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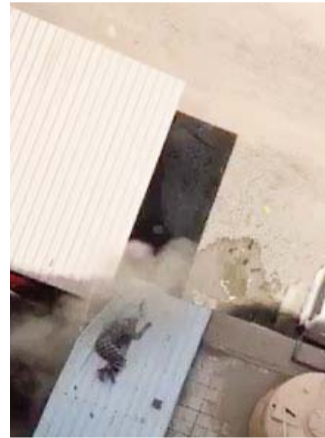


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NO: 17184 - Friday, MARCH 31, 2017

MAID'S 7-FLOOR FALL FILMED



KUWAIT: A maid fell from the 7th floor of her sponsor's apartment in Sabah Al-Salem after hanging from a window and begging for help. The maid's employer filmed her holding onto the window and then falling to the corrugated roof of a laundry below. Unconfirmed reports say that the maid was attempting suicide.

At least one lawyer, Fawzia Al-Sabah announced that she will file a complaint with the public prosecutor against the maid's employer, who was standing next to the woman filming her hanging on by her fingers to the window ledge but did not grab her hand or try to prevent her fall.

The maid survived the fall but suffered multiple fractures. She was rushed to Adan hospital.

SEE PAGE 3



Tassyoura Breakfast (For 2 Person)

Kuwaiti Breakfast 5.950 KD

Omelette, Foul , Lebneh, Chicken Liver, Fresh Vegetable, Qimar , Darabeel, Baqsam, Jam & Honey, Served With Tanoor Bread

Jordanian Breakfast 4.900 KD

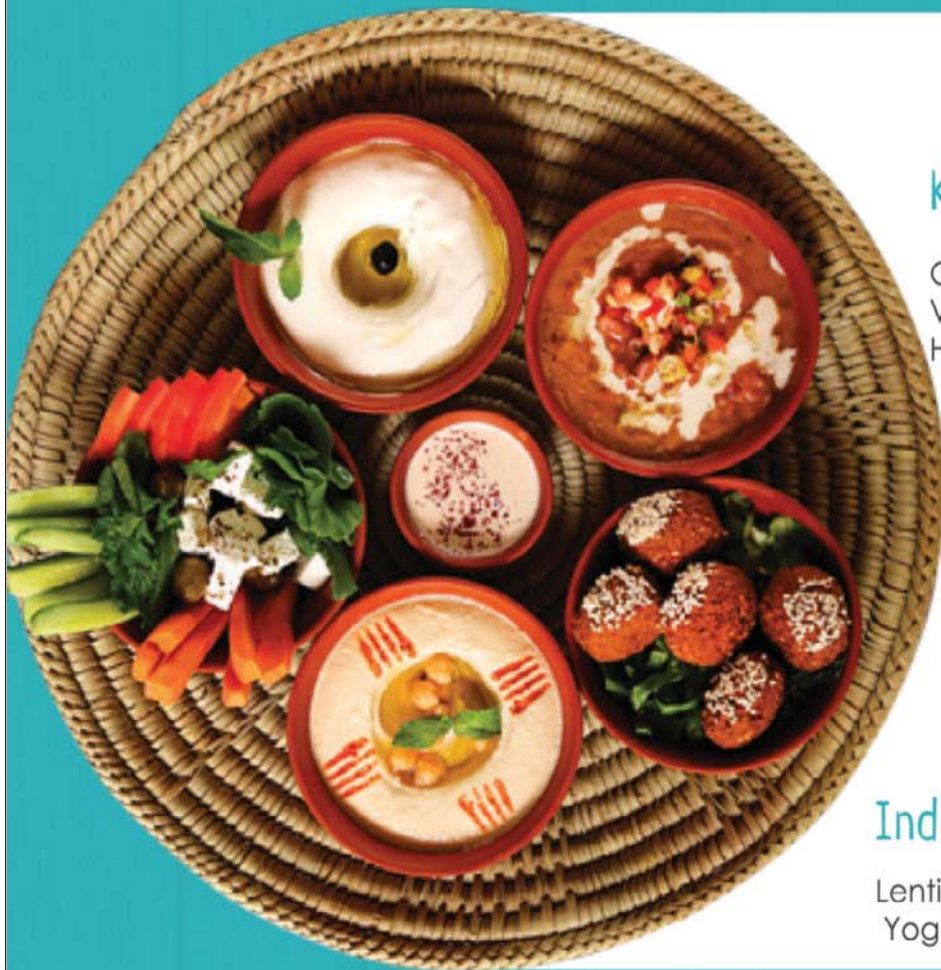
Whole Egg, Foul, Falafel, Musabaha, White Cheese, Olive Oil , Zaatar , Served With Tanoor Bread

Lebanese Breakfast 5.950 KD

Fried Egg, Grilled Halloum , Sausage , Lebneh " Traditional Lebanese " , Makdoos , Cold Cut , Qimar & Honey , Served With Lebanese Bread

Indian Breakfast 4.750 KD

Lentil Mix , Qeema, Tawa Chicken, Egg Tomato, Yoghurt Mint , Served With Chapatti



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PHOTO OF THE DAY



Girls dancing in a local operetta. Photo by Ahmed Suror. — KUNA

in my view

SPIRITUAL WELLNESS: ON SALE!



By Jeri Al-Jeri

local@kuwaittimes.net

We all have our insecurities in life. Our mortality, forces us to wonder what is this all about? And we all have our ways on how to deal with it. Traditionally, people have turned to their inherit belief system, with its preacher, guru, sheikh who promised to suffice their "spiritual" needs. And all cultures, have valued concepts such as "harmony", "peacefulness", "happiness"; etc. And as luck would have it, these "blissful feelings" are all packaged for us and on sale for a mind blowing KD 14.000!

While I was pondering whether I was too aggressive on the meticulous sales men behind the self-help movement in my last article on KT, the phone rang, "We would like to offer you a ticket for a trip to the Egyptian pyramids, to practice our specially designed form of yoga that we all will practice together alongside doctor (.....) himself! And right in the center of the Pharaoh's tomb!

"Why?" I asked. A scripted answer was sure to follow, "Don't we all have our anxieties about the future? Don't we have our moments of pain and sore from the past?" after a brief moment of silence, she continued, "The pyramid's energy will filter your subconscious and wash away all the psychological wounds and scars from your soul, and it will rejuvenate your zest for life!"

While the tape recording was on, I asked, "I have written about the scams of the self-help movement, and proven that it is never based on psychological discourses nor legitimate managements' theories and I knew that it crossed the line to spiritualism along time ago, so allow me to ask, what are the qualifications of the instructor?"

She answered after suppressing a giggle, "Not psychology!" "Look I can get you a job better than this," I told her. "You know your product is impractical, your speaker is not a sage from any respected religion, nor a doctor. And about special materials influencing the soul - that is utter nonsense. There is no such thing in physics as an "aura"! Therefore, this so-called aura that the advertisement group keeps showing us its pictures, is nothing but organic radiation. There is not an ounce of credibility on what your people are trying to sell us, and by the way, it is damaging for vulnerable men and women who are placing their hearts and minds in the hands of non-professionals claiming to heal them of hurts and damaged caused by life's experiences.

"I must think about it," she replied, under the seduction of more paychecks.

I had arranged two dinners with two "coaches" who shared the impression that I was not the argumentative type, and for once, since they started their careers, they felt a stranger would listen to them without the pressure of all social expectations.

In his house, he opened his computer to show me all his Power Point presentations with all the same old tired, copy-pasted quotes.

"Can you call it a lucrative profession?" I asked him. "Throw a coin in the air and it will fall onto the head of a so-called 'life coach'. They are everywhere, multiplying in numbers and decreasing in quality, and I am jumping on board with them."

The second life coach said it with a sharper tone: "I rent a hall for KD 10 per head in any hotel and invite all my Instagram followers to take a three hour course for KD 50 each and even sell them their 'completion certificates' with my logo on it.

This leads me to conclude that it is capitalism not coaching that is the draw.

Local Spotlight

HAPPINESS PATROL



By Muna Al-Fuzai

muna@kuwaittimes.net

by informing and providing road users with information and guidance. It has a social function as well, by encouraging people to adhere to the rules of traffic to enhance public confidence and respect of the police and policemen.

They created the idea of reward instead of violation through the dissemination of a culture of adherence to the rules of traffic and happiness of road users by rewarding them with a "happiness voucher" or "yellow card", and remove black points from the driver's record and replace them with white dots.

In Kuwait, we are also a diverse society, so what do we need to do to attain this level of traffic awareness? I see people driving as if they are fighting to reach their destinations, and many lives are lost because of recklessness, speeding and non-compliant drivers who ignore traffic laws. Even the dignity of policemen is humiliated, and they don't receive the appreciation they deserve for their hard work in the Kuwaiti weather. We need hundreds of initiatives to spread a culture of respect and commitment, along with happiness.

Such projects where happiness is an end, with the government sector as a key partner, will surely lead to creating the right environment for the happiness of the individual and society. The achievement of human development in any society requires not only money, but a lot of smart and sincere initiatives like this one for a better life.

Well done! I am happy already.

On a recent trip to Abu Dhabi, my friend took me on a city tour. While we were enjoying the open, clean and organized roads, something that seemed like a police patrol car grabbed my attention, but it was not a regular police jeep - it was the happiness patrol! This police initiative aims to promote positive values and encourage road users to abide by traffic laws.

In 2016, UAE's minister of state for happiness and commander-in-chief of Abu Dhabi police launched the traffic happiness patrol, the first initiative of its kind in the UAE. Let me tell you that these days, everything in the UAE is about the concept of happiness and positivity. I think it is a fantastic idea to spread among people.

The happiness patrols are not for entertainment, but have several goals including the task of reducing traffic accident rates. They aim to build a positive relationship with the public



conspiracy theories

IN COLD BLOOD



By Badrya Darwish

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What? That's all? You couldn't put the phone down and try to catch her hands and pull her to safety? This actually reflected against the sponsor, thank God, because now she is accused that she did not help save the woman.

What changes people and makes them so cold blooded lately? The story of this Ethiopian maid who fell and is all over the social media today in Kuwait is shocking. It's bizarre, I don't understand. I watched the video 100 times and I can't figure it out. Her employer (called kafeela) was standing right there and could have helped the lady but instead she was busy videotaping the maid as she hung from the window by her fingers, screaming for help.

Then her boss tells the maid in a cool voice, "you crazy, come back".

What? That's all? You couldn't put the phone down and try to catch her hands and pull her to safety? This actually

reflected against the sponsor, thank God, because now she is accused that she did not help save the woman.

By the way, some other video was quickly published in defense of the sponsor, showing a dark skinned woman slapping a baby. The posters claimed that the video showed the same maid earlier in a way intended to defend the sponsor for not helping the maid as she fell from the window.

But it's not clear that the two women are the same.

And the other point, which is more important, I have to ask, is who videotaped the woman slapping the baby? You can tell from the video that it was done with someone holding a phone, not by hidden camera. And if this same maid

was slapping the baby, why wasn't the police called and she arrested earlier? Why leave her hanging on the edge of a window to fall?

Luckily the maid survived. But many questions remain.

Maybe she was trying to commit suicide? But there was a big chance for her boss to help her. Even if she didn't save her, she shouldn't have been videotaping in cold blood.

I'm sure the Ministry of Interior investigators and the public prosecution will investigate fully to know the details of this horror.

MEDICAL EXAMS FOR FILIPINO WORKERS BACK TO GAMCA

By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Medical examinations for Filipino workers bound to Kuwait will now revert back to its original process using the regional screening agreed through the GAMCA. Speaking with the Kuwait Times, an official from the Philippines Embassy confirmed the old scheme would be resumed after the suspension of a controversial new contract that limited medical screening to eight clinics only.

"I still don't have the official report from Manila about this issue, so I cannot categorically and 100 percent explain what happened. But what I know, just this week, Kuwait has agreed to conduct again its medical checks through the GAMCA (Gulf Approved Medical

Centers Association)," the official said.

The problem began last summer when the Kuwait Embassy, in cooperation with the Philippines Ministry of Health, issued a new contract accrediting only eight clinics in Manila to process all screenings for workers coming to Kuwait. The new contract drastically raised the costs of the medical screenings and created a backlog of workers waiting to come to Kuwait.

Medical exams through GAMCA accredited clinics cost around P250 (Philippine pesos) but the new eight clinics were charging an exorbitant P8,400 (pesos). As a result, the cost of hiring Filipino domestic helpers was passed on to sponsors in Kuwait, with prices rising from KD 800 to KD 1,300 to hire a helper. Both

the domestic recruitment labor offices here and many workers as well as sponsors complained of the higher costs.

Some recruitment agencies and officials claimed that the measure was implemented by some parties intended to monopolize and profit from the process of bringing maids to Kuwait.

The Kuwait Embassy in the Philippines implemented the new regulations in August 2016, awarding the medical screening to a limited number of clinics being run by Winston Q8 Certification Solutions Inc. - a firm registered here and in the Philippines. The new contract created an uproar in Manila and dramatically slowed the process of deployment for workers to Kuwait.

As a result, on 9 March, the government in the Philippines suspended the new contract and the GAMCA clinic process was restored. But the time lag created another slowdown in processing of paperwork for Filipinos with jobs in Kuwait. Some worried that there was a 'ban' implemented on sending Filipinos to Kuwait.

"There is no ban on sending Filipino workers to Kuwait, perhaps, the problem was the result of the suspension of some clinics," the embassy official clarified.

GAMCA approved clinics total nearly 30 in the Philippines and with the resumption of medical checks through these clinics, the flow of Filipino workers to Kuwait should resume as normal.

SABBIYA - WITNESS TO ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS

KUWAIT: Sabbiya, an area in northeast of Kuwait, bears witness to human life and civilizations that existed in this historic area thousands of years ago. Sabbiya, 50 kilometers from Al-Jahra City, includes historic sites and ancient archaeological relics, some of them dating back to the Ubaid civilization, which was one of the first civilizations in earth. Sabbiya was named after the Sabba sect who lived in Kuwait half a century ago. The



Sabbiya, an area in northeast of Kuwait bears witness to human life and civilizations that existed thousands of years ago. — KUNA Photos

Sabba were skilled in melting and manufacturing of gold. Their name was similar to the name of their religion, explained Abdullah bin Nasser, a historian and researcher in Kuwait's history. Bin Nasser said Sabbiya witnessed three historic periods; the first was the Stone Age where the Ubaid civilization lived 4,500-5,500 BC. The civilization was named after a small hill known as Ubaid Hill. He said evidence of life was also found. Archaeologists found tools used by humans 7,300 years ago, foremost the "raha," a tool consisting of rocks used to crush seeds.

The skull of a human being who lived 4,000 BC was found as well. Bin Nasser said archaeologists also found a boat and a pearl, two necklaces made of sea shells, as well as colorful pottery pieces dated to 5,000 BC. A recent discovery was of a footprint of a human being. Bin Nasser noted discovery of a rock, called the Rock of Mudeera, which has drawings of some animals which resembled herding in ancient times. The historian said the second age in Sabbiya was the Bronze Age, which acquired this name because humans back then used metals. Bin Nasser said a Gulf expedition discovered 14 graves and a big water well.

People from the Islamic Age also lived in Sabbiya. Bin Nasser said a Kuwait team of archaeologists discovered remains of a fortress with a wall around 30 meter-long. In each of the four corners is a round-shape tower. The fortress was believed to be the Kadhema Fortress, which was famous in the Islamic culture. Historians wrote about Kadhema, a distinguished feature in Sabbiya, when they mentioned the history of this particular region. — KUNA



Gulf expedition discovered 14 graves and a big water well.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF...

THE TRIALS AND 'FAKE' LIFE OF A PROMOTER

ABK LAUNCHES ITS DEBUT
\$500 MILLION SENIOR
UNSECURED BOND ISSUE

Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait K.S.C.P. (ABK) announced today the successful debut issue from its recently established US\$1.5 billion Euro Medium-Term Note (EMTN) programme. The Bank is issuing a first Tranche benchmark of \$500 Million under the programme, which is being jointly lead managed and arranged by Citibank, HSBC and National Bank of Abu Dhabi.

This is the debut bond issue for ABK and the first since its acquisition of Piraeus Bank – Egypt in 2015, and it has drawn strong interest from investors in SE Asia, the Middle East and Europe. Commenting on the launch, Mr Michel Accad, ABK's Chief Executive, said: "ABK is the

first Kuwaiti issuer to launch a bond following Kuwait's recent successful debut sovereign bond, which has allowed investors to price off the sovereign yield curve. Our plan is to use the proceeds of the issue to further diversify our funding sources and to better match the tenor of our assets through longer-dated liabilities." Moody's Investors Service (Moody's) has assigned a provisional senior unsecured foreign-currency rating of A2 to ABK's EMTN programme, in line with ABK's long-term deposit ratings of A2.

ABK is listed by Global Finance as one of the world's Top 50 safest banks and one of the Top 10 safest banks in the Middle-East.

By Faten Omar

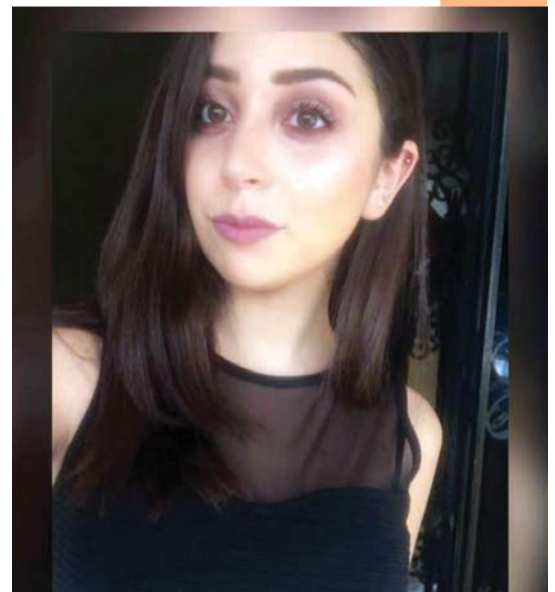
She wears a black dress with shiny black shoes, and full makeup is required to attract customers, along with a (fake) smile. Waking up at eight in the morning to get ready to stand all day long - up to 12 hours - seems exhausting, but for Ghoson Yousef, a 25-year-old full-time promoter, it is just another day. "I start my day early to try to get a feel of the market and the big news of the day, to see if competitors launched something overnight," she said.

According to her, no matter if you hold a degree or not, without 'wasta', you will be just another secretary, receptionist or promoter. "We have to suffer as fresh graduates. But being a promoter is sometimes fun," Yousef told Kuwait Times. "When you hear the word promoter, you think of the most annoying person who wants to sell anything to the customer. It may look like this, but in fact we are like marketing directors - we study to develop a deep knowledge of our target audience and create a marketing strategy that will help reach a wider audience and ultimately draw more customers," she explained.

According to Yousef, the job description of a promoter varies depending on the industry. Promoters are decisive, creative and communicative. They're "idea people". Promoters should also be witty, energetic, outgoing. They seem to look the part, but Yousef reveals that it hurts like hell. "Imagine standing all the time begging people to buy things they do not want! Sometimes I cry because of the way people snub us, or when my feet hurt," she said.

Promoters in Kuwait are paid KD 15

to KD 25 per day, to work up to 12 hours sometimes. Yousef said companies from the UAE pay more than KD 50 a day if they are holding exhibitions in Kuwait. A fake Kuwaiti dialect is required during some events, such as election day.



"On election day, candidates choose pretty girls with Kuwaiti looks who have the ability to speak 'Kuwaiti' - just a few words - to convince people to vote for them. They pay KD 50 to expats and KD 100 to Kuwaitis to pretend to be their family members or young people who seem to believe in their vision. Usually, they choose five to six girls of varying ages, along with other women and men to stand at a booth with promotional flyers," Yousef revealed.

At the end of the day, a promoter's job could be awful, but you get a chance to gain experience in marketing, sales and the business field.

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Shoot & Win KUWAIT SCENERY & NATURE PHOTOGRAPHY COMPETITION



March 12th, 2017 Till April 20th, 2017

Rules & Conditions

First prize

- Canon Camera EOS 5D MARK II BODY + free Bag.
- One Economy class ticket Kuwait - Dubai - Kuwait by Jazeera Airways*.

Second prize

- Canon Camera EOS 80D +18-55MM IS STM + free Bag.
- One Economy class ticket Kuwait - Dubai - Kuwait by Jazeera Airways*.

Third prize

- Canon Camera EOS 750D 18-135 IS STM + free Bag.
- One Economy class ticket Kuwait - Dubai - Kuwait by Jazeera Airways*.

Fourth prize

- EOS 750D 18-55 IS STM +Free Bag.
- One Economy class ticket Kuwait - Dubai - Kuwait by Jazeera Airways*.

Fifth prize

- EOS 750D 18-55 IS STM + Free Bag.
- One Economy class ticket Kuwait - Dubai - Kuwait by Jazeera Airways*.

Sixth prize

- Canon Camera Dsc Ixus 310 HS + Free Bag.
- One Economy class ticket Kuwait - Dubai - Kuwait by Jazeera Airways*.

Seventh prize

- Canon Camera PSD 30 BLUE + free Bag.
- One Economy class ticket Kuwait - Dubai - Kuwait by Jazeera Airways*.

Eighth prize

- Canon Camera PSD 30 BLUE + Camera Bag.
- One Economy class ticket Kuwait - Dubai - Kuwait by Jazeera Airways*.

Ninth prize

- Canon Camera IXUS 180 BLACK + free Camera Bag.
- One Economy class ticket Kuwait - Dubai - Kuwait by Jazeera Airways*.

Tenth prize

- Canon Camera IXUS 180 BLACK 2085 + free Camera Bag.
- One Economy class ticket Kuwait - Dubai - Kuwait by Jazeera Airways*.

The photo contest begins on March 12, 2017 and ends on April 6, 2017.

To ensure eligibility for the contest, please submit files in high resolution:

- **Photographic Camera:** Please submit original files (entries should include metadata if possible) in jpg format on CD or flash memory with hard copy on photo paper (size 300 x 400 millimeters or 11.81 x 15.75 inches)
- **Mobile phone or tablet Camera:** Please submit original files in jpg format on CD or flash memory with hard copy on photo paper (A4 size – 210 x 297 millimeters or 8.27 x 11.69 inches).
- **All photographs** should accurately reflect the subject matter and the scene as it appears. 'High Dynamic Range' images are acceptable. Photos that have been digitally altered beyond standard optimization (removal of dust, cropping, reasonable adjustments to exposure, color, contrast, etc.) will be disqualified.

Caption information should include:

- Location - Detailed caption of subject matter

If you choose to include people in your submission, you are responsible for obtaining the necessary permissions from the individuals depicted, and must be able to provide copies of these to Kuwait Times upon request.

- **Kuwait Times & Jazeera Airways** has all rights to use the photograph in internal and external communications materials including but not limited to websites and web publications, fact sheets, fundraising publications, advertising, multimedia, presentation and membership services, annual reports and Kuwait Times' magazines, newsletters, reports, displays, web pages, videos, membership premiums and the like.
- Winners will be chosen by a panel of independent judges.
- Original coupon should be stuck on the back of each photo with complete information of the participant.

Shoot & Win KUWAIT SCENERY & NATURE PHOTOGRAPHY COMPETITION

2017

Participation Form

If you are interested in participating fill in the form and send it to Kuwait Times.

- Name:
- Tel:
- e.mail:
- Civil ID:
- DSLR Camera Mobile phone or tablet camera
- Caption information:



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For more information contact Kuwait Times Tel: 24835616/7 Fax 24835620/1 or send an email to: ads@kuwaittimes.net



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The Middle East's Largest Students' Art Competition

KUWAIT BEAUTIFUL & GREEN STUDENTS ART COMPETITION

March 19th Till April 20th, 2017

HELLO ARTISTS...

Welcome to the Student's Art Competition. I hope you are ready to paint a beautiful painting and win wonderful prizes. The theme for your painting must be related to planting and greening, basically anything pertaining to our environment. We are looking for a great painting. So, please pick up your color pencils, paint brushes, crayons or whatever you prefer and start drawing and painting.

Good luck to you, our young artists.

- Competition is open to ages from (6 - 8) (9 - 11) (12 - 14) (15 - 17) and Special needs.
- The competition is open for all schools in Kuwait (Government and Private)
- **The competition will start on March 19th and will continue till April 20th 2017.**
- 10 winners from each category will receive valuable prizes.
- All participants will receive a certificate of appreciation.
- All schools participating in

- the competition will receive an appreciation plaque.
- Any school or individual interested to participate in this competition is welcome to visit the office of Kuwait Times and collect the drawing sheets.
- Drawing sheets will be given to schools FREE of charge.
- Only drawing sheets provided by the Kuwait Times will be allowed.
- You can use any kind of color pencils, paint brushes or crayons.

* For all Jazeera Airways tickets terms and conditions are applied



* For more information and updates please visit



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Kuwait Times Participation Form

If you are interested to participate fill the form and send it to Kuwait Times.

From: _____

We would like to confirm our participation in the above mentioned activity with the total number of participating student's so the corresponding number of drawing sheets can be delivered to our school.

School: _____

Tel: _____ Fax: _____

Address: _____

Total number of interested students are
 6 - 8 years 9 - 11 years 12 - 14 years 15 - 17 years Special need

Name: _____ Signature: _____

For more information contact Kuwait Times Tel: 24835616/7 Fax 24835620/1 or send an email to: ads@kuwaittimes.net



SHOULD KUWAITI WOMEN BE ABLE TO PASS NATIONALITY TO THEIR CHILDREN?

THE NIQASHNA DEBATES

By Athoob Al-Shuaibi

Dozens of activists gathered Wednesday evening in the Promenade Mall in Hawally to discuss one of the most controversial topics in Kuwait. Should a Kuwaiti woman have the right to pass nationality to her children if she is married to a foreigner? Local human rights activists have called on lawmakers to change the second article of the Nationality Law, which currently stipulates that children who are born to a Kuwaiti father, in Kuwait or abroad, are entitled to a nationality, while the law does not give Kuwaiti women the same right. (Except in certain circumstance, like if the child is illegitimate and the father unknown or if the Kuwaiti mother obtains a divorce from her non-Kuwaiti husband or if he is deceased.)

The Nationality Law is a source of constitutional ambiguity as it opposes the provision of the Twenty Ninth Article, which states that people are equal in human dignity and are equal in public rights and duties, without discrimination on grounds of race, origin, language or religion. Typically, such hot button issues are a source of screaming and heated exchanges when discussed in public. One only see posts on social media announcements about the issue to note how quickly tempers can rise.

This is why a local initiative, Niqashna is set out to hold civilized debates regarding controversial issues. Led by

Mohammed Nuseibah and Nezar Al-Saleh, the Niqashna (Our Debate) aims to tackle an array of important social and political issues by engaging all members of society. "We promote and encourage tolerance, open-minded discussion, accepting opposing views without slandering and personal attacks. We deal with the differences of opinions with mutual respect, taking into account diversity," said Nuseibah.

On their second debate, Niqashna picked the topic 'Kuwaiti women and nationality' - an issue increasingly facing challenges across the Gulf. Two teams hashed out the issues. The affirmative was led by Sara Al-Mutairi, president of the Constitutional Law Society in Kuwait University and Maryam Al-Eissa, founder and director of Re:food, a humanitarian non-profit initiative.

"Anybody can sign up in the debate through their website. This topic matters to me personally and I believed I had to debate as pro-granting Kuwaiti nationality to children of Kuwaiti women" explained Al-Eissa.

The Negative team was represented by Yousef Al-Azmi, who works at the Kuwaiti Parliament and Hamad Al-Otaibi, a business administration student at GUST. The debate started with the Affirmative offering their point of view, noting statistics that the number of children from Kuwaiti mothers to non-Kuwaitis is only 7 percent of total births and as such do

not represent an economic burden on the country, as some claim. In addition, the Affirmative side argued that minors whose moms are Kuwaitis are entitled to citizenship like expat wives who are married to Kuwaiti males.

Sara Al-Mutairi, also described Kuwaiti women as second-class citizens, as they have not equal rights to Kuwaiti men. "Kuwait is among only 25 countries that do not grant this right. The state of Kuwait has signed all the provisions of the CEDAW International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, but refused to sign the article granting women the right to extend citizenship to their children," she added.

The Negative team argued against the idea, noting that it could be detrimental to the concept of Kuwaiti identity. They said that some sensitive advantages of being a Kuwaiti, inside Kuwait and abroad, including visa-free access to many countries, which may constitute a security problem. But the Negative conceded that perhaps children of Kuwaiti women could be treated as Kuwaitis without granting them citizenship.

In rebuttal, the Affirmative replied that those who are born to a father from the GCC don't need any advantages, and that they should expand their visions to realize that nationality is not solely related to materialism. It is a matter of identity, dignity and human rights.



KUWAIT: Affirmative Team (from left) Sara Al-Mutairi, president of the Constitutional Law Society in Kuwait University and Maryam Al-Eissa, founder and director of Re:food, a humanitarian non-profit initiative.



Negative Team (from left) Hamad Al-Otaibi, a business administration student at GUST and Yousef Al-Azmi, Kuwaiti Parliament employee.

—Photos by A2k Production (instagram: @a2kproduction)



SOCIAL MEDIA FACILITATES CHARITY EFFORTS: ACTIVISTS

KUWAIT: The arrival of social media applications and websites has revolutionized the way people interact on the internet and in recent years and these tools were put to use in facilitating donations and the documentation of humanitarian efforts. With a few clicks and swipes, people donating for humanitarian causes could select the amount of money they were willing to spend and make sure that their donation reached those who are in need for aid. A number of humanitarian workers, volunteers, and enthusiasts said that they became more informed about humanitarian causes through social media.

What made it interesting to them was the fact that with little effort, people could make a tremendous difference on the ground by donating money online and promoting causes. The social media, used in the correct way, will create a sense of trust between donors and humanitarian aid organizations, Farhan Al-Enizi said. Before the advent of social media, people were a bit wary when it came to donating money, Al-Enizi revealed. He affirmed that the social media made it more safe to participate in humanitarian efforts due to the "in the moment" aspect that these cyber tools bring to the table.

Some people were inspired by social media's humanitarian activists as in the case of Ahmad Al-Daihani who affirmed that he got interested in carrying out relief aid efforts after following social media account of an aid worker. He stressed that social media established this direct connection amongst people that official channels rarely provide, adding that this was the most prominent feature of these applications. The sense of trust in social media's humanitarian message is not only a matter of interest locally; activists in other countries share the same viewpoint. Saudi Arwa Al-Braik said that she used social media to help her in carrying out humanitarian efforts in the capital Riyadh.

Social media encourages volunteers to head out there and make a difference, said Al-Braik, adding that these cyber tools enabled her to get involved in local humanitarian efforts in Saudi Arabia. Al-Braik's compatriot, Sheikha Al-Oujan said that social media made her aware of the grave humanitarian catastrophes and wars that were ravaging the world. Social media evoked a sense of purpose beyond the regular relief aid channels, she said, adding that experiencing things on a personal level made it imperative for people to stand up and help fellow human beings. —KUNA

Crime

Report

Men driving recklessly arrested

KUWAIT: Three young men were arrested for driving recklessly and insulting police officers. Two police officers were patrolling Bayan area at dawn and saw the three behaving recklessly, so they stopped the men. While charges of suspected drunkenness were being prepared, the three verbally insulted the patrol men and threatened to hurt them. All three were detained for further legal action, and their cars impounded.

Man caught at airport

Capital detectives arrested an Egyptian before he was able to leave Kuwait Airport after running over another Egyptian, while driving a heavy duty machine to pave streets, without having a license to drive it.

Man killed in car crash

A bedoon was killed and his three children injured during a two car collision on Fifth Ring Road near Ardhiya area. Fire men had to cut through metal to get the injured out.

Hit and run fatality

The body of an unknown person was recovered by the coroner after being run over by a citizen near Jahra hospital. Police will try to identify him through his finger prints.

Stone thrower sought

Jahra detectives are searching for a man who throws stones at expat cars to force them to stop, then he beat and robs them. A security source said a Pakistani told Naeem police that a man was throwing stones at his car so he stopped to see what was going on, then suspect beat him and took KD 655 before escaping. The source said an Indian came an hour later and told them a man threw stones at him, and gave descriptions of the suspect.

