

SUBSCRIPTION

Kuwait Times



ESTABLISHED 1961

THE FIRST DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF

SATURDAY, MAY 27, 2017

RAMADAN 1, 1438 AH

No: 17240



150 Fils

28 DIE AS MASKED GUNMEN ATTACK EGYPT'S CHRISTIANS

LATEST IN SERIES OF DEADLY ATTACKS • AMIR OFFERS CONDOLENCES



Min 28°
Max 45°



MINYA: Photo shows bodies of victims killed when gunmen stormed a bus in Minya, Egypt yesterday. — AP

EDWA: Gunmen attacked a group of Coptic Christians traveling to a monastery in southern Egypt yesterday, killing 28 people and wounding 24, with many children among the victims, Health Ministry officials said. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attack, which came on the eve of the holy month of Ramadan. It followed a series of church bombings claimed by Islamic State in a campaign of violence against the Copts.

Eyewitnesses said masked men opened fire after stopping the Christians, who were in a bus and other vehicles. Local TV channels showed a bus apparently raked by gunfire and smeared with blood. Clothes and shoes could be seen lying in and around the bus. The attack, which Egypt's Muslim leaders condemned, happened 15 km from the monastery, a security official on the scene said. Ambulance workers, monks and Muslim clerics were also present but declined to speak. Police armed with assault rifles formed a security perimeter and officials from the public prosecutor's office were gathering evidence and fingerprints. Heavily armed Special Forces arrived later wearing face masks and body armor.

The injured were taken to local hospitals and some were being transported to Cairo. One of the vehicles attacked was taking men to carry out maintenance work at the monastery while another was carrying children, officials said. The Health Ministry said that among those injured were two children aged two. President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi called a meeting of security officials, the state news agency said, and the cabinet said the attackers would not succeed in dividing the nation. The grand imam of al-Azhar, Egypt's 1,000-year-old centre of Islamic learning, said the attack was intended to destabilize the country.

"I call on Egyptians to unite in the face of this brutal terrorism," Ahmed Al-Tayeb said from Germany, where he was on a visit. The Grand Mufti of Egypt, Shawki Allam, condemned the perpetrators as traitors. The Coptic Church said it had received news of the killing of its "martyrs" with pain and sorrow. The attack took place on a road leading to the monastery of Saint Samuel the Confessor in Minya province, which is home to a sizeable Christian minority. An Interior Ministry spokesman said the unidentified gunmen had arrived in three four-wheel-drive vehicles. Security forces launched a hunt for the attackers, setting up dozens of checkpoints and patrols on the desert road.

Coptic Christians, whose church dates back nearly 2,000 years, make up about 10 percent of Egypt's population of 92 million. They say they have long suffered from persecution, but in recent months the frequency of deadly attacks against them has increased.

Continued on Page 8

TV SERIES TELL UNTOLD STORIES OF IS WOMEN

DUBAI: They are mothers, daughters, wives—and suicide bombers: an Arab television drama timed for the Muslim holy month of Ramadan tells the untold stories of women and the Islamic State group. Inspired by true events, "Black Crows" airs over Ramadan - prime time for television viewers in the Arab world—which starts this weekend, and it is the first television series depicting life under IS rule in Syria and Iraq. Produced by Saudi Arabia's MBC Group, the series focuses on the stories of the women who volunteer with or are forced to join the jihadist group and "the fear that shapes" their relationships.

"We wanted to tell real stories that would both touch people and reflect the ugly reality of terrorism," MBC spokesman Mazen Hayek said at the network's Dubai headquarters. "We realized

that the Arab media could no longer sit and watch while terrorist groups used media as a central part of their war." One episode features a girl and her grandmother, both in the niqab Muslim veil, selling dinner plates decorated with pictures of animals in an IS-controlled village in order to survive.

A group of armed women from the Hesba, the extremists' female police unit, order them to pack their goods on the grounds that the animal designs were "haram", or forbidden in Islam. But the grandmother refuses to yield to Hesba's authority, saying she would rather break her plates than give in. She is shot in the head by a member of the Hesba. Another episode shows a training camp for children with machine-guns and "human targets"-prisoners taken by IS. "Bullets are faster than people," a gunman reminds a child aiming at prisoners scrambling to take cover. "Get two more of them and you can go see your mum."

With a cast including actors from Saudi Arabia, Syria and Iraq, the \$10-million production was filmed mainly in Lebanon and took over a year to research and another six months to shoot. "Shocking scenes" in the series could "either attract or repel the viewer, but he could not remain indifferent," said Fadi Ismail, head of the production company. "It is strong drama and the viewer can always control what to watch," he said.

Lebanon, the main location, hosts more than one million Syrian refugees and has been the scene of deadly suicide bombings claimed by IS. "Security was our most difficult challenge" during shooting, said executive producer Amer Sabbah. "When you transform an area in Lebanon into what resembles an IS headquarters, you have to consider security and safety of your crew," he said. In 2015, an MBC-produced Ramadan special, a satire named "Selfie", took aim at IS with a storyline in which the Saudi main character heads to Syria to bring back his son who had joined the group. The actor, Nasser Al-Qasbi, received a string of online death threats after the episode aired. — AFP



A handout picture shows actors on the set of the prime-time series 'Black Crows' at the group studios in Lebanon. — AFP



Imsak	Fajr	Shorook	Duhr	Asr	Maghrib	Isha
03:08	03:18	04:50	11:45	15:20	18:40	20:10



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah

AMIR EXCHANGES RAMADAN GREETINGS WITH GCC, ARAB, MUSLIM LEADERS

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah yesterday exchanged greetings with GCC, Arab and Muslim leaders on the advent of the holy month of Ramadan. Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir received cables of congratulations and warm wishes on the advent of holy month of Ramadan by a host of senior state officials and figures.

His Highness the Amir received cables from His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem, National Guard Chief His Highness Sheikh Salem Al-Ali Al-Sabah, Deputy National Guard Chief Sheikh

Mishaal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, and the First Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

In their cables, the state officials wished His Highness the Amir the best of health and the homeland, the Arab and Muslim worlds prosperity. His Highness the Amir sent reply cables in which he expressed gratitude for the warm sentiments and prayed to Allah Almighty to bless Kuwait with prosperity, stability and security and also bless all peoples of the world with peace. —KUNA

PREMIER TO RECEIVE RAMADAN WELL-WISHERS



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah

KUWAIT: His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah will receive Ramadan well-wishers at the diwan of the late Sheikh Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah in the seaside Al-Shaab district. The reception will be after Isha prayers on the second day of Ramadan. The Premiership expresses good wishes to the people of Kuwait, the Arab and Muslim nations on the advent of the holy month. —KUNA



KUWAIT: (From left) Capital Governor Thabet Al-Muhanna, Russian Ambassador Alexey Solomatin and Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah cut the cake during the ceremony. —Photos by Joseph Shagra



Diplomats, state officials and other dignitaries attended the event, which was hosted at the Russian Embassy.



Russian Ambassador Alexey Solomatin welcomes Kuwait Times Editor-in-Chief Abd Al-Rahman Al-Alyan.



Australia's Ambassador to Kuwait Warren Hauck (left) and Kuwait Times Editor-in-Chief Abd Al-Rahman Al-Alyan.



Russian Ambassador Alexey Solomatin poses with guests.

KUWAIT MAINTAINS CLOSE TIES WITH RUSSIA: DIPLOMAT

KUWAIT: Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Suleiman Al-Jarallah said Thursday that Kuwait is looking forward to the visit by Russian President Vladimir Putin to the country. President Putin is likely to visit other countries in the region as well, Jarallah said while attending a celebration held by the Embassy of the Russian Federation to mark Russia's national day. "Kuwait maintains exemplary deep-rooted relations with Russia and was the first Gulf state to establish diplomatic ties with Russia in December 1991. Russia is one of the most influential players in the region and this is why we keep in close contact with the friends in Russia," he said.

Jarallah noted that he took part, during his last visit Russia, in the annual meeting of the joint commission, saying that the meeting was very fruitful and reviewed various aspects of cooperation. He voiced hope that cooperation with Russia will grow remarkably in the coming years particularly in the defense field. —KUNA



Capital Governor Thabet Al-Muhanna, Russian Ambassador Alexey Solomatin and Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah pose with diplomats at the event.

NEW ELECTRICITY FEES INTENDED TO PROMOTE SAVING: OFFICIAL



**Undersecretary
Mohammad Boushehri**

KUWAIT: Planned new fees on power and water are primarily aimed at promoting consumption rather than reaping money, a ranking official affirmed. No matter how high the fees may be, they will not match the actual production cost, affirmed Ministry of Electricity and Water's Undersecretary Mohammad Boushehri.

Cutting consumption by 10 percent per day saves some \$1.8 million daily, equivalent to \$640 million per year. "This figure is not small particularly when considering projected consumption hike in the coming years," he said.

Simultaneously with the imposition of the new fees, the power department, in cooperation with the Ministry of Information, is launching an awareness campaign titled "consume with responsibility." The relevant regulations exempt private residences, which account to 40 percent of the consumption, in addition to excluding the citizen who lives in a rented apartment.

The new fees' laws are applicable on the commercial sector as of February 22, 2018. The National Assembly (Parliament) approved, on April 26 2016, the relevant bill

setting the rates for power and water consumption. The ministry has set the fees at five fils per kilowatt per hour (kWh) for the investment and commercial sectors, 25 fils for the government sector, three fils for the industrial and agricultural sectors, five fils for non-producing sectors, in addition to 12 fils for the other fields. As to the consumption of fresh water in the investment and commercial sectors the rates will be KD 2 per 1,000 imperial gallons, KD 4 for the government sector, KD 2.250 for industrial and agricultural facilities, KD 2 for chalets and stables. —KUNA

KUWAITI DETAINEE IN US ACQUITTED: ENVOY

NEW YORK: Kuwait Permanent Delegate to the United Nations Mansour Al-Otaibi confirmed that a US court acquitted Naif Al-Rashidi, a Kuwaiti student who has been detained since last June. The court dropped all charges brought against Rashidi and he will be able to go home after completing some measures as a matter of routine, Otaibi said on Thursday. The diplomat congratulated the exonerated student and his family on the success of the efforts made by the Kuwaiti diplomatic mission to follow up the case since the very beginning. —KUNA

IRAQI MINISTER MEETS KUWAIT'S MISSING PRISONERS COMMITTEE

BAGHDAD: Iraq's Defense Minister Erfan Al-Hiyali met Thursday with chief and members of Kuwait's National Committee for Missing Persons and Prisoners. The two sides discussed the dossier of missing persons and prisoners, and means of rapidly settling this issue, said the ministry in a brief statement. The meeting was attended by Kuwait's Ambassador in Baghdad Salem Al-Zamanan and Iraqi officials tasked with this dossier, it added. —KUNA



KUWAIT OIL PRICE DOWN 67 CENTS TO \$50.30 PB

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti oil came down 67 cents to \$50.30 per barrel (pb) on Thursday, after being at \$50.97 pb Wednesday, Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) said yesterday. Prices in international markets lost some five percent yesterday after OPEC's meeting in Vienna. The meeting agreed on extending the production cut agreement; taken last January, for another nine months in a bid to balance market and decrease offer. —KUNA

SCIENTIFIC VISION IN MAKING TO INVEST YOUTH INITIATIVES, OVERCOME BUREAUCRACY: MINISTER

KUWAIT: Minister of State for Municipal Affairs Mohammad Al-Jabri affirmed on Thursday that Kuwait would start working on a scientific vision to capitalize on youth initiatives, and carry them out away from "bureaucracy." The minister made the statement at the opening session of a conference on supporting youth and small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs).

This vision aims to remove all obstacles facing creative and innovative ideas and projects. He expressed deep belief in the necessity of establishing an official incubator that can receive youth energies and adopt their thoughts and expectations. —KUNA

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KUWAIT CALLS FOR PROTECTING HUMANITARIAN EXPEDITIONS

NEW YORK: The State of Kuwait has affirmed necessity of respecting international human rights laws and protecting humanitarian and medical expeditions in regions afflicted with conflicts and violence. Horrific figures about civilian victims of conflicts and wars reflect extent of the tragedies, suffered by the globe's population nowadays, said Ambassador Mansour Ayyad Al-Otaibi, the permanent envoy to the UN, during a UN debate on sparing civilians in armed conflicts. Up to 65 million people have been driven out of their homes in strife, violence and repression, he said, alluding to some contents of a report prepared by the United Nations Secretary General.

Breaches of the UN Resolution 2286 have been mounting by conflicts' parties in various regions of the globe particularly in the Middle East and Africa, he said, regretting that some parties have been intentionally targeting civilians and civil targets "as a weapon to defeat their foes."

Security Council resolution 2286 (2016) deals with protection of the wounded and sick, medical personnel and humanitarian personnel in armed conflicts. In Iraq, militants of so-called Islamic State (Daesh) try to defend themselves with "human shields," practice sexual violence, enforce coercive marriage and abduct civilians, Ambassador Otaibi said.

In Palestine, the Israeli occupation authorities continue acts of abuse and violence against the Palestinian people, in addition to pursuing the settlement policy. Ambassador Otaibi called anew on the Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities as stipulated by the UN charter and relevant resolutions and confront urgently these ongoing Israeli breaches.

The Security Council has adopted Resolution 2334, which affirms that the Israeli settlements are illegal, and illegitimate, urging Tel Aviv to halt all settlement activities in the occupied territories including East Jerusalem. On Syria, Otaibi indicated that despite efforts to relieve the Syrian people's war-afflicted plights, with three international donation conferences hosted by Kuwait for that purpose, these acts have remained insufficient to meet humanitarian needs by millions of displaced and refugees.

Hailing efforts for enforcing a cease-fire, setting up "tension de-escalation zones" and pursuing the Geneva talks, the envoy re-affirmed Kuwait's support for implementing UN resolutions namely 2254 to reach a political settlement and preserve the



Ambassador Mansour Ayyad Al-Otaibi

country's unity and sovereignty. He lauded the Arab coalition role for restoring legitimacy in Yemen, re-establishing medical facilities in liberated areas and distributing relief supplies to the needy in the troubled nation.

Security and stability can only be restored to Yemen through implementing resolution 2216, the GCC initiative and outcome of the national dialogue, Otaibi said, renewing the State of Kuwait's readiness to host new talks among the

Yemeni parties to try find a settlement to the crisis.

In conclusion, he affirmed support for the UN chief report calling for a flurry of diplomatic activities to tackle conflicts, enhance early warning mechanisms and boosting collecting action to reform the UN systems related to establishing peace and security and achieving development in addition to bolstering partnerships and cooperation with regional organizations. — KUNA



KUWAITI RELIEF AID REACHES GAZANS

GAZA: The Palestinian Al-Falah charity distributed humanitarian aid yesterday provided by Kuwaiti donors to low-income families on onset of the fasting month of Ramadan. The relief supplies were given to the poor families as part of a humanitarian campaign, themed "Ramadan brings us together," said the association chairman, Ramadan Tanboura, in a statement.

He indicated that the delivered items would be helpful for the locals to prepare

'sohoo' and 'iftar' meals in the coming fasting days. The association will be involved in a number of such humanitarian initiatives during the holy month to hand over food and cash money to the needy.

Tanboura expressed gratitude to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Kuwaiti Government, people and charities for the effective support for the Palestinian people and their cause. — KUNA





KUWAIT: People walk past the Kuwait Towers as they are illuminated with the colors of the United Kingdom flag, in tribute to the victims of the May 22 terror that killed 22 and injured dozens, in Kuwait City on Thursday. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

FOOD SAFETY CRACKDOWNS CONTINUE

KUWAIT: Kuwait Municipality inspectors confiscated 735 kilograms of expired food products during a recent crackdown in Shuwaikh, launched as part of food safety campaigns carried out on the advent of Ramadan. Meanwhile, inspectors filed 31 citations during a similar crackdown at restaurants and shops in Qurain. Furthermore, 60 kilograms of expired food were confiscated and six shops were closed during a crackdown in Farwaniya.

Officer faces charges

A policeman faces charges after he appeared in uniform in a video circulated on social media accompanied by a woman in a compromising position. Police arrested their colleague, along with the girl who was found at a personal property in Kabd and was under the influence of alcohol at the time of arrest, the Interior Ministry said in a statement. The two were sent to the proper authorities for further action.

Illegals arrested

Police arrested 26 people for violating residency and visa regulations. The suspects were arrested in an ambush carried out by police after detectives verified information



about their illegal activities. Police were earlier tipped off about a number of people holders of Article 20 visas (domestic helpers) who were offering domestic help services illegally after absconding from their original employers. They were taken to the relevant authorities to face charges.



MINISTRY SAYS INTENSIVE SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS MADE FOR RAMADAN

KUWAIT: The Interior Ministry (MoI) has made due arrangements to guarantee people's security during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, an official statement said on Thursday. The preparations have been taken in line with directives of Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah, stressing the necessity of continuous vigilance to guarantee full security control, Director of the ministry's Security Media and Public Relations Department Brigadier Adel Al-Hashash added that in the statement.

The security arrangements for Ramadan are of a prime importance, owing to the heavy traffic on the streets, especially in shopping areas and places of worship, during the holy month, Hashash added. The MoI is keen on streamlining the traffic, deploying

patrols in major areas nationwide, he added. The traffic lights will be recalibrated to fit with Ramadan's rush hours, mainly before iftar. Hashash noted that the MoI works hard to curb panhandlers in Kuwait, especially during Ramadan days.

The statement cautioned those who may be tempted to eat food in public during the hours of fasting in Ramadan that such an act would be in violation of the law, necessitating the offender to be jailed for a month or pay a fine of KD 100, or both penalties. — KUNA



Brigadier Adel Al-Hashash

Photo of the day



KUWAIT: The Othman Museum. —KUNA



KUWAIT: Capital Governor Thabet Al-Muhanna honored the National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) recently in recognition of their social service contributions.



MADRID: Kuwait's Ambassador to Portugal Sheikh Fahad Salem Al-Sabah with chief of Portugal's Republican Guard (Guarda Nacional Republicana) Lieutenant General Manuel Mateus Couto. —KUNA

PORTUGAL BACKS KUWAIT'S JOINING OF FIEP: ENVOY

MADRID: Kuwait's Ambassador to Portugal Sheikh Fahad Salem Al-Sabah said Thursday that Portugal vowed to support the State of Kuwait to get a membership of the Association of the European and Mediterranean Police Forces and Gendarmeries with Military Status (FIEP). The ambassador added that chief of Portugal's Republican Guard (Guarda Nacional Republicana) Lieutenant General Manuel

Mateus Couto announced his backing to Kuwait for this move. He said this came at the end of a meeting between Couto and Undersecretary of Kuwaiti National Guard Lieutenant General Hashim Al-Rifai and his accompanying delegation. The envoy noted that Al-Rifai submitted a request for joining FIEP, expressing his hope that there would be other meetings between the two sides to share

expertise, and carry out execute joint drills and trainings. In this context, Rifai invited Couto to visit Kuwait after the conference of FIEP to be hosted by Jordan next October, Sheikh Fahad Al-Sabah said. He stressed that Portugal has been supporting Kuwait on all levels; it took part in coalition forces during the liberation of the State of Kuwait from the Iraqi invasion. —KUNA

International

SATURDAY, MAY 27, 2017

Republican accused of 'body slam' wins special election

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How a Haiti child sex ring was whitewashed

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Floods, landslides kill at least 91 in Sri Lanka

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TAORMINA, Italy: (From left) Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, US President Donald Trump, Italian Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni, French President Emmanuel Macron, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Britain's Prime Minister Theresa May pose for a family photo at the ancient Greek Theatre of Taormina during the Heads of State and of Government G7 summit yesterday in Sicily. —AFP

TRUMP ROWS SHADOW 'TOUGHEST G7'

TAORMINA, Italy: G7 leaders held annual summit talks yesterday with divisions on trade and climate change, and fresh friction surrounding Donald Trump, threatening to undermine a show of unity against jihadist terrorism. "There is no doubt that this will be the most challenging G7 summit in years," European Union president Donald Tusk predicted, setting the tone for the two-day meet in Sicily's ancient hilltop resort of Taormina.

The meeting comes days after several children were among 22 people killed in a concert bomb attack in Manchester, north-west England. British Prime Minister Theresa May was to lead a discussion on terrorism and issue a call for G7 countries to put more pressure on internet companies to ensure extremist content is quickly taken offline and notified to authorities.

With the Islamic State group on the retreat in Iraq and Syria, "the fight is moving from the battlefield to the internet", May would tell her colleagues, aides said, before flying home early to oversee the ongoing "critical" security situation in Britain. US officials acknowledged they were expecting a difficult discussion on trade after reports that Trump had described the Germans as

"bad, very bad" and vowed to stop them selling millions of cars in the United States, during a meeting with senior EU officials in Brussels on Thursday.

Both US and EU officials confirmed the outspoken president had raised the auto trade issue but sought to play down the language used, as Trump shared friendly words with German Chancellor Angela Merkel and other leaders heading into the G7 gathering. White House economic advisor Gary Cohn said that trade would be a "big topic" overall after Trump rode to power on an "America First" platform of protectionism. "We are going to continue to fight for what we believe is right, which is free, open and fair trade, which the president has been very clear on what that means," Cohn said. "We will have a very robust discussion on trade."

With May and Trump among four new faces in the club of the world's major democracies, the gathering in Italy was billed as a key test of how serious the new US administration is about implementing its radical policy agenda, particularly on climate change. Senior officials are preparing to work overtime in a bid to bridge what appear to be irreconcilable differences over Trump's declared intention of ditching the

US commitment to the landmark Paris accord on curbing carbon emissions.

Leaks row

Officials acknowledge the summit is effectively about damage limitation against a backdrop of fears among US partners that the Trump presidency could undermine the international order in place since World War II. For Trump, the talks will be the final leg of his first presidential foray overseas. The gruelling week-long trip briefly diverted attention from domestic concerns focused on alleged campaign collusion with Russia.

But that issue reared up again overnight as it emerged the FBI is examining his son-in-law Jared Kushner's contacts with the Russian ambassador in connection with the probe of alleged interference in the election campaign by Moscow. US officials had hoped the globe-trotting trip would enable Trump to position himself as a more statesmanlike figure and he enjoyed largely positive coverage on his stops in Saudi Arabia, Israel and the Palestinian territories, and at the Vatican. But some of that has been undone by now-viral images of the billionaire tycoon shoving his way past other leaders at a NATO summit in Brussels on Thursday, and by his reported comments on Germany.

Abe pushes Korea issue

The other new face is France's youthful president, Emmanuel Macron, who has vowed to defend the Paris climate change deal agreed in 2015. Macron met May just before the summit and promised France would do "everything we can" to help Britain in the fight against terrorism. On climate change, the effort to keep Trump on board will focus on convincing his team that developing renewable energy forms and technology to facilitate cleaner fossil fuels can be drivers of the job-creating growth that he says is his priority.

"If we do it right, climate protection and growth go hand in hand - and then it is not really important if it is a man-made problem or not," said a German source. Cohn said US compliance with its Paris commitments would be "crippling" to economic growth, but added the president was "leaning to understand the European position". Japan was using the summit to air its concerns about North Korea with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe set to warn that Pyongyang "is a grave threat not only to East Asia but also to the world". Abe met Trump in Sicily and the US leader bullishly promised the problem posed by North Korea's missile and nuclear programs "will be solved". —AFP

ELECTION BATTLE RESUMES AFTER MANCHESTER ATTACK

MANCHESTER: Britain's government came under fire for cutting police budgets as election campaigning resumed yesterday and investigators scrambled to bust a Libya-linked jihadist network thought to be behind the Manchester terror attack. Opposition Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn said it was the "responsibility" of governments to minimize the risk of terror by giving police the funding they need after cuts made while Conservative Prime Minister Theresa May served as interior minister.

May and Corbyn had suspended campaigning for a snap June 8 election after Monday's suicide bombing at a Manchester pop concert, which killed 22 people, including children and teenagers, and wounded dozens more. Eight suspects are currently in detention on UK soil in connection with the blast, for which the Islamic State group has claimed responsibility, while police in Libya have detained the father and brother of 22-year-old suicide bomber Salman Abedi.

Police said the eight men ranged in age from 18 to 38, including a 30-year-old arrested in the Moss Side area of Manchester in the early hours of yesterday. Washington's top diplomat Rex Tillerson also visited London on Friday



MANCHESTER: Imam Irfan Chishti (left) speaks to the congregation as Greater Manchester Police Superintendent David Pester (right) stands to the side at the start of Friday Prayers at Manchester Central Park Mosque yesterday. —AFP

in an expression of solidarity after Britain reacted furiously to leaks of sensitive details about the investigation to US media. "We take full responsibility for that and obviously regret that that happened," Tillerson told reporters.

Britain briefly suspended intelligence-sharing with the United States on Thursday over the leaks. "In terms of fixing the relationship between the

United States and Great Britain, this special relationship that exists between our two countries will certainly withstand this particular unfortunate event," Tillerson said. US President Donald Trump has threatened to prosecute those responsible for the "deeply troubling" security breach, which has strained the close relationship between Washington and London.

'Critical' threat

Monday's bombing at a concert by teen pop idol Ariana Grande was the latest in a series of IS-claimed attacks in Europe that have coincided with an offensive on the jihadist group in Syria and Iraq by US, British and other Western forces. Britain's terror threat assessment has been hiked to "critical", the highest level, meaning an attack is considered imminent. Troops have also been sent to guard sensitive sites, an unusual sight in mainland Britain, while armed police are now patrolling the country's trains for the first time.

The issue of security, which was not widely discussed in the general election campaign before the attack, is now expected to feature highly. A YouGov poll published in Friday's edition of The Times put the Conservatives on 43 percent compared to Labour on 38 percent, far better for Labour than the double-digit margin that had previously separated it from the ruling party. However, the poll also suggested that 41 percent of respondents believe the Conservatives would handle defense and security best, compared to 18 percent who said the same of Labour. —AFP

TUNISIA OPENS TRIAL OVER 2015 BEACH MASSACRE

SIX OF THE DEFENDANTS ARE POLICEMEN

TUNIS: A Tunisian court held its first public hearing yesterday in the trial of 26 people in connection with a 2015 beach massacre that killed dozens of foreign tourists. A student armed with a Kalashnikov assault rifle and grenades went on a rampage in the Port El-Kantaoui resort near Sousse killing 38 holidaymakers, 30 of them Britons, before being shot dead by police. It was the second of two deadly attacks on foreigners claimed by the Islamic State group that year, which devastated Tunisia's once-lucrative tourism sector.

Security was unusually tight at the Tunis courthouse for yesterday's hearing, which lasted around an hour and a half and was attended by British diplomatic officials. Six of the defendants are policemen accused of failing to assist a person in danger. The remainder, all Tunisians, are accused of terrorist offences, murder and "conspiracy against the security of the state", the prosecution said.

The prosecution told AFP that 26 people were being tried, revising the number down from its earlier statement that 33 accused were going on trial. If convicted, they could face the death penalty under a 2015 anti-terror law, despite a moratorium on capital punishment since 1991. The examining magistrate finished his investigation in July last year. Lawyers for both the prosecution and the defense had said before the trial that they would ask for an adjournment to give them more time to study the case.

Several defense lawyers applied for bail, telling the judge their clients had "no link" to the attacker. Tunisian authorities say gunman Seifeddine Rezgui had "mainly" been radicalized on the internet before receiving



TUNIS: Members of the Tunisian police stand guard outside the courthouse yesterday. —AFP

weapons training in neighboring Libya. Ines Harrath said her client, Achraf Sandi, was not a "terrorist" but had been arrested "because his brother, who is on the run, is accused of involvement in the case".

Another defense lawyer, Salha Ben Farah, said her two clients had been tortured during interrogation and in prison. The judge told AFP that the date for the next hearing would be announced yesterday afternoon. There has been widespread criticism of the Tunisian police force's actions during the June 26, 2015 massacre.

British judge Nicholas Loraine-Smith, who held an inquest into the deaths of the Britons among the holidaymakers, said in

February that the police response had been "at best shambolic, at worst cowardly". "Their response could and should have been more effective," he said. Andrew Ritchie, a lawyer representing 20 victims' families, read out a Jan 2015 report by a British diplomat, saying there had been "little in the way of effective security to prevent or respond to an attack" at the beach.

Nearly two years after the massacre, London still advises against non-essential travel to Tunisia, a restriction Tunis would like to see lifted. Prime Minister Youssef Chahed said in November that the security situation was "stable" and Tunisia was under no more threat than other countries. —AFP

AIR STRIKES KILL MORE THAN 100

BEIRUT: Air strikes since Thursday evening have killed more than 100 people including children and other family members of Islamic State fighters in al-Mayadin, a town held by the jihadists near Deir al-Zor in eastern Syria, a war monitor reported. The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the raids were carried out by US-led coalition warplanes. A spokesman for the US-led coalition fighting Islamic State told Reuters that its forces had conducted strikes near Al-Mayadin on May 25 and 26 and were assessing the results. —Reuters

28 DIE AS MASKED GUNMEN ...

Continued from Page 1

About 70 have been killed since December in bombings claimed by IS at churches in the cities of Cairo, Alexandria and Tanta. An Islamic State campaign of murders in North Sinai prompted hundreds of Christians to flee in February and March. Copts fear they will face the same fate as brethren in Iraq and Syria, where Christian communities have been decimated by wars and Islamic State persecution.

Egypt's Copts are vocal supporters of Sisi, who has vowed to crush Islamist extremism and protect Christians. He declared a three-month state of emergency in the aftermath of the church bombings in April. But many Christians feel the state either does not take their plight seriously enough or cannot protect them against determined fanatics. The government is fighting insurgents affiliated to Islamic State who have killed hundreds of police and soldiers in the Sinai peninsula, while also carrying out attacks elsewhere in the country.

Meanwhile, His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah yesterday sent a cable to Egypt's President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi expressing condolences and sympathy over the victims of the armed terrorist attack that targeted a bus carrying Coptic Christians in Minya, southern Egypt. His Highness the Amir reiterated Kuwait's strong condemnation of these criminal heinous acts that target security and stability. He reaffirmed Kuwait's support to Egypt and whatever measures Cairo might take to counter such acts of terrorism. His Highness the Amir stressed Kuwait's unwavering stance rejecting all forms of terrorism, as well as the country's support to the international community in the fight against it and dry up its financing sources. —Agencies

KUSHNER A FOCUS IN FBI RUSSIA PROBE

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, is willing to cooperate with federal investigators looking into ties between Russia and the Trump campaign, his attorney said. The statement from attorney Jamie Gorelick was issued Thursday amid reports that the FBI was investigating meetings Kushner had in December with Russian officials. "Mr Kushner previously volunteered to share with Congress what he knows about these meetings. He will do the same if he is contacted in connection with any other inquiry," the statement said.

Meanwhile, the chairman of the House oversight committee asked the FBI to turn over more documents about former Director James Comey's interactions with the White House and Justice Department, including materials dating back nearly four years to the Obama administration. The FBI and the oversight committee - as well as several other congressional panels - are looking into Russian meddling in the 2016 presidential election and possible connections between Russia and the Trump campaign. Trump fired Comey May 9 amid questions about the FBI's investigation, which is now being overseen by special counsel Robert Mueller, a former FBI director.

NBC News and The Washington Post first reported that the FBI's ongoing investigation includes a look at Kushner, which would place the probe inside the White House. Kushner, a key White House adviser, had meetings late last year with Russia's ambassador to the US, Sergey Kislyak, and Russian banker Sergey Gorkov. The



WASHINGTON: This file photo taken on March 17, 2017 shows White House Senior Advisor Jared Kushner and wife Ivanka Trump before a meeting with business leaders in the Cabinet Room of the White House. —AFP

Post story cited anonymous "people familiar with the investigation", who said the FBI investigation does not mean that Kushner is suspected of a crime.

Earlier Thursday, House oversight committee chairman Jason Chaffetz told acting FBI Director Andrew McCabe that he wants records of Comey's contacts with the White House and Justice Department dating to Sept 2013, when Comey was sworn in as FBI director under President Barack Obama. In a letter to McCabe, Chaffetz said he is seeking to review Comey's memos and other

written materials so he can "better understand" Comey's communications with the White House and attorney general's office.

Chaffetz previously requested Comey's recent memos about his private contacts with Trump. But the bureau told him Thursday it could not yet turn them over because of Mueller's probe. Chaffetz, who said last week he has his "subpoena pen" ready to force Comey or the FBI to turn over the documents, told McCabe that "Congress and the American public have a right and a duty to examine this issue independently of the special counsel's investigation". He added, in a thinly veiled threat, "I trust and hope you understand this and make the right decision - to produce these documents to the committee immediately and on a voluntary basis."

Chaffetz's letter comes a month before he is scheduled to leave office after abruptly announcing his resignation earlier this year. He canceled a hearing scheduled Wednesday after Comey declined to testify. Assistant FBI Director Gregory Brower told Chaffetz on Thursday the agency is evaluating his request and will update him as soon as possible. Some Republican members of Congress have pressured Chaffetz to step down from the Comey probe, saying it should be led by someone who will remain in Congress.

Rep Trey Gowdy is considered the frontrunner to replace Chaffetz as oversight chair. Gowdy led a special House panel that spent more than two years investigating the deadly 2012 attacks at a US diplomatic compound in Benghazi, Libya. —AP

COURT MAINTAINS TRAVEL BAN BLOCK

WASHINGTON: A US federal appeals court on Thursday dealt a fresh setback to President Donald Trump's controversial travel ban, upholding a lower court's decision to block the measure targeting travelers from six Muslim majority countries. The government quickly announced its intention to appeal the decision - the latest in a series of stinging judicial defeats for the Republican billionaire, who took office in January - to the Supreme Court.

At issue was the intent behind the measure - whether or not it deliberately singled out Muslims by targeting nationals from Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen. The US Constitution forbids religious discrimination. The Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals said it "remained unconvinced" that the part of the measure naming the specific countries had "more to do with national security than it does with effectuating the president's promised Muslim ban."

The court - based in Richmond, Virginia - said it could not find that the government's security concerns outweighed the plaintiffs' concerns about discrimination. "Congress granted the president broad power to deny entry to aliens, but that power is not absolute," Chief Judge Roger Gregory said in the 10-3 ruling. "It cannot go unchecked when, as here, the president wields it through an executive edict that stands to cause irreparable harm to individuals across this nation."

Gregory said the order "speaks with vague words of national security, but in context drips with religious intolerance, animus and discrimination". Attorney General Jeff Sessions countered that the court's move "blocks the president's efforts to strengthen this country's national security". "This Department of Justice will continue to vigorously defend the power and duty of the executive branch to protect the people of this country from danger, and will seek review of this case in the United States Supreme Court," he said.

