Most popular English books of 2016 in Kuwait

Manhunt for Berlin suspect intensifies as anger grows

Bayern hammer 10-man Leipzig to open up lead

In this Dec 20, 2016, photo, Julie Dombo celebrates her first full day with her new electronic hands with her husband, John in Derby, Kansas. Julie whose hands and feet had to be amputated after she was shot during a robbery got an early Christmas gift, new electronic hands worth $260,000, courtesy of a businessman and his wife. —AP

Kansas amputee gets surprise holiday hands

See Page 21
Christmas is NOT haram!

By Muna Al-Fuzai

I am stunned by these calls and messages on social media that associate every act with the term haram.

Christmas is round the corner, and as usual, I have received messages and warnings on social media not to exchange any joyful gestures or greetings that reflect happiness on this important event for our Christian friends. Everything has been labeled as haram (unlawful in Islam). Muslims are not supposed to say Merry Christmas or Happy Holidays or smile at anyone who happens to be a Christian.

There are two reasons given for this - first, that this is not our celebration and is a Western ritual that has nothing to do with Islam. The second is that we should be mourning the death of people in the Arab world instead of expressing joy. I am stunned by these calls and messages on social media that associate every act with the term haram. During our Islamic holidays, such as Eid, many of my Christian friends and readers shower me with emails and messages wishing me and my family. Should I counter them with the term 'haram'?

Christmas is a festival of joy that revolves around decorating Christmas trees, Santa Claus, candles and snowmen, although every country has its own rituals. For example in Japan, Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) is considered the traditional meal on Christmas, since the launch of the “Kentucky Festival of Christmas” campaign in 1974. Japan is not a Christian nation, but adopted this tradition from the Western world.

Christmas is considered one of the most important festivals for Christians after Easter. So it's natural to associate it with religious ceremonies and private prayers. Large numbers of non-Christians also celebrate this festival. I see no harm in it and I enjoy it too. It is a great feeling to let yourself be a kid again and enjoy the holiday spirit - whether it's by leaving cookies and clogs by the fireplace for Santa in this cold weather. It makes you experience the spirit of magic and joy.

While all European countries are preparing to celebrate Christmas and the New Year, it's a different issue in Arab countries. Many countries forbid Christmas and New Year celebrations, and warn the public against doing so. I love Christmas in the UAE. Major hotels and shopping malls in Dubai and Abu Dhabi celebrate Christmas by setting up Christmas trees and Santa figures.

Of course, children always enjoy the biggest share of the celebrations by receiving gifts from everyone. But it is not always rosy. Many Islamic states prohibit the celebration and have penalties that may reach up to imprisonment. Kuwait is a little conservative over celebrating these festivals, but it doesn't interfere with the celebrations. Of course, it is nothing compared to the celebrations in Dubai.

Some Muslim scholars rush to issue fatwas for people to avoid expressing or sharing the joy of such festivals. Some have even said that the celebration of Christmas is against Islamic identity. I have joined my Christian friends in these celebrations for years, and I'm still a Muslim. I cannot see any negativity in it. There are other religious men who do not see any harm in these celebrations.

So to all my Christian friends and readers - Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!
Most popular English books of 2016 in Kuwait

By Athoob Al-Shuaibi

With the swift pace of life and the need to achieve some sort of balance between work and family responsibilities, while keeping up with friends and other social relations, all of us need some me-time. We strive to savor some relaxing moments to enjoy a book with a favorite hot drink in a quiet place to escape from daily pressures.

As we can see from the list above, English novels are widely popular among the youth and younger readers. There is an absence of romantic novels, compared to books of mythology, action and thriller genres. The list also shows there’s some interest in self-development books. In addition, novels turned into movies become popular in the same year, because readers like to compare between the two, and usually exclaim: “The novel is way better than the movie!” Nevertheless, Kuwait is far behind global book trends, and we can’t assign the blame only on the bureaucratic procedures of the censorship department of the information ministry. Bookstores often bring in what sells the most. Therefore, the lack of variety is disappointing for avid readers, turning them to buy their favorite books online.