Jabriya attack

Six men beat a citizen in Jabriya, then damaged his car before escaping. The citizen told police that the six stopped him in Jabriya, pulled him out of the car beat him, then insulted him verbally, then used sticks, smashing his car before escaping.

Detective sentenced

The misdemeanors court sentenced a detective from Sulaibkhat to one month in jail for detaining a citizen without any legal reason. The victim's lawyer said the officer forced the citizen to sit in his car after tying his hands behind his back, then once at the police station he slapped the man across the face, and another detective put his feet up and beat him nearly 30 times.

SHUAIBA REFINERY CLOSED

KUWAIT: The decision to shut down Kuwait's long-running Shuaiba refinery was the result of thorough studies that found the facility to be unfit for business, Minister of Oil Essam Al-Marzouq said yesterday. Speaking to the press, Al-Marzouq, who is also Minister of Electricity and Water, said that the decision to close the refinery is largely an economical one and that the establishment will still be used to store oil products. Moreover, he noted that the country seeks to boost its oil refining capacity

to meet the growing needs of the local market, adding that the closure of Shuaiba refinery will not be detrimental to oil production.

On future projects, he said that Kuwait will sign a deal to partner with Oman's Duqm refinery, which has a capacity of 200,000 barrels per day, on April 10th. On a related note, the Minister of Oil said that Kuwait National Petroleum Company's (KNPC) "Clean Fuel Project" would be 84 percent complete by the end of the month, with an expected total

cost of four billion Kuwait Dinars (\$13 billion). He also pointed out that an ad hoc committee tasked with monitoring the progress of an OPEC decision to slash oil production is not looking into ways to extend the accord, as such decisions are left to the discretion of OPEC oil ministers, who are set to meet on May 26th.

Soaring gas demand

Meanwhile, Kuwait National Petroleum Company (KNPC) CEO Mohammad Al-Mutairi said yesterday Kuwait's Mina Al-Ahmadi Refinery will meet the growing need for gasoline consumption with Shuaiba refinery out of the picture. In a statement to the press, Al-Mutairi said that Mina Al-Ahmadi refinery features two units for gasoline production, in addition to a third for gas compounds. Moreover, he said that KNPC's refining capacity would be 746,000 barrels per day (bpd) after the closure of the long-running Shuaiba refinery, a figure that largely hinges on the needs of the local market. He pointed out that after KNPC's "Clean Fuel Project" comes to fruition next year, the company's refining capacity will be boosted to 801,000 bpd. The KNPC CEO also spoke of plans to import fuel oil as local fuel consumption has skyrocketed. On plans to privatize fuel stations, he said that "it is still tentative at this point" and that the company fully supports the country's private sector. —Agencies



Minister of Oil Essam Al-Marzouq during the Shuaiba refinery's closure.

News

in brief



WASTE FROM SPRING CAMPS - A THREAT TO ENVIRONMENT

KUWAIT: Waste and trash, left by people while camping in the desert during the annual spring break, present a grave threat to Kuwait's environment and ecosystem. Pieces of plastic, used furniture, wood, water containers and other materials are left behind without care - displaying shallow knowledge of what these materials could do to harm the environment. The cleaning process also is a huge challenge to the municipal council's teams, which spend days - trying to clean the desert. —KUNA

MP ADASANI THREATENS TO GRILL PRIME MINISTER

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: Leading opposition lawmaker Riyadh A-Adasani said he has prepared a grilling to Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah and what remains is just to put the date on it. Adasani said he is not part of any deal with the government and that he will not wait for the highly anticipated ruling of the Constitutional Court on May 3. The lawmaker had in the past repeatedly threatened to file to grill the prime minister over the issue of revoked citizenship, hiking electricity and petrol prices and other issues.

Adasani did not reveal the basis or the issues of the grilling but he reiterated that he is not a part of any deal between MPs and the government. He specifically criticized the lawmakers of the Islamic Constitutional Movement (ICM) saying that they are only four MPs and should not lead the house in striking deals with the government and the assembly speaker. Adasani said that he believes there was a deal between the government, the speaker and ICM lawmakers about rejecting a request to lift the immunity of MP Jamaan Al-Harbash and Nayef Al-Merdas so they could be tried over charges of insulting the Amir.

The request to lift their immunity was rejected in a tight vote in the Assembly in Tuesday with 26 supporting the request and 26 voting against it. Adasani said that he is not afraid of filing the grilling against the prime minister, adding that he is not worried about the possibility of scrapping the national assembly by the constitutional court on May 3. Head of the national assembly panel on alien behaviors MP Mohammad Hayef said yesterday that his committee debated the spread of drugs in the society and found out that establishing a special department for fighting drugs has become a necessity.

BOGUS HELPERS' OFFICE BUSTED

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Residency detectives discovered a bogus domestic helpers office run by six Ethiopians in mahboula area. Detectives worked on tips about a bogus office that swindles citizens by making agreements with them to get domestic helps in exchange of money and gives them receipts to show they are dealing with a legitimate office. The office was stormed and six Ethiopians were found, all reported absconding and wanted.

Forged workpermits

Two Bangladeshis were arrested for forging work permits to bring Bangladeshi workers and charged money for them. A man complained against the two when they told him they can get work permits in exchange of money. The permits were made, when checked in the computer, they were found forged and information are not correct. The suspects were sent to concerned authorities.

Canada targets mega enterprises in Kuwait

KUWAIT: Canada plans to promote mega enterprises in Kuwait's infrastructure, with prospected participation of other foreign entrepreneurs according to the partnership formula bonding the private and public sectors, says the nation's envoy in Kuwait. Ambassador Martin Morrow, in a statement to KUNA on fringes of a seminar held by the embassy, indicated that she was awaiting "some details" from her government concerning the aspired investments in Kuwait. Jim Quick, President and CEO at Aerospace Industries Association of Canada, expressed readiness, in a statement at the forum, to help narrow the technological gulf between Kuwait and his nation Quick, whose country is the third globally in aircraft production, elaborated saying that the global fleet is forecast to grow by five percent, with 40,000 planes, worth \$5.9 trillion, expected to be put in operation in coming years.

Health system advances to international levels

KUWAIT: Recent international indications and reports have affirmed the progression of Kuwait's health system to global levels, Health Minister Dr Jamal Al-Harbi said yesterday. The country has attained significant achievements on health and medical levels, lining itself alongside countries advanced in these fields, Al-Harbi said in his speech while marking National Doctors' Day, of which Kuwait hosts for the first time through Al-Amiri Hospital's initiative. The Kuwaiti health system has contributed lately in reducing the rate of infants, children under five years, and maternal mortalities, in addition to eradicating polio, increasing preventive vaccinations for major childhood diseases, and increasing of birth rates, said the minister. Such achievements would have never been possible to attain without the tireless efforts exerted by medical physicians and healthcare providers, government's support, modern technology, latest updates and developments in the health and medical fields, and keenness on preparing and qualifying medical and health cadres, Al-Harbi affirmed.

Kuwait and Sri Lanka ink new loan accord

KUWAIT: Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) has signed a KD five million loan agreement with Sri Lanka to finance developing the region of Kalu Ganga. KAFED said in a statement yesterday, that the lent fund would be invested for developing Mahaweli river basin. The project has been executed by the Sri Lankan Government since the 60s; aimed at increasing agricultural and farming products, in addition to securing housing and improving living standards for the natives in the region. It is the second loan accord, signed by KFAED to fund this mega venture. In March, 2009, the fund lent the Asian nation KD 10 million for the same project. Sri Lankan Finance Undersecretary Dr Samarantunga inked the deal on behalf of his government. From KAFED, it was the Deputy General Director, Hamad Al-Omar, who signed it, with Kuwaiti diplomats attending the signing ceremony. The Kuwaiti fund had given the country technical aid, worth KD 455,000 to finance feasibility studies for agricultural and energy projects.

Kuwait's Direct Aid Society collects \$8.2m for Somalia

KUWAIT: A popular campaign launched by the Kuwait's Direct Aid Society has managed to collect donations estimated at KD 2.5 million for fighting famine in Somalia. The Society's General Director Dr Abdullah Abdulrahman Al-Sumait said the collected money would be spent on a number of projects to save the lives of Somalia people who are suffering from severe drought and famine. He added that the Society would start the implementation of the projects as of next week. He thanked the generous donors as well as the Kuwaiti government for facilitating the launching of the popular campaign for aiding the Somali people. Earlier, the Direct Aid Society launched the relief aid campaign for Somalia, through its local branches and electronic media sites, in order to combat famine that threatens the lives of Somali people. The campaign was aiming at collecting KD 500,000 for digging big water wells at Somali villages to meet their needs for at least 10 years.

International

FRIDAY, MARCH 31, 2017

UN chief in Iraq backs fight against IS group



Tillerson, Turkish leaders fail to settle Kurdish row



Putin says he will be 'glad' to meet Trump



HONOLULU: Hawaii Attorney General Douglas Chin speaks outside federal court in Honolulu, on Wednesday. A federal judge in Hawaii questioned government attorneys Wednesday who urged him to narrow his order blocking President Donald Trump's travel ban because suspending the nation's refugee program has no effect on the state. — AP

US JUDGE BLOCKS TRUMP TRAVEL BAN AGAIN

ANOTHER BLOW TO WHITE HOUSE IN BANNING ARRIVAL OF REFUGEES

LOS ANGELES: The judge who halted President Donald Trump's revised travel ban on refugees and arrivals from six mainly Muslim countries has extended his order, dealing another blow to the White House. After a hearing lasting several hours, US District Judge Derrick Watson in Hawaii said Wednesday he had turned his original temporary restraining order into a preliminary injunction. Such an injunction generally has no set expiration date, said Hawaii state Attorney General Doug Chin, meaning Trump will be barred from enforcing the ban while it is contested in court.

The US Justice Department is expected to appeal to the US 9th Circuit Court of Appeals. Hawaii was the first of several US states to sue over the amended ban. Trump has said his proposed travel ban is needed to preserve US national security and keep out terrorists intent on doing harm to Americans.

The government had asked Watson to limit his first ruling to just the part of the order involving the six Muslim countries—Somalia, Iran, Syria, Sudan, Libya and Yemen, the New York Times reported.

Justice Department attorney Chad Readler argued before the judge that the refugee resettlement restriction had no effect on far-flung Hawaii, the paper said. But Watson rejected the argument. He said 20 refugees had been accepted in Hawaii since 2010, the Times said.

Widespread protests

Watson's first order suspending enforcement of Trump's amended ban was issued March 15 — a day before it was to go into effect. Trump's first ban and the revised one have both been criticized as amounting to a ban on entry of Muslims into the US. Hawaii's attorney general Chin praised the new court ruling.

"With a preliminary injunction in place, people in Hawaii with family in the six affected Muslim-majority countries - as well as Hawaii students, travelers, and refugees across the world - face less uncertainty," he said.

"While we understand that the president may appeal, we believe the court's well-reasoned decision will be affirmed," he added in a statement. In his first order, Watson ruled it was plausible "to conclude that targeting these countries likewise targets Islam" given their Muslim populations ranging from 90.7 percent to 99.8 percent.

If the Justice Department appeals the latest ruling it will be heard in the same San Francisco-based court that upheld a halt to Trump's first travel ban in February after a judge in Seattle ruled against it.

The ban aims to close US borders to nationals of Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen for 90 days, and all refugees for at least 120 days. Iraq was included in the original ban but then was removed in the revision. — AFP

ITALY FOILS PLOT TO BLOW UP RIALTO BRIDGE IN VENICE

ROME: Three men from Kosovo and an unidentified minor have been arrested in Venice on suspicion of plotting to blow up the city's celebrated Rialto Bridge, Italian police said yesterday.

"With all the unbelievers there are in Venice, you put a bomb under the Rialto and you go straight to heaven," one of the alleged jihadist plotters said in a wiretapped conversation, said Adelchi d'Ippolito, the Venice prosecutor in charge of the case. "That was one of the most worrying and alarming remarks we heard," he said at a press conference, revealing that the group had been under surveillance since last year. The suspects were detained in an overnight sweep carried out after it was established that they had undergone "religious radicalization", according to a police statement.

Raids were conducted at 12 locations in the historic centre of the city, which is a magnet for millions of visi-

tors from around the world. D'Ippolito said the suspects appeared to have been studying how to build explosives but did not have the necessary components for making a bomb.

"There was a lot of talk about unconditional support to ISIS (the Islamic State group). It wasn't just theory and dogma," d'Ippolito said of the wiretaps. They were also envisioning moving on to "planning and projects", he said. Interior Minister Marco Minniti praised the police for what he called "an important success in our terrorism prevention effort."

The Rialto Bridge is the oldest of the four bridges that span Venice's Grand Canal, first built at the end of the 12th century. The current bridge, an arched stone construction which dates from the late 16th century, is one of the best-known landmarks in the floating city and its walkways are frequently packed with tourists. — AFP

QATAR AIRWAYS TO OFFER FREE LAPTOPS ON US FLIGHTS

DOHA: Qatar Airways said yesterday it will offer free laptops to business class passengers flying to the United States, in an effort to get round an American ban on electronics. In a statement, the Doha-based carrier said it would begin offering a "laptop loan service" to those travelling in business class from "next week".

The computers would be collected by US-bound passengers from their departure gate just before boarding, said Qatar Airways. "By providing this laptop loan service we can ensure that our passengers on flights to the US can continue to work whilst on board," said the airline's boss, Akbar Al-Baker.

A similar laptop proposal is being considered by fellow Gulf carrier, Emirates, which is also affected by the US ban. Abu Dhabi's Etihad Airways meanwhile said it would offer free wi-fi and tablet computers to first and business class passengers on US-bound flights. The move comes after Washington earlier this month stopped electronic devices bigger than mobile phones from being taken on direct flights to the United States from 10 airports in seven Middle Eastern countries and Turkey.

A similar ban was also imposed by Britain, but this exempted some of the Gulf airlines, including Qatar. US officials said the measure was intended to thwart possible attacks on airliners with small explosive devices hidden in consumer electronics. —AFP

ISRAEL MINISTER SWIMS AGAINST TIDE WITH GAZA ISLAND PLAN

TEL AVIV: An Israeli minister has gone against the tide in proposing a way he says would alleviate conditions in the Gaza Strip while maintaining his country's security control-build an island nearby.

The unusual proposal has gained backing among some in the Israeli security establishment, but he is a long way from convincing everyone. Those concerned with Palestinian rights say it would do little to address the root of the problem and question whether it would further separate the Gaza Strip from the West Bank-making a future contiguous Palestinian state even more difficult to achieve.

Israeli Intelligence and Transport Minister Yisrael Katz argues that it is feasible and the best option for now, with the island's long-term status to be negotiated. Katz has pushed the idea for several years, but has recently redoubled efforts to spread the word. It would see an artificial island built in the Mediterranean Sea some three miles (five kilometres) off the coast of the Gaza Strip, the Palestinian enclave under a decade-long Israeli blockade.

The island would be tiny at some 534 hectares (1,320 acres), only a fraction of the size of Malta, for example. It would include infrastructure to provide the Gaza Strip with essential services it currently lacks, including desalination facilities for clean water and an electricity plant. There would also be a freight harbour and an area for container storage, which Katz says will help open the Gazan economy to the outside world.

A bridge would connect it to Gaza, with one portion acting as a drawbridge. An airport could be considered at a later stage. But a key point for Katz is Israel would control security around the island and in the port, with threats such as rockets and tunnels that could be used for attacks from the territory a major concern.

On the island itself, Katz envisions an international police force. The cost would be some \$5 billion-but Katz argues it could be covered by private companies locating there. "We have to find a way to deter Hamas from the other side, but let the residents, Palestinians, live their lives," Katz told AFP recently at his Tel Aviv office, a mock-up of his idea hanging on the wall. "We are taking a risk here but I think it is a viable risk." — AFP

UN CHIEF IN IRAQ BACKS FIGHT AGAINST ISLAMIC STATE GROUP

IRAQ POLICE INCH DEEPER INTO MOSUL'S OLD CITY

BAGHDAD: The UN chief offered support for Iraq's fight against the Islamic State group during a visit to Baghdad yesterday, even as the country faces a growing humanitarian crisis following the months-long battle for Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city.

At a joint press conference with Antonio Guterres, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider Al-Abadi said Iraqi forces were doing their "utmost" to protect civilians in the fight against IS and accused the extremists of intentionally putting civilians in harm's way while also "intensifying their propaganda machine to spread rumors." Guterres expressed support for Iraq's fight, condemned IS crimes against civilians and pledged continued aid for the some 3 million Iraqis displaced by the fighting. Hours earlier, as the secretary-general arrived in the Iraqi capital, the Islamic State group claimed responsibility for a suicide truck bombing in Baghdad the previous night that killed 15 people and wounded 45.

The fight to take back Mosul began in October, backed by the US-led international coalition. After routing IS from the eastern part of the city, Iraqi forces in February launched a push to drive the militants from the western half. The Tigris River separates Mosul into its eastern and western sector.

Shortly after landing at Baghdad International Airport, Guterres said on Twitter that his visit is to "focus on the dire humanitarian situation on the ground." Amid reports of dozens of civilians killed by airstrikes in Mosul, he added that "protection of civilians must be the absolute priority." Guterres met with Iraq's president and parliament speaker as well as the prime minister. The UN chief also plans to meet leaders



MOSUL: Widad Ibrahim (right) sits outside her house near the old city during fighting between Iraqi security forces and Islamic State militants on the western side of Mosul yesterday.—AP

in Iraq's northern semi-autonomous Kurdish region. Since the start of the Mosul military operation, more than 350,000 people have fled the fighting, according to UN figures.

Stiff resistance

Yesterday, Iraq's militarized federal police inched deeper into Mosul's old city - a dense urban core in the city's western half - where they met with stiff resistance from IS militants. First Lt. Walid Khalid of the 3rd brigade Federal Police said his troops advanced about 100 meters (yards) in the last two days. "The distance between IS and us is 50 meters, yesterday, we killed four IS fighters and right now their bodies are in the street," Khalid told The Associated Press. "The situation is very good and the Iraqi

air force is doing well." He said the troops were about 100 meters from a symbolic mosque where the IS leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, declared the extremists' self-styled caliphate in the summer of 2014. Also Thursday, the SITE Intelligence Group, which monitors extremist groups, reported the IS claim of responsibility for the bombing late Wednesday in Baghdad. In the claim, IS warns Iraqi Shiites that the "flame of the battle" in Mosul will come to them in the cities of Baghdad, Karbala, and Najaf.

In the attack, a suicide truck bomb targeted a police checkpoint on the Iraqi capital's main southern entrance. Three policemen were among the 15 dead while the rest were civilians, police and health officials, speaking on condition of anonymity under regulations. — AP

SYRIA REFUGEE TOTAL HITS OVER FIVE MILLION: UN

BEIRUT: More than five million Syrians are now refugees, the UN said yesterday, as aid groups urged the international community to end the country's six-year war and provide more assistance.

The new figures mean around a quarter of Syria's population has fled since the March 2011 start of a conflict that has killed over 320,000 people. The UN refugee agency UNHCR urged more

international assistance, with spokeswoman Cecile Pouilly calling the figure an "important milestone".

"As the number of men, women and children fleeing six years of war in Syria passes the five million mark, the international community needs to do more to help them," UNHCR said in a statement. NGOs helping Syrian refugees have regularly sounded the alarm about the cri-

sis, appealing for more funds and international action to end Syria's war.

"It's clear that the international community has completely failed to end the conflict in Syria," said Alun McDonald, regional spokesman for Save the Children. "The situation inside the country is still not remotely safe for people to go home, we see more people being uprooted every day," he told AFP. He said much of the international community was also failing refugees, increasingly closing borders and turning them away. Most Syrian refugees are hosted regionally, by neighbors Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan, with more in Iraq and Egypt.

Largest group in Turkey

Hundreds of thousands of Syrians have also fled to Europe, often risking exploitation by smugglers and even death on arduous journeys by land and sea. Smaller numbers have been resettled officially in Europe, Canada and the United States, though President Donald Trump's administration has sought to temporarily halt all Syrian refugee entries. The largest group is in Turkey, with over 2.9 million registered Syrian refugees, according to the UN. — AFP



GENEVA: UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura (second from left), attends a meeting of Intra-Syria peace talks with Syria's opposition delegation at Palais des Nations in Geneva yesterday.—AP

NEGOTIATOR DENIES UK IS BLACKMAILING EU ON SECURITY

LONDON: Britain's chief negotiator in the country's divorce from the European Union yesterday rejected suggestions the UK has threatened to end security cooperation unless it gets a good trade deal, as the UK announced plans for the huge task of replacing thousands of EU laws and regulations with domestic law.

Brexit Secretary David Davis said Prime Minister Theresa May's letter triggering talks on Britain's departure made clear Britain wants to continue to work with the EU on a range of issues, including security, for both sides. "We want a deal, and she was making the point that it's bad for both of us if we don't have a deal," Davis told the BBC. "Now that, I think, is a perfectly reasonable point to make and not in any sense a threat."

May's six-page letter triggering two years of divorce negotiations makes 11 references to security, and said that without a good deal, "our cooperation in the fight against crime and terrorism would be weakened." The Sun tabloid was in no doubt about what May meant: "Your money or your lives," was its front-page headline Thursday, along with

the words "PM's Brexit threat to EU." Britain is a European security powerhouse - one of only two nuclear powers in the bloc and with some of the world's most capable intelligence services. May said Wednesday that Britain will probably have to leave EU police agency Europol after Brexit, but wants to "maintain the degree of cooperation on these matters that we have currently."

Home Secretary Amber Rudd, whose responsibilities include intelligence and security, also denied there was a threat, but told Sky News: "If we left Europol, then we would take our information ... with us. The fact is, the European partners want to keep our information."

Senior European leaders responded positively to the warm overall tone of May's letter - but they could not miss the steely undertone. "I find the letter of Mrs. May very constructive generally, but there is also one threat in it," said European Parliament Brexit coordinator Guy Verhofstadt, saying May seemed to be demanding a good trade deal in exchange for continued security cooperation. "It doesn't work like that," he told Sky News. "You cannot

abuse the security of citizens to have then a good deal on something else."

Exit process

A day after triggering its EU exit process, the British government began outlining yesterday how it intends to convert thousands of EU rules into British law when it leaves the bloc in 2019. The government published plans for a Great Repeal Bill that will transform more than 12,000 EU laws in force in Britain into UK statute so that "the same rules will apply after exit day" as before. The bill is designed to prevent Britain plunging into a legislative black hole once it extricates itself from the EU. "It will also ensure we deliver on our promise to end the supremacy of European Union law in the UK as we exit," Davis said. "Our laws will then be made in London, Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast - and interpreted not by judges in Luxembourg, but by judges across the United Kingdom."

To accomplish the transition, lawmakers will need to delegate authority to the government to change some laws by executive order, using so-called Henry VIII clauses.

While the government says it will only use such powers to clean up technical issues, opposition lawmakers are unhappy at plans to give government ministers power to change some laws without votes in Parliament. They fear the Conservative government will use it as a chance to water down workers' rights and environmental protections introduced in Britain during four decades of EU membership.

Labour Party Brexit spokesman Keir Starmer said the proposed bill "gives sweeping powers to the executive" and lacks "rigorous safeguards" on their abuse.

The government insists executive powers will be time-limited and will only be used to make "mechanical changes" so laws can be applied smoothly. It says it is trying to balance "the need for scrutiny and the need for speed." Simon James, a partner at the international law firm Clifford Chance, says the reality is that Parliament doesn't have the capacity to review all EU law and make necessary changes over the next two years and any attempt to do so "would be doomed to failure." —AP

TILLERSON, TURKISH LEADERS FAIL TO SETTLE KURDISH ROW

US READIES OPERATION TO RETAKE RAQQA FROM IS

ANKARA: The United States and Turkey struggled yesterday to resolve a deep dispute over the Kurdish role in the fight against the Islamic State group, but appeared no closer to a resolution as US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson wrapped up his first trip to Turkey.

As the US prepares an operation to retake the de facto IS capital of Raqqa, Syria, the US and Turkey are deadlocked over who should do the fighting. Turkey wants the US to partner with its military and with Turkish-backed forces in Syria, but the US has been backing Syrian Kurdish fighters who have proven the most effective ground force against IS.

"Let me be very frank: These are not easy decisions," Tillerson said in Ankara. "They are difficult decisions that have to be made." Turkey considers the Kurdish force, known as the YPG, to be a terrorist group that threatens Turkey's security. The US hasn't formally announced a decision on who will be part of the Raqqa operation. But all signs point to the US continuing to bet on the Kurds. In recent days the US military airlifted hundreds of Syrian Kurdish forces along with US military advisers and artillery behind enemy lines as preparations for the Raqqa offensive ramp up.

Tillerson said he and Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu had explored "a number of options and alternatives" for the operation, but signaled they'd reached no agreement. He said both countries would keep working to resolve the issue while insisting there was "no space" between the allies as far as their joint resolve to defeat IS.

But Cavusoglu, standing alongside Tillerson, warned that past US support for the Syrian Kurdish forces had already damaged America's relations with Turkey. He accused the US of using one terrorist organization to fight another. "It has negatively affected the Turkish people's sentiments toward the United States," Cavusoglu said in Turkish.



ANKARA: Turkey's Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu (left) and US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson arrive for a meeting yesterday.—AFP

Insurgents

Cavusoglu claimed that the Trump administration and the US military have accepted that the YPG, the dominant force in the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces, is intrinsically linked to the PKK, or Kurdistan Workers' Party. The PKK has led a three-decade long insurgency in southeast Turkey and is considered a terrorist group by the US. But the US has not extended that designation to the Kurds in Syria, and American military officials have said there's no evidence the YPG have posed a threat to Turkey in recent years.

Though the US and Turkey share a goal of defeating IS in Iraq and Syria, the US has been concerned that Turkey's Operation Euphrates Shield is more focused on preventing Syrian Kurds from forming an autonomous region in northern Syria, along Turkey's border, that could embolden Turkey's own Kurdish minority. On Wednesday, Turkish Prime

Minister Binali Yildirim announced that the operation had ended after its troops and allied rebels secured territory along the border between Turkey and Syria. "Life is back to normal. Everything is under control," Yildirim said on Turkey's NTV news channel. "Euphrates Shield has ended. If there is a need, a new operation will have a new name."

Addressing reporters after meeting with Cavusoglu, Tillerson said it was up to Syria's people to determine any future role for Syrian President Bashar Assad amid the country's long-running civil war. The US has long insisted Assad lacks the legitimacy to lead Syria, but in recent days has prioritized the fight against IS, which is also fighting Assad's forces. Hanging over Tillerson's trip is Turkey's continued insistence that the US extradite Fethullah Gulen, a Muslim cleric living in Pennsylvania whom Turkey blames for instigating last year's failed coup. — AP

ETHIOPIA STATE OF EMERGENCY EXTENDED BY FOUR MONTHS

ADDIS ABABA: Ethiopia's parliament yesterday approved a four month extension of a state of emergency that was first imposed in October to quell nearly a year of anti-government protests.

"The House unanimously voted to extend the state of emergency," said a report carried by state media. Defense Minister Siraj Fegessa said the "extension is needed so as to take the prevailing relatively good peace and security situations to the point of no return," the Fana Broadcasting Corporate (FBC) reported. Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn declared a six-month state of emergency in October after months of protests in different parts of the country that were met with a strong security response that killed hundreds, according to human rights groups.

The protesters also targeted foreign farms and businesses, especially in the Oromia region close to the capital where unrest began in November 2015. A key complaint of the protesters is the domination of the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) party, in power since 1991, and which holds all 546 seats in parliament.

Anteneh Terefe, an opposition Blue Party official was dismayed by the government's decision. "This is a bad signal to all of us as political parties, as Ethiopians as individuals and for the state of country," he said.

"Extension of the state of emergency means things have not gone back to normal. I really wonder how it will possible for us to do any kind of politics." More than 11,000 people were arrested under the state of emergency but most were released after receiving "renewal training" on the country's constitution and other topics, FBC reported last month.

As part of a crackdown on dissent some opposition leaders in the country have been arrested, while others in exile are facing trial in absentia. Olympic silver medallist Feyisa Lilesa drew attention to the protests at last year's Rio games by crossing his wrists above his head—a gesture that has become a symbol of the protest movement. He now lives in exile in the US.

The current state of emergency is the first in Ethiopia nationwide since the fall of communist dictator Mengistu Haile Mariam in 1991. —AFP

VENEZUELA SUPREME COURT GRANTS ITSELF LEGISLATIVE POWERS

CARACAS: Venezuela's Supreme Court took over legislative powers yesterday from the opposition-majority National Assembly, a dramatic tightening of leftist President Nicolas Maduro and his allies' grip amid a devastating economic crisis.

The opposition attacked what it called a "fraudulent court" packed with Maduro loyalists bent on keeping him in power in the South American oil giant, where a three-year recession has caused food shortages, riots and an epidemic of violent crime. The high court, whose judges have staunchly backed Maduro in a power struggle with the legislature, made the decision late Wednesday night, citing an earlier ruling that the opposition majority was in contempt of court.

"As long as the National Assembly's contempt of court and invalidity persist, parliamentary powers shall be exercised directly by (the Supreme Court's) constitutional chamber or by the body it stipulates to safeguard the rule of law," it said. The court ruled in August 2016 that the National Assembly leadership was in contempt for swearing in three lawmakers who were suspended over alleged electoral fraud. The opposition condemns the fraud charges as a trumped-up bid to curb its power.

The main opposition coalition, the Democratic Unity Roundtable (MUD), won a landslide in legislative elections in December 2015 with a promise to oust Maduro. That forced the president and his allies in the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) to share power for the first time since its founder, Hugo Chavez, surged to power in 1999.

But the Supreme Court scuttled the opposition's powerful two-thirds majority when it barred the three investigated lawmakers from taking their seats.

Since then, the court has overturned every law passed by the legislature. Opposition lawmaker Henry Ramos Allup bitterly condemned the ruling. "This is a fraudulent court whose interpretations of the constitution violate the document itself," he said in a radio interview. "We must continue... doing our jobs despite the risk, because no one person gave us our titles as lawmakers. — AFP

I'LL BE 'GLAD' TO MEET TRUMP WHEN SCANDALS OVER: PUTIN

ACCUSATIONS 'ABSURD' AND 'IRRESPONSIBLE'

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday denounced the scandals over Donald Trump's ties to Moscow, adding that he would be happy to meet with his US counterpart this year.

Speaking at an international forum on the Arctic organized by Russia in the northern city of Arkhangelsk, Putin once again denied any Kremlin involvement in the US election last year, slamming the recent accusations as "absurd" and "irresponsible." "We are just waiting for when the situation improves," Putin said in televised comments. "When it's over, I hope we decide on holding a meeting" with Trump.

Putin said he would be keen for their first face-to-face talks to happen at the G20 summit in July or earlier, for example at a summit Finland may host after becoming chair of the Arctic Council intergovernmental forum in May. "Such events should be prepared by both sides. If it happens, then we would be glad, I would be glad, to take part in this event," Putin said at the forum, which Finnish President Sauli Niinisto is also attending.

"If not, then such a meeting could take place within the framework of the usual meetings, at the G20," Putin added. The G20 summit of world powers is set to convene in the northern German city of Hamburg in early July and both US and Russian leaders are expected to attend.

"We see the US as a great country with which we want to have a good partnership. Everything else is lies, inventions and provocations" used by "some political forces in the US... to strengthen their position," said Putin.



ARKHANGELSK: Russian President Vladimir Putin (right) meets with Finnish President Sauli Niinisto during the International Arctic Forum in Arkhangelsk Yesterday.—AFP

He slammed the scrutiny of the Russian ambassador to the US, Sergey Kislyak, whose meetings with Trump's associates figure in several congressional investigations into possible election meddling by Moscow. "I can see the US ambassador (to Russia John Tefft) is sitting here... He is communicating with everyone," Putin told the audience at the forum. "Meanwhile the contacts of our envoy are being limited, his every meeting is met with hostility as some kind of spy stunt," Putin said, insisting that Kislyak is simply doing his job.

"What else is he there for?" "What do we want?" US intelligence has accused Moscow of waging a broad-ranging campaign to help Trump win the election. This has led to investigations in the Senate and House of Representatives as well as an FBI probe into the Trump campaign's ties with Russia. Trump's son-in-law and top aide Jared Kushner is to face a congressional panel over his contacts with Russian state bank executives last year that Moscow has dismissed as "normal business" for the banks. — AFP



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GERMANY DEPORTING MORE 'POTENTIAL ATTACKERS' NOW TOUGHER APPROACH AFTER BERLIN ATTACK

BERLIN: Germany has deported 10 potential attackers since January as part of a tougher approach towards failed asylum seekers and other foreigners it deems dangerous after one of them killed 12 people at a Berlin market, security sources said yesterday.

Interior Minister Thomas de Maiziere and other top officials have been pushing for quicker deportations of those denied asylum, while working with Morocco, Tunisia and other countries to speed up the repatriation process. Tunisian Anis Amri, a supporter of Islamic State, attacked a Christmas market in Berlin in December after being denied asylum. He was shot dead by Italian police days later.

Shortly after the incident, German's Joint Terrorism Prevention Centre (GTAZ), reviewed the open cases of all other "potential attackers" like Amri, the sources said. "A total of 10 potential attackers have since been successfully deported in a joint effort with the affect-

ed German states," said one of the sources. The Interior Ministry estimates that there are more than 600 potentially dangerous Islamists in Germany, including 250 who are citizens of other countries but not asylum seekers.

The suspected militants were sent back to mainly North African countries, the sources said, without providing details. The change in approach was agreed by de Maiziere and Justice Minister Heiko Maas at a meeting on Jan. 10, where both men agreed that the Amri case must not be repeated.

In Amri's case, one of the obstacles to physically deporting him was Tunisia's failure to issue replacement identification papers, despite the availability of finger- and handprints. This month German Chancellor Angela Merkel secured a promise from Tunisia to take back 1,500 rejected Tunisian asylum seekers, with those who agreed to leave voluntarily eligible to receive government aid. Germany also offered Tunisia

250 million euros in development aid. Merkel, who will seek a fourth term as chancellor in September, has come under fire for allowing more than one million refugees to enter Germany over the past two years.

De Maiziere vowed on Tuesday to continue pushing for legislative changes that would make it easier to detain and deport potential attackers following the Amri case. One proposed law also calls for use of electronic tags. The security sources said state prosecutors in the past had sought to exhaust opportunities to prosecute potential attackers in Germany for various other infractions, but this had proven difficult and time-consuming.

The sources did not provide details on the 10 individuals deported or say whether they were related to the Amri case. German authorities have arrested at least two individuals who had contact with Amri before the December attack. — Reuters



ST JULIANS: The President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker delivers a speech during the European People's party congress (EPP) yesterday in St Julian's Malta. —AFP

JUNCKER WARNS TRUMP OVER BREXIT SUPPORT

VALLETTA: European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker joked yesterday that he was ready to encourage Ohio or Texas to leave the United States should President Donald Trump continue to celebrate Brexit. "The newly elected president is delighted to see Britain leave" the European Union, Juncker told a congress of the European People's Party (EPP) in Malta on the day after one of the bloc's biggest members started the exit process.

"If he carries on, I am going to promote the independence of Ohio and Austin, Texas," he said in German to chuckles from delegates in Valletta. Juncker, who was in Malta with EU President Donald Tusk, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy, urged the remaining 27 EU nations to pull together. "Brexit is not the end of everything, but we must make it a beginning of something that will be new, stronger and better."

Britons last year voted 52 percent to 48 percent in favour of Brexit, leaving the country bitterly divided. Trump said the vote to leave the EU was a good idea and that other countries would likely follow suit. In an interview last week, Juncker said he had asked Trump's administration not to encourage other countries to ditch the bloc. — AFP

TWO KILLED IN SHOOTING IN KENTUCKY SUBURB

ANCHORAGE, Ky: Two people killed in an officer-involved shooting in a wealthy Kentucky suburb are suspects in the homicide of an elderly widower in another city 60 miles away, officials said Wednesday. Investigators from three jurisdictions are still piecing together the series of events Tuesday night that left three dead, including a 74-year-old man fatally stabbed in his home in Hardin County and two people police believe are connected to that homicide - a man and a woman later killed in a confrontation with police.

Hardin County Chief Deputy David Lee said police officers in Anchorage, Kentucky, a suburb of Louisville, called his county's dispatchers about 7 p.m. Tuesday to report a car abandoned near a field. A deputy was dispatched to check on the registered owner of that car. The deputy peered through the window of the home, where 74-year-old Lewis Hoskinson lives alone since his wife passed away. The deputy saw signs of foul play and called in backup. "The house was ransacked, everything was in disarray," Lee said. The deputies entered and discovered Hoskinson dead. He had been stabbed with a very large knife, Lee said. Meanwhile, officers with the Anchorage Police Department investigated around the stolen car, abandoned near a gravel drive that leads to a field behind the back lawns of stately houses. At some point, they encountered the two suspects.

Both were killed in the confrontation. The Jefferson County Coroner's Office identified them late Wednesday as 18-year-old Destiny A. Moneyhun and 25-year-old Bradley James Sheets. Chief Deputy Coroner Jo-Ann Farmer said both were white and from Barren County, 50 miles from the stabbing victim and more than 100 miles from where they were shot and killed.

Sheets was arrested earlier this year after police found him passed out behind the wheel of his truck at an inter-



ANCHORAGE: Technicians with the Louisville Metro crime scene unit prepare to videotape the scene of a shooting involving two officers on Wednesday.—AP

section, according to local media reports at the time. He was booked with driving under the influence, possession of synthetic drugs and possession of drug paraphernalia.

Officers involved

Both Sheets and Moneyhun were pronounced dead at the scene. Autopsies will be conducted today. The two Anchorage police officers involved in the shooting were not injured. City attorney John T. McGarvey said one was a uniformed officer who was wearing a body camera. The second was in plain clothes and was not wearing a body camera.

Louisville Metro Police Department spokeswoman Alicia Smiley said the Anchorage Police Department asked Louisville police to investigate the incident. Police have released few details on the shooting. McGarvey said the video and other evidence have been turned over to Louisville investigators. Lee said it remains unclear whether the suspects

knew Hoskinson or if anything other than the car was stolen. He said deputies are working with the man's relatives to piece together what might have happened and what might be missing from his home.

In Anchorage, a half-dozen police cars remained at the shooting scene Wednesday, along with forensic crews who cordoned off the overgrown field behind suburban homes.

The bodies of two people remained uncovered at the scene. A pile of belongings, including a notebook and a teddy bear, lay near the woman's feet. Anchorage, a bedroom community of 2,300 people, is one of Kentucky's most expensive cities, with a median household income of \$160,000, four times higher than the state. Crime is rare. There were no violent crimes reported in 2015, the most recent year of complete statistics published by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Anchorage Police Chief H. Dean Hayes referred questions to the Louisville police. — AP

'HURRY UP, HURRY UP!': 911 CALLS CAPTURE CHAOS AT NIGHTCLUB

CINCINNATI: Recordings of people calling 911 and police officers responding to a weekend nightclub shooting in Cincinnati in which one person was killed and 16 injured illustrate the chaos of the unfolding crisis. One man yells repeatedly "Hurry up, hurry up!" because his friend has been shot, and a woman pleading for help for a victim says there is "blood everywhere."

Another man tells a dispatcher two of his friends have been shot and he needs help. I didn't see anything," he says in response to a dispatcher's question. "I was running for my life." A panicked woman is screaming so loudly the dispatcher has trouble communicating with her. The recordings capture chaos in the background with multiple people screaming. The 911 calls surrounding the early Sunday morning shooting at a popular hip-hop music spot near the Ohio river east of downtown Cincinnati were released Wednesday along with recordings of responding police officers.

One police officer urgently tells a dispatcher to "expedite" every unit possible, while another says three people are injured and adds: "Get me cars now!" The dispatcher says calmly at one point: "Basically the entire city's responding at this time." An incident report also released Wednesday showed the victims were in their 20s and 30s and included 14 men and three women.

The Hamilton County coroner's office has said that O'Bryan Spikes, the 27-year-old man killed in the shooting, died from a single gunshot to the chest. A hospital spokeswoman said Wednesday night that two victims remained in critical condition. Police estimate 200 people were inside the Cameo club when a dispute escalated into a gunfight in which more than 20 shots were fired by an unknown number of shooters. — AP

MUSLIM IMMIGRANT TO JOIN CALIFORNIA LT GOVERNOR RACE

LOS ANGELES: A Pakistani-born doctor announced Wednesday that he is joining the 2018 race for lieutenant governor on a platform of saving the Affordable Care Act, providing free community college education and fighting what he termed "Donald Trump's hate." "I am a proud Muslim and I love America," Dr. Asif Mahmood said at a news conference in front of the downtown federal building that houses a US Immigration and Customs Enforcement field office.

"President Trump continues to attack people like me: immigrants, people of color and Muslims," Mahmood said. "I say President Trump has it all wrong. It's time to get tough on hate. California must be the leader of the Trump resistance, and I will fight him every step of the way." The pulmonologist said he came to the United States because he wanted his family to live in a place



Dr. Asif Mahmood, a physician who came to the U.S. from Pakistan, announces he is joining the 2018 race for California's lieutenant governor in front of the downtown federal building that houses a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement field office in Los Angeles Wednesday, March 29, 2017. Mahmood is promising to run on his Muslim faith, immigrant past and career as a health care provider. —AP

"that celebrates diversity and tolerance." Born in a small, rural village, Mahmood moved to Kentucky in the 1990s to complete medical school. He came to Southern California in 2000 and lives near Los Angeles with his wife and three teenage children.

As a first-time candidate, Mahmood's challenge is to build a statewide coalition, potentially anchored to civil rights. He starts as a virtual unknown and Muslims make up a tiny percentage of people living in California. To be competitive and grow beyond a niche candidacy, he must craft a message that resonates with the large, diverse pool of voters in a state that is home to 1 of every 8 Americans. Lt. Gov. Gavin Newsom, the incumbent, is barred by term limits from seeking a third term and is running for governor.

Mahmood, a Democrat, said he did not think his religion would be an obstacle in a state known for diversity.

Mahmood said his experience running a medical practice and volunteering at free clinics that treat poor populations gave him the credentials to campaign for health care reform. He supports protecting Obamacare and expanding Medicare to cover everyone. California's lieutenant governor post is largely ceremonial, but the lieutenant governor leads the state when the governor travels outside it and can break tie votes in the state Senate. The lieutenant governor also has a seat on the board of regents of the 10-campus University of California. Mahmood said he would use it to influence higher education reform.

Mahmood said he wants to provide a free community college education and doesn't support fee hikes, such as the recent California State University tuition increase. "I believe that education is the main asset that any nation can have, any society can have," he said. — AP

SENATE HEARING TO FOCUS ON ALLEGED RUSSIAN TACTICS

WASHINGTON: Some tactics Russia used to meddle in last year's presidential election would give shivers to anyone who believes in American democracy, the Senate intelligence committee's top Democrat says. Sen. Mark Warner of Virginia spoke ahead of a committee session yesterday that will address how the Kremlin allegedly uses technology to spread disinformation in the US and Europe. Warner and the panel's chairman, Sen. Richard Burr, R-NC, provided an update of the committee's investigation into activities Russia might have taken to alter or influence the 2016 elections and whether there were any campaign contacts with Russian government officials that might have interfered with the election process.

"There were upwards of 1,000 paid internet trolls working out of a facility in Russia, in effect, taking over series of computers, which is then called a botnet," Warner told reporters on Capitol Hill Wednesday. Warner said the committee was investigating to find out whether voters in key states, such as Wisconsin, Michigan and Pennsylvania, might have been served up Russian-generated fake news and propaganda along with information from their traditional news outlets.

"We are in a whole new realm around cyber that provides opportunity for huge, huge threats to our basic democracy," Warner said. "You are seeing it right now."

Burr added that Russians are trying to influence elections in Europe as well. "I think it's safe by everybody's judgment that the Russians are actively involved in the French elections," Burr said. The first round of the French presidential election is to be held next month. Scheduled to appear at the committee's open hearing are: Eugene Rumer, director of the Russia and Eurasia program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; Roy Godson, professor of government emeritus at Georgetown University; Clint Watts, senior fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute Program on National Security; Kevin Mandia, chief executive officer of the cybersecurity firm FireEye Inc.; and retired Gen. Keith Alexander, former director of the National Security Agency and president of IronNet Cybersecurity.

French connection

Pledging cooperation, Burr and Warner said they would steer clear of politics in their panel's probe of Russian meddling. They made a point of putting themselves at arm's length from the House investigation that has been marked by partisanship and disputes.

Democrats have called for House intelligence committee Chairman Rep. Devin Nunes to recuse himself because of his ties to the Trump team, especially because the investigation includes looking at contacts that Russians had with President Donald Trump's associates. Nunes, R-Calif, met with a secret source on the White House grounds last week to review classified material, which he says indicates that Trump associates' communications were captured in "incidental" surveillance of foreigners. — AP



BANGALORE: In this Feb 16, 2017, file photo, a US fighter aircraft F-16 performs during the Aero India 2017 at Yelahanka air base in Bangalore. The Trump administration told Congress on Wednesday that it plans to approve a multibillion-dollar sale of F-16 fighter jets to Bahrain. — AP

TRUMP GOVT PLANS TO OKAY SALE OF F-16S TO BAHRAIN

GULF STATE TO PURCHASE 19 FIGHTER JETS

WASHINGTON: The Trump administration has told Congress it plans to approve a multibillion-dollar sale of F-16 fighter jets to Bahrain without the human rights conditions imposed by the State Department under President Barack Obama.

If finalized, the approval would allow the Gulf island to purchase 19 of the jets from Maryland-based Lockheed Martin Corp., plus improvements to other jets in Bahrain's fleet. Though Congress has opportunities to block the sale, it is unlikely it will act to do so, given the Republican majority's strong support for the sale. The decision is the latest signal that the Trump administration is prioritizing support for Sunni-led countries seen as critical to opposing Iran's influence in the Mideast over human rights issues that Obama had elevated.

Bahrain, home to the US Navy's 5th Fleet and an under-construction British naval base, is an island state off the coast of Saudi Arabia.

Under Obama, the United States withdrew approval before the fighter jet

deal was finalized because it said Bahrain hadn't taken steps it had promised to improve human rights.

Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Bob Corker's office said the committee was told Wednesday by the State Department that it plans to proceed with the sale. The State Department declined to comment. The notice triggers a 40-day "consultation" period in which committee staff can review a draft of the Bahrain approval, ask questions about the sale and raise any concerns. Then the State Department will send a formal notification to Congress, setting off a final, 30-day review period, during which Congress could pass a joint resolution or take other steps to stop the sale.

Lockheed had lobbied strenuously for the sale's approval, even as rights groups and pro-democracy activists urged the administration not to jettison human rights conditions. Brian Dooley of the Washington-based group Human Rights First said decoupling the sale from such conditions would "encourage

further repression" and fuel instability during a tense period for Bahrain.

Meanwhile, a series of attacks, including a January prison break, have targeted the island. Shiite militant groups have claimed some of the assaults. Bahrain has accused Iran's Revolutionary Guard of training and arming some militants, something the Shiite regional power has dismissed as a "futile and baseless lie." Lockheed declined to comment while Bahrain's government did not respond to a request for comment.

In prepared remarks before a hearing Wednesday of the US House's Armed Services Committee, the head of the US military's Central Command acknowledged the delay in the fighter jet sale to Bahrain "continues to strain our relationship." "We continue to urge the government of Bahrain to reverse steps it has taken over the past year to reduce the space for peaceful political expression in its population and have encouraged the Bahrainis to implement needed political reforms in the country," US Gen Joseph Votel said. — AP

DUTERTE THREATENS TOP NEWSPAPER, BROADCASTER



MANILA: Opposition Filipino lawmaker Gary Alejano, a former military officer who joined an uprising against former president Gloria Arroyo in 2003, arrives to file his supplemental impeachment complaint against President Rodrigo Duterte at the Philippine Congress yesterday. In his complaint, Alejano accused Duterte of having a "defeatist stance" for failing to assert the Philippines' claims to the disputed South China Sea. — AFP

MANILA: Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte yesterday described two major media outlets as "sons of whores" and warned them of karmic repercussions for their critical coverage of his deadly drug war.

Duterte's verbal attacks on top television broadcaster ABS-CBN and the Philippine Daily Inquirer newspaper came in a pair of speeches in which he also lashed out at the European Union for criticizing him over alleged human rights abuses.

"I'm not threatening them but someday their karma will catch up with them," Duterte said of the two media outlets. "They're shameless, those sons of whore journalists." Duterte named the Prieto and Lopez families that own the Inquirer and ABS-CBN respectively, calling them "oligarchs" who use the media to promote their chosen political candidates.

"That is what ails the Philippine society: It is the corrupt media, the face of Prieto and Lopez and their

money and the church," he said. He also threatened to use the government TV station to shame those two families.

"I will give you your due also. I will go through your lives and those of your children," on government television, he said. Duterte easily won presidential elections last year after vowing to eradicate illegal drugs in society by killing tens of thousands of people.

Since taking office in June, police have reported killing at least 2,564 people in drug raids while more than 4,200 others have been killed in unexplained circumstances, according to official figures.

Rights groups have warned he may be overseeing a crime against humanity, while the European Parliament has been among other extremely critical foreign institutions. Duterte frequently responds to criticism with foul-mouthed defiance. He also branded then US president Barack Obama a "son of a whore" last year. — AFP

MALAYSIA SAYS KIM JONG NAM'S BODY RELEASED TO NORTH KOREA PYONGYANG AGREES TO RELEASE 9 MALAYSIANS

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia: Malaysia said yesterday it has agreed to release the body of Kim Jong Nam to North Korea in exchange for the return of nine Malaysians held in the North's capital.

Relations between Malaysia and North Korea have been badly frayed by the murder of the North Korean leader's half-brother at Kuala Lumpur's airport. Both countries withdrew their ambassadors and North Korea blocked nine Malaysians from leaving the country. Malaysia responded in kind, barring North Koreans from exiting its soil, including three suspects believed to be hiding in the North Korean Embassy.

Following negotiations that he described as "very sensitive," Prime Minister Najib Razak said yesterday North Korea had allowed the nine Malaysians to leave, and that Malaysia had agreed to release Kim's remains to North Korea. He didn't say whether Kim's body had already left Malaysia.

Earlier, a van was seen leaving the morgue where Kim's body was being held, after which police guards were removed. Najib said in a statement that Malaysia would also "allow North Koreans to leave Malaysia" as part of the agreement. It wasn't clear whether that included the three suspects wanted by police. The three include an embassy employee and an Air Koryo worker. Four other North Korean suspects left the country on the day Kim was killed.

"Following the completion of the autopsy on the deceased and receipt of a letter from his family requesting the remains be returned to North Korea, the coroner has approved the release of the body," Najib said. North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency confirmed the agreement, saying the two sides had pledged to "guarantee the safety and security" of each other's citizens, and that Malaysia had agreed to transfer the body "to the family of the deceased" in North Korea. Kim, however, is believed to have children with women living in Macau and Beijing, not in North Korea.

Government officials couldn't immediately be reached for further details. Custody of the body had been a flashpoint as relations between Malaysia and North Korea deteriorated sharply. Kim was poisoned on Feb 13 in a crowded terminal at the airport. According to Malaysian investigators, two young women approached Kim as he waited for a flight and smeared VX nerve agent - a banned chemical weapon - on his face. He was dead within 20 minutes. North Korea, which is widely suspected to be behind the attack, has rejected the autopsy findings.

Experts say the VX was almost certainly produced in a sophisticated state weapons laboratory, and North Korea is

widely believed to possess large quantities of chemical weapons. North Korea has denied any role in the killing and denounced the investigation as flawed and politically motivated. North Korea does not even acknowledge the victim is Kim Jong Nam, referring to him instead as Kim Chol, the name on the passport he was carrying when he died.

North Korea had demanded custody of the body because the victim was one of its citizens. But Malaysia refused, in part because it needed to formally identify the body, which it now says it has done, using DNA from his son. The two women accused of wiping Kim's face with the poison have been charged with murder. The two - an Indonesian and a Vietnamese - say they were duped into thinking they were taking part in a hidden-camera prank TV show. — AP



BEIJING: A man believed to be then-North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il's eldest son, Kim Jong-Nam, walking amongst journalists upon his arrival at Beijing's international airport. — AFP

JAPAN RULING PARTY URGES STRIKE ABILITY AMID N KOREA THREAT

TOKYO: Japan's ruling party urged the government yesterday to consider arming the country with more advanced and offensive capability, such as striking enemy targets with cruise missiles, further loosening the self-defense-only military posture Japan has had since the end of World War II.

The Liberal Democratic Party's council on defense policy urged the government to immediately start studying ways to bolster Japan's capability to intercept missiles with a system such as the Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense, or THAAD system, that the US and Seoul have agreed to install in South Korea. The panel cited a "new level of threat" from North Korea, which fired four missiles this month, three of them landing inside Japan-claimed exclusive economic waters.

"North Korea's provocative acts have reached a level that Japan absolutely cannot overlook," the party's security panel said in the proposal given to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. "We should not waste any time to strengthen our ballistic missile defense." The panel noted that North Korea's recent missile launches have shown advancing technology, with a capability to launch from a mobile facility or submarine, use solid fuel, as well as fired to a high-altitude trajectory - which makes it harder to trace and respond.

With higher levels of threat coming from North Korea, Japan should now consider possessing "our own capability of striking back an enemy base, with cruise missiles for instance, to further improve deterrence and response as part of the Japan-US alliance," according to the proposal. The panel said the government should immediately start studying a possibility of introducing THAAD and the shore-based Aegis missile defense system, among other equipment, while pursuing upgrades to two existing missile defense systems - ship-to-air SM-3 interceptors and the ground-based PAC-3. It said necessary budget should be allocated for the possible new options.

Realistic option

Japan has maintained that its right to strike a foreign base in case of an imminent attack is not banned under the constitution and hawkish lawmakers have studied a possibility, though it has never been proposed as a realistic option. Former defense minister Itsunori Onodera, who headed the defense policy council, told Abe that Japan needs to be prepared for being targeted by multiple missiles. "Our proposal is about how we can fight back and stop the other party from firing a second missile, instead of making a pre-emptive strike," he said. Abe said he takes the report seriously and will cooperate with the party to improve Japan's ballistic missile response. — AP

TOP TIBETAN LAMA ABANDONS MONKHOOD TO MARRY FRIEND

NEW DELHI: A senior Tibetan lama at the centre of a long-running row over one of Buddhism's most important titles has abandoned the monkhood altogether after marrying a childhood friend in India, his office said yesterday. Thaye Dorje, 33, has claimed since childhood to be the reincarnation of the Karmapa Lama, the leader of one of the four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

But many adherents of the Karma Kagyu school of Buddhism follow another monk with a rival claim to the title, Ugyen Trinley, who is recognized by the Dalai Lama.

The disagreement has long split Tibetan Buddhists, but yesterday Thaye Dorje's office made the surprise announcement that he had married in a private ceremony in New Delhi on March 25, and abandoned the monkhood. "I have a strong feeling, deep within my heart, that my

decision to marry will have a positive impact not only for me, but also for the lineage," the statement quoted Thaye Dorje as saying.

"Something beautiful, something beneficial will emerge, for all of us." Thaye Dorje will continue to fulfil the role of the Karmapa, including by offering teachings and blessings to students around the world, his office said. His new wife, 36-year-old Rinchen Yangzom, was born in Bhutan and educated in India and Europe. Under Tibetan tradition, monks identify a young boy who shows signs he is a reincarnation of a late leader.

Thaye Dorje was born in Tibet and his own father was a high lama, while his mother was descended from Tibetan nobility. According to his official biography, he was just one-and-a-half years old when he started telling people that he was the Karmapa. — AFP



NEW DELHI: This handout photograph released by Karmapa.org yesterday, shows The Karmapa Thaye Dorje (second left) and his parents Mipham Rinpoche (C/TOP), Dechen Wangmo Bottom (right /rear) Rinchen Yangzom (left) and her parents Chencho (center front) and Kunzang as they pose in New Delhi. — AFP

News

in brief



SALUBIRO: The body of 25-year-old Akbar who was found when local people cut open the seven metre python after it was found bloated and slithering awkwardly in the village of Salubiro, on the eastern island of Sulawesi. —AFP

Indonesian found dead after being swallowed by python

JAKARTA: An Indonesian farmer has been found dead inside a 7-meter (23-foot) python after being reported missing on his failure to return home from work on a palm plantation. Village officials cut open the swollen body of the snake in a graphic video taken by a resident of Mamuju, on the eastern island of Sulawesi, the site of the incident. The victim's legs, encased in rubber boots, emerge as the snake is pulled apart. Family members and neighbours of the 26-year-old victim, Akbar, had launched a search when he failed to come home for more than 24 hours, a resident of the area told Reuters. "We saw a python that couldn't move properly and it's belly was swollen," said Asdin Rudi Fathir, 43. "Residents and officials decided to kill the python and were shocked to find a human body inside." Relatives identified the victim, who went by only one name, as do many Indonesians. While large snakes and other animals are common in that part of Sulawesi, attacks on humans are rare, Fathir added.

Train derailment in north India injures 25

NEW DELHI: At least 25 people were injured yesterday when eight carriages of a passenger train derailed in northern India, a railway ministry spokesman said, the latest in a series of incidents involving the world's fourth-largest rail network. The Mahakoshal Express was travelling from Jabalpur city in central India's Madhya Pradesh to the capital, New Delhi, when it derailed at about 2 am (2000 GMT Wednesday) in Uttar Pradesh state. "Rescue operations are underway. We have rushed a disaster management team to the incident spot," railways ministry spokesman Anil Saxena said in New Delhi. The cause of the derailment has not been determined yet and police would investigate whether it was an accident or a planned attack, he said.

BANGLADESH FORCES STORM HIDEOUT, FIND EIGHT BODIES

TROOPS ENTER ISLAMIST DEN AFTER 2-DAY STANDOFF

DHAKA: Bangladesh security forces found the scattered remains of up to eight people, including women and possibly children, in a "horrific scene" when they stormed an Islamist hideout yesterday, police said.

Security forces entered the building after a two-day stand-off with armed fighters believed to be from a new faction of an extremist group the government has blamed for a wave of deadly attacks targeting foreigners and religious minorities. Bangladesh prides itself on being a mainly moderate Muslim country. But that perception has been damaged by a series of gruesome killings of atheist bloggers, foreigners and religious minorities.

The head of the counter-terrorism unit Monirul Islam said police believed the group holed up in the hideout had blown themselves up to avoid being taken by security forces in the latest incident.

He said some of those killed were women, and that there could also be children among the dead. "There was an explosion late yesterday afternoon when the operation began. They died due to that explosion," he told reporters. "We think there were seven to eight bodies of different ages. It's a horrific scene."

Police came under grenade attack when they raided two Islamist hideouts in the northeastern district of Moulvibazar on Wednesday. Militants threw at least eight grenades as police cordoned off the two houses-one in the Moulvibazar town and another outside the town in a village called Nasirpur, both owned by a Bangladesh origin British citizen. Counter-terrorism officers and the elite SWAT unit then stormed Nasirpur hideout at the village and found body parts scattered across two rooms, Islam said.

Security forces were also planning to storm a second hideout in the town, where authorities believe one or two

extremists were holed up, district police chief Mohammad Shah Jalal told AFP.

Last week army commandos stormed a five-storey building in the nearby city of Sylhet, triggering a violent three-day stand-off. At least four extremists died and another six people including two police officers were killed when two bombs went off on Saturday near a crowd watching the operation.

The Islamic State group took credit for

the twin bomb attacks, but the government has rejected the claim and instead blamed the banned homegrown Islamist organisation, Jamayetul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB). There has been a resurgence of extremist attacks in recent weeks in the Muslim-majority nation of 160 million after a relative lull since five IS-linked gunmen killed 22 people including 18 foreign hostages at a Dhaka cafe on July 1. — AFP

ONE YEAR ON: WHAT DO PEOPLE THINK OF SUU KYI?

YANGON: One year after Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) party was sworn in as Myanmar's first elected government in half a century, opinions are mixed on its performance. Many have a saint-like adoration for "The Lady", who championed a decades-long democracy struggle against the country's former military oppressors. But after 12 months with dubious progress on economic reform and repressive legislation still on the books, some supporters are starting to lose patience. Here are some views from Myanmar:

Maung Saungkha

"I was imprisoned for six months for a poem," said the young writer who was arrested in 2015 for penning a satirical verse about having a tattoo of former junta-installed president Thein Sein in his private parts. "We understood that the previous (military-backed) government was a new form of junta... so when we attacked them, people supported us."

"But since the new government led by Aung San Suu Kyi took power, we can't say what we like. We can't point

out issues or criticize Aung San Suu Kyi. If we did, people who support her online or outside would attack us."

Many activists have expressed acute concern about a spike in the number of online defamation prosecutions since the NLD came to power, with some cases filed by party members. "The law can keep people silent," said Maung Saungkha. "This situation should not be acceptable in a democratic country. There is no democracy without freedom of expression and certainly we don't have that today."

Nay Phone Latt, NLD lawmaker in Yangon

The former free speech blogger, who spent years in jail for criticizing the junta before being elected as an NLD lawmaker in 2015, said the government needed to improve its communication with the public. "Some problems and mismanagement happened because of the eagerness to change the country quickly," he said, pointing to the chaos caused by an ill-planned overhaul of Yangon's bus service and the uproar that greeted the government's decision to cut the 10-day Thingyan holiday in April. — AFP

S KOREA'S OUSTED PRESIDENT PARK APPEARS IN COURT

SEOUL: South Korea's ousted president Park Geun-Hye was grilled for nearly nine hours in court yesterday as a judge deliberated whether she should be arrested over the corruption and abuse of power scandal that brought her down. Looking grim-faced and pale, Park ignored a barrage of press flashbulbs and did not speak when she arrived at the Seoul Central District Court, nor when she left.

She was taken to a prosecutor's office to await the judge's decision, which was not expected until late into the night. Being taken into custody would be a dramatic step in the disgrace of South Korea's first woman president, and is a key demand of the millions of people who took to the streets to protest against her as the scandal engulfed her leadership last year.

The former president, who was stripped of her immunity when she was dismissed from office by the country's top court earlier this month, is accused of multiple offences including bribery, leaking government information, and abuse of power. Park has denied the accusations. Choi Soon-Sil, Park's secret confidante at the heart of the scandal, is already on trial for forcing top local firms including tech giant Samsung to "donate" nearly \$70 million to non-profit foundations which she allegedly used for personal gain.

Park, 65, was driven to the courthouse from her home in southern Seoul past hundreds of flag-waving, screaming supporters lining the narrow street. Some tried to break through police barricades in an effort to stop the passage of her four-car convoy, which was broadcast live on television. Ahead of the hearing, prosecutors submitted around 120,000 pages of documents to the Seoul Central District Court in relation to the charges against Park, and said it would be



SEOUL: Ousted South Korean President Park Geun-hye, center, leaves after hearing on a prosecutors' request for her arrest for corruption at the Seoul Central District Court in Seoul yesterday. —AP

"counter to the principle of fairness" if she was not arrested.

"The accused is denying most of the charges, and there is a risk of destroying evidence in the future," they said. If the warrant is granted Park will be formally detained and taken to a detention centre south of the capital, becoming the third former leader to be arrested over corruption in Asia's fourth-largest economy, where politics and big business have long been closely tied.

Samsung Electronics vice chairman Lee Jae-Yong, who was arrested last month in connection to the scandal, was in court for over seven hours for his hearing, and his detention was approved early the following day.

Opposition lawmakers called for Park's arrest. "The least she can do as the ex-president who damaged national dignity is to admit her criminal acts, bow her head and seek forgiveness," said a spokesman for the main opposition Democratic Party.

An election to choose her successor will be held on May 9. Moon Jae-In, her rival in 2012 and a former Democratic Party leader leads opinion polls by large margins.

Sleepless nights

Park, daughter of late dictator Park Chung-Hee, secured the largest vote share of any candidate in the democratic era when she was elected in 2012. But she was impeached by parliament in December, as the scandal combined with mounting economic and social frustrations to trigger huge candlelit demonstrations. The Constitutional Court later upheld the decision.

Last week she underwent a 21-hour interrogation session at the prosecutors' office, having refused repeated requests to be interviewed while in power. Then, prosecutors addressed her as "Madam President" but Kang was to call her the "suspect".

She had been "lost for words" when authorities asked for her arrest, the Chosun Ilbo daily quoted an unidentified pro-Park lawmaker as saying.

Another said she had been having "sleepless nights and skipping meals" since moving out of the presidential palace. Park allegedly offered governmental favours to top businessmen who enriched Choi, including Samsung's Lee.

She is also accused of letting her friend, a high school graduate with no title or security clearance, handle a wide range of state affairs including nomination of top officials.

Park is also said to have cracked down on thousands of artists who had voiced criticisms of her or her father's iron-fisted rule from 1961 to 1979. She has repeatedly apologized for the upset caused by the scandal but not admitted any wrongdoing, blaming Choi for abusing their friendship. —AFP



BEIJING: Chinese President Xi Jinping (right) shakes hands with Serbian President Tomislav Nikolic during an honorary citizenship ceremony for Nikolic at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday. —AFP

CHINA'S XI AND TRUMP TEE UP MAR-A-LAGO SUMMIT

BEIJING: China's President Xi Jinping will meet Donald Trump next week at the US leader's Florida golf resort, the first face-to-face meeting between the heads of the world's two most powerful nations.

The visit, which will take place at Trump's luxury Mar-a-Lago club, follows a rocky start to US-China relations under the billionaire politician, who has repeatedly blasted Beijing for its trade policies and reluctance to bring pressure on North Korea over its nuclear and missile programs. The meeting, which is scheduled for April 6-7 and was confirmed by both countries Thursday, could be crucial in setting the tone of the relationship between the two powers in coming years.

The White House confirmed the meeting in a statement, saying that the leaders will "discuss global, regional, and bilateral issues of mutual concern." Trump and his wife Melania will also host Xi and China's first lady Peng Liyuan for dinner, it added. Just weeks ago the summit seemed a distant possibility after Trump infuriated Beijing with suggestions he might break from the US's long-standing One China Policy, which nominally acknowledges the Asian giant's claims over Taiwan without recognizing them. —AFP

HONG KONG ACTIVIST JAILED OVER UMBRELLA MOVEMENT PROTEST

9 FACE CHARGES AMID THREATS TO FREEDOM

HONG KONG: A Hong Kong democracy activist was jailed yesterday over Umbrella Movement mass protests while nine more campaigners face charges, as fears grow that freedoms are under threat in the semi-autonomous city. The cases come days after pro-Beijing leader Carrie Lam was selected as city leader by a committee skewed towards the mainland camp.

They also precede an expected visit by China's President Xi Jinping in July to mark the 20th anniversary of the handover of Hong Kong back to China by Britain in 1997.

Activist Alvin Cheng, 28, who has in the past advocated the idea of Hong Kong's independence from China, was sentenced to three months in prison for criminal contempt of court. The charge related to defying an injunction order for activists to clear a sprawling protest camp in the commercial area of Mong Kok in November 2014 during the Umbrella Movement rallies, which called for fully free leadership elections but failed to win concessions from Beijing.

Mong Kok saw some of the most violent clashes during the demonstrations and some activists refused to leave the site despite the order from authorities. Judge Andrew Chan said Cheng had shown "little remorse" and also chastised

him for being late to hearings, and playing with his mobile phone.

Another protester, Au Yuk-kwan, was fined HK\$10,000 (\$1,287), also for defying the clearance injunction, and given a suspended one-month jail sentence. Separately yesterday, nine other campaigners accused of causing a public nuisance or inciting others to do so during the 2014 rallies appeared at magistrates' court, in a case they have criticized as political persecution.

The group, ranging from 22 to 73-years-old and including students, professors and lawmakers, were charged one day after pro-Beijing Lam won the leadership.

They could face up to seven years in prison. Their case was adjourned to May 25 after a brief hearing, during which the defense requested a High Court jury trial so that the public could participate in the decision. They have yet to enter a plea.

'Sustained attack'

Rival protesters from the pro-democracy and pro-China camps faced off outside the court where the nine activists' case was being heard, chanting at each other. Some pro-China supporters slapped a picture of democracy campaigner Benny Tai with a pink plastic slipper, mimicking a local custom practised

by some where a shoe is used to beat an image of an enemy.

Speaking outside court, Tai told reporters the activists would not give up on the fight for democracy in Hong Kong. "I believe our society is steeped with the spirit of civil disobedience," said Tai, co-founder of Occupy Central, one of the groups behind the Umbrella Movement rallies.

"We won't give up until Hong Kong has real democracy and real universal suffrage," he added.

Rights group Amnesty International condemned the charges, saying the case showed the city's freedom of expression and right to peaceful assembly was "under a sustained attack".

Activist Ken Tsang started a five-week jail term earlier this month for assaulting police during the 2014 protests. Tsang was himself attacked the same night by seven police officers who were jailed for two years in February for assault causing actual bodily harm.

New leader Lam has promised to try to unify divided Hong Kong, but opponents said the new crackdown immediately undermined that pledge. Sunday's vote was dismissed as a sham by democracy campaigners who say Lam will be no different from unpopular current chief executive, Leung Chun-ying. —AFP

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Lifestyle

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FIRST AFGHAN WOMEN'S ORCHESTRA TRIES TO CHANGE ATTITUDES

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In this file photo, musicians rehearse before their concert in Kabul, Afghanistan. — AP



This pictures show spectators waiting for a film showing at the Regal cinema, an 84-year-old movie hall, in the heart of the Indian capital New Delhi. — AFP photos



Indian projectionist Ramesh Kumar, who has worked at the Regal cinema for 23 years, looking at an old projector at the 84-year-old movie hall in the heart of the Indian capital New Delhi.

LIGHTS GO OUT AT HISTORIC DELHI CINEMA AFTER 84 YEARS

After years of slow but steady decline the colonial-era Regal cinema, a New Delhi institution, is enjoying a late flourishing—sadly just as it is about to close its doors. Manager Roop Ghai says families have been flocking to the crumbling white building at the heart of the Indian capital since learning that it is shutting down, a victim of competition from the gleaming multiplex cinemas springing up around the city. “People are

coming in much larger numbers than they have in recent years, especially older people who have many memories linked to this cinema hall,” he told AFP at the Regal, which closed yesterday.

“We are happy to be busy again, even if it is only for a few more days.” The Regal is one of India’s oldest cinema halls—when it first opened its doors in the 1930s, the country was still a British colony. In the ensuing decades it hosted everyone from the

last British viceroy Louis Mountbatten to independent India’s first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru and his daughter Indira Gandhi as well as Bollywood legend Amitabh Bachchan. But many young Indians now prefer the air-conditioned comfort of the out-of-town multiplexes, which offer a far greater choice of movies than the old single-screen cinemas. Among them is Amita Raj, who was visiting the Regal for the first time despite living nearby. “I wanted to see it and watch a movie here before it shuts in the next few days,” she said as she queued to buy her ticket.

Bollywood legend

The building may survive as a cinema—its historic facade cannot be altered, but its owners say they will try to get permission to eventually turn it into a multi-screen cinema. But the closure will be the end of the road for Ramesh Kumar, who has worked as a projectionist for 44 years, 23 of them at the Regal. He regretted the cinema’s closure because unlike modern multiplexes, it was affordable for all. Tickets for a

matinee at Regal cinema cost as little as 100 rupees (\$1.50), going up to 200 rupees for a prime “box” seat—around half of what multiplexes typically charge. Audiences can expect to pay as much as 1,200 rupees at a sleek, suburban multiplex with faux leather recliners and more expensive confectionery and popcorn.

But he said the building had not been properly maintained of late. “No one paid (enough) attention to it. If someone had taken care of it, we wouldn’t have reached the situation where we are today,” he said. The final straw for the Regal’s owners was the recent collapse of another building in the historic Connaught Place complex where it is located. Municipal authorities have since launched a crackdown on buildings violating structural safety regulations and the necessary repairs would have proved too onerous to be worthwhile. But the writing had been on the wall for a long time. “Earlier, no matter what film was screened here, the cinema used to be always full. There used to be long queues from here to the

corners of the street outside,” said Ravi Shukla, who worked at the Regal’s canteen for 36 years.

“Now things are not how they used to be.” Last night, the Regal will hold special screenings of two classic Raj Kapoor movies from its heyday in the 1960s and 70s. The legendary Bollywood actor and director was a regular visitor and many of his films premiered at the Regal. Ghai, the Regal’s manager, said the cinema had been full of fans in recent days, from young people taking selfies to older couples wanting to show it to their children. “It feels like parting with a family member,” he said. — AFP



Audience standing for the Indian national anthem before a movie starts at the Regal cinema.



Indian cashier Bhoop Singh selling tickets before a movie starts at the Regal cinema.



Audience standing for the Indian national anthem before a movie starts at the Regal cinema.



Spectators queuing at the Regal cinema.



An exterior view of the Regal cinema.

Bollywood film spotlights youngest girl to conquer Everest



Indian mountaineer Poorna Malavath attends the screening of upcoming Hindi film 'Poorna' in Mumbai on March 27, 2017. — AFP

A Bollywood film hitting Indian cinemas today tells the inspirational story of a tribal girl from rural India who became the youngest woman to summit Mount Everest. Poorna Malavath was 13 years and 11 months old when she planted India's tricolour flag on the top of the world's highest mountain on May 25, 2014. Malavath's remarkable journey from a remote, backward Adivasi tribal village to the record books inspired filmmaker Rahul Bose to produce, direct and act in the biopic, which is simply titled "Poorna". "A 13-year-old girl scaling Mount Everest was improbable in itself because here was a poor, uneducated girl from Telangana (state), which does not even have a mound, forget a mountain," Bose told AFP.

The director said he wanted to show the "sheer physical danger" that Malavath put herself through reaching the 8,848-metre summit in Nepal. "But I also wanted to make the film which spotlights what it's like to be a girl, uneducated, Adivasi, and poor. These are four big strikes against a person and to cross these are big hurdles," he added. Malavath is the daughter of agricultural labourers. Her journey started when she was selected to be part of an extra-curricular rock climbing initiative for tribal schools, run by the state government, which was then part of Andhra Pradesh.

Bose plays R. S Praveen, who started the initiative, and became Malavath's mentor. Praveen and the climbing instructor, who himself had summited Everest, arranged for Malavath and some other children to go to India's mountainous north-eastern state of Darjeeling to improve their skills. Praveen then decided he wanted to arrange for an Adivasi girl to attempt Everest to inspire tribal families about the potential of their children. Malavath was chosen and summited along with a teenage Dalit boy called Sadhanapally Anand Kumar. Both were feted by the Indian media on their return. "There is a line when Poorna says 'girls can do anything'. I would say the message is never give up and that everyone can overcome their own Everest," said Bose. — AFP

In this file photo, Disney Frozen Feature Fashion Dolls are displayed at the Mattel booth at the American International Toy Fair in New York. — AP



Evil Elsa? 'Frozen' producer reveals film's original ending

Disney's animated phenomenon, "Frozen," may not have been a heartwarming tale of sisterly love if its creators stuck to the film's original planned ending. "Frozen" producer Peter Del Vecho tells Entertainment Weekly the original version of the film

was more in line with the Hans Christian Andersen tale on which it's based.

Del Vecho says princess sisters Anna and Elsa weren't related in early scripts. He says "Elsa was a self-proclaimed Snow Queen, but she was a villain and pure evil." The drafts included a finale

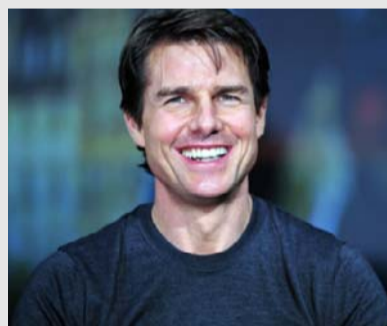
with Elsa using her powers to save the kingdom, but Del Vecho says the character's evilness gave them "no emotional connection" to her.

The filmmakers finally got things right after reworking the script. A sequel to the film is in production. — AP

Tom Cruise cajoled 'The Mummy' cast to do own stunts

Tom Cruise is known for performing his own death-defying stunts in his action movies-but the cast of horror blockbuster "The Mummy" revealed Wednesday he's started roping in his co-stars. Annabelle Wallis told the CinemaCon convention Cruise convinced her to join him in a terrifying zero gravity plane crash stunt, when the scene could easily have been filmed in front of a green screen.

"Tom is renowned for making sure that the audience gets the most out of their cinematic experience," Wallis, 32, told an audience at the annual Las Vegas gathering for movie theater operators. "So when it came to doing this sequence we had options to do it on a stage. Tom, in his glory and slight madness, was adamant that he wanted it to be done on a plane in zero gravity." The scene involved 64 takes during four high alti-



Tom Cruise

tude flights over two days, leading to "a lot of barfing," according to writer and director Alex Kurtzman.

Wallis ("X-Men: First Class") revealed that Cruise, in true action hero style, had no problems keeping down his lunch. Jake Johnson ("Jurassic World"), who plays Cruise's sidekick, said working with

the star was a lot of fun, but a "terrifying" experience. "We jump off buildings and towns explode, and Tom really does it all, and he insists his cast do it too, and I say the word 'makes,'" said Johnson, 38, at the start Universal's presentation of its upcoming slate of movies. "Yes, I got hurt. My character dies, I almost died. We'd do a stunt and it would hurt, and I'm like, 'I think something went wrong because it hurt' and he'd go 'Well yeah-we jumped off a building, dummy.'"

"The Mummy," which opens on June 9, tells the story of an ancient princess who is awakened from her crypt beneath the desert and unleashes a malevolence that has grown over millennia. Sofia Boutella, 34, ("Kingsmen," "Star Trek Beyond") takes on the role of the titular monster-a female for the first time in cinematic history. She revealed that she turned down Kurtzman's job offer at first. — AFP

Diesel fights back tears for friend Paul Walker

Vin Diesel choked back tears on Wednesday as he paid an emotional tribute to his dead "The Fast and the Furious" co-star Paul Walker at the CinemaCon convention. The 49-year-old revealed it was Walker who insisted there should be an eighth installment in the \$3.9 billion franchise, as he introduced "The Fate of the Furious" at the gathering in Las Vegas. "Part of Paul's legacy lives through every frame that we shoot... You are reminded of this angel that was so integral to this concept of brotherhood for our millennium," Diesel said, fighting his

emotions. "There's something beautiful about that. There's something celebratory about that... I always feel like he's looking down on us, so we didn't want to let him down." Walker was 40 when he died in a fiery single-vehicle crash in California in 2013, before the seventh film was released. Tyrese Gibson, who has been in the high-octane franchise since "2 Fast, 2 Furious" (2003), echoed Diesel's tribute.

"The last time I was on this stage we were here with Paul Walker. We move and operate in the memory of Paul Walker," he told the crowd at the Caesar's Palace

hotel. In "The Fate of the Furious," due to hit theaters on April 14, a mysterious woman seduces Diesel's Dominic Toretto into the criminal underworld. Diesel, now a producer as well as star, confirmed a previous announcement that the series would extend to at least a tenth movie. "As the world sees this movie, they'll see how it's the beginning of a new trilogy," he said. Diesel and Gibson were joined onstage by Ludacris and newcomers Kurt Russell and Charlize Theron, before Universal delighted the CinemaCon audience by premiering the movie. — AFP

Actor Vin Diesel speaks onstage at Universal Pictures' presentation featuring footage from its upcoming slate at The Colosseum at Caesars Palace during CinemaCon. — AFP





French photographer Youri Lenquette poses at the gallery of the French Institute in Dakar during the preview of his exhibition titled 'Youri ne dort pas' (Youri doesn't sleep), a series of portraits of celebrities. — AFP photos



French photographer Youri Lenquette poses at his home in the Senegalese capital Dakar.

Cobain's last photographer turns his lens to African music

Best known for taking the last professional images of Kurt Cobain before his suicide, French photographer Youri Lenquette's newest exhibition reveals an eye now firmly fixed on Africa's most vibrant musicians. A longtime documenter of punk, rock and grunge stars, Lenquette is these days just as likely to be found on a Dakar terrace or Abidjan club floor, rubbing shoulders with the artists who have made those cities' vibes famous. His new exhibition, "Youri Doesn't Sleep", is currently on show in Dakar where he has lived since 2010 with his Senegalese wife Adja and two children, filled with stars drawn from the worlds of reggae, rumba and pop. The undisputed king of Senegal's music scene, Youssou N'Dour, has called him a friend since they met in Paris in the early 1990s and dubbed him a Frenchman "who has the soul of Africa" in his work. "When I saw him, I knew that he could put Africa on display, he could show off African artists," N'Dour told AFP in an interview. Lenquette's images were never meant to hang on a gallery wall, said Vincent Berniere, the exhibition's curator. They were originally shot for album sleeves and promo material.

But unconsciously, Berniere believes, the Frenchman has adopted a long tradition of west African photo-portraits led by figures such as Malian photographer Malick Sidibe.

Viewers observe Ivorian reggae artist Tiken Jah Fakoly sitting astride a bright blue motorbike, surrounded by a young entourage, or Cape Verde's late soul diva Cesaria Evora, known for her sad ballads, breaking into laughter with her friends. N'Dour makes an appearance himself, sitting in a giant frame, while Papa Wemba, the Congolese "king of rumba" who collapsed on stage in Abidjan last year and died, shows off his nation's sharp-suited "sapeur" style.

Cobain's 'big brother'

Born in Cahors, southwestern France in 1956, and raised in the city of Nice, former music journalist Lenquette first picked up a camera in his late teens to provide photos to go with his early writing. He gained notoriety in 1994 for portraying troubled Nirvana star Kurt Cobain pointing a gun at the camera while looking frail in a tattered sweater, an image which blazed across the pages of now defunct French rock magazine Best. Two months later, Cobain shot himself in the head, thereafter lending a disturbing quality to Lenquette's picture. That year, the rock journalist became a full-time photographer.

Recalling Cobain, Lenquette crossed him so often during the height of grunge that he "adopted me as a big brother", he recount-

ed in an AFP interview, peering through his trademark giant glasses. Cobain's death so affected him, Lenquette said, that his work had to move away from the "live fast, die young" philosophy of grunge. He went on to photograph everyone from Icelandic songstress Bjork to anarchic rocker Iggy Pop, and formed a close bond with Cuba's Buena Vista Social Club. But Latin American and African music provided "something much more alive," the photographer told AFP.

When Lenquette converted to Islam to marry his wife, he chose to take the same first name as Ibrahim Ferrer, who joined Buena Vista Social Club later in life and died in 2005, linking the photographer's musical past with his spiritual present. Now in his early 60s, life is no less busy with two young children and a full schedule of shoots, shows and celebrity mates, he says, sitting in a garden full of his photos transposed onto giant tarpaulins. There are, he maintains, "heaps" of musicians he has yet to photograph, despite the amazing array of styles and personalities he has already represented in his work. Salif Keita, an albino Malian singer-songwriter who helped pioneer Afro Pop and is sometimes called "the Golden Voice of Africa", is his next dream project. — AFP



In this file photo, Leonardo DiCaprio attends the premiere of the National Geographic Channel's 'Before The Flood,' at the United Nations.



In this file photo, Q-Tip, from A Tribe Called Quest, performs at the 59th annual Grammy Awards in Los Angeles. — AP photos

Leonardo DiCaprio, Q-Tip bro it up at intimate showcase

Longtime friends Leonardo DiCaprio and Q-Tip hung out at an intimate showcase for an Australian band making its New York City debut late Wednesday. The Oscar-winning actor and Grammy-winning rapper were in the small audience at Ludlow House as trio Chase Atlantic performed songs in a stripped, raw form. DiCaprio bobbed his head from his plush chair while sitting next to Sports Illustrated Swimsuit model Nina Agdal and chatting with the leader of A Tribe Called Quest. Q-Tip went to the stage to watch when the band asked people

to come closer, as DiCaprio, in a fedora, sat back. The audience included music industry insiders, record label players and some press.

Chase Atlantic performed songs from its three-song project released in January, "Part One," as well as tracks from another three-song album, "Part Two," to be released Friday. The group's genre-bending sounds echo The Weeknd and The 1975. Band members include brothers Clinton Cave and Mitchel Cave, and Christian Anthony. — AP

Beach Boys' Wilson, Usher headline Montreux Jazz

Beach Boys great Brian Wilson, Usher and the Pet Shop Boys will be among the headliners at the 51st edition of the Montreux Jazz Festival, organizers announced yesterday. The June 30 to July 15 festival in the idyllic Swiss lakeside town will showcase many of music's veterans but with a lineup also pitching to younger audiences. The roster "draws from the great founders of jazz, reveals young talents and includes the return of pop sensations and the kings of R&B", festival director Mathieu Jatton said at the program's launch.

Leading the youth appeal is Beyonce's rising sister, Solange, and the American folk rock group The Lumineers. Former Fugees front-woman Lauryn Hill is due to perform on July 6, three days before an appearance by Jamaican singer and model Grace Jones. Other names are Britain's Bryan Ferry, formerly lead singer of Roxy Music, regular Montreux fixture Herbie

Hancock, the American jazz legend, and Welsh crooner Tom Jones, making his first appearance at festival. Senegalese star Youssou N'Dour will headline the closing night of the festival. — AFP



This file photo shows Jamaican singer, actress and model Grace Jones performing during the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Concert at Buckingham Palace in London. — AFP



Orchestra conductor Negin Khpolwak, 20, center, rehearses with Afghanistan's first all-female symphony in Kabul.



Zarifa Adiba, 18, an orchestra conductor in Afghanistan, plays during a concert in Kabul. — AP photos

FIRST AFGHAN WOMEN'S ORCHESTRA TRIES TO CHANGE ATTITUDES

The formation of the orchestra is aimed at sending a positive message to the community'

Afghanistan's first - and only - all-female symphony is trying to change attitudes in a deeply conservative country where many see music as immoral, especially for women. The symphony's two conductors show how difficult that can be, but also how satisfying success is. One of them, Negin Khpolwak, was supported by her father when she joined the Afghanistan National Institute of Music and then became part of its girls' orchestra, called Zohra. But the rest of her family was deeply against it. Her uncles cut off ties with her father. "They told him he is not their brother anymore," said Khpolwak, now 20. "Even my grand-mother disowned my father."



Musicians rehearse before their concert in Kabul, Afghanistan.

Khpolwak had learned about the music institute at the orphanage in Kabul where she spent most of her life. Her father sent her to the orphanage because he was afraid for her safety in their home province of Kunar in eastern Afghanistan, an area where Taliban militants are active. The institute is one of the only schools in Afghanistan where girls and boys share classrooms, and it draws its students from the ranks of orphanages and street children, giving them a chance at a new life. Khpolwak studied piano and drums before becoming the orchestra's conductor. More than 30 girls aged 12 to 20 play in Zohra, which is named after a goddess of music in Persian literature. In January, the orchestra, which performs traditional Afghan and Western Classical music, had

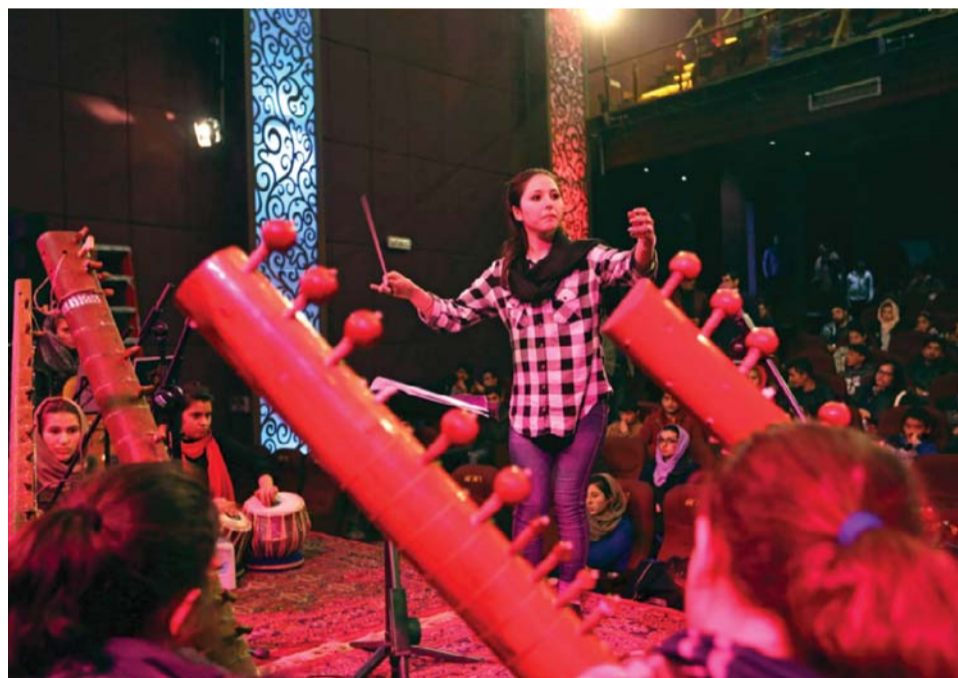
its first international tour, appearing at the World Economic Forum in Davos and four other cities in Switzerland and Germany.

"The formation of the orchestra is aimed at sending a positive message to the community, to send a positive message to the girls, to encourage families and girls to join the music scene of the country," said Ahmad Naser Sarmast, the institute's founder and director. Sarmast has experienced firsthand the militants' hatred of music. In 2014, a Taliban suicide bomber blew himself up at a concert Sarmast was attending. He was wounded and a German man in the audience died. The Zohra orchestra was created in 2014 when one of the institute's students, a girl named Meena, asked Sarmast if there could be a group where girls could play together. Sarmast leaped at the idea.

Playing music

Since then, Meena has disappeared. Last year, the 7th grader told the school she had to attend her sister's wedding in her family's village in eastern Nangarhar province. She never returned, a sign of how tenuous people's situation is in a country where war rages, communications are poor and poverty is rife. Sarmast said the school has not been in contact with her, but he's hopeful she'll return to the school and Zohra. The orchestra's other conductor, 18-year-old Zarifa Adiba, faced resistance from her family just as Khpolwak did. When she joined the school in 2014, she only told her mother and step-father, not her four brothers and her uncles, because she knew they would disapprove. Her mother and step-father tried to tell them about the importance of music - without mentioning Adiba - but they weren't convinced. "If my brothers and uncles had known about me learning or playing music, they 100 percent would have stopped me because they had a very negative view toward music," Adiba said.

Her family's opposition to music was so intense she hesitated to join the orchestra's trip to Davos. But she ended up going, and as one of the conductors she was widely interviewed in the media there and appeared on TV. When she returned, her uncles were the first to congratulate her. Two of her brothers are still not happy about her involvement with music but now she has the support of the rest of the family, she has more courage, and she said she is sure her brothers will eventually come around. "I changed my family, now it is time for other girls to change their families because I am sure that slowly all Afghanistan will change," she said. — AP



Orchestra conductor Negin Khpolwak, center, rehearses with Afghanistan's first all-female symphony in Kabul.



Orchestra conductor Zarifa Adiba, 18, performs during a concert in Kabul.



This image released by DreamWorks Animation shows characters Tim, voiced by Miles Bakshi, left, and Boss Baby, voiced by Alec Baldwin in a scene from the animated film, 'The Boss Baby.' — AP photos



This image released by DreamWorks Animation shows the characters Mother, voiced by Lisa Kudrow, from left, Boss Baby, voiced by Alec Baldwin, and Father, voiced by Jimmy Kimmel from the animated film, 'The Boss Baby.'

In 'The Boss Baby,' it's clear who wears the diapers

Some of the best animated films have been inspired by fairy tales, ancient Greek fables or mythology. Now comes one clearly inspired by, of all people, David Mamet. The creators of "The Boss Baby" have obviously been mining the playwright's gritty, foul-mouthed "Glengarry Glen Ross" to build the title character, a ruthless, capitalist-minded newborn with pupils the size of saucers who insists that "Cookies are for closers." To make the connection even firmer, they've hired Alec Baldwin to voice the baby, reprising in cartoon version his motivational speaker from hell from the 1992 film version of "Glengarry Glen Ross." The baby is also drawn in Baldwin's black suit and tie with a gold watch and slicked-back hair.

The casting and homage to Mamet's snarling, soulless character is funny indeed but seems somewhat outsized in this sweet film, overpowering its understated humor and terrific animation. Altogether, it sometimes seems like "The Boss Baby" was a really good 20-minute short film that became stretched out like a piece of gum until the taste grew stale. An army of animators - no, really, the endless end credits are staggering to sit through - have been employed to make a 12-course banquet out of a whimsical board book by Marla Frazee, which introduced the suit-wearing toddler. Onscreen, alternate realities mix with several exciting chase sequences, Elvis impersonators, montages and moments of tenderness.

Screenwriter Michael McCullers, an alumnus of "Saturday Night Live" who went on to write some of the "Austin Powers" movies, has built an insane plot to accommodate Frazee's briefcase-wielding, spicy tuna roll-loving parody of 1980s avarice. Both the book and film share the same premise - that a baby's arrival changes a family. The movie version is told from the point of view of a 7-year-old only child with a swoop of hair (Miles Bakshi) whose idyllic world is shattered by the arrival of son No. 2 (Baldwin). It gets worse: The new baby can

both talk and scheme. He's actually undercover on behalf of a corporate behemoth to push his agenda. (New parents will totally get that.)

Nifty flavor

Directed by Tom McGrath, the director of the "Madagascar" franchise, "The Boss Baby" is best when it riffs off other action films, such as "The Matrix," "Mary Poppins," "Honeymoon in Vegas" and "Raiders Of The Lost Ark," to name a few. The animation and sound effects are so superbly rendered - the fantasy sequences have an entirely different and nifty flavor - that a drop of drool or a puff of baby powder seems to have real texture and feeling. The laughs aren't machine-gun fast; they're rather gentle, surprisingly not completely scatological, and only a few are meant for adults only. (One takes place on a plane, in which the pilot welcomes customers with the line: "Ladies and gentlemen - and those in coach.") But make no mistake: A lot of money has gone into this story about the joy of brotherhood. The soundtrack includes tunes by Paul McCartney, Irving Berlin, Elvis, Carole King and Burt Bacharach. The voice cast also includes Steve Buscemi, Jimmy Kimmel and Lisa Kudrow. Baldwin - no surprise - turns out to be simply great at playing a big, scary baby. His unmistakable presence here also adds a strange twist to a movie that its creators couldn't have anticipated. Baldwin, after all, has become notorious on "Saturday Night Live" for playing another suit-wearing character who's also egomaniacal, compassionless and a self-described business genius. This spring, Baldwin plays them both. "The Boss Baby," a DreamWorks Animation release, is rated PG by the Motion Picture Association of America "for some mild, rude humor." Running time: 97 minutes. Three stars out of four. — AP

WARNER MOVIES DAZZLE CINEMA CON BUT PREVIEW LACKS PIZZAZZ

Warner Bros. previewed its stunning slate of some of the most hotly anticipated upcoming movies at CinemaCon Wednesday-but its tightly scripted format lacked the personality of many rival shows. Warner is among ten studios presenting its output for the coming months at the four-day Las Vegas convention, where studios tend to allow their stars off the leash to improvise, banter and reveal secrets behind their productions.

The studio flouted that convention, however, eschewing Q&A panels and having its actors read scripted speeches voicing excitement with little in the way of insight or revelation. For the lion's share of the presentation, at the Caesar's Palace hotel, the celebrities were either relatively obscure or were beamed in from elsewhere by video link. Even the big finish-a personal appearance by Ben Affleck, Henry Cavill, Jason Momoa, Ezra Miller and Ray Fisher to promote D.C. movie "The Justice League," left the stage after only a few minutes without uttering a single word, leaving director Zack Snyder to make prepared comments.

"That was lame," said one delegate as the lights went up and people began to file out of the hotel's packed Colosseum theater. It's not that the footage of the movies themselves failed to live up to expectations; the crowd shrieked with fright during previews for upcoming horror films "Annabelle Creation" and "It." And they howled with laughter during previews of comedies "The House," starring Will Ferrell and Amy Poehler, and "Bastards," the directorial debut of Larry Sher, the cinematographer on "The Hangover" and its sequels. The presentation started promisingly, with Christopher Nolan ("The Dark Knight," "Interstellar") introducing stunning footage from his World War II movie "Dunkirk."

Breakneck pace

The film, starring Tom Hardy and Cillian Murphy and due for release on July 21, tells the story of the evacuation of Allied soldiers surrounded by the German Army on the beaches on Dunkirk. "They were faced with the choice between surrender and annihilation and the fact this story ends in neither surrender nor annihilation is why I believe Dunkirk to be one of the greatest stories in human history," said Nolan, 46.

But the director's appearance also produced an awkward moment as he appeared to distance himself from studio policy on

home entertainment. "The only platform I'm interested in talking about is theatrical exhibition," Nolan said, to warm applause from the audience of mainly theater operators. His comment came less than 10 minutes after worldwide marketing and distribution president Sue Kroll had argued the case for shortening the gap between theatrical releases and DVD and Blu-ray debuts.

Host Maria Menounos rattled through the next eight films at breakneck pace before a preview of eagerly awaited "Blade Runner 2049," a sequel to Ridley Scott's iconic 1982 sci-fi classic. The movie is being distributed internationally by Sony's Columbia Pictures and had already been previewed earlier in the week. But the segment still turned out to be a highlight,

with personal appearances by director Denis Villeneuve and Jared Leto, one of its stars.

There was also a behind-the-scenes featurette including interviews with Harrison Ford and Ryan Gosling, as well as new footage. "It's fun to play a character 30 years later and trying on old clothes, and luckily they still fit," Ford says. Another highlight was an extensive look at "Wonder Woman," starring Gal Gadot and Chris Pine, with plenty of new footage of the warrior princess in battle. There was also a more detailed glimpse than before of the burgeoning relationship between Gadot's Wonder Woman and Pine's Steve Trevor. — AFP



Zack Snyder, center, director of the upcoming film 'Justice League,' addresses the audience with cast members, from left, Ray Fisher, Ezra Miller, Henry Cavill, Ben Affleck and Jason Momoa during the Warner Bros Pictures presentation at CinemaCon 2017 at Caesars Palace on Wednesday in Las Vegas. — AP



Tibetan designer Aj-Namo (center) makes a traditional gesture at the end of her collection presentation during China Fashion Week in Beijing yesterday. — AFP

Tibetan fashion hits the Beijing runway

Face painted yellow and white with long braids draping her shoulders, a model in voluminous grey robes walks down the runway—an image of Tibetan grace in the heart of China's political power. It was the first appearance of an ethnic Tibetan designer's creation at Beijing's twice yearly fashion week, now in its 20th year. Aj-Namo, who hails from a predominantly Tibetan area in the southwestern province of Sichuan, first made her name as a singer, but has since branched out into clothing. Today she is known for her eponymous AJ-NAMO brand and is based in Beijing.

At the show, not far from Beijing's vast Great Hall of the People next to Tiananmen Square, the center of the universe in Chinese politics, a stream of Tibetan and Han Chinese models paraded colorful outfits inspired by Tibetan attire but altered to suit contemporary tastes. It was a moving moment for Aj-Namo, whose face trembled with emotion as she took her bow and audience members expressed their approval by jumping on the catwalk to wrap traditional Tibetan scarves around her neck. "Tibetans have many talented designers, but there's no platform to promote them," Aj-Namo told AFP Thursday after her debut.

China has 56 officially recognized ethnic groups, but the vast majority of the country's more than 1.3 billion people are Han.

Tibetans number roughly 6.3 million, with most living in China's western half—the autonomous region of Tibet, as well as the provinces of Gansu, Qinghai, Sichuan and Yunnan. Many ethnic minorities live in relatively poor areas, where limited education, language barriers and a heavily agricultural economy provide scant opportunities for young people to pursue a career on the national stage.

"I hope that thanks to this experience, more ethnic minorities, more Tibetans—especially models—will be inspired to put themselves out there," Aj-Namo said. Expressions of Tibetan ethnic pride can be fraught in China. Beijing says its troops "peacefully liberated" the region in 1951, but many Tibetans accuse the central government of religious repression and eroding their culture. The Dalai Lama, the Tibetan spiritual leader who has been exiled in India since 1959, has accused the Chinese government of committing "cultural genocide" against the Tibetan people. — AFP





Nan Pizza is a fun way to eat the flavors of India

This nan pizza is a fun way to eat the flavors of India in America's favorite food. The popular chicken tikka masala is widely believed to have been created in England for the British palate and is actually the national dish. But it is so tasty that restaurant diners have demanded that the dish is made worldwide.

These days, nan - Indian flatbread - is available in nearly every grocery store. It can be plain or flavored, and even stuffed. Nan used to be an occasional treat when I'd go out to eat at an Indian restaurant. It was hard not to fill up on the nan before the meal arrived. But now that nan is as available as pita bread, you can enjoy it at home.

The small size and light and airy texture of store-bought nan makes it a shoe-in for a quick pre-made pizza crust. And because I wanted to keep the

pizza in the spirit of India, I am topping the pizza with chicken tikka masala which is tailor-made for pizza as it is the sauce and toppings in one. The ever-popular dish is chock-full of chunks of chicken simmered in an aromatic, creamy and slightly spicy tomato sauce full of onions, garlic, ginger, cumin and turmeric.

This sauce is the perfect thing to brighten up a boneless, skinless chicken breast and will "dress" to impress grilled shrimp, pork and countless vegetables. I used to think that I could only have this exotic sauce in an Indian restaurant, but truth be told, it is one of the easiest pan sauces to make.

NAN PIZZA WITH CHICKEN TIKKA MASALA

Ingredients

Servings: 6
Start to finish: 55 minutes
2 tablespoons clarified butter (ghee)
1 tablespoon olive oil
2 cups white onions, finely chopped (1 large onion)
3 cloves garlic, grated
1 inch piece of ginger root, grated
3 tablespoons tomato paste
2 teaspoons smoked sweet paprika
1 teaspoon ground cumin
1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper
1 teaspoon sea salt
1/2 teaspoon turmeric powder
1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
2 cups crushed tomatoes

1/2 cup heavy whipping cream or sour cream
2 boneless skinless chicken breasts, cut into 1-inch cubes
2 cups grated mozzarella cheese
4 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese
4 prepared nan bread

Preparation

Heat clarified butter or ghee and olive oil in a heavy-bottom saucepan. Sautee onions until translucent. Add garlic and ginger. Stir to combine and continue sauteing until the garlic and ginger begin to turn golden. Add tomato paste, paprika, cumin, cayenne, salt, turmeric and cinnamon. Saute for a couple more minutes to "toast" the spices.

Add the crushed tomatoes and chunks of chicken. Bring to a boil; reduce heat and simmer about 20 minutes with the lid on. Stir occasionally. Stir in cream. Continue to simmer on low

heat with the lid off, stirring occasionally until the sauce is reduced and the consistency of thick gravy. The sauce can be made in advance and kept for 2 days in the refrigerator.

To use: Preheat oven to 400 F. Lay the nan out on a rack set into a sheet pan and sprinkle a small amount of the grated cheese on the bread. Top the cheese with the tikka masala, leaving a 1/2 inch border around the edge. Sprinkle the top with more grated cheese. Place in the oven for about 15 minutes. The pizza is done when the cheese is melted and the edges are crisp. Remove from the oven and brush the edges with a little olive oil while it is still hot. Serve and enjoy. — AP

Cooking on a deadline: CHICKEN THIGH DELIGHTS

By Katie Workman

Passover comes in the spring, but there is often still a chill in the evening air as families and friends gather in their homes for Seder dinners. A richly flavored and warming meal is still very welcome at this time of year.

Tender chicken thighs can sit for an extra bit of time in the oven without drying out, which is handy for a meal that often can't be timed precisely. A sauce dense with onions, lemon and olives also keeps the meat moist, and hits nice notes of savory, sweet, tart and salty. A bit of hot sauce keeps it lively. If

you have a huge pan you can double the recipe, or just make two pans' worth for a bigger group.

You could serve this right from the pan, or move the cooked chicken to a plate for a moment, transfer the onions and olives and all of the wonderful sauce to a shallow serving platter, and then place the chicken back on top. Serve with a big bowl of mashed potatoes, or maybe even polenta, depending on your tradition. On occasions other than Passover, plenty of other starches, from fregola to couscous, would also be perfect.



CHICKEN THIGHS WITH ONIONS AND GREEN OLIVES

Ingredients

Serves 4 to 6
Start to finish: 1 hour 40 minutes
3 pounds chicken thighs (about 6 to 8)
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon cumin
1 teaspoon paprika
1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1/4 teaspoon ground allspice
2 tablespoons olive oil
4 large yellow onions, halved and thinly sliced
1 cup chicken broth
1 cup pitted green olives, halved
1 teaspoon hot sauce, such as Sriracha

1 lemon, cut into 8 wedges
1/4 cup minced fresh parsley

Preparation

Preheat the oven to 400 F. Pat the chicken dry. Combine the salt, cumin, paprika, pepper and allspice. Rub the spice mixture evenly onto the thighs, on both sides. Heat the oil in a very large, deep, ovenproof skillet over medium-high heat. Add the chicken thighs and brown on both sides, about 5 minutes per side, and then transfer them to a paper-towel-lined surface. Do this in batches if necessary.

Pour off all but 2 tablespoons of the fat left in the pan, reduce the heat to medium low, and add the onions. Cook,

stirring frequently, for about 20 minutes until they are very soft and browned, but do not allow them to get too dark; adjust the heat as necessary. You can add a tablespoon of water from time to time if they appear to be getting too brown.

Stir in the broth, olives, hot sauce and lemon wedges. Return all of the chicken to the pan, skin side up, nestling the pieces into the sauce. Cover the pan, place in the oven and bake for about 30 minutes. Remove the lid and bake for another 15 minutes, until the chicken is cooked and tender and the skin is crisped. Sprinkle with the parsley before serving. — AP

Friday Times

FRIDAY, MARCH 31, 2017

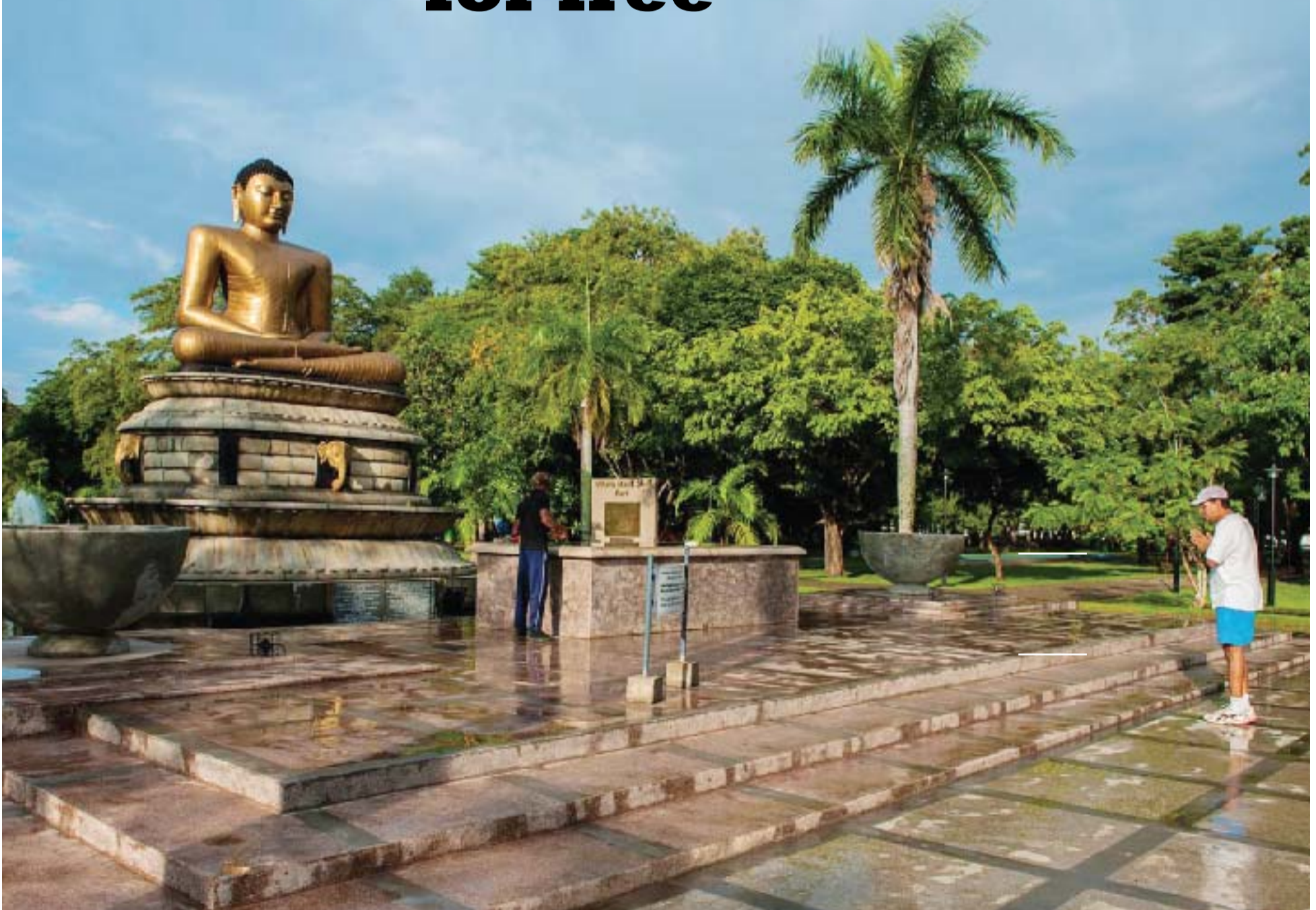
Travel



**Ten great ways
to explore**

Colombo

for free





Taking in the sea air
at Galle Face Green

Colombo is more than just a gateway to the resorts and surf breaks of Sri Lanka's south coast. Despite the noise and crowds, this is a city of vibrant colors and rich culture, offering fascinating insights into the national psyche of Sri Lanka. Many people rush through Colombo and make straight for the beaches, but linger and you'll find a city full of history, where stately British colonial buildings jostle for space with Sri Lankan dagobas (stupas), palm-shaded parks and Dutch colonial churches. Here are 10 great ways to explore this constantly evolving city for free.

Snake charmers charm at Viharamahadevi Park

Colombo is spoilt for choice when it comes to places to chill out, but beautifully maintained Viharamahadevi Park is a city favourite. The parades of palms and fig trees are spectacular, the lawns are dotted with statues and fountains, there are views of Colombo's colonial-era Town Hall, and there's always the chance of catching the odd snake charmer in action. Find a shady spot and you can people-watch for hours.

Join the locals on Colombo's favorite promenade

Whilst it might not be quite as green as it once was, Galle Face Green is still frequented by locals in search of some relaxing downtime. There's a tacky but loveable charm to this seafront park, which is animated by bubble-blowers, bouncing beach balls and vibrant kites swooping across the sky. It's also a great spot for a snack - street food traders congregate on the waterfront at sunset, serving delicious Sri Lankan treats, including crispy egg hoppers and the island's signature kottu, a griddle fry-up of chopped noodles, eggs and spices.

Dive into an open-air gallery at Kala Pola Art Market

On any non-rainy day of the week, you can catch a cohort of talented local artists as they transform the streets of Nelum Pokuna into an open-air gallery with their latest creations. The Kala Pola Art Market is the oldest art market in town, and traders have been holding court here for over a century. Some of the

work on display is touristy and generic, but there are some gems to be unearthed here if you look beyond the clichéd depictions of elephants and tigers. If you feel like investing, paintings are usually on canvas and can be rolled up to carry away.

Engage with Sri Lankan contemporary art at Paradise Road Gallery

The Paradise Road Gallery (paradiseroad.lk) is a piece of art in itself. This upscale gallery is a

beautiful space that exhibits contemporary Sri Lankan artists of high renown and is considered one of the most important art spaces in the country. The general ambience, decadent aesthetic and renowned Gallery Café add to its charm. With monthly rotating exhibitions, it's definitely worth popping back again for a second visit before leaving the island.

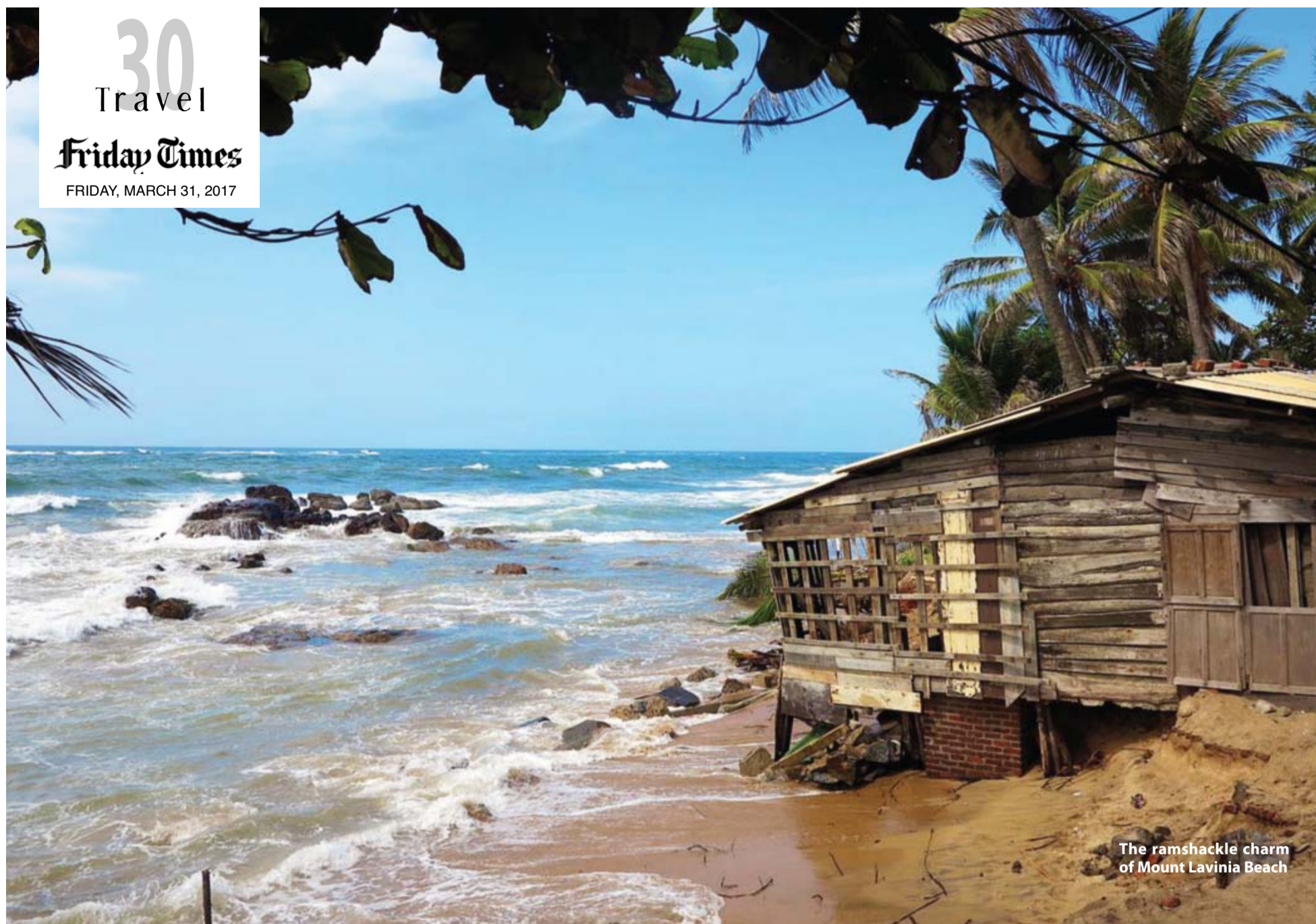
Zen out and meditate at Bellanwila Temple

It's a pretty tough job finding a temple in Colombo that doesn't charge tourists nowa-

days, but for anyone venturing down south to Mount Lavinia, the Bellanwila Temple is a top detour. This is a real locals' temple, where visitors can experience the authenticity of the Buddhist tradition without having to share it with camera-toting crowds. Unsurprisingly, it's a great spot for meditation. The temple is famed for its bright and bold Buddhist statues and its revered bodhi-tree - one of thirty-two saplings taken from the sacred bodhi in Anuradhapura.



Sri Lankan colors
on sale at Nelum
Pokuna Art Street



The ramshackle charm of Mount Lavinia Beach

Love the sunset on Mount Lavinia Beach

Just a forty-minute bus ride from the centre, Mount Lavinia beach is the perfect refuge for travellers wanting to escape the city hustle. Whilst the main drag of Mount Lavinia beach is often dotted with litter, there are plenty of tucked away spots that remain unspoiled and the sunsets here are simply spectacular. As you make your way onto the golden sands, watch for locals taking the back route, walking fearlessly along the coastal railway tracks.

Graffiti in 3D at Diyatha Uyana

Colombo's most happening public park, Diyatha Uyana, has become an outdoor hub of cultural activity. Created by unknown local

artists, trompe l'oeil graffiti artworks that seem to burst into 3D are the latest addition to the park's artistic legacy, creating dizzying optical illusions in front of the beautiful view over Lake Batturumullam. Make a day of it and explore the serene grounds, scan the vegetation for tropical birds or check out the Good Market held on Thursdays, selling healthy snacks and Sri Lankan crafts.

Books, exhibitions and more at Barefoot Bookshop

More than just a bookshop, Barefoot is a great find. As well as the carefully curated range of titles by Sri Lankan authors, exquisite coffee table books and insightful travel guides in the bookstore, there are free exhibitions, displays of cultural textiles and live

Dumbara weaving, all taking place under one roof. Even if you don't buy, browsing the bookshelves is a great way to learn about the vitality of Sri Lankan culture.

Have a run in with history at Independence Square

Finding time to exercise on a trip to Sri Lanka can be tricky when there's so much to see and do, but taking a run on the tracks at Independence Square is a great way to kill two birds with one stone.

As you work up a sweat, you can admire the Independence Arcade, whose white-washed colonial buildings once housed the Jawatta Lunatic Asylum and the offices of the former Western Provincial Council. Scattered fountains and green spaces en

route make this a seriously pleasant place to work out.

Delve into Dutch history at Wolvendaal Church

A short distance from the chaos of Pettah Market, this impressive piece of Dutch architecture was put together in 1757. The jackals that used to roam this area were mistaken for wolves by early Dutch settlers, giving the church its curious name - Wolvendaal, or 'Valley of Wolves'. Although the church isn't well maintained, its five-foot thick stonewalls are laden with history. You could spend hours staring at the life stories of forgotten settlers, carved into the ornate tombstones that pave the floor. Catch a church service on Sundays at 9.30am. - (www.lonelyplanet.com)



The gleaming white dagoba at Bellanwila



Rich pickings at Barefoot Books



Aries (March 21-April 19)

If you own a company, today may be the day you come up with some good ideas about transportation for your employees. A small shuttle bus to meet at the train or city transportation station, or both, will get everyone into work on time and with less expense for gas and mileage on their vehicle. It could also be you can get a discount to ride for your employees. If you supply a shelf in the office for trading used items, you may have people coming in to work at an earlier time. It would be good to actually follow through on any one of your ideas; one idea at a time you will make a positive difference and have a happy group of employees. If you do not own a company, you might submit these suggestions for better business ideas!



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Your inner talents and resources are strong. Your artistic side is showing! Frustrations all around may cause you to pull out your own personal ideas. Then you will find yourself pleased with the positive results from your efforts. Problem-solving techniques have never been so good. When you seek to use your time in a useful manner you cannot help but succeed. Others follow your example today. You may not have much enthusiasm for family projects this afternoon because your list of goals for today makes for a very full day. Pamper yourself and those around you with a good nutritional meal this evening. You may teach a bit of science to a young person that needs to be informed. After dinner you might get the telescope out for viewing the planets.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Ambition is a quality you hold in special regard-focus is very important and you will want to take notes. There is a yearning for the stimulation of new ideas. Others may see the world as it is and ask why, and some, like you, imagine the world as it could be and ask why not. New friends and an involvement in idealistic groups take on greater importance for you at this time; the old is suspect and the new seems to hold all the answers. This could mean anything from a new piece of software for your computer, a new safety item or a new way of thinking to even a new relationship. Romance, the arts and others of life's pleasures seem to take center stage this evening. This could mean a concert, a special date or just an evening out with your loved one.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

Procrastination may be a problem this day and you may need to look at the possibilities that you have overextended your energies in the recent past. This may not always be the case, but it is possible at this time. You will want to look at ways to bring a better balance into your life and appreciate the quiet times for what they are: quiet times. You complete work chores and may be filling out way too much paperwork. On the way home this afternoon you may want to enjoy an aquarium or a pet store-just for watching things go around and around. After dinner, you and a family member may enjoy an art gallery or the library. You enjoy the conversations that come when viewing different and unusual things. One of you may decide to try your hand at artwork.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

This is another one of your better days. You will find your concentration and interests mostly focused on the business world and your progress. Success is pleasing and you turn your success around and work even harder. Later today you may need some kind of tax help. A family member offers financial advice and perhaps a bit of assistance, if it is warranted. Any tax or inheritance problems should be placed in the hands of a competent lawyer or accountant. If you feel you can afford one, you will be happier if you acquire an accountant. Personal interests take over this afternoon-you find ways to enjoy some time with a hobby or recently begun book. This evening you think about your physical appearance and find new ways to feel more attractive.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Pace yourself today and if possible, take more time with projects than usual. Hurrying through this day, or project, may force you to have to stop and clean up some mistakes. In a group discussion, you demonstrate understanding and sensitivity. You are in a good position to communicate concerning society in general. Whether you are male or female, you may find yourself having fun this evening through entertaining or cooking for a spur-of-the-moment gathering. Group get-togethers are satisfying to your needs and provide some great opportunities to network and create new business. Anything that encourages you to express your creativity can bring a great deal of satisfaction. Relax to music this evening.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

Ambitious schemes and the pursuit of success and status take on a high priority. You have plenty of enthusiasm, as well as plenty of ideas. Jumping in too quickly, however, may cause you to feel burned out before the day has ended. Ambition is a powerful motivation and can lead you into conflict if you let it get out of control. You are good at solving emotional upheavals. You embody the saying, "make peace, not war." one step at a time and you will succeed. Romance is favored this evening and if you have no partner, you could find yourself meeting that special person with opportunities that come throughout the end of this month. If you are hoping to enhance your relationship or add to the family, now is the time.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

Goals and security needs are focuses in your life. This is the time to act, particularly with regard to a financial situation. This is also a better time to sell than to buy, a period when pruning the excess and the obsolete is the right thing to do. This applies to material things, but extends to social and romantic relationships-there is a need to improve channels of understanding. You are inventive, original, high tech. Do not worry too much about what others think of your abilities-this is a great time to get much accomplished. You may decide that after such a busy day, tonight is a good night to stop and purchase food and have an evening of relaxation. If you have people living with you or a family, they will probably have requests.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

You like being organized and when someone requests your suggestions, you are passionate about teaching. People who work in real estate would hire you quickly for a job called staging. This is where you make a home look its best in order to sell. You could accomplish much. This is a good day to start new projects or push forward with what is already in motion. You may enjoy a sense of creating your own opportunities. Someone older may be a motivating force for change in your life: change for less stress. Your health is excellent, but the strain of stress can tell a different story by the end of the month. Put your feelings into words or music. Write poetry, songs, stories, etc., to give your problems or unspent energies some release.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

You seem empowered with much energy this day. Try to engage yourself with projects that need to be finished before starting a new one. This is a good time for clear deliberation and problem solving. You are in a serious frame of mind and will find yourself dealing with matters of much responsibility. This afternoon the atmosphere is less stressful. Reevaluate your fitness program and consider returning to an exercise activity you enjoyed in the past. This evening you enjoy a social time with several friends, loved ones and perhaps a few of your co-workers. This could mean a dance, a reunion or a community gathering; certainly there are lots of happy conversations. This is a great time to exchange ideas. Hear and keep no secrets.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

A stalled project needs your attention. Your expertise at trouble-shooting will bring success. Respect, status and achievement are close at hand. You may be gritting your teeth and diving into a new project this afternoon. You could be feeling that if you choose a different direction-your job would change in some way-and you might be right. Idealism, rationality and critical thinking become more and more a part of your mental patterns and the way you communicate. Walk instead of driving if at all possible today. At least park a good distance from where you work so that you will exercise a bit and have an opportunity to clear away some foggy thinking. Do something romantic for the one you love. Flowers at the dinner table are charming.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

Now is your time to speak out and speak up-others are listening. You are called on to help make practical decisions concerning group issues this morning. You usually have a natural sense of what the clients want. Clear decisions affecting others could be made. You could be most persuasive with others and eloquent in communicating what you mean. The situation is a natural for self-expression and lends itself to your particular ideas. An emotional and perhaps manipulative person in the workplace may learn about acceptable behavior from your guidance. You have much optimism and faith as well as a tendency to take chances at the deepest emotional levels. You will have the opportunity to play with a young person 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 American Tarzan
- 11:50 Supertruckers
- 12:40 Castro: The World's Most Watched Man
- 13:30 Wheeler Dealers
- 14:20 Diesel Brothers
- 15:10 Deals, Wheels And Steals
- 16:00 Made By Destruction
- 16:25 Made By Destruction
- 18:30 Made By Destruction
- 19:45 Made By Destruction
- 20:10 Made By Destruction
- 20:35 Made By Destruction
- 21:00 Wheeler Dealers
- 21:50 Diesel Brothers
- 22:40 Harley And The Davidsons



- 00:00 The First 48
- 01:00 The Jail: 60 Days In
- 02:00 Homicide Hunter
- 03:00 It Takes A Killer
- 03:30 It Takes A Killer
- 04:00 The First 48
- 05:00 The Jail: 60 Days In
- 06:00 The Jersey Slayings
- 07:00 Murder In-Law
- 08:00 Fred Dinenage: Murder Casebook
- 09:00 Homicide Hunter
- 14:00 Murder In-Law
- 15:00 Fred Dinenage: Murder Casebook
- 16:00 Homicide Hunter
- 17:00 Gangs Of Britain...
- 18:00 It Takes A Killer
- 18:30 It Takes A Killer
- 19:00 The First 48
- 20:00 Fred Dinenage: Murder Casebook
- 21:00 Murder In-Law
- 22:00 Campus Killer: Santa Barbara



- 00:30 What Could Possibly Go Wrong?
- 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 What Could Possibly Go Wrong?
- 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 Deception With Keith Barry
- 18:40 Destroyed In Seconds
- 19:05 Destroyed In Seconds
- 19:30 How It's Made
- 19:55 How It's Made
- 20:20 Mythbusters
- 21:10 Battle Bots
- 22:00 Deception With Keith Barry
- 22:50 Destroyed In Seconds
- 23:15 Destroyed In Seconds

- 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 Zapped
- 19:20 Star Darlings
- 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



- 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 Milo Murphy's Law
- 07:25 Star vs The Forces Of Evil
- 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
- 12:00 Pair Of Kings
- 12:30 Future-Worm!
- 12:55 Lab Rats Elite Force
- 13:20 Lab Rats Elite Force
- 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 Walk The Prank
- 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 Walk The Prank
- 21:40 Disney Mickey Mouse
- 21:45 Marvel's Avengers Assemble
- 22:10 Marvel Ultimate Spider-Man vs The Sinister 6
- 22:35 Boyster

- Again!
- 16:00 Don't Tell The Bride
- 17:00 Surprise Surprise
- 17:50 Home Fires
- 18:45 Emmerdale
- 19:45 Coronation Street
- 20:10 Kate Middleton: Heir We Go Again!
- 21:00 Don't Tell The Bride
- 22:00 Surprise Surprise



- 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
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- 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
- 00:55 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
- 18:05 Botched
- 19:00 E! News
- 20:00 Mariah's World
- 21:00 Mariah's World
- 22:00 Mariah's World
- 23:00 E! News



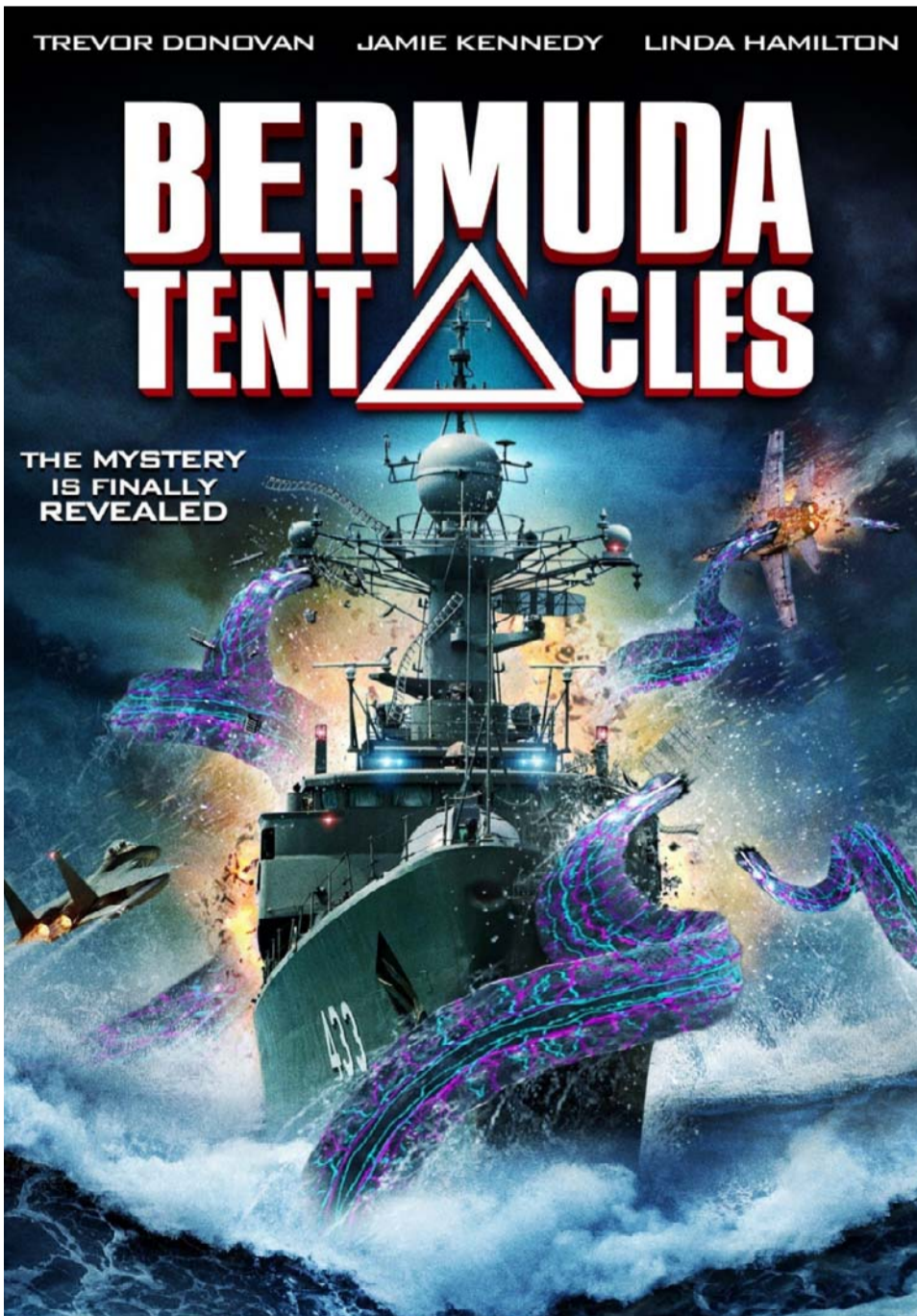
- 00:20 Crocodile King
- 01:10 Invasion Of The Killer Whales
- 02:00 Hippo vs Croc
- 02:50 Ultimate Animal Countdown
- 03:45 World's Deadliest GPU
- 04:40 Man V. Monster
- 05:35 Hippo vs Croc
- 06:30 Ultimate Animal Countdown
- 07:25 World's Deadliest GPU
- 08:20 Man V. Monster
- 09:15 Snakes In The City
- 10:10 Nature's Greatest Talents
- 11:05 World's Deadliest Killers
- 12:00 Humpbacks: Cracking The Code
- 12:55 Crocs Of Katuma
- 13:50 Ultimate Animal Countdown
- 14:45 Asia's Deadliest Snakes
- 15:40 Man V. Monster
- 16:35 Snakes In The City
- 17:30 Nature's Greatest Talents
- 18:25 World's Deadliest Killers



- 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 Kate Middleton: Heir We Go



- 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



BERMUDA TENTACLES ON OSN MOVIES ACTION HD

FRIDAY, MARCH 31, 2017

- 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



- 19:00 Cities Of The Underworld
- 20:00 America's Book Of Secrets
- 21:00 Ancient Aliens
- 22:00 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
- 13:30 Hunting Hitler: Inside The Investigation
- 14:20 Hunting Hitler
- 18:30 Shipping Wars
- 18:55 Shipping Wars
- 19:20 Leepu And Pitbull
- 20:10 Ice Road Truckers
- 21:00 American Pickers
- 21:50 Forged In Fire

FOUR BROTHERS ON OSN MOVIES HD



ACTION

- 00:00 The Exorcism Of Molly Hartley
- 02:00 Navy Seals: The Battle For New Orleans
- 04:00 Bad Company
- 06:00 Escape
- 08:00 Bermuda Tentacles
- 09:45 Blown Away
- 11:45 Bad Company
- 13:45 Rivers Nine
- 15:30 Hudson Hawk
- 17:15 King Arthur
- 19:30 Divergent
- 22:00 The Dead Lands



FAMILY

- 00:15 Hotel For Dogs
- 02:15 Santa's Little Helper
- 04:00 Gnomeo & Juliet
- 05:45 Pooh's Heffalump Movie
- 07:00 Hotel For Dogs
- 09:00 The Land Before Time: Journey Of The Brave
- 11:00 Gnomeo & Juliet
- 13:00 Brother Bear
- 15:00 Ice Age
- 17:00 Ice Age 3: Dawn Of The Dinosaurs
- 19:00 Finding Nemo
- 21:00 D3: The Mighty Ducks



- 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



COMEDY

- 00:00 Running Scared
- 02:00 The Golden Child
- 04:00 Forces Of Nature
- 06:00 Paul Blart: Mall Cop 2
- 08:00 The Golden Child
- 10:00 Forces Of Nature
- 12:00 Paul Blart: Mall Cop 2
- 14:00 Kicking And Screaming
- 16:00 The Rewrite
- 18:00 Hanging Up

- 20:00 Two Night Stand
- 22:00 Two-Bit Waltz



FESTIVAL

- 01:00 Whiplash
- 03:15 Young Ones
- 05:00 Love & Mercy
- 07:15 Healing
- 09:15 The Express
- 11:30 The Blind Side
- 13:45 Wildlike
- 15:30 And Justice For All
- 17:30 Changeling
- 20:00 Bulworth
- 22:00 The Shining



KIDS

- 01:00 Cher Ami
- 02:45 Evolution Man
- 04:30 Bonta
- 06:00 Dixie And The Zombie Rebellion
- 07:30 Blue Elephant 2
- 09:15 Pirates Who Don't Do Anything
- 10:45 Cher Ami
- 12:15 Evolution Man
- 14:00 Yugo & Lala 2
- 16:00 Pirates Who Don't Do Anything
- 18:00 Robosapien: Rebooted
- 20:00 True Story Of Puss'n Boots
- 21:45 Yugo & Lala 2



- 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



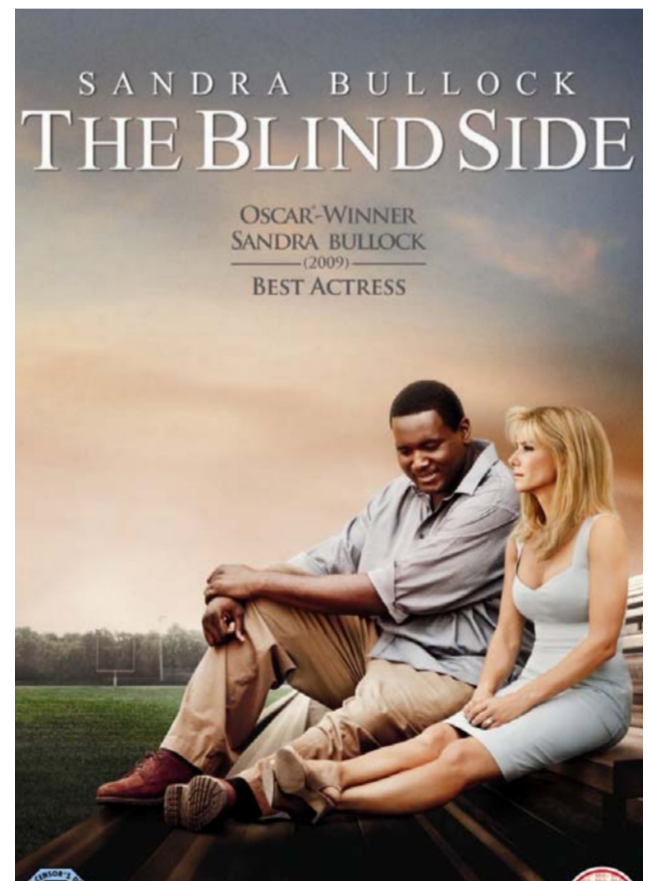
- 00:00 World War II: Lost Films
- 01:00 Cities Of The Underworld
- 02:00 America's Book Of Secrets
- 02:50 Ancient Aliens
- 03:40 Million Dollar Genius
- 04:30 The Universe
- 05:20 World War II: Lost Films
- 06:10 The Universe
- 07:00 Cities Of The Underworld
- 08:00 America's Book Of Secrets
- 09:00 Ancient Aliens
- 10:00 Million Dollar Genius
- 11:00 The Universe
- 12:00 World War II: Lost Films
- 13:00 Cities Of The Underworld
- 14:00 America's Book Of Secrets
- 15:00 Ancient Aliens
- 16:00 Million Dollar Genius
- 17:00 The Universe
- 18:00 World War II: Lost Films



- 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?
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- 17:15 Cake Boss
- 17:40 Cake Boss
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- 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 Tia Mowry At Home
- 01:00 Dinner At Tiffani's
- 02:00 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
- 03:00 Man Fire Food
- 04:00 Chopped
- 05:00 Guy's Grocery Games
- 06:00 Barefoot Contessa: Back To Basics
- 07:00 The Kitchen
- 08:00 The Pioneer Woman
- 10:00 Siba's Table: Fast Feasts
- 11:00 The Kitchen
- 12:00 The Pioneer Woman
- 13:00 Siba's Table: Fast Feasts
- 14:00 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
- 15:00 Chopped
- 16:00 The Kitchen
- 17:00 The Pioneer Woman
- 18:00 Chopped
- 19:00 Iron Chef America
- 20:00 Ching's Amazing Asia
- 20:30 Ching's Amazing Asia
- 21:00 Reza, Spice Prince Of Thailand
- 21:30 Reza, Spice Prince Of Thailand



THE BLIND SIDE ON OSN MOVIES FESTIVAL HD

Word Search Puzzles

Sports

Find and circle all of the Sports that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell a secret message - a Vince Lombardi quotation.

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

- | | | | |
|------------|----------|---------------|------------|
| ARCHERY | CROQUET | JAI ALAI | SOCCER |
| BADMINTON | CYCLING | LACROSSE | SOFTBALL |
| BASEBALL | DARTS | POLO | SQUASH |
| BASKETBALL | FENCING | RACQUETBALL | SURFING |
| BILLIARDS | FISHING | RUGBY | SWIMMING |
| BOCCE | FOOTBALL | RUNNING | TENNIS |
| BOWLING | GOLF | SKATEBOARDING | VOLLEYBALL |
| BOXING | HANDBALL | SKATING | WRESTLING |
| CRICKET | HOCKEY | SKIING | |

Yesterday's Solution

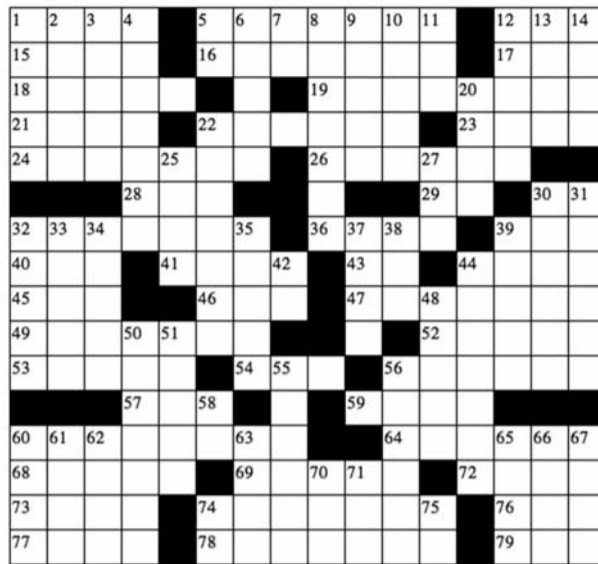
Songs From the Year 2003

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

- | | | | |
|------------|--------------|--------------|-----------|
| ALL I HAVE | GET LOW | LANDSLIDE | SO GONE |
| ANGEL | GOSSIP FOLKS | LIKE A STONE | SOMEDAY |
| BABY BOY | HEADSTRONG | LIKE GLUE | STAND UP |
| BEAUTIFUL | I CAN | MESMERIZE | STUCK |
| CLOCKS | I WANT YOU | MISS YOU | SUGA SUGA |
| COME OVER | I'M WITH YOU | PICTURE | SUNRISE |
| DRIFT AWAY | IGNITION | RAIN ON ME | SUPERMAN |
| FIGHTER | IN DA CLUB | RIGHT THURR | TROUBLE |
| FRONTIN' | INTO YOU | SAY YES | UNWELL |
| GET BUSY | INTUITION | SENORITA | |

The hidden song title is: HOW YOU GONNA ACT LIKE THAT

CROSSWORD 1564



ACROSS

- A course of conduct.
- A collection of things wrapped or boxed together.
- A health resort near a spring or at the seaside.
- A member of an Iroquoian people formerly living on the south shore of Lake Erie in northern Ohio and northwest Pennsylvania and western New York.
- 1 species.
- Goddess of the dead and queen of the underworld.
- Cubes of meat marinated and cooked on a skewer usually with vegetables.
- A woman who guided Dante through Paradise in The Divine Comedy.
- Type genus of the Aceraceae.
- Freedom from difficulty or hardship or effort.
- Portico at the west end of an early Christian basilica or church.
- An Asian river.
- The sense organ for hearing and equilibrium.
- A gonadotropic hormone that is secreted by the anterior pituitary.
- Small fatty fish usually canned.
- The act of delivering a blow with the foot.
- A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.
- A Tibetan or Mongolian priest of Lamaism.
- A white metallic element that burns with a brilliant light.
- Top part of an apron.
- A mature blood cell that contains hemoglobin to carry oxygen to the body tissues.
- Pertaining to or resembling amoebae.
- Surveying instrument consisting of the upper movable part of a theodolite including the telescope and its attachments.
- A share of something.
- Relating to the deepest parts of the ocean (below 6000 meters).
- 10 grams.
- Committee formed by a special-interest group to raise money for their favorite political candidates.
- Powerful mackerel shark of the Atlantic and Pacific.
- Water travel for pleasure.
- A motley assortment of things.
- A yellow pungent volatile oil (trade name Agene) formerly used for

bleaching and aging flour.

- Having help.
- An amino acid that is found in the central nervous system.
- A member of a rural Finnish people living in eastern Russia.
- Towards the side away from the wind.
- A particular geographical region of indefinite boundary (usually serving some special purpose or distinguished by its people or culture or geography).
- Filled with vapor.
- An agency of the United Nations affiliated with the World Bank.

DOWN

- Large dark brown North American arboreal carnivorous mammal.
- Any of several tall tropical palms native to southeastern Asia having egg-shaped nuts.
- A river of central Italy.
- (used only in combination) Having a heart as specified.
- An informal term for a father.
- Large antelope with lightly spiraled horns of desert regions of North Africa.
- Being ten more than one hundred forty.
- United States filmmaker (born in 1928).
- An independent ruler or chieftain (especially in Africa or Arabia).
- Of great mass.
- Take in solid food.
- One of the two main branches of orthodox Islam.
- Either of two large muscles of the chest.
- On or toward the lee.
- The 20th letter of the Hebrew alphabet.
- French physiologist noted for research on secretions of the alimentary canal and the glycogenic function of the liver (1813-1878).
- Precipitation of ice pellets when there are strong rising air currents.
- A kind of person.
- An instrumentality invented for a particular purpose.
- Having a price assigned or having a price as specified.
- A promontory in northern Morocco opposite the Rock of Gibraltar.
- Marked by excessive enthusiasm for and intense devotion to a cause or idea.
- To fix or set securely or deeply.
- The United Nations agency concerned with civil aviation.
- A rotating disk shaped to convert circular into linear motion.
- Having three dimensions.
- A radioactive element of the actinide series.
- United States food manufacturer who (with his brother) developed a breakfast cereal of crisp flakes of rolled and toasted wheat and corn.
- Port city on southern Honshu on Osaka Bay.
- Minute freshwater crustacean having a round body enclosed in a transparent shell.
- Having winglike extensions.
- An island in the Aegean Sea in the Saronic Gulf.
- The opening into the stomach and that part of the stomach connected to the esophagus.
- Being one more than one hundred.
- Any culture medium that uses agar as the gelling agent.
- Wrap us in a cecerecloth, as of a corpse.
- Medium-sized tree having glossy lanceolate leaves.
- An island in Indonesia east of Java.
- In bed.
- (Greek mythology) Goddess of the earth and mother of Cronus and the Titans in ancient mythology.
- An operating system that is on a disk.
- Electronic warfare undertaken under direct control of an operational commander to locate sources of radiated electromagnetic energy for the purpose of immediate threat recognition.
- Before noon.
- A silvery ductile metallic element found primarily in bauxite.

Daily SuDoku

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	4							3 7
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Yesterday's Solution

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

Yesterday's Solution

F	D	A		T	A	P	D	A	N	C	E		O	P	S	
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R	E	T	A	M	A		A	D	A	D		S	C	U	P	
A	L	T		E	B	B		I	D	E	A		A	B	O	
D	I	U	R	N	A	L		M	E	N	H	A	D	E	N	
E	A	S	E	D		A	D	E		D	A	L		L	A	
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B	E	A	D		B		B	A	A	L		P	T	S	D	
A	D	D		L	A	C	T	I	C		T	H	E	C	A	
A	D	H		E	N	F	O	R	C	E	D		L	A	B	
S	A	D		R	E	C	R	E	A	N	T		A	B	A	

GLOBAL DEPRESSION NUMBERS SURGE IN PAST DECADE

GENEVA: Cases of depression have ballooned almost 20 percent in a decade, making the debilitating disorder linked to suicide the leading cause of disability worldwide, the World Health Organization said yesterday. By 2015, the number of people globally living with depression, according to a revised definition, had reached 322 million, up 18.4 percent since 2005, the UN agency said. "These new figures are a wake-up call for all countries to rethink their approaches to mental health and to treat it with the urgency that it deserves," WHO chief Margaret Chan said in a statement.

According to the agency's definition, depression is more than just a bout of the blues. It is a "persistent sadness and a loss of interest in activities that people normally enjoy, accompanied by an inability to carry out daily activities for two weeks or more." Lack of energy, shifts in appetite or sleep patterns, substance abuse, anxiety, feelings of worthlessness and thoughts of self-harm or suicide are also common, and can wreak havoc on entire families. The drop in productivity, and other medical conditions often linked to depression, also takes a financial toll, with the global cost estimated at \$1 trillion annually, the WHO said.

Shekhar Saxena, head of the agency's mental health and substance abuse department, said yesterday that both psycho-social and medical treatments could be highly effective, insisting on the importance of reaching more of those in need. Even in the most developed countries, around half of people suffering from depression are not diagnosed or treated, and the percentage soars to between 80 and 90 percent in less developed nations. Treatment can be difficult to access, while a fear of stigma also prevents many people from seeking the help required to live healthy and productive lives, the agency said.

According to the WHO, every dollar invested in improving access to treatment leads to a return of \$4 in better health and productivity. And "early identification and treatment of depression is a very effective means of decreasing death by suicide," Saxena told reporters. About 800,000 people commit suicide worldwide every year, amounting to one suicide every four seconds. And the link to depression is clear. —AFP

POT BUSINESS IS SMOKING HOT IN US, DESPITE TRUMP

LOS ANGELES: Walk into Brett Vapnik's medicinal marijuana dispensary in Los Angeles and the pungent aroma of pot is good and strong. All day long, hundreds of people file in and out—a sign of the strength of the pot industry, despite big question marks posed by the new administration of President Donald Trump. For now Vapnik, who also has a small pot garden in his store, just sells marijuana for medicinal purposes: From the plant itself, with varying degrees of potency, to beauty products and even chocolate and cookies, all laced with herb.

But next year he expects sales to triple, as the most populous US state is slated to legalize sales and consumption of marijuana for recreational purposes. Almost 60 percent of the US population lives in states where the sale and use of marijuana is legal to one extent or another: 29 states and the capital Washington, DC have laws governing its medicinal use. And of these, eight and Washington, DC allow its use for people simply to get high, for fun. But the federal government still classifies marijuana as an illegal drug.

"According to them, yes, I'm a drug dealer," Vapnik told AFP. He said that now that the conservative Trump is in power, there is a lot of uncertainty in the industry, which had a reported \$6.9 billion in revenue in 2016. White House spokesman Sean Spicer set off alarms recently when he said of federal law on marijuana, "I do believe you will see greater enforcement of it." But what did he mean, exactly? That there will be raids in states where sales are legalized? It is hard to tell, said Vapnik, 44 and co-owner of a dispensary since 2010. He said he does not think the DEA drug agency will intervene

because Congress has barred any federal action in states where marijuana for medicinal purposes is legal—an order that can be extended to pot for recreational use.

So maybe way the to crack down will be taxes, said Vapnik. Now, the tax on revenue at shops like his varies from 40 percent to 70

respected state laws allowing this. But for advocacy groups the bigger source of worry are people in the Trump administration like Attorney General Jeff Sessions, a conservative southerner who opposes legal pot. "While the short term prognosis is uncertain, the long term prognosis has never been better,"



LOS ANGELES, California : Customers buy marijuana products at the Perennial Holistic Wellness Center which is a medicinal marijuana dispensary in Los Angeles, California. —AFP

percent. "Technically, the federal government is our biggest partner in what they consider an illegal drug operation," said Vapnik. He said he does not see pot being legalized at the federal level with Trump in power. So for the time being, customers keep coming into his shop and leaving with their pot in small white paper bags. His revenue is about \$4 million a year.

During the election campaign Trump said he supported medicinal use of marijuana and

said Troy Dayton, head of the marketing research firm Arcview.

It was Arcview that calculated the pot industry was worth \$6.9 billion in 2016. By 2021 it sees the industry moving \$21 billion a year. "I think by 2021 it is reasonable that Congress will end federal prohibition," said Dayton. "The sky hasn't fallen" in Colorado, Oregon, Washington, the states where marijuana use for recreational purposes was first legalized, Dayton told AFP. —AFP

CLINIC PAGE



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Friday Times BUSINESS

FRIDAY, MARCH 31, 2017

GERMAN INFLATION DATA PUSHES EURO LOWER



US Q4 growth revised higher

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Page 40



MOSCOW: Iranian President Hassan Rouhani steps off a plane upon his arrival at the government Vnukovo II airport just outside in Moscow, Russia. — AP

WILL IRAN'S ROUHANI SURVIVE BLEAK ECONOMY?

TEHRAN: Iranian President Hassan Rouhani is credited with pulling the economy back from the brink, but less than two months before his re-election bid, has he done enough to convince voters? "This year was full of stress—no jobs, recession, a stagnant housing market," said Ali Bakhtiyari, a jeweler in the Tajrish bazaar of northern Tehran. Business has been slow, he said, even during last week's run-up to Nowruz, the Persian new year. "The government is trying to unlock things, but four years have passed. The locks should have been opened by now," he said.

Such sentiments are heard everywhere on the Iranian street, and weigh heavy on Rouhani's bid for re-election in May. Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has also been sharply critical of the government's economic performance. "What has been done is far from the expectations of the people and the supreme leader," Khamenei said in his Nowruz address, focusing particularly on the unemployment rate which stands at 12 percent, and at over a quarter for young people.

Who's to blame?

Despite the criticism, most experts say Rouhani, a moderate cleric who won power in 2013 by promising to rebuild ties with the West and ease social pressures, has done

about as much as he could. Rouhani inherited an economy crippled by sanctions and the unconstrained spending of his populist predecessor, Mahmud Ahmadinejad. He faced the near-impossible task of reining in inflation, which hit 40 percent, while also stimulating the economy.

"I'd give Rouhani good grades. He hasn't done everything, but he's brought down inflation, tried to attract more business, tackle corruption and outdated banking practices," said Rouzbeh Parsi, director of the European Iran Research Group. Rouhani can point to impressive figures. Gross domestic product (GDP) shrank 7.7 percent the year before he took power. This year the IMF forecasts it will grow by 6.6 percent. Inflation has dropped to single digits. A nuclear deal with world powers ended sanctions and brought an endless stream of foreign suitors to Iran's door. But much of the growth is from the return of oil revenues that are not trickling down. "It's still not going fast enough for the average Joe on the street," said Parsi.

Cash crunch

The central problem is a cash crunch. Wealthy Iranians are still not investing in new businesses. "This is the most critical problem," said Saeed Laylaz, an economic advisor

to the president. "If we can't attract investment, GDP will sink back to zero." Without greater transparency, investors will remain cautious, he said. But greater transparency does not sit easily with a conservative establishment still wedded to the revolutionary priorities of opposing Israel and the West, and projecting power around the Middle East—priorities which require a certain amount of shadowy financing. "At some point, the political leaders will have to decide: are they in the money-making business or the revolutionary-rhetoric business?" said Parsi.

Toxic debts

The other major problem is that Iran's banks are a mess, riddled with toxic debts from an uncontrolled construction boom. Bad loans and worthless properties account for up to 45 percent of total bank assets, according to a report in November. Hopes that foreign money might make up the shortfall in domestic cash have not panned out. Global banks remain fearful of engaging with Iran's murky system, and everyone is waiting to see whether US President Donald Trump re-imposes sanctions as he threatened during his campaign. "Expectations were set high by both Iran and other signatories to the nuclear deal for how much tangible econom-

ic benefit would flow into Iran after the sanctions," said Ellie Geranmayeh, of the European Council on Foreign Relations. "Part of the problem relates to the difficulty of doing business in Iran—there's so much red tape and so many hurdles to jump."

No alternative

The saving grace for Rouhani is that his conservative opponents appear unable to coalesce around a single candidate to run against him in May. Some analysts have interpreted the supreme leader's criticism as a sign he wants a conservative to replace Rouhani. But Geranmayeh said he was just keeping the government in check: "He's the balancer. Part of his role is to critique every sitting government and make sure no one camp becomes overly popular."

Nor are voters likely to turn to hardliners or civil unrest for a way out of their economic woes—such paths have already been well tested in Iran. "If people are tired and impatient, they won't go back to the conservatives. They just won't participate at all. That isn't good for anyone," said Laylaz. If Rouhani gets a second term, "he must be more aggressive on economic, social and political reforms. He has no choice. The alternative is catastrophe." — AFP

GERMAN INFLATION DATA PUSHES EURO LOWER

LONDON: Low readings for German inflation drove the euro back to nine-day lows against the dollar yesterday. Dollar bulls are still recovering from the collapse in faith in the "Trumpflation" trade caused by last week's defeat for the White House on healthcare and the greenback was again struggling to make progress past 111 yen. But against the euro it gained a quarter of a cent, trading as strong \$1.0731 after several German states reported a slump in annual inflation to well below the ECB's 2 percent target.

That later delivered an overall national number of 1.5 percent and added to sig-

nals from sources close to the bank on Wednesday that ECB officials were unhappy at a shift in market expectations towards tighter monetary policy and higher euro zone interest rates. "That sort of off the record briefing that came through yesterday and German inflation this morning do seem to have pulled the rug from under the euro," said Nick Parsons, a strategist with National Australia Bank in London.

"More generally it has been pretty quiet this morning. We are in one of those awful periods where we cannot decide which currency we dislike the least. And

that tends to lead to lower volatility." The fall for the euro, down from a 4-1/2-month high of \$1.0906 scaled on Monday, helped the broader dollar index into positive territory, up 0.1 percent at 100.15. Sterling, knocked back by the dollar's recovery as Prime Minister Theresa May lodged Britain's formal request to leave the European Union on Wednesday, was also down 0.1 percent at \$1.2414. Several ECB policymakers said yesterday the bank should stick to its already laid out policy path.

Reuters on Wednesday reported ECB sources as saying that policymakers had

been taken aback by moves to price in an interest rate hike early next year and would be keen at their April meeting to reassure investors that their easy-money policy was far from ending. "It's a bit soon to draw conclusions but yesterday's ECB sources piece put a dampener on front end rates and that has weakened sentiment towards the euro somewhat," said Citi G10 currencies strategist Josh O'Byrne. "The mood around the dollar has softened a lot. On balance I think most people still buy into this stronger global demand story but it may be a bit late in the day to be chasing this theme." —Reuters



STOKE: Photo shows tea cups on production line at Wedgwood factory, in Stoke on Trent, England. Wedgwood has embarked on a sweeping revamp of its offerings to broaden its international market. —AP

EUROPEAN STOCKS CARVE PATH ON TRUMP, BREXIT

LONDON: Europe's main stock markets steadied yesterday as investors mull the outlook for US President Donald Trump's economic agenda and Britain's Brexit negotiations with the European Union. "Investors appear unsure as to what will happen next with respect to the Trump administration's next policy move," said Michael Hewson, chief market analyst at CMC Markets UK. "Will they try and revive the health care bill or move on to the trickier subject of tax reform?"

Trading floors turned red at the start of the week as Trump's failure to push through his healthcare reform fuelled worries about the prospects for his economy-boosting agenda. Traders went on to regain some confidence on optimism about the US economy as data points to a healthy outlook-and the hopes the new president will eventually be able to deliver promised tax-cut and spending measures.

Markets meanwhile barely flinched Wednesday as Britain triggered the two-year process to quit the European Union, with investors having already largely priced in "Brexit" since

last year's referendum. "Lifeless trading persisted, with investors continuing to be broadly unmoved by the triggering of Article 50," said Connor Campbell, financial analyst at Spreadex trading group. On Trump, Greg McKenna, chief market strategist at AxiTrader, said: "It looks like the (recent) Trumponomics rally is as much about the actual improvement in the data as it is about expectations of the future in a Trumponomics world."

On currency markets, the pound avoided suffering more heavy losses against the dollar and euro. The British currency sank Wednesday following the official handover of a letter which signaled Britain's desire to leave the EU, kicking off two years of divorce talks. Sterling tumbled after Prime Minister Theresa May-whose letter had just been handed to EU President Donald Tusk-told parliament there was "no turning back" and warned there would be "consequences" for the country. Analysts said focus for the pound-watchers would be on the EU's declaration next Tuesday on Brexit, and a summit at the end of the month.—AFP

ASIA MARKETS SLIP BUT OIL JUMP HELPS ENERGY FIRMS

HONG KONG: Asian markets turned negative yesterday following two days of gains, but energy firms were lifted by an oil rally while the pound held up after Britain formally triggered talks to leave the European Union. Trading floors turned red at the start of the week as Donald Trump's failure to push through his healthcare reform fuelled worries about the prospects for his economy-boosting agenda. Regional traders had regained some confidence since Monday, fuelled by optimism about the US economy-as data points to a healthy outlook-and the hopes the new president will eventually be able to deliver promised tax-cut and spending measures.

Greg McKenna, chief market strategist at AxiTrader, said: "It looks like the Trumponomics rally is as much about the actual improvement in the data as it is about expectations of the future in a Trumponomics world." But Asia was unable to press on with the recent gains yesterday. Tokyo ended 0.8 percent down, while Hong Kong slipped 0.4 percent and Shanghai lost one percent. Seoul dipped 0.1 percent while Singapore, Jakarta and Taipei also retreated. Sydney was 0.4 percent higher.

Energy stocks took the lead from their US counterparts after a US inventory report showed a smaller-than-expected increase in crude supplies and lower stockpiles of gasoline. The news sent both main oil contracts around two percent higher Wednesday and they edged slightly higher in Asia trade. Japan's Inpex was up 0.3 percent and Origin Energy rose 0.9 percent in Sydney. "Beleaguered oil bulls finally had something to cheer about overnight, as crude jumped over two percent following a lower than expected EIA Crude Inventory number," Jeffrey Halley, senior market analyst at OANDA, said in a note. The smaller-than-forecast increase, along with a supply disruption in Libya "saw buyers dip their toes into the market with vigor for the first time in two weeks". On currency markets the pound avoided suffering more heavy losses against the dollar and euro after sinking Wednesday following the official handover of a letter signaling Britain's desire to leave the EU, beginning two years of divorce talks. Sterling tumbled after Prime Minister Theresa May-whose letter had just been handed to EU President Donald Tusk-told parliament there was "no turning back" and warned there would be "consequences" for the country. Analysts said focus for the pound-watchers would be on the EU's declaration Tuesday on Brexit, and a summit at the end of the month. In early European trade London and Frankfurt each rose 0.1 percent while Paris was up 0.2 percent. —AFP

GREECE CLOSE TO DEAL WITH CREDITORS

ATHENS: Greece is close to a long-delayed deal with its creditors after months of tough talks that have held up the payment of vital loans, a senior official has said. "We are close to an agreement in coming days," Greek parliament chief Nikos Voutsis told a European Left meeting late on Wednesday. "All indications show that a deal is imminent," he added, according to the state Athens News Agency. Finance Minister Euclid Tsakalotos has said that reaching an agreement in time for a scheduled April 7 meeting

of euro-zone ministers is "feasible." Negotiations between Athens and its euro-zone and International Monetary Fund creditors have dragged for months owing to disagreements over debt relief and budget targets for the austerity-hit country.

Among the measures reportedly demanded by the creditors are new pension cuts, lower tax breaks and more restrictive rules on union strikes. They are also pushing for a major asset sale at the state Public Power Corporation, Greece's largest electricity

provider and a near monopoly, in the interests of increasing competition in the sector. The impasse has held up the latest installment of Greece's 86-billion-euro (\$91 billion) bailout, agreed in 2015, which it needs for debt repayments in July. The last such deadlock over Greece, which followed the election of leftist Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras in early 2015, nearly saw Athens expelled from the euro.

Experts say the uncertainty has also dragged down Greece's troubled economy. The latest data shows the econo-

my stagnated in 2016, dashing hopes for a small recovery. It has also held up access to the European Central Bank's asset purchase program, known as quantitative easing, or QE. Without access to QE, the country will not be able to make a planned return to debt markets by early 2018, according to the Greek finance ministry. The issue is further complicated by back-to-back elections in Germany and France later this year, which are expected to hold up decision-making on Greece at the euro-zone level. — AFP



YANGON: People light up oil lamps during Myanmar's first ever Earth Hour event at Shwedagon pagoda in Yangon. — AFP

WAITING FOR GRID, MYANMAR VILLAGES SWITCH ON TO SOLAR

NYAUNG KONE: For generations, residents of this farming village in central Myanmar had a set rhythm to their day - waking up with the sunrise and going to sleep after dark. Diesel generators and batteries were for the privileged few, while the candles used by most were a fire hazard for thatch and bamboo houses. On a recent, balmy evening, however, the remote village of Nyaung Kone in Myanmar's central Dry Zone was still abuzz long after night fell. Women sifted onions and winnowed peanuts under their stilt homes. There were queues at snack stalls and children recited their lessons. One family watched a Korean soap opera on TV.

"I used to spend about 200 kyat (\$0.15) every night on candles for my sons to study, and I was always worried it would cause a fire. Now I don't spend that anymore and can work late into the night," said peanut farmer Than Than Sint, 44. A power inverter blinked nearby on the floor of her neighbour's home, connected to two solar panels. Access to electricity from clean sources such as solar and small-scale hydropower is changing the centuries-old way of life in thousands of rural communities like this across Myanmar.

But experts say unsupportive policies and a lack of political will are hampering the development of a commercially viable market in renewable energy. More than two-thirds of Myanmar's 51 million people lack access to reliable, affordable electricity, mostly in rural areas. Yet successive governments have focused on large-scale hydropower, gas and coal, which critics say are environmentally destructive and costly.

Than Than Sint, whose husband left to work in Malaysia nine years ago, paid 63,000 kyat for her solar system in installments over 10 months, under a project led by Pact, an international nonprofit working with businesses to bring electricity to a million people in rural Myanmar by 2020. The solar power lights up her shrine, living room and the space beneath her house, where she works in the evenings. Half of Nyaung Kone bought solar systems through Pact's program, while 16 more families later purchased them outright from the same supplier. The project's second phase, if Pact can find funding, would develop mini-grids - local power networks that can supply a village, unconnected to the national grid. — Reuters

ITALY PRIVATIZATION DRIVE PETERS OUT AS POLL NEARS

POLITICIANS RELUCTANT TO SELL ASSETS

ROME: Italy's commitment to selling off public assets is petering out as politicians look ahead to elections early next year, making it harder to cut the country's huge public debt and leaving it vulnerable to any rise in interest rates. In late 2015, then-Prime Minister Matteo Renzi said the debt would come down the following year for the first time in eight years, thanks partly to privatizations worth 0.5 percent of gross domestic product.

In the end, the state managed to sell less than a fifth of its targeted amount and the national debt rose to a new high of almost 133 percent of gross domestic product, the highest ratio in the euro zone after Greece. Renzi confirmed the same privatization target for this year before he resigned in December after Italians rejected his planned constitutional reform in a referendum, but the prospects for selling state assets have continued to dwindle.

With the ruling Democratic Party (PD) embroiled in a bruising leadership battle and elections slated for early 2018, senior PD members including Renzi himself have recently voiced doubts about whether privatizations are a good idea after all. "As elections come into sight, privatizations don't seem to be the government's focus," said Gianluigi Mandruzzato, head of economic analysis at BSI, part of EFG International.

The most appetizing items on the government's slate are the state railway company, which is wholly state owned, and the post office, of which 65 percent remains in public hands after a first tranche was sold in 2015. But it failed to follow up with the sale of a planned second tranche of the post office in 2016, citing unfavourable market conditions. While the market picture has improved, with the Milan bourse up 5.5 percent this year after falling about 10 percent in 2016, the political will seems to have disappeared.

Infrastructure Minister Graziano Delrio recently admitted to "problems" in selling the railways and Antonello Giacomelli, a junior industry minister, warned of the "dangers" of letting the post office fall into the hands of "foreign investment banks" which could close branches and cut staff. "Politics has taken precedence over economic concerns and there are no privatizations on the horizon now," said

Stefano Micossi, an economics professor and director general of Assonime, the association of Italy's listed companies.

"They are unpopular with the unions and politicians who see state companies as a source of jobs and favors to hand out," he added. "There is enormous resistance from the PD and also inside the government." The Post Office, whose top management was changed by the Treasury this month, declined to comment on whether privatization would go ahead this year. The state railways is supposed to spin off its high speed and long distance train businesses by July with a view to selling them by the end of the year, but has still not named the advisers for the spin-off. The company said the privatization required government legislation, which it was discussing with relevant ministers.

Rising bond yields

From a numerical point of view, the targeted privatization revenues can only marginally chip away at the public debt, which the European Commission fore-

casts will reach a new record high this year. Mandruzzato said the drift in the privatization target was "not good news in terms of commitment and credibility." Italy has the most sluggish growth in the 19-nation euro zone and an unstable political outlook, and it has repeatedly backslid on promised deficit cuts. The result is that markets have become increasingly leery of its government bonds. The spread between Italian benchmark bond yields and their safer German equivalent has risen to almost 2 percentage points from 1 percentage point a year ago, and the rise would have been far steeper without the support of the European Central Bank.

Under its "quantitative easing" program the ECB has been buying several billion euros of Italian bonds every month. After it cuts back on these purchases, as it is set to do next month, some analysts say the issue of Italy's debt sustainability may resurface and its yields could surge as they did in 2011 and 2012 at the height of the euro zone debt crisis. — Reuters

PETROCHINA PROFIT PLUNGES 78 PERCENT TO RECORD LOW

SHANGHAI: State-owned Chinese energy giant PetroChina yesterday announced it slumped to a record-low profit for 2016 as global oil price weakness slashed earnings by 78 percent. Net profit fell to 7.86 billion yuan (\$1.1 billion), the Beijing-based company said in a statement to the Hong Kong stock exchange, where it lists shares. Bloomberg News reported that the profit figure was a record-low for PetroChina, the country's biggest oil producer.

Citing a "complicated and severe domestic and international economic environment," PetroChina blamed the result on depressed prices of crude oil and natural gas and a "severe" oversupply of refined products due to slower demand as China's economic growth moderates. PetroChina said it was cautiously optimistic for 2017, if the global economy can recover. "As the global oil market gradually tends to be balanced,

the international oil price is likely to rebound, but may still involve relatively great uncertainty," the company statement said. Tian Miao, a Beijing-based analyst at North Square Blue Oak Ltd., told Bloomberg News that profit was "badly hit by the oil price crash last year".

"We're expecting better results from the company this year with the rebound in international crude prices." PetroChina's Hong Kong-listed shares closed 0.2 percent higher at HK\$5.76 on Thursday before the earnings statement. Earlier this week, state-owned Chinese energy major Sinopec said its 2016 net profit jumped 44 percent to 46.7 billion yuan (\$6.8 billion), its first annual profit rise in three years. It said strong demand and better margins in its downstream refining business helped offset low oil prices. Sinopec, Asia's biggest refiner, had previously seen profits dive around 30 percent in both 2015 and 2014. — AFP

ECB POLICYMAKERS WANT TO STICK TO PLAN

AMSTERDAM: The European Central Bank needs to stick to its already laid out policy path, several policymakers argued yesterday, although a top conservative urged them to leave the door open to a more rapid reduction in stimulus. Economic growth is gaining momentum and the euro zone may be on its best economic run in a decade. But inflation is still not moving decisively higher, the policymakers argued, hinting at little appetite for now to amend the ECB's policy stance.

The comments gel with Reuters report on Wednesday that policymakers are wary of making any new change to their policy message after small tweaks this month upset investors and raised the spectre of surging borrowing costs for the bloc's indebted periphery. With inflation at a four-year high, critics of the ECB, particularly in Germany, have called on the bank to start

winding down its unprecedented stimulus measures, including a 2.3 trillion euro asset-buying scheme designed to rekindle growth and inflation.

"We are not yet sufficiently confident that inflation will converge to levels consistent with our aim in a durable manner," ECB chief economist Peter Praet said, referring to ECB's 2 percent inflation objective. Although euro zone inflation was at 2 percent year-on-year in February, core inflation remains low. Early March inflation figures suggest a dip with Spain dipping to 2.1 percent from 3.0 percent and Germany at 1.5 percent from 2.2 percent. "Inflation dynamics still remain reliant on the very substantial degree of monetary accommodation which prevails," Praet added.

The ECB next meets on April 27, before the final round of the French presidential

election. A potentially contentious run-off could also encourage the bank to act with caution. Arguing for steady hand, Austrian central bank chief Ewald Nowotny said there was no need to deviate from the already charted course while Finnish central bank governor Erkki Liikanen expressed support for the ECB's policy path expressed in its so-called forward guidance. "The strategy for 2017 has largely been set and from my point of view there is no reason to depart from this," Nowotny said in Vienna.

The asset buys are set to run at least until the end of the year and talks about how and when to wind it down have not yet started. The sole dissent and relatively minor came from Klaas Knot, the Dutch Central bank chief who has opposed many of the ECB's easing measures. He argued for flexibility, suggesting an earlier end, but only if the

economy continues to outperform expectations. "Only if the economy does even better than we now expect in our estimates could we consider bringing the tapering forward," Knot said, referring to the ECB's plans to buy 60 billion euros worth of bonds each month until the end of the year.

Knot, like Liikanen, meanwhile rejected a suggestion by some policymakers that the ECB could change its guidance, which now sees the first rate change only well after the end of the asset buys. "I think this sequence makes sense, the forward guidance makes sense and I don't see a need to revisit that now," Knot said. "The logic is one of a consistent communication message which is neutral along the yield curve and which prevents giving conflicting views as to the front end and the long end of the yield curve." — Reuters



PITTSBURGH: A shopper passes a sale sign in the Shadyside shopping district of Pittsburgh. The Labor Department reports on US consumer prices for February. — AP

US Q4 GDP ECONOMIC GROWTH REVISED HIGHER

WEEKLY JOBLESS CLAIMS FALL 3,000

WASHINGTON: US economic growth slowed less than previously reported in the fourth quarter as robust consumer spending spurred the largest increase in imports in two years. Gross domestic product increased at a 2.1 percent annualized rate instead of the previously reported 1.9 percent pace, the Commerce Department said yesterday in its third GDP estimate for the period. The economy grew at a 3.5 percent rate in the third quarter.

The government also said that corporate profits after tax with inventory valuation and capital consumption adjustments increased at an annual rate of 2.3 percent in the fourth quarter after rising at a 6.7 percent pace in the previous three months.

Profits were held back by a \$4.95 billion settlement between the US subsidiary of Volkswagen AG and the US federal and state governments for violation of environmental regulations. Data on trade as well as consumer and construction spending suggest that economic growth moderated further at the

start of 2017. The Atlanta Federal Reserve is forecasting GDP rising at a rate of 1.0 percent in the first quarter.

With the labor market near full employment, the data likely understate the health of the economy. GDP tends to be weaker in the first quarter because of calculation issues the government has acknowledged and is trying to resolve. A separate report from the Labor Department yesterday showed initial claims for state unemployment benefits fell 3,000 to a seasonally adjusted 258,000 for the week ended March 25. Claims have now been below 300,000, a threshold associated with a healthy labor market for 108 straight weeks.

That is the longest stretch since 1970 when the labor market was smaller. The economy grew 1.6 percent for all of 2016, its worst performance since 2011, after expanding 2.6 percent in 2015. Prices of US government debt fell after the data. US stock index futures pared losses, as did the US dollar against a basket of currencies.

Strong import growth

The moderate economic expansion poses a challenge to President Donald Trump, who has vowed to boost annual growth to 4 percent by slashing taxes, increasing infrastructure spending and cutting regulations. The Trump administration has offered few details on its economic policies. Economists polled by Reuters had expected fourth-quarter GDP would be revised up to a 2.0 percent rate.

Growth in consumer spending, which accounts for more than two-thirds of US economic activity, was revised up to a 3.5 percent rate in the fourth quarter. It was previously reported to have risen at a 3.0 percent rate. Some of the increase in demand was satiated with imports, which increased at a 9.0 percent rate. That was the biggest rise since the fourth quarter of 2014 and was an upward revision from the 8.5 percent pace reported last month. Exports declined more than previously estimated, leaving a trade deficit that subtracted 1.82 percentage point from GDP growth instead of the previously reported 1.70 percentage points. — Reuters

BREXIT BANKS SET TO AVOID A LENGTHY EURO-ZONE TEST

FRANKFURT: Banks in London that relocate operations to the euro-zone after Brexit are likely to be spared a lengthy entry test by regulators, making it easier for them to shift, according to two officials with knowledge of the matter. The European Central Bank, the euro-zone's banking supervisor, has had many inquiries from British-based banks wanting to come under its watch, prompting it to look at fast-tracking licence applications, according to the sources.

It is set to temporarily waive an examination of the financial models that big retail lenders and investment banks use to determine the risk of a default on a mortgage or derivative - as long as the banks meet the standards of British regulators, they said. Any such decision by the ECB would be chiefly for practical rather than political reasons and would, said one of the people, to minimize disruption to European finance after Britain leaves the EU.

"Resources are limited. We would find a way of doing it (applications) quickly," said the official, talking on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter. "The European financial system wants to continue to function." Such a waiver would nonetheless serve to speed up banks' relocation plans and help reshape Europe's financial landscape by expediting the process of Frankfurt, Paris, Luxembourg and Dublin winning business from London.

The ECB declined to comment. British Prime Minister Theresa May will trigger divorce proceedings with the European Union on March 29, launching two years of negotiations that will help determine the future of Britain and Europe. While the final terms for doing business with the EU from Britain are uncertain, May has made it clear that Britain will leave the single market which allows banks in London to sell their services across the bloc.

Finance executives say privately they expect Brexit to isolate London, currently Europe's financial capital, and want to establish bases inside the EU from where they can access its market. Dublin has received 80 such inquiries from financial institutions including banks, according to IDA Ireland, an agency that attracts foreign investment, while about 50 envoys from foreign banks met Germany's watchdog earlier this year about a possible move.

Grace period

The final decision in granting a banking licence in the euro zone is taken by the ECB, which looks at the strength of a bank's capital as well as that of its management when it comes to granting approval. But, according to the sources, it is set to waive the immediate examination of the financial models which contain the basic assumptions underpinning a bank's business and are essential to understanding their riskiness - a process that can take more than a year.

The waiver would be based on the principle that the Bank of England's checks are good enough. It would only be a temporary reprieve, however, to smooth the relocation process, and banks would eventually have to face testing of their models. The sources said the period of grace could last several months. "It is reasonable to decide that there is an interim period where these models are accepted," said the second official. A decision by ECB officials on the waiver is expected in the coming months. — Reuters

BULLYING, BONUSES AND A RED FLAG THAT BT MISSED IN ITALY

MILAN: Three employees of BT Group's Italian unit warned their Madrid-based supervisor in November 2015 about possible accounting problems at BT Italy, one of the three said, a year before the phone company revealed financial irregularities at the division. The source's disclosure, on condition of anonymity because Italian prosecutors are investigating the matter, raises questions about how promptly BT began investigating an accounting scam that has cost it 530 million pounds (\$670 million) and hit its share price.

BT, one of Britain's oldest companies, said last October it had discovered "inappropriate management behavior" and "historical accounting errors" at its Italy unit, taking a 145 million pounds write-down. In January, it said in a statement it had identified improper accounting at BT Italy and expanded the write-down to a total of around 530 million pounds. BT Chief Executive Gavin Patterson told reporters at the time that BT could not have detected the problem sooner because Italian managers kept their London bosses in the dark. BT did not say how it believed managers were involved in this deception. Reuters was unable to verify BT's allegation.

The source told Reuters that he and two BT Italy colleagues had met the head of European sales, Jacinto Cavestany, on the sidelines of a company gathering in Munich in November 2015. The three told the sales chief that they were worried something was wrong with the unit's financial results, though they did not provide evidence, the source said. They also complained to Cavestany of bullying by local management, especially then BT Italy Chief Executive Gianluca Cimini, and of pressure to meet tough bonus targets, the source said. The source added that the sales chief had replied that the three should help him to steer Cimini "in the right direction".

BT said in response to questions by Reuters that it began an internal investigation after receiving allegations in late summer 2016 of "inappropriate behavior" at BT Italy - almost a year after the Munich meeting. It did not specify the allegations or say exactly when the probe began. Contacted by Reuters, Cavestany referred questions to BT. The company said in an email that "Jacinto has no recollection of these issues being raised with him at the conference". Cimini, in an email to Reuters, denied allegations of bullying. In relation to alleged financial irregularities, he said he knew of no illegal behavior and that BT Italy's accounts were verified by head office during his time as CEO.

BT declined to say exactly when it uncovered irregularities. "BT became aware of the financial irregularities after receiving allegations of inappropriate behavior in late summer 2016. This led to us carrying out an initial investigation of the alleged conduct as we announced in October," it told Reuters. As a listed firm, BT is obliged to make timely disclosure of price-sensitive information. BT's shares fell 20 percent when it made its January disclosure on improper accounting at BT Italy.

BT has publicly disclosed that it uncovered a complex set of improper sales, leasing transactions and factoring. Factoring is a way in which firms sell future income to financiers for cash. BT also said in response to Reuters' questions that it had received complaints of what it called bullying at BT Italy earlier in 2016. It said senior company representatives



CORNAREDO: Visitors pick tulip flowers in the first Italian tulip field, planted by a Dutch couple to recreate the tradition in the Netherlands where you can pick your own tulip, in Cornaredo, near Milan, Italy. — AP

had visited the Italian business and looked into the issue.

According to a person familiar with BT's internal investigation, the probe - codenamed Project Crane - began as an inquiry into bullying and interviewed about 40 employees. It concluded that Italian management had been responsible for "bullying and inappropriate behavior", according to a one-page summary of the findings reviewed by Reuters. It was not clear from the summary what the "inappropriate behavior" referred to.

During or as a result of Project Crane, BT uncovered financial irregularities, current and former employees of BT said. BT then hired auditor KPMG to look at the irregularities. Neither the Project Crane report nor KPMG report has been released. In the United States, several BT shareholders have filed class-action lawsuits alleging the group misled investors and failed to promptly disclose the financial irregularities. In a suit filed by Rosen Law Firm on Jan. 25, a shareholder claims BT had failed to disclose improper accounting that was either known to the company or "recklessly disregarded by them" for four years until their first disclosure in October 2016. Rosen Law Firm spokesman Noel Chandonnet said the lawsuit would show that BT lacked effective internal controls.

Faking sales

The source involved in the Munich meeting, as well as four current employees not involved in that meeting, also laid out for the first time certain details of how they say the deception worked. The five sources said a network of people in the Italy unit had exaggerated revenues from certain BT-installed phone lines, faked contract renewals and invoices and invented bogus supplier transactions in order to meet bonus targets and disguise the unit's true financial performance. All

of these practices had been going on since at least 2013, they added. Two sources familiar with the KPMG report said it had found these same types of irregularities.

For example, BT Italy earned income from toll-free hotlines provided to corporate clients. This income varied according to how much traffic a hotline carried: the busier the line, the more money a client paid to BT Italy. According to four of the sources, client-account managers exaggerated hotline traffic by misstating them in internal records. They did this in order to meet aggressive internal targets and collect their bonuses, they added. Clients were unaware of the deception and only paid revenues due on the actual traffic recorded, they said.

BT Italy's purchasing office also colluded to mask the true state of the business, making fake purchase orders to suppliers with no intention of receiving goods, four sources said. Reuters was unable to determine if any of the suppliers was aware of the scheme. No cash changed hands, but BT Italy would suddenly cancel the order and ask the supplier to issue a credit note by way of a refund, these sources said. Some bogus credit notes were then sold to a factoring company for cash, said one of the sources, a current client-account manager at BT.

One current employee said multiple internal accounting systems, a legacy of BT acquisitions in Italy, enabled staff to inflate revenues by entering two duplicate invoices for the same client. The genuine invoices were entered into one system and mailed to clients; the duplicates went into another system, according to this source. A source familiar with the prosecutors' investigation said the accounts of the former and current employees matched the prosecutors' findings on the practice of faking income. BT annual reports show it examined Italy's risk controls

in 2013 and 2014. It said in its 2014 report that the unit had made significant progress to improve its control environment.

Bullying

The deception took place in an atmosphere in which employees were criticized and shouted at by a few top managers in front of colleagues for failing to meet targets, all five BT Italy sources said. They said the pressure to hit targets rose after Cimini became the unit's chief executive in April 2013. He was formerly its chief financial officer. For example, the current BT Italy client-account manager said his 2016-17 goals, set early last year, require him to more than double overall revenues from his clients.

In a staff meeting in Milan, one eyewitness source said, Cimini spoke about the need to meet targets and demonstrated how no employee was indispensable. He dipped a finger into a glass of water and remarked: "What happens if I put my finger inside and take it out? Absolutely nothing - the same if you left the company." Cimini denied this incident took place. "The episodes of mobbing (bullying) that were reported (to Reuters) are absolute fantasy and falsehood, but evidently the sources can invent and speak of stuff they know nothing about when they think they are protected by anonymity," he said.

BT suspended Cimini and some other managers late last year after its internal inquiry. It did not disclose the reason for their suspensions. The five BT sources offered no evidence that Cimini knew of the deception. Cimini said in his emailed comments to Reuters that the most recent company survey on BT Italy's internal environment showed it was one of the best workplaces in Europe. Reuters could not verify this. BT declined to comment on employee surveys across different lines of business. — Reuters

NADAL ON TRACK FOR FEDERER SHOWDOWN

MIAMI: Rafael Nadal took a step closer to a possible final against long-time rival Roger Federer in the Miami Open after a straight sets win over American Jack Sock on Wednesday at Key Biscayne. Nadal's 6-2, 6-3 win over the 13th-seeded Sock sets up a semi-final meeting with unseeded Italian Fabio Fognini who upset second ranked Kei Nishikori 6-4, 6-2 earlier in the day.

The Spaniard's forehand was ominous as he neutralized Sock in one hour and 22 minutes. Nadal was able to save six of seven break points earned by Sock as he kept control of the contest. He broke Sock in the American's first service game and swiftly established a 3-0 advantage and a second break at 5-2 wrapped up the opening set. The American showed his spirit though as he broke Nadal at the start of the second but was unable to take advantage of a double break

that could have put him 3-0 up.

Instead Nadal pulled back to 2-2 and with Sock failing to make the most of a chance of further break points it was comfortable in the end. The 30-year-old Spaniard has never won in Miami despite being a four-time finalist and he expects plenty of work to get past Fognini and make it a fifth appearance. "We know each other very well. He has beaten me a couple of times and so it will be a good test. I am happy to be the semi-finals but it will be a tough one and I will need to play my best," said Nadal.

Fognini has three wins from ten meetings with the Spaniard, the most recent coming on clay in Rio de Janeiro in 2015. The 29-year-old world number 40 showed plenty of confidence as he took the game to his Japanese opponent from the outset. It was the

Italian's first victory in three attempts over Nishikori and his first Masters series quarter-final win since 2013, when he reached the last four in Monte-Carlo.

Nishikori earlier said he had not felt fully in top shape for the contest. "I wasn't 100%, physically, I mean, it was tough conditions for me," he said, referring to the heat on the mid-afternoon Key Biscayne centre court. "But it was also same for him, too. He was playing a lot of the long matches, but I think he still played good enough to beat me today," he added. Fognini, who was cheered on by his friend, former Italy footballer Christian Vieri, said he had come through a demanding test. "It wasn't easy and I was just focused on my game. I am very happy, I'm in the semifinal, I'm playing well and I feel good again on the court," he said.



MIAMI: Venus Williams, of the United States, tries to return a shot against Angelique Kerber, of Germany, during a quarterfinal match at the Miami Open tennis tournament, Wednesday, March 29, 2017, in Key Biscayne. — AP

VENUS DOWNS KERBER TO SET UP KONTA CLASH IN MIAMI

MIAMI: Venus Williams rolled back the years to send world number one Angelique Kerber crashing out of the Miami Open on Wednesday and advance to a semi-final showdown with Britain's Johanna Konta. Williams, at 36 the oldest woman in the field, downed Kerber in straight sets, winning 7-5, 6-3 while Konta fought back to beat Romania's Simona Halep 3-6, 7-6(9/7), 6-2.

Both results had the element of surprise about them with Kerber the top seed and Halep the third and in good form, but they set up what should be a fascinating contest. The other semi-final pits Denmark's Caroline Wozniacki against second-seed Karolina Pliskova of the Czech Republic. With the local crowd behind her, Williams, a three-time winner at Miami clearly believed she could topple the German but the first set saw both players struggle to hold their serves.

The American broke Kerber four times while Williams failed to hold serve twice, but the contest was more one-sided in the second set. Williams raced to a 4-1 lead before Kerber broke back and started to produce some great shots as she battled in vain to save the match. "It was an interesting match. I was controlling it. I had more errors than I like and lower first serve percentage than I would like," said Williams.

"I have to play well against the number one in the world. She's on top of her game and she played well, so I had to find a way to play a little better," added the American. Kerber has

yet to win a tournament this year and most recently went out in the round of 16 in Indian Wells. "This wasn't the best start I would have wished for, but it's not a drama because I'm still playing good and winning matches. I'm looking forward to playing again," she said.

"It wasn't my best game, but she deserved to win because she played really well tonight," added the German. Konta's victory over made her the first British woman to reach the last four at Miami. "I'm really happy that I've come through and I am just looking forward to my next round - it's going to be a tough one," said Konta. Halep settled well in the opening set, with her powerful forehand dominant, but Konta fought back well in the second.

The Australia-born Konta broke early to establish a 3-0 lead but the gritty Romanian clawed her way back winning the next three games while her opponent failed to make the most of her openings in what was an error-strewn contest. Nonetheless, Konta stuck at her task and was able to break again when Halep was serving for the match and force a tie-break which she eventually won 9-7 to take the pair into the third game. There was a tense discussion between Halep and her Australian coach Darren Cahill. Konta broke in the fifth game of the deciding set and visibly growing in confidence she broke again to take a 5-2 lead and serve out for the match. — AFP

WOMEN START WITH A MAJOR

HOUSTON: One tournament is the first major championship of the golf season. The other is all about getting ready for a major. Lydia Ko took the plunge last year when she won the ANA Inspiration over a badly faltering Ariya Jutanugarn. Victory at Mission Hills means jumping into Poppie's Pond, which fronts the par-5 18th green that so often decides the LPGA Tour's opening major.

Ko returns in something of a slump. It's not just that she missed the cut last week at the Kia Classic - the 19-year-old from New Zealand hasn't won a tournament since the Marathon Classic last July. Jutanugarn, meanwhile, learned well from that meltdown last year. The powerful Thai went on to win five times, including the Ricoh Women's British Open, and she beat out Ko for all the top LPGA Tour awards, from the money title to player of the year.

Over on the PGA Tour, 29 players at the Shell Houston Open are already in the Masters. It would have been 30, except that Dustin Johnson decided to take the week off after winning the Dell Technologies Match Play for his third straight victory. That's good news for the 144 players at the Golf Club of Houston, specifically for the 115 players who need a victory to get into Augusta National. The Masters field is set, so the only way in now is to win the Houston Open. And yes, there's another Masters tune-up going on in Mississippi, where the PGA Tour Champions has three players in the field who will be at Augusta National, including Bernhard Langer.

LPGA Tour

For a major that dates to 1983 and is played on the same golf course, remarkably there has only been one back-to-back winner. Annika Sorenstam won in 2001, and then she boldly wore red shoes in the final round and won in 2002. That's what Ko will try to match.

Even though the 18th hole at Mission Hills can be dramatic as a par 5 with water wrapped around the green, Ko won last year by choosing to lay up with an 8-iron, and then stuffing a wedge in close to make birdie. She wound up winning when Jutanugarn completed her collapse with one last bogey.

The 18th green has seen plenty of action, most notably in 2006 when Karrie Webb holed a pitching wedge from 116 yards on her last hole for a 65. That got her into a playoff with Lorena Ochoa, who made eagle with a 5-wood into 6 feet. Webb won in the playoff. Michelle Wie was 15 at the time and looked like a winner. She had a chance to win with an eagle chip on the 18th green, hit it too hard and missed the birdie putt to lose a spot in the playoff.

It could have been worse. IK Kim had a 1-foot putt to win in 2012. She missed, and lost in a playoff. Wie is alarmed to be playing this event for the 14th time. And this will really make her feel old - she is paired with Lucy Li, who is all grown up now at 14. Li was 11 when she qualified for the US Women's Open at Pinehurst No 2. Juli Inkster, meanwhile, sure doesn't act her age. Inkster, who two weeks ago shot 64 in the Founders Cup, is playing the ANA Inspiration. She won the second edition of this major in 1984, so long ago it was known as the Nabisco Dinah Shore.

ICC MULLING BID FOR OLYMPIC INCLUSION

LONDON: The time is right for cricket to return to the Olympics and a decision on applying for inclusion in 2024 will have to be made within months, the head of the sport's governing body said yesterday. The founder of the modern Olympics, Frenchman Pierre de Coubertin, was enthusiastic about cricket, a sport dominated by Britain and former British colonies such as Australia and India, but it has only once featured in a Games - in Paris in 1900.

"We need to make a decision by, I guess, July of this year so that we can submit an application by September," Dave Richardson, chief executive of the International Cricket Council (ICC), told reporters. "And of course it's not what cricket wants, it's whether the IOC wants us." The International Olympic Committee (IOC) will choose between 2024 bid cities

Paris and Los Angeles at a meeting in Lima in September, with new sports also under consideration. Baseball and softball are set to return in Tokyo in 2020. Richardson said it did not matter which city won the bid.

"Both (cities) would ... probably be opportunistic for us, especially the US option, but also in Europe," he said at the SportsPro Live conference at Wembley Stadium. "You'd have to spend a little bit more money on cricket pitches in France than in the US but it's not impossible. I think the majority of the members, and certainly myself, think the time is right," Richardson added. "I think we've come to the conclusion that the overall benefit to the game of helping to globalise it and grow will outweigh any negatives."

Richardson said any approach would be for crick-

et's shortest Twenty20 format. The IOC had already made clear that there were limitations on athlete numbers, which would mean a competition of six to eight national sides at elite level. There have been concerns that Olympic inclusion could damage the sport's own events, while clearing the calendar at a busy time of the cricket year would be another headache. The problems that golf suffered, with many top players not attending, could also count against cricket. Golf returned to the Games last year in Rio for the first time since 1904. England and West Indies could not compete as such. Britain represents England and the other home nations at the Olympics, while Jamaica and other Caribbean nations compete individually. However, India would have a real medal chance. — Reuters

COACH LEHMANN HAILS 'BRADMAN-LIKE' SMITH

SYDNEY: Australian coach Darren Lehmann has hailed captain Steve Smith as "Bradman-like" after a hard-fought and fiery Test tour against India, while praising the entire "impressive" team. India won the bad-tempered series 2-1 after a thumping eight-wicket win in Dharamsala this week, with tensions frequently boiling over. Smith, who struck a conciliatory tone at the end after run-ins with his opposite number Virat Kohli, led from the front, scoring three hundreds among his 499 runs in four Tests.

Lehmann said he had not only been "brilliant" with the bat, but also showed leadership which could see him become one of the great modern Test captains. "He's been unbelievable. He's been Bradman-like with the bat but all the stuff behind the scenes has been exceptional," the coach said in comments on the Cricket Australia website Thursday, referring to legendary Australian Don Bradman. "Really pleased for him and what he's brought to the team as a leader. Three hundreds in four Test matches is pretty special."

Despite the fireworks, and the series defeat, it was a positive tour for Australia, just months after they suffered one of the worst runs in their history. Lehmann, speaking from India, said he was really happy with how the team performed in Indian conditions and under intense pressure. "The way they've gone about it has been impressive. They (the Australia team) have been young, they've been up against it, the pitches have been as we would expect," he said. "There's a lot of learnings in this group over this tour."

"They're all hurting and disappointed for the result but really pleased with the effort and the attitude and trying to change the way we play here." But it was Smith who was the standout for Lehmann, who played under former Test skipper Mark Taylor, Steve Waugh and Ricky Ponting. He praised his tactical mind and evolution as a leader, suggesting he could be captain for years more having assumed the mantle from Michael Clarke. "Yeah, I think so," Lehmann said when asked if he could prove to be at least the equal of Taylor, Waugh and Ponting. "He's a different leader to Michael, to Ricky, to Mark Taylor, to Steve Waugh," he said. "And he's working out his own identity as a captain. But I've been proud of him; everyone has been proud of him. So, pleased with where he is going and he'll just get better and better." — AFP



NEW DELHI: Rising Pune Supergiants cricket team captain Steve Smith speaks during a press conference in the Indian capital. — AFP



PUNE: This file photo taken on February 23, 2017 shows India's captain Virat Kohli (R) and teammate Ravichandran Ashwin celebrate after the dismissal of Australia's captain Steve Smith during the first day of the first cricket Test match between India and Australia at The Maharashtra Cricket Association Stadium. — AFP

KOHLI SAYS AUSSIE FRIENDS COMMENT ARE OVERBLOWN

NEW DELHI: India skipper Virat Kohli yesterday downplayed controversial remarks about ditching Australian cricketers as friends, saying his comments were blown out of proportion and he remained on good terms with some players. Kohli, who captained India to victory in the emotionally-charged four-Test series, told reporters after the decisive Dharamsala match that he would never consider Australian players as friends again.

Australian media labeled Kohli's remarks "classless" in the wake of a series marked by controversies that India claimed 2-1. But the Indian skipper sought to clear the air Thursday as he prepares to share a dressing room with Australian players in the Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 tournament. "My answer at the post match conference has been blown way out of proportion," Kohli posted on his official Twitter account. "I did not categorically say the whole Australian team but only a couple of individuals. 'I continue to be in good terms with the few guys I know & who I've played with at RCB (Royal Challengers Bangalore) & that doesn't change.'"

Kohli led RCB to the final last year with Australian players Mitchell Starc, Shane Watson and Travis Head. While Starc will not join RCB for the upcoming season starting April 5, Watson and Head will play side by side with Kohli in the Indian club. The hotly-anticipated Test series was overshadowed by bitter exchanges, most notably when Kohli all but accused his coun-

terpart Steve Smith of cheating after the Australian skipper looked to his dressing room while deciding whether to review an lbw dismissal in the second Test.

DONE AND DUSTED

Rules forbid players from consulting with anyone off the pitch about whether to seek a review from the umpires. A war of words ensued and the cricket boards of India and Australia intervened but even a clear-the-air meeting between the skipper failed to smooth things over. Smith sidestepped the spat Thursday as he concentrated on his upcoming captaincy of IPL side Rising Pune Supergiant.

"Look, the series is done and dusted, it's time to move on," Smith told reporters. "I spoke after the game that India outplayed us and won the series 2-1." Smith's IPL teammate Ajinkya Rahane, who stood in as captain for the injured Kohli in the deciding Test this week, also called for the hatchet to be buried. "What happens on the ground stays on it. Our focus is on IPL," said Rahane.

As the bitter series wrapped up, Smith revealed that an invitation extended to India for reconciliation drinks was rebuffed, but Rahane said there was no issue. "We had our own get-together in our own dressing room so I was actually busy there. We were enjoying each other's company after a well-fought series," he said. — AFP



ORLANDO: Oklahoma City Thunder's Russell Westbrook (0) drives past Orlando Magic's Evan Fournier (10) during the first half of an NBA basketball game. —AP

TRIPLE-KING WESTBROOK SETS NBA RECORD

LOS ANGELES: Stephen Curry and Klay Thompson led the Golden State Warriors to a magnificent come-from-behind victory over the San Antonio Spurs on Wednesday on a record-breaking night for Oklahoma City's Russell Westbrook. Curry and Thompson—the fabled “Splash Brothers” of the Warriors offense combined for 52 points as the Dubs overturned a 29-7 deficit to secure a 110-98 win over their Western Conference rivals.

The win saw Golden State tighten their grip on the top seed position in the conference standings, improving to 61-14 as second-placed San Antonio slipped to 57-17. The Warriors victory hands the Oakland franchise a psychological boost as they head into the playoffs next month, where they could ultimately face San Antonio for a place in the NBA Finals. “We’re on the right track,” Curry said.

“We don’t win a championship in this game but we understand we’re getting better as we get to the playoffs and that’s really the only focus right now. We want to keep it up.” Curry finished with 29 points while Thompson weighed in with 23. Andre Iguodala (14) and David West (15) also posted double figure tallies for the Dubs. Spurs coach Gregg Popovich was blunt in his assessment of the game, describing the Warriors as the best team in the NBA.

“They played great, they all played great,” Popovich said. “They just played better. Curry, Thompson—they all made shots. That’s why they’re the best team in the league.” In Orlando meanwhile, Oklahoma star Westbrook was feted with loud chants of “MVP, MVP” by Orlando Magic fans after an electrifying performance. Westbrook finished with 57 points, 13 rebounds and 11 assists as the Thunder rolled to a 114-106 win in over-

time at Orlando’s Amway Center. It was Westbrook’s fourth consecutive triple-double and his 38th of an incredible season. It also set a new record as the highest-scoring triple-double in NBA history. The 28-year-old is now just three shy of equalling Oscar Robertson’s longstanding NBA record for triple-doubles in a single season.

The win helped the Thunder improve to 43-31 while the Magic are now at 27-48 after a second consecutive defeat. Westbrook said his hunger to scale new heights had inspired him. “You just got to want it more than other people,” Westbrook said. “I don’t think about getting tired. I just keep going and going. I don’t think about it. I just think about making the next play, making winning basketball plays. I’m blessed.” The highlight of Westbrook’s masterclass was a devastating late burst of scoring which saw him net 19 points in the final six minutes of regulation time, draining a three-pointer with seven seconds remaining to send the game into overtime.

BUCKS 103, CELTICS 100

Giannis Antetokounmpo had 22 points and nine rebounds, and the Milwaukee Bucks knocked the Boston Celtics out first place in the Eastern Conference. Malcolm Brogdon, one of the leading contenders for NBA Rookie of the Year, finished with 16 points and nine assists. He had six key points in the final 2:46 to help Milwaukee fend off a late Boston charge. The Bucks (39-36) have won five of six, including four straight on the road. Boston (48-27) had won four in a row. The loss put the Celtics back in second in the East, percentage points behind idle Cleveland. Isaiah Thomas led the Celtics with 32 points. Avery Bradley added 12 points and 10 rebounds.

HEAT 105, KNICKS 88

Goran Dragic had 20 points, nine assists and seven rebounds, and the Miami Heat breezed past the New York Knicks. Reserve James Johnson added 18 points for the Heat. Josh Richardson finished with 17 points as Miami (37-38) improved to 26-8 since an 11-30 start. Kristaps Porzingis had 20 points and eight rebounds for the Knicks, who were eliminated from postseason contention for the fourth straight season since winning the Atlantic Division in 2012-13. Carmelo Anthony was scoreless in the first half and finished with nine points on 4-of-12 shooting. The Knicks fell for the ninth time in 11 games.

HORNETS 110, RAPTORS 106

Marco Belinelli scored 21 points, Kemba Walker had 19 and the Charlotte Hornets beat the Toronto Raptors. Walker hit two big 3-pointers in the final 2 minutes, including one that gave the Hornets a 104-101 lead with 37.5 seconds left. He also had four rebounds and two assists, helping Charlotte (34-41) stop Toronto’s six-game win streak. The Hornets went 8 for 10 from 3-point range in the fourth quarter. They finished the night 16 for 32 from beyond the arc. DeMar DeRozan scored 28 points for Toronto (45-30), and Jonas Valanciunas had 14 points and 15 rebounds. The loss prevented the Raptors from clinching home-court advantage in the first round of the playoffs.

HAWKS 99, 76ERS 92

Dwight Howard had 22 points and 20 rebounds to lead the Atlanta Hawks over the Philadelphia 76ers. The Hawks have won two straight following a seven-game losing streak that stunted their push in the Eastern Conference playoff standings. Atlanta is still

in the fight for a fifth seed with Milwaukee, Indiana and Miami. Tim Hardaway Jr and Kent Bazemore each scored 19 points for the Hawks. Richaun Holmes led the Sixers with 25 points and Dario Saric had 15. Saric was only 5 of 18 from the floor, but remains the leading contender for NBA Rookie of the Year.

PELICANS 121, MAVERICKS 118

Anthony Davis had 30 points and 13 rebounds, DeMarcus Cousins added 29 points and 16 rebounds in his return from a two-game absence, and the New Orleans Pelicans beat the Dallas Mavericks. Back from a right ankle sprain, Cousins played 40 minutes. His baskets included a 29-foot 3 pointer at the end of the first half and he was 10 of 12 at the free-throw line. Davis’ highlights included an offensive rebound and dunk with 1:50 left as New Orleans won for the seventh time in 10 games. Jordan Crawford’s 15-point performance included a 22-foot jumper that put the Pelicans up 121-116 with 47 seconds left. Dirk Nowitzki had 23 points for Dallas, which lost its third straight. Harrison Barnes scored 19 and Seth Curry 18 for the Mavericks.

JAZZ 112, KINGS 82

Gordon Hayward scored 20 points, Rodney Hood had 18 and the Utah Jazz beat the Sacramento Kings. Utah jumped out to an early 20-point lead, and then squandered most of it in the second quarter. But it put together a solid second half to secure its third win in four games. Rudy Gobert had 16 points and 15 rebounds for the Jazz, and Shelvin Mack scored 14 points. Hood went 5 for 5 from beyond the arc. Ben McLemore tied a season high with 22 points for Sacramento. —Agencies



UNDER 12 TENNIS TOURNAMENT ENDS



KUWAIT: The Kuwait Tennis Federation's Under 12 year tournament concluded yesterday at Yarmouk sports club in the presence of KTF Assistant Treasurer Ahmad Al-Qallaf. Yarmouk Sport Club players Hussein Abdelredha Al-Shatti was in first place, Yaqoub Yousuf Mohammad was second and Mohammad Saud Buabbas came third.

Meanwhile in the doubles category Hussein Al-Shatti and Mohammad Adel were first, Yousuf Al-Majdaly and Haitham Al-Bahrani second while Abdelrazaq Abdal and Hassan Jamal were third. The final results placed Yarmouk sports club first, Salmiya sports club second and Kazima sports club rounded up the group in third place. The tournament was officiated by Aseel Ahmad Shaheen along with referees from KTF.



BENCH BLUES: ENIGMATIC BEN ARFA FRUSTRATED AT PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN

PARIS: For Hatem Ben Arfa, signing with Paris Saint-Germain was supposed to be the end of a long and tortuous road back to the lime-light. But less than a year after landing at France's biggest club, Ben Arfa has the blues. Frustrated by his lack of playing time, the former France winger has made it clear he could look for another destination if his personal situation does not improve.

"Arriving in a big club, I expected when I joined Paris that it would be difficult. But I did not think it would be as complicated as it is," the much-traveled Ben Arfa said in a video posted on social networks. In the footage, Ben Arfa is seen walking alone on a bridge over a canal. He has lost his charming smile, wears a pair of thick-rimmed glasses, and reflects on his substitute role with the French champions. "Today I'm not accepting my situation," the 30-year-old Ben Arfa said.

After a chaotic stint in the Premier League, the former golden child of French soccer revived his languishing career with Nice last season, scoring 17 league goals for the Riviera side. His excellent showings earned him a move to PSG after club president Nasser Al-Khelaifi made his purchase a priority. But for Ben Arfa, the dream move quickly turned into a bitter experience as he failed to win the confidence of PSG coach Unai Emery.

NO EXPLANATIONS

Ben Arfa has played only 643 minutes in 23 league appearances after starting only five matches. He was left out of both Champions League games against Barcelona and has not started in a big match this season. Emery is not giving many explanations for his little use of Ben Arfa, but he criticized his work rate earlier this season.

"I am not asking for anything here, not game time or a specific role, it's just that I want to be given my chance," Ben Arfa said. "I want to feel that there is competition in this team. I am a competitor and I am a champion. In my head, I love to win and it's difficult to accept being a substitute." A member of the "Generation 87," a group of promising players born in 1987 that included Karim Benzema and Samir Nasri, Ben Arfa has struggled to live up to expectations after he left Lyon in 2008. Following two seasons in Marseille, he joined Newcastle, where a heavy tackle from Manchester City midfielder Nigel De Jong left him with a leg broken in two places, a serious injury that put him on the sidelines for almost a year.

Ben Arfa, a creative player with dazzling dribbling skills, was loved by the Magpie fans but his relationship with coach Alan Pardew became strain and the Northern club sent him on loan to Hull, where he played eight match-



PARIS: In this Aug 21, 2016 file photo, PSG's Hatem Ben Arfa walks during training session before the French League One soccer match between PSG and Metz at the Parc des Princes stadium. —AP

es. His goals with Nice ultimately placed him back under the spotlight but were not enough to earn him a spot in the France team that reached the European Championship final last year.

Ben Arfa's latest comments came only days before PSG takes on Monaco in Saturday's League Cup final, and his message to Emery

could not have been clearer. "It is easier to accept being on the bench when you know that it will be temporary or that it could change," Ben Arfa said.

"Otherwise, it is like a punishment. If I am given a chance and I do not play well, I will leave. I will understand. But I need to be given that chance." — AP

SCHWEINSTEIGER EAGER TO START MLS CAREER

CHICAGO: German star Bastian Schweinsteiger said he is ready to make an immediate start to his Major League Soccer career with Chicago Fire at a formal presentation before journalists here Wednesday. The 32-year-old former Bayern Munich and Manchester United midfielder told reporters he was available to make his debut in Chicago's clash with Montreal Impact this Saturday if selected.

"I am 32 years old. I am ready, but of course I need more training sessions to have the right rhythm, to be where I want to see myself," Schweinsteiger said. "My head is more than 100 percent. I feel quite comfortable. The session was pretty intense today and I could do it, so that was good. "I was preparing before I came here and, of course, I need some days more training but I feel I am ready whenever the coach needs me."

Schweinsteiger, a key member of Germany's 2014 World Cup-winning team, confirmed his move to MLS last week after struggling to find a role at Manchester United. Schweinsteiger said his swift departure from the Premier League giants after just under two years with the club meant he was unable to say a proper goodbye to his Old Trafford teammates.

"It was not so easy because the decision was a bit late so I couldn't say a proper goodbye to the team," Schweinsteiger said. "Also they had an away match, so I couldn't really tell them because I didn't want the focus on me, but on the team. I had a great time there, especially with the teammates and the staff." Schweinsteiger is reported to have signed a one-year deal with Chicago as a designated player, meaning he can be paid outside of MLS salary

restrictions. He is set to earn \$4.5 million for his season in the Windy City.

Chicago coach Veljko Paunovic was coy about whether Schweinsteiger would play this weekend. "Obviously, he is going to be available. We are not going to reveal our plans here," he said. "But we still have a talk to have and discuss how he feels and more things about the team and how we want to play. So be ready." Wednesday's news conference, meanwhile, saw one awkward exchange where a reporter asked Schweinsteiger whether he felt that the "World Cup was a realistic expectation" for Chicago Fire. Chicago general manager Nelson Rodriguez promptly stepped into clarify the question, stating: "We as a club don't play for the World Cup, we play for the MLS Cup." — AFP

SOCCER WEEKEND: WHAT TO WATCH IN EUROPE'S LEAGUES

LONDON: What to watch in the leading soccer leagues in Europe this weekend:

ENGLAND

A seventh team could be joining the race for Champions League qualification. Everton is making a late run to challenge the current top six, with seven wins from 10 games putting the team at the top of the Premier League's table since the start of the year. A derby tomorrow against neighbor Liverpool, which is one of the sides fighting to clinch a place in Europe's top competition. Everton would move within three points of fourth-place Liverpool with a win at Anfield.

But the international break hasn't been kind to Everton manager Ronald Koeman. The defense will be stretched after attacking right back Seamus Coleman broke a leg on Ireland duty and center back Ramiro Funes Mori injured a knee while playing for Argentina. Arsenal and Manchester City, two other members of the top six, meet at Emirates Stadium on Sunday while Chelsea takes a 10-point lead into a match against Crystal Palace.

FRANCE

Monaco has a chance to break Paris Saint-Germain's hegemony by taking the League Cup off the defending champions. One of the most exciting teams in Europe this season, Monaco is chasing a first major title since it won the League Cup in 2003. The team has scored 16 goals in its past five games. But Monaco's ambitions could be hampered by the absence of key players in Saturday's final in Lyon. Midfielder Fabinho is suspended while Djibril Sidibe (rib injury) and Radamel Falcao (hip injury) are doubtful for the final. Monaco, the last French team standing in the Champions League, remains in contention for a rare quadruple. The club has a three-point lead over PSG in the league and will play Lille in the French Cup quarterfinals next month.

PORTUGAL

In a game that could go a long way to determining the destination of the title, league leader Benfica hosts FC Porto with one point separating them. Porto has closed a five-point gap to join Benfica as the front-runners, with Sporting Lisbon nine points behind in third. Benfica is seeking an unprecedented fourth straight league title. At home, Benfica is unbeaten in the league this season and hasn't failed to score since October 2015.

SPAIN

A spat between Barcelona's Gerard Pique and Real Madrid's Sergio Ramos has added fuel to a heated title race. Madrid holds a two-point lead and hosts Alaves on Sunday, while Barcelona visits struggling Granada. Alaves, which will play Barcelona in the Copa del Rey final in May, is 10th with only one loss in its last six matches. Granada has lost four of its last five matches and is in the relegation zone. Third-place Sevilla, six points off the lead, will try to move closer to the top when it hosts relegation-wary Sporting Gijon on Sunday. Fourth-place Atletico Madrid plays at Malaga on Saturday.

ITALY

Gonzalo Higuain will return to Napoli for the first time since his move to Juventus. The love Napoli fans had for Higuain



GIJON: Spain's midfielder Isco (2R) celebrates with teammate defender Sergio Ramos after scoring a goal during the WC 2018 group G football qualifying match Spain vs Israel at El Molinon stadium. — AFP

swiftly turned to hatred following his transfer for an Italian record 90 million euros (\$100 million) after scoring 36 goals last season to break a 66-year-old Serie A record. Napoli fans were banned from attending the match in Turin in October for security reasons and they will now have two matches in quick succession to vent their animosity as their team plays Juventus in the league on Sunday and in the return leg of the Italian Cup semifinals three days later. Napoli is third in Serie A, two points behind Roma and 10 behind Juventus. It trails 3-1 in the cup.

GERMANY

Schalke can settle its angst over an inconsistent season so

far with a win over Borussia Dortmund in the 172nd Ruhr derby tomorrow. A victory over the visitors would help Schalke fans get over the disappointment of a season that promised much but has fizzled into mediocrity and could even get worse. Schalke, currently ninth, is just six points off the relegation zone with nine games remaining. Dortmund has also endured a frustrating season but the team has at least recovered to move into third and should be able to defend its automatic Champions League qualification spot. Though Dortmund has won four of its last five league games and Schalke has won only two, form is a footnote when these rivals meet for what is always a highly charged affair. — AP

MOURINHO 'TOTALLY AGAINST' INTERNATIONAL FRIENDLIES

LONDON: Manchester United manager Jose Mourinho says he is "totally against" international friendlies following injuries to key central defenders Chris Smalling and Phil Jones on England duty. Mourinho expects to be without five first-team players against West Bromwich Albion tomorrow, including the injured Paul Pogba and suspended Zlatan Ibrahimovic.

"I am totally against the friendly matches," Mourinho told Sky Sports, after Jones had to withdraw from the England squad with a toe injury suffered in a training ground clash with Smalling, who pulled out after sustaining a leg injury in the Germany friendly. Both defenders missed England's 2-0 World Cup qualifying win over Lithuania, leading Mourinho to question the need for friendlies during the season.

"I think friendly matches for the national team only make sense before the final phases," he said. "A couple of weeks

before the Euros or a couple of weeks before the World Cup makes sense. But mid-season friendly matches mixed with qualification matches, I don't think that makes sense. "On top of that the matches are not really big matches so I am not a big fan. But I think one day I will be there so I cannot be very critical."

Mourinho, who had 13 players away on international duty, believes his side will be at a disadvantage when they resume Premier League action at Old Trafford this weekend. "If you compare our situation with our opponents, West Brom, only one player on international duty," Mourinho told this week's Soccer Saturday program, underestimating the number of Baggies players who joined up with their national teams in the past fortnight. "They had time to work, time to rest and prepare. It's going to be hard." — AFP

BAYERN'S NEUER OUT FOR TWO MATCHES

MUNICH: Bayern Munich goalkeeper Manuel Neuer will be out for two matches after sustaining an injury in training, but should be fit for the Champions League showdown with Real Madrid, the Bundesliga giants said yesterday. "Manuel Neuer underwent a successful minor operation ... on Wednesday evening after sustaining an injury to his left foot in training,"

Bayern said in a statement. The 31-year-old Germany keeper will be sidelined for Bayern's Bundesliga matches against Augsburg on Saturday and Hoffenheim next Tuesday. Then comes the league clash with Borussia Dortmund on April 8, followed by the Champions League quarter-final against Real four days later. Neuer hasn't played since March 19, having pulled out

of Germany's 1-0 friendly win over England and a 4-1 World Cup qualifier victory over Azerbaijan with a calf injury. Sven Ulreich will likely replace Neuer for the two upcoming Bundesliga games, the reserve goalkeeper having only donned the Bayern jersey once this season, in the club's surprise 3-2 defeat by Rostov in a Champions League pool game. — AFP

CAIPIRINHAS TOAST FOR RUSSIA-BOUND BRAZIL

SAO PAULO: When Tite found out the Brazil team he has coached back from the abyss had become the first to qualify for the 2018 World Cup, he gave thanks to God. Then he said he was ready for a giant caipirinha. Most Brazil fans would agree the 55-year-old coach deserves a celebratory drink.

When Tite was appointed to replace the sacked Dunga, it seemed things couldn't get worse for the five-time world champions. The apocalypse of Brazil's 7-1 defeat to Germany on home soil in the 2014 World Cup had been followed by a string of embarrassments in their qualifying campaign for Russia 2018. Less than a year ago, Brazil were in sixth place in South America—below the qualifying cut-off—after taking just nine points from six matches.

The sense of crisis only heightened when they were eliminated in the first round of last year's Copa America Centenario. But then last June, 1994 World Cup winner Dunga was sacked as head coach. Tite, then at Sao Paulo club Corinthians, was named to replace him. It was the start of an almost miraculous rebirth. Since Tite took the reins, Brazil have won eight straight qualifiers, surging to the top of the table.

Tite was still basking in their latest win—a 3-0 drubbing of Paraguay on Tuesday—when a reporter at the post-match press conference broke the news: Uruguay had lost to Peru, mathematically guaranteeing Brazil a ticket to Russia. Aside from the hosts, who have an automatic berth, Brazil are now the first team booked for the 2018 World Cup. It was 1:10 in the morning in Sao Paulo. Tite, whose leathery face is often creased with intensity on the pitch, broke into a giant smile, then a full-throated laugh, at the news. "Thank you, father in heaven!" he said. Asked if he was planning to have a caipirinha—Brazil's celebratory cocktail par excellence—he said, "Yeah, this big," extending his hands from his waist to the top of his head.

Renaissance man

Qualifying for the World Cup is a big deal in Brazil. Besides holding the record for the most World Cup titles, Brazil prides itself on being the only country to have played in every edition of the tournament since its launch in 1930. It is a fact Brazilians defensively trot out when the "selecao" is struggling to find its "jogo bonito," as its demanding fans say it has been since its last World Cup title in 2002. Tite is now being hailed as Brazil's renaissance man.

"You can see the atmosphere here, the dedication of every player," said Marcelo, who scored the third goal against Paraguay. "Everyone is working hard at every practice, giving their life in every match. We are thankful for the arrival of Tite and his team. It changed practically everything. We owe him a lot." Neymar spoke of the recent winning streak restoring the team's faded glory.

"It's a great source of happiness to be able to bring back Brazilian fans, to see them coming out to watch us and having a good time watching the match. That had stopped a bit before," said the Barcelona star. "I remember back when I couldn't wait to watch my idols play for Brazil—Ronaldo, Ronaldinho, Robinho. That's coming back little by little," he said.

"We can dream a little bit more with this team." Taking a moment to drink it all in, Tite dedicated the team's revival to the fans. "My greatest happiness is sharing happiness," he said. Then it was back to business. "Now we have to consolidate," he said, telling reporters he would use the remaining four qualifying matches to fine-tune his starting 11 for Russia. "We have to maintain our level of play, without wavering," he said. "That will make us consistent, heavy, strong. We're not ready yet." — AFP



LONDON: Crystal Palace team manager Sam Allardyce during the English Premier League soccer match between Arsenal and Crystal Palace at the Emirates stadium. — AP

SURVIVAL SPECIALIST ALLARDYCE MAKING HIS MARK AT PALACE

MANCHESTER: With his brief and humiliating experience as coach of England's national team behind him, Sam Allardyce is back on familiar ground in the Premier League and doing what he does best: Turning around the fortunes of a struggling team.

"Big Sam," as he is known in soccer circles, is a master at keeping clubs in the Premier League, so it was no surprise that Crystal Palace turned to him late last year as the south London club plunged toward the relegation zone. He made a slow start to life at Palace, but results over the last month have been typical of Allardyce: Three games, three gritty performances, three clean sheets and — most importantly — three wins. Palace has pulled four points clear of the bottom three.

Another team saved by Allardyce? Not quite, but he certainly has Palace — the worst performing team in all four professional leagues of English soccer in 2016 — heading in the right direction. The pragmatic, no-nonsense manager has done that by getting back to basics, starting at the back where Palace was extremely shaky under previous manager Alan Pardew.

Fortunately, Allardyce had a transfer window to shake up the squad and two signings are starting to prove their worth. France center back Mamadou Sakho was brought in on loan from Liverpool, where he was out of the team because of fitness issues and after getting a provisional ban for a failed doping test that was later dismissed by UEFA. Sakho has slotted

into a newly formed five-man defense and Palace hasn't conceded a goal with him in the team.

Luka Milivojevic, a holding midfielder from Serbia, joined from Olympiakos and has been stationed in front of the defense for the wins over Middlesbrough (1-0), West Bromwich Albion (2-0) and Watford (1-0), offering great protection. It hasn't been pretty but Palace is grinding out crucial points. The hard work might just be starting, though.

On Saturday, Palace plays at first-place Chelsea in the first game of a difficult 10-match run-in in the Premier League that includes trips to Southampton, Liverpool, Manchester City and Manchester United as well as home games against Arsenal, Leicester and Tottenham. That four-point cushion could come in very handy for Palace, which is 16th in the 20-team league. Allardyce is looking to rebuild his reputation that was damaged by an ill-fated 67-day spell in charge of England, which ended in September when he was forced out because of unguarded comments he made to undercover reporters posing as businessmen.

His last firefighting role in the Premier League was at Sunderland, which he joined in October 2015 when the team was next-to-last in the league and preserved its place in the top flight. Having never been relegated from the Premier League as a manager, he has also established Bolton, Blackburn and West Ham as top-flight teams during his 26 years in management. — Agencies

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WENGER'S FUTURE 'NOT SORTED COMPLETELY'

LONDON: Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger said his future was "not sorted completely" yesterday as he ducked another opportunity to make an announcement about what he intends to do. Wenger, Arsenal's manager since 1996, has come under fire from fans after the club were humiliated by Bayern Munich in the Champions League and dropped out of the Premier League top four. The Frenchman said recently that he would

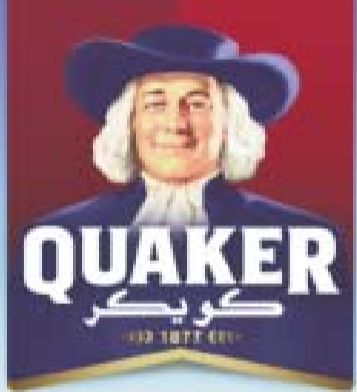
make an announcement on his future "very soon", but he did not divulge any new information when invited to do so at his weekly press conference.

"Not today, but I'm very clear in my mind," he told reporters at Arsenal's London Colney training base when asked if there was any news on his future. "Do I stay two months or two years? My commitment will be exactly the same. The time I spent here doesn't influence

at all my attitude. "I've always been very clear in my mind, but I think it's a subject that is not sorted completely out." Wenger is reported to have been offered a new two-year contract by Arsenal. It is 13 years since Arsenal last won the league and their 10-2 aggregate defeat by Bayern condemned them to a seventh successive last 16 exit in the Champions League.

The north London club are sixth in the Premier League table ahead of Sunday's home

game with Manchester City, having lost four of their last five games. But Wenger dismissed the suggestion that the uncertainty about his future was having a negative impact on his players. "No, I believe the priority in life is always to focus on what is important and not to look for excuses," he said. "At the moment our results are not going the way they should, but we have to make sure the priority is what happens on the pitch." —AFP



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