are available. Your choices at this time are much wiser than the choices from your past. You will find yourself whistling and singing when you formerly never even thought about it. Your expertise is in management and your directional abilities are beginning to strengthen. You have a lot of talent to bring to an employer. Take time today to make your communication to others clear. Quick answers, great wit and a surplus of insights and solutions are at the ready.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

There are tendencies to lean toward new beginnings. Enthusiasm and creative energies are prevalent and you will be ready to apply this energy to initiate new enterprises. Never intimidated by failure, you are usually ready to overcome obstacles and seek new challenges. The exchange of ideas becomes a focal point in your life. You have a strong desire to lead the way for others, finish first and prove yourself more through actions and deeds than through words. You can be extremely successful when you complete what you start or when you guide others to carry out a project. Do not forget to share financial results with others. Tread carefully where touchy issues are involved on the home front. The more diplomatic, the better!



Libra (September 23-October 22)

During high-cycle days you are in a push to accomplish much and may become sharp with your words. Today and tomorrow are high-cycle days so don't give into the frustrations. Privacy may be hard to find today and mental work may serve you best. Your awareness is quick and your psychic abilities are in tune with the universe, especially if you are paying attention. You may become more aware of the need to help improve your community. This could be through some volunteer group or by letters written to officials of your community. A persistent problem may be best solved in a group project. Relating with old chums is easy this evening and extremely pleasant. You find several opportunities to deepen an old relationship tonight.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Your workload is heavy but you have the energy to match the demand. You are in the mood to start a multitude of projects but you may have to work through your professional requirements first. You might keep a card catalog of the things you want to do so you can keep your ideas nearby. This way you won't lose track of your thoughts and goals. Lovers, children and other people or things dear to your heart are emphasized this afternoon. Being appreciated and admired for your gifts and talents is a great feeling that keeps you coming back for more. If you are not romantically involved, you could meet your sweetheart through a community meeting, a party or a club group. This evening you enjoy your friends. The situation is a natural for self-expression.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

This can be another rewarding day for you. These are the days that bring you opportunities to better your job or finances. You could enjoy making your own way and finding solutions to whatever problems you find. By helping someone today, you gain benefits in the workplace. A period of intellectual creativity has begun; expressing yourself with your own idioms comes to mean more to you. Beating the odds through cleverness is appealing and this may lead to an interest in all kinds of financial speculation. You can relieve stresses today through your exercise program. Such a busy day may have you ignoring the demands from home. Avoid arguments at home by finding ways to compromise. If there is a social event, take your loved one.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Take action to improve your investments now. This may mean dropping an investment or hiring an accountant. Budgeting may not be necessary, but extra savings at this time can give you a sense of security later. You may have a rewarding job or a great relationship but your biggest growth this year is when you put your insecurities behind you and learn self-confidence. This self-confidence will become a greater realization as the year progresses but you may be able to recognize some of the positive feelings from this thinking now. Express support to your loved ones by listening to their feelings and their dreams. Seek out forms of exercise that can be playful and beneficial to your body, perhaps skating or bodybuilding exercises with a friend.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

You may have work that is nothing but boring today. If you are by yourself, you could listen to a book on some sort of recorded device. However, you are at your mental best with sharp ideas and clear thoughts. You might use a recorder to keep track of some of your ideas as you move forward with whatever has you busy, yet bored today. The time cycle you are entering into now could bring with it an exciting new romantic interlude for you. If you are already involved-be aware. If you are single and looking, this could be a time you become very serious about a new lover-careful. This is certainly a time you stop to reflect on your life. You may want to examine where you have been and the direction you are now taking. You are rejuvenated spiritually.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

You focus on your career now. You are determined to get a mountain of work completed. You could find yourself mentally aware and in a problem-solving mood all day long. Projects or ventures will have a way of winding to a close. You concentrate and become determined in your priorities. You may spend a lot of time balancing your commitments this afternoon. Find ways in which to eliminate or allocate some of your responsibilities in order to create a balance in your life and relieve some of the stress. You may want to enjoy a little time out from all the thinking that you do by working a puzzle, reading a fiction magazine or bicycle riding with a friend. Use techniques like journal writing to help you balance out your energies this evening.

COUNTRY CODES

Afghanistan	0093	Kuwait	00965
Albania	00355	Kyrgyzstan	00996
Algeria	00213	Laos	00856
Andorra	00376	Latvia	00371
Angola	00244	Lebanon	00961
Anguilla	001264	Liberia	00231
Antigua	001268	Libya	00218
Argentina	0054	Lithuania	00370
Armenia	00374	Luxembourg	00352
Australia	0061	Macau	00853
Austria	0043	Macedonia	00389
Bahamas	001242	Madagascar	00261
Bahrain	00973	Majorca	0034
Bangladesh	00880	Malawi	00265
Barbados	001246	Malaysia	0060
Belarus	00375	Maldives	00960
Belgium	0032	Mali	00223
Belize	00501	Malta	00356
Benin	00229	Marshall Islands	00692
Bermuda	001441	Martinique	00596
Bhutan	00975	Mauritania	00222
Bolivia	00591	Mauritius	00230
Bosnia	00387	Mayotte	00269
Botswana	00267	Mexico	0052
Brazil	0055	Micronesia	00691
Brunei	00673	Moldova	00373
Bulgaria	00359	Monaco	00377
Burkina	00226	Mongolia	00976
Burundi	00257	Montserrat	001664
Cambodia	00855	Morocco	00212
Cameroon	00237	Mozambique	00258
Canada	001	Myanmar (Burma)	0095
Cape Verde	00238	Namibia	00264
Cayman Islands	001345	Nepal	00977
Central African Republic	00236	Netherlands (Holland)	0031
Chad	00235	Netherlands Antilles	00599
Chile	0056	New Caledonia	00687
China	0086	New Zealand	0064
Colombia	0057	Nicaragua	00505
Comoros	00269	Niger	00227
Congo	00242	Nigeria	00234
Cook Islands	00682	Niue	00683
Costa Rica	00506	Norfolk Island	00672
Croatia	00385	Northern Ireland (UK)	0044
Cuba	0053	North Korea	00850
Cyprus	00357	Norway	0047
Cyprus (Northern)	0090392	Oman	00968
Czech Republic	00420	Pakistan	0092
Denmark	0045	Palau	00680
Diego Garcia	00246	Panama	00507
Djibouti	00253	Papua New Guinea	00675
Dominica	001767	Paraguay	00595
Dominican Republic	001809	Peru	0051
Ecuador	00593	Philippines	0063
Egypt	0020	Poland	0048
El Salvador	00503	Portugal	00351
England (UK)	0044	Puerto Rico	001787
Equatorial Guinea	00240	Qatar	00974
Eritrea	00291	Romania	0040
Estonia	00372	Russian Federation	007
Ethiopia	00251	Rwanda	00250
Falkland Islands	00500	Saint Helena	00290
Faroe Islands	00298	Saint Kitts	001869
Fiji	00679	Saint Lucia	001758
Finland	00358	Saint Pierre	00508
France	0033	Saint Vincent	001784
French Guiana	00594	Samoa US	00684
French Polynesia	00689	Samoa West	00685
Gabon	00241	San Marino	00378
Gambia	00220	Sao Tome	00239
Georgia	00995	Saudi Arabia	00966
Germany	0049	Scotland (UK)	0044
Ghana	00233	Senegal	00221
Gibraltar	00350	Seychelles	00284
Greece	0030	Sierra Leone	00232
Greenland	00299	Singapore	0065
Grenada	001473	Slovakia	00421
Guadeloupe	00590	Slovenia	00386
Guam	001671	Solomon Islands	00677
Guatemala	00502	Somalia	00252
Guinea	00224	South Africa	0027
Guyana	00592	South Korea	0082
Haiti	00509	Spain	0034
Holland (Netherlands)	0031	Sri Lanka	0094
Honduras	00504	Sudan	00249
Hong Kong	00852	Suriname	00597
Hungary	0036	Swaziland	00268
Ibiza (Spain)	0034	Sweden	0046
Iceland	00354	Switzerland	0041
India	0091	Syria	00963
Indian Ocean	00873	Taiwan	00886
Indonesia	0062	Tanzania	00255
Iran	0098	Thailand	0066
Iraq	00964	Toga	00228
Ireland	00353	Tonga	00676
Italy	0039	Tokelau	00690
Ivory Coast	00225	Trinidad	001868
Jamaica	001876	Tunisia	00216
Japan	0081	Turkey	0090
Jordan	00962	Tuvalu	00688
Kazakhstan	007	Uganda	00256
Kenya	00254	Ukraine	00380
Kiribati	00686	United Arab Emirates	00976



00:20 Street Outlaws
01:10 What On Earth?
02:00 Treasure Quest: Snake Island
02:50 The Wheel: Survival Games
03:40 Fast N' Loud
04:30 Storage Hunters
05:00 How Do They Do It?
05:30 How Do They Do It?
06:00 Made By Destruction
06:25 Made By Destruction
06:50 You Have Been Warned
07:40 Impossible Engineering
08:30 What On Earth?
09:20 Treasure Quest: Snake Island
10:10 The Wheel: Survival Games
11:00 Ed Stafford: Into The Unknown
11:50 Racing Extinction
13:30 Wheeler Dealers
14:20 Diesel Brothers
15:10 Deals, Wheels And Steals
15:35 Deals, Wheels And Steals
16:00 How Do They Do It?
18:30 How Do They Do It?
19:45 How Do They Do It?
20:10 How Do They Do It?
20:35 How Do They Do It?
21:00 Wheeler Dealers
21:50 Diesel Brothers
22:40 Deals, Wheels And Steals
23:05 Deals, Wheels And Steals
23:30 Racing Extinction



00:00 It Takes A Killer
01:00 The First 48
02:00 The Jail: 60 Days In
03:00 Homicide Hunter
04:00 It Takes A Killer
05:00 The First 48
06:00 The Jail: 60 Days In
07:00 Crime Stories
08:00 Crime Stories
09:00 Fred Dinenage: Murder Casebook
10:00 Homicide Hunter
11:00 My Crazy Ex
15:00 Crime Stories
16:00 Fred Dinenage: Murder Casebook
17:00 Homicide Hunter
18:00 Gangs Of Britain...
19:00 It Takes A Killer
20:00 The First 48
21:00 Fred Dinenage: Murder Casebook
22:00 Crime Stories
23:00 The First 48



00:30 Prototype This
01:20 Strip The Cosmos
02:10 NASA's Unexplained Files
03:00 What Happened Next?
03:25 What Happened Next?
03:50 Ultimate Survival
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 Awesome Adventures
07:50 Bondi Vet
08:40 How It's Made
09:05 How It's Made
09:30 Prototype This
10:20 Mythbusters
11:10 Bondi Vet
12:00 Ultimate Survival
12:50 How It's Made
13:15 How It's Made
13:40 Dirty Jobs
14:30 Dick 'n' Dom Go Wild
14:55 Awesome Adventures
15:20 Mythbusters
16:10 What Could Possibly Go Wrong?
17:00 Battle Bots
17:50 Breaking Magic
18:15 Breaking Magic
18:40 What Happened Next?
19:05 What Happened Next?
19:30 How It's Made
19:55 How It's Made
20:20 Mythbusters
21:10 Battle Bots
22:00 Breaking Magic
22:25 Breaking Magic
22:50 What Happened Next?
23:15 What Happened Next?
23:40 Ultimate Survival



00:10 Hank Zipzer
00:35 Binny And The Ghost
01:00 Violetta
01:45 The Hive
01:50 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
02:40 Hank Zipzer
03:05 Binny And The Ghost
03:30 Violetta
04:15 The Hive
04:20 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
05:10 Hank Zipzer
05:35 Binny And The Ghost
06:00 Violetta
06:45 The Hive
06:50 The 7D
07:00 Jessie
07:25 Jessie
07:50 Tsum Tsum Shorts
07:55 The Zhuzhus
08:20 Elena Of Avalor
08:45 Bunk'd
09:10 Stuck In The Middle
09:35 Wizards Of Waverly Place
10:25 A.N.T. Farm
11:15 Good Luck Charlie
12:05 Shake It Up
12:30 Shake It Up
12:55 Disney Mickey Mouse
13:00 Welcome To The Ronks
13:15 Gravity Falls
13:40 Hank Zipzer
14:05 Star Darlings
14:10 Austin & Ally
14:35 Jessie
15:00 Bunk'd
15:25 Kirby Buckets
15:50 Sunny Bunnies

15:55 The Zhuzhus
16:20 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug And Cat Noir
16:45 Elena Of Avalor
17:10 Stuck In The Middle
17:35 Teen Beach Movie
19:25 The Next Step
19:50 Austin & Ally
20:15 Star Darlings
20:20 Shake It Up
20:45 Backstage
21:10 Liv And Maddie
21:35 Cracked
21:40 Dog With A Blog
22:05 Best Friends Whenever
22:30 Jessie
22:55 Tsum Tsum Shorts



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 Minnie's Bow-Toons
08:05 Sheriff Callie's Wild West
08:15 Jake And The Neverland Pirates
08:30 Miles From Tomorrow
08:45 Goldie & Bear
08:55 The Lion Guard
09:20 PJ Masks
09:35 Jake And The Neverland Pirates
09:50 Doc McStuffins
10:00 Goldie & Bear
10:15 PJ Masks
10:30 Minnie's Bow-Toons
10:35 The Lion Guard
11:00 Sofia The First
11:30 Doc McStuffins
11:55 Mickey Mouse Clubhouse
12:20 My Friends Tigger & Pooh
12:50 Loopdidoo
13:05 Sheriff Callie's Wild West
13:30 Gummi Bears
13:55 Zou
14:10 Mickey Mouse Clubhouse
14:35 PJ Masks
15:00 My Friends Tigger & Pooh
15:30 The Lion Guard
15:55 Unbungalievable
16:00 Sofia The First
16:30 Doc McStuffins
16:55 Goldie & Bear
17:20 The Lion Guard
17:50 PJ Masks
18:15 Sofia The First
18:40 Doc McStuffins
19:05 Jake And The Never Land Pirates
19:30 Mickey Mouse Clubhouse
20:00 The Lion Guard
21:00 Unbungalievable
21:05 Goldie & Bear
21:35 Mickey Mouse Clubhouse