'We won'

Trump issued his initial travel ban by executive order in January, but that measure - which banned entry to nationals from seven countries for 90 days and suspended the nation's refugee program for 120 days - was quickly halted by the courts. A revised executive order announced in March, meant to address the issues raised by the federal judges, deleted Iraq from the list and removed an indefinite ban on Syrian refugees.

It earned widespread scorn nevertheless, including from human rights activists and states led by Democrats. A district court judge in Maryland issued a nationwide block on the ban's core provision concerning travel from the short list of countries, sending the issue to the Fourth Circuit. Given the case's high-profile nature, the full appeals court in Richmond heard the arguments - bypassing the usual initial three-judge panel - for the first time in a quarter-century. —AFP

REPUBLICAN ACCUSED OF 'BODY SLAM' WINS SPECIAL ELECTION

GIANFORTE APOLOGIZES FOR INCIDENT

MISSOULA, Montana: A US Republican candidate accused of assaulting a reporter was declared the projected winner of Thursday's Montana special congressional election, which had been considered a bellwether in the opening months of Donald Trump's crisis-ridden presidency. Greg Gianforte - a wealthy businessman who had been expected to comfortably win the contest until recent weeks - emerged the projected victor despite Wednesday's clash, taking 50.4 percent of the votes against his Democratic opponent's 43.8 percent, according to CNN, with 84 percent of the votes tallied.

He faces up to six months in county jail and a \$500 fine if convicted of misdemeanor assault against a journalist from the British newspaper The Guardian. In his victory speech Gianforte apologized to the reporter, telling a cheering crowd of supporters he had "learned a lesson". "Last night I made a mistake. And I took an action that I can't take back," he said. "I should not have treated that reporter that way. And for that I am sorry. Rest assured our work is just beginning. But it does begin with me taking responsibility for my own actions."

The Wednesday clash, caught on an audio recording, had mushroomed into a major headache for Trump's party as Montanans trooped to the polls to replace a Republican who vacated the seat to join the president's cabinet. In accepting his projected win over his rival - 69-year-old cowboy-poet Rob Quist - Gianforte vowed to be his state's "strong voice back in Washington DC". "Montana sent a strong message tonight that we want a congressman who will work with President Trump to make America and Montana great again."

Republicans now find themselves with an incoming member of Congress forced to appear in county court in coming weeks - a predicament Democrats will no doubt exploit as an example of the GOP's decay. Following Wednesday's incident the state's three main newspapers had rescinded their endorsements of Gianforte, but a majority of voters had already cast absentee ballots before the altercation, local media reported. During the vote Democrats on the streets of Missoula expressed outrage. "It is a little shocking to learn that someone who is trying to be our leader behaves in that way," Montana voter Rachel Pauli, 27, said as she waved anti-Gianforte signs on a bridge over the Clark Fork river.

'Wake up call'

Police were called to the scene of Wednesday's incident, at a Gianforte campaign event in the city of Bozeman, and Jacobs was taken to hospital for X-rays. The altercation took place after Jacobs asked



BOZEMAN, Montana: Republican Greg Gianforte celebrates with supporters after being declared the winner at an election night party at the Hilton Garden Inn on Thursday. —AFP

Gianforte about the Republican health care bill intended to replace Barack Obama's signature health reforms. The issue has become a focal point for American voters, and Gianforte, 56, had remained non-committal about the legislation, even though he has embraced many aspects of the Trump presidency.

"Greg Gianforte just body-slammed me and broke my glasses," Jacobs tweeted before news of the incident went viral on social media. The reporter posted an audio clip in which a loud crash is heard, and Gianforte then appears to say: "The last time you came in here you did the same thing. Get the hell out of here!" Gianforte's campaign issued a statement offering a starkly contrasting account. Jacobs entered the office uninvited, and "aggressively shoved a recorder in Greg's face, and began asking badgering questions," the campaign said, as it blamed the incident on "aggressive behavior from a liberal journalist."

Other witnesses corroborated Jacobs's version of events - including a crew from Fox News, the most-viewed US cable news channel and a favorite of conservatives. The state's Democratic governor, Steve Bullock, described the incident as "a wake-up call to all Montanans and Americans." "It is unsettling on many levels that Greg Gianforte physically assaulted a journalist and then lied, refusing to take responsibility for his actions," he said in a statement. —AFP

TRUMP TARGETS MS-13 TO BUTTRESS CRACKDOWN

NEW YORK: For a president obsessed with deporting “bad hombres” from the United States, the Latino street gang known as MS-13 is the perfect target. Known for its horrific murders, in which victims are set upon with machetes and baseball bats, it has a reach that now extends from its base in Central America into 40 US states as well as Mexico, Canada and Spain. “MS-13 is a very well-known criminal brand,” says Samuel Logan, author of a book on the gang. “It’s a brand that creates fear and they use fear as a weapon.”

And Donald Trump, whose administration has declared MS-13 a national security threat, has seized on that fearsome brand to justify stepped up deportations of undocumented immigrants, a border wall and pressure on so-called “sanctuary cities” to stop protecting vulnerable migrants. MS-13 has “literally taken over towns and cities of the United States,” Trump said last week, arguing that the border wall is needed to keep gang members out. “MS-13 is going to be gone from our streets very soon, believe me,” he said on another recent occasion.

The US Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency this month announced the arrests of nearly 1,100 gang members or associates. But two-thirds of those arrested were US citizens, not immigrants, and only 104 were members of MS-13. Last week, Los Angeles police arrested 21 members of MS-13 - a dozen of whom were gang leaders - and charged 44 people in the city’s biggest ever operation against the group.

Hector Silva, a Salvadoran with Insight Crime, a research group that focuses on organized crime in Latin America, says the gang is the perfect foil for Trump’s policies. MS-13, he says, kills two birds with one stone for Trump: “In the minds of Americans, gangs are Latin American, hence they are both bad and foreign,” Silva says. But experts and law enforcement officials warn that the strategy could make combating MS-13, or Mara Salvatrucha as the gang is also known, more difficult.

Police say undocumented Hispanics are the victims in nearly all MS-13 crimes, and Trump’s anti-immigration policies keep them from coming forward with information about the violence, for fear of being deported. New York’s Suffolk County was the scene of a brutal murder in April of four young men, whose mutilated bodies were found dumped in a wooded area in the town of Central Islip. One was 16 years old, two were 18 and the fourth was 20 - and the extreme violence with which they were killed pointed to MS-13.

But the county’s police commissioner, Timothy Sini, told a US Senate hearing this week that cracking down on illegal immigrants is not helping police investigators. “If individuals believe that they cannot freely cooperate with law enforcement because of their immigration status, the mission of the police department and the safety of all residents are compromised,” Sini said. Silva says undocumented immigrants are more afraid of being deported than they are of run-ins with the gang. “They can live with the gang, as cruel as it is, but not with deportation,” he said.

A vicious circle

MS-13 emerged in the 1980s in the streets of Los Angeles among Salvadoran immigrants who had fought in their country’s brutal civil war. The gang caught on, and its ranks spread to other Central American immigrants. In the 1990s and 2000s, many gang members were deported to El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, where they gained immense power, turning Central America’s northern triangle into the world’s deadliest region not at war. Many then returned to the United States, strengthened by their organizational base in Central America. Today, MS-13 has a presence across the US, and has become expert at smuggling deportees back into the country. It also is exploiting the vulnerability of the thousands of Central American minors who cross the border alone. “We’re concerned that MS-13 is recruiting younger people,” said Sini. “In one instance, a 10-year-old.”

The average age of the gang members arrested in Suffolk County, which encompasses the eastern end of Long Island, is 18, he said. MS-13 is not a big drug trafficking cartel, like the powerful Colombian and Mexican crime groups. Instead, it finances itself with street sales of drugs, extortion, human trafficking and sometimes prostitution. It was declared a “transnational criminal organization” in 2012 by the United States. “I don’t think that MS-13 is a security threat to the United States ... but rather a threat to the security of Hispanic communities,” said Silva. “Where they truly are a national security threat is in El Salvador,” he said. —AFP

VENEZUELA VIOLENCE A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

CARACAS: A young man set ablaze by protesters in Caracas. Looting, destruction and 57 people dead. Both the Venezuelan government and the opposition admit that violent protests that have gripped the country for nearly two months are out of control - and analysts warn they could be a double-edged sword that might trigger even more unrest. “We condemn violence wherever it comes from,” Attorney General Luisa Ortega said on Wednesday.

Nominally an ally of socialist President Nicolas Maduro, Ortega is now the highest-profile public official to criticize the author-

Nightmare scenes

Maduro says that his moves to draft a new constitution will bring “peace”. He called on the opposition again on Thursday to sit down with the government within the framework of a “constituent assembly” to be elected in July and tasked with drafting a new constitution. His critics reject the plan, calling it a power grab in the face of deadly unrest. The burning of 21-year-old Orlando Figuera - beaten, doused in fuel and set alight in a recent Caracas protest - highlights the country’s descent into chaos.

The prosecutor investigating the incident

at 57 after some eight weeks of demonstrations demanding general elections to remove Maduro. Senior opposition lawmaker Freddy Guevara said his side plans to march in protest to a military complex in Caracas on Friday to demand the armed forces drop their support for Maduro. Ortega has blamed the military police for hundreds of injuries in the unrest. Protesters brand the socialist president a dictator, accusing him of causing economic turmoil and food shortages. Maduro has resisted those calls, insisting the opposition and the United States are plotting a coup against him.

Hooded warriors

Analysts warn the violence benefits neither the government, which faces mounting international pressure, nor the opposition, which could lose sight of its aims. If the opposition becomes “radical and violent,” said analyst Luis Vicente Leon, it risks “scaring people away”. Nicmer Evans, a political scientist ideologically loyal to the socialist leadership but critical of Maduro, says people in both the government and the opposition are driving the violence - but that it has especially “discredited” the opposition.

“We see hooded warriors, with Molotov bombs, in a stupid confrontation of David versus Goliath that spawns rejection and distracts from goals,” he said. But Roberto Briceno Leon, head of Venezuelan Violence Watch, says the government is promoting confrontation “because it no longer has popular support.”

Fears of war

Venezuelans are struggling with shortages of food and medicine, soaring inflation - prices could rise by 720 percent this year, the International Monetary Fund estimates - and one of the world’s highest violent crime rates. If the violence continues, analysts say it could come close to “civil war”, as sociologist Francisco Coello puts it. “A problem of this type,” Briceno said, “cannot be resolved... without political negotiation.” —AFP

dubbed it “nightmarish,” blasting videos that appear to have been “manipulated to favor one of the sides in the dispute” as “vulgar”. The government says Figuera was attacked for being a Maduro supporter. The opposition, which has also condemned the incident, says members of the crowd had accused him of “stealing.”

March on military

The public prosecution service said in a new report Thursday that the death toll stands

RIOT ACT: AMONG VENEZUELA’S URBAN WARRIORS

CARACAS: Early in the morning, Maria and her comrades-in-arms creep out from the storm drains under the Caracas streets. They put on their helmets and black masks and take up their wooden shields. “The ruckus is starting,” Maria, 30, tells her companions. And off they go to look for the riot cops. Venezuela’s political opposition insists that demonstrations must be peaceful if they are to achieve political change in a country wracked by hunger and violence. But unlike some, these young people are not willing to march patiently to express their frustration with the government. “The adrenaline drives us against them,” says one of the group, Alejandro, 19. “Every day it gets harder. But we are ready to do anything.”

Street fighting

The authorities call them “guarimberos” - rioters - and even “terrorists”. They call themselves “the resistance” against President Nicolas Maduro and his allies in the leftist “chavista” movement inspired by late president Hugo Chavez. One of the leaders of the Altamira group, Julio, 28, says he used to be a mechanic. “How did I become a guarimbero? Out of hatred,” he says. “If I got hold of a chavista now, I would burn him right here.” They barricade the streets and when the military police fire tear gas, they hurl back rocks and Molotov cocktails. Behind Maria, out climbs Manuel, an 18-year-old who has a two-year-old daughter. He shows a scar on his hand where a tear gas canister hit him. “I won’t stop fighting until the government goes,” he says.

Lynching

Prosecutors say 57 people have been killed in the unrest since April 1, many of them shot dead in the chaos of the protests. Among the regular angry protesters and the looters, gunmen on motorbikes have struck, the state prosecution service says. Last weekend, a 21-year-old man was set on fire at an opposition protest. Maduro said it was because he was a government supporter. The opposition said the man was lynched for thieving. The government blames the “guarimberos” for such violence. But the opposition accuses the authorities of sending armed thugs to the protests. In the chaos, it is easy for government agitators “to infiltrate” the demonstrations, says Colette Capriles, a sociologist at Simon Bolivar University.

‘Warriors’

In Venezuela’s crisis, the street warrior groups bring together various strands beyond the fringes of politics. “These kids are hard to categorize,” says Colette Capriles. “There are groups of warriors. There are some who think they are in a video game. There are some who are totally mentally deficient,” she adds. “It is tragic because they put lives at risk. But one thing should be made clear: they are not part of the political opposition.” —AFP



CARACAS: Opposition activists attend a press conference by opposition mayors at Bolivar Square in the Chacao neighborhood on Thursday. —AFP

ities during the protests against him. The government blames its opponents - some armed with stones and Molotov cocktails - for the clashes. But opposition protesters say they must defend themselves from tear gas and even bullets. “If they let us march, we wouldn’t do anything,” said 19 year-old Alejandro, who belongs to a group of hooded youths opposed to Maduro. “But they attack first so we throw rocks and bottles,” he told AFP.

PRISONER EXECUTED IN 8TH DATE WITH DEATH

WASHINGTON: Tommy Arthur was executed late Thursday after his eighth, and final, rendezvous with the US state of Alabama's capital punishment system. The 75-year-old was given a lethal injection after the US Supreme Court allowed the execution to proceed by denying the inmate's stay requests. Arthur's death ends a legal saga spanning more than three decades in which he became known by some as the Houdini of death row, managing to evade his final sentence seven times.

He was first sentenced to death back in 1983 for a murder he denies committing. Since then, the southern US state has executed 58 people - an end Arthur had until now dodged. "Thomas Arthur's protracted attempt to escape justice is finally at an end," Alabama's Attorney General Steve Marshall said in a statement released following the execution. In last-minute appeals Arthur's lawyers had challenged the injection method to be used on Thursday and asked that a cellphone be put in the death chamber in the event that something went awry - requests the nation's highest court denied.

In her dissenting opinion Justice Sonia Sotomayor



Tommy Arthur

saw his endless run-ins with execution as a form of psychological torture, while those who supported the sentence see Arthur and his legal team as constantly playing the system to cheat justice. "Thomas Arthur is an escape artist," said Janette Grantham, director of the advocacy group Victims of Crime and Leniency (VOCAL). "He has used every trick in the books to manipulate the courts for over 34 years. He has used every trick possible to manipulate the pub-

lic into believing he is innocent," she said. "Hopefully Houdini's bag of tricks is empty and he is finally going down. No Houdini no more."

'Houdini no more'

His case had angered both opponents and supporters of the death sentence: The former

noted the risks of the lethal injection protocols, writing: "When Thomas Arthur enters the execution chamber tonight, he will leave his constitutional rights at the door."

Arthur was found guilty of conspiring with his then-lover Judy Wicker to murder her husband Troy so that she could cash in on his life insurance. She was accused of paying Arthur \$10,000 for the hit. Arthur had already served five years for the 1977 murder of his sister-in-law and was out of jail on work release at the time. He admitted to the previous killing, which he says was an accident and blames on being drunk. But he has always denied murdering Wicker.

Prior to the execution Troy Wicker's niece had told Alabama media that the execution would give surviving family members closure after decades of pain. "There are no words to describe the living hell that this has been for the Wicker family. We are hoping and praying that the execution is not delayed any further," Vicky Wilkerson told AL.com. "Our family deserves closure and justice for the loss of (Wicker) and the nightmare that we have lived through," she said. "Tommy Arthur placed our family through a living hell for a pathetic \$10,000 payout." — AFP

KENNEDY WAS A SCHOOL PRANKSTER

BOSTON: Years before he captained the torpedo boat PT-109, ran for office or set the United States on a path to put a man on the moon, President John F Kennedy was a troublesome teen whose hijinks nearly got him kicked out of his prestigious boarding school. The scion of a wealthy Boston family, Kennedy spent his mid-teens at Connecticut's elite Choate Rosemary Hall, where he excelled at history and literature - but infuriated the school's headmaster by organizing pranks as a member of an unofficial school club known as "The Muckers".

Those details of the early life of the 35th president, whose term was cut short by an assassin's bullet in Dallas in 1963, emerge in a new exhibit at Boston's John F Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, timed to commemorate the 100th anniversary of his birth on May 29, 1917. Pages from a high school scrapbook, diligently filled out by the man who would go on to become the first Roman Catholic president, show he loved ancient history, music and football, as well as "beefing," slang for complaining or arguing. Despite his later fame as an orator, he never got higher than the middling grade of C+ in public speaking, according to the school.

"Got shot at today for calling an old farmer a bad name," reads an entry written by a 17-year-old Kennedy on Oct 19, 1934. "Almost got hit." The scrapbook pages are among 40 Kennedy relics never before publicly exhibited, with notes extending to his years at Harvard University and the London School of Economics, before his World War Two service aboard torpedo boats and well before his first successful run for Congress in 1947. Kennedy went on to serve in the Senate before being elected president in 1960, at the start of one of the most tumultuous decades in US history. "That's why I so love this scrapbook, because it is so revealing about who he was at the time," said Stacey Bredhoff, the museum's curator. Kennedy and his prankster friends went head-to-head with Choate's headmaster, George St John, in his years at the school. The "Muckers" club took its name from a speech in which St John excoriated pranksters, using the label applied to Irish immigrants whose only work was shoveling up horse manure.

The group took the idea and ran with it, commissioning gold shovel pins and hatching a plot to pile horse manure in the school gymnasium. "George St John got wind of it and even though the prank never was actualized, it was enough that they would even consider such a thing, so he threatened to expel them all," but eventually relented, said Judy Donald, the school's archivist. The details of the group's successful pranks may be lost to time. But Donald said an oft-told tale that a young Kennedy blew up a school toilet with a powerful firecracker known as a cherry bomb is not true - while that incident did occur, it was the work of another student a decade later. "St John was understandably angry," Donald said. "But JFK was not responsible for that one." — Reuters

HOW A HAITI CHILD SEX RING WAS WHITEWASHED

UN SYSTEM BLAMED FOR ATROCITIES

COLOMBO: When a Haitian teenager alleged that she had been raped and sodomized by a Sri Lankan peacekeeper, the government here dispatched a high-ranking general suspected of war crimes to lead the investigation. He didn't interview the accuser or medical staff who examined her, but he cleared the peacekeeper - who remained in the Sri Lankan military. "A suspected war criminal is the wrong person to conduct an investigation into alleged crimes committed by a peacekeeper," said Andreas Schuller of the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights, a Berlin-based group that helped launch the complaint.

It wasn't the first time that accusations against Sri Lankan peacekeepers were swept aside. In 2007, a group of orphaned Haitian children identified 134 Sri Lankans who gave them food for sex in a child sex ring that went on for three years, an AP investigation found. In that case, which was corroborated by UN investigators, the Sri Lankan military repatriated 114 of the peacekeepers, but none was ever jailed. In fact, Sri Lanka has never prosecuted a single soldier for sexual misconduct while serving in a peacekeeping mission abroad, the AP found.

A culture of impunity that arose during Sri Lanka's civil war has seeped into its peacekeeping missions. The government has consistently refused calls for independent investigations into its generation-long internal conflict, marked by widespread reports of rape camps, torture, mass killings and other alleged war crimes by its troops. Despite those unresolved allegations, the UN has deployed thousands of peacekeepers from Sri Lanka. This is a pattern repeated around the world: Strapped for troops, the UN draws recruits from many countries with poor human rights records for its peacekeeping program, budgeted at nearly \$8 billion this year.

An AP investigation last month found that, in the past 12 years, an estimated 2,000 such allegations have been lev-



KUKULEGANGA, Sri Lanka: In this Sept 13, 2016 photo, Sri Lanka air force airmen train for deployment as UN peacekeepers at the Institute of Peace Support Operations Training. —AP

eled at UN peacekeepers and personnel. That tally could change as UN officials update their records and reconcile data from old files. Many of today's 110,000 or so peacekeepers come from unstable and violent countries. Congolese troops, for example, also have been accused of rape, torture and killings during the long-standing war in their country; as peacekeepers, they have faced allegations of sexual abuse and exploitation.

Robert O Blake, who served as the US ambassador to Sri Lanka from 2006 to 2009, was one of many officials who pressed the Sri Lankan government for more transparency into alleged wartime abuses. As for the peacekeepers, he said, "You are there to keep the peace. If they themselves are guilty of atrocities, clearly they are not suitable candidates for peacekeeping operations."

Eight years after Sri Lanka's war ended in 2009, people who have fled the country are increasingly coming forward to give horrific accounts of camps where they say they were gang-raped. One

woman said in testimony shared with the AP that she was kidnapped by masked men, taken to what she believes was an army camp, and repeatedly raped. One of her tormentors was brought to the room she shared with four other women. "He was asked to take his pick," she told the International Truth and Justice Project. "He looked around and chose me. And took me to another room and raped me."

Jagath Dias

She identified him from a series of photographs. The AP found that the soldier, an officer, went on to become a UN peacekeeper. During the last months of the civil war that ended eight years ago, Maj Gen Jagath Dias led an army division whose troops were accused of attacking civilians and bombing a church, a hospital and other humanitarian outposts. Nevertheless, when a teenager said she was raped by a peacekeeper in Haiti, Dias was dispatched to investigate the 2013 case. — AP

UWSA NEW POWERBROKERS IN MYANMAR

NAYPYIDAW, Myanmar: Branded as Asia's most heavily-armed drug dealers, the China-backed ethnic Wa rebels have emerged as key players in Myanmar's peace process, a development seen as strengthening Beijing's influence over its violence-wracked neighbor. When Myanmar's new civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi convened the first round of peace talks with the country's myriad ethnic groups last year, the United Wa State Army's (UWSA) attendance was a side-show to the main action.

But as hundreds of delegates gathered in the capital this week for round two of the peace negotiations, all eyes were on the militia. A scrum of media surrounded their five grinning representatives as they strode into the vast conference hall in Naypyidaw sporting traditional studded red blazers emblazoned with their symbol of a horned buffalo head. With them were members of several ethnic groups who have rallied behind Myanmar's most heavily-armed militia after an explosion of violence in the country's northeast.

For years the group has kept a low profile in Myanmar's politics after a 1989 ceasefire deal granted them their own independent territory the size of Belgium on the Chinese border. The



NAYPYIDAW: This picture taken on May 24, 2017 shows Wa territory foreign affairs minister Zhao Guo An (left) attending the second session of the Union Peace Conference. —AFP

secretive 'statelet' is like a little piece of China - signs are written in Mandarin, people trade in the Chinese currency the yuan, and the casinos are filled with Chinese gamblers. From there the Wa are accused of running one of the world's largest drug-trafficking operations, pumping out millions of meth pills

across Southeast Asia and increasingly into Bangladesh and India.

Beijing's bargaining chip

Analysts say the UWSA's growing muscle in the peace talks is strengthening Beijing's hand as it looks to tap Myanmar's vast natural resources and secure new ener-

gy projects. Publicly Beijing has declared its support for Myanmar's peace process, sending a delegate to the talks and mediating with armed rebels, which have fought against the country's military for decades in a horseshoe of conflict-wracked border regions. In March, China held military drills in a show of strength after thousands of refugees poured across the border to escape the worst fighting in decades between one insurgent group and Myanmar's army. At a meeting in Beijing this month, President Xi Jinping pledged to Suu Kyi that China would "continue to provide necessary assistance for Myanmar's internal peace process". But analysts say Myanmar's giant neighbor is also fuelling the conflict by arming the UWSA with heavy artillery, surface-to-air missiles and light armored vehicles, and helping them arm their allies. China's support for the rebels "provides a lever by means of which to apply pressure, actual or potential, on (the government)," said IHS Jane security analyst Tony Davis. Beijing is also keen to "secure the stability in the border regions" to drive through its One Belt One Road initiative, he said, referring to a huge infrastructure project intended to link Asia to Europe and Africa that would run through northern Myanmar. —AFP

FOREIGN MILITANTS IN DEADLY PHILIPPINE URBAN CLASHES

DUTERTE URGES IS-LINKED REBELS TO START TALKS

MARAWI, Philippines: Foreigners are among Islamist gunmen battling security forces in a southern Philippine city, the government said yesterday as soldiers tore down black IS flags in retaken districts and the reported death toll climbed to 46. Tens of thousands of people have fled clashes raging through residential neighborhoods in Marawi, one of the biggest Muslim cities in the mainly Catholic Philippines, with cars choking roads out of the area.

President Rodrigo Duterte imposed martial law across the southern region of Mindanao on Tuesday, hours after gunmen loyal to the Islamic State group

rampaged through the city in response to a raid on one of their safe houses. "You can see that ISIS is here already," Duterte said in a speech yesterday at a military camp near Marawi, referring to the militant group by another acronym, as officials said the insurgents were from multiple countries. "My message mainly to the terrorists on the other side is we can still solve this through dialogue. And if you cannot be convinced to stop fighting, so be it. Let's just fight."

Six foreign fighters were believed to have died in the bloodshed, according to Philippine military spokesman Brigadier-General Restituto Padilla,

including Malaysians, Indonesians and another nationality which he did not specify. Another government official listed Singaporeans as also among the militants. Padilla said 11 soldiers, two policemen and 31 militants had been confirmed killed in the fighting, which has involved the military bombing buildings where the militants have been hiding.

Two civilians were also killed inside a hospital that the gunmen had occupied on Tuesday, and the military was investigating reports that nine people had been murdered at a checkpoint the militants had set up, authorities said. The fighting erupted on Tuesday after security forces raided a house where they believed Isnilon Hapilon, a leader of the infamous Abu Sayyaf kidnap-for-ransom gang and Philippine head of IS, was hiding. The United States regards Hapilon as one of the world's most dangerous terrorists, offering a bounty of \$5 million for his capture.

Militants rampage

The raid went spectacularly wrong as dozens of gunmen emerged to repel the security forces, then tore across the city while flying black IS flags. Authorities said ending the crisis was proving extremely hard because the militants, even though they were believed to number only in the dozens, had planted bombs in the streets and were holding hostages. They said militants had also occupied higher ground in the city, enabling them to slow down or stop assaults from the security forces.

Snipers fired yesterday afternoon at about 100 troops who were marching single-file uphill through one district of Marawi that the militants had previously controlled, according to journalists accompanying the soldiers. The troops pulled down a black IS flag that had been raised on top of one house, then set up position as the gunfire from uphill intensified. Duterte said the militants belonged to the Maute group that has emerged only in recent years in Mindanao and gained strength on the proceeds of drug money. —AFP

TRUMP: N KOREA 'WILL BE SOLVED'

TAORMINA, Italy: US President Donald Trump promised yesterday that North Korea "will be solved", as G7 powers opened a summit that will confront a series of missile tests by the nuclear-armed nation. Trump's tough talk came in a meeting with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan, which along with South Korea is most immediately threatened by North Korean belligerence. But the isolated regime has also threatened to target places further afield such as the US West Coast, and Trump has called North Korea's young leader Kim Jong-Un a "madman with nuclear weapons".

"We will be discussing many things including of course North Korea which is very much on our minds," he said in the Sicilian town of Taormina as he held bilateral talks with Abe at the start of the two-day G7 summit. "It's a big problem, it's a world problem. It will be solved, you can bet on that," he added, without giving further details. North Korea carried out two atomic tests last year, and has accelerated its missile launch program, despite tough UN sanctions aimed at denying Kim the hard currency needed to fund his weapons ambitions.

So far Washington has opted for sanctions and diplomatic pressure, while looking to China, the North's closest ally, to help rein in Pyongyang. Earlier this month naval exercises were conducted in the Sea of Japan (East Sea) by the aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson, with South Korean and Japanese aircraft also taking part. Abe said he intended to use the G7 summit to underscore the danger posed by the unpredictable regime in North Korea. "The issue of North Korea is a grave threat not only to East Asia but also to the world," he told reporters before leaving Tokyo, urging the G7 to act "resolutely".

Pyeongyang's launches this year have included a Hwasong-12 intermediate-range missile this month which the North claimed was capable of carrying a "heavy" nuclear warhead, fuelling tensions with Washington. The US is worried that if Kim is not stopped, other countries in the region including Japan and South Korea would be compelled to seek their own nuclear capability as a defense measure. —AFP



MARAWI, Philippines: Residents load their belongings into a tricycle as they prepare to evacuate Marawi on the southern island of Mindanao yesterday as the battle between government troops and Islamist militants continue. —AFP

INDONESIA MAKES ARRESTS OVER SUICIDE ATTACK

JAKARTA: Indonesian authorities have arrested three men in connection with a twin suicide bombing at a Jakarta bus terminal that killed three police officers, an official said yesterday, as the Islamic State (IS) group claimed the attack. The elite anti-terror squad working with regular police Thursday detained the suspects around Bandung in the west of Java

island and searched their homes, authorities said. The arrests came as President Joko Widodo called for a plan to strengthen anti-terror laws to be pushed through, to give security forces in the world's most populous Muslim-majority country greater powers to combat a surge in militant plots.

The two bombers attacked the busy terminal in the capital

late Wednesday in a dramatic assault that sparked panic and left human body parts and shattered glass strewn across the street. Three policemen were killed, while several other officers and civilians were injured in the assault at the Kampung Melayu terminal. IS claimed responsibility through its propaganda agency Amaq late Thursday. — AFP



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AFGHAN SHELTERS BRING SUCCOUR TO ABUSE VICTIMS

KABUL: Heavily pregnant at 16 after being raped by an insurgent commander, Malala was on the brink of committing suicide when she found refuge and hope in a women's shelter in Kabul. The non-descript building, tucked away in a residential neighborhood in the Afghan capital, is one of the few hidden sanctuaries where battered women can seek support. Managed by the charity Women for Afghan Women (WAW), the shelter has given hope to those such as Malala in a country where rape, abuse and forced marriages are commonplace.

Malala is still tormented by her past, but now wants to channel her energy to build a better future for herself, her child, and others - declaring that she wants to become a police officer in order to "defend women". But shelters are hugely controversial, often dismissed as "w****houses" in the conservative country, still one of the worst places in the world to be a woman. Cameras monitor the entrances discreetly and curious onlookers are viewed with suspicion. "Nobody comes here," said Najia



KABUL: In this photograph taken on March 20, 2017, an Afghan NGO worker leads a life-skills class at a women's shelter. — AFP

Nasim, the WAW director in Afghanistan. "Even our (male) employees do not know where the center is. This place must remain confidential." Such extreme caution is well founded. Most of the women here are in danger

of being killed by violent husbands or vengeful relatives.

Runaway women

Thirty shelters have been established across 13 Afghan provinces since

the end of the Taliban regime in 2001, mostly by WAW with financial support from the United Nations and some European powers. It is a rare but real achievement for women in a country that ranks a dismal 152 out of 155 nations in the global Gender Inequality Index. "Before the shelters, there was nothing for these runaway women," said Benafsha Efaf, the WAW director for Kabul. "Many families have disowned the girls for shaming their (tribes), which makes them vulnerable to violence. We are their last chance and their ultimate hope."

According to UN Women, a specialized agency of the world body, 87 percent of Afghan women experience violence in one form or another during their lives, 62 percent of them multiple times. The traditional system sanctifies male domination, and nearly four decades of conflict have exacerbated violence within Afghan households, UN Women says. Cultural attitudes often make women, some very young, a bargaining chip to settle a debt or acquire a new wife, notes Efaf. —AFP

FLOODS, LANDSLIDES KILL AT LEAST 91 IN SRI LANKA

RECORD RAIN IN MANY PARTS OF ISLAND

COLOMBO: Flooding and landslides killed at least 91 people and left another 110 missing in Sri Lanka as the monsoon set in yesterday, dumping record rainfall in many parts of the island, authorities said. About 20,000 people were also driven out of their homes in the south and western parts of the country, the Disaster Management Centre said. "The Southwest monsoon began with very intense rain," deputy minister for disaster management Dunesh Gankanda told

reporters in Colombo. "There are some areas where we are unable to reach, but relief operations are under way."

The DMC said the toll rose to 91 dead and another 110 missing as reports came in from areas which had been inaccessible earlier in the day. Sri Lanka appealed to the international community including the United Nations and neighboring countries for help as the numbers of dead and missing climbed. Heavy rains in the southern and western

parts of the country have destroyed hundreds of homes and cut off several roads. "The (foreign) ministry will continue to monitor the flood situation and seek assistance as required in consultation with the Ministry of Disaster Management," the government said in a statement.

It said Colombo had already sounded out the UN and its South Asian neighbors. The latest flooding was the worst since May 2003 when 250 people were killed and 10,000 homes destroyed after a similarly powerful Southwest monsoon, officials said. On Friday the military deployed thousands of troops to reach marooned villagers and the air force carried out several rescue operations to pluck people from rooftops of flooded homes.

In the early hours of the day a mountainside collapsed on a women's hostel at a tea plantation at Neluwa in the island's south, killing at least seven women, police said. Evacuation notices were issued to residents along the Kelani river, which flows to the Indian Ocean through the capital Colombo, amid fears that it was about to burst its banks. "The residents who are living along the Kelani should evacuate to high ground within six hours," the DMC said.

DMC officials said the monsoon had been expected on Thursday night and ended a prolonged drought that had threatened agriculture as well as hydro power generation. The rains filled the reservoirs used for hydro power, which had hit rock bottom, raising concerns of power shortage in June. But officials said most reservoirs were now so full they were in danger of spilling over and causing dangers of flooding to people living downstream. — AFP



BELLANA, Sri Lanka: Sri Lankan military rescue workers and villagers search for survivors at the site of a mudslide in this village in Kalutara yesterday. — AFP



DHAKA: Bangladeshi workers take down a controversial statue on the premises of the country's highest court after Islamist radicals protested for months against what they called an 'un-Islamic' Greek deity yesterday. — AFP

BANGLADESH REMOVES 'UN-ISLAMIC' STATUE

DHAKA: Violent protests broke out yesterday in Bangladesh over the removal of a controversial justice statue deemed "un-Islamic" by religious hardliners from outside the Supreme Court, a move its creator said marked a victory for Islamists. Police fired tear gas and water cannons to try to disperse hundreds of secular demonstrators who came out to protest the statue's removal, which they see as a sign of creeping Islamization in the officially secular country.