English novels are widely popular among the youth and younger readers. Interest in self-development, action and thriller books also tops interest in romantic novels.
S \textbf{pending hours stuck in traffic may take a toll on your health and happiness, and can lead to road rage. Road rage is a term used to describe angry, hostile reactions when driving that are directed towards other drivers. That, in turn, may raise the risk of having a heart attack or physically assaulting another motorist. Road rage is on the rise all over the world, so Kuwait Times spoke to a psychologist to give readers the best tips on how to reduce the stress, anger and anxiety when their cars are stuck in a traffic jam.}

"\textbf{Overcrowding of roads and highways is one reason people resort to road rage. Human nature reacts defensively when we feel that our personal space has been invaded. The feeling of anonymity and security behind the wheel makes an otherwise timid driver lose his temper over traffic-related situations, and induces behaviors like obscene or provocative gestures, yelling, cursing and tailgating,}" Consultant Psychologist Abdullah Al-Hamadi told Kuwait Times.

First of all, the driver should check his mood before driving, he said. If you leave your home or workplace in an angry, irritated or otherwise upset mood, there’s a good chance that a minor traffic incident can set you off. Hamadi said that to control an angry, adrenaline-driven response, the driver should focus on breathing.

"Pay attention to each breath as it goes in and out. Maintain a normal breathing rhythm, as it relaxes the body. Inhale and exhale calmly - this is a proven technique for eliciting relaxation. It’s also simple enough to do behind the wheel," he noted.

"The driver should not personalize an incident - you must refuse to allow another driver - someone whom you do not know and will probably never see again - to dictate your mood and determine the quality of your day," Hamadi advised.
He said that the best solution to avoid the worst rush-hour traffic is by leaving home an hour earlier. “If people are wary about arriving early for work, they can have a cup of coffee or go to the gym before work. Avoid peak traffic times - this will vary from one city to another, but traffic is generally at its worst between 7:00 and 10:00 am and from 1:00 to 7:00 pm.”

Listen to the radio
Hamadi remarked that social media has done a good job to help pass a driver’s time while waiting. “The driver can tell himself it’s a welcome respite from work. It is also a golden opportunity to listen to your favorite radio show or the soundtrack of your favorite movie,” he said.

A 2007 report by the National Centre for Biotechnology Information on the psychology behind road rage stated that previous literature had demonstrated “an association between road rage and psychiatric morbidity”. Also, a 2012 study by Washington University in St Louis noted that being exposed to the daily hassles of traffic could lead to higher chronic stress. Hamadi advised drivers to not expect to eliminate every negative feeling. “If you feel a twinge of worry over being late, notice and accept the feeling nonjudgmentally, and then let it go. Turn your awareness to what’s happening in the present moment. Listen to soothing music - it is a good way to relax when you start to experience road rage. Music can help you calm down and focus on getting to your destination safely.”

For some people, hand yoga is an excellent way to relieve stress. Hand yoga is the act of stretching and relaxing the muscles of the hands. “Spread your fingers and stretch out both hands as much as possible. Hold this position for a few seconds, then release it. Curl each finger individually into your palm, pushing gently with your thumb. Hold, then release. Flex your wrists and bend each knuckle individually to “shake out” the muscles and joints,” he explained. Also, making eye contact is a sign of aggression. “Whether someone is honking their horn, flashing you with high beams or just driving aggressively, make sure you avoid eye contact with that person. Experts warn that making eye contact with an enraged driver can be seen by that person as a sign of aggression, and could result in an attack,” Hamadi cautioned.
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FM leaves for Jeddah to attend OIC meeting

KUWAIT: First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah left Kuwait yesterday heading to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, to partake in the urgent meeting for the Islamic Cooperation Organization (OIC) on the situation in Syria and specifically the tragic humanitarian crisis in Aleppo.

Kuwait: Speakers of Mongolia’s parliament Khural Miyegombyn Enkhbold and his accompanying delegation left the country yesterday, after two-day official visit. He was seen off at the airport by National Assembly’s Secretary and head of the mission of honor accompanying the Mongolian official MP Dr Ouda Al-Rowai and Charge d’affaires at Mongolian Embassy in Kuwait. During his visit, the Mongolian official met with His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister and Head of the government Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and His Highness the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior, Al-Khaled Al-Jarrah. During his visit, he also met with National Assembly’s Speaker Marzouq Ali Al-Gharnim in addition to top state officials.

Mongolian parliament speakers leaves Kuwait

KUWAIT: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