06:00 Gravity Falls
06:25 Counterfeit Cat
06:50 Atomic Puppet
07:15 Star vs The Forces Of Evil
07:25 Danger Mouse
07:40 Supa Strikas
08:10 K.C. Undercover
08:35 Star Wars Freemaker Adventures
09:00 Lab Rats
09:25 Lab Rats
09:50 Danger Mouse
10:20 Supa Strikas
10:45 Supa Strikas
11:10 Counterfeit Cat
11:35 Pair Of Kings
12:30 Future-Worm!
12:55 Lab Rats: Bionic Island
13:20 Lab Rats: Bionic Island
13:45 Atomic Puppet
14:10 Disney Mickey Mouse
14:15 Counterfeit Cat
14:40 Supa Strikas
15:05 Lab Rats
15:30 Gamer's Guide To Pretty Much Everything
15:55 Right Now Kapow
16:25 K.C. Undercover
16:50 Future-Worm!
17:15 Gravity Falls
17:40 Lab Rats: Bionic Island
18:05 Disney Mickey Mouse
18:10 Mighty Med
18:35 Right Now Kapow
19:00 Atomic Puppet
19:25 Gamer's Guide To Pretty Much Everything
19:55 K.C. Undercover
20:20 Kickin' It
20:45 Mighty Med
21:10 Danger Mouse
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

16:00 Don't Tell The Bride
17:00 Tonight At The London Palladium
17:50 Home Fires
18:45 Emmerdale
19:45 Coronation Street
20:10 The Jonathan Ross Show
21:00 Don't Tell The Bride
22:00 Tonight At The London Palladium



00:15 Cool Spaces
01:05 Grandma's Boy
01:30 Dog Whisperer
02:20 World's Best Beaches
03:10 Lyndey Milan - Taste Of Australia
03:35 Sara's Australia Unveiled
04:00 Street Food Around The World
04:50 Valentine Warner's Wild Table
05:20 The Wine Show
06:15 One Man & His Campervan
06:40 One Man & His Campervan
07:10 Grandma's Boy
07:35 Dog Whisperer
08:30 World's Best Beaches
09:25 Lyndey Milan - Taste Of Australia
09:55 Sara's Australia Unveiled
10:20 Street Food Around The World
10:50 Street Food Around The World
11:15 Valentine Warner's Wild Table
11:45 One Man & His Campervan
12:10 One Man & His Campervan
12:40 What's For Sale?
13:05 Dog Whisperer
14:00 World's Best Beaches
14:55 Lyndey Milan - Taste Of Australia
15:25 The Game Chef
15:50 Street Food Around The World
16:20 Street Food Around The World
16:45 Lucky Chow
17:15 The Wine Show
18:10 One Man & His Campervan
18:35 One Man & His Campervan
19:05 Lyndey Milan - Taste Of Australia
19:30 The Game Chef
20:00 Street Food Around The World
20:25 Street Food Around The World
20:55 Lucky Chow
21:20 The Wine Show
22:10 One Man & His Campervan
22:35 One Man & His Campervan
23:00 What's For Sale?



00:05 So Cosmo
01:50 E! News
02:50 Hollywood Medium With Tyler Henry
05:30 Celebrity Style Story
06:00 Hollywood Medium With Tyler Henry
06:55 E! News
07:10 Hollywood Medium With Tyler Henry
08:10 E! News
09:10 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
12:00 E! News
12:15 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
15:00 E! News
15:15 So Cosmo
16:10 So Cosmo
17:05 Botched
19:00 E! News
20:00 Mariah's World
21:00 Mariah's World
22:00 Mariah's World
23:00 E! News
23:15 Hollywood Medium With Tyler Henry



00:10 The Chase
01:00 Emmerdale
01:30 Coronation Street
02:00 Coronation Street
02:30 The Jonathan Ross Show
03:25 Don't Tell The Bride
04:25 5 Star Family Reunion
05:15 Home Fires
06:10 The Chase
07:05 The Jonathan Ross Show
08:00 Don't Tell The Bride
09:00 5 Star Family Reunion
10:00 Home Fires
10:55 The Chase
11:50 The Jonathan Ross Show
12:45 Emmerdale
13:15 Emmerdale
13:45 Coronation Street
14:15 The Chase
15:10 The Jonathan Ross Show



00:20 Amazonia's Giant Jaws
01:10 World's Wildest Encounters
02:00 Super Predators
02:50 Ultimate Animal Countdown
03:45 World's Deadliest GPU
04:40 Man V. Monster
05:35 Super Predators
06:30 Ultimate Animal Countdown
07:25 World's Deadliest GPU
08:20 Man V. Monster
09:15 Snakes In The City
10:10 Nature's Greatest Talents
11:05 World's Deadliest Animals
12:00 Shark Island
12:55 Hippo vs Croc
13:50 Ultimate Animal Countdown
14:45 World's Deadliest GPU
15:40 Man V. Monster
16:35 Snakes In The City
17:30 Nature's Greatest Talents
18:25 World's Deadliest Killers
19:20 World's Deadliest GPU
20:10 Man V. Monster
21:00 Snakes In The City
21:50 Nature's Greatest Talents
22:40 World's Deadliest Killers
23:30 Shark Island



00:10 Apocalypse: The Rise Of Hitler
01:00 Apocalypse: The Rise Of Hitler
02:00 Locked Up Abroad
02:55 Science Of Stupid
03:20 Science Of Stupid
03:50 Apocalypse: The Rise Of Hitler
04:45 Street Genius
05:10 Street Genius
05:40 Car SOS
06:35 Crimes Against Nature
07:30 Miracle Hospital
07:55 Miracle Hospital
08:25 Genius By Stephen Hawking
09:20 Street Genius



THE GUARDIAN ON OSN MOVIES HD

- 09:45 Street Genius
- 10:15 Locked Up Abroad
- 11:10 The Border
- 12:05 Route Awakening
- 13:00 Genius By Stephen Hawking
- 14:00 Years Of Living Dangerously
- 15:00 Crimes Against Nature
- 16:00 Locked Up Abroad
- 17:00 The Border
- 18:00 Taboo
- 19:00 Living Free With Kimi Werner
- 20:00 Locked Up Abroad
- 20:50 The Border
- 21:40 Taboo



- 00:19 Team Umizoomi
- 00:41 Louie
- 00:48 Louie
- 00:54 Olive The Ostrich
- 00:59 Olive The Ostrich
- 01:04 Max & Ruby
- 01:28 Wanda And The Alien
- 01:38 Ben & Holly's Little Kingdom
- 01:48 The Day Henry Met
- 01:53 The Day Henry Met
- 01:59 Blaze And The Monster Machines
- 02:23 Blaze And The Monster Machines
- 02:45 Zack & Quack
- 03:07 Team Umizoomi
- 03:30 Olive The Ostrich
- 03:35 Olive The Ostrich
- 03:40 Paw Patrol
- 04:03 Little Charmers
- 04:15 Ben & Holly's Little Kingdom
- 04:27 Dora The Explorer
- 04:49 Max & Ruby
- 05:13 Bubble Guppies
- 05:37 Shimmer And Shine
- 06:00 Dora And Friends: Into The City!
- 06:22 Zack & Quack
- 06:33 The Day Henry Met
- 06:38 The Day Henry Met
- 06:44 Blaze And The Monster Machines
- 07:06 Paw Patrol
- 07:19 Paw Patrol
- 07:43 Dora The Explorer
- 08:00 Zack & Quack
- 08:22 Dora And Friends: Into The City!
- 08:46 Blaze And The Monster Machines
- 09:10 Paw Patrol
- 09:35 Shimmer And Shine
- 09:58 Dora The Explorer
- 10:21 Paw Patrol
- 10:45 Little Charmers
- 10:57 Bubble Guppies
- 11:20 Fresh Beat Band Of Spies
- 11:40 Zack & Quack
- 11:52 Team Umizoomi
- 12:15 Team Umizoomi
- 12:38 Louie
- 12:45 Louie
- 12:53 Olive The Ostrich
- 12:58 Olive The Ostrich
- 13:03 Max & Ruby
- 13:26 Wanda And The Alien
- 13:35 Ben & Holly's Little Kingdom
- 13:46 The Day Henry Met
- 13:51 The Day Henry Met
- 13:57 Blaze And The Monster Machines
- 14:19 Blaze And The Monster Machines
- 14:41 Zack & Quack
- 15:03 Team Umizoomi
- 15:25 Olive The Ostrich
- 15:30 Olive The Ostrich
- 15:35 Paw Patrol
- 15:58 Little Charmers
- 16:10 Ben & Holly's Little Kingdom
- 16:22 Dora The Explorer
- 16:44 Max & Ruby
- 17:07 Bubble Guppies
- 17:31 Shimmer And Shine
- 17:54 Dora And Friends: Into The City!
- 18:17 Zack & Quack
- 18:29 The Day Henry Met
- 18:34 The Day Henry Met
- 18:38 Blaze And The Monster Machines
- 19:00 Paw Patrol
- 19:13 Paw Patrol
- 19:37 Dora The Explorer
- 20:00 Zack & Quack
- 20:22 Dora And Friends: Into The City!
- 20:46 Blaze And The Monster Machines
- 21:10 Paw Patrol
- 21:35 Shimmer And Shine
- 21:58 Dora The Explorer
- 22:21 Paw Patrol
- 22:45 Little Charmers
- 22:57 Bubble Guppies



THE NOVEMBER MAN ON OSN MOVIES ACTION HD



- 00:00 The November Man
- 02:00 7500
- 04:00 Metro
- 06:00 Double Team
- 08:00 Reign Of Fire
- 10:15 The Machine
- 12:30 Metro
- 14:30 Double Team
- 16:30 Reign Of Fire
- 18:30 Dracula Untold
- 20:15 Momentum
- 22:00 Mad Max: Fury Road



- 00:45 Atlantis: Milo's Return
- 02:15 Return To Oz
- 04:15 The Muppets
- 06:15 Pooh's Heffalump Halloween Movie
- 07:30 Atlantis: Milo's Return
- 09:00 The Shaggy Dog
- 11:00 The Muppets
- 13:00 Treasure Planet
- 15:00 Because Of Winn Dixie
- 17:00 Tuck Everlasting
- 19:00 The Lone Ranger
- 21:30 The Education Of Little Tree
- 23:30 Because Of Winn Dixie



- 01:30 Everest
- 03:45 X-Men: The Last Stand
- 05:30 The Guardian
- 08:00 Eight Men Out
- 10:00 Everest
- 12:15 X-Men: The Last Stand
- 14:00 October Sky
- 16:00 Steve Jobs
- 18:15 Four Brothers
- 20:15 X-Men: First Class
- 22:30 The Gambler



- 00:00 Growing Up And Other Lies
- 02:00 Baby's Day Out
- 04:00 Liberal Arts
- 06:00 After The Ball
- 08:00 Baby's Day Out
- 10:00 Liberal Arts
- 12:00 After The Ball
- 14:00 Twins
- 16:00 How Do You Know
- 18:00 Perfect Match

- 20:00 Ride Along
- 22:00 Ted 2



- 02:00 A Little Chaos
- 04:00 Ordinary People
- 06:15 Grand Central
- 08:00 Manny
- 10:00 The Water Diviner
- 12:00 Experimenter
- 14:00 Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon
- 16:00 Brooklyn
- 18:00 The Lobster
- 20:00 Manglehorn
- 22:00 Barry Lyndon



- 00:45 Alpha Dogz: Pups United
- 02:30 True Story Of Puss'n Boots
- 04:15 Pet Pals In Windland
- 06:00 Barnyard
- 07:45 Garfield
- 09:15 Jetsons: The Movie
- 10:45 Alpha Dogz: Pups United
- 12:30 True Story Of Puss'n Boots
- 14:00 Rugrats Go Wild
- 16:00 Jetsons: The Movie
- 18:00 The Tale Of Despereaux
- 20:00 Albert
- 21:30 Rugrats Go Wild
- 23:15 Garfield



- 00:40 Mythbusters
- 01:30 How Do They Do It?
- 01:55 Food Factory
- 02:20 Food Factory USA
- 02:45 Food Factory USA
- 03:10 How The Earth Works
- 04:00 What Could Possibly Go Wrong?
- 04:48 Mythbusters
- 05:36 How Do They Do It?
- 06:00 Food Factory
- 06:24 Food Factory USA
- 06:49 Food Factory USA
- 07:12 How The Earth Works
- 08:00 How Do They Do It?
- 08:26 What Could Possibly Go Wrong?
- 09:14 Mythbusters
- 10:02 Strangest Weather On Earth
- 10:50 How Do They Do It?
- 11:14 Food Factory
- 11:38 Strip The Cosmos
- 12:26 What Could Possibly Go Wrong?
- 13:14 Mythbusters
- 14:02 How Do They Do It?
- 14:26 Food Factory
- 14:50 Strangest Weather On Earth
- 15:38 What Could Possibly Go Wrong?
- 16:26 Food Factory USA
- 16:51 Food Factory USA
- 17:14 Mythbusters
- 18:02 How The Earth Works
- 18:50 What Could Possibly Go Wrong?
- 19:40 Mythbusters
- 20:30 The Unexplained Files
- 21:20 How Do They Do It?
- 21:45 Food Factory
- 22:10 How The Earth Works
- 23:00 The Unexplained Files
- 23:50 What Could Possibly Go Wrong?



- 00:20 Iyanla: Fix My Life
- 01:10 Randy To The Rescue
- 02:00 My Big Fat Fabulous Life
- 02:25 Say Yes To The Dress: Bridesmaids
- 02:50 Love At First Swipe
- 03:15 Cake Boss
- 03:35 Iyanla: Fix My Life
- 04:20 Little People, Big World
- 04:45 Little People, Big World
- 05:10 Toddlers & Tiaras
- 06:00 Little People, Big World
- 06:25 Little People, Big World
- 06:50 Little People, Big World
- 07:15 Little People, Big World
- 07:40 Little People, Big World
- 08:05 Little People, Big World
- 08:30 Little People, Big World
- 09:20 Sister Wives
- 10:10 Dare To Wear
- 11:00 Dare To Wear
- 11:50 Love At First Swipe
- 12:15 Love At First Swipe
- 12:40 Love At First Swipe
- 13:05 Love At First Swipe
- 13:30 Love At First Swipe
- 13:55 Oprah: Where Are They Now?
- 14:45 Iyanla: Fix My Life
- 15:35 Cake Boss
- 16:00 Cake Boss
- 16:25 Cake Boss
- 16:50 Cake Boss
- 17:15 Cake Boss
- 17:40 Cake Boss
- 18:05 Cake Boss
- 18:30 Little Miss Atlanta
- 19:20 Little People, Big World
- 20:10 Sister Wives
- 21:00 Little People, Big World
- 21:50 Sister Wives
- 22:40 Too Ugly For Love?
- 23:30 Return To Amish



- 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 Million Dollar Genius
- 05:30 The Universe
- 06:20 WWII: Europe's Secret Army
- 07:10 The Universe
- 08:00 Cities Of The Underworld
- 09:00 America's Book Of Secrets
- 10:00 Ancient Aliens
- 11:00 Million Dollar Genius
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- 16:00 Ancient Aliens
- 17:00 Million Dollar Genius
- 18:00 The Universe
- 19:00 WWII: Europe's Secret Army

- 20:00 Cities Of The Underworld
- 21:00 America's Book Of Secrets
- 22:00 Ancient Aliens
- 23:00 True Monsters



- 00:20 Lost Worlds
- 01:10 Outlaw Chronicles: Hells Angels
- 02:00 Search For The Lost Giants
- 02:50 Storage Wars
- 03:15 American Pickers
- 04:05 Pawn Stars
- 04:30 Pawn Stars
- 05:00 Mountain Men
- 06:00 Mankind The Story Of All Of Us
- 06:50 Time Team
- 07:40 Battle 360
- 08:30 Ax Men
- 09:20 Ice Road Truckers
- 10:10 Swamp People
- 11:00 American Pickers
- 11:50 Counting Cars
- 12:15 Car Hunters
- 12:40 Pawn Stars
- 13:05 Pawn Stars Best Of
- 13:30 The Curse Of Oak Island
- 18:30 Shipping Wars
- 19:20 Leepu And Pitbull
- 20:10 Ice Road Truckers
- 21:00 American Pickers
- 21:50 Football: A Brief History By Alfie Allen
- 22:40 Forged In Fire
- 23:30 The Curse Of Oak Island



- 00:00 Dinner At Tiffani's
- 01:00 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
- 02:00 Man Fire Food
- 03:00 Chopped
- 04:00 Guy's Grocery Games
- 05:00 Barefoot Contessa: Back To Basics
- 06:00 The Kitchen
- 07:00 The Pioneer Woman
- 08:00 Siba's Table
- 09:00 The Pioneer Woman
- 10:00 The Kitchen
- 11:00 The Pioneer Woman
- 12:00 Siba's Table
- 13:00 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
- 14:00 Chopped
- 15:00 The Kitchen
- 16:00 The Pioneer Woman
- 17:00 Chopped
- 18:00 Iron Chef America
- 19:00 Luke Nguyen's United Kingdom
- 20:00 Follow Donal... To Europe
- 21:00 Girl Eat World
- 22:00 Guy's Grocery Games
- 23:00 Luke Nguyen's United



THE WATER DIVINER ON OSN FESTIVAL HD

WORD SEARCH

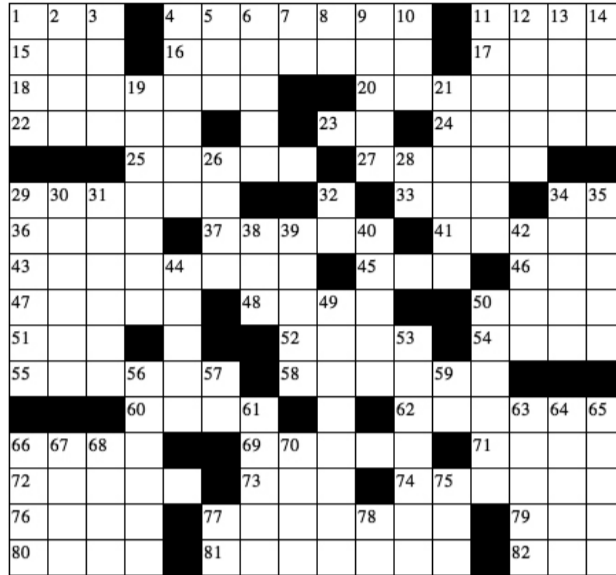
Shakespeare: Hamlet

Find and circle all of the words relating to Hamlet that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell a secret message - a Hamlet quotation.

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

- AMBASSADORS
- BARNARDO
- CASTLE
- CHALICE
- CLAUDIUS
- CORNELIUS
- DEATH
- DENMARK
- DUEL
- ELSINORE
- FORTINBRAS
- FRANCISCO
- GERTRUDE
- GHOST
- GRAVEDIGGERS
- GUILDENSTERN
- HAMLET
- HAUTBOYS
- HORATIO
- KING
- LAERTES
- MADNESS
- MARCELLUS
- MELANCHOLY
- MESSENGER
- MURDER
- OPHELIA
- OSRIC
- POISON
- POLONIUS
- PRIEST
- PRINCE
- QUEEN
- REGICIDE
- REVENGE
- REYNALDO
- ROSENCRANTZ
- SKULL
- SWORD
- THE PLAYERS
- TRAGEDY
- VOLTEMAND
- WINE
- YORICK

CROSSWORD 1557



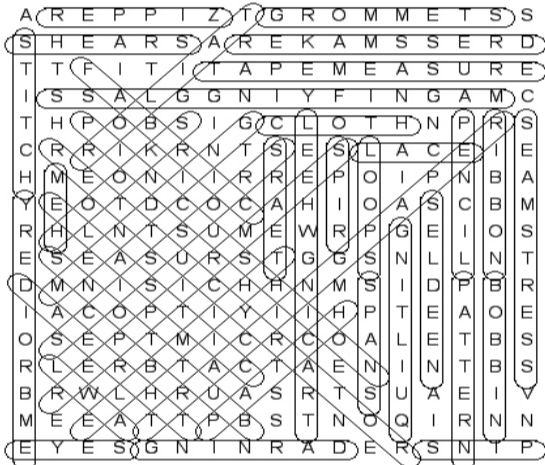
ACROSS

1. Type genus of the Muridae.
4. Of or relating to Passover or Easter.
11. For fear that.
15. Not in good physical or mental health.
16. An amine containing the double bond linkage -C=C-N.
17. Type genus of the Amidae.
18. Thickened or coalesced in soft thick lumps (such as clogs or clots).
20. A member of any of various Indian peoples of central Mexico.
22. Of or relating to or involving an area.
23. A ductile malleable reddish-brown corrosion-resistant diamagnetic metallic element.
24. Bearded reddish sheep of southern Asia.
25. Large-eyed arboreal prosimian having foxy faces and long furry tails.
27. A brief description given for purposes of identification.
29. A port city and resort in Andalusia in southern Spain on the Mediterranean.
33. Being ten more than one hundred eighty.
36. Large elliptical brightly colored deep-sea fish of Atlantic and Pacific and Mediterranean.
37. A city in southern Turkey on the Seyhan River.
41. State in northeastern India.
43. Accelerates a continuous beam of electrons to high speeds by means of the electric field produced by changing magnetic flux.
45. The branch of information science that deals with natural language information.
46. A Turkish unit of weight equal to about 2.75 pounds.
47. Any system of principles or beliefs.
48. Monotypic genus of palms of Australasia.
51. (informal) Of the highest quality.
52. Flat tableland with steep edges.
54. A whetstone made of fine gritstone.
55. A historical region on northwestern India and northern Pakistan.
58. A peninsula between the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf.
60. Genus of Eurasian spiny shrubs.
62. English courtier (a favorite of Elizabeth I) who tried to colonize Virginia.
66. (Babylonian) God of storms and wind.
69. A condensed but memorable saying embodying some important fact of experience that is taken as true by many people.
71. (music) A curved line spanning notes that are to be played legato.
72. Cubes of meat marinated and cooked on a skewer usually with vegetables.
73. (British) Your grandmother.
74. (of tempo) Leisurely n.
76. Exhibiting or restored to vigorous good health.
79. The sign language used in the United States.
80. A particular geographical region of indefinite boundary (usually serving some special purpose or distinguished by its people or culture or geography).
81. Larval salamander of mountain lakes of Mexico that usually lives without metamorphosing.
82. (sports) The chief official (as in boxing or American football) who is expected to ensure fair play.

2. (Norse mythology) One of the Aesir known for his beauty and skill with bow and skis.
3. Wild plum of northeastern United States having dark purple fruits with yellow flesh.
4. A prosthesis that replaces a missing leg.
5. Used of a single unit or thing.
6. (Hinduism) An ascetic holy man.
7. A metric unit of length equal to one hundredth of a meter.
8. An expression of greeting.
9. Declare invalid.
10. A unit of length of thread or yarn.
11. A tangible symbol signifying approval or distinction.
12. (computer science) A system of world-wide electronic communication in which a computer user can compose a message at one terminal that is generated at the recipient's terminal when he logs in.
13. Wife of Ramachandra.
14. Great in vertical dimension.
19. (Arthurian legend) The most virtuous knight of the Round Table.
21. Cap that fits over the hub of a wheel.
26. A flat-bottomed volcanic crater that was formed by an explosion.
28. An edge tool with a heavy bladed head mounted across a handle.
30. A short synopsis.
31. Rigged with a triangular (lateen) sail.
32. Half the width of an em.
34. Large heavily built goat antelope of eastern Himalayan area.
35. Affect with wonder.
38. A Spanish title of respect for a gentleman or nobleman.
39. (Jungian psychology) The inner self (not the external persona) that is in touch with the unconscious.
40. Squash bugs.
42. A district in southwestern Manhattan noted for its shops and restaurants and galleries and artist's lofts.
44. Employing variations in pitch to distinguish meanings of otherwise similar words.
49. Around the anus.
50. Drought-resistant Asiatic treelike shrub bearing pleasantly acid small red edible fruits commonly used in sherbets.
53. Discharge bad feelings or tension through verbalization, in psychoanalysis.
56. The southern part of the ancient Palestine succeeding the kingdom of Judah.
57. A light strong brittle gray toxic bivalent metallic element.
59. A state in midwestern United States.
61. An anti-anxiety agent (trade name Xanax) of the benzodiazepine class.
63. British composer (1857-1934).
64. An artful or simulated semblance.
65. Norse chieftain who became the first duke of Normandy (860-931).
67. Dearly loved.
68. (usually followed by 'to') Having the necessary means or skill or know-how or authority to do something.
70. Herb of the Pacific islands grown throughout the tropics for its edible root and in temperate areas as an ornamental for its large glossy leaves.
75. A metric unit of volume or capacity equal to 10 liters.
77. Informal terms for a mother.
78. A heavy odorless colorless gas formed during respiration and by the decomposition of organic substances.

Yesterday's Solution

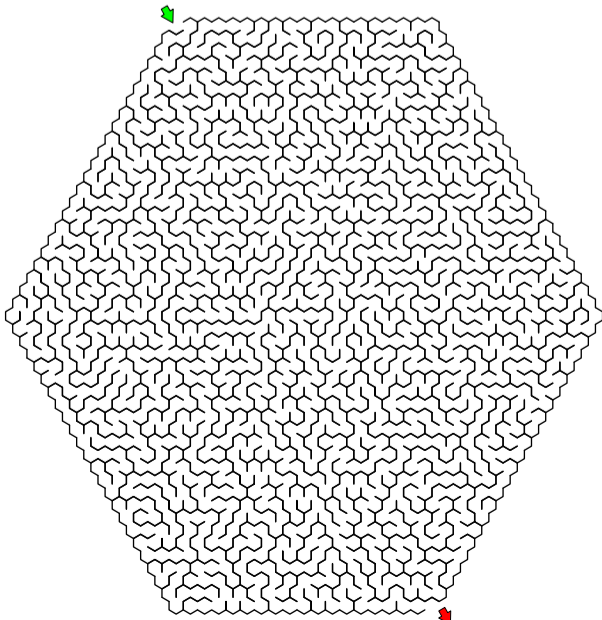
Sewing



- AWL
- BOBBIN
- BUTTONS
- CLOTH
- DARNING
- DRESSMAKER
- ELASTIC
- EMBROIDERY
- EYES
- FABRIC
- GROMMETS
- HEM
- HOOKS
- LACE
- MAGNIFYING GLASS
- MENDING
- NEEDLES
- PATCH
- PATTERN
- PENCIL
- PINCUSHION
- PINS
- QUILTING
- RIBBON
- RIPS
- ROTARY CUTTER
- SCISSORS
- SEAM RIPPER
- SEAMSTRESS
- SHEARS
- SNAPS
- SPOOL
- STITCH
- TAILOR
- TAPE MEASURE
- TEARS
- THIMBLE
- THREAD
- TRACING PAPER
- TRACING WHEEL
- ZIPPER

The hidden sentence is: A STITCH IN TIME SAVES NINE

CHALLENGING MAZE



Daily SuDoku

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

Yesterday's Solution

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

IN WAR-SCARRED GAZA, WATER POLLUTION ADDS TO HEALTH WOES

UNICEF FEARS CATASTROPHE WITHIN THREE YEARS

GAZA CITY: More and more Gazans are falling ill from their drinking water, highlighting the humanitarian issues facing the Palestinian enclave that the UN says could become uninhabitable by 2020. The situation has already reached crisis point in the war-scarred, underdeveloped and blockaded territory, says Monther Shoblak, general manager of the strip's water utility.

"More than 97 percent of the water table is unfit for domestic use because of salinization never before seen," he said. The United Nations puts scarcity and pollution of water resources at the forefront of Gaza's scourges. "If the catastrophe does not arrive this year, it will surely be here within three years," said Zidane Abu Zuhri who is in charge of water issues at UNICEF, the world body's children's fund.

Almost all of the narrow coastal strip's two million people depend upon its water table for their private or commercial needs, reaching their taps through a dilapidated public system or pumped privately from the ground.

The health of Gazans is suffering as a result. "Each year we see a 13-14 percent increase in the number of patients admitted with kidney problems," said Dr Abdallah al-Kishawi, head of nephrology at Shifa Hospital in Gaza City.

These kidney problems have "previously known origins, such as tension, diabetes and hereditary diseases, but there is no



GAZA CITY: This file photo taken on February 22, 2017 shows Palestinian youths filling bottles and jerricans with drinking water from public taps at the Rafah refugee camp in the southern Gaza Strip. —AFP

doubt that water pollution also plays a role", he said. High salinity, for example, can cause kidney stones and problems in the urinary tract.

Safe levels far exceeded

In 2012 and again in 2015, the United Nations listed the threats that could render the enclave uninhabitable by 2020. It

spoke of the ravages of three wars since 2008 and the decade-long Israeli blockade, an unemployment rate of almost 44 percent and food insecurity. UN officials have called for the blockade to be lifted on the territory run by Islamist movement Hamas. Israel says however that it is needed to keep Hamas from obtaining weapons or materials that could be used

to produce them. In a territory on the edge of the desert, bounded by Israel, Egypt and the Mediterranean Sea, where watercourses are reduced to mainly dry gulches, the water table is overexploited. The level drops and seawater seeps in, raising salinity. Brackish water is then used for cooking, showers, laundry and irrigation.

Pollution by ammunition

Well-off Gazans dig their own wells pumping water brought to the surface from dozens of metres (yards) below. Sami Lubbad, in charge of environmental issues at the Gaza health ministry, says pollution is of two kinds, chemical and microbiological. At the deepest part of the water table, these pollutants combine and raise the chloride and nitrate levels. They can cause congenital cyanosis in babies "and also play a role in the development of cancers", says university professor Adnan Aish.

"The prevalence of cancer is higher among people living near water treatment plants," he adds.

Microbiological pollution is caused by bacteria of faecal origin, mainly from wastewater and agriculture runoff. Chemical pollution is caused by pesticides but also, say experts, by the toxic remnants of ammunition fired during wars. Lead and sulfur can cause kidney problems, says Dr Kishawi.—AFP

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PAGE



Kuwait Times
THE LEADING INDEPENDENT DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF

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KNCC PROGRAMME FROM THURSDAY TO WEDNESDAY (23/03/2017 TO 29/03/2017)

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Friday Times BUSINESS

FRIDAY, MARCH 24, 2017



Bulgaria's economy:
A tale of extremes

PHILIPPINE CB KEEPS RATES STEADY, TRIMS INFLATION OUTLOOK

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MIAMI: Construction laborers work at a site in Miami, Florida. New claims for US jobless benefits rose more than expected last week, to the highest level in two months, but continued a record low run. — AFP

GERMANY SLAMS TRUMP CHARGE ON AGEING FM SAYS GOVT HAS NO CONTROL OVER CURRENT ACCOUNT

BERLIN: Germany has launched a two-pronged attack on US President Donald Trump's charge that its current account surplus is too high—don't blame us for being good at what we do, and our ageing population is going to eat it all up anyway. The finance ministry said in its monthly report yesterday that as Germany's society ages fast, its swelling senior population will be more inclined to spend at home rather than save abroad, boosting consumption and shrinking the surplus.

"In a society where ageing is growing, savings—including capital invested abroad—will fall as pensioners use that to finance their consumption in Germany," it said. "This will probably reduce the current account surplus and could even turn it into a deficit."

Better off

At the same time, it said that the surplus—which irks the International Monetary Fund and many in Europe as well—was the result, frankly, of Germany being better than others at business. It said it was down to the competitiveness of the German economy over which the government had no influence. "The current account in Germany is not controlled by the state," the ministry said.

The new US administration has accused Germany of exploiting a weak euro to gain a trade advantage and has called for bilateral discussions to reduce the \$65 billion U.S. trade deficit with Germany. Many

Europeans, meanwhile, reckon Germany's surplus epitomises the imbalances of the euro zone, in which productive Germany drives ahead of less competitive, primarily southern countries in the bloc.

Graphed over the past 20 years, the US-German gap indeed looks like the open jaw of an alligator. But Germany's main new pitch is that the jaw will snap shut when demographics kick in.

Old and wealthy

Economists say there is some truth—at least in theory—to Germany's claim that demographics will put negative pressure on the current account surplus. Some 21 percent of Germany's 82-million population is aged 65 or more, a figure projected to rise to 27 percent by 2030. But more active measures like boosting government and corporate spending would give more credibility to German efforts to counter the criticism of its disproportionately strong exports sector.

"All in all, it is a valid argument but falls short explaining the entire story. More investments, both by the private and public sector would make the story much more convincing," said ING-Diba economist Carsten Brzeski. He added: "Not only for the U.S. administration but also for the German economy, which would be the main beneficiary from such a policy change." Brzeski said that Japan, whose population is older than Germany's, still has a

high current account surplus. This doesn't bode well for German arguments that demographics will depress the surplus.

The finance ministry said that in addition to demographics, increased private consumption and an eventual normalisation of the European Central Bank's expansionary mone-

etary policy were also likely to narrow the surplus. But economists say the government could spend more on education and digital infrastructure, which would in turn prod German companies sitting on billions of euros in savings to invest in factory modernisations and new machineries. — Reuters

DUBAI DUTY FREE EXPECTS \$2M SALES HIT FROM ELECTRONICS BAN

DUBAI: Dubai International Airport's duty free operator estimates that it will lose about \$2 million in sales this year from the ban on carrying most electronic devices on United States-bound flights, a senior executive said yesterday. Under new security measures announced this week, electronics larger than a mobile phone will be banned from passenger cabins on direct flights to the United States from airports in eight Muslim-majority nations, including the United Arab Emirates, starting tomorrow.

"We estimate that the ban will cost us around \$2 million in revenue for the year," Dubai Duty Free's Chief Operating Officer Ramesh Cidambi told Reuters in an emailed statement. The estimate is based on sales of electronics to US-bound passengers, excluding mobile phones and accessories, for 2016

and if the ban runs until the end of the year. US officials have said the ban is indefinite.

Dubai Duty Free made \$1.85 billion in total sales last year, Cidambi said. The chief executive of Dubai Airports, Paul Griffiths, had earlier told DubaiEye radio that the ban on electronics covers goods sold in the airport, including duty free stores. The regulations, prompted by reports that militant groups want to smuggle explosive devices in electronic gadgets, state that electronics larger than a mobile phone—including laptops and tablets—must be stowed with checked baggage on US-bound passenger flights. Emirates, the only airline operating direct flights to the United States from Dubai, will allow passengers to hand over electronic devices at boarding to minimise disruption, President Tim Clark told Reuters on Wednesday. — Reuters

PHILIPPINE CB KEEPS RATES STEADY, TRIMS INFLATION OUTLOOK

MANILA: The Philippine central bank left its benchmark interest rate unchanged yesterday, and dampened expectations for an imminent policy tightening after it lowered the outlook on inflation. The policy-making Monetary Board kept the overnight borrowing rate steady at 3.0 percent, saying domestic demand remains strong and consumer prices are forecast to stay well-behaved.

Nine out of 10 economists in a Reuters poll predicted the central bank would stand pat on rates. A lone dissenter called for a rate hike. "Based on what we see today, the Philippine economy remains robust, it remains resilient. Inflation is low and stable. You have a growing

economy," deputy governor Diwa Guinigundo told a news conference.

The central bank trimmed its 2017 and 2018 inflation forecasts on lower oil prices and global economic uncertainties, although it said risks were tilted to the upside. It now expects inflation to average 3.4 percent this year from its previous estimate of 3.5 percent, and 3.0 percent in 2018 from 3.1 percent. It has a 2-4 percent inflation target for this year and next.

"We continue to think the BSP will be in little hurry to adjust rates soon. Although the headline inflation rate has been drifting higher in recent months, it remains within the BSP's target range," Capital Economics said in a research

note. Tame inflation and strong growth has allowed the central bank to keep interest rates steady since it raised its main rate by 25 basis points in September 2014.

Strong growth

Some analysts believe the time is ripe for tighter policy as Philippine economic growth stays robust. Eugenia Victorino, economist at ANZ, is sticking to her prediction the central bank will raise rates by as much as 50 basis points this year given strong growth and rising inflation. Trinh Nguyen, economist at Natixis, agreed the next move would be a hike as US rates were going up and domestic inflationary

pressures were rising. But the deputy governor said there was no need to modify the current stance when the inflation forecasts indicate within-target levels for this year and next.

The government is confident of hitting this year's 6.5-7.5 percent growth target, buoyed by higher infrastructure spending and robust consumption - the same drivers that helped spur growth in 2016 to a three-year high of 6.8 percent. Growth in the first quarter could be between 6.5-7.0 percent, or faster, economic planning minister Ernesto Pernia told Reuters yesterday. The central bank has two more meetings, in May and June, before the change in leadership at the monetary authority. —Reuters

S KOREA THROWS SHIPBUILDER DAEWOO NEW \$6BN LIFELINE

SEOUL: South Korea offered troubled Daewoo Shipbuilding & Marine Co. a new \$6 billion bailout yesterday, as the giant firm's financial crisis worsens. Daewoo is the world's largest shipyard in terms of its order book and was previously given a 4.2 trillion won (\$3.8 billion) aid package in 2015. It is majority-owned by state-owned banks. Previously it was a subsidiary of the now-defunct Daewoo Group, once the country's second-largest conglomerate but which collapsed in the 1990s.

The shipbuilding unit survived, only for the sector to suffer turmoil of its own in the face of a global glut of vessels and ferocious price competition from China. It suffered a 2.7 trillion won net loss last year, with its debts 27 times greater than its capital.

The 6.7 trillion won (\$6.0 billion) bailout envisages 2.9 trillion won in fresh loans from the Korea Development Bank (KDB), its largest shareholder and main creditor, and the Export-Import Bank of Korea, also a shareholder. The money is conditional on other lenders and bondholders agreeing another 3.8 trillion won in debt-for-equity swaps and rollovers.

The new rescue plan sparked criticism that Seoul was backtracking on earlier promises to stop injecting fresh funds into Daewoo. "We're very sorry that we've failed to assess more conservatively the industry's long-term slump and Daewoo's latent downside risks," said KDB CEO Lee Dong-Geol. Daewoo was in "critical" financial condition and would face insolvency in April, when it has to repay large corporate bonds, unless "strong and comprehensive measures" were taken, he told journalists. Economist Chun Seong-In at Hongik University lambasted the finance ministry for being "inconsistent, belated and unfair" in its dealings with the company, which has more than 10,000 employees. The ministry "missed a chance for a radical corporate restructuring" in 2015, forcing the government to inject additional funds, he said.

'Big Three'

The global shipbuilding slump is expected to ease from 2018, when according to Yonhap news agency the government hopes to sell a downsized and reborn Daewoo to reduce the country's "Big Three" shipbuilders-which also include Hyundai Heavy Industries and Samsung Heavy Industries-to two, for better economies of scale. The "Big Three" shipbuilders were once considered jewels in Korea Inc.'s corporate crown, controlling nearly 70 percent of the global market after seeing off their European and Japanese rivals in the 1980s and 1990s. Year after year, they churned out massive cargo ships, oil tankers and offshore drilling rigs for shipping firms and energy giants around the world.

But a prolonged slump in oil prices and the global economic slowdown sapped demand for tankers and container ships, while overcapacity, regional rivalry and competition from cheaper Chinese shipbuilders squeezed profit margins.—AFP



TOKYO: A man walks past an electronic stock indicator of a securities firm in Tokyo yesterday. — AP

GLOBAL MARKETS RISE BEFORE CRUCIAL US HEALTHCARE VOTE

LONDON STOCKS REMAIN FLAT AFTER ATTACK

LONDON: World stock markets mostly rose yesterday as investors awaited a key US healthcare vote, while London turned flat one day after a terror attack killed three people in the heart of the capital.

Most Asian and European equities edged up and the dollar recovered somewhat as investors tracked a bounce in New York, with focus now on a crucial congressional vote on US healthcare reform later in the day. However, markets had suffered a sharp sell-off Tuesday on fears that US President Donald Trump's economy-boosting measures could be delayed by his struggles to push through his repeal of Obamacare.

"Trump's healthcare vote could be key to markets," said Oanda analyst Craig Erlam. "Should the healthcare plan be approved by Congress then we could see a resumption of the Trump rally while a failure could leave markets vulnerable to a larger correction."

Expectations are that the tycoon's health system proposals will fall foul of lawmakers, including many Republicans, raising questions about the fate of promised infrastructure spending, tax cuts and deregulation.

Back in Europe yesterday, London's benchmark FTSE 100 index turned flat at midday, with the previous day's terror attack in the capital showing no noticeable effect on investor sentiment.

Three people were killed in an "Islamist-related" attack in Westminster in central London on Wednesday, when a man mowed down pedestrians on a bridge and then stabbed a police officer outside parliament before being shot dead.

In total, the assailant killed three people during the rampage: two members of the public and the stabbed police officer. Forty people were hurt in the attack with 29 treated in hospital, including seven who

remained in a critical condition yesterday.

"Yesterday's terrorist attack in Westminster proved once again that markets are remarkably resilient in the face of such atrocities," said IG analyst Joshua Mahony. "Terrorist attacks will typically only impact markets if they have a subsequent international military response. Memories of a rise in the French CAC index in the wake of the Paris atrocities goes to show that markets are rational and any selling is usually short-lived if such an attack bears little impact for the economy going forward."

The dollar enjoyed some tentative buying, edging up slightly against the euro and yen. However, the greenback is still languishing at five-month lows against the Japanese unit after the Federal Reserve last Wednesday indicated its pace of interest rate hikes would likely be slower than thought.—AFP



WASHINGTON: Federal Reserve Chair Janet Yellen speaks at the Federal Reserve System Community Development Research Conference in Washington yesterday. — AP

PROBLEMS OF CHILDHOOD POVERTY LINGER: YELLEN

WASHINGTON: A new Federal Reserve survey has found that children who grew up in poverty were twice as likely to struggle with financial challenges later in life, Fed Chair Janet Yellen said yesterday. The survey showed that more than half of young people age 25 to 39 who reported that as children they worried over things like having enough food were currently facing financial challenges, Yellen said. That was double the number with financial troubles who did not face such concerns as children.

Yellen told a Fed conference on community development that the findings underscored the need to provide children with the resources they need to achieve financial success later in life. In her speech, Yellen made no comments on the current state of the economy or interest rates. In the survey, which the Fed will publish later this spring, Yellen said there was a clear connection between childhood struggles and financial problems later in life.

"Young adults who regularly or sometimes worried when they were children about care, safety or having enough to eat are also less likely to be employed, less likely to have consistent income month-to-month and less likely to pay all of their current monthly bills in full, compared with those who never or rarely worried about these concerns as children," Yellen said. Yellen said the research to be presented at the Fed's two-day conference made a compelling case for the need to prepare people starting at an early age for success in the labor market.

"This research underscores the value of starting young to develop basic work habits and skills," she said. "These habits and skills help prepare people for work, help them enter the labor market sooner, meet with more success over time and be in a position to develop the more specialized skills and obtain the academic credentials that are strongly correlated with higher and steadier earnings." — AP

KENYA SELLS BOND OVER MOBILES IN WORLD FIRST

KENYA LOOKING TO TAP NEW INVESTORS TO FUND BIG PROJECTS

NAIROBI: Kenya began selling a government bond exclusively via mobile phones yesterday, a world first aimed at expanding the pool of investors in a country that needs money for infrastructure projects and where many people don't have a bank account.

The three-year bond, called M-Akiba, can be bought by phone users without any need for a bank account. The issue is likely to be monitored by treasuries in other emerging economies, most of which would like to broaden sources of borrowing beyond banks and other financial institutions.

The government made a limited offer of 150 million shillings (\$1.5 million) on Thursday to test the system before a bigger offer of 4.85 billion shillings planned for June. A large screen in the main boardroom of the treasury in downtown Nairobi showed about 200 investors had put in about 600,000 shillings within an hour of the start of the sale. Kenya has borrowed heavily in the past four years to fund an ambitious development program, including new roads and a new coast-capital railway, and the government wants to raise more cash. But few ordinary Kenyans bought government bonds, scared off by the minimum investment of 50,000 shillings and the need for a commercial bank account.

Investors can buy the bond for as little as 3,000 shillings, earning a tax-free interest of 10 percent. They will be able to trade it on the secondary market. "The sale of government bonds in very small amounts through the mobile phone with no need of a bank account is a first in the world," said Mehnaz Safavian, the lead financial sector specialist at the World Bank's Kenya office.

Millions of mobile users

Only 38 percent of adults have a bank account in the country of 44 million people, compared with 77 percent in South Africa, according to FSD Kenya, a UK-funded development program working to expand access to financial services. But there were 38.5 million mobile phone subscriptions as of last September, Kenya's telecoms regulator said, and Finance Minister Henry Rotich said they were all potential investors that could reduce government dependence on outside financing.

The new bond will be offered on the mobile financial service M-Pesa and similar services that allow users who don't have bank accounts to pay bills and move money via phones. Both bond purchases and coupon payments will be made through phones.

It represents a further expansion by telecoms operators into areas that have traditionally been the province of banks. Safaricom, which started M-Pesa in 2007, now also offers savings, lending and insurance products. Rotich said the 10 percent interest rate offered by M-Akiba, higher than 7 percent for bank deposits, could drive demand. Analysts said the new bond would help the government secure cheaper long-term financing.

"It should allow the authorities to tap into informal savings pools," said Razia Khan, head of research for Africa at Standard Chartered in London. Patrick Njoroge, the central bank governor, said it could also boost Kenya's national savings rate, one of the lowest in the world at 12 percent of GDP. "This is a product that will dramatically improve the savings culture of our people," he said. — Reuters

AMERICAN AIRLINES TO BUY STAKE IN CHINA CARRIER

SHANGHAI: American Airlines is in advanced talks to buy a \$200 million stake in Asia's biggest airline China Southern, reports said yesterday, as it looks to get a shoe-in to the country's huge aviation market. The Texas-based company plans to take the stake in the Chinese firm's Hong Kong-listed shares through a private placement, Bloomberg News reported, quoting people familiar with the matter. China Southern suspended its stocks traded in both Hong Kong and Shanghai yesterday morning pending a "possible major strategic cooperation",

exchange statements said. China Southern has a total market capitalisation of HK\$15 billion (\$2 billion) in Hong Kong, exchange data shows.

American is the world's biggest airline in terms of revenue by kilometres flown, while China Southern is the fifth largest and number one in Asia, according to the latest available rankings by the International Air Transport Association. The move comes as increasing demand for air travel among China's growing middle class is expected to make it the world's biggest aircraft market in the coming years. — AFP

CHINA-BACKED BANK AIB OKAYS 13 NEW MEMBERS

BEIJING: The China-backed Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) said yesterday it has approved 13 new prospective members including Canada, in a coup for Beijing after Washington failed to dissuade US allies from signing up. The Beijing-headquartered multilateral lender, which began operations earlier last year, has been seen by some as a rival to the World Bank and the Philippines-based Asian Development Bank, which was founded in 1966.

The \$100 billion AIIB counts several major European countries among its shareholders after they joined up despite Washington's objections. The bank announced approval of 13 new members yesterday, including Hong Kong, Canada, Venezuela, Afghanistan, Ireland, Hungary, Belgium, Peru, Ethiopia, and the Republic of Sudan. They will officially join AIIB after making their first deposit of capital and finishing required domestic processes, bringing the bank's total membership to 70, it said in a statement. "The interest in joining AIIB from around the world affirms the rapid progress we have made to establish the Bank as an international institution," AIIB president Jin Liqun said in the statement.

"I am very proud that AIIB now has members from almost every continent, and we anticipate further applications being considered by our Board of Governors later this year." Critics feared the bank would set low standards for projects and undermine principles of social, environmental and economic sustainability adhered to by the World Bank and other multilateral development finance institutions. — AFP



JAKARTA: In this photograph taken on March 22, 2017 Indonesian goldsmith Fauzi Supono cleans a gold ring for a customer at his workshop in Jakarta. A controversial U-turn on mineral exports has sparked turmoil in Indonesia's key mining sector, providing a fresh headache for firms struggling to work in Southeast Asia's biggest economy. — AFP



LOVECH: Employees work in a sewing factory in the northern town of Lovech, on February 24, 2017. — AFP

BULGARIA'S ECONOMY: A TALE OF EXTREMES

EU'S POOREST COUNTRY GRAPPLES WITH WAGE ANOMALIES

LOVECH, Bulgaria: Bent over the machines for hours with headphones to block out the whirring noise, textile workers in Bulgaria, which holds elections Sunday, earn a pittance even after 10 years of EU membership. "We sew more cheaply here than in China," industry association chief Radina Bankova shrugged in her factory in the northern town of Lovech as her employees cut, stitched and sewed.

The women working here produce high-end clothes for a German fashion brand but with monthly salaries starting at 230 euros (\$250), they are unlikely to be able to afford to buy what they are making.

And ahead of the third parliamentary election in four years in the European Union's poorest country, they are not

expecting any improvement to their lives any time soon.

"I don't care about politics. Whoever comes, it's all the same. I commute here and I am happy to have a job, as low-paid as it is," said a Roma woman in her 50s employed at the factory. "We work from 8 am to 5 pm with one half-an-hour break five days a week for the minimum wage. If there is a big order to finish, we also work Saturdays without additional pay," said another worker in a textile company from the town of Dupnitsa.

"Nobody dares to say a word for fear of being sacked." The textiles and clothing sector was a major employer under communism and 25 years after the advent of democracy it remains the second largest employer, after the state, with about 100,000 workers.

Salaries have improved in recent years but not by much. Workers in similar sectors such as construction, hospitality and farming also earn around 300-400 euros per month.

Bulgaria's average monthly salary is 500 euros, the lowest in the EU, around half the bloc average, and a fraction of what workers earn in western Europe. This has put many people off working, leading to a slump in labour force participation rates, and prompted over three and a half million Bulgarians to emigrate since 1990.

In 2016 alone, 30,000 young and highly educated workers upped sticks, taking advantage of the ability to work anywhere in the 28-country EU. Out of an economically active population of 4.7 million only 2.9 million people work, with the majority of the rest being long-term unemployed or not looking to find a job.

Silicon Sofia

But there are also some bright spots, as can be seen in the spacious and peaceful offices of US software company EPAM in downtown Sofia where rows of people work in front of computers. The sector, which employs 40,000-50,000 people, contributes some 3.5-4.0 percent of Bulgaria's economic output—twice that of textiles despite half the number of employees.

The average salary in the sector is 1,400 euros per month but industry sources say that top professionals with niche or very specialized qualifications can earn 10 times that. "(They) can negotiate the same conditions in Bulgaria as in any other Western country in terms of net salary, if you take into account the lower cost of living here," EPAM Bulgaria director and Outsourcing Association chairman Stanimir Nikolov said.

Together with other booming areas like auto parts, Bulgaria's IT and outsourcing sector has attracted billions of euros in foreign direct investment in recent years. — AFP

VIENNA AIRPORT APPEALS AGAINST BAN ON EXPANSION

VIENNA: Vienna Airport appealed yesterday to Austria's highest courts to annul a ruling that blocked its planned expansion for environmental reasons, arguing the decision ignored constitutionally guaranteed rights and EU law. An Austrian administrative court blocked the construction of a third runway at Vienna's airport last month, saying it would run counter to the country's pledge to the Paris climate agreement.

The ruling, which law experts see as trend-setting for other major infrastructure projects in Europe, attracted criticism from politicians and business people but also praise from environmentalists.

One basis for the appeal was the violation of essential rights such as freedom of ownership, freedom to carry on a business and the principle of equality, the airport said. "The court also fails to understand that obliga-

tions arising from international climate protection agreements relate to individual countries and the EU Commission and cannot be directly applied to individual projects," Julian Jaeger, a member of Vienna Airport's management board, told a news conference in Vienna.

Climate considerations make up part of the approval process for many major infrastructure projects, especially since nearly 200 countries agreed to fight global warming in Paris in 2015.

Aviation has been in the spotlight as the sector accounts for about 3 percent of the EU's total greenhouse gas emissions. The construction of a third runway at London's Heathrow airport was only approved after the operator provided an environmental package, and a German court slapped a night flight ban on Frankfurt airport after a fourth runway started being used. — Reuters

EUROZONE SURVEY DATA POINT TO ROBUST Q1

FRANKFURT: Economic recovery in the eurozone is gaining ground and some data point to robust momentum in the first quarter despite uncertainty over Brexit, China's rebalancing and new US policies clouding the outlook, the European Central Bank said yesterday. "Incoming data, notably survey results, have increased the Governing Council's confidence that the ongoing economic expansion will continue to firm and broaden," the ECB said in its regular economic bulletin. "Surveys point to a robust growth momentum in the first quarter of 2017."

Global trade, a key contributor to growth, also seems to be picking up momentum and despite increasingly protectionist rhetoric from Washington world trade is expected to expand broadly in line with global activity, the ECB added. The United States has recently backed away from a pledge for free and open trade, calling for a review of some trade agreements and proposing an import duty tax, arguing for "fair" trade.

Indeed, the ECB said that uncertainty remains elevated, particularly due to the lack of clarity regarding the new US administration's "America First" policies and their impact on the rest of the world. But even as growth picks up, the ECB warned that the rise in inflation will be more subdued with oil futures implying a stable crude prices and suggesting only a "very limited" impact from energy prices on inflation. Having fought ultralow inflation for years, the ECB remains concerned that the recent spike in price growth is only due to rising oil prices and thus temporary, requiring continued stimulus.

The bank noted that wage growth, a key condition for a rise in inflation, remains low by historic standards, suggesting ample slack in the economy and weak productivity growth. "In contrast to energy inflation, the expected pick-up in (headline) inflation excluding energy and food is likely to be much more gradual," the ECB said. "There are only weak signs of upward pipeline price pressures." — Reuters

CANADA BUDGET HALTS SPENDING SPREE ON HAZY GLOBAL OUTLOOK

OTTAWA: Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's Liberal government put the brakes on its spending spree in the latest budget released Wednesday, as US policies and EU elections cast a haze over the global economic outlook. The proposed budget limits new spending to Can\$5.7 billion (US\$4.3 billion) over six years—about 10 times less than the Liberals' inaugural budget last year. While the 2016 fiscal blueprint took Canada back into deficit to try to force an end to years of low growth, this latest budget keeps a tight rein on spending until a clearer picture of US policies and the future of Europe's single market emerges.

The government did not unveil any big new initiatives in the document. Rather Finance Minister Bill Morneau appeared content to tinker with the tax regime—consolidating tax credits and subsidies, closing loopholes, and earmarking small sums to study economic and social challenges. "We're taking a responsible approach to managing our economy," Morneau told reporters. "We made sure that every dollar we spend will have an important impact on the economy."

There are funds allocated for entrepreneurs, for example, to advance quantum technologies, to boost tourism, and for Canada to participate in NASA's next Mars orbiter mission. A consumer tax would be applied to ride sharing services such as Uber, while it would be removed from naloxone used to treat opioid drug overdoses, which have claimed thousands of lives across the country.

About Can\$8.5 billion in military procurement that was earmarked for the next 20 years would be pushed to future years. The government said it will make more federal land available for housing to help stem a housing crisis with prices in Toronto and Vancouver soaring beyond the reach of average Canadians. And it will develop a strategy to close the gender wage gap.

The Tory opposition in parliament, critical of the Trudeau administration for spending wildly and increasing debt while failing to put a dent in stagnating growth, filibustered to force a short delay in the budget announcement. Under the government's plan, the fiscal deficit would increase to Can\$28.5 billion in fiscal 2017-2018, or 1.4 percent of the nation's GDP. — AFP

SIGNALS BACK TO GREEN FOR DEUTSCHE BAHN

BERLIN: Publicly-owned German rail operator Deutsche Bahn said yesterday it returned to profit in 2016, after it booked its first loss in more than a decade the previous year.

Net profit stood at 716 million euros (\$773 million) last year, a rebound from the 1.3 billion euros lost in 2015 as Deutsche Bahn struggled with problems in its freight division, the impact of harsh storms in Germany and repeated train drivers' strikes. "2016 was a good year for us," chief executive Richard Lutz told a press conference in Berlin—just one day after formally taking the reins from former boss Ruediger Grube, who abandoned the top job over disagreements about extending his contract.

Since mid-2015, Deutsche Bahn has been tightly focused on quality as it fends off low-cost competition from long-distance bus operators. "We've clearly increased the quality of our products and our punctuality," Lutz said, with "a record number of passengers on main-line trains" last year.

While the rail operator was able to increase punctuality—which it defines as arriving with less than six minutes' delay—to 79 percent in 2016 and 84 percent so far in 2017, it remains the butt of frustrated but fond jokes among the German public. The new year has also seen Deutsche Bahn install free wifi service on all of its high-speed ICE trains.

Across Europe, the rail company transported people on some 4.4 billion journeys by train and bus last year, an increase of 81 million over 2015's figure. But freight division DB Cargo continues to weigh the firm down, making an operating loss of 81 million euros.

"I can't promise to our customers and employees that all the Bahn's problems will vanish at a stroke," Lutz declared from a podium between two ICE trains at a Berlin maintenance site.

"But I and my colleagues on the board promise to work with all our might to make Deutsche Bahn more attractive day by day." Looking ahead to this year, Deutsche Bahn aims to bring in revenues of 41.5 billion euros—around one billion more than 2016 — for an operating profit of at least 2.1 billion euros. —AFP



BERLIN:(L-R) Head of main lines and transport, Berthold Huber, board member, Ronald Pofalla, CEO of the German railway operator Deutsche Bahn (DB), Richard Lutz, and Head of Communications and Marketing, Oliver Schumacher hold the company's annual results news conference in Berlin yesterday.—AFP

BREXIT DELAYING MAJOR UK INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

LONDON: Britain's move to leave the European Union is delaying major UK infrastructure projects from tower blocks and power stations to new roads and rail lines, construction and services company Kier Group said yesterday. Peers such as Capita, Mitie, Interserve and Carillion have all reported tougher trading in their UK businesses since last June's Brexit referendum.

But whereas most firms have been reluctant to give details, Kier CEO Haydn Mursell highlighted specific areas of weakness as his company reported a 4 percent rise in first-half profit.

Construction contracts for high-rise buildings and large office blocks in major cities, as well as public funding and approvals for large-scale road, transport works and power stations are all being delayed, he told Reuters. "Certainly job starts have gone back on large projects," he said, adding contracts for the HS2 high-speed rail project had been pushed back by about a year.

"I think Brexit has created a distraction for government," he added. However, Mursell said the market was still buoyant for repeat public sector work, as well as smaller deals with an average value of about 10 million pounds (\$12.5 million)—where Kier's regional business does a lot of its work. Helped by this, Kier said its order book stood at about 9 billion pounds at the end of December, up from 8.7 billion at the end of June. This means the company has secured 100 percent of its forecast revenue for the year ending June 2017, and about 70 percent for the next financial year, it said.

Kier's first-half underlying operating profit rose to 56.5 million pounds from 54.4 million a year earlier. The company also announced a joint venture with CKH Developments, an east England-focused housing association, to free up funds to invest in other parts of its business. "We believe the outlook for Kier is bright," JP Morgan Cazenove analysts wrote in a research note, lifting their share price target to 1,639 pence from 1,613 pence. — Reuters

US JOBLESS CLAIMS JUMP; LABOR MARKET STILL STRONG

WEEKLY JOBLESS CLAIMS INCREASE 15,000

WASHINGTON: The number of Americans filing for unemployment benefits unexpectedly rose last week, but remained below a level associated with a strengthening labor market. Initial claims for state unemployment benefits increased 15,000 to a seasonally adjusted 258,000 for the week ended March 18, the Labor Department said yesterday. Claims for the prior week were revised to show 2,000 more applications received than previously reported. The government revised the claims data going back to 2012 and published new seasonal factors for 2017.

The revisions showed claims falling to 210,000 for the week ended Feb. 25, the lowest level since 1969. Claims have now been below 300,000, a threshold associated with a healthy labor market for 80 straight weeks. That is the longest stretch since 1970 when the labor market was smaller. The labor market is currently near full employment.

The four-week moving average of claims, considered a better measure of labor market trends as it irons out week-to-week volatility, rose only 1,000 to 240,000 last week. US stock index futures were modestly higher as investors turned their attention to President Donald Trump's first significant policy test, as he looks to get a Republican-sponsored healthcare bill passed in Congress.

Prices of US Treasuries were mostly lower, while the dollar was slightly higher against a basket of currencies. The claims data covered the period during which the government surveyed

employers for March's nonfarm payrolls report. The four-week average of claims fell 7,750 between the February and March survey weeks, suggesting another month of strong job gains.

Job growth has averaged 209,000 per month over the past three months and the unemployment rate is at 4.7 percent, close to the nine-year low of 4.6 percent hit last November. Tightening

labor market conditions and rising inflation enabled the Federal Reserve to raise interest rates last week. Yesterday's claims report also showed the number of people still receiving benefits after an initial week of aid fell 39,000 to 2.0 million in the week ended March 11. The four-week average of the so-called continuing claims declined 32,000 to 2.0 million. — Reuters

BOE WARNS EXPORTERS PRE-BREXIT 'SWEET SPOT' MAY NOT LAST

LONDON: British exporters cannot count on enjoying the "sweet spot" which was created by the Brexit vote last year, a top Bank of England official said yesterday, underscoring the BoE's cautious view on the outlook for the economy. Deputy Governor Ben Broadbent said the fall in sterling—down around 16 percent against the dollar since June's vote to leave the European Union—would normally provide a powerful incentive to exporting companies.

But businesses are probably already tempering their investment decisions because of uncertainty about the country's trading prospects once it leaves the EU, Broadbent said. Prime Minister Theresa May is poised to start the process of taking Britain out of the EU this month, kicking off two years of negotiations which will rework the

country's relationship with its largest trading partner. Uncertainty about the outcome of the negotiations has weighed on the pound.

"Either the currency market is right about the consequences of Brexit, in which case the UK's trading relationships will become less favourable; or it's wrong, in which case sterling is likely to recover," he said in a speech at Imperial College. Britain's economy has so far proven to be much more resilient than expected to the shock of the Brexit decision. Strong consumer spending helped the economy to grow more quickly than all other Group of Seven nations bar Germany last year. While there have been some signs recently that shoppers are now feeling the impact of rising inflation, manufacturers are getting a boost from sterling's fall. — Reuters



AUSTIN: Dustin Johnson tee's off at the 14th during round one of the World Golf Championships-Dell Technologies Match Play at the Austin Country Club on March 22, 2017. — AFP

ASIAN CUP BERTH IS ESSENTIAL FOR INDIA

MUMBAI: Qualifying for the 2019 Asian Cup finals is essential for India if football in the country is to continue to develop in the wake of the success of the Indian Super League, coach Stephen Constantine told Reuters. India, currently ranked 132nd in the FIFA world rankings, have never played in the World Cup finals and kick off the latest phase of their attempt to qualify for the Asian Cup on Tuesday when they take on Myanmar in Yangon.

They last qualified for the Asian Cup in 2011 but, with the country due to host the under-17 World Cup later this year, Constantine believes booking a spot in the United Arab Emirates in two year's time would give the game a significant boost. "I think it would be huge given the fact that it would come two years after we have hosted the U-17 World Cup," the Englishman said in an interview.

"We've also got the Asian Games in 2018 (in Jakarta) and have got the chance to build there. "I think it would be another sign of continued progress and consistency, which is what we've lacked in the past. We really need to qualify to keep the momentum in Indian football going. Every country needs to see success." Interest in the game among India's 1.3 billion population has been boosted by the 2014 launch of the eight-team Indian Super League, which has seen players such as Nicolas Anelka and Diego Forlan come out of retirement to play. But while the game has been showing signs of growth, the national team has achieved little. India's qualification for the 2011 Asian Cup in Qatar came after the country won the AFC Challenge Cup, a tournament for the lowest ranked nations in the continent. That was their first appearance since 1984 and while they are still the dominant force in South Asia, Indian football remains a long way behind the likes of Japan, Australia, South Korea, Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Second stint

Constantine returned to India for his second stint as coach two years ago after India failed to qualify for the 2015 Asian Cup and feels he has introduced a level of competition in the squad that was previously absent. "You can say I have introduced 30 players over the last two years and we have expanded the pool of players," said Constantine, whose side will also face Macau and Kyrgyzstan in Asian Cup qualifying. "That has given the opportunity to many more players to play in the national team and that's a major reason we are in the position we are in now, because now everybody is fighting for places, it's not a given. You need to have people who want to have the same thing."

While progress for the national team has been slow, there have been successes. Bengaluru FC were AFC Cup runners-up last year, the first time an Indian side played in the decider in a continental club competition. — Reuters

JOHNSON ROLLS AS MCILROY AND SPIETH STUMBLE AT MATCH PLAY

TEARFUL DAY WITHDRAWS FROM WGC MATCH PLAY

TEXAS: World number one Dustin Johnson rolled and Rory McIlroy and Jordan Spieth stumbled, while Jason Day left to be with his ailing mother in Wednesday's opening day of the WGC-Dell Match Play in Austin, Texas. Johnson won the first three holes and was 5-up after nine holes and steam-rolled Webb Simpson 5&3. "When you get up real early, you just want to keep the momentum on your side," said Johnson.

Rory McIlroy and Jordan Spieth were surprise losers in their first round-robin matches at Austin Country Club. McIlroy, who reached last year's semi-finals, fell 2&1 to Dane Soren Kjeldsen while Japan's Hideto Tanihara, making his first appearance at the tournament, routed Spieth 4&2. Kjeldsen was 1-down with five to play but rattled off four succes-

sive birdies, knocking his last four approaches inside nine feet, with the last three inside four feet. "I played well. If I had played anyone else, I might have won. Soren played great," said McIlroy.

Northern Irishman McIlroy will play Gary Woodland on Thursday and Argentine Emiliano Grillo on Friday. Woodland beat Grillo 3&2. Twice major champion Spieth never led against Tanihara, who has 13 career titles overseas. The American played his last nine holes in three over, hitting only one green. "I knew if I brought my 'A' game, I could probably compete against him," said Tanihara. "I wanted to see how a top player would play and I was just looking forward the whole day." Next up for the Texan is a clash with Japan's Yuta Ikeda on Thursday and Ryan Moore on Friday. Moore halved his match with Ikeda.

Japan's Hideki Matsuyama and US Ryder Cup Captain Jim Furyk halved, while Brooks Koepka was lights out with the putter in a 6&5 trouncing of fellow American Kevin Kisner.

Day, last year's winner, walked off the course after six holes, revealing to reporters that he was leaving to be with his mother, who is having lung cancer surgery on Friday.

"Hard to comprehend being on the golf course right now with what she's going through," said a tearful Day. "Family is first." The event is comprised of 16 four-player groups who play round-robin matches from Wednesday through Friday with the winners of each group advancing to a single-elimination bracket at the weekend. Players receive one point for a win and a half-point for a halved match. — Reuters

GOLF

KO AND ARIYA TOP FIELD IN LPGA MAJOR TUNEUP

LOS ANGELES: Top-ranked defending champion Lydia Ko and world number two Ariya Jutanugarn pace an elite field for this week's LPGA Kia Classic, the last tuneup for next week's first major championship.

In all, 23 of the world's 25 top-ranked players will compete at Aviara Golf Club near San Diego ahead of next week's ANA Inspiration at Rancho Mirage, California. But New Zealand 19-year-old Ko will be a focus as the reigning champion at Rancho Mirage as well as this week even as she tries to enjoy some of her favorite holes.

"This is my favorite stretch of events," Ko said. "I don't think it real clicked until I had to do media days that I actually did win back to back.

They are great events." Many players, including South Korea's sixth-ranked Jang Ha-Na, will try to treat the week like

any other even as she fine tunes her game in quest of a first major title next week. "It feels really good this week. So maybe it will be a really good score after this week," Jang said. "Feels really exciting, but not thinking too much, not thinking too differently. Just thinking tournament."

Thailand's Ariya has been ranked second to Ko with 34 weeks in a row and hopes to close the gap even as the South Korean-born Kiwi has found her form with three top-10 showings this year, including shares of eight last week at the Founders Cup and in Thailand and ninth at Singapore. But Ko has yet to win since making wholesale changes in her support team before the start of the 2017 campaign, using a new swing, caddie and coach. Ko and Lizette Salas each fired four rounds last week without a bogey, a feat achieved by only two other players since 2011. — AFP

CRICKET

BAD-TEMPERED INDIA, AUSTRALIA TEST SERIES SET FOR SHOWDOWN

DHARAMSALA: India and Australia begin the finale of a bitterly fought Test series tomorrow, with home skipper Virat Kohli keen to silence attacks that even Australia's ex-skipper Michael Clarke has warned are "getting out of control". Kohli, who has been compared in the Australian press to US President Donald Trump, has had a series to forget so far after scoring only 46 in the first three Tests and injuring his shoulder in the process. The 28-year-old, who scored a record-breaking four double centuries in the four previous series, has come under scrutiny both over his form and his conduct under pressure after his controversial outburst against his opposite number Steve Smith at the end of the second Test in Bangalore.

Smith, who was accused by Kohli of abusing the Decision Review System (DRS), had the last laugh by scoring a massive 178 in the third Test which ended in a draw Monday, leaving the series on a knife-edge at 1-1. Despite clear-the-air talks before the Ranchi Test, more bad blood flowed during the match with India taking offence when Australia's Glenn Maxwell made fun of Kohli's injury by clutching his shoulder in mock agony. Even the chief executive of the Australian cricket board, James Sutherland, has been stirring the pot by telling a radio interviewer that he didn't think Kohli "knows how to spell the word" sorry.

A defense of Kohli has come from an unlikely quarter, with Smith's predecessor Clarke slamming the sniping and saying: "This is getting out of control." "I don't think Virat Kohli has done anything that Steve Smith wouldn't do or that I wouldn't have done as (Australian) captain," Clarke told the India Today television network. "I see the Australian in Virat Kohli. That toughness that he displays on the field, that was the way I was brought up by all the champions in the team that I came into." Clarke also warned that a match-winning innings from Kohli could be just round the corner. "He may come up with a big century and win India the series in Dharamsala," he said.

No style-change for Kohli

India's outstanding batsman of the series has been Cheteshwar Pujara, who spent more than 11 hours at the crease in the last Test as he ground out a double century. While full of praise for Pujara, Kohli made clear after Ranchi that he would not temper his swashbuckling style in a bid to get back in the runs. "Everyone has different style of batting. I would not change mine," he told reporters. After his team held out for a draw in Ranchi, Smith said the momentum was now with Australia going into the final game, with the tourists only needing to avoid defeat to retain the Border-Gavaskar trophy.

However, defeat could see Australia overtaken by South Africa as the number two Test side behind top-ranked India, with the Proteas currently playing a series against New Zealand. "One-all in the series-massive game in Dharamsala, really exciting and can't wait," said Smith after the Ranchi Test. Peter Handscomb, one of Australia's heroes in Ranchi, said the tourists were confident of finishing the series in style in Dharamsala, a Himalayan hill station which is one of cricket's most pictureque venues.

"Already we can walk away from this series with our heads held high, and if we keep performing the way we are in this final Test we can definitely come away with a win," he told reporters in Dharamsala. Whatever the result, India will retain their number one ranking at the end of a season which has seen them host a record 13 Test matches against four different visiting teams. Kohli has hinted that fit-again fast bowler Mohammed Shami, who recently claimed four wickets in a domestic one-day final, could be brought into the starting lineup in Dharamsala. Australia are expected to be unchanged for the match.—AFP



COLOMBO: Bangladeshi wicketkeeper Nurul Hasan attempts to catch a ball off a shot played by Sri Lanka's board president's XI batsman Kusal Perera during a limited overs warm up match in Colombo, Sri Lanka on Wednesday, March 22, 2017. — AP

ATHLETICS

KAMPALA HOSTS FIRST MAJOR SPORTS SHOWPIECE

NAIROBI: The World Cross Country Championship takes place in Kampala Sunday in Uganda's biggest ever sports showpiece, with the traditional rivalry between Kenyan and Ethiopian athletes set to dominate the event. More than 550 athletes from 59 countries and one refugee team from South Sudan will take part, making the event the biggest cross country meeting since 2006 where 574 competitors took part in the Japanese city of Fukuoka. Kenya and Ethiopia have dominated the event since 1981 and all eyes will be on the two running-mad nations at Kampala's Kololo grounds, scene of Uganda's Independence celebrations in October 1962.

Kenya won the men's senior title a record 18 years in row from 1986 to 2003, with most of the wins under former national team coach Mike Kosgei. Kosgei is back with Kenya as the deputy team manager for Kampala championships, and the veteran coach has warned that although Kenya will field a formidable team, the hosts and a couple of countries with former Kenyan-born athletes should not be underrated. "Many people are thinking the race will be between Ethiopia and Kenya, but they are forgetting about the Ugandans and former Kenyans who are competing for other countries like Bahrain, Qatar and the United States", Kosgei said.

"Uganda have a very strong team led by the 2014 World and African 10,000m champion Joshua Cheptegei and Timothy Toroitich, winner of two big international cross-country races in Spain this winter," Kosgei said. "Being the hosts should also give the Ugandans the home advantage to show their pedigree before their home crowd." Bahrain claimed its first ever medal at the last World cross country championship in Guiyang with a bronze in the team event, thanks to a legion of former Ethiopian and Kenyan runners.

Nearly a quarter of the 28-member strong team representing the United

States are former Kenyans who have taken up American citizenship. The United States team includes the national cross country champion Leonard Korir, who won the Great Edinburgh cross country race in January and the current Olympic 5000m silver medalist, Paul Chelimo. The 26-year-old Chelimo is one of the four athletes named for the inaugural Mixed Relay, a race comprising male and female runners introduced for the first time to spice up the championships.

Both Kenya and Ethiopian have named an array of Olympic and world champions in their teams for the relays, which will be

held before the main competition. The world cross country championship is considered one of the most difficult races to win, even more difficult than the Olympic Games, due to the tough course terrains. Uganda becomes only the fourth African country to host the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) event in its 44th year history. Morocco hosted twice in 1975 and 1998, South Africa in 1996 and Kenya in 2007. The competition was changed from an annual to a biennial event in 2011. Kampala also marks the first time that senior women will race the distance of 10 kilometers.—AFP

INJURIES ROCK NEW ZEALAND, SOUTH AFRICA AHEAD OF TEST

WELLINGTON: Injuries rocked New Zealand and South Africa yesterday, two days out from the start of the third and final Test in Hamilton with Tim Southee ruled out and Quinton de Kock doubtful. New Zealand, under pressure to win if they are to level the series, were already sweating on their firepower and the availability of Trent Boult when his new-ball partner Southee was sidelined by a hamstring injury. South Africa have no experienced back up for de Kock, who plays a prominent role in their balance as a wicketkeeper-batsman. The uncapped Heinrich Klaasen is travelling as the sole replacement.

The injuries added to the dark clouds hovering near Hamilton with the forecast for showers throughout the five days of the Test, reducing the prospect of a result. South Africa, in an unbeatable 1-0 lead after the eight-wicket, three-day thrashing they inflicted on New Zealand in the second Test at Wellington, said they

would make a late call on whether the influential de Kock would play. New Zealand, however, ruled out Southee as soon as his hamstring tear was confirmed but said there would be no replacement bowler called up.

This indicated a start for Boult, who missed the Wellington Test through leg soreness and has only had light sessions in the nets this week ahead of a final fitness test. Complicating South Africa's team selection with the question mark over de Kock was the state of the pitch. They had called in Dane Piedt as a fresh spinner before Keshav Maharaj and JP Duminy performed with distinction in Wellington but expectations of a spinners paradise in Hamilton appeared to be unfounded. The pitch has a typical New Zealand grass cover, which seemed at odds with coach Mike Hesson's claim that it would be unwise to do anything that would further assist South Africa's impressive seam bowling attack.—AFP

SPAIN'S LA LIGA CHIEF DISMISSES EUROPEAN SUPER LEAGUE IDEA

SINGAPORE: The president of Spain's La Liga yesterday shot down suggestions for a European super league, saying it will likely face stiff resistance from national leagues and fans. Javier Tebas dismissed reports that Spanish heavyweights Real Madrid were seeking the formation of an exclusive European league which would see a closed competition of 20 sides from the continent. Madrid-based newspapers Marca and AS reported in February that Real was pushing for a European league after growing disgruntled with the Spanish league. "The phenomena that there will be a Super League is never going to happen because the national leagues like English Premier League and Bundesliga in Germany, they are

very consolidated," Tebas said through a translator.

"It is impossible that the Spanish fans could accept that Real Madrid quits Spanish football," he added, pointing out that Real makes 70 percent of its income from the Spanish market. Tebas said the proposed super league made up of football giants over the continent would mean some clubs have to finish in "10th, 11th or 12th", and he does not see fans of these sides accepting such low rankings. Tebas spoke to AFP on the sidelines of the launch of La Liga's office in Singapore as part of moves to expand their presence in Southeast Asia, a football-crazy region of more than 600 million people. La Liga already has offices in Dubai, China and India.

Aleksander Ceferin, president of European football's governing body UEFA, vowed on Wednesday that no super league will be formed under his watch, although media reports said major clubs were unofficially discussing the idea. Some of the reports suggested that Real is unhappy with the disparity of income compared to English sides. Tebas said however he was "sure" the Spanish League would catch up with the English Premier League economically in eight to ten years. According to consulting firm Deloitte, English clubs generated 4.4 billion euros (\$4.75 billion) in revenues in the 2014-2015 season compared to 2.3 billion euros for the Bundesliga and 2.05 billion euros for La Liga. — AFP



BASQUE COUNTRY: Real Madrid's French forward Karim Benzema (right) celebrates with Welsh forward Gareth Bale after scoring his team's first goal during the Spanish league football match Athletic Club Bilbao vs Real Madrid CF at the San Mames stadium on March 18, 2017. — AFP

US LOOK FOR MENTAL EDGE IN CRUCIAL WORLD CUP TEST

SAN FRANCISCO: Veteran coach Bruce Arena believes a tougher mental approach can help the United States reignite their 2018 World Cup qualification campaign today as the Americans prepare to face Honduras in a must-win tie in California. Arena, who replaced sacked coach Jurgen Klinsmann in November, is targeting six points from Friday's game in San Jose and next week's trip to face Panama in the CONCACAF regional qualifiers.

The US are currently languishing at the foot of the six-team "Hexagonal" qualifying tournament, with no points from their opening two games which ended in defeats to Mexico and Costa Rica last November. The second of those two losses—a catastrophic 4-0 drubbing by "Los Ticos" in Costa Rica—prompted Klinsmann's dismissal, paving the way for Arena to return for a second stint in charge. The 65-year-old, who led the United States at the 2002 and 2006 World Cups, says toughening the squad's brittle mentality following the lopsided Costa Rica defeat has been a priority since he took over.

"Mentally, to me, they collapsed in the game against Costa Rica," Arena told

Fox Sports. "So, over the past three months, we've worked really hard and talked to the players about their role, the importance of playing for the US team and becoming a team once we come together in San Jose. "I think the message is out to the players. I have a lot of experience. I understand the temperature of a team and have the right feel. I can promise you when Friday comes around we're going to be ready to play against Honduras."

'HANGING ON BY FINGERNAIL?'

US captain Michael Bradley said Arena had already had a positive impact. "Bruce has come in and done a good job in terms of re-establishing certain things, getting out a few things," Bradley said. "I think the mentality and the spirit in training and around the group, both in January and now this week, has been excellent." The top three finishers in the "Hex" qualify automatically for next year's World Cup finals in Russia. The fourth placed team faces a two-leg playoff against a side from Asia.

While Arena remains confident the US will qualify for Russia, he raised the stakes for Friday's qualifier by stating

that only a win would do. "We need to win. Period," Arena said. "Our goal on Friday is to win. "I don't know if we're hanging on by a fingernail, but we're getting close. If there were two games left, I'd be concerned. I think we can close the gap." Bradley, meanwhile, said the losses in the opening games had left the Americans with little room to maneuver. "The reality is simple. We let ourselves down in the first two games. It means that our margin for error is now very, very small," Bradley said.

Arena was given an injury headache after Hamburg forward Bobby Wood withdrew from the squad, citing a back injury. That could mean a recall for Seattle Sounders veteran Clint Dempsey, who has returned to football after an enforced layoff last year caused by the discovery of an irregular heartbeat. Dempsey, second on the all-time USA scoring charts with 52 goals in 130 internationals, is back in the squad and could feature against Honduras. Arena said Dempsey would have a "reduced role." "It's important to move him back the right way and not to push him too hard. If he steps on the field he'll contribute," Arena said. — AFP

EUROPE BACK TO BUSINESS ON ROAD TO 2018 W CUP

PARIS: Qualifying for next year's World Cup in Russia ramps up again this weekend in Europe, as the group stages reach the halfway point and with some countries already with one foot in the finals. AFP Sport picks out five clashes to watch out for in the games from Friday to Sunday:

BALE AND WALES IN TROUBLE

They may be Euro 2016 semi-finalists and have one of the best players in the world in Real Madrid forward Gareth Bale, but Wales have failed to fire after those heady summer days in France when they stunned Europe to reach the last four. Wales trail leaders Ireland by four points after four games in Group D and defeat in Dublin on Friday would leave them in grave danger of missing out on a place in Russia. If they are to beat a dogged Ireland they will need Bale at his brilliant best. All the ingredients are there for a Wales win—they are at full strength whereas Ireland are blighted by injuries and suspension.

THREE-WAY TUSSLE

There is all to play for in an intriguing Group G: Spain are top on goal difference from Italy. But Israel are very much in the hunt, just one point behind. Only the top team from each group is guaranteed a place in Russia with most of the teams finishing second going into play-offs. That means either Spain or Italy—both former World Cup winners—are going to have to do it the hard way. On Friday, Italy will fully expect to brush aside Albania. The same evening Spain will need to be wary of Israel. His side might be the underdogs, but Israel boss Elisha Levy said his side will go on the attack in Gijon.

CLASH AT THE TOP

The top two clash in Group I when table-toppers Croatia entertain Ukraine today in Zagreb. Something needs to give: both are unbeaten after four games and victory for Croatia would give them a comfortable buffer in a group that also includes Euro 2016 surprise package Iceland and Turkey, third and fourth respectively. Turkey's campaign has been a disappointment so far and they must beat Finland at home to keep any hopes of Russia alive. Iceland travel to the bottom side Kosovo.

BELGIUM FLYING

Belgium, under coach Roberto Martinez and with Thierry Henry by his side, have been flying. They have a 100 percent record from four games and have hit 21 goals and conceded just one. They will do well though to keep up that scoring rate of five goals a game when they host an obstinate Greece on Saturday in top versus second in Group H. Greece don't score many but they have conceded only twice from their four games. However, in Romelu Lukaku, free-scoring Belgium have one of the hottest strikers in Europe. Good news though for Greece: Eden Hazard is out injured.

ENGLAND EXPECTS

England can already start thinking about where they are going to stay in Russia, topping a weak Group F despite managerial upheaval. But world football's great underachievers are often compelling viewing—if only to see the national handwringing each time they fail to produce the high standards the English public demands. But even England will surely send fourth-placed Lithuania packing with ease on Sunday at Wembley in coach Gareth Southgate's first qualifier since being named on a permanent basis following the sacking of Sam Allardyce. — AFP

MORE WOE FOR BOUCHARD WITH MIAMI EXIT

MIAMI: Eugenie Bouchard's poor run of form continued as the Canadian suffered a first-round exit at the hands of Australia's Ashleigh Barty at the Miami Open on Wednesday. Wildcard Barty's 6-4, 5-7, 6-3 win sets up an all-Australian clash in the second round against 14th seed Samantha Stosur. But for the 23-year-old Bouchard, a former world number five who has slumped to 56th in the world rankings, it was another blow after her first round exit in Indian Wells.

"It's been a bit of a struggle," said a stone-faced Bouchard, who was unable to account for her loss of

form. Bouchard was a beaten finalist at Wimbledon in 2014 but, apart from a run to the semi-final at Sydney, where she was beaten by Britain's Johanna Konta, she has been unable to make an impact this year. Barty reproduced the gutsy tennis that helped her secure her maiden WTA title at the Malaysian Open in Kuala Lumpur last month. "We've had a good pre-season and get a good foundation and the stars aligned a bit for us this year so far. We have worked hard and it is just that hard work starting to pay off," said the Australian.

The 20-year-old, who took time out from tennis in

2014 to play cricket, has never come up against her compatriot Stosur before and while she will start as clear underdog she is relishing the challenge. "It will be good. Obviously we have trained together and hit a lot so it will be interesting, I am really excited, for me it is just another opportunity to go out and play," she said. Serbia's Jelena Jankovic was another high-profile early exit, the 2008 Miami finalist falling 4-6, 6-4, 7-6(7/3) to Kazakhstan's Yaroslava Shvedova. Britain's Heather Watson, who reached the fourth round in Miami last year, was beaten 7-6 (7/4), 6-1 by Romanian qualifier Patricia Maria Tig. — AFP

LADD LIFTS ISLANDERS

NEW YORK: Andrew Ladd scored the tiebreaking goal with about 7 1/2 minutes remaining in the third period as the New York Islanders rallied for 3-2 victory over the crosstown-rival Rangers in the NHL on Wednesday night. Anders Lee had a goal and an assist, and Nikolay Kulemin also scored for the Islanders, who pulled two points behind Boston for the Eastern Conference's second wild-card spot. Anthony Beauvillier had two assists and Thomas Greiss stopped 34 shots.

Mats Zuccarello and Rick Nash scored, and Antti Raanta finished with 25 saves for the Rangers, who remained six points behind Columbus for third place in the Metropolitan Division. The Islanders, who beat the Rangers for the third time in four games this season and seven of eight over the last two, won for just the second time in six games (1-3-1). The Islanders also improved to 17-9-4 since interim coach Doug Weight replaced the fired Jack Capuano. The loss extended the Rangers' home losing streak to seven games (0-5-2) since beating Washington on Feb 19.

MAPLE LEAFS 5, BLUE JACKETS 2

William Nylander and Leo Komarov each had a goal and an assist to help the Toronto Maple Leafs beat the Columbus Blue Jackets. Auston Matthews and Nazem Kadri also scored, and Frederik Andersen had 32 saves as Toronto stayed in the thick of the playoff hunt in the Atlantic Division. Nikita Zaitsev scored an empty-net goal after the Blue Jackets pulled their goalie for a sixth skater near the end. David Savard and Brandon Saad scored for Columbus, which lost for the first time in the last five games. Backup goaltender Joonas Korpisalo stopped 26 shots. The Blue Jackets stayed in third place in the Metropolitan Division, two points behind leader Washington and one behind Pittsburgh. They play the Capitals in Washington on Thursday night.

DUCKS 4, OILERS 3

Rickard Rakell scored the go-ahead goal while Hampus Lindholm had a goal and two assists as the Anaheim Ducks defeated the Edmonton Oilers. Jonathan Bernier made 29 saves, and Josh Manson and Patrick Eaves also scored as Anaheim passed Edmonton for second place in the Pacific Division with nine games remaining for both teams. Cam Talbot gave up four goals on 18 shots before being pulled midway through the second period as the Oilers' four-game winning streak ended. Connor McDavid had a goal and an assist, giving him 84 points to extend his league lead, and Leon Draisaitl also scored for the Oilers. Mark Letestu added a 6-on-3 power-play goal with 6.7 seconds remaining. — AP



New York Islanders left wing Nikolay Kulemin (86), of Russia (from left) and right wing Joshua Ho-Sang (66) celebrate with left wing Anthony Beauvillier (72) after Kulemin scored a tying goal in the third period of an NHL hockey game against the New York Rangers at Madison Square Garden in New York on Wednesday, March 22, 2017. — AP

IOC 'STILL HOPEFUL' NHL PLAYERS WILL COMPETE IN PYEONGCHANG

BERLIN: The International Olympic Committee was hopeful negotiations with the National Hockey League would eventually be successful, allowing the world's best players to compete at next year's Pyeongchang winter Games, the governing body said on Thursday. The NHL players' participation is traditionally a thorny issue for the Olympics with the season forced to shut down for 2-1/2 weeks to accommodate the Games while club owners are concerned with player injuries and the high cost of insurance.

The NHL last met with the IOC and the International Ice Hockey Federation in early February but talks have so far been un-

successful and NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman said this week it was unlikely the players will travel to South Korea. "We remain hopeful that the negotiations between the IIHF and the NHL will prove successful," an IOC spokesperson told Reuters. "The fans want to see the best hockey players taking part in the Olympic Winter Games Pyeongchang 2018."

Bettman had told Reuters on Tuesday it should be assumed players would not compete at the winter Games in South Korea. "There are no negotiations ongoing," Bettman said. "We were open to having discussions on a variety of things that might mitigate the damage to our season but that

had no resonance. "As things stand now people should assume we are not going." For handing over \$3.5 billion in player contracts the NHL is seeking something akin to IOC Top Sponsor status that would allow the league to market the Winter Games on its platforms. The NHL has also said the IOC will have to backtrack and pay player insurance and transportation costs after saying it would no longer bear the costs like it had during the five previous Winter Games. The NHL did not agree to go to the 2014 Olympics in Sochi until July, 2013. While NHL owners have dug in, the IOC and IIHF have both the players and the sponsors in their corner applying pressure. — Reuters



DENVER: Cleveland Cavaliers forward Channing Frye (right) fouls Denver Nuggets guard Jamal Murray as he drives to the rim in the second half of an NBA basketball game Wednesday, March 22, 2017, in Denver. The Nuggets won 126-113.— AP

WESTBROOK'S TRIPLE-DOUBLE HELPS THUNDER BEAT PHILLY

OKLAHOMA CITY: Russell Westbrook recorded his 35th triple-double of the season with 18 points, 11 rebounds and 14 assists as the Oklahoma City Thunder cruised to a 122-97 win over the Philadelphia 76ers on Wednesday night. The Thunder have won 16 straight games against Philadelphia, a run that stretches to the 2008-09 season, the franchise's first in Oklahoma City. Westbrook, who made all six of his field-goal attempts and all six of his free throws, has recorded five triple-doubles against Philadelphia, his highest total against any NBA team. He needs six triple-doubles in Oklahoma City's final 11 games to tie Oscar Robertson's single-season record, set during the 1961-62 season. Nik Stauskas led the 76ers with 20 points, reaching the 20-point mark in consecutive games for the first time in his career.

NUGGETS 126, CAVALIERS 113

Wilson Chandler scored 18 points in his return from a pulled groin and provided stellar defense on LeBron James in Denver's victory over Cleveland. The Nuggets bounced back from consecutive heartbreaking last-second losses to Houston with a signature win that increased their lead to 1 1/2 games over idle Portland in the race for the final playoff spot in the West. Will Barton scored 20 points, Kenneth Faried added 17 and Jamal Murray had 15 off the bench for

Denver, which also got 21 points from Gary Harris and 16 from Nikola Jokic. Kyrie Irving led the Cavs with 33 points but James had just 18 and the two stars sat out much of the fourth quarter with Cleveland trailing by double digits.

CELTICS 109, PACERS 100

Isaiah Thomas scored 25 points, Avery Bradley had 18 with eight rebounds and Boston beat Indiana night for its fifth win in six games. Al Horford added 15 points with eight boards and eight assists, and Jae Crowder also scored 15 points for Boston, which won for the 12th time in 13 home games. Paul George led the Pacers with 37 points and Jeff Teague had 25. Indiana has alternated by winning and losing in its last 15 games.

BULLS 117, PISTONS 95

Nikola Mirotic scored a season-high 28 points as Chicago beat Detroit. Mirotic shot 12 of 15 and made 4 of 6 3-point attempts to lead Chicago to an easy win after dropping eight of 10. Jimmy Butler added 16 points and 12 assists. Joffrey Lauvergne filled in for suspended center Robin Lopez and outplayed Andre Drummond with 17 points and seven rebounds. Rookie Paul Zipser added a career-high 15 points.

HORNETS 109, MAGIC 102

Kemba Walker scored 22 points and

Marco Belinelli came off the bench to add 20 as Charlotte pulled off a fourth-quarter comeback to defeat Orlando. Orlando entered the fourth quarter with a five-point lead but Frank Kaminsky came off the bench to score 13 of his 18 points and Walker added eight points to help the Hornets outscore the Magic 32-20 in the final quarter. Cody Zeller also had 15 points and Nicolas Batum added 10. Terrence Ross led five Magic in double figures with 19 points while Nikola Vucevic had 14 points and 12 rebounds.

WIZARDS 104, HAWKS 100

Bradley Beal scored 28 points and John Wall added all 22 of his in the second half to help Washington over Atlanta. Wall also had 10 assists on a night he shot just 6 of 21 from the floor, including two assists to Beal during a late 14-2 run that helped Washington ensure victory after Atlanta had led by as many as 12 early. Ian Mahinmi had 10 rebounds off the bench as the Wizards used a 55-44 edge on the glass to overcome 40 percent shooting. Tim Hardaway Jr scored 29 points and Dennis Schroder had 18 to lead the Hawks, who fell to their fifth consecutive defeat.

BUCKS 116, KINGS 98

Greek star Giannis Antetokounmpo had 32 points, 13 rebounds and six assists

for Milwaukee, which cruised to a victory over Sacramento. The win moved the Bucks into a tie with Indiana for the sixth spot, one game behind fifth-place Atlanta in the tight Eastern Conference playoff race. The Bucks have been the NBA's hottest team the past three weeks, winning 10 of 12 games. Greg Monroe had 15 points for the Bucks, who have won two straight and four of five. Mirza Teletovic and Khris Middleton had 13 points each and Malcolm Brogdon had 12. Rookie Buddy Hield had 21 points and Tyreke Evans added 18 for the Kings. Arron Afflalo and Garrett Temple had 12 points each.

JAZZ 108, KNICKS 101

Rudy Gobert scored a career-high 35 points and grabbed 13 rebounds as Utah rallied to defeat New York. The Jazz snapped a three-game losing streak, while the Knicks dropped their third in a row. Gobert carried the Jazz throughout with the 7-foot-1 Frenchman scoring off pick-and-rolls, offensive rebound put-backs and even going full-court for a dunk after a steal. The Jazz struggled on offense, but Gobert connected on 13 of 14 shots. Gordon Hayward finished with 19 points and eight rebounds for the Jazz. Kristaps Porzingis led New York with 24 points, while Derrick Rose added 17 and Carmelo Anthony tallied 16.— AP



LOS ANGELES: Jim Leyland, manager for team United States, accepts the trophy after their 8-0 win over team Puerto Rico during Game 3 of the Championship Round of the 2017 World Baseball Classic at Dodger Stadium on March 22, 2017. — AFP

USA CLAIM CLASSIC CROWN

UNITED STATES ROUTS PUERTO RICO 8-0

LOS ANGELES: The United States clobbered Puerto Rico 8-0 on Wednesday to capture their first World Baseball Classic title, avenging an earlier loss and ending Puerto Rico's perfect run to the championship game. The Americans won the title in their first trip to the final, which was a rematch of a second-round game Friday in which the US rallied late but lost 6-5. "If you think about what we did, we beat them all," said US manager Jim Leyland, who came out of retirement to guide the US team, which finished with a 6-2 record.

"Puerto Rico had a terrific team. Up until tonight they played better baseball than anybody in the tournament. We pitched better, we played better." Puerto Rico finished with a 7-1 record as they were trying to become just the second team in tournament history to roll undefeated through the quadrennial global showcase of elite talent. Asked if there was extra motivation on the part of the US to avenge Friday's loss, center fielder Adam Jones answered frankly: "You want to know the truth?"

There were some champion shirts made and we didn't make them."

"A flight booked and a parade planned and that didn't sit well with us." This was also the second loss in a row in the final for the bleached-blond haired Puerto Ricans, who were beaten by the Dominican Republic in the 2013 final. Marcus Stroman pitched a no-hitter through six innings and Ian Kinsler belted a home run as the United States carved up Puerto Rico before a crowd of 51,000 at Dodger Stadium.

Stroman, who has Puerto Rican roots, had his no-hit bid ended when leftfielder Angel Pagan opened the bottom of the seventh with a double. But the damage had already been done as Stroman set the early tone with superb pitching and Kinsler opened the scoring with a 402-foot two-run homer to centerfield in the third inning. "I love pitching in these moments," Stroman said. "I love the atmosphere. I pride myself on being a big game pitcher. This was probably one of the biggest, if not the biggest, games I ever pitched in." "I

was confident. I was locked in. I am glad we got the win."

The last out of the three-hour, 30-minute contest came when Puerto Rico's Carlos Correa grounded out to third base, touching off a wild celebration for the Americans on the field followed by a victory lap on the warning track. Right-hander Stroman was named Most Valuable Player and, like his teammates, he played Wednesday as if he had a chip on his shoulder. His added motivation came partly after his Puerto Rican mother was harassed on social media over his decision to compete for the Americans. Puerto Ricans were angered because after the last tournament in 2013 he had indicated in a tweet that he might pitch for them.

MVP booed

Stroman, who was booed by Puerto Rican supporters as he spoke on the field during the MVP trophy presentation, allowed only one hit and struck out three batters in six innings for the USA. "Added a

little fuel to the fire. They pretty much counted us out before the game started," said Stroman of the T-shirts and Caribbean parade plans. The victory ends years of frustration for the USA on their home soil in the tournament, which has been going since 2006. The US is considered baseball's birthplace and the nation has a world-leading 626 players in Major League Baseball but until Wednesday its team had never played in a Classic final.

Puerto Rico, in contrast, has just 50 major leaguers. The Americans' best previous performance was a semifinal run in 2009 in which they lost to Japan. Puerto Rico had advanced to the final by showing swagger and passion, but their defense—which had been so solid through the first seven games—crumbled Wednesday. The US scored a total of four runs in the seventh and eighth innings with two outs on the board. "They outplayed us. They outscored us. They outhit us," said Puerto Rican manager Edwin Rodriguez. "They beat us in all phases of the game." — AFP