The sculpture of a blindfolded, sari-clad woman holding scales had been in place for less than six months when authorities removed it early yesterday under pressure from hardliners who said it was based on the Greek goddess of justice. Its creator Mrinal Haque choked back tears as he oversaw the removal, saying it felt like "clearing a dead body". "Even my mother's death did not make me so grief-stricken," Haque told AFP. He said the authorities had "bowed to the Hefazat (-e-Islam)," referring to the headline Islamist group that held months of mass protests demanding the statue be destroyed and replaced with a Holy Quran.

After its removal, protests broke out on the court premises and at the Dhaka University campus, a traditional secular bastion. "Four people were detained for questioning as they broke a barricade. The protesters have also vandalized several cars," deputy commissioner of Dhaka police Maruf Hossain Sorder told AFP. An AFP photographer at the scene saw police fire rubber bullets as well as tear gas and water cannon. "It is a betrayal of the people. The depressing thing is that the government is using it as a political tool," secular activist Imran Sarkar told AFP. — AFP

Kuwait Times 55th Anniversary BUSINESS

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ASSAM: Photo shows an aerial view of the Dhola-Sadiya bridge across the River Lohit, a tributary of the River Brahmaputra, which was inaugurated by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Assam. — AFP

MODI OPENS INDIA'S LONGEST BRIDGE

GUWAHATI: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, marking three years in power, yesterday inaugurated the country's longest bridge that spans the vast Brahmaputra River in the northeastern state of Assam. The 9.15 km (5.7 mile) Dhola-Sadiya bridge, strong enough to carry a 60-tonne battle tank, will reduce travel times from Assam to the frontier state of Arunachal Pradesh whose territory is partly claimed by China. "The inauguration of the bridge marks the end of a long wait for the people of this area," Modi's office quoted him as saying in a speech, adding the bridge "opens the door for economic development on a big scale".

Modi led his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to a landslide victory in 2014. He remains popular - his party swept Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state, in a recent state election and looks on track to win re-election in 2019. The 66-year-old prime minister has made upgrading India's infrastructure a priority, also setting up a ministry to develop India's remote northeast beyond the so-called Chicken's Neck - a narrow strip of territory around Bangladesh. Modi's trip to Assam, during which he will deliver a public address later in the day, rounded off a week of festivities and briefings to highlight his government's achievements. He embarks on a European tour next week. — Reuters

PAKISTAN ANNOUNCES A 40 PERCENT INCREASE IN DEVELOPMENT BUDGET

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan yesterday announced a 40 per cent increase in its development budget over the next financial year as the government continues to invest in infrastructure projects. Speaking to parliament, Finance Minister Ishaq Dar said the Public Sector Development Program would have its funding increased from 715 billion rupees (\$6.8 billion) to 1,001 billion rupees for 2017-18.

The government also announced an 11 per cent hike in total expenditure over the next year, as positive financial indicators and an improving security situation attract more investors to the country. "The estimate for the total expenditure in the year 2017-18 is 4,753 billion rupees, which is 11.7 per cent more than the previous year's expenditures of 4,256 billion rupees," Dar said. The defense budget has been increased from 841 billion

rupees to 920 billion rupees. On Thursday, the government said its economy expanded almost 5.3 per cent, its largest increase in a decade.

The rise follows a construction boom linked to a \$50-billion Chinese investment plan to upgrade transport and power infrastructure. Confidence in Pakistan is growing, with the International Monetary Fund saying in October that the country had emerged from crisis and stabilized its economy after completing a bailout program. Pakistan's credit rating has also improved, though foreign investment remains poor compared to its South Asian neighbors.

Economists believe the country will need to register sustained growth of six to eight per cent over several years to make a significant dent in poverty and provide enough jobs for its youth. — AFP



TOKYO: People stand in front of an electronic stock board of a securities firm in Tokyo yesterday. Asian stock markets are mixed as investors weighed Wall Street's latest gains on strong earnings reports against the latest oil production cut that dragged down crude prices and commodity shares. —AP

BATTERED CRUDE FIGHTS BACK AS STERLING SLIDES

OIL RECOVERS AFTER OPEC DISAPPOINTMENT

LONDON: Battered oil prices recovered some ground yesterday as investors looked past disappointment that an OPEC meeting did not produce bigger supply cuts, while sterling slid on a poll showing the ruling Conservatives' lead shrinking, two weeks before an election. European stock markets opened down as turbulence in oil markets following Thursday's OPEC meeting, at which oil producers extended existing output cuts but did not expand them, undermined sentiment towards risk assets in general. Asian shares also fell. Some of the sharpest moves came in currencies, where Britain's pound fell over 0.5 percent to \$1.2861 and looked set for its biggest one-day slide in over three weeks and steepest one-week decline since early April.

The first poll taken since a suicide bombing killed 22 people indicated that Britain's opposition Labor Party had cut May's Conservative Party lead to five points less than a fortnight before the parliamentary election. "With this kind of momentum and almost two weeks to go until the vote, not only is this not

going to be the breeze that May anticipated when she called the snap election last month, it could yet turn into a humiliating defeat for the Conservative leader and her party," said Craig Erlam, senior market analyst at OANDA. "Coming on the back of losses yesterday, it's turning into a rotten end to the week for the pound."

Sterling's weakness, good news for exporters, helped keep London's blue-chip FTSE-100 stock index in positive territory just as other European bourses fell. Earlier, MSCI's broadest index of Asia-Pacific shares outside Japan, which closed at a two-year high on Thursday, fell 0.2 percent, shrinking its weekly gain to 1.45 percent. Japan's Nikkei closed 0.6 percent lower. Trade in US stock futures pointed to a muted start for Wall Street, where the S&P 500 and the Nasdaq closed at record highs on Thursday after strong earnings reports from retailers.

Oil rebound

Oil edged higher but remained on the back foot after tumbling 5 percent in the

previous session. On Thursday in Vienna, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and some non-OPEC producers agreed to extend a pledge to cut around 1.8 million barrels per day (bpd) until the end of the first quarter of 2018 - disappointing investors betting on longer or larger curbs. Clawing back some of Thursday's losses, Brent crude futures were at \$51.80 per barrel at 0755 GMT, up 0.66 percent, from their last close. They were still set to end with a weekly loss of more than 3 percent, however. US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures were below \$50, at \$49.15, though still up 16 cents from their last close.

Elsewhere, the dollar slipped 0.5 percent to 111.25 yen, while the dollar index, which tracks the greenback against a basket of six major peers, was 0.14 percent lower at 97.110. The euro was virtually flat on the day at \$1.1212. The weaker dollar and pullback in risk appetite were a boon for gold. Spot gold rose 0.5 percent to \$1,261 an ounce, poised for a 0.5 percent gain for the week. — Reuters

YEN DRIVEN UP BY LOWER US BOND YIELDS

LONDON: The yen rose nearly 1 percent yesterday against the dollar after a dip in Treasury yields hit the US currency, while Britain's pound hit a three-week low after a poll showed a narrowing lead for the ruling Conservatives before elections next month. The dollar was slightly higher against a basket of peers, while the euro reversed modest gains earlier in the day.

The Japanese yen hit a three-day high, up 0.8 percent to 110.88 per dollar. Analysts cited a fall in US Treasury yields since Federal Reserve minutes on Wednesday prompted questions over the pace and extent of interest rate hikes. "The yen appreciated and continues to correlate more closely with US bond yields. I don't believe they'll fall very far but the move could be exacerbated by a number of places having a holiday on Monday," said Kit Juckes, currency strategist with Societe Generale in London.

"You can get outsized moves (owing to the holiday), and I suspect that yen shorts were a consensus trade last week." Investors tend to "square" or offset their long (buy) or sell (short) positions on currencies before major holidays. Against a basket

of six major currencies, the dollar was up less than 0.1 percent to 97.281. The euro pared gains made earlier in the day and was down 0.2 percent at \$1.1192, having touched a 6-1/2 month high of \$1.1268 earlier this week. The common currency has enjoyed a near 3 percent gain this month on factors including an ebb in French political concerns and upbeat euro zone data.

Sterling hit by polls

In a sign that Britain's June 8 election could be far more closely contested than previously thought, a YouGov poll published on Thursday showed the opposition Labor Party had cut the lead of May's Conservatives to five points. That pulled the pound over half a percent lower to \$1.2837 by the European afternoon, further from a May 18 peak of \$1.3048, the pound's strongest level since September last year. The assumption that a landslide election win for May would strengthen her hand over hardline Brexiters in her ruling party and allow her to negotiate a smoother departure from the European Union, has given sterling a near 4 percent bump since she announced the election. — Reuters

OPEC OIL CUT EXTENSION RENEWS SUPPLY WORRIES

SINGAPORE: The OPEC-led decision to extend a production cut to March 2018 disappointed financial investors, prompting an exit from oil futures markets, while refiners in Asia were mostly concerned with whether it meant they would need to go hunting for crude. In Vienna, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and some non-OPEC producers on Thursday extended a pledge to cut 1.8 million barrels per day (bpd) of output until the end of the first quarter of 2018.

Financial traders did not like what they heard, thinking it meant an ongoing oil glut. "The market voted with its feet", investment bank Jefferies said, dragging crude futures down 5 percent to near \$50 a barrel. In physical markets, however, where tankers can take weeks or months to deliver up to \$100 million in crude oil, refiners want to know if they will be forced to search for new suppliers. "This is a declaration of a strong will of OPEC as well as non-OPEC producers to tighten overall supply-demand," said Yasushi Kimura, president of the Petroleum Association of Japan, and chairman of petroleum conglomerate JXTG Holdings.

To ensure crude supplies, "we need to carefully monitor OPEC's production cut adherence," Kimura said. Crude is by far the biggest cost for refiners and the petrochemical industry, shaking margins whenever benchmark prices take broad swings. Kimura said the extended cuts could mean demand may exceed supply in 2017, which would be the first time in years. This would force refiners to start using up reserves, pushing up prices at least until production catches back up with consumption. "In 2017, global demand is likely to exceed supply ... and crude prices are likely to ... rise towards \$60 by the end of the year," JXTG Holdings' Kimura said.

Real supply cuts?

So far, though, the cuts that started in January have barely dented supply in Asia, home to three of the world's four biggest oil consumers. Exporters were keen to maintain global market share, and they cut domestic supplies or shipments to marginal buyers. As a result, inventories in the big consumer markets have remained bloated, and prices low.

"We have (so far) not had any impact in terms of any cut from any of these (OPEC) sources into India," said B. Ashok, chairman of Indian Oil Corp, the country's biggest petroleum company. OPEC sources said that will change as top exporter Saudi Arabia especially is keen to see a visibly tighter market. Many refiners, however, are still not expecting a real crude shortage, largely due to ample alternative supplies. "Crudes that can be processed in our refineries include crudes from the US. We have procured some crude even from Canada. We have been procuring crude from Latin America ... Africa, Russia," Ashok said.

Alternatives at a price

US producers have become a key alternative source of supply as their output - largely due to shale oil - has soared by 10 percent since mid-2016 to 9.3 million bpd, close to Saudi Arabia's and Russia's levels. These producers have been fast to fill OPEC's gap, with an average of 374,000 bpd of crude from the United States coming to Asia in the first four months of 2017, according to data compiled by Thomson Reuters Oil Research and Forecasts. That compares with an average of just 48,000 bpd in 2016. "The cut in OPEC supplies will be offset by higher US crude production," said KY Lin, spokesman for Formosa Petrochemical Corp, one of Asia's biggest refiners and petrochemical producers.

Still, most analysts including Goldman Sachs, Jefferies and Barclays, expect prices to gradually rise towards the beginning of 2018 as the market tightens. While consumers may have to live with higher prices as OPEC and its allies hold back output, the longer the policy lasts, the more the cartel risks losing permanent market share. "In response to ... OPEC production cuts we are working on diversification of crude oil import sources and looking beyond the Middle East," said Kim Wooyung, a spokeswoman at SK Innovation, owner of South Korea's largest refiner SK Energy. — Reuters

JAPAN, EURO-ZONE PERFORMING BETTER THAN EXPECTED US DIP A 'SPLUTTER' NOT A SLUMP

LONDON: The dip in the US economy is a "splutter" rather than a more serious downturn, the International Monetary Fund's chief economist said, though policy uncertainty in Washington was making forecasting increasingly difficult. In an interview with Reuters, Maurice Obstfeld, who is nearing his two-year anniversary as the IMF's top forecaster, said China's economy was also slowing, though both the euro zone and Japan were performing better than expected. The Fund's last set of forecasts in mid April nudged up its global growth projections to 3.5 percent for this year and 3.6 percent for next year. Since then, however, there have been some shifts in the landscape.

A string of controversies surrounding US President Donald Trump's administration have put his plans to cut taxes and increase infrastructure spending on the back-burner, taking some of the steam out of the world's top economy in the process. Revised first quarter US GDP numbers due later are expected to confirm it grew at less than 1 percent. "We saw the weak first quarter in the US that we interpret as a splutter rather than a change in the fundamental trajectory of the US economy ... A soft patch in other words," Obstfeld said on the sidelines of a City Week conference on Thursday.

"And in the second quarter we have seen China

taking some pretty energetic measures to slowdown credit growth and get a better grip on what is going on in the shadow banking sector. "That seems to have taken some of the froth out of the economy. So we see a bit of slower growth there." It is too early to say for sure whether the two factors would see the IMF lower its next set of global forecasts in July. The process is not yet in full swing, but the task is also being made more complicated than normal by a lack of clarity and mixed messages over US policy.

Obstfeld said that while there was now a rough outline of what maybe Trump would like to do, Paul Ryan, one of the other most senior members of the Republican party, seemed to have a different view. "It's hard to say what exactly will happen and what the macro impact will be," Obstfeld said. "We are working to find out what is the most likely scenario and what impact that will have on growth and our forecasts." "We don't know when or what the fiscal initiative will be so I think markets are kind of looking at this and saying show us the money."

Go slow

There have been upside surprises since April, however, that are helping balance some of the U.S. and Chinese loss of momentum. A weaker dollar and low-

er bond yields was a potential boost for emerging markets and other global borrowers. Japan is performing better than already raised expectations as is the euro zone, which this month saw France elect pro-business Emmanuel Macron over the anti-euro Marine Le Pen and is being driven by a humming German economy.

"If you look at the soft indicators, PMIs, even in France where the hard indicators have not been amazing, you get some hint there might be an upside surprise," Obstfeld said. The strengthening euro-zone recovery has also fuelled talk that the European Central Bank will cut its stimulus program again by the end of the year. The IMF, as usual, though is urging it to take things slowly.

Asked whether it would be wise to tread carefully with stimulus removal, he said: "That would be my view." The recent US "soft patch" also meant that the Fed does not need to be overly aggressive as it raises interest rates, the next of which is expected next month. "In view of the weak first quarter and the fact wage growth is still low, I don't think they feel a huge danger they are going to get behind the curve," Obstfeld said. "I don't think they are wedded to any particular number of rate increases this year, two versus three, for example." — Reuters

INMATES CAN ORDER FANCY ITALIAN PIZZA MADE IN JAIL

CHICAGO: How can you get a gourmet Italian pizza delivered right to your door for no more than \$7? Get locked up at Cook County Jail in Chicago. Inmates in the jail's medium-security Division 11 can now order pizzas made with the finest ingredients in the kind of ovens found in pizzerias. It's all part of Sheriff Tom Dart's ongoing effort to make jail a bit more humane while providing inmates skills that might help keep them from returning once they're set free.

Pizzas have been served and prepared behind bars before. A few institutions allow inmates to order from nearby restaurants. At one Massachusetts jail, inmates make pizzas that guards can buy and take home and heat themselves. But it's safe to say Dart is the first jail administrator to bring into his facility an Italian chef to oversee an operation in which inmates bake a couple hundred pizzas a week in a \$16,000 oven and deliver them piping hot to the cells of captive customers.

"We're teaching skills to make them more marketable when they get out of here," Dart said. At the same time, by giving inmates a break from the bland jail food, he's employing what experts say is an effective tactic to keep inmates in line. "If any detainee assaults staff or engages in misconduct they're moved out of that division, and they're not able to purchase the pizzas," said Cara Smith, the department's chief policy officer. "So it's an incentive to behave." Other programs Dart has introduced include using chess to teach inmates about problem-solving and patience, and sending inmates from the jail's boot camp to tear down abandoned buildings.

The pizza delivery service is an outgrowth of a program called "Recipe for Change" that's run by Bruno Abate, a chef and owner of trendy Chicago restaurant Tocco, that teaches inmates about cooking and nutrition. Abate said there's no overstating the effect gourmet pizza has in a place where the drab food only reminds inmates of where - and what - they are. "This is treating people with dignity and respect as a human and not (an) animal," he said. The pizza also might be the best food some of the desperately poor inmates have ever eaten.

"How many of them even get to go to a decent restaurant?" asked Ron Gidiwtz, a prominent Republican fundraiser who donated money to buy the oven and raised the rest. When the inmates bring the pizzas to the cells, the effect, inmates say, is immediate. "Their eyes light up like it's Christmas," said Jonathan Scott, whose nametag reads "Chef Jonathan," as he waits for trial on an armed robbery charge. Dart said he decided to sell the pizzas to raise money for the program. Initially, he planned to have the inmates sell them to correctional officers. — AP

US GROWTH REVISED UP TO 1.2%, BUT STILL WEAK

WASHINGTON: The US economy started 2017 out with a whimper, but it wasn't quite as weak as first thought. The government revised up its January-March growth reading to a rate of 1.2 percent - better than an earlier estimate of 0.7 percent but well below President Donald Trump's ambitious growth targets. Growth in the gross domestic product, the broadest measure of economic health, is down from a 2.1 percent annual growth rate in the fourth quarter and marks the weakest result in a year, the Commerce Department reported yesterday.

The upgrade to 1.2 percent reflected new-found strength in consumer spending, business investment and state and local government spending. Many economists believe growth in the current April-June quarter will rebound sharply to above 3 percent, helped by stronger consumer spending that reflects solid employment gains and an unemployment rate that has fallen to a decade low of 4.4 percent. Moreover, part of the first quarter weakness reflected various temporary factors such as unusually warm winter weather.

Paul Ashworth, chief US economist at Capital Economics, said even with the upward revision it "doesn't alter the fact that it was another disappointing start to the year." But he and other analysts said they were still looking for a better showing in the current quarter. "Growth is bouncing back in the second quarter," said Gus Faucher, chief economist at PNC. "Consumer spending continues to expand with job and wage gains, and business investment is picking up, especially for energy-related industries."

However, after a spring surge, analysts believe growth will fall back to a level of 2 percent to 2.5 percent in the second half of the year - the same moderate pace that has been in effect for the



MIAMI: A construction worker works on a high-rise condominium project on Biscayne Boulevard, in downtown Miami. The US Labor Department has issued revised data on productivity in the fourth quarter. — AP

almost eight years of this economic recovery, making it the slowest expansion in the post-World War II period. During the campaign, Trump attacked the economy's weak growth and blamed it on failed economic policies of the Obama administration. He vowed that his economic program of tax cuts, deregulation and tougher enforcement of trade agreements would double growth to 4 percent or better.

Trump released his first budget on Tuesday, a \$4.1 trillion spending plan that counts on faster growth to trim deficits by \$2 trillion over the next decade. Many private economists believe Trump's budget is far too optimistic about how fast the US economy can grow, given an aging workforce and stubbornly low productivity gains. The economy grew 1.6 percent for all of last year, the poorest showing in five years. With Trump's legislative program running into obstacles in Congress, fore-

casters have been trimming their growth numbers for the second half of this year and pushing any gains from Trump's tax cuts into 2018.

The revision for the first quarter reflected a boost in consumer spending to an annual rate of 0.6 percent, still the slowest in seven years but up from an initial estimate of 0.3 percent. Analysts believe that consumer spending should expand in the current quarter, helped in part by the tendency of consumers to spend more during periods of rising stock prices and home values because their net worth is increasing.

The latest result was also driven by lower declines in spending by state and local governments than initially thought and stronger investment by businesses in structures and intellectual property. The report on GDP represented the government's second of three estimates of GDP performance in the first quarter. — AP

LAGOS TURNS 50: HALF-A-CENTURY OF URBAN CHAOS

LAGOS: It's only when the thick smog of humidity and pollution lifts that the size of Lagos becomes clear: from above, the megacity of some 20 million people seems to stretch out to infinity. Not even the Atlantic Ocean appears to be able to stop its exponential growth, a tide of multi-storey apartments and shacks stretching into the sea. The state of Lagos was created just 50 years ago, on May 27, 1967. At that time, the quiet city on the edge of a large green lagoon was Nigeria's capital and home to about one million people.

But Nigeria's population then exploded. The biggest boom happened in Lagos, seen as a place of possibilities where people came from all over the country and west Africa to

make their fortune. Fifty years on, Lagos is the world's 10th largest city with between 17 and 22 million people, although no-one seems to be counting. With an average of 900 new arrivals a day during the last half-century, the provision of housing, transport, water and electricity has been stretched beyond breaking point. Yet Lagos drives Nigeria's economy, and with the country set to become the world's third largest by 2050, it is destined to drive African growth.

Mission impossible

"All African cities are facing the same problems: rapid urbanization, land management, pollution," said Guillaume Josse, from French research

firm Groupe Huit. "But Lagos is a caricature. Its challenges are so huge that they seem insurmountable," added Josse, who specializes in developing cities. Ayo Assaf, however, has decided to try the impossible and rethink the historic heart of Lagos. For nearly seven years, the urban planner who earned his stripes in New York has surveyed the streets of Lagos Island at the request of the state government. The population density on Lagos Island is up to 1,200 people per hectare - more than 20 times the density in London.

Wearing jeans and a white collared shirt, Assaf calmly picks his way through the crowded alleyways of the former business district, now converted into a giant market. No space is wasted: a jewelry vendor uses the rail-

ings outside a mosque as a display stand for her necklaces; an old library has been transformed into a wedding dress shop. The pavements are overrun with photocopiers and mechanics, or converted into kitchens selling take-away Nigerian food. "There is such energy, the trading generates millions of naira. You cannot wipe this out, you have to use what's there and enhance it due to safety and hygiene concerns," said Assaf.

Assaf dreams of a more sophisticated Lagos, where better infrastructure makes it easier to do business, and more people have access to housing and basic services. "There, I imagine a large street with small shops, it will be our Champs Elysees," he says with a grin. — AFP



LAGOS: Urban planner Ayo Assaf and his assistants discuss the vision they have been developing for Lagos Island west. Lagos is the world's 10th largest city with between 17 and 22 million people, although no-one seems to be counting. —AFP



LAGOS: Nigerian blogger Ono Bellotakes takes a selfie in Lagos. With its 159,700 'followers' on Instagram and its online magazine onobello.com, the former model and former journalist, dictates fashion in Nigeria. — AFP

UNDERCURRENT OF RISK PUSHES EURO-ZONE BOND YIELDS LOWER

EURO-ZONE PERIPHERY BOND YIELDS

LONDON: An undercurrent of political and policy risks pushed down euro zone government bond yields yesterday, discouraging investors from putting too much faith in improved economic data. Despite a market-friendly result in the French presidential election and strong recent inflation and private sector activity numbers from the bloc, most euro zone bond yields are well below recent highs. Germany's 10-year government bond yield, the benchmark for the region, fell 3 basis point to a one-week low of 0.33 percent - comfortably above the 0.20 percent level at the start of the year but well below the 0.51 percent March high.

Other euro-zone yields were 2-4 bps lower on the day, with Belgium's 10-year yield hitting a three-month low of 0.695 percent. Investors took their cue from policymakers staying cautious on the brightening political and economic picture in Europe and its implications for monetary policy. "We have had a few positive political outcomes, but we still have Brexit negotiations to come, Italian and German elections, a potential Catalonia (independence) referendum and the unpredictable factor of Donald Trump's presidency," ING strategist Padhraic Garvey said.

"So even though we are moving towards higher rates in the US and tapering in Europe, in general policymakers are being very care-

ful." This was underlined this week when top European Central Bank officials made it clear they would not favor changing the policy path they had already outlined.

US Federal Reserve minutes this week showed policymakers agreed to hold off on raising interest rates until it was clear a recent US economic slowdown was temporary. Expectations the Fed will run down its balance sheet were also exerting downward pressure on yields, said Rabobank strategist Richard McGuire. "As the Fed appears to be on course on balance sheet normalization, that possibly adds to the bullish outlook for US Treasuries as they presumably won't hike rates at the same time they are reducing the balance sheet," he said.

Ten-year US Treasury yields dropped 2 basis points to 2.235 percent while volatility in Treasuries hit a 3-year low, after the minutes signaled a steady, predictable balance sheet rundown. A survey showed this week that businesses across the euro zone maintained April's strong growth rate in May, pointing to 0.7 percent economic growth in the second quarter. "Certainly this is a positive assessment of the way the euro zone economy is heading, but you could say the surveys are running ahead of the hard data," said Investec economist Philip Shaw. "There is still a degree of scepticism." — Reuters

CEO PAY BY THE NUMBERS

NEW YORK: The typical big-company CEO raked in \$11.5 million last year in salary, stock and other compensation, according to a study by executive data firm Equilar for The Associated Press. That's an 8.5 percent raise from a year earlier, the biggest in three years. The bump reflects how well stocks have done under these CEOs' watch. Boards of directors increasingly require that CEOs push their stock price higher to collect their maximum possible payout, and the Standard & Poor's 500 index returned 12 percent last year. Over the last five years, median CEO pay in the survey has jumped by 19.6 percent, not accounting for inflation. That's nearly double the 10.9 percent rise in the typical weekly paycheck for full-time employees across the country. Here are some other highlights from the AP's annual package of stories on CEO pay, which was published this past week.

Top of the charts

The top-paid CEO last year was Thomas Rutledge of Charter Communications, at \$98 million. The vast majority of that came from stock and option awards included as part of a new five-year employment agreement, and Charter's stock will need to more than double for Rutledge to collect the full amount. No 2 on the compensation list last year was Leslie Moonves of CBS, who earned \$68.6 million. No 3 was Walt Disney's

Robert Iger, who made \$41 million. The media business is full of big paychecks, where actors and other employees far from the executive suites can make millions of dollars, and the industry's CEOs have traditionally pulled down some of the country's biggest packages.

Nay on pay

CEO pay did fall for one group of companies last year: those where investors complained the loudest about executive pay. Compensation dropped for nine of the 10 companies scoring the lowest on "Say on Pay" votes, where shareholders give thumbs up or down on top executives' earnings. At Exelon, for example, the majority of voting shares were against how much executives made in 2015, particularly when the stock lost 22 percent that year. Following the vote, Exelon made several changes, including capping how much executives can receive in incentive payments if the stock loses money over the year. Auto supplier BorgWarner had last year's second-lowest passing rate in the survey on "Say on Pay," with 60 percent of voting shares saying no or abstaining. The company made changes to its compensation program and cut a 2016 incentive award by \$2.4 million to \$950,000 for CEO James Verrier. His total compensation dropped 29 percent to \$12.3 million last year.

MULTI-SPEED EUROPE THREATENS CEE UNITY

WARSAW: Efforts by some western governments to foster closer ties within the European Union could undermine the unity of central Europe, weakening the region's clout within the bloc, a senior adviser to the Polish president has said. Krzysztof Szczerski's comments add to a chorus of concerns in the EU's east over the idea of "multi-speed" Europe, which is earning growing support in Germany, France and other EU countries since Britain voted to leave the bloc.

"We cannot allow for a scenario where the evolution of the European Union towards a multi-speed Europe hits the unity of central and eastern Europe," Szczerski, President Andrzej Duda's adviser, told the Reuters Central & Eastern Europe Investment Summit. Since coming into power in 2015, Poland's ruling conservatives, together with Hungary's nationalist-minded

Prime Minister Viktor Orban, have hoped to rally support among neighbors for a push to erode the power of Brussels institutions.

The Czech Republic and Slovakia are considerably less enthusiastic in their overall euro-scepticism than either Warsaw or Budapest. Still, Prague has said there should be no splitting of Europe into two groups of countries with different integration levels. Szczerski said that if being in Europe's top speed group were to require simultaneous membership of the Schengen area, the euro zone and participation in talks on the bloc's new security policy, only Slovakia and Slovenia would fulfill all the criteria.

Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary, as well as the Baltic States, for various reasons, would be left out, Szczerski said. "Therefore, we are working to strenght-

en our regional community to build a too big to fail force here, so that the region's potential is so great that it cannot just be shredded in the shredder of a multi-speed Europe," he said.

EURO-ZONE REFORM

Poland is in no hurry to adopt the euro, with Szczerski saying that the flexibility of national exchange rates allows for a greater control of economic development. According to different polls, more than two-thirds of Poles oppose joining the euro area. While Poland wants the euro zone, its largest exports market, to be stable, reforms in the currency union should not lead to higher entry costs for future members, Szczerski said. "Secondly, the reforms cannot lead to political pressure to make decisions that are not in line with economic interests, for example, by cre-

ating a separate budget for the euro area at the expense of non-member states," he added.

Newly elected French President Emmanuel Macron's enthusiasm for a common euro zone budget and finance ministry - although, crucially, viewed with scepticism in Berlin - has also raised fears among eastern countries that they could lose out on EU funds. Poland is the largest beneficiary of EU funds and is due to receive 77.6 billion euros (\$84.4 billion) in the current 2014-20 budgetary period for infrastructure projects, its poorer regions and improving the competitiveness of its economy. "We will keep a careful track of developments (in the euro-zone)," Szczerski said. "I think a meeting at the highest level (between Poland, Germany and France) would be a good opportunity to talk about it openly." — Reuters

NIGERIA TO ISSUE FIRST GREEN BOND

CANCUN: Nigeria plans to launch its delayed "green" bond - the first for an emerging market country - within a few weeks, the country's former environment minister said. Amina Mohammed, now deputy secretary-general of the United Nations, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation proceeds from the sovereign bond - which is expected to raise about 20 billion naira (\$63.6 million) from its first tranche - would be used to fund renewable energy, transport and agriculture projects.

Nigeria's green bond could lay the groundwork for other African countries to follow suit, she added. Green bonds have been around for a decade but sovereign borrowers had been absent from the market, which was traditionally dominated by international development banks. The green bond market has enjoyed strong growth in the last two years, with issuance jumping 105 percent last year alone to a record \$72 billion, according to data compiled by Thomson Reuters and the Climate Bond Initiative. Poland and France have both launched sovereign green bonds since the end of last year.

Mohammed, who initiated the Nigerian bond while she was environment minister, said its issue had been postponed from an initial date at the end of March because the country's budget had to be passed first. "We've just had the budget approved, so I believe Nigeria will look, probably within the next few weeks, to doing (the bond issue)," Mohammed said on Thursday on the sidelines of a U.N. conference in Mexico on disaster risk reduction. Announcing the plan for the bond in February, the environment ministry said it was aimed at widening Nigeria's funding options and diversifying the OPEC member's oil-dependent economy, which is the largest in Africa.

Peter Tarfa, director of the climate change department in the environment ministry, told a separate conference in Barcelona this week that the bond would be launched in the coming month, and would generate resources for climate change projects, including forest-planting and a mass rapid transit system. The total amount raised, including a second tranche targeted for September, would be more than 45 billion naira, he said. The green bonds "have the potential to deliver the low-carbon, climate-resilient infrastructure needed in Nigeria... with access to private capital at scale", he said. — Reuters

EUROPE STOCKS WOULDN'T ESCAPE FALLOUT FROM A WALL ST RETREAT

FINANCIAL, ECONOMIC, CORPORATE LINKAGES STILL STRONG

LONDON: Europe's brightening economic prospects are unlikely to insulate regional stocks from any sharp pullback on Wall Street where a wobble last week heightened anxiety about whether a market at record highs is due a correction. Darkening clouds in the United States contrast with an acceleration of the euro zone economy and an ebbing of political risk after this month's defeat for the anti-euro, far right in France's presidential elections. Some analysts have wondered whether European stocks could 'decouple', or move independently, from the richly-valued S&P 500 if it retreats significantly.

History shows this is unlikely. "We're all in one boat. The world is a global village, whether we like it or not," said Burkhard Varnholt, deputy global chief investment officer at Credit Suisse, which oversees 1.3 trillion Swiss francs (\$1.33 trillion) of assets under management. "If the US slows down then it's inevitable Europe is affected too, although the European economy is performing particularly well right now." The S&P 500 fell nearly 2 percent last Wednesday, the largest one-day loss since President Donald Trump was elected in November, on questions about his future and business-friendly economic agenda.

World stocks fell nearly 1.5 percent and European shares fell 1.2 percent the following day. Over the past 30 years every instance of a month with a 5 percent or more drop on the S&P 500 was accompanied by a drop of at least as much on European stocks, according to Thomson Reuters data. The same data shows several instances of large drops on European indices during months where the S&P 500 was unchanged or even higher. More recent episodes of US weakness, notably over the summer of 2015 and in January 2016 weakness, spread fast to global markets.

US sets the direction

The reflation trade - bets on stocks that benefit from a pickup in growth and inflation such as banks and machinery makers - are still pinned to growth in the United States, the world's largest economy and a



HONG KONG: A lion statue sits in Hong Kong's business district of Central with financial buildings in rear. Moody's has cut its credit rating for Hong Kong hours after downgrading China for rising debt levels, which it said would have 'significant impact' on the Asian financial hub because of their close links. — AP

driver for global growth. The United States accounts for more than 14 percent of the combined revenue of the developed world's biggest non-US listed companies, a significant enough proportion to move the needle for investors should US growth falter.

Top German and UK companies get nearly a fifth of their revenue from the United States. Japanese firms, led by the automakers, derive 14 percent of their revenue from the United States. "It just comes down to working out whether the US economy is moving forwards or backwards," said Kevin Gardiner, global investment strategist at Rothschild Wealth Management. "That sets the theme for global markets. The US can set the direction for capital markets." The US equity market, now worth more than \$20 trillion,

is the combined size of the listed market values of the entire European and Asia-Pacific stock markets.

If there is a slow trickle out of US stocks, other markets can benefit, as has happened this year in Europe. But if large sums of money leave US stocks other global markets are not big enough to absorb it. The brighter outlook in Europe may have put European stocks, particularly in the euro zone, in a better position to recover from any sharp sell off. "There is no recession in the pipeline, but the US economy could slow next year. It's already a very long cycle by historical standards," said Amundi's Borowski. "Part of the correction is welcome," he said, adding that any knock-on impact to European stocks is likely to be short-lived. — Reuters



BEIJING: A waiting worker is seen seated in the back of a tricycle in Beijing. —AFP

COMPANIES' DOLLAR BOND RUSH ADDING TO CHINESE DEBT PILE

BALLOONING CHINESE DOLLAR BORROWING A DILEMMA FOR INDEX TRACKERS

LONDON: Record-breaking dollar bond sales from Chinese companies are steadily increasing China's weight in global indexes, raising concerns about overexposure among investors who track them. Corporates' rapid move onto offshore bond markets, partly a response to the crackdown on runaway credit growth at home, highlights China's multi-faceted indebtedness, a growing worry for investors.

Overall debt is approaching 300 percent of annual economic output (GDP) and Moody's said it was the reason for cutting China's credit rating for the first time in 30 years. Stripping out maturing debt and coupon payments, year-to-date bond sales from companies in emerging markets total \$65 billion including \$54 billion from China, JPMorgan estimates. In gross issuance terms, almost half this year's emerging market corporate bond sales are from Chinese firms, the bank said.

Company debt issuance in other emerging markets has been subdued by commodity and growth slumps. Some indexes cap the weight they give to each country but most are committed to broadly representing the market. This means that the indexes have to increase the weighting they give to China and investors whose portfolios track or benchmark an index must adjust accordingly. "It poses a challenge for global portfolios. You don't want to have too much of a good thing," said Greg Saichin, head of emerging debt at AllianzGlobal Investments. China today comprises around 20 percent of the Markit iBOXX emerging market corporate index versus 0.5 percent in 2007.

In JPMorgan's CEMBI Broad index too, China is 21 percent, up from less than 4 percent in 2010, though in the iBoxx corporate dollar bond index which also

includes developed countries and is dominated by US names, China's weight remains around 0.8 percent. It has risen however from 0.074 percent five years ago. Chinese firms should this year easily surpass the \$108 billion debt raised in 2016 and \$116 billion in 2014. In 2010, just \$14 billion was issued. "It's just a juggernaut of issuance," said Guy Stear, co-head of fixed income research at Societe Generale in Paris. "It's so large that it's a game changer in terms of EM corporates... it's not just commodity companies, its cement, materials, internet companies, there's a broad range."

The Chinese deals are mostly welcomed by money managers who need to invest the money pouring into their funds. Also, Chinese state-run firms still carry investment grade ratings, unlike issuers from many big emerging economies such as Russia, Turkey, and Brazil. "Relative to rating Chinese debt pays relatively decent yield...against that people are conscious that if you are running an EM credit fund you have very high exposure to one part of the world," Stear said.

Allocation conundrum

One popular solution for the allocation dilemma is "unconstrained" debt funds that are less committed to representing the market. Morningstar data showed 10 such funds focused on Asian fixed income were launched already this year by asset managers. More than 40 launched in 2016. "We are already seeing clients and investors wanting a diversified approach rather than just seeking exposure to a broad emerging market bond index," said Bryan Collins, a portfolio manager at Fidelity International in Hong Kong. Such funds can opt for less China exposure.

Or they can delve down the credit curve and away from state-run firms whose close correlation with sovereign yields offers less prospect of outperformance, Collins said. Other commonly used indexes cap China's weight - JPMorgan's CEMBI Broad Diversified limits the weight each country can have, while Citigroup and Bloomberg have recently launched index variations capping China exposure. "We stay with the Broad Diversified and we are comfortable with China at 8-10 percent," said Steve Cook, co-head of emerging debt at PineBridge Investments in London. Cook noted that the \$400 billion-plus market was still a fraction of the \$5.7 trillion outstanding in US investment grade credit. Corporate dollar bonds also comprise a small proportion of the country's overall debt, estimated by some to be as high as \$28 trillion.

Cooling down

Chinese authorities were trying to cool the dollar bond boom even before the Moody's rating downgrade. Property firms for instance no longer receive new issuance quotas, Reuters has reported. Their efforts could accelerate after the Moody's downgrade and subsequent rating cuts for state-run firms should also raise borrowing costs. But bond sales are unlikely to grind to a complete halt. For one, raising cash overseas can allow companies to sidestep curbs that are in place to combat capital flight. Second, companies' total debt repayments in 2017 are estimated at 5.5 trillion yuan (\$797.36 billion) by ratings agency China Chengxin. For investment-grade Chinese firms, dollar borrowing works out some 90 basis points cheaper than on domestic markets where interest rates have risen. —Reuters

CHINA'S REFORMS NOT ENOUGH TO ARREST THE MOUNTING DEBT

BEIJING: China's structural reforms will slow the pace of its debt build-up but will not be enough to arrest it, and another credit rating cut for the country is possible down the road unless it gets its ballooning credit in check, officials at Moody's said. The comments came two days after Moody's downgraded China's sovereign ratings by one notch to A1, saying it expects the financial strength of the world's second-largest economy to erode in coming years as growth slows and debt continues to mount.

In announcing the downgrade, Moody's Investors Service also changed its outlook on China from "negative" to "stable", suggesting no further ratings changes for some time. China has strongly criticized the downgrade, asserting it was based on "inappropriate methodology", exaggerating difficulties facing the economy and underestimating the government's reform efforts. In response, senior Moody's official Marie Diron said on Friday that the ratings agency has been encouraged by the "vast reform agenda" undertaken by the Chinese authorities to contain risks from the rapid rise in debt.

However, while Moody's believes the reforms may slow the pace at which debt is rising, they will not be enough to arrest the trend and levels will not drop dramatically, Diron said. Diron said China's economic recovery since late last year was mainly thanks to policy stimulus, and expects Beijing will continue to rely on pump-priming to meet its official economic growth targets, adding to the debt overhang.

Waiting for implementation

Moody's also is waiting to see how some of the announced measures, such as reining in local government finances, are actually implemented, Diron, associate managing director of Moody's Sovereign Risk Group, told reporters in a webcast. China may no longer get an A1 rating if there are signs that debt is growing at a pace that exceeds Moody's expectations, Li Xiujun, vice president of credit strategy and standards at the ratings agency, said in the same webcast "If in the future China's structural reforms can prevent its leverage from rising more effectively without increasing risks in the banking and shadow banking sector, then it will have a positive impact on China's rating," Li said.

But Li added: "If there are signs that China's debt will keep rising and the rate of growth is beyond our expectations, leading to serious capital misallocation, then it will continue to weigh on economic growth in the medium term and impact the sovereign rating negatively." "China may no longer suit the requirement of A1 rating." Li did not give a specific target for debt levels nor a timeframe for further assessments.

Moody's expects China's growth to slow to around 5 percent in coming years, from 6.7 percent last year, compounding the difficulty of reducing debt. But Diron said the economy will remain robust, and the likelihood of a hard landing is slim. After Moody's downgrade, its rating for China is on the same level as that on Fitch Ratings, with Standard & Poor's still one notch above, with a negative outlook. On Friday, Fitch said it is maintaining its A+ rating. Andrew Fennel, its direct of sovereign ratings, noted China's "strong macroeconomic track record", but said that its growth "has been accompanied by a build-up of imbalances and vulnerabilities that poses risks to its basic economic and financial stability". —Reuters



BEIJING: A woman walks past hoarding depicting a butterfly on a leaf in Beijing yesterday. Moody's slashed China's credit rating for the first time in almost three decades citing concerns about the country's rising debt and slowing growth, but Beijing rejected the downgrade as "inappropriate". —AFP



A shop is being decorated by lanterns at a market in Kuwait City yesterday a day before the start of the holy month of Ramadan. For Muslims across the world, the beginning of the ninth month in the Muslim lunar calendar which marks the start of Ramadan is a time for spiritual reflection, prayers and fasting. During Ramadan practicing Muslims do not eat, drink, smoke or have sex between sunrise and sunset. — Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat



Journalists take photos of the "forest bus" in Taipei yesterday. — AFP photos



Journalists take photos of live vegetation inside the "forest bus" in Taipei yesterday.

Taiwan's 'forest bus' charms passengers

With moss-covered seats and an explosion of lush plants and flowers throughout its interior the "forest bus" offers a fragrant leafy ride for passengers used to crammed public transport in Taiwan's capital. The ordinary single-deck city bus has been converted into a travelling greenhouse decorated with orchids, ginger lilies and a variety of ferns is running on a special route through Taipei, with stops including an art museum, a popular temple and a night market.

Florist Alfie Lin, who created the temporary installation, said he wanted to bring a touch of nature to commuters' busy routines. "I hope the public will feel that it's a beautiful and interesting experience," he told AFP. "They can smell the scent of summer on the bus and see the vibrant green plants to feel messages from nature." Reactions have been enthusiastic, with passengers queuing to board and expressing hopes that it will become a permanent attraction in Taipei.

For now the toll-free bus is running on a week-long trial, ending Sunday, and takes around 20 passengers. "I feel happy and relaxed on the bus smelling the flowers and plants. I hope it can become a regular service on a double-decker. It would become something special to Taipei," said housewife Celine Wei. Museum employee Larry Huang is also a big fan of the bus and has been on it three days in a row. "There is no rushing on and off like a regular bus. We chat and take photos for each other. I feel like I'm at a party with friends," he said. — AFP



German map project to aid future rebirth of Aleppo

‘A city built with a peculiar stone that gave it a unique color’

With its battered facades, pulverized houses and skeletons of buildings, one of the world’s oldest cities, Aleppo, has been utterly devastated by the war in Syria. Now, in Germany, scholars are preparing for its reconstruction one day by creating a super-detailed map of the old city and its treasures, long listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site. In a bright office of a university campus in Cottbus in the former East Germany, urban planner Christoph Wessling runs his index finger through the labyrinth of alleys and streets of Aleppo.

Spread across his large desk lies a huge map, measuring two by 2.5 meters (more than six by eight feet), drawn to a scale of 1:500. It is an exceptional document that replicates the walled ancient city with its souks, hammams, mosques, churches and residential dwellings, with infinite precision and loving detail. In total, some 16,000 plots have been traced, as well as 400 floor plans of the main buildings of this city, which has been inhabited continuously for over 6,000 years. As the academic traces the ancient web of streets and alleys of the Silk Road city, his minds drifts back to a place that a 12th century poem described as being as old as eternity.

Hidden gems

Aleppo was a city of hidden gems, recalled Wessling, who was a frequent visitor to the northern Syrian metropolis before the start of the war in 2011. “In Aleppo, we would enter a house whose austere facade was absolutely nothing special,” he said. “And then suddenly



Syrian doctoral student Zeido Zeido, poses for an AFP interview in his office at the university in Cottbus.

we came upon a chain of three enchanting inner courtyards with richly decorated pillars.” That was life before the country’s commercial center was divided between the rebel-held east and the loyalist-controlled west and became a main battleground of the civil war. Aleppo became the scene of a major humanitarian tragedy in late 2016, before it was captured by the army of President Bashar al-Assad, backed by Russia and Iran.

In coming weeks the map, created by six experts with a budget of 60,000 euros (\$67,000), will be put online and made available to anyone wishing to participate in the eventual reconstruction of Aleppo. The online map will feature “all the site plans, photos and descriptions of a given place”, according to the univer-



Urban planner Christoph Wessling poses for an AFP interview in his office at the university in Cottbus. — AFP photos

sity, which is handling the project with the German foreign ministry and German Archaeological Institute. “We are not politicians,” said Wessling. “But as urbanists, we wanted to lay a foundation” so that the city can one day recover some of its peculiar splendor. The hope is, he added, that construction companies don’t simply bulldoze the ruins and build hotels and shopping malls atop the ancient rubble.

Rest of Aleppo?

Syrian Cottbus student Zeido Zeido, 29, who

is preparing a doctoral thesis on his hometown Aleppo, warns against excessive attention to the old city. He said “there are other districts with more recent architectural styles that need to be protected, such as late 19th-century buildings” from the era when Aleppo was one of the main cities of the Ottoman Empire. “There is no national heritage protection plan for the districts which are not classified by UNESCO,” he added. The challenge of reconstruction will be immense, according to researchers at the Cottbus faculty of architecture. —AFP

Guns N’ Roses keep reunion going for another round

More than a year after a long-mulled reunion finally materialized, rock greats Guns N’ Roses on Thursday extended their tour in North America again. The group—which starts a European leg in Ireland on Saturday after hitting the Americas and Asia—announced an additional 15 shows to already scheduled dates in the United States and Canada this year. The new concerts include two nights at Madison Square Garden in New York and will close with shows on November 24 and 25 in Los Angeles, the band’s home base.

Guns N’ Roses, led by Axl Rose’s raw, sweeping voice coupled with Slash’s intricate guitar, still hold the record for the top-selling debut album in US

history, 1987’s “Appetite for Destruction.” But the band also became notorious for off-stage drama, often turning up on stage hours late, and Rose and Slash parted ways in 1993 after closing a tour in Buenos Aires. The long-distant pair reunited in April 2016 before headlining the Coachella festival in California. However, the classic lineup still lacks rhythm guitarist Izzy Stradlin, who co-wrote many Guns N’ Roses’ hits but complained about the payment offered to join the reunion. Guns N’ Roses grossed more than \$188 million worldwide by touring last year, trailing only Bruce Springsteen, Beyonce and Coldplay, according to the industry publication Pollstar. — AFP



This file photo taken on April 23, 2016 shows, (from left) Musicians Duff McKagan, Axl Rose, Frank Ferrer, Slash and Melissa Reese of Guns N’ Roses perform onstage during day 2 of the 2016 Coachella Valley Music & Arts Festival Weekend 2 at the Empire Polo Club in Indio, California. —AFP



In this file photo, Shawn Mendes arrives at the iHeartRadio Music Awards at the Forum in Inglewood, Calif. — AP

Shawn Mendes: ‘You should never be afraid to enjoy music’

Days after the deadly bombing of an Ariana Grande concert in England, Shawn Mendes says fans should “never be afraid to enjoy music.” Fan video shows the 18-year-old Canadian pop singer delivering that message Wednesday night at his show in Paris, where nearly 90 people were killed during an attack at an Eagles of Death Metal concert in 2015.

After mentioning Monday’s attack at the Grande concert, Mendes called music “one of the very rare things in life that can bring people together in a way that words cannot describe, but we can only feel.” He said fans “should never be afraid to live life to the fullest.” A suicide bomber killed 22 people during the attack outside the arena in Manchester, England, just after Grande’s show ended. — AP



Dutch model Marjan Jonkman attends the amfAR's 24th Cinema Against AIDS Gala at the Hotel du Cap-Eden-Roc in Cap d'Antibes, France. — AFP photos



Former England football captain David Beckham.



US actor Dustin Hoffman and his wife Lisa.



US actress Jessica Chastain and US actor Will Smith.

(From left) Russian model Valery Kaufman, US model Hailey Baldwin, Australian model Jordan Barrett, French designer and fashion editor Carine Roitfeld, US model Bella Hadid, Russian model Natasha Poly, Swedish model Elsa Hosk and Czech model Hana Jirickova conduct an auction during the amfAR's 24th Cinema Against AIDS Gala.



Stars dig deep at charity Cannes AIDS gala

A galaxy of stars including Leonardo DiCaprio, Dustin Hoffman, Nicole Kidman and Will Smith turned out for an AIDS benefit that is the social highlight of the Cannes film festival. The annual amfAR Foundation for AIDs Research gala dinner late Thursday at the luxury Eden Roc hotel just along the French Riviera at Cap d'Antibes saw celebrities and benefactors paying up to half a million dollars (466,000 euros) for a table.

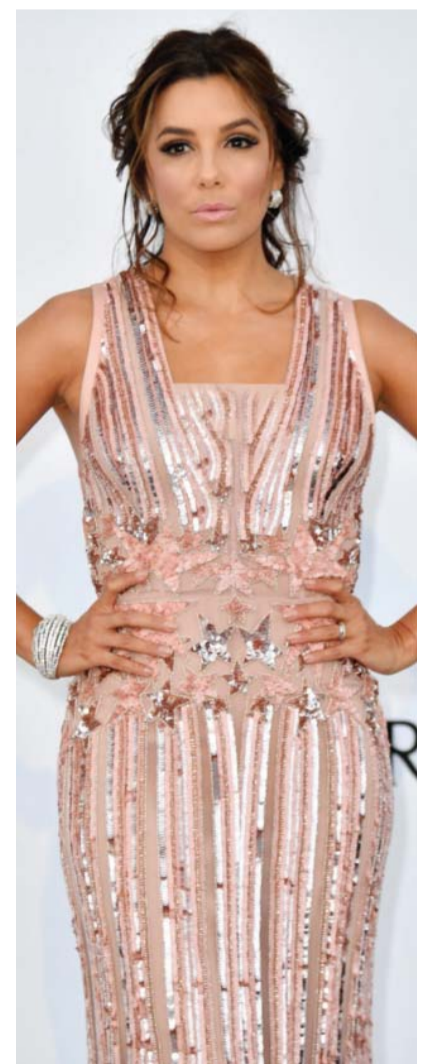
Actresses Jessica Chastain, Milla Jovovich and Eva Longoria, former footballer David Beckham, director David Lynch and director and jury president Pedro Almodovar were also among A-listers present for the auction to help the charity founded by the late Hollywood legend Elizabeth Taylor. They were aiming to beat the 22 million euros raised at last year's dinner when DiCaprio-who acted as auctioneer-sold a sculpture by British artist Damien Hirst for 3.1 million euros and a day with Hollywood star Kevin Spacey for half a million.

"Ending AIDS is not a fantasy. Its a goal within our reach and one amfAR was among the first to recognize as attainable," said the foundation's president Kenneth Cole. "Our goal is a cure for 2020. You have the power to stop this pandemic that has killed 35 million people," he told the gala's guests. This year's lots included a week in an exclusive resort in the Maldives for 60 people, a fully restored 1958 Jaguar XK150 sports car and a weekend for 30 on a luxury yacht.

For those on more modest budgets, there was a 14-metre (46-foot) statue specially created for the occasion by French artist JR, whose "Faces Places" documentary with Agnes Varda is one of the hits of the festival, which ends Sunday. The final figure from this year's auction will be released today. Since the galas began at the Cannes festival in 1993, the "Cinema Against AIDS" dinners have raised more than 174 million euros for the charity. — AFP



Australian actress Nicole Kidman.



US actress Eva Longoria.

A group picture in the rebel-held town of Douma shows Syrian girl actors posing after performing an English language school-play adaptation of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. — AFP photos



Syria girls escape nightmare of war with Snow White fable

To escape the nightmare of life in their besieged hometown near Syria's capital, 13 young girls sought refuge in a fairytale performance of "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs". The all-girl cast spent months memorizing lines from the classic Brothers Grimm fable before performing in front of a packed audience this week in the elementary school in Douma. "It was really hard, but I memorized all my lines in English," said proud 10-year-old Afnan, who played the story's lead antagonist, the Queen.

"When I act, I forget the war that we're living through in Douma and I feel happy and hopeful," she said. Afnan's hometown is the de facto capital of the Eastern Ghouta region, the last remaining rebel enclave near Damascus and besieged by government troops since 2012. Until this month, Eastern Ghouta had been regularly targeted by air strikes and artillery as part of a government offensive chipping away at rebel territory. The bombardment would often wound or kill children as they headed to street markets, played outside, or walked to school. But the skies have been quiet since a landmark deal earlier this month to create four "de-escalation zones" in Syria, where more than 320,000 people have been killed since conflict broke out in 2011.

'Bombing is their normal'

On-stage, her character is consumed by a search for youthful beauty, but Afnan said her own ambitions in life lie elsewhere. "The lesson from the play is that beauty is in your heart and your soul, not in your looks! I want to be a doctor-I want to be brave and treat sick people," Afnan said. With the glittering stage decorations and nervous murmurs of young students, the evening could have almost taken place in any school around the world. But halfway through the performance, two distant booms shook the room-rockets that hit the edge of the town, residents later said. "These children don't know what it's like



Syrian girls act in an English-language school-play adaptation of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs at a local school.

not to have shelling. For them, bombing is their normal," a female stagehand told AFP.

Earlier this year, international aid group Save the Children warned that a whole generation of war-scarred Syrian children may be "lost to trauma and extreme stress". For the school's director of extracurricular activities, Yasser Al-Assaad, theatre is one of the most effective ways to offset years of traumatic experiences for the young students and their mentors alike. "I get my rehab from a student's smile, and that student draws her psychotherapy from the teacher that came to her school to motivate her," Assaad told AFP. It is his third fairytale performance: in 2015, he helped put on "Little Red Riding Hood", and last year his students performed "Beauty and the Beast". "We want to send a message to all of humanity that Syrian children can create, that we are open to all civilizations," he said.

'Flowers can grow'

Despite efforts to leave Douma's devastation behind, death seemed to touch the cast of Snow White. Just days before the final performance, the director's husband was killed by a stray bullet from intra-rebel clashes in the town. And the play's rosy-cheeked narrator, Dania, recalled how her own school had been bombed just a year and a half ago. "It was all blood and (the bodies of) girls in front of me," the 11-year-old told AFP. Even lead actress Rayhana Noaman, who played Snow White, said her favorite part of the story was escaping a tragic fate.

"The witch wanted to kill me, but the charming prince saved me from death!" she said with a shy smile. Slender Amal Al-Kurdi burst onto the stage with an explosive introduction: "A-a-achoo! I'm Sneezy!" The eight-year-old actress donned a white felt beard



Syrian girls act in an English-language school-play adaptation of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs.



A Syrian girl acts in an English-language school-play adaptation of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs at a local school.

and brown shirt like her fellow dwarfs. "I really liked acting because we learned how to be brave and how not to be afraid to speak in front of an audience," she said. As his students prepared to raise the curtain, Assaad said the performance was a sign that "flowers can grow amid rocks of pain." "Every household in Douma has lost someone and tasted the anguish of pain, war, and siege. Despite this, we can build Syria anew," he said. — AFP



Photo provided by Universal Orlando shows part of the Volcano Bay water park that will open May 25 at Universal Orlando in Orlando, Fla.

Technology elevates new theme park experiences in Orlando



This photo provided by Universal Orlando shows a water slide at the Volcano Bay water park that will open May 25 at Universal Orlando in Orlando, Fla.

For more than a moment, you feel the way "Avatar" hero Jake Sully felt plunging down the side of a floating mountain and coming just close enough to a giant wave to feel the mist on your face - all while on the back of a flying banshee that then swoons and soars high above the land of Pandora. Flight of Passage, the new signature ride of Disney World's \$500 million Pandora-World of Avatar experience, has been designed to make riders feel like they are in an alien land. And it delivers.

Not to be outdone, however, all of the major theme parks in Orlando are using technology this year to give park-goers that immersive feel of a simulated reality. Guests can speed through the streets chasing "Tonight Show" host Jimmy Fallon at Universal Orlando on the new Race Through New York attraction. Young theme park visitors can karate-chop their way to victory at Legoland's Ninjago World. And next month SeaWorld will unleash its first virtual reality roller coaster when Kraken reopens.

"Technology is really playing a key role," said Arthur Levine, a theme park expert for About.com. "All of these things are really incorporating technology to be able to tell stories in very unique ways." Easily the most powerful and immersive experience is Disney's Flight of Passage, where riders are thrust into the land of gigantic Na'vi aliens with the use of state of the art 3-D simulated

technology. Sure, you are strapped onto a motorcycle-shaped seat in front of a blue screen, wearing 3-D glasses, but you feel like you are there in Pandora experiencing a Na'vi rite of passage.

"It creates a new sense of immersion for guests where they really have a sense of place," said Jon Landau, executive producer of the movie "Avatar," which inspired Disney's Pandora land, located at Animal Kingdom. "You are literally going to another world, figuratively and literally." Levine says without question Disney has raised the technology bar with Flight of Passage. "Like all motion simulations, you really don't move more than a couple of inches in

any direction, but the experience is so convincing," he said. "This is the ultimate to this point."

But the technology revolution isn't just on the rides. Visitors to Universal's new water park Volcano Bay will get an experience they've never had in a packed amusement park: No lines! There are no areas to stand in line because park-goers will be in line virtually, thanks to new wearable technology, TapuTapu, that will allow them to enjoy the rest of the park until it's their turn. The Jimmy Fallon ride will also have virtual line capability. Here's a look at some of the best new attractions in Florida this summer.



Photo shows guests as they explore Ninjago World at Legoland Florida in Winter Haven, Fla.



Park guests enter Ninjago World at Legoland Florida in Winter Haven, Fla.

**Walt Disney World
Pandora-World of Avatar**

Walt Disney World's 12-acre land inspired by the "Avatar" movie opens in Florida in late May at the Animal Kingdom park. The marquee attraction at the half-billion-dollar land is Flight of Passage, where a 3-D simulator plunges riders into a cinematic world. You feel like you're riding on the back of a banshee, a bluish, gigantic, winged predator that resembles something out of the Jurassic era. At night, Pandora transforms into a sea of color with glowing lights on artificial plants and even in the pavement. The enormous blue Na'vi aliens from the "Avatar" movie appear sparingly, really just on Flight of Passage and a second attraction called Na'vi River Journey.

**Universal Orlando
Volcano Bay**

Volcano Bay is Universal Orlando's new water-themed park with a huge, exploding volcano as its centerpiece. The resort is calling Volcano Park its "third park," after Universal Studios and Islands of Adventure. Universal closed the nearly-40-year-old Wet 'n Wild water park to make way for the more intensely-themed Volcano Bay, whose story line is that visitors are entering a Pacific island belonging to the Watuiri people. The opening of the water park in May marks the debut of the TapuTapu wearable wristband which can pay for food, open lockers, trigger special effects, set spending limits on the kids and eliminate waiting in lines by sending alerts when it's your turn for a ride.

Race Through New York Starring Jimmy Fallon

At the Jimmy Fallon attraction, which opened in April, visitors enter an area made to look like the lobby of a Rockefeller Center building. On display are photos, videos and memorabilia from decades of past "The Tonight Show" shows. The ride is pioneering the use of virtual lines, which allows visitors to watch live entertainment or hang out in a lounge instead of waiting in line. When it's their turn to go on the ride, visitors are alerted. The 3-D simulator ride gives visitors the experience of drag-racing through the streets and in the clouds above New York City.

**Seaworld Orlando
Kraken**

Virtual reality is coming to a roller coaster at SeaWorld's Orlando's Kraken 17-year-old ride. Visitors wanting the virtual reality experience can choose to wear a virtual-reality headset that make them think they're going on a deep-sea mission alongside sea creatures. It is SeaWorld's first digitally-enhanced ride experience and is set to debut June 16. — AP



A Lego dragon greets park guests as they enter Ninjago World at Legoland Florida in Winter Haven, Fla.

The Na'vi Shaman of Songs celebrates with music in Na'vi River Journey ride at Pandora-World of Avatar land attraction in Disney's Animal Kingdom theme park at Walt Disney World.



A look at Disney World's new Pandora-World of Avatar land

It's not a movie set, but visitors to Disney World's new Pandora-World of Avatar land are in for a cinematic experience. The 12-acre land, inspired by the "Avatar" movie, opens in Florida in late May at Walt Disney World's Animal Kingdom. It cost a half-billion dollars to build. The marquee attraction is Flight of Passage, where a 3-D simulator plunges riders into a cinematic world. You feel like you're riding on the back of a banshee, a bluish, gigantic, winged predator that resembles something out of the Jurassic era. Wearing 3-D glasses and straddling what resembles a stationary motorcycle, you're strapped in, then the lights go out, a screen in front lights up and you're swooped into a world of blue, gigantic aliens called Na'vi, with moon-filled skies, plunging waterfalls, jumping marine animals and towering ocean waves.

The ride provides an enchanting and intoxicating five minutes that touches all the senses. Blasts of air and spritzes of mist hit your face, and as you fly through a lush forest, a woody aroma wafts through your nostrils. A visitor could go on the ride 20 times and not catch half the visual details. Disney designers are quick to say the new land is the star of the action, not the backdrop. "The character is being portrayed and played by the place itself and that's different than a set," said Joe Rohde, the design and production leader of Pandora-World of Avatar.

Other aspects of Pandora can't quite compete with the excitement and immersion of Flight of Passage. Much of Pandora, at least during the daytime, is hard to distinguish from the rest of Animal Kingdom, Disney's almost 20-year-old zoological-themed park with lush landscaping, an emphasis on conservation and a Noah's ark range of animals.

At night, though, Pandora transforms into a sea of color with glowing lights on artificial plants and even in the pavement. The enormous blue Na'vi aliens from the "Avatar" movie appear sparingly, really just on Flight of Passage and a second attraction called Na'vi River Journey. Before going on Flight of Passage, visitors walk through a tunnel in a faux mountain until they stumble upon a laboratory that includes a Na'vi floating in a tank. "It's not as simple as a guy in a costume painted blue walking around here," Rohde said of the aliens. "We know they are culturally present around us but we will meet them when we go on an excursion." The other main attraction, Na'vi River Journey, is an indoor river ride in the dark, lit up by glowing creatures and plants. The ride culminates with a Na'vi animatronic woman beating on drums as a chorus of voices reaches a crescendo. Images of the Na'vi riding horse-like creatures appear behind lush foliage, glimpsed in the distance from the river.

A story set in the future

Disney has been building attractions themed on movies since Disneyland opened in 1955 with rides inspired by Snow White, Peter Pan and Alice in Wonderland. Often, as with Pandora, the attractions open years after the movies debut. "Avatar" came out in 2009. Director James Cameron's sequel isn't due out until 2020. Lands based on "Star Wars" are scheduled to open in Disney parks in California and Florida in 2019.

Pandora-World of Avatar isn't tied to a narrative from the film but rather tells a story set in the future, after humans degraded the jungle through industrial folly and a resurgence of nature overtakes the human-built environment. That there is a recurring architectural motif, for example with a beverage stand and cantina made to look like they were built for industry by humans but then overrun by plant life. Throughout Pandora, real plants intermingle with artificial plants that resemble alien pods or Dale Chihuly glass sculptures. It's difficult to distinguish what is real. — AP



In this photo, park guests will see a Na'vi in a science lab while in the queue for the Avatar Flight of Passage ride at Pandora-World of Avatar land attraction in Disney's Animal Kingdom theme park at Walt Disney World in Lake Buena Vista, Fla. — AP photos



Landscaping consisting of real Earth plant species mixed with sculpted Pandora artificial flora is surrounded by ponds and gentle waterfalls at the Pandora-World of Avatar land attraction in Disney's Animal Kingdom theme park at Walt Disney World.

Dr Beach names Florida's Siesta Beach best beach in US

'I wish they would turn car ferries to pedestrian ferries'



This undated photo provided by the Hawaii Tourism Authority shows a view of the Kapalua coastline in Maui, Hawaii. — AP photos

The sand on Siesta Beach on Florida's Gulf Coast is as fine as powdered sugar, a pure, sparkling white and soft as a kitten's fur - all because it's comprised of 99 percent pure crushed quartz. For that reason, and many others, it was selected this year as the best beach in America by a professor who's made a career ranking and studying beaches around the United States. "The sand is outstanding," said Stephen Leatherman, aka Dr. Beach, a professor at Miami's Florida International University. "Every time I go there, I've got to take a bag home with me. It's almost sacrilegious to walk on it with shoes on."

Other beaches that made the list this year, in order of ranking, are: Kapalua Bay Beach in Maui, Hawaii; Ocracoke Lifeguarded Beach on



This undated photo provided by VisitNC.com shows a boy on the beach at Ocracoke on the Outer Banks of North Carolina.

the Outer Banks of North Carolina; Grayton Beach State Park on the Florida Panhandle; Coopers Beach in Southampton, New York; Coast Guard Beach on Cape Cod in Massachusetts; Caladesi Island State Park in Dunedin/Clearwater, Florida; Hapuna Beach State Park, Big Island, Hawaii; Coronado Beach in San Diego, California; and Beachwalker Park on Kiawah Island, South Carolina.

On a recent workday, Siesta Beach was packed with people, even though it wasn't particularly sunny. The turquoise water was still gorgeous, the sand still fine. The beach is about 200-300 feet (60-90 meters) wide in some places, which means people can stretch out and not feel crowded.



This undated photo provided by Kirk Lee Aeder shows Hapuna Beach in Hawaii.



This undated photo provided by Visit Florida shows Caladesi Island State Park in Dunedin, Florida.



This undated photo provided by the Cape Cod Chamber of Commerce shows Coast Guard Beach on Cape Cod in Massachusetts.

The beach was last year's runner up and one of three in Florida on this year's top 10 list. "It's nice and clean, that's what I look for," said Jamie Gaskin, a 59-year-old retiree from Lakeland, Florida, who was scoping out the beach for a family Memorial Day party. She especially liked the two-story pavilion, which boasts a snack bar and restrooms. It's only two years old and even offers sweet crepes for breakfast and tapas dishes in the early evening.



File photo, a child chases a sea gull on Coronado Beach in Coronado, Calif.

"There's plenty of tables to barbecue and to hang out. And the restrooms were nice and clean. I'd definitely recommend this," she said. Siesta Beach is on a barrier island in the Gulf of Mexico, and is located just southwest of downtown Sarasota. The water is placid on most days - Leatherman says you can measure the waves "in inches" - and is shallow and safe for swimming, with no sharp drop-offs. Added bonuses include lots of parking, a trolley service to and from the island's adorable downtown area and plenty of lifeguards. The beach also has natural dunes, which is a bit rare for Florida, and the fine sand is excellent for building sand castles.

Tropical fish swimming all around

"I look for kind of a balance between nature and a developed environment," said Leatherman, who lives on the other side of the state, closer to Miami Beach. "Fourteen million people go to Miami Beach every year. There's just too many people there. I think a lot of people are looking for more of a get-



Photo shows Siesta Beach on Siesta Key in Sarasota, Fla.

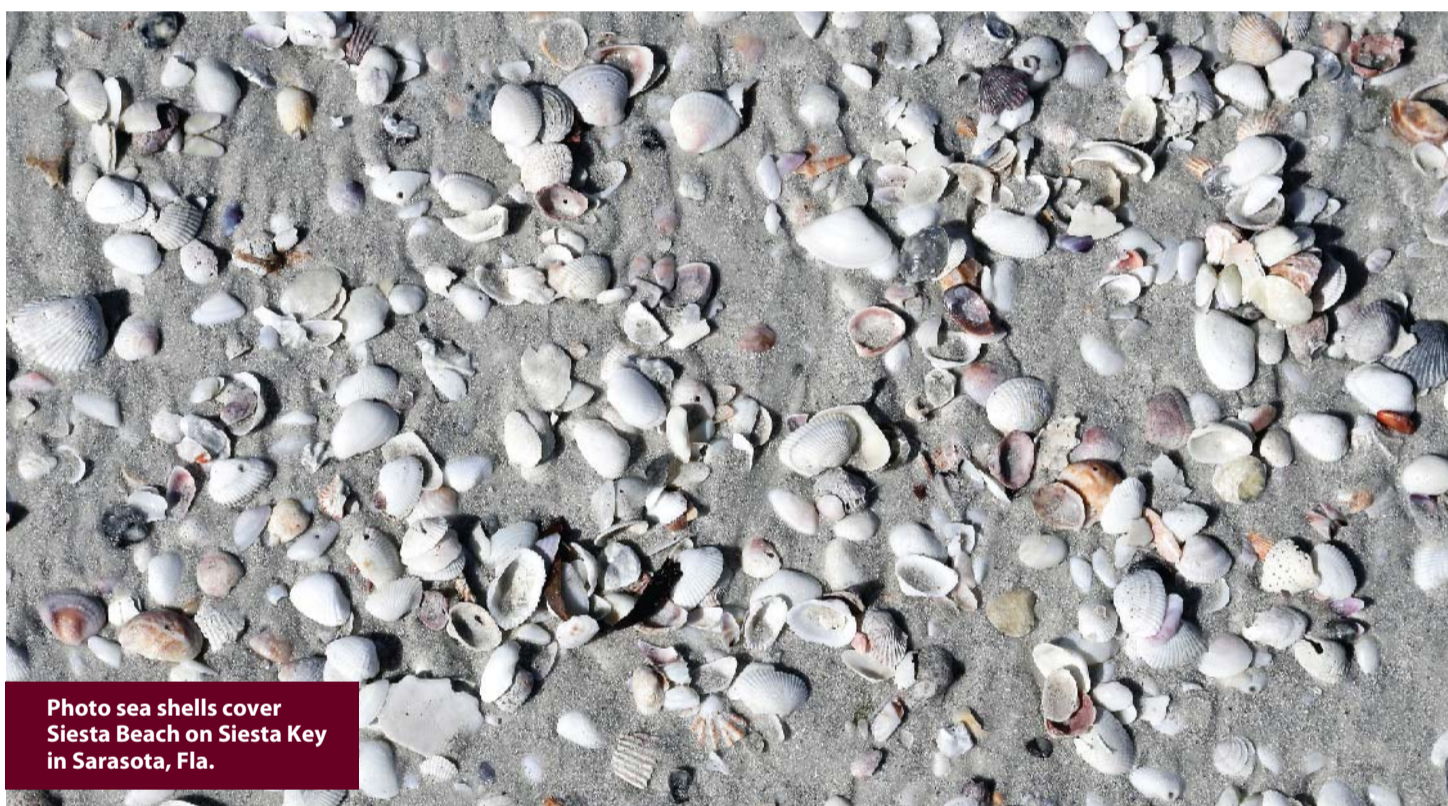


Photo sea shells cover Siesta Beach on Siesta Key in Sarasota, Fla.

away." Leatherman, who is director of the Laboratory for Coastal Research at Florida International University, uses about 50 criteria to assess and rank beaches across the country. In recent years, he has given extra points to beaches that prohibit smoking, saying cigarette butts are not only environmentally damaging, but can ruin the experience for beachgoers. Safety and environmental management are other major factors, he said. He's rated beaches since 1991. The Maui beach that

came in at No. 2 on the list, Kapalua Bay Beach, is smaller than Siesta Beach. It's crescent-shaped and flanked by palm trees. Unlike lots of Hawaii beaches, there aren't many waves at Kapalua, he said, making it perfect for safe swimming. "The coral reefs almost go right to the beach. There are tropical fish swimming all around."

The third beach on the list, Ocracoke, is unique in both history and location. Leatherman points out that it was once the

pirate Blackbeard's old haunt. And it's only accessible by a state ferry. "The only negative I have, it seems like too many cars," he said. "I wish they would turn car ferries to pedestrian ferries." Leatherman says he tries to select locations that are a bit off the beaten path, yet immensely rewarding once visitors arrive. Siesta Beach, he points out, is an outstanding place to watch the sun dip below the Gulf horizon - one more reason why it made the top of this year's list. — AP



Photo shows Siesta Beach on Siesta Key in Sarasota, Fla.



This undated photo provided by the Kiawah Island Golf Resort shows sunrise as seen from Beachwalker Park, Kiawah Island, South Carolina.

ADIDAS' SLAVERY BUSTER HOPES TECHNOLOGY CAN END SLAVERY

LONDON: Adidas executive Aditi Wanchoo is on a mission - to wipe out any slavery in the German sportswear company's supply chain, and she hopes giving workers the technology to speak out will help. With a background in corporate social responsibility at consultancy firm Accenture, Wanchoo was hired 18 months ago in a new position created by Adidas, one of the first companies to set up a role dedicated to fighting slavery.

In recent years modern-day slavery has increasingly come under the spotlight, putting regulatory and consumer pressure on companies to ensure their supply chains are free of forced labor, child labor and other forms of slavery. As apparel and footwear industries rely heavily on outsourcing, sportswear companies have faced growing scrutiny. Wanchoo said Adidas had been actively working on this issue since it was revealed at the 1998 World Cup that footballs were produced by child laborers in India and companies

realized they did not have control over their suppliers.

Governments are now trying to tackle the problem with new legislation, such as the UK's 2015 law requiring companies to disclose how they are ensuring supply chains are slavery free. "We have found that the UK Modern Slavery Act and recent legislative action in France and Australia have helped take the conversations to the boardroom," Wanchoo told the Thomson Reuters Foundation in an interview this week in London.

"My role was created to look at building relevant partnerships to continue our work on addressing potential modern slavery risks for our extended supply chain, i.e. our Tier 2 processing facilities and Tier 3 raw material sources." Slavery has emerged as a major global problem with the Global Slavery Index by the Walk Free Foundation estimating there are nearly 46 million slaves in the world.

The United Nations has a global goal

to eradicate forced labor and slavery by 2030 and end all child labor by 2025. Wanchoo said she was tackling the issue in various ways such as collaborating with other companies, NGOs and governments, and training suppliers about the risks of bonded labor and the impact of recruitment fees on workers.

Tech to give workers a voice

She said Adidas was also on a major drive to encourage workers to speak up and use this information to eradicate slavery and improve workers' conditions. The company already has "worker hotlines" giving 300,000 factory workers in China, Indonesia, Vietnam and Cambodia the opportunity to anonymously ask questions, make suggestions or express concerns via text messages and smart phone applications. But the company found this was not enough, and over the past year Adidas has run a pilot project in China with apps for workers to anonymously

report issues - data that is collected and then analyzed. Wanchoo said the aim is to introduce such a system in all of the company's 105 or so primary factories in the next five years and then look at cascading this down to second-tier suppliers. In Turkey these worker grievance systems had uncovered concerns about child labor and reports of illegal workers from Turkmenistan, while in Asia workers had complained about abuse by supervisors, wage issues and food, she said.

She added that efforts to hear directly from workers was paying off. Last year campaign organization KnowTheChain ranked Adidas top out of 20 firms, chosen because of their size, for its efforts to eliminate forced labor and human trafficking. "We want to make it as easy and anonymous as possible for workers," said Hong Kong-based Wanchoo, whose official title is senior manager - development partnerships, social and environmental affairs at Adidas. — Reuters

WEARABLE TECH LATEST MUST-HAVE FOR CHINA'S PROUD PET OWNERS

HONG KONG: Electronic device makers such as Hong Kong-listed SUGA and other start-ups are looking to cash-in on a boom in China in so-called pet wearables, like smart collars, leashes and feeders. Pet ownership, denounced as a decadent and bourgeois habit after the Communist Party took power in China more than 60 years ago, has become popular again among the country's growing middle class. Lia Yang Liu, 39, a lecturer in Chinese literature at a Beijing university, bought a GPS tracker that attaches to her dog's collar.

"The device really helped me once, when I loosened the collar and he just ran out of the park," said Liu. She is sceptical of other products though. "I think the commercials just exaggerate the effects. I don't believe devices can translate a pet's language for us." The electronic pet device market in China is still quite small but by some estimates is growing by a fifth or even a quarter every year, drawing developers and producers such as PetPace LLC, Mars Petcare's Whistle Labs Inc, i4C Innovations, Fitbark and DeLaval.

Alfred Ng, chief technology officer at Suga, estimates China is now 5 percent of a global market that US-based market intelligence firm Transparency Market Research estimates was worth \$1 billion at the end of 2016. Ng forecasts that China's share of the market will jump to more than 20 percent by 2024, by which time Transparency Market Research estimates the global market will be worth at least \$2.5 billion. SUGA produces wearable tech that monitors pets' health and food intake.

It is also eyeing a device to check pet emotions. Chen Xufeng, marketing manager of Guangzhou-based software developer Guangdong Lekong IOT Technology Co Ltd, expects the China market in pet electronic devices to grow 20 percent to 25 percent in the next two to three years. "There are more than 10 million pieces of wearable products for pets sold in the Chinese market every year," Chen said.

IDTechEx, an independent market research firm, said there are 300 manufacturers of wearable pet gadgets globally and almost half are based in China. It predicted the number will rise to 500 as the market expands. Ava Lui, 33, an IT professional in Hong Kong, has three cats and a dog and has fitted her pets with collars that can monitor their activity and food intake. "I just wish that they will never get sick, they won't get hurt. The less I take them to see vets the more time I can spend playing with them. That would be ideal," she said.—Reuters

ZUCKERBERG URGES HARVARD GRADS TO BUILD A WORLD OF 'PURPOSE'

NEW YORK: Mark Zuckerberg returned Thursday to Harvard, where he launched Facebook and then dropped out, telling graduates it's up to them to bring purpose to the world, fight inequality and strengthen the global community. "Change starts local. Even global changes start small - with people like us," the Facebook CEO said.

He shared stories about graduates such as David Razu Aznar, a former city leader who led the effort to legalize gay marriage in Mexico City, and Agnes Igoye, who grew up in conflict zones in Uganda and now trains law enforcement officers. "And this is my story too," Zuckerberg added. "A student in a dorm room, connecting one community at a time, and keeping at it until one day we can connect the whole world."



MASSACHUSETTS: Facebook CEO and Harvard dropout Mark Zuckerberg delivers the commencement address at Harvard University commencement exercises in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Such lofty talk now comes naturally to Zuckerberg, a 33-year-old billionaire who has committed to giving away nearly all of his wealth. In February, he sketched out an ambitious, if vague, vision for Facebook that committed the company to developing "social infrastructure" that would help build a "global community that works for all of us."

But it also strikes a sharp contrast with the criticism Facebook has taken recently - not so much for connecting the world (a big chunk of it, anyway) as for failing to anticipate how vulnerable that connectedness could be to those who abuse it.



MASSACHUSETTS: Facebook CEO and Harvard dropout Mark Zuckerberg, left, is presented with an honorary Doctor of Laws degree by Vice President and Secretary of Harvard University Marc Goodheart, right, during Harvard University commencement exercises in Cambridge, Massachusetts. — AP photos

Journey back

Zuckerberg, who like the graduates is a millennial, started Facebook in his dorm room in 2004. What began as a closed networking site for Harvard students is now a global communications force with nearly 2 billion members. Facebook's founding was the subject of a Hollywood movie, "The Social Network," in 2010. Facebook's effect has been profound. It has connected people who would have never met otherwise, letting them form supportive networks online and offline. And it has allowed people to communicate in developing countries even if they don't have a phone number or a smartphone. But it has also served to spread misinformation bordering on propaganda, hateful views and bullying, reflecting the worst parts of humanity back to us. In his commencement speech, in interviews and in his February manifesto, Zuckerberg is decidedly optimistic about all that. He's been saying he wants to make the world more open and connected for more than a decade now, and he doesn't relent.

Higher purpose

He told the graduates how, when

Facebook's investors and executives wanted him to sell the company early on, he resisted. "You see, my hope was never to build a company, but to make an impact," he said. But as a young CEO, he never explained this to his co-workers, and the subsequent fight "tore our company apart."

"I wondered if I was just wrong, an impostor, a 22 year-old kid who had no idea how the world worked," Zuckerberg said. "Now, years later, I understand that is how things work with no sense of higher purpose. It's up to us to create it so we can all keep moving forward together."

Later in the speech, Zuckerberg's voice cracked with emotion as he talked about a high school student he mentors who is living in the US illegally. When Zuckerberg asked him what he wants for his birthday, the student started talking about others he wanted to help, and asked for a book on social justice. "Here is a young guy who has every reason to be cynical," Zuckerberg said, his eyes welling with tears. "He wasn't sure if the country he calls home - the only one he's known - was going to deny him his dream of going to college. But he wasn't feeling sorry for himself. He wasn't even thinking of himself." — AP

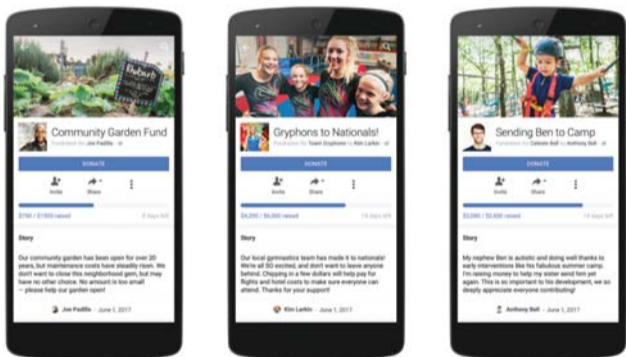
SAMSUNG INVESTIGATING GALAXY S8 'IRIS HACK'

SEOUL: Samsung Electronics is investigating claims by a German hacking group that it fooled the iris recognition system of the new flagship Galaxy S8 device, the firm said yesterday. The launch of the Galaxy S8 was a key step for the world's largest smartphone maker as it sought to move on from last year's humiliating withdrawal of the fire-prone Galaxy Note 7s, which hammered the firm's once-stellar reputation. But a video posted by the Chaos Computer Club (CCC), a German hacking group founded in 1981, shows the Galaxy S8 being unlocked using a printed photo of the owner's eye covered with a contact lens to replicate the curvature of a real eyeball. "A high-resolution picture from the internet is sufficient to capture an iris," CCC spokesman Dirk Engling said, adding: "Ironically, we got the best results with laser printers made by Samsung."

A Samsung spokeswoman said it was aware of the report and was investigating. The iris scanning technology was "developed through rigorous testing", the firm said in a statement as it sought to reassure customers. "If there is a potential vulnerability or the advent of a new method that challenges our efforts to ensure security at any time, we will respond as quickly as possible to resolve the issue." Samsung's hopes of competing against arch-rival Apple's iPhone had been pinned on the Galaxy S8 after last year's Note 7 disaster.

The recall debacle cost Samsung billions of dollars in lost profits and hammered its global credibility, forcing it to apologize to consumers and postpone the S8 launch. But since it was released in April it has received positive reviews and strong orders.

The CCC previously demonstrated a way to defeat Apple's TouchID fingerprint sensors using graphite powder, a laser etching machine and wood glue—just weeks after the first iPhone 5s hit the shelves. Traditional PIN protection was "a safer approach than using body features for authentication", Engling said. — AFP



CALIFORNIA: This photo provided by Facebook shows examples of fundraisers available on Facebook, displayed on a smartphone. — AP

NEED CASH? FACEBOOK EXPANDS PERSONAL FUNDRAISING TOOLS

NEW YORK: Facebook is expanding its fundraising tools that let users ask friends and strangers to give them money to help pay for education, medical or other expenses. The company has been testing the tool, which is similar to online fundraising services such as GoFundMe, since March. With the latest update unveiled Wednesday, it has added sports and community fundraisers as options.

It's also possible to raise money for medical expenses for pets, crisis relief, funerals, and a slew of other categories. To start a fundraiser, scroll down the "menu" icon on mobile until you get to the "fundraisers" category. On desktop, visit facebook.com/fundraisers. Facebook says it will review all fundraisers within 24 hours. There is a fee of 6.9 percent of the total amount raised plus 30 cents for payment processing, vetting and security. — AP



WUZHEN: Chinese Go player Ke Jie, left, looks at the board as a person makes a move on behalf of Google's artificial intelligence program, AlphaGo, during a game of Go at the Future of Go Summit in Wuzhen in eastern China's Zhejiang Province. — AP

COMPUTER WINS SECOND GAME AGAINST CHINESE GO CHAMPION

WUZHEN, China: A computer beat China's top player of go, one of the last games machines have yet to master, for a second time Thursday in a competition authorities limited the Chinese public's ability to see. Ke Jie lost despite playing what Google's AlphaGo indicated was the best game any opponent has played against it, said Demis Hassabis, founder of the company that developed the program. AlphaGo defeated Ke, a 19-year-old prodigy, in their first game Tuesday during a forum organized by Google on artificial intelligence in Wuzhen, a town west of Shanghai. They play a final game Saturday.

AlphaGo previously defeated European and South Korean champions, surprising players who had expected it to be at least a decade before computers could master the game. Internet users outside China could watch this week's games live but Chinese censors blocked most mainland web users from seeing the Google site carrying the feed. None of China's dozens of video sites carried the live broadcasts but a recording of Tuesday's game was available the following night on one popular site, Youku.com. State media reports on the games have been brief, possibly reflecting Beijing's antipathy toward Google, which closed its China-based search engine in 2010 following a dispute over censorship and computer hacking. Google says 60 million people in China watched online when AlphaGo played South Korea's go champion in March 2016. The official response to the match, a major event for the worlds of go and artificial intelligence, reflects the conflict between the ruling Communist Party's technology ambitions and its insistence on controlling what its public can see, hear and read.

The government encourages internet use for business and education but tries to block access to material considered subversive. The possible reason for suppressing coverage while allowing Google to organize the event was unclear. Censorship orders to Chinese media are officially secret and government officials refuse to confirm whether online material

is blocked. On Thursday, AlphaGo "thought that Ke Jie played perfectly" for the first 50 moves, Hassabis said at a news conference.

"For the first roughly 100 moves, it is the closest game we have ever seen anyone play against the master version of AlphaGo," he said. Ke said the computer made unexpected moves after playing more methodically on Tuesday. "From the perspective of human beings, it stretched a little bit and I was surprised at some points," he said. "I also thought that I was very close to winning the match in the middle," Ke said. "I could feel my heart thumping. But maybe because I was too excited, I did some wrong or stupid moves. I guess that's the biggest weak point of human beings."

Go players take turns putting white or black stones on a rectangular grid with 361 intersections, trying to capture territory

and each other's pieces by surrounding them. The game is considered more difficult than chess for machines to master because the near-infinite number of possible positions requires intuition and flexibility. This week's games are taking place in a hall where Chinese leaders hold the annual World Internet Conference, an event attended by global internet companies.

China has the world's biggest population of internet users, with some 730 million people online at the end of last year, according to government data. Censors block access to social media and video-sharing websites such as Facebook and YouTube. Internet companies are required to employ teams of censors to watch social media and remove banned material. Web surfers can get around online filters using virtual private networks, but Beijing has cracked down on use of those. — AP

GOOGLE TO COOPERATE IN REMOVAL OF TOXIC CONTENT

HANOI: Google Inc's parent firm, Alphabet, will work with Vietnam's communist government to stamp out "toxic" and illegal information on its platform, the Southeast Asian nation said yesterday. Vietnam tolerates little dissent and human rights groups and western countries have criticized its arrests of anti-government bloggers. In February, Vietnam complained about "toxic" anti-government and offensive content on Facebook and Google's YouTube application, pressuring domestic firms to withhold advertising until the social media firms found a solution.

Alphabet made the assurance during a meeting of Chairman Eric Schmidt and Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc in Hanoi on Friday, the government said on its website. "Mr Eric Schmidt said (he) will tightly cooperate with Vietnam to remove toxic information violating Vietnamese laws and will consider opening a representative office in the country," it said in a statement. Google said it had no

immediate plan for an office in Vietnam, however. "We have clear policies for removal requests from governments around the world, and those policies have not changed," spokesman Taj Meadows said in an email. "We rely on governments to notify us of content that they believe is illegal through official processes, and where appropriate, will restrict it after a thorough review." Besides meeting the prime minister, Schmidt met Vietnamese people engaged in fields ranging from technology to healthcare and art, including singer and activist Mai Khoi.

"I told Eric about Vietnam's internet censorship issue and he said he knew about it and would try to improve internet freedom here in a delicate way," Khoi told Reuters. Vietnam makes up a very small part of the business operations of companies such as Facebook and Google, but is one of Asia's fastest growing economies and a hot investment target for global consumer brands. — Reuters

SATURDAY, MAY 27, 2017



00:45 Bondi Vet
01:40 Wildest Africa
02:35 Tanked
03:25 Wildest Islands
04:15 Cats 101
05:02 River Monsters (Best Of Series 1-5)
05:49 Wildest Africa
06:36 Going Ape
07:00 Going Ape
07:25 Animal Cops Houston
08:15 Dog Rescuers
09:10 From WAGs To Riches
10:05 Speed Of Life
11:00 Wild Ones
11:25 Wild Ones
11:55 Bondi Vet
12:50 Dogs/Cats/Pets 101
13:45 Cats 101
14:40 Cats 101
15:35 Cats 101
16:30 Cats 101
17:25 Dogs/Cats/Pets 101
18:20 Lone Star Law
19:15 Wildest Africa
20:10 Dr. Jeff: Rocky Mountain Vet
21:05 Pit Bulls & Parolees
22:00 Lone Star Law
22:55 Tanked
23:50 Tanked



00:30 How Do They Do It?
00:55 Food Factory
01:20 Mythbusters
02:10 The Big Brain Theory
03:00 What Could Possibly Go Wrong?
03:48 Mythbusters
04:36 How Do They Do It?
05:00 Food Factory
05:24 Mythbusters
06:12 The Big Brain Theory
07:00 How Do They Do It?
07:26 Food Factory
09:26 How Do They Do It?
09:50 How Do They Do It?
10:14 How Do They Do It?
10:38 How Do They Do It?
11:02 How Do They Do It?
11:26 The Big Brain Theory
15:26 Mythbusters
16:14 Mythbusters
17:02 Mythbusters
17:50 Mythbusters
18:40 Mythbusters
19:30 How The Universe Works
20:20 Strangest Weather On Earth
21:10 How Things Work
22:00 Street Science
22:25 Street Science

00:50 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
01:15 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
01:40 Hank Zipzer
02:05 Binny And The Ghost
02:30 Binny And The Ghost
02:55 Hank Zipzer
03:15 The Hive
03:20 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
03:45 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
04:10 Hank Zipzer
04:35 Binny And The Ghost
05:00 Binny And The Ghost
05:25 Hank Zipzer
05:45 The Hive
05:50 The 7D
06:00 Jessie
06:25 Jessie
06:50 Tsum Tsum Shorts
06:55 Austin & Ally
07:20 Rolling With The Ronks And Cat Noir
07:45 The Zhuzhus
08:10 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug
08:35 Elena Of Avalor
09:00 Stuck In The Middle
09:25 Best Friends Whenever
09:50 Bunk'd
10:15 Bizaardvark
10:40 Princess Diaries
12:40 Descendants Wicked World
12:45 Liv And Maddie
13:10 Liv And Maddie
13:35 Liv And Maddie
14:00 Liv And Maddie
14:25 Liv And Maddie
14:50 Jessie
15:15 Austin & Ally
15:40 Austin & Ally
16:05 Descendants Wicked World
16:10 Elena Of Avalor
16:35 Liv And Maddie
17:00 Girl Meets World

17:25 Double Teamed
19:00 Star Darlings
19:05 Stuck In The Middle
19:30 Bizaardvark
19:55 Bunk'd
20:20 Elena Of Avalor
20:45 Disney The Lodge
21:10 Girl Meets World
21:35 That's So Raven
22:00 Shake It Up



00:00 Henry Hugglemonster
00:15 Calimero
00:30 Art Attack
00:55 Zou
01:05 Loopdidoo
01:20 Henry Hugglemonster
01:35 Calimero
01:50 Zou
02:05 Art Attack
02:30 The Hive
02:40 Loopdidoo
02:55 Henry Hugglemonster
03:10 Art Attack
03:35 Loopdidoo
03:50 Calimero
04:05 Art Attack
04:30 Henry Hugglemonster
04:45 Zou
05:00 Art Attack
05:30 Henry Hugglemonster
05:45 Loopdidoo
06:00 Zou
06:15 Calimero
06:30 Loopdidoo
06:45 Henry Hugglemonster
07:00 My Friends Tigger & Pooh
07:30 Goldie & Bear
08:00 Mickey And The Roadster Racers
08:30 Doc McStuffins

09:00 Jake And The Never Land Pirates
09:30 Sofia The First
10:00 The Lion Guard
10:30 Mickey And The Roadster Racers
11:00 PJ Masks
11:25 Goldie & Bear
11:55 My Friends Tigger & Pooh
12:20 The Lion Guard
12:50 Sofia The First
13:20 Sofia The First
13:45 Sofia The First
14:10 Sofia The First
14:40 Mickey And The Roadster Racers
15:05 PJ Masks
15:35 The Lion Guard
16:05 Miles From Tomorrow
16:35 Sofia The First
17:05 Sofia The First
17:35 Doc McStuffins
18:05 Jake And The Never Land Pirates
18:35 Sofia The First
19:05 Goldie & Bear
19:35 Goldie & Bear
20:05 Sofia The First
20:35 Mickey And The Roadster Racers
21:00 Goldie & Bear
21:25 Jake And The Never Land Pirates
21:50 Minnie's Bow-Toons
22:00 Jake And The Never Land Pirates

12:25 Hollywood Medium With Tyler Henry
13:15 E! News
13:45 Celebrity Style Story
14:15 E! News: Daily Pop
15:10 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
16:10 Live From The Red Carpet
18:00 Fashion Police
19:00 E! News
20:00 Second Wives Club
21:00 Second Wives Club
22:00 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
23:00 E! News



00:00 America: The Story Of The U.S.
01:00 Cities Of The Underworld
02:00 America's Book Of Secrets
02:50 Ancient Aliens
03:40 Pirate Treasure Of The Knights Templar
04:30 The Universe
05:20 America: The Story Of The U.S.
06:10 The Universe
07:00 Cities Of The Underworld
08:00 America's Book Of Secrets
09:00 Ancient Aliens
10:00 Ancient Aliens: The Ultimate Evidence
11:00 The Universe
12:00 America: The Story Of The U.S.
13:00 Cities Of The Underworld
14:00 America's Book Of Secrets
15:00 Ancient Aliens
16:00 Ancient Aliens: The Ultimate Evidence
17:00 The Universe
18:00 Million Dollar Genius
22:00 Million Dollar Genius
23:00 Million Dollar Genius



06:00 Supa Strikas
06:25 Disney11
06:50 Marvel's Guardians Of The Galaxy
07:15 Gravity Falls
07:40 Walk The Prank
08:05 Two More Eggs
08:10 K.C. Undercover
08:35 Milo Murphy's Law
09:00 Supa Strikas
09:25 Walk The Prank
09:50 Gamer's Guide To Pretty Much Everything
10:20 K.C. Undercover
10:45 Star vs The Forces Of Evil
11:10 Lab Rats Elite Force
11:35 Mech-X4
12:00 Bedtime Stories
13:30 Star vs The Forces Of Evil
13:45 Gamer's Guide To Pretty Much Everything
14:10 Disney Mickey Mouse
14:15 Milo Murphy's Law
14:40 K.C. Undercover
15:05 Walk The Prank
15:30 Atomic Puppet
15:55 Lab Rats
16:25 Mech-X4
16:50 K.C. Undercover
17:15 Gamer's Guide To Pretty Much Everything
17:40 Mighty Med
18:10 Star Wars Rebels
18:35 Bolt
20:05 Danger Mouse
20:20 Star vs The Forces Of Evil
20:45 Mighty Med
21:10 Star Wars Rebels
21:35 Disney Mickey Mouse
21:40 Disney Mickey Mouse
21:45 Marvel's Guardians Of The Galaxy
22:10 Ultimate Spider-Man
22:35 Boyster



00:20 Search For The Lost Giants
01:10 Lost In Transmission
02:00 Fifth Gear
02:50 Storage Wars
03:15 Pawn Stars South Africa
05:00 Lost In Transmission
06:00 Storage Wars
06:25 Storage Wars
06:50 Pawn Stars South Africa
07:15 Pawn Stars South Africa
07:40 American Pickers
08:30 American Pickers
09:20 Lost In Transmission
10:10 Big Easy Motors
10:35 Big Easy Motors
11:00 Shipping Wars
11:25 Shipping Wars
11:50 Fifth Gear
12:40 Ax Men
13:30 Lost Worlds
14:20 101 People Who Made The 20th Century
15:10 American Pickers
16:00 Gold Hunters: Legend Of The Superstition...
16:50 Big Easy Motors
17:15 Big Easy Motors
17:40 American Restoration
18:30 Shipping Wars
18:55 Shipping Wars
19:20 American Pickers
20:10 Forged In Fire
21:00 Alone
21:50 Mummies Alive
22:40 Pirate Treasure Of The Knights Templar
23:30 Alone



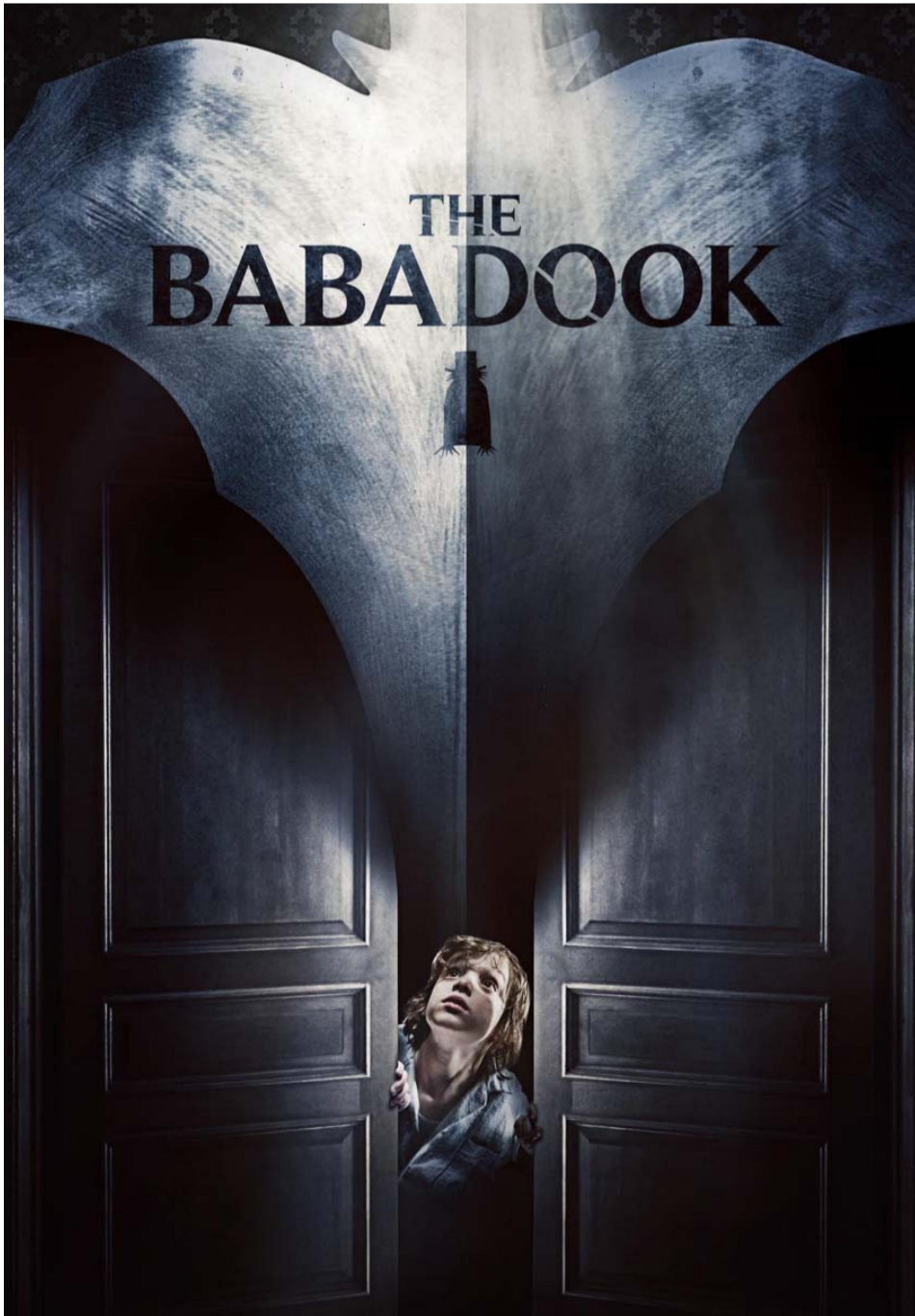
00:00 Monster In My Family
01:00 My Haunted House
02:00 Killer Kids
03:00 Deadly Wives
04:00 Monster In My Family
05:00 My Haunted House
06:00 My Crazy Ex
07:00 The First 48
08:00 Private Crimes
08:30 Private Crimes
09:00 Nightmare In Suburbia
10:00 Nightmare In Suburbia
11:00 Crimes That Shook Britain
12:00 Crimes That Shook Britain
13:00 The First 48
14:00 The First 48
15:00 Crime Stories
16:00 Crime Stories
17:00 Evil Up Close
18:00 Evil Up Close
19:00 Evil Up Close
20:00 The First 48
21:00 Homicide Hunter
22:00 Babies Behind Bars
23:00 Escaping Polygamy



00:00 Binny And The Ghost
00:25 Hank Zipzer
00:45 The Hive



00:30 Invent It Rich
01:20 Now That's Funny
02:10 Don't Blink
02:35 Don't Blink
03:00 Kids Do The Craziest Things
03:25 Kids Do The Craziest Things
03:50 Ultimate Survival
04:40 How It's Made
05:05 How It's Made
05:30 Storm Chasers
06:20 Mythbusters
07:00 Kenny The Shark
07:25 Kenny The Shark
07:50 Awesome Adventures
08:15 Awesome Adventures
08:40 Bad Dog
09:30 K9 Cops
10:20 K9 Cops
11:10 K9 Cops
12:00 K9 Cops
12:50 Mythbusters
13:40 Mythbusters
14:30 Mythbusters
15:20 Mythbusters
16:10 Mythbusters
17:00 Invent It Rich
17:50 Dogs: The Untold Story
18:40 Now That's Funny
19:30 React To That
19:55 React To That
20:20 Guinness World Records Smashed UK
21:10 The Carbonaro Effect
21:35 The Carbonaro Effect
22:00 Kids Do The Craziest Things
22:25 Kids Do The Craziest Things
22:50 Kids Do The Craziest Things
23:15 Kids Do The Craziest Things



THE BABADOOK ON OSN MOVIES HD



00:05 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
00:55 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
01:50 E! News
02:50 Celebrity Style Story
03:20 Celebrity Style Story
03:50 Mariah's World
04:40 Mariah's World
05:30 Celebrity Style Story
06:00 EJ NYC
06:55 E! News
07:10 EJ NYC
08:10 E! News: Daily Pop
09:05 Fashion Police
09:55 Second Wives Club
10:45 Hollywood Medium With Tyler Henry
11:35 Hollywood Medium With Tyler Henry



00:15 Charlie Luxton's Homes By The Sea
01:10 Andy And Ben Eat Australia
01:40 Andy And Ben Eat Australia
02:05 Carnival Eats
02:35 My Restaurant In India
03:00 Chef On The Road
03:55 Glamour Puds
04:25 Croatia's Finest
04:50 Around The World In 80 Dishes
05:45 Lyndey Milan - Taste Of Australia
06:15 Around The World In 80 Dishes

SATURDAY, MAY 27, 2017

- 07:10 Rustic Adventures Italy
- 08:05 Eat: The Story Of Food
- 09:00 Croatia's Finest
- 09:25 Croatia's Finest
- 09:55 Chasing The Sun
- 10:20 Andy And Ben Eat Australia
- 10:50 Lyndey Milan - Taste Of Australia
- 11:15 Sara's Australia Unveiled
- 11:45 What's For Sale?
- 12:10 What's For Sale?
- 12:40 Andy And Ben Eat Australia
- 13:05 Andy And Ben Eat Australia
- 13:35 Carnival Eats
- 14:00 My Restaurant In India
- 14:30 Straight To The Source: Korean Food
- 14:55 Top Chef Top Table: Seoul
- 15:25 Glamour Puds
- 15:50 Croatia's Finest
- 16:45 Tripping Out With Alie & Georgia
- 17:15 Home Strange Home
- 18:10 Lyndey Milan - Taste Of Australia
- 18:35 Sara's Australia Unveiled
- 19:05 Top Chef Top Table: Seoul
- 19:30 Glamour Puds
- 20:00 Croatia's Finest
- 21:00 Home Strange Home
- 22:00 Tripping Out With Alie & Georgia
- 22:25 Lyndey Milan - Taste Of Australia



STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS ON OSN MOVIES ACTION HD

- 00:10 Cash Trapped
- 01:00 Emmerdale
- 03:25 Coronation Street
- 03:50 Coronation Street
- 04:15 Coronation Street
- 04:40 Coronation Street
- 05:05 Coronation Street
- 05:30 Jekyll And Hyde
- 06:30 Shoot The Messenger
- 07:30 Paul O'Grady's Animal Orphans
- 08:25 Who's Doing The Dishes?
- 09:20 Broadchurch
- 10:15 Broadchurch
- 11:10 Tutankhamun
- 12:10 Coach Trip
- 15:00 Surprise Surprise
- 15:55 Jekyll And Hyde
- 16:50 Shoot The Messenger
- 17:45 Tutankhamun
- 18:45 Tina & Bobby
- 19:45 Broadchurch
- 20:40 Broadchurch
- 21:30 Paul O'Grady's Animal Orphans
- 22:20 5 Star Family Reunion
- 23:15 Coronation Street
- 23:40 Coronation Street



- 00:20 Big Cat Games
- 01:10 Wild Indochina
- 02:00 Return Of The Spider Monkeys
- 02:50 Savage Kingdom
- 03:45 Animal Underworld
- 04:40 Wild Survivor
- 05:35 Europe's Last Wilderness
- 06:30 Monster Fish
- 07:25 Monster Fish
- 08:20 Extreme Animal Babies
- 09:15 Safari Brothers
- 10:10 Secret Life Of Predators
- 11:05 World's Deadliest Animals
- 12:00 Shark Men
- 12:55 Gorilla Murders
- 13:50 Savage Kingdom
- 14:45 Animal Underworld
- 15:40 Wild Survivor
- 16:35 Animal Fight Club 4.5
- 17:30 Hunter Hunted
- 18:25 Ultimate Rivals: Cat V. Dog
- 19:20 Animal Underworld
- 20:10 Wild Survivor
- 21:00 Animal Fight Club 4.5
- 21:50 Hunter Hunted
- 22:40 Ultimate Rivals: Cat V. Dog
- 23:30 Shark Men



- 00:30 Happy Endings
- 01:00 Happy Endings
- 01:30 Angie Tribeca
- 02:00 Angie Tribeca

- 02:30 2 Broke Girls
- 03:00 Malcolm In The Middle
- 03:30 Malcolm In The Middle
- 04:00 Mr. Sunshine
- 04:30 The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon
- 05:30 Fresh Off The Boat
- 06:00 Til Death
- 06:30 Late Night With Seth Meyers
- 07:30 Last Man Standing
- 08:00 Mr. Sunshine
- 08:30 Malcolm In The Middle
- 09:00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show
- 10:00 Late Night With Seth Meyers
- 11:00 The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon
- 12:00 Til Death
- 12:30 Mr. Sunshine
- 13:00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show
- 14:00 Malcolm In The Middle
- 14:30 Last Man Standing
- 15:00 Fresh Off The Boat
- 15:30 Happy Endings
- 16:00 Happy Endings
- 16:30 Til Death
- 17:00 The Ellen DeGeneres Show
- 18:00 Wrecked
- 18:30 Life In Pieces
- 19:00 Playing House
- 19:30 Playing House
- 20:00 The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon
- 21:00 Happy Endings
- 21:30 Happy Endings
- 22:00 Angie Tribeca
- 22:30 Angie Tribeca
- 23:00 2 Broke Girls
- 23:30 Late Night With Seth Meyers



- 00:00 The Night Shift
- 01:00 Emerald City
- 02:00 Eyewitness
- 03:00 Survivor: Game Changers
- 04:00 Chicago Med
- 05:00 Good Morning America
- 07:00 The Chew
- 08:00 The View
- 09:00 Lie To Me
- 10:00 Chicago Med
- 11:00 Once Upon A Time
- 12:00 The Chew
- 13:00 The View
- 14:00 Survivor: Game Changers
- 15:00 Live Good Morning America - Weekend
- 16:00 Lie To Me
- 17:00 Chicago Med
- 18:00 Once Upon A Time
- 19:00 The Night Shift
- 20:00 The Blacklist: Redemption
- 21:00 Game Of Silence
- 22:00 Stan Lee's Lucky Man
- 23:00 Taken



- 01:00 Larceny
- 02:30 Hitting The Apex
- 05:00 Batman: Bad Blood
- 06:15 Star Wars: The Force Awakens
- 08:45 The Throwaways
- 10:30 Batman: Bad Blood
- 11:45 The World Is Not Enough
- 14:00 Star Wars: The Force Awakens
- 16:30 DCU: Justice League vs Teen Titans
- 18:00 Die Another Day
- 20:15 Seventh Son
- 22:00 Hard Target 2



- 01:30 The Hot Chick
- 03:15 Oscar
- 05:15 Father Of The Bride
- 07:00 National Security
- 08:30 Oscar
- 10:30 Father Of The Bride
- 12:15 National Security
- 13:45 Mr. Popper's Penguins
- 15:30 Father Of The Bride Part II
- 17:15 Norbit
- 19:00 Spy
- 21:15 Undercover Brother
- 22:45 A Short History Of Decay



- 00:30 Pirates Of The Caribbean: At World's End
- 03:15 Pirates Of The Caribbean: On Stranger Tides
- 05:45 Pirates Of The Caribbean: Curse Of The Black Pearl
- 08:15 Pirates Of The Caribbean 2: Dead Man's Chest
- 10:45 The Incredible Adventures Of Professor Branestawm
- 11:45 Treasure Planet
- 13:30 The Land Before Time: Journey Of The Brave
- 15:00 Alice In Wonderland
- 17:00 Toy Story 3
- 18:45 Peter Pan
- 20:45 Hannah Montana Movie
- 22:30 Alice In Wonderland



- 01:00 Stealing Cars
- 02:45 The Help
- 05:15 Walking On Sunshine

- 07:00 Manny
- 08:30 Jappeloup
- 10:45 Trash
- 12:45 The Help
- 15:15 Chariots Of Fire
- 17:15 Man In The Moon
- 19:00 Neil Young: Heart Of Gold
- 20:45 The Joy Luck Club
- 23:00 The Assassination Of Jesse James



- 00:00 The Babadook
- 01:45 Gulliver's Travels
- 03:45 The Invention Of Lying
- 06:00 Big
- 08:00 Rocky v
- 10:00 Amelia
- 12:00 X-Men: First Class
- 14:15 The Bucket List
- 16:00 Rocky Balboa
- 18:00 Dick Tracy
- 20:00 The Taking Of Pelham 123
- 22:00 The Woman In Black 2: Angel Of Death



- 01:00 Blue Elephant 2
- 02:45 Albert
- 04:15 Ghosthunters On Icy Trails
- 06:00 Mune
- 07:30 Lego: Scooby Doo Haunted Hollywood
- 09:00 Ploddy Police Car On The Case
- 10:30 Savva
- 12:15 Blue Elephant 2
- 14:00 Bonta
- 15:30 Ploddy Police Car On The Case
- 17:00 Cher Ami
- 18:45 Dixie And The Zombie Rebellion
- 20:30 Bonta
- 22:00 Lego: Scooby Doo Haunted Hollywood

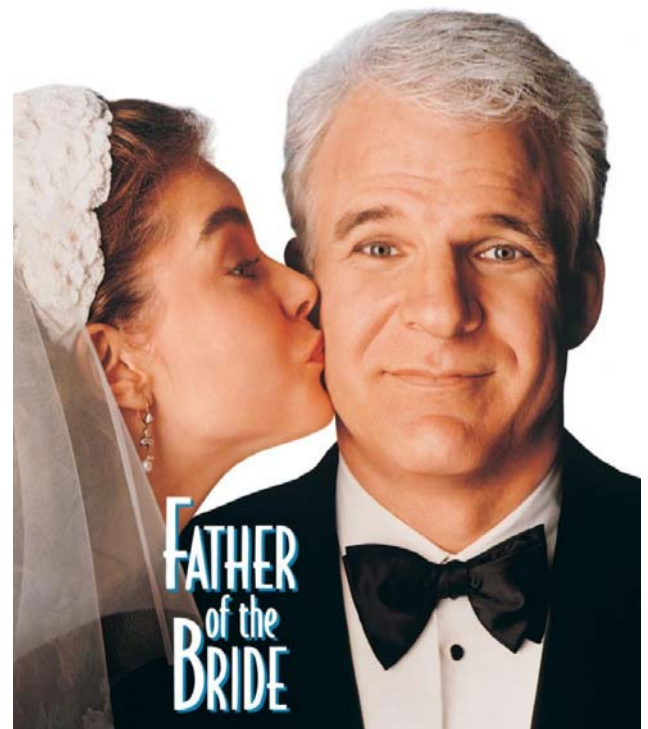


- 00:20 Tiny At 20
- 01:10 The Undateables
- 02:00 Married By Mum And Dad
- 02:50 Monsters Inside Me
- 03:35 Outdaughters: Busby Quints
- 04:20 Toddlers & Tiaras
- 05:10 Toddlers & Tiaras
- 06:00 Holiday Hijack
- 06:50 Holiday Hijack
- 07:40 Outdaughters: Busby Quints



- 00:01 Max & Ruby
- 00:24 Ben & Holly's Little Kingdom
- 00:45 The Day Henry Met
- 00:55 Blaze And The Monster Machines
- 01:17 Blaze And The Monster Machines
- 01:40 Zack & Quack
- 02:11 Team Umizoomi
- 02:34 Olive The Ostrich
- 02:43 Paw Patrol
- 03:43 Shimmer And Shine
- 04:06 Shimmer And Shine
- 04:29 Dora And Friends: Into The City!
- 05:15 Blaze And The Monster Machines
- 06:00 Rusty Rivets
- 06:13 Paw Patrol
- 06:36 Dora The Explorer
- 07:00 Zack & Quack
- 07:21 Dora And Friends: Into The City!
- 07:44 Blaze And The Monster Machines
- 08:07 Paw Patrol
- 08:30 Shimmer And Shine
- 08:53 Dora The Explorer
- 09:15 The Day Henry Met
- 09:22 Paw Patrol
- 09:45 Rusty Rivets
- 09:57 Bubble Guppies
- 10:20 Fresh Beat Band Of Spies
- 10:40 Zack & Quack
- 10:52 Team Umizoomi
- 11:15 Shimmer And Shine
- 11:38 Louie
- 11:45 Louie
- 11:53 Olive The Ostrich
- 12:03 Max & Ruby
- 12:26 Ben & Holly's Little Kingdom
- 12:47 The Day Henry Met
- 12:57 Blaze And The Monster Machines
- 13:19 Blaze And The Monster Machines
- 13:41 Zack & Quack
- 14:11 Team Umizoomi
- 14:33 Olive The Ostrich
- 14:43 Paw Patrol
- 15:43 Shimmer And Shine
- 16:30 Dora And Friends: Into The City!
- 17:16 Blaze And The Monster Machines
- 18:00 Rusty Rivets
- 18:13 Paw Patrol
- 18:37 Dora The Explorer
- 18:58 Zack & Quack
- 19:20 Dora And Friends
- 19:43 Blaze And The Monster Machines
- 20:05 Dora The Explorer
- 20:52 Dora The Explorer
- 21:14 The Day Henry Met
- 21:20 Paw Patrol
- 21:43 Rusty Rivets

STEVE MARTIN DIANE KEATON MARTIN SHORT



FATHER OF THE BRIDE ON OSN MOVIES COMEDY HD

DARTMOUTH AWARDS AUK FOUNDER SHEIKHA DANA AL-SABAH HONORARY DOCTORATE DEGREE



Sheikha Dana Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah, Founder and Chair of the Board of Trustees of the American University of Kuwait (AUK), will receive a Doctorate of Humane Letters from Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire, for founding Kuwait's first and only Liberal Arts University. Established in 2003 as an independent, private, equal opportunity, and coeducational institution, AUK offers a liberal arts education based on an American model, developed out of AUK's long-standing collaboration with Dartmouth.

Al-Sabah is the chairwoman of United Education Co. (UEC), Kuwait's leading company in the education sector. UEC consolidates seven K-12 schools with over 12,500 students. The United Education network includes some of the leading American, Indian, and Pakistani schools in Kuwait.

She is also the Chief Executive Officer of Al-Futooh Holding Co., the major stakeholder in Kuwait Project Co. (KIPCO), a multi-sector operating holding company with a diversified portfolio spanning the Gulf Cooperation Council countries and the wider Middle East and North Africa region.

Al-Sabah received a BA in English Literature from Kuwait University and studied at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana.

The other honorary degree recipients are:

Jake Tapper '91, Award-winning journalist and CNN news anchor

Frances Arnold, professor of chemical engineering, biochemistry, and bioengineering

Abbey D'Agostino '14, NCAA champion runner and Olympic athlete

Bob '57 and Dottie King, philanthropists

Jim Sinegal, co-founder of Costco Wholesale Corp.

Anna Deavere Smith, actress, playwright, and teacher

C Fordham von Reyn '67, professor and director of DarDar International Programs

Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire, an "Ivy League" member, is the international partner institution to the American University of Kuwait (AUK). Dartmouth and AUK have worked closely together since 2003, when the two institutions



signed a Memorandum of Understanding that facilitated a series of advisory, consultative, and cooperative projects. Dale F. Eickelman, Relationship Coordinator of the American University of Kuwait-Dartmouth College Program, and Ralph and Richard Lazarus Professor of Anthropology and Human Relations Emeritus, has worked with AUK since 2003.

He said: "We share with Sheikha Dana the excitement of creating a liberal arts university. She recognizes how universities old and new have continuously to adapt to new challenges. Both Dartmouth and AUK learn from one another." Dartmouth College was founded in 1769 and offers a broad-based undergraduate education, as well as advanced degrees in the arts and sciences, medicine, engineering, and business administration. Dartmouth has been accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) since 1929.

Dartmouth

KUWAIT FOOTBALL LEGENDS WINS EXPAT LEAGUE CUP TOURNAMENT

The Kuwait Expat League Cup Tournament was held at the PSA Everton ground in Bayan. Kuwait Football Legends were crowned as the winners. Congratulations to all the participating teams and thanks to sponsors Jack Wills.





AMBASSADOR OF ETHIOPIA CELEBRATES NATIONAL DAY

The Ambassador of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Abdelaziz Ahmed Adem hosted a reception on the occasion of national day at Crowne Plaza Hotel over the weekend. Higher officials, diplomats, Ethiopian community members and media persons attended the event. — Photos by Joseph Shagra

FUTURE EYE THEATRE PRESENTS 'BLACK GOLD'

Future Eye Theatre presented its latest play named "Black Gold" on April 26, 2017 at the premises of Indian Community School, Khaitan. The same had turned to be epitome of a new Theatre concept especially in Middle East. The formal function was being inaugurated by Mr Gangadhar (Principal - ICSK, Khaitan) followed by a warm welcome speech from Future Eye Theatre's Secretary Mr Vattiyoorkavu Krishna Kumar.

Further, Mr Praveen Aduthila had delivered the felicitation speech and the New LOGO of Future Eye Theatre was published by Mr Mohanakumar Nair. Well-wishers of this theatre community, Ms Seetharaj, Mr Dharmaraj Madapally and Mr Babu Chackola also made felicitation speeches during the function. It was the privilege of the group's emeritus writer-director and Vice President of Future Eye Theatre Mr Shemej Kumar K K to introduce the concept of 'Motion Theatre' to the audience gathered wherein he also tried explaining the story plot and pursuit of the play "Black Gold".

He opined that this concept is very novel among the entire Middle East theatre groups wherein Future Eye Theatre had taken much challenges conceptually and technically in making the play a reality. Team members of Future Eye Theatre strongly aspire that this play would mark a remarkable position of innovation for its followers to accomplish in the days to come. There was a remarkable



benchmark differences being executed in arenas pertaining to costumes, make-up, stage arrangements, background music etc.

At a point of time during the play, a live entry of a bike to the stage had given the audiences a different experience in terms of the suspense it created on the play's story plot. The play portrays the story of a group of workers in the oil exploration field inculcating their needs, dreams, realities etc. The play opens with the plot of a group of workers starting their day's mission from their camp; who further moves to the main site in a staff commutation bus.

The highlight of this part of the play is that even the audiences travel in live along with these characters on the bus wherein they are getting more compassionate on the story plot these characters are portraying. This journey ends at the work site where these characters are going to explore their 'black gold'. The art director of the play had also made the exploration site look perfectly natural with laden



reminiscent of old military vehicles and buildings. The play was being carried out at a different location of the ICSK school premises which itself was a technically challenging, yet really amazing innovation.

The script of the play also adapted the legendary "Palazhy Madhanam" from the Epic Mahabharata to evolve the fictions conceptualities of the "Exploration of Black Gold" and the prosperity it brings forth for the characters out there. This part of the play was superbly supported by the light & smoke show giving a very amazing experience to the audience around. After conclusion of the play, the team had also arranged for an interactive session with the audience - An Open Forum Discussion which had also witnessed a lot of

appreciation and constructive criticisms on the play.

Before winding up of the day, the entire crew of 35 personnel who worked for making this happen, were being introduced to the audience including the leading contributors like Mr Dharmaraj Madapally and Mr Deepak L B Nair (Script Writers); Mr Satheesh Varjakshan & Biju Velloor (Associate Directors); the main cast - Mr. Govind Santha, Mr Deepu Vellimon, Mr Jithesh Nair, Mr Aneeshkumar Adoor, Mrs Mini Satheesh and Mr Vattiyoorkavu Krishna Kumar. The conclusion was remarked with a great applause and appreciation from the group of audience who had gathered out there to witness the first of its kind motion theatre experience in Kuwait.

US HONEYBEE WINTER LOSSES IMPROVE FROM HORRIBLE TO BAD

WASHINGTON: There's a glimmer of hope for America's ailing honeybees as winter losses were the lowest in more than a decade, according to a US survey of beekeepers released Thursday. Beekeepers lost 21 percent of their colonies over last winter, the annual Bee Informed Partnership survey found. That's the lowest winter loss level since the survey started in 2006 and an improvement from nearly 27 percent the winter before.

The US government has set a goal of keeping losses under 15 percent in the winter. "It's good news in that the numbers are down, but it's certainly not a good picture," said survey director Dennis vanEngelsdorp. "It's gone from horrible to bad." Reduction in varroa mites, a lethal parasite, is likely the main cause of the improvement, said vanEngelsdorp, a University of Maryland entomologist. He credited the reduction in the parasite to a new product to fight the mite and better weather for pesticide use.

The 10-year average for winter losses is 28.4 percent. "We would of course all love it if the trend con-

tinues, but there are so many factors playing a role in colony health," said bee expert Elina Lastro Nino at the University of California Davis, who wasn't part of the survey. "I am glad to see this, but wouldn't celebrate too much yet." For more than a decade, bees and other pollinators have been rapidly declining with scientists blaming a mix of parasites, disease, pesticides and poor nutrition.

While usually hive losses are worst in the winter, they occur year round. The survey found yearly losses also down, but not quite to record levels. About one third of the honey bee colonies that were around in April 2016 were dead a year later, the survey found. That's better than the year before when the annual loss rate was more than 40 percent.

The survey, originally started by the US government and now run by a nonprofit, is based on information from nearly 5,000 beekeepers who manage more than 360,000 colonies. University of Montana's Jerry Bromenshenk said the study gives too much weight to backyard beekeepers rather than commercial beekeepers. —AP



VIRGINIA: In this photo, honeybees work in a hive located in an apple grove at Hartland Orchard, a family farm near the Blue Ridge Mountains in Markham, Virginia. — AP

NASA'S JUNO SPOTS CHAOTIC WEATHER OVER JUPITER'S POLES

MONSTROUS CYCLONES CHURN OVER JUPITER

CAPE CANAVERAL: Monstrous cyclones are churning over Jupiter's poles, until now a largely unexplored region that is more turbulent than scientists expected. NASA's Juno spacecraft spotted the chaotic weather at the top and bottom of Jupiter once it began skimming the cloud tops last year, surprising researchers who assumed the giant gas planet would be relatively boring and uniform down low.

"What we're finding is anything but that is the truth. It's very different, very complex," Juno's chief scientist Scott Bolton of the Southwest Research Institute said Thursday. With dozens of cyclones hundreds of miles across - alongside unidentifiable weather systems stretching thousands of miles - the poles look nothing like Jupiter's equatorial region, instantly recognizable by its stripes and Great Red Spot, a raging hurricane-like storm.

"That's the Jupiter we've all known and grown to love," Bolton said. "And when you look from the pole, it looks totally different ... I don't think anybody would have guessed this is Jupiter." He calls these first major findings - published Thursday - "Earth-shattering. Or should I say, Jupiter-shattering." Turning counterclockwise in the northern hemisphere just like on Earth, the cyclones are clearly clustered near the poles. The diameters of some of these confirmed cyclones stretch up to 1,700 miles.

Even bigger, though shapeless weather systems are present in both polar regions. At the same time, the two poles don't really resemble each other, which is puzzling, according to Bolton. Scientists are eager to see, over time, whether these super cyclones are stable or dynamic. "Are they going to stay the same way for years and years like the Great Red Spot ... Of course, only time will tell," Bolton said. Just as intriguing will be how fast these super cyclones are moving.

Fuzzy core

Launched in 2011 and orbiting Jupiter since last summer, Juno is providing the



IN SPACE: This NASA image taken by the JunoCam imager on NASA's Juno spacecraft highlights a swirling storm just south of one of the white oval storms on Jupiter. — AFP

best close-up views ever of our solar system's largest planet, peering beneath the clouds for a true portrait. It's made five close passes over Jupiter so far for science collection, the most recent last week; they occur about every two months given Juno's extremely oblong orbit. The next one will be in July, with investigators targeting the Great Red Spot.

Juno is moving so fast during these chummy encounters that it takes only two hours to get from the north pole to the south. Besides polar cyclones, Juno has spotted white ice caps on Jupiter - frozen bits of ammonia and water. Bolton refers to them as Jovian snowfall - or maybe hail. Juno also has detected an overwhelming abundance of ammonia deep down in Jupiter's atmosphere, and a surprisingly strong magnetic field in places - roughly 10 times greater than Earth's.

It's also led scientists to believe Jupiter may have a "fuzzy" core - as Bolton puts it

- big but partially dissolved. Then there are the eerie sounds of plasma waves at Jupiter - "nature's music," according to Bolton. During the teleconference, he played two minutes of the spacecraft's recording from February, adjusted for the human ear and full of percussion sounds as well as high-pitched beeps and squeals, and even flute-like notes. Results were published in Science and Geophysical Research Letters.

Jupiter's poles appear dramatically different from neighboring Saturn's, according to the scientists, with nothing like the hexagon-shaped cloud system over Saturn's north pole. Researchers hope to compare Juno's observations with those of NASA's Cassini spacecraft, in its final months orbiting Saturn. Juno's findings are "really going to force us to rethink not only how Jupiter works, but how do we explore Saturn, Uranus and Neptune," Bolton said. —AP

AS SENEGAL'S COAST CRUMBLES, RESIDENTS MOVE TO SAFER GROUND

SAINT-LOUIS, Senegal: Cheikh Badiane, a weathered fisherman, looks out to sea from the edge of his neighborhood in the north Senegalese city of Saint-Louis. Behind him is a densely populated fishing quarter, where buildings rise haphazardly, and children and animals fill narrow sandy streets. Before him, the land ends abruptly and waves lap against the ruins of a concrete wall. Each year, a bit more of his hometown crumbles into the Atlantic Ocean.

"A French man told us once that there will be a time when this land won't exist," said Badiane, who lives in the working-class district of Guet Ndar. "Maybe in 30 years, maybe in 50. I don't know." What he knows is that the land he grew up on - a thin strip between the Senegal River and the ocean - is disappearing fast. Senegal's coastline is receding at an estimated average rate of 1 to 2 meters per year, driven by rising sea levels, rapid urbanization and illegal sand mining for construction.

Other countries in West Africa face similar problems. In vulnerable communities like Badiane's, some experts say the trend is irreversible, and the best option is for families to move before they lose their houses and belongings. "The people are trying to fight, but in reality the phenomenon has become very serious," said Abdou Sane, a former parliamentarian based in Dakar who has spearheaded efforts to reduce the threat of disasters. "It exceeds the means of the government, the means of communities," he added.

Disappearing dunes

Ten miles south of Saint-Louis, two villages have already been submerged. They are the casualties of a disastrous attempt to reduce flood risks by re-routing the river, which accelerated erosion. "We left the day the water came into our house," said Mba Thio Ndiaye, sitting outside with her children in the village of Mbambara, which houses a small community of the displaced.

When floodwaters swelled around Saint-Louis in 2003, the government dug an emergency channel from the river to the ocean, breaching the long peninsula and allowing the water to recede. But the peninsula's fragile sand dunes have continued to give way. Initially 4 meters across, the channel is now 6 kilometers wide and growing. Ndiaye's home village of Doun Baba Dieye, abandoned five years ago, was the first in its path.

The breach has exposed new parts of the mainland to waves, and is progressively poisoning arable farmland with saltwater. Experts say it gives a glimpse of what will eventually happen elsewhere, due to a combination of natural processes, human intervention and climate change. "No one helped us. We lost everything and started over with zero," Ndiaye said.

Experts have urged the government to relocate other communities before they face a similar fate. A UN-Habitat program in 2011 helped move about 60 families out of Guet Ndar to a settlement a short distance inland. "That's a way of being resilient," said Mateugue Diack, a professor of agronomy and disaster risk reduction at the nearby Gaston Berger University. But communication was lacking and people were reluctant to move, he said. The relocation effort fizzled out before it was completed. —Reuters

WATER LEVEL AND OPTIMISM RISE AT IDAHO FISHING CREEK

BOISE, Idaho: The reputation of what is generally considered Idaho's premier and nationally renowned fly fishing destination has taken a beating after three years of drought, but Silver Creek could get its groove back this season as abundant water fills its channels. With the fishing season opening this weekend, anglers hope the resurgence draws brown and rainbow trout to bite artificial flies dancing on the stream's mirror-smooth surface.

The area, which attracted luminaries such as Ernest Hemingway in the 1940s, also is a prime spot for birders and nature enthusiasts. "I think we certainly were seeing the effect of the drought on the creek," said Silver Creek Outfitter's guide Bret Bishop. "What I'm hoping is that this year with better flows, we'll see the fish spread out." The roughly 4 miles of fishable water is divided into the Nature Conservancy's publicly accessible Silver Creek Preserve, a private ranch with pay-to-play rules, and a public section managed by the

Idaho Department of Fish and Game.

Bishop said low water forced fish from much of the preserve last season, likely to deeper water where the creek was dredged on the private ranch, leaving much of the preserve empty of anglers during prime fishing season. Work at the ranch also included putting in a fish passage at a century-old irrigation dam. Fish will likely be back this weekend, Bishop said, and the Nature Conservancy is preparing for an onslaught of anglers at the creek about 50 miles south of the resort towns of Ketchum and Sun Valley.

Sunny Healey, preserve manager, said she expects up to 100 people at a free public barbecue Saturday. "It's opening day, and people haven't been able to fish for six months," she said. "And it's supposed to be a very beautiful weekend." The water flowing through the creek is at 226 cubic feet per second, more than double the average. It's also well above the 35 cubic feet per second recorded last September. Healey said water



IDAHO: This undated photo shows birds flying over Silver Creek at the Nature Conservancy's Silver Creek Preserve near Picabo, Idaho.



IDAHO: This undated photo provided by The Nature Conservancy shows fly fishermen on Silver Creek at the Nature Conservancy's Silver Creek Preserve near Picabo, Idaho. — AP photos

temperatures pushing 70 degrees and a low dissolved oxygen content in the creek last year were bad for fish.

While this year is looking good, scientists say the long-term outlook is less clear because the 86-square-mile Wood River Valley aquifer system that feeds the creek is under increasing pressure from population growth. Jim Bartolino, a ground water hydrologist with the US Geological Survey, said the problem is most evident in dry years when less water goes through canal systems and less melting snow refill the aquifer and when ranchers are forced to pump groundwater.

"It's kind of a triple whammy," he said.

But things are changing as farmers and ranchers switch from flood irrigation to more efficient sprinkler systems that result in less

water seeping into the ground and making its way to refill the aquifer. Ranch owner Nick Purdy sells annual club memberships to fish the creek through his property but said he only discusses rates with potential clients. Access to the state-owned section downstream is free, but Bishop said fish have been scarce in that area in recent years.

It's possible that cooler water flowing out of the deeper areas on Purdy's ranch could improve fishing, Bishop said. Bartolino, the hydrologist, also fly-fishes Silver Creek, trying to fool savvy trout that require nearly invisible fishing lines and artificial flies mimicking the insect hatch. "I'm a horrible fly fisherman, and fishing Silver Creek is hard," he said. "I just primarily enjoy the aesthetics of being out there."

CLINIC PAGE



Kuwait Times THE LEADING INDEPENDENT DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF

Dr. Fahad Al-Mukhaizeem

 استشاري أطفال
 M.B. Bch. FRCPC. FAAP. PEM

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

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Florina Antonho Dsouza, Passport No. J4435039 has changed my name to Florinda Aguiar. (C 5315) 27-5-2017

ACCOMMODATION

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LOST

Lost original certificate of A/SSE issued by C.B.S.E, Delhi, holding No. 8105696 of the year 2012/2014 in the name Zain Mohammad s/o Syed Zulqarnain Hailer. Founder may contact Indian Public School, Salmiya. Call: 95593976.

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Fajr: 03:18
Shorook: 04:50
Duhr: 11:45
Asr: 15:20
Maghrib: 18:40
Isha: 20:10



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KNCC PROGRAMME FROM 1ST DAY OF RAMADAN TO WEDNESDAY (31/05/2017)

SHARQIA-1 KING ARTHUR: LEGEND OF THE SWORD THE BLEEDER (CHUCK)	9:45 PM 12:15 AM	AVENUES-1 MINIONS (Re Release) ALIEN: COVENANT	9:30 PM 11:30 PM	MAMNO'O MIN AL EKTIRAB AW ALTASWEER	12:15 AM
SHARQIA-2 GIFTED GIFTED	10:00 PM 12:05 AM	AVENUES-2 MINIONS(Re Release)-3D-4DX JURASSIC WORLD (Re Release)-3D-4DX	10:00 PM 12:05 AM	360 ∞-3 GODHA -Malayalam EVERYTHING, EVERYTHING	9:30 PM 12:05 AM
SHARQIA-3 DIARY OF A WIMPY KID: THE LONG HAUL ALIEN: COVENANT	9:30 PM 11:30 PM	AVENUES-3 THE BOSS BABY HERE ALONE	10:30 PM 12:30 AM	AL-KOUT.1 GIFTED GIFTED	9:30 PM 11:30 PM
MUHALAB-1 RARANDOI VEDUKA CHUDDAM-Telugu KING ARTHUR: LEGEND OF THE SWORD	9:30 PM 12:30 AM	AVENUES-4 Special Show "ALIEN: COVENANT" SUN DIARY OF A WIMPY KID: THE LONG HAUL NO SUN GIFTED	9:30 PM 10:45 PM 12:45 AM	AL-KOUT.2 DIARY OF A WIMPY KID: THE LONG HAUL MAMNO'O MIN AL EKTIRAB AW ALTASWEER	10:00 PM 12:05 AM
MUHALAB-2 GIFTED GIFTED	10:15 PM 12:15 AM	AVENUES-5 KING ARTHUR: LEGEND OF THE SWORD KING ARTHUR: LEGEND OF THE SWORD	9:45 PM 12:15 AM	AL-KOUT.3 KING ARTHUR: LEGEND OF THE SWORD KING ARTHUR: LEGEND OF THE SWORD	9:45 PM 12:30 AM
MUHALAB-3 DIARY OF A WIMPY KID: THE LONG HAUL ALIEN: COVENANT	9:45 PM 11:45 PM	AVENUES-6 KING ARTHUR: LEGEND OF THE SWORD KING ARTHUR: LEGEND OF THE SWORD	10:00 PM 12:30 AM	AL-KOUT.4 THE BLEEDER (CHUCK) THE BLEEDER (CHUCK)	10:15 PM 12:15 AM
FANAR-1 SACHIN: A BILLION DREAMS -Hindi THE BLEEDER (CHUCK)	10:00 PM 12:45 AM	AVENUES-7 RAMANTE EDANTHOTTAM -Malayalam FAST & FURIOUS 8	9:45 PM 12:15 AM	BAIRAQ-1 MINIONS (Re Release) GIFTED	9:45 PM 11:45 PM
FANAR-2 KING ARTHUR: LEGEND OF THE SWORD KING ARTHUR: LEGEND OF THE SWORD	9:45 PM 12:15 AM	AVENUES-8 MAMNO'O MIN AL EKTIRAB AW ALTASWEER MAMNO'O MIN AL EKTIRAB AW ALTASWEER	9:30 PM 11:45 PM	BAIRAQ-2 THE BOSS BABY JURASSIC WORLD (Re Release)	9:30 PM 11:30 PM
FANAR-3 RARANDOI VEDUKA CHUDDAM-Telugu ALIEN: COVENANT	9:30 PM 12:30 AM	AVENUES-9 GIFTED BAAHUBALI 2: The Conclusion -Hindi	9:45 PM 11:45 PM	BAIRAQ-3 DIARY OF A WIMPY KID: THE LONG HAUL KING ARTHUR: LEGEND OF THE SWORD	10:00 PM 12:05 AM
FANAR-4 DIARY OF A WIMPY KID: THE LONG HAUL DIARY OF A WIMPY KID: THE LONG HAUL	10:00 PM 12:05 AM	AVENUES-10 THE BLEEDER (CHUCK) THE BLEEDER (CHUCK)	10:00 PM 12:05 AM	PLAZA GODHA -Malayalam RAMANTE EDANTHOTTAM -Malayalam	9:30 PM 12:05 AM
FANAR-5 THE BOSS BABY GIFTED	9:30 PM 11:30 PM	AVENUES-11 DIARY OF A WIMPY KID: THE LONG HAUL-CINESCAPE 11-2D DIARY OF A WIMPY KID: THE LONG HAUL-CINESCAPE 11-2D	10:15 PM 12:15 AM	LAILA DIARY OF A WIMPY KID: THE LONG HAUL KING ARTHUR: LEGEND OF THE SWORD	9:45 PM 11:45 PM
MARINA-1 GIFTED GIFTED	10:00 PM 12:05 AM	360 ∞-1 KING ARTHUR: LEGEND OF THE SWORD KING ARTHUR: LEGEND OF THE SWORD	9:45 PM 12:30 AM	AJIAL.1 RAMANTE EDANTHOTTAM -Malayalam GODHA -Malayalam	9:30 PM 12:05 AM
MARINA-2 KING ARTHUR: LEGEND OF THE SWORD KING ARTHUR: LEGEND OF THE SWORD	9:45 PM 12:15 AM	360 ∞-2 MAMNO'O MIN AL EKTIRAB AW ALTASWEER	10:00 PM	AJIAL.2 SACHIN: A BILLION DREAMS -Hindi SACHIN: A BILLION DREAMS -Hindi	9:30 PM 12:15 AM
MARINA-3 DIARY OF A WIMPY KID: THE LONG HAUL THE BLEEDER (CHUCK)	9:30 PM 11:30 PM			AJIAL.3 THONDAN- Tamil THONDAN- Tamil	9:45 PM 12:30 AM

SATURDAY, MAY 27, 2017

WORDSEARCH PUZZLE

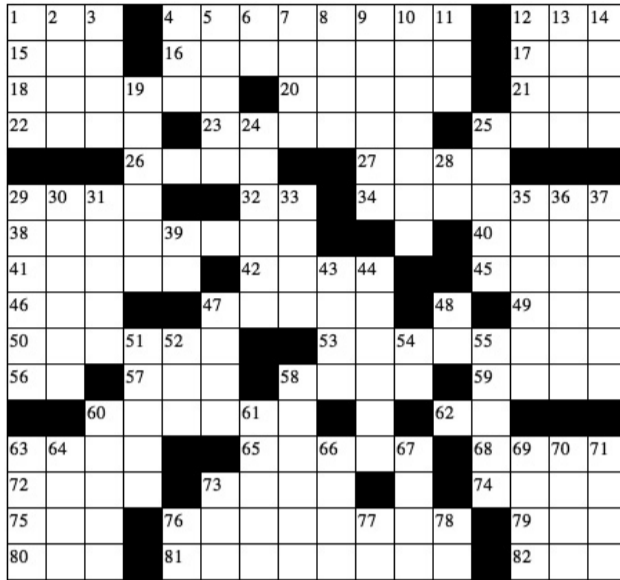
Christmas

Find and circle all of the Christmas words that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell a secret message.

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

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| ANGEL | FRUITCAKE | MANGER | SNOWFLAKES |
| BELLS | GABRIEL | MARY | SNOWMAN |
| BETHEHEM | GIFTS | MISTLETOE | STABLE |
| CANDLES | GOLD | MYRRH | STAR |
| CANDY CANE | GREETING CARDS | ORNAMENTS | STOCKING |
| CAROLS | HOLLY | POINSETTIA | THREE WISE MEN |
| DECORATIONS | ICICLES | SANTA | TOBOGGAN |
| EGGNOG | JESUS | SHEPHERDS | TOYS |
| FAMILY | JOSEPH | SKATES | TREE |
| FRANKINCENSE | LIGHTS | SLEIGH | WREATH |
| FRIENDS | | | |

CROSSWORD 1620



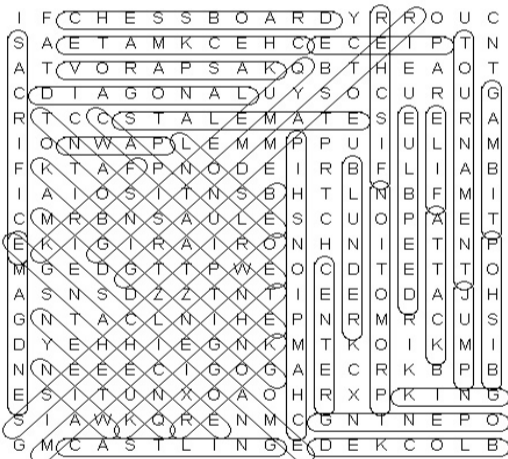
ACROSS

- (Australian and New Zealand) A disparaging term for English immigrants to Australia or New Zealand.
- Structure forming the transverse part of a cruciform church.
- Wet spongy ground of decomposing vegetation.
- Any of various primates with short tails or no tail at all.
- A genus of Cricetidae.
- A federal agency established to coordinate programs aimed at reducing pollution and protecting the environment.
- Any of several plants of the genus *Manihot* having fleshy roots yielding a nutritious starch.
- The region of the shore of a lake or sea or ocean.
- A graphical record of electrical activity of the brain.
- According to the Old Testament he was a pagan king of Israel and husband of Jezebel (9th century BC).
- The capital of Nationalist China.
- Someone who works (or provides workers) during a strike.
- Harsh or corrosive in tone.
- A French abbot.
- A bachelor's degree in science.
- A nihilistic art movement (especially in painting) that flourished in Europe early in the 20th century.
- A nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (trade name Clinoril).
- A language unit by which a person or thing is known.
- An ancient upright stone slab bearing markings.
- Providing sophisticated amusement by virtue of having artificially (and vulgarly) mannered or banal or sentimental qualities.
- A primeval personification of air and breath.
- An associate degree in applied science.
- Wild and domestic cattle.
- Relating to or being within or near the inner side or limit.
- Yellowing of the skin and the whites of the eyes caused by an accumulation of bile pigment (bilirubin) in the blood.
- A chronic inflammatory collagen disease affecting connective tissue (skin or joints).
- A nucleic acid that transmits genetic information from DNA to the cytoplasm.
- United States newspaper publisher (1858-1935).
- A class of proteins produced in lymph tissue in vertebrates and that function as antibodies in the immune response.
- Any of numerous local fertility and nature deities worshipped by ancient Semitic peoples.
- Dwell (archaic).
- A Chadic language spoken south of Lake Chad.
- Type genus of the Alcidae comprising solely the razorbill.
- An Arabic speaking person who lives in Arabia or North Africa.
- How long something has existed.
- A federal agency that supervises carriers that transport goods and people between states.
- Experiencing or showing sorrow or unhappiness.
- Lack of strength or vigor esp from illness.
- A potent estrogen used in medicine and in feed for livestock and poultry.

- Large elliptical brightly colored deep-sea fish of Atlantic and Pacific and Mediterranean.
- Flat tableland with steep edges.
- The widely studied plant virus that causes tobacco mosaic.
- A long noosed rope used to catch animals.
- A colorless and odorless inert gas.
- Not final or absolute.
- A cleansing agent made from the salts of vegetable or animal fats.
- The cardinal number that is the sum of eight and one.
- A tricycle (usually propelled by pedalling).
- Syndrome resulting from a serious acute (sometimes fatal) infection associated with the presence of staphylococcus.
- Fermented alcoholic beverage brewed from malt and hops.
- An organization of countries formed in 1961 to agree on a common policy for the sale of petroleum.
- Mentally or physically infirm with age.
- A descent down a nearly vertical surface by using a doubled rope that is coiled around the body and attached to some higher point.
- The jurisdiction or office of an abbot.
- A city in southern Turkey on the Seyhan River.
- A state in the Rocky Mountains.
- Occurs in natural gas.
- Give a benediction to.
- A mark left by the healing of injured tissue.
- (prosody) Of or consisting of iambs.
- An enthusiastic kiss.
- The monthly discharge of blood from the uterus of nonpregnant women from puberty to menopause.
- A silvery soft waxy metallic element of the alkali metal group.
- Type genus of the Majidae.
- Situated in a particular spot or position.
- Wild or seedling sweet cherry used as stock for grafting.
- A colorless explosive liquid that is volatile and poisonous and foul-smelling.
- A Dravidian language closely related to Tamil that is spoken in a hilly section of southwestern India.
- A nucleic acid consisting of large molecules shaped like a double helix.
- A monarchy in northwestern Europe occupying most of the British Isles.
- A religious doctrine that is proclaimed as true without proof.
- Large terrestrial monkeys having doglike muzzles.
- Closed with a lace.
- Occurring or done each day.
- Primitive chlorophyll-containing mainly aquatic eukaryotic organisms lacking true stems and roots and leaves.
- Any tree or shrub of the genus *Inga* having pinnate leaves and showy usually white flowers.
- (Norse mythology) Goddess of old age who defeated Thor in a wrestling match.
- Lacking sufficient water or rainfall.
- The front of the head from the forehead to the chin and ear to ear.
- The elementary stages of any subject (usually plural).
- Having leadership guidance.
- Informal terms for a mother.
- Before noon.
- (Akkadian) God of wisdom.

Yesterday's Solution

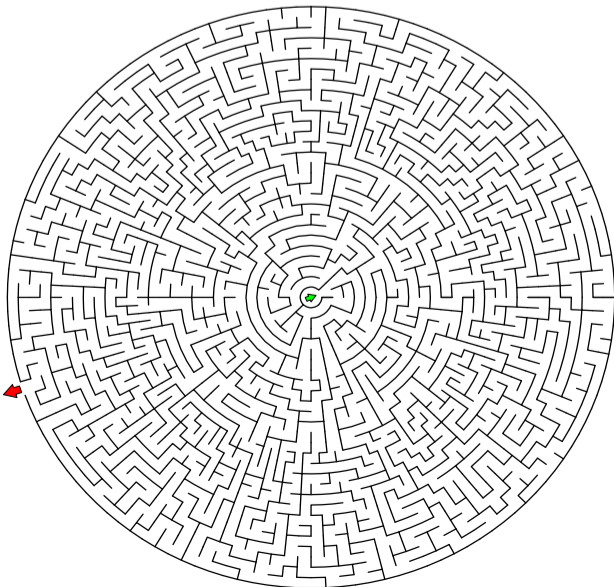
Chess



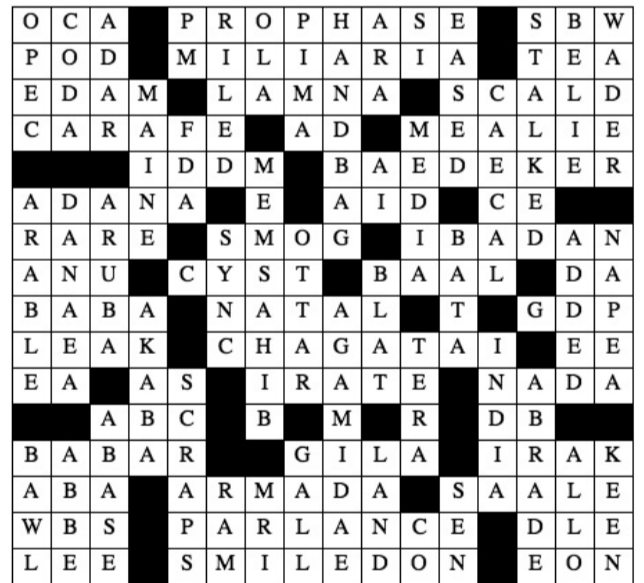
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| ATTACK | CHAMPIONSHIP | GRANDMASTER | PAWN |
| BISHOP | DEEP BLUE | JUMP | PIECE |
| BLITZ CHESS | DIAGONAL | KASPAROV | PROMOTION |
| BLOCKED | EN PASSANT | KIBITZING | QUEEN |
| BLUNDER | ENDGAME | KING | QUEENING |
| CAPTURE | EXCHANGE | KNIGHT | ROOK |
| CASTLING | FILE | LOSE | SACRIFICE |
| CENTER | FISHER | MATE IN TWO | STALEMATE |
| CHECKMATE | FORK | MIDDLEGAME | TOURNAMENT |
| CHESSBOARD | GAMBIT | OPENING | WIN |

Hidden sentence: IF YOU CAN'T BEAT YOUR COMPUTER AT CHESS, TRY KICKBOXING

CHALLENGING MAZE



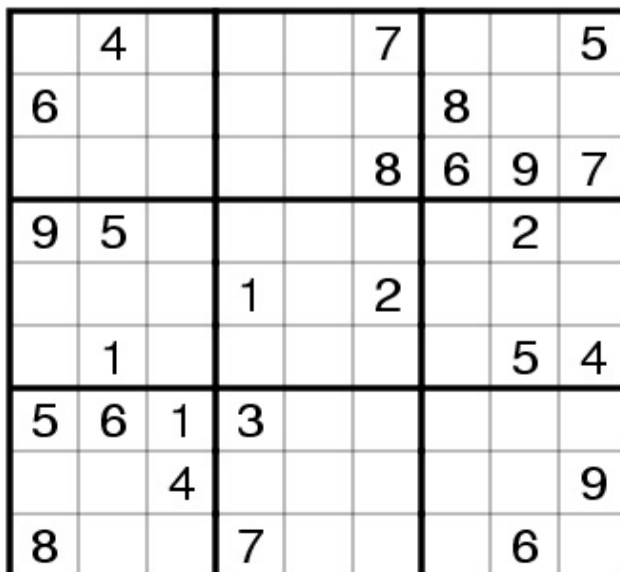
Yesterday's Solution



DOWN

- Large burrowing rodent of South and Central America.

Daily SuDoku



Yesterday's Solution





MILWAUKEE: Orlando Arcia #3 of the Milwaukee Brewers turns a double play past Gregor Blanco #5 of the Arizona Diamondbacks in the fifth inning at Miller Park. — AFP

RAY GOES 7 INNINGS AS D'BACKS BEAT BREWERS

MILWAUKEE: Robbie Ray pitched seven innings of two-hit ball to lower the NL's second-best road ERA to 0.57, Gregor Blanco and Chris Owings homered, and the Arizona Diamondbacks beat the Milwaukee Brewers 4-0 Thursday night for their ninth win in 10 games. Ray (4-3), coming off a dominating performance against San Diego in his last start, did not allow a run for the second straight outing. He struck out nine and walked none to send the Brewers to their season-worst fourth straight loss. Arizona is 11 games above .500 for the first time since 2011. Blanco, who went 3 for 4, hit the second pitch of the game off Milwaukee starter Zach Davies (5-3) for his fourth career leadoff home run. Owings tied his career high with his sixth of the season leading off the second. David Peralta had an RBI double in the third and Paul Goldschmidt scored on a wild pitch in the eighth.

CUBS 5, GIANTS 1

Kris Bryant, Jason Heyward and Ben Zobrist hit solo homers, and Chicago won its third straight. Spot starter Eddie Butler (2-0) allowed one run and four hits in five innings, and Mike Montgomery pitched one-hit ball over four innings for his first professional save. Jeff Samardzija (1-6) gave up three runs and six hits in seven innings with eight strikeouts. He also gave up three home runs against Arizona in his first start of the season on April 6.

MARINERS 4, NATIONALS 2

Nelson Cruz greeted reliever Jacob Turner (2-3) a three-run homer in the sixth inning that

overtaken a 2-0 deficit, and Seattle stopped a five-game losing streak. Ariel Miranda (4-2) allowed two runs, three hits and three walks in five innings. Edwin Diaz, Seattle's sixth pitcher, threw a one-hit ninth that completed a six-hitter. Diaz got his first save since May 9 and has eight in 10 chances overall.

PIRATES 9, BRAVES 4

Ivan Nova (5-3) allowed four runs and 10 hits in 8 1/3 innings, and Adam Frazier hit a three-run homer. Pittsburgh pounded Bartolo Colon (2-5), who a day after his 44th birthday allowed seven runs and 10 hits in five innings. His ERA rose to 6.96.

PHILLIES 2, ROCKIES 1

Tommy Joseph hit a tying home run in the seventh inning and a winning single against Scott Oberg (0-1) in the 11th after Michael Saunders' one-out double, stopping Colorado from a four-game sweep. Jeanmar Gomez (3-1) pitched a hitless 11th in his return from a disabled list stint caused by an elbow injury. Philadelphia ended a five-game losing streak, winning for the fifth time in 25 games. Colorado, which has the NL's best record, had won four in a row.

RAYS 4, ANGELS 0

Matt Andriese (5-1) allowed six hits over eight innings, Colby Rasmus drove in four runs and Tampa Bay salvaged a four-game split. Tommy Hunter got three outs to complete a six-hitter. Daniel Wright (0-1), recalled from Triple-A Salt Lake to fill in for the injured Alex Meyer, allowed four runs - two earned - and six hits in 4 1/3 innings.

PADRES 4, METS 3

Dinelson Lamet overpowered the Mets in his major league debut, New York's Rafael Montero labored on short notice and San Diego won on a rainy night. Scattered showers soaked Queens all day, and thunderstorms were forecast for midgame, although heavy rain never came. Mets manager Terry Collins pushed back scheduled starter Jacob deGrom to try avoiding an abbreviated outing, instead telling Montero around 3:45 p.m. that he'd start the 7:10 p.m. contest. Montero (0-4) allowed two runs during a 45-pitch first inning, including a bases-loaded walk to Matt Szczur. Montero threw 87 pitches over three innings, giving up three runs, five hits and three walks. His ERA rose to 8.24. Lamet (1-0) cruised through five innings of one-run ball. The 24-year-old right-hander punched out eight and surrendered just three hits, including Lucas Duda's solo homer in the second. Brad Hand allowed a run but escaped a jam in the ninth for the second straight night, getting his second career save and second in two nights.

RED SOX 6, RANGERS 2

Drew Pomeranz pitched six strong innings and tied his career high with 11 strikeouts to lift Boston past Texas. Xander Bogaerts and Deven Marrero hit their first home runs of the season helping Boston to their fourth straight win. Pomeranz (4-3) made it as far as six innings for the third time this season and beat Texas for the first time in nine career outings. Elvis Andrus homered and Nomar Mazara had two hits and an RBI

for Texas, which has lost four of five. Andrew Benintendi and Mitch Moreland had RBI singles in the first inning as Boston got to Nick Martinez (1-3) early.

ASTROS 7, TIGERS 6

Jake Marisnick hit a tiebreaking home run in the eighth inning for Houston's fourth homer of the game, lifting the Astros to a 7-6 victory over the Detroit Tigers on Thursday night. The Tigers tied it 6-6 in the top of the eighth when Jose Iglesias doubled off reliever Luke Gregerson (2-1) to drive in Andrew Romine. Marisnick's homer to deep center off Detroit reliever Alex Wilson (1-2) gave Houston the lead back. Ken Giles got the last three outs for his 13th save as the Astros won three of four from the Tigers. Carlos Correa, Marwin Gonzalez and Juan Centeno all homered off Justin Verlander in Houston's five-run fourth that gave the Astros a 5-3 lead.

DODGERS 7, CARDINALS 3

Kenta Maeda fell into a 3-0 hole in the first inning of his first start for the Dodgers in two weeks coming off the disabled list. Then, the Japanese right-hander rallied Los Angeles to the win. Maeda (4-2) drove in the tying and go-ahead runs with a two-out single in the fourth off Michael Wacha and turned an inning-ending double play in the fifth to help the Dodgers take two of three from the Cardinals. Maeda allowed three runs and seven hits in five innings, struck out four and walked two. Wacha (2-2) gave up six runs and seven hits in four-plus innings. — AP

JAYAWARDENE NEW COACH OF B'DESH LEAGUE TEAM

DHAKA: Former Sri Lanka captain Mahela Jayawardene was yesterday named as the head coach of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) side Khulna Titans for the next two seasons of the Twenty20 tournament. Jayawardene, who has plied his trade across the globe after taking international retirement in 2015, played for BPL franchise Dhaka Dynamites last season.

This will be the second stint for the Sri Lankan great as a head coach of a team, following his success with current Indian Premier League (IPL) champions Mumbai Indians. Jayawardene, who succeeded former Australian captain Ricky Ponting as coach of Mumbai, helped the Indian side to a landmark third IPL title in the 10th edition of the cash-rich league.

"We are excited to have Mahela Jayawardene join the Titans as head coach for the next two editions of BPL," Khulna Titans Managing Director Kazi Inam Ahmed said in a statement. "We were thrilled to see him win the IPL recently as the coach of the Mumbai Indians. I am sure all of us Titans will learn a lot from him and the tournament will be enriched by his presence" Ahmed added.

Jayawardene, 39, will replace former Australia batsman Stuart Law, who has become the head coach of the West Indies national team. "I enjoyed playing in the BPL last year and that has given me a great insight into what will be required to be successful in the 2017 tournament," said Jayawardene. The fifth edition of the BPL is set to begin November 4 with the organizers announcing the inclusion of an eighth team for the lucrative meet. — AFP



NEW DELHI: Former Indian cricketer Sachin Tendulkar (C) - an honorary Indian Air Force Group Captain - looks on after the preview of the film 'Sachin A Billion Dreams' at The Indian Air Force Auditorium Subroto Park. — AFP

BIG EXCITEMENT FOR TENDULKAR MOVIE DESPITE MIXED REVIEWS

NEW DELHI: Critics called the new Sachin Tendulkar biopic "hagiographic" but fans of the Indian cricket legend loved the work that hit screens amid nationwide fanfare yesterday. "Sachin: A Billion Dreams", directed by Emmy-nominated British filmmaker James Erskine, brought out throngs of fans from the first day. It has real footage of the right-handed batsman who made his debut for India in 1989 aged just 16, but its claims to reveal the more intimate side of the icon did not impress reviewers.

"Sachin: A Billion Dreams is a well-made effort, looks good, but when you reach out for something insightful, your hand closes on air," Indian Express sports journalist Sriram Veera wrote. "It's the dumbing down that makes you sigh. It's a movie (docu-feature) that you would take your kids to ... The real disappointment lies in the absence of any insights," Veera added. Tendulkar, recipient of India's highest civilian honour, the Bharat Ratna, is the only cricketer to have scored 100 international centuries and the highest run scorer in international cricket with more than 34,000 runs.

Private Tendulkar

But The Times of India gave the movie three stars out of five and

slammed what it called the "hagiographic narrative". "Most controversies around the cricketing God are glossed over. Many of us (me included) die-hard Sachin fans are ready to face the fact that our icon may have displayed feet of clay on occasion," the review said.

"However, the film doesn't take chances ... The hagiographic narrative continues with commentators, critics and colleagues-Dhoni, Kohli, Ganguly, Sehwag and Harbhajan are (sigh!) only eulogizing the Little Master." Tendulkar's autobiography released in 2014 got a similar response from critics who wanted a more open account.

Tendulkar, 44, who retired in November 2013, admits he is a private person who has struggled to expose himself to the media. He has been criticised for not speaking enough on major cricketing issues. However a review by British daily The Guardian praised Erskine's effort to bring together the life of person who was "the closest thing Indian cricket has to a living deity". Cricketers also gave their thumbs up to the epic which was screened for the Indian team before they left for England to defend the Champions Trophy.

"Thank you @sachin_rt Paaji for arranging the perfect send-off," skipper

Virat Kohli wrote on his twitter account after watching the film in Mumbai. Indian batsman Lokesh Rahul, Shikhar Dhawan, Ajinkya Rahane and fast bowler Bhuvneshwar Kumar also tweeted their support. "A BILLION Dreams! A truly inspiring movie. thank you Sachin Sir for inspiring everyone Indian," Rahane tweeted.

The film is really aimed at Sachin fans who would not be influenced by critics when they saw a 9.30am screening in south Mumbai. "It was an awesome movie. It told us about his whole life and what he has done. We learned about his social work," said 16-year-old Rayan Kothari. "My favorite part was when the World Cup that was held in India in 2011. That was a proud moment for India and him also. I want to watch it again." Arpit Jain, 19, said "it was really great movie, very inspiring, motivating and emotional as well. My favorite bit was when Dhoni hit that last six (at the 2011 World Cup final) and Sachin's dream came true.

"Practice makes perfect is the main motto of the film. He struggled really hard for it (his success). Training and practicing for a thousand hours was really unforgettable. "I'm really proud of him, he's the god of cricket." — AFP

ICC PANEL BACKS TEST CHAMPIONSHIP

LONDON: A top international cricket committee on Thursday called for TV referrals to be used in T20 internationals and gave high level backing to a Test world championship. In addition, umpires will be allowed to send off players for misconduct, bat sizes will be restricted for the first time and run out rules changed from October 1 if the recommendations are approved by the International Cricket Council (ICC) chief executives committee.

The ICC cricket committee, headed by outgoing India coach Anil Kumble and several former star players made the recommendations after a two-day meeting at Lord's in London on Tuesday and Wednesday. The so-called Decision Review System (DRS) — where a TV umpire makes a call on decisions taken on the field-is already used in Tests and one-day internationals. The cricket committee said it should be extended to T20 internationals. The committee said teams will not lose a review, in any game, when an lbw decision comes back from the TV umpire.

At the moment, teams can call for one review in each innings in one day games and two for every 80 overs bowled in Test matches. The committee said that if the new lbw measure is applied, the 80 over rule would be ended for Tests. The committee gave strong backing to the five-day game, expressing unanimous support for a Test world championship, and called it "crucial for the future of international cricket". It also reiterated its support for the game getting an Olympic place.

Giving more authority to umpires to battle misconduct, the committee said football-style sendings off should be used for serious violence and other offences during play. It recommended the use of instant replays to help umpires signal no balls. The panel suggested introducing restrictions on the thickness and depth of bats and said a batsman will be deemed to have made his or her ground "when a bat bounces after being grounded behind the crease by a running or diving batsman".

It also backed a two-year trial of concussion substitutes after Australia urged the ICC to introduce them after opening batsman Matt Renshaw was ruled out of the Pakistan Test in January, suffering twin blows on his helmet while fielding close-in. The panel includes former stars like India's Rahul Dravid, former England captain Andrew Strauss, Sri Lanka's Mahela Jayawardene and current Australia coach Darren Lehmann. The meeting was held ahead of the Champions Trophy which begins on June 1 with hosts England taking on Bangladesh in the opener. — AFP

MOEEN SEEKS IMPROVEMENT

LONDON: The balance of the England's one-day team means Moeen Ali is required to bat at number seven and the bearded all-rounder, who prefers to ply his trade earlier in the innings, is working hard to hone his skills at a tricky position in the order. Not a power-hitter in the mould of Ben Stokes or Jos Buttler, Moeen's unbeaten 77, along with the couple of wickets he claimed with his off-spinners, earned him the man-of-the-match award in Wednesday's first ODI against South Africa. Moeen smashed five sixes in his 51-ball blitz at Headingley to help England take a 1-0 lead in the three-match series but the 29-year-old admits it is not an easy position to bat.

"I find batting at number seven tough," he told reporters. "But I'm trying to get better at it. "In county cricket and when I

played first for England I opened the batting. I can beat the field in the first few overs and then later on I can play a few more shots. "When I'm in, I feel I can hit decent-sized sixes... But it's not easy for someone like me, who probably can't hit sixes like Ben Stokes, Jos Buttler and hit the gas like those guys."

Moeen, however, has no plans to copy his muscular team mates. "I find if I work on power-hitting I lose my rhythm," he said. "I just try to keep it as natural as possible. Even towards the end of my innings (in Leeds) there were a couple I tried to slog and I lost my shape." Moeen has also come to terms with the reality that his position in the lower middle-order becomes untenable when England are deprived of Stokes' all-round service through injury. — Reuters

MATCHING SENNA WOULD BE UNREAL FOR HAMILTON

MONACO: As a child racing go-karts and dreaming of Formula One glories to come, Lewis Hamilton was always in awe of Ayrton Senna and eager to emulate him. The Mercedes driver has matched already the late Brazilian's three championships and sailed past his 41 career wins and today, at the Monaco Grand Prix, he can equal Senna's 65 pole positions.

If he does, and the Briton faces a big battle after Ferrari's Sebastian Vettel set the fastest lap ever around the harbourside circuit in Thursday practice, the location will be fitting. This weekend is the 30th anniversary of the first of Senna's record six wins in the Mediterranean principality, with a statue unveiled at the Fairmont Hotel, in the presence of Senna's niece Bianca. Photographs and memorabilia are also on display at the Yacht Club de Monaco.

"I'm one away from matching his qualifying record, which just doesn't seem real," said Hamilton, a Monaco resident who has had three poles in five races this year. "I feel very honored to be up and amongst the greats. "I don't really feel like there is any pressure. If it happens this weekend, it happens. If it doesn't, it will happen. I will get another pole at some stage."

Mercedes have won the last four Monaco Grands Prix and Hamilton, who has twice triumphed at the most glamorous of circuits, returns after a memorable victory in Spain. He is still six points behind Vettel, with the title rivals having won two races each. Senna famously talked of a magical 'perfect lap' around Monaco after taking pole in 1988 with a time 1.4 seconds quicker than French team mate Alain Prost, who joined him on the front row.

Hamilton, with only one Monaco pole to his credit so far, played down talk of such an experience even if he loved racing around the circuit. "Of course there's an incredible feeling when you feel like you are as close to the edge, that dreamline edge that you're trying to get close to every year. I've never had that here," he said. "I've had good laps here that have felt very close, but... you can always find millimeters here and there. That's the great thing about this sport. If we hit the perfect lap, then I don't know, what's next beyond perfect? "I love that there's a constant chase, a constant challenge. The target's always moving, so you might touch it for just a split second, but then it shifts and moves somewhere else. That's what I love about it." — Reuters

KIEFFER, FISHER JOIN WENTWORTH LEAD

WENTWORTH: Germany's Maximilian Kieffer and England's Oliver Fisher leapt to the top of the European PGA Championship leaderboard as the second round got underway at Wentworth yesterday. Kieffer, ranked 288th in the world, had a golden start to his back nine making three birdies and an eagle in four holes from the 11th to join overnight leader Johan Carlsson, who was an afternoon starter, and get to six-under par after 15 holes.

Kieffer had briefly taken the outright lead at seven-under but a bogey on the par-4 15th saw him fall back level with Fisher and Carlsson. Twenty-eight-year-old Fisher, aiming for his first European Tour win since 2011, was making the most of the perfect conditions. He was four-under for the day and six-under in total after eagling the par-5 12th despite a nervy start when he dropped a shot at the first.

And there was progress for Lee Westwood, winless in this tournament after 23 attempts, as he went to five-under the card after going out in 32, three-under par, to be level with Belgium's Thomas Pieters after 10 holes. South Africa's Branden Grace, who was subject of a drop controversy in the first round, was a shot back on four-under level with Henrik Stenson with the pair having nine holes of their second round left.

Grace was heavily criticised by TV commentators, including former European Ryder Cup captain Paul McGinley, and some fellow players for taking a free drop in a bunker on the 13th on Thursday. He claimed his stance would have been affected by a rubber mat in the sand and claimed the drop on his way to a 68. Grace had conferred with rules officials but the incident occurred on the same day another South African, Ernie Els, called a two-shot penalty on himself. —AFP



PITTSBURGH: A Pittsburgh Penguins fan cheers and holds up a mock Stanley Cup against the Ottawa Senators in Game Seven of the Eastern Conference Final during the 2017 NHL Stanley Cup Playoffs at PPG PAINTS Arena. — AFP

ITS NHL ROYALTY VS THE ROWDY NEIGHBORS IN STANLEY CUP FINAL

PITTSBURGH: The Pittsburgh Penguins kept getting by even as their star players kept skating off the ice in pain. Even as the targets on their back as Stanley Cup champions kept getting bigger. Even as Columbus and Washington and Ottawa kept pushing and prodding, poking and pinching. "Just play," coach Mike Sullivan kept telling his players. Over and over and over again.

So the Penguins did. And the team that found itself uncharacteristically on its heels for long stretches as it fended off the Blue Jackets in the first round, shut down the Capitals in the second and outlasted blue-collar Senators in the third is back where it was a year ago: heading to the Stanley Cup Final with confidence, momentum and more than a little bit of swagger. Next up: "Smashville."

Pittsburgh earned a return trip to the Cup with a thrilling 3-2 double-overtime victory over Ottawa in Game 7 of the Eastern Conference finals on Thursday. Chris Kunitz provided the winner, a knuckler from just outside the circle that made its way past Craig Anderson 5:09 into the second extra period and moved the Penguins a step closer to becoming the first team in nearly 20 years to repeat.

And here's the scary part: after a season pock-marked by the loss of do-everything defenseman Kris Letang and significant absences by Evgeni Malkin, Sidney Crosby, Kunitz, goaltender Matt Murray and a host of others, the Penguins are starting to look like the team that picked apart San Jose last June to capture the franchise's fourth title. "Our last four games in this series for me, we really found our game," Sullivan said.

Intriguing final

The result is a potentially intriguing final between NHL royalty and the rowdy neighbors next door. The Penguins have the experience, the leadership and the star power. The Predators have defenseman PK Subban, a bunch of country music A-listers in the stands and absolutely nothing to lose in their first appearance on hockey's biggest stage. Game 1 is Monday night in Pittsburgh. The teams split their two meetings during the regular season, with each winning on home ice, with Nashville overwhelming Pittsburgh 5-1 back in November and the Penguins returning the favor with a 4-2 victory in January.

Don't let the flimsy resume fool you. Though they tied for the fewest points in the 16-team playoff field (94), the

Predators are dangerous and very much for real after steam-rolling through the Western Conference playoffs, never trailing at any point in series wins over Chicago, St Louis and Anaheim. "We haven't dominated the play that maybe we wanted to," Kunitz said. "Maybe we've done a better job these last couple of games. But it's something we're going to have to get better at playing a 60-minute game if we're going to have a chance to beat Nashville."

The meeting marks the first time in NHL history the coaches of both teams are Americans. Nashville's Peter Laviolette first turned a team in the deep south into a champion 11 years ago when he guided the Carolina Hurricanes to their first and only Cup. Sullivan took over in Pittsburgh in Dec. 2015 and provided the edge the Penguins so desperately needed, becoming the sixth US-born coach to win it all.

Reflections

Their teams in some ways have become reflections of them. The Predators aren't nicknamed "Smashville" just for kicks. They were the last team to qualify for the playoffs but have caught fire in the last six weeks, sweeping Chicago in the first round then proving it wasn't a fluke by putting away the Blues and the Ducks. "It should be some exciting hockey as far as back and forth and fast and physical," Crosby said. "I think both teams like to play a pretty similar style."

With a handful of familiar faces on both sides. One of Pittsburgh general manager Jim Rutherford's first moves when he was hired in 2014 was to trade forward James Neal to the Predators for Patric Hornqvist and Nick Spaling. It's worked out for nearly all involved. Hornqvist's relentless energy and penchant for crashing the net is invaluable when teamed with Malkin or Crosby, while Neal has given Nashville one of the more lethal shots in the league.

Yet it was Subban's arrival in a trade last June that provided Nashville with the grit and leadership it so desperately needed. Subban has been spectacular at times during the playoffs and goaltender Pekka Rinne is playing the finest hockey of his career, helping stoke the passion of a fanbase that likes to sledgehammer beat-up cars in parking lots before games and throw catfish onto the ice during them. The Penguins, by contrast, have been here. They've done this. Considering all they've gone through to get back, they have every intention of doing it again. "The biggest step is ahead," Crosby said. The last one, too. — AP

SAVING FINGERS WAS MY BIGGEST BATTLE: KVITOVA

PARIS: Petra Kvitova will return to tennis at the French Open having already won her biggest battle-saving the fingers so badly damaged fighting off a knife-wielding burglar. Two-time Wimbledon champion Kvitova, 27, a semi-finalist at Roland Garros in 2012, suffered career-threatening injuries to her left playing hand when she tackled an intruder at her home in the eastern Czech town of Prostějov in December.

The terrifying attack left the popular Kvitova fighting to save her hand and her career. But almost six months on, she is ready to return to the sport, claiming that the nightmare incident has left her with a fresh perspective on life. "I actually already won my biggest fight. I stayed in life and I have all my fingers," the 6ft (1.82m) Kvitova told reporters at

a sweltering Roland Garros yesterday. She still carries the physical and mental scars, making her increasingly wary of the people around her.

"I didn't sleep well the days after. I don't really have nightmares," she added. "From the beginning I was really feeling really weird when I went in the city or somewhere. 'I was always staring at the guys and looking to see if there are no strangers there. With time, it's better. But of course I'm more actively watching the people around me.'" Kvitova was told by her doctors that she may never play tennis again as a result of the attack.

That was an earth-shattering realization for a woman who has made over \$22 million, reached number two in the world and counts the 2011 and 2014 Wimbledon crowns amongst her 19 career

titles. "I knew this day would come but sometimes when I was watching tennis on TV, I didn't really feel great. I felt like the tennis was taken away from me, and it wasn't my decision.

"Suddenly I couldn't do what I love. So I'm happy that I can be here." Kvitova admitted that she is returning to action around a month earlier than expected and isn't expecting to cause a great sensation in the tournament. She described her return to Paris as a "last-minute decision". "I missed the court, the fight. Now I can just enjoy everything-sometimes I just stand outside and see the sun and say, Oh, it's beautiful. 'I see different kind of things than before.'" As 15th seed, Kvitova will face Julia Boserup of the United States in the first round. — AFP



PARIS: Defending champions Serbia's Novak Djokovic and Spain's Garbine Muguruza pose in front of the cups during the draw of the French Open tennis tournament at the Roland Garros stadium. — AFP

DJOKOVIC, NADAL ON FRENCH OPEN SEMI-FINAL COLLISION

PARIS: Defending champion Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal were drawn to face each other in a blockbuster French Open semi-final yesterday. Nadal is chasing a 10th title at Roland Garros while second seed Djokovic, working with new coach Andre Agassi, is looking to defend the only major he still holds. "Rafa is the number one favourite," said Djokovic.

World number one Andy Murray is seeded to face 2015 champion Stan Wawrinka in the last four. Murray starts against Russia's world number 85 Andrey Kuznetsov, Djokovic tackles Spanish clay courter Marcel Granollers while Nadal meets combustible Frenchman Benoit Paire. Murray could face dangerous Juan Martin del Potro in the third round. Injury-plagued del Potro, who lost to Murray in the 2016 Olympics final, is playing Roland Garros for the first time since 2012.

If the seedings work out, 2016 runner-up Murray, who is reportedly suffering from an illness, would face Japan's Kei Nishikori in the last eight. The other quarter-finals would see Wawrinka meet 2014 US Open champion Marin Cilic, Nadal would meet Canada's Milos Raonic while Djokovic could take on Dominic Thiem. Djokovic demolished high-

ly-regarded Austrian Thiem for the loss of just one game in the Rome Masters semi-finals last week.

The 30-year-old Nadal has already reached the magical 10 titles number this year at the claycourt events in Monte Carlo and Barcelona. For good measure, he also won Madrid for a fifth time, ending a seven-match losing streak, stretching back over two years against Djokovic in the process. Nadal boasts a sensational career record at Roland Garros — 72 wins and just two defeats, to Djokovic in 2015 and an injury-affected shock loss to Robin Soderling in 2009.

'No magic pattern'

On clay this year, Djokovic has been on an upward curve-quarter-finals in Monte Carlo, semi-finals in Madrid and a runners-up spot in Rome where he was comprehensively demolished by Alexander Zverev. "It was one of my last dreams in terms of tournaments that I wanted to win here," said Djokovic at the draw yesterday. "It was missing from my list so I ticked it off and got the full set of Grand Slams."

Murray has endured a wretched season

by his standards with an elbow injury not helping his cause. He lost in the third round in Monte Carlo, made the semis in Barcelona, was a third-round loser in Madrid before an opening defeat in Rome to Fabio Fognini. Zverev faces Spanish veteran Fernando Verdasco first up, Thiem tackles Bernard Tomic of Australia while fellow 'NextGen' star Nick Kyrgios faces Philipp Kohlschreiber of Germany.

Nishikori, yet to get past the quarter-finals in Paris, begins against 21-year-old Australian Thanasi Kokkinakis. In the women's draw, top seed Angelique Kerber starts against experienced Russian Ekaterina Makarova in the first round. Kerber is due to face defending champion Garbine Muguruza of Spain in the semi-finals.

"I am super-excited to be here. I am preparing the best I can but there is no magic pattern," said Muguruza who comes into the tournament having suffered a neck injury in Rome last week. Muguruza has a tough opener against former champion Francesca Schiavone. Second seed Karolina Plisova was drawn to face 2014 runner-up Simona Halep in the semi-finals but will start against Zheng Saisai of China. — AFP

A CHANCE PHONE CALL LED TO SNARING AGASSI

PARIS: Novak Djokovic revealed yesterday that a chance telephone call sparked his decision to hire US legend Andre Agassi as his new coach. World number two Djokovic, who is about to begin the defence of his French Open title, said he originally only sought out Agassi's contact details so he could thank him for his support as his career threatened to hit the skids earlier this year.

Now they have agreed to work together at the French Open on a temporary basis. Djokovic recently split with long time coach Marian Vajda, having also ended a three-year relationship with six-time Grand Slam champion Boris Becker at the end of last season "Even, before when I was No. 1 and playing very successfully, winning trophies and in the latest period where I was not as successful and where I received a lot of criticism from many sides, Andre was one of the few people that was actually standing on my side and supporting me," said the 30-year-old Djokovic yesterday.

"So I appreciate that very much, and I wanted to thank him in person, and over the phone. "It turned out to be a long conversation, and that's where it all started. At that time, at that point, we both didn't think about this evolving to become a professional relationship, but finally, after a few weeks, it did. It was completely up to him." Agassi, an eight-time major winner at Roland Garros back in 1999, retired from tennis after the 2006 US Open and has never coached professionally before. But Djokovic believes he can learn from the American whose own career suffered numerous ups and downs, both on and off the court.

"That's one of the things I felt like I needed is new inspiration, someone that knows exactly what I'm going through, you know, on the court, off the court," added the world number two. "He has been through all these transitions, he has been in my shoes before playing Grand Slams, being the best in the world, and facing all the challenges that are present in professional sport."

Agassi admitted this week that he was at first reluctant to take on the job as coach but was eventually persuaded by his wife and fellow former tennis legend Steffi Graf. "Novak called me about three weeks ago and I said no at the start," said 47-year-old Agassi. "But Steffi said 'you should go, you will love it'. We had organized a family trip during Roland Garros anyway which was planned for a long time. "So I hope to see one or two of Novak's matches and try to bring to him what I can because even a small remark can do a lot." — AFP

SEVILLA REACH DEAL WITH ARGENTINA FOR SAMPAOLI

MADRID: Jorge Sampaoli moved a step closer to taking over the vacant position as Argentina coach yesterday as the Argentine Football Association (AFA) reached a deal with his club side Sevilla. "Sevilla and AFA have reached an agreement in principle to release coach Jorge Sampaoli... so he can take charge as Argentina national team coach," Sevilla said in a statement.

The Spanish side had been holding

out for AFA to pay a 1.5 million euro (\$1.7 million) release clause in Sampaoli's contract which still had one more year to run. Sampaoli enjoyed a largely successful solo season in charge at the Sanchez Pizjuan as he led Sevilla to fourth in La Liga behind the might of Real Madrid, Barcelona and Atletico Madrid. However, a tail off in form towards the end of the campaign was blamed on Sampaoli's desire to

leave the club as rumors linked him with Barcelona and Argentina.

"There's a clear intention from my country to have me as coach and, since I was young, it's something that has appealed to me," Sampaoli said ahead of Sevilla's final La Liga game of the season last weekend.

Despite being able to call on a rich pool of talent including Lionel Messi, Argentina sit fifth in South American

World Cup qualifying with just four games to go.

Only the top four qualify automatically for the tournament in Russia next year with fifth-place earning a playoff against the winners of the Oceania region. However, Sampaoli already has an impressive record in international football as he led Chile to win the Copa America for the first time in 2015, beating Messi's Argentina in the final. —AFP

PSG WANT FRENCH CUP AS SEASON SWANSONG

PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain will seek to draw their bitter-sweet season to a winning close when they take on unheralded Angers in today's French Cup final. PSG missed out on the Ligue 1 title to rivals Monaco, who finished eight points clear at the top of the table to break the Parisians' hopes of a fifth consecutive trophy. Despite that second place, guaranteeing Champions League football next season, and victory over an under-strength Monaco in the League Cup final, PSG coach Unai Emery has found himself in the spotlight of the ever-demanding Qatari owners.

Emery's first season since joining from Sevilla saw PSG notch up a memorable 4-0 home win over Barcelona in the Champions League before the Catalans stunningly overturned that deficit at home in the round of 16, meaning the Paris side missed out on the quarter-finals of Europe's lucrative club competition for the first time in five years.

"There were some changes last summer and after that we had some problems in the first half of the season," PSG goalkeeper Kevin Trapp acknowledged, notably with the departure of stars Zlatan Ibrahimovic and David Luiz to the English Premier League. "Our season wasn't as bad as all that, we finished with 87 points in the league despite the season Monaco had. "But we must ask ourselves some questions for next season because there are always things to improve. "The second part of the season was good and we were competitive."

PSG focused on 11th Cup title

Trapp added that the team were now focused on landing a record 11th-and third consecutive-French Cup title. "We have to win the Cup final. If we'd won the league, there wouldn't have been less pressure," he said. "There's the same pressure when you're in a club like PSG-like that you always want to win everything." PSG's opponents in the 100th staging of the Cup final will be Angers, the western club that finished 12th in the league.

Despite a limited budget that pales into insignificance compared to PSG's, Angers coach Stephane Moulin has moulded a team ethic based around tight on-field discipline which has paid dividends. "Football fills my life in an almost permanent way," the 49-year-old admitted. "I want us to live for the team. "What I look for in a player is the desire to work, the taste for work. "I like generous or courageous people. If they've got talent, all the better!"

Angers' appearance in the Cup final will be their first in 60 years, when they lost 6-3 to Toulouse, and just the second in club history. A victory would also guarantee a spot in the Europa League. "Should that happen, it will push us a bit to accelerate some things" said Angers president Said Chabane, an Algerian who touched down in France at the age of 23 to finish his engineering studies before going on to found a food group. "We're not ready now, but that's not to say we won't be ready at the start of September." —AFP



MADRID: Vicente Calderon stadium before the Spanish league football match Atletico de Madrid vs Athletic Club Bilbao at the Vicente Calderon stadium on May 21, 2017. — AFP

MIXED EMOTIONS: ATLETI WAVES GOODBYE TO CALDERON STADIUM

MADRID: Atletico Madrid's mythical Vicente Calderon stadium will soon be history: sad news for supporters of Real Madrid's rivals but not so for locals who hope the neighborhood will improve once noisy fans are gone. This weekend spells the end for the ageing structure that for over 50 years has housed Atletico-not as well known abroad as the world-famous Real Madrid despite fielding players like French star Antoine Griezmann but with a huge following in the Spanish capital.

Fans will watch Spain's Copa del Rey final between Barcelona and Alaves on Saturday and a charitable match on Sunday. Next year, the stadium that currently stands on the shores of the Manzanares river in southern Madrid, surrounded by blocks of flats and cheap cafeterias, will be razed to the ground. "I've been a member since the 2001-2002 season, when the Atletico was in second division," says Oscar Fernandez, 23, standing near the stadium in Madrid's Imperial district. Wearing the red and white shirt of a club that has since risen back to dizzying heights, winning the La Liga top division in 2014 and reaching Champions League finals in 2014 and 2016, Fernandez says he lives in Rome but returned expressly to see the final games at the Vicente Calderon. The stadium "is part of my life," he says.

A visceral attachment

From next season, Atletico-which

ended third in La Liga this year-will play on the other side of the Spanish capital, at a stadium called the Wanda Metropolitano. Still in construction, it has a capacity for 70,000 people, 15,000 more than the Calderon. But fans are hugely attached to the worn stadium, under which passes a ring-road that circles Madrid, where Atletico played for the first time on October 2, 1966.

Javier Fischer, 30, is so nostalgic that he has reserved three stadium seats to take away as a souvenir, one of them in memory of his father who died a year ago. Last Sunday, he was there for Atletico's last La Liga game in the Calderon "the saddest day ever here," he says, despite his team's 3-1 victory over Athletic Bilbao.

Standing in front of the club's office, Valentin Hernandez agrees with Fischer, but he also acknowledges that "the Calderon was too small." "Atletico needs to change with the times, like the big European teams," he says. In order to help finance the stadium, the club sold the naming rights to China's multinational Wanda Group, which also owns 20 percent of the club.

With help from Wanda and the increase in capacity, Atletico hopes to increase its annual budget from the current 280 million euros to 400 million euros in the 2019-2020 season. By so doing, it hopes to close the gap with Barcelona and Real Madrid, which

made more than 600 million euros each this season.

Still, the new stadium in the San Blas district is in a remote area in eastern Madrid, far from southern parts of the Spanish capital which traditionally support Atletico more than Real Madrid. And the 60-million-euro cost of the stadium also has supporters up in arms. They worry that the ensuing debt will stop the club from being able to pay the 80 to 90 million euros needed "to bring first-class players," says Ricardo Menendez, a journalist for the Atletico-specialized website Esto Es Atleti.

Locals rejoice

But the mood among locals in the Imperial district is much better. The stadium itself will be torn down to make way for some 1,300 flats and a large green space. Locals hope that the departure of Atletico-and the new flats-will revitalize the neighborhood. Many are also happy the commotion of fans and match days will now be a thing of the past. "I'm delighted it's going," says Jesus Ferro, 83, complaining about the "filth left" by fans as well as the noise. Ernesto Ortiz, manager of a hardware store, also thinks things will be better after Atletico leaves. "On match days, if there was any repair or maintenance work to do, we couldn't move around as the area was so full of vehicles," he says. —AFP



LONDON: Arsenal's French manager Arsene Wenger watches from the touchline during the English Premier League football match between Arsenal and Everton at the Emirates Stadium in London on May 21, 2017. —AFP

WENGER SEEKING SOLACE IN QUEST FOR SEVENTH FA CUP

LONDON: Bruised but unbowed, Arsene Wenger hopes to end the most painful season of his long tenure as Arsenal manager with a record-breaking FA Cup final victory over Double-chasing Chelsea. Though he has been barracked by his own fans and failed to secure Champions League qualification for the first time in 20 years, Wenger can make history by becoming the first manager to win seven FA Cups. With his contract due to expire and no news forthcoming about his future, today's game could provide an opportunity for a golden send-off-not that Wenger will be disclosing his plans in advance.

"Would it be a nice farewell? No, what I want is to win the next game," he said this week. "I love to win and I love to do well for my club. I want to win the cup for my club. It's not about me, it's about us winning the trophy and giving everything to achieve it." It is not the first time Wenger finds himself looking to the world's oldest cup competition for solace, with the FA Cup having enabled him to apply silver finishes to the season in both 2014 and 2015.

But he has never before gone into a final knowing it is his last hope of salvaging anything from the season, after Arsenal missed out on the top four and fell by the wayside in the League Cup and Champions League. While the Frenchman continues to be targeted by the vociferous 'Wenger Out' brigade, Arsenal's recent form means they approach the game with something of a spring in their step.

They won seven of their last eight league matches, winning all of the last five, and lost out to Liverpool in the race for fourth place by only a point. Their most recent Wembley outing will also stand them in good stead, with Arsenal having seen off Pep Guardiola's Manchester

City 2-1 in the semi-finals courtesy of an extra-time winner by Alexis Sanchez. Wenger's switch to a back three-mirroring Chelsea-has helped Arsenal find a second wind, but the defence he aligns beneath the Wembley arch will be far from a first-choice triumvirate.

Manchester tributes

Laurent Koscielny is banned following his dismissal in last Sunday's 3-1 win over Everton and Gabriel has been ruled out with knee ligament damage sustained in the same game. Shkodran Mustafi is a doubt due to concussion. Chelsea manager Antonio Conte hopes to emulate his Italian compatriot Carlo Ancelotti by steering the club to a league and FA Cup Double in his first season at Stamford Bridge.

He, too, can point to impressive form-six straight league wins - and a stirring recent Wembley triumph, his side having overcome Mauricio Pochettino's dangerous Tottenham Hotspur 4-2 in the last four. "We don't feel any pressure. We're just taking this game as it comes," says wing-back Victor Moses. "We think we're good enough to beat Arsenal, but it's not going to be an easy game. "We've got the league title and they're going to want to win because they missed out on top four. We're going to try and stop them because we want the Double."

The game will be John Terry's last in Chelsea's colours and although he is not expected to start, he could bow out by lifting his 17th trophy as captain and 18th in total. Conte once again has a full squad to choose from and must decide who out of Pedro and Willian will complete his front three alongside Eden Hazard and Diego Costa. —AFP

PABLO ZABALETA JOINS HAMMERS

LONDON: Argentina full-back Pablo Zabaleta will join West Ham United from Premier League rivals Manchester City, it was announced yesterday. Zabaleta will formally begin a two-year deal with the London club on July 1, when his City contract expires. The 32-year-old had already been released by City, for whom he made more than 200 appearances after joining from Espanyol in 2008.

"This is an absolute pleasure to be part of West Ham. I hope I can give you good moments. Of course, I come to the club to enjoy myself and hopefully we can have a

very successful time," Zabaleta told West Ham TV. Zabaleta won the Premier League twice as well as the 2011 FA Cup and two League Cups during his time at City, where he became a popular figure with fans as a symbol of the club's modern resurgence as a major force in English football.

Zabaleta, who revealed he turned down offers from Italy, Spain and also elsewhere in England to sign for the Hammers, now hopes to play his part in helping the east London club improve on last season's mid-table finish. "Sometimes a new challenge is all you need as a person and as a player. I

thought my time at City was done. It has been a fantastic nine years, absolutely brilliant," he said.

"Manchester City gave me the opportunity to come to this wonderful league, the Premier League, something I've been enjoying a lot as a player. And, of course, for me it was probably the right time to move on. "Also, as a player, I thought I wanted to keep playing in the Premier League. "For me, after being in this country for so long, this is a new challenge for me in the Premier League and I'm ready for it and looking forward to it." —AFP

LUIZ HAPPY 'HOME' COMING PAID OFF

COBHAM: Chelsea defender David Luiz admits he took a risk leaving Paris St Germain to come 'home' but as he prepares for the FA Cup final, having already won the Premier League, it's a gamble which he believes has reaped dividends. The 30-year-old Brazilian was a firm favorite in Paris, an established and respected part of a successful team which won back-to-back domestic 'trebles' during his two-year stay in the French capital.

That's a contrast to his first spell at Chelsea when he was heavily criticized by television pundits for the poor quality of his defending-despite eventually being sold for a world record fee of £50million for a defender. So, it's easy to question why he answered a call just ahead of the 2016/17 campaign to return to Stamford Bridge to a side managed by Antonio Conte who had been tasked with restoring morale after a turbulent season prior to that when they had gone from champions to finishing 10th.

His return, was hardly greeted with celebrations either-certainly not outside of Stamford Bridge-and instead described as a panic buy by the home media. So Luiz can understand why many people wondered if he had made a mistake. "I was winning in Paris. I went to Paris for two years and won all the titles in France and I had a great life," he told journalists at the club Open Day head of today's final against London rivals Arsenal.

"So I have everything in Paris and then I took a risk to come back in one country that was not that happy with me. "They always criticize me a lot even with the Champions League, Europa League, and playing all the games. "So that's why it was a risk. And I love the risk. If you never take risks in your life you never feel something new. "So I taste something new and I like it. "I don't like to stay always with the easy life-so that's why I took the risk and today I am very happy."

'I cut my salary'

The contrast between the Chelsea of last season and the Antonio Conte side going for a league and cup 'double' is immense; and Luiz has been such an important part of the transformation, becoming a pivotal cog in Conte's 3-4-3 formation. "I think last season was not a good season for Chelsea and this season we did great since the beginning, not just because of me, I think because of everybody," insisted Luiz.

"It was because of the commitment, desire, the mentality we put on the pitch every day. "Every day we are working hard and that's why we deserve it."

In fact, Luiz describes re-signing for Chelsea as 'the right decision' and revealed that it involved taking a pay cut from the lucrative package he enjoyed in Paris. "If you want to know about the money, I cut my salary to come back here. "But it's OK, God has given me a lot so I'm happy with this," he said.

Since making his surprise move almost everything has gone well for the Brazilian and, inevitably, his critics have gone strangely quiet. In fact former Manchester United defender Gary Neville, who in 2013 famously said Luiz played like "he was being controlled by a ten year old on the Playstation" went as far as to retract his comments four years on. —AFP



Matches on TV
(Local Timings)

ENGLAND FA CUP

Arsenal v Chelsea
beIN SPORTS

19:30

SPAIN COPA DEL REY

Barcelona v Deportivo
beIN SPORTS

22:30

CUP FINAL LAST CHANCE TO SALVAGE BARCA'S SEASON

MADRID: Only victory in today's Copa del Rey final against Alaves will salvage some pride from Barcelona's season and give coach Luis Enrique a successful send-off, whilst the Basques dream of lifting the trophy for a first time. On a night of goodbyes as Atletico Madrid's Vicente Calderon hosts its final competitive fixture, Enrique will take charge of Barca for the last time. A win would complete a clean sweep of the Copa del Rey in his three seasons in charge.

However, in contrast to the previous two years when Cup success was the icing on a successful season having won the treble in 2015 and a league and Cup double last season, Barca this time head into the end-of-season showpiece without a major trophy. "Although it can be called the lesser of all the trophies, for us another trophy is at stake," said Barca captain Andres Iniesta. "It will allow us to end the season on a high."

Selection headache

Enrique faces a selection headache with both Luis Suarez and Sergi Roberto suspended after being sent-off in a tempestuous semi-final win over Atletico back in February. Paco Alcacer is expected to be handed a rare big game start in Suarez's absence up front, whilst the Catalans are hopeful that Javier Mascherano will shrug off a hamstring problem to fill in at right-back.

Even without Suarez, Barca still have plenty of firepower to call upon with Lionel Messi set to start his 700th match for club and country, whilst Neymar has netted in the final in the past two seasons. Manuel Pellegrino could also be taking charge of Alaves for the final time after a terrific campaign in which they have reached their first Cup final and finished ninth on their first season in a decade back in the top flight.

And the Argentine believes Barca have merely come back down to earth after an "abnormal" run of success over the past decade. "They have made the abnormal seem normal. For Barca, winning two or three trophies a season is normal. "They have won so much that now it seems like they haven't had a good season." Alaves have already shown the damage they can cause to Barca this season. A shock 2-1 win for the visitors at the Camp Nou in September ultimately cost Enrique's men the three points that separated them from Real Madrid in the title race come the end of the campaign.

However, Alaves also suffered a Barca backlash when the visitors won 6-0 at Mendizorroza in February. "They have the mentality of wanting to win every game. That is what they are used to," added Pellegrino. "We need to play a very complete game to stand a chance." The presence of Theo Hernandez adds extra intrigue as he too bids farewell after a highly successful loan spell at Alaves and probably to his parent club Atletico too. Left-back Hernandez looks set to become the first player since 2000 to cross the Madrid divide by signing for Real Madrid and has rebuffed the attentions of Barca to do so. —AFP



ROME: This file photo taken on December 22, 2016 shows AS Roma supporters holding a banner in honor of team's captain Francesco Totti reading 'King of Rome, history continues', during the Italian Serie A football match between AS Roma and Chievo Verona at the Olympic Stadium. —AFP

ALLEGRI LOOKS TOWARDS TREBLE AS SERIA A BIDS TOTTI FAREWELL

ORTISEI: While coach Massimiliano Allegri rings the changes for Juventus ahead of their bid for a historic club treble, Serie A will wave farewell to legendary Francesco Totti in his final game with Roma tomorrow. Allegri faces arguably the biggest challenge of his career when the Turin giants face Real Madrid in the Champions League final in Cardiff on June 3.

But with a record sixth consecutive scudetto, and record third successive league and Cup double now in the bag, the 49-year-old coach can at least afford to rest key players for Sunday's final league outing of the season at Bologna. Allegri has yet to name his starting line-up, but with Germany midfielder Sami Khedira sidelined and focused on recovering in time for Cardiff, Venezuelan Tomas Rincon is looking forward to a rare start.

Despite some brief respite after following their 2-0 Cup final win over Lazio with a 3-0 romp over Crotone last weekend, he said the focus is firmly on Bologna. "We had two days off but we're already focused on Saturday's game," said Rincon. "As always, we're going to Bologna looking to win. We're in good shape and hoping to finish the championship with another three points before we start to focus on the Champions League final. "It will be an intense week, but we have to stay calm, focused and work hard."

As Juventus look to emulate Inter Milan, the first Italian team to win the treble, in 2010 under Jose Mourinho, closest rivals Roma host Genoa looking for the win that would comfortably secure the league's second automatic Champions League spot. For once this season, the Stadio Olimpico will be filled to capacity but only because Totti, having played 25 seasons with the Giallorossi, will make his final Serie A appearance. Or at least hope to.

King of Rome

With Roma requiring a win to keep Napoli, one point further adrift, from snatching second spot, coach Luciano Spalletti may rain on Totti's parade. "Even though he deserves all his accolades, and everything that comes his way when he retires, my job is to make sure Roma win," Spalletti said. "I have to treat him as an important player but one who is part of a squad. And to be fair, I sometimes have to make choices that penalize him."

Totti not making an appearance in his own finale would do little for Spalletti's popularity in a week in which he has been linked with the vacant coach's job at embattled Inter Milan, who have already failed to qualify for Europe before they host Udinese at the San Siro. Despite winning only one scudetto, in 2001, the 'King of Rome' (Re di Roma) as one-club man Totti has been known-is so respected that even the hardline 'ultra' fans of city rivals Lazio are admirers.

"We've been enemies all our lives, but we salute you Francesco Totti," read a banner at the Stadio Olimpico last week as Lazio suffered a rare defeat to Inter. Totti is expected to continue his career with Roma, albeit off the pitch, having signed a contract to work in management alongside the club's new sporting director Monchi. But the 40-year-old icon is keeping fans guessing. Amid reports he could accept an offer to keep on playing outside Serie A, Totti said on Thursday:

"From Monday I'm ready for a fresh start. I'm ready for a new challenge." AC Milan, already assured of a Europa League place, travel to Cagliari looking to cap what has been an underwhelming season for the seven-time European champions with a win. Crotone, meanwhile, host Lazio looking to upset predictions and secure the win that could secure top flight survival. The Calabrians sit one point behind fourth-from-bottom Empoli, who are away at already-relegated Palermo. —AFP

DORTMUND EYE CUP, AUBAMEYANG EYES DOOR

BERLIN: Hot-shot striker Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang bids to lift his first title with Borussia Dortmund today amidst growing speculation the German Cup final will be his last appearance for the club. Dortmund face Eintracht Frankfurt at Berlin's Olympic Stadium at 8:00 pm (1800 GMT) with Borussia bidding to end their run of three straight defeats in Germany's showcase final. "Every time we have been to Berlin in the past three years, we have had to drive home empty handed," Dortmund captain Marcel Schmelzer told daily newspaper Die Welt.

Schmelzer, who hopes to be fit despite a hamstring knock, added:

"It's high time that we won again." But this could be the last appearance for both Aubameyang and head coach Thomas Tuchel. "I will speak to the club and make my decision after the final," said Aubameyang when asked about his Dortmund future having reportedly been considering bumper offers from Italy, France and China. Despite having a contract until 2020, German daily Bild claim Aubameyang, the Bundesliga's top-scorer this season with 31 goals, has already told Dortmund's bosses he wants to leave.

Having arrived in 2013, the German Cup could be his first and last Dortmund title with AC Milan, Paris

Saint Germain and China's Tianjin Quanjian, where he could earn 500,000 euros (\$559,180) per week, having reportedly made offers. After Aubameyang's predecessor Robert Lewandowski left on a free transfer in 2014 for arch rivals Bayern Munich, Dortmund will want to cash in, should their Gabon star decide to go. Likewise, Tuchel could be overseeing his final game after two seasons. The 43-year-old fell out with CEO Hans-Joachim Watzke after insisting he was not consulted about whether to play their home Champions League quarter-final less than 24 hour after the April 11 bomb attack on the Dortmund team bus. —AFP

Sports



Wenger seeking solace in quest for seventh FA Cup

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BOSTON: The Cleveland Cavaliers pose with their trophy after winning Game 5 of the NBA basketball Eastern Conference finals against the Boston Celtics 135-102. —AP

JAMES PASSES JORDAN, CAVS BACK IN FINALS

BOSTON: The NBA Finals has its first "three-match," courtesy of a King who passed His Airness. LeBron James scored 35 points and passed Michael Jordan to become the NBA's all-time playoff scoring leader as the Cleveland Cavaliers beat the Boston Celtics 135-102 on Thursday night to claim their third straight Eastern Conference title and another trip to the NBA Finals to meet the Golden State Warriors.

Kyrie Irving added 24 points and Kevin Love finished with 15 for the Cavs, who never trailed and led by as many as 39 points in one of their most dominating wins of the series. The Cavs set an NBA record by winning their 13th consecutive series closeout opportunity.

Cleveland's 4-1 series win gives it a 12-1 record this post-season and sets up a third consecutive matchup with Western Conference champion Golden State, the team it beat in the Finals last season to claim the franchise's first championship. "I wear the number because of Mike," James said. "I think I fell in love with the game because of Mike, just because of what he was able to accomplish. When you're watching Michael Jordan it's almost like a god. So I didn't think I could be Mike."

Boyhood idol

It will mark the seventh straight trip to the Finals for James, who hit a 3-pointer late in the third quarter to nudge past Jordan on the playoff scoring list. He quickly flashed one finger as he backpedaled down the court. In the postgame trophy presentation backstage, James spent most of it lingering in the background as his teammates celebrated. But there's no denying that his accolades are putting him in the orbit of Jordan, his boyhood idol.

"The biggest thing is I did it just being me, I don't have to score the ball to make an impact on the basketball game," James said. "That was my mindset. If I'm not scoring the ball, how can I still make an impact on the game?" As much as this series was about James, Irving helped turn the tide of the series with a 42-point effort in Game 4. But he said both he and his teammates continue to be inspired by their leader. "He's been the driving force, this entire playoff run, and all of us have just helped us along the way," Irving said. Coach Tyrone Lue said they've gotten tighter this season.

"This team is a crazy team. They just stayed resilient all year, got to the playoffs, and we really stepped our game up," he said.

"Now we can start focusing on Golden State to get ready. As of tonight, I'll get started." Avery Bradley led Boston with 23 points.

The Cavaliers basically conceded the East's top seed to the Celtics at the end of the regular season by opting to rest their starters in advance of the playoffs. But they displayed their superiority over the final two games to wrap up the series. After allowing the Celtics to seize the early momentum in Game 4, the Cavs barely gave them the chance in Game 5.

Led by its Big Three, Cleveland quickly built a 21-point lead in the first quarter, while getting lots of contributions from their teammates. Love continued to knock down shots from the outside, Irving sliced his way into the lane to the rim and James got free for several of his one-handed, tomahawk dunks. It was a very welcomed sight in Irving's case, after he rolled his left ankle in the third quarter of Cleveland's Game 4 win. He showed no signs of lingering issues, though, beating several defenders off the dribble and handing out seven assists. Meanwhile, JR Smith and Kyle Korver helped spread out Boston's defenders by connecting on several wide-open scoring opportunities. Deron Williams, who had been quiet for most of the series, also got in on the act with a series-best 14 points for Cleveland. —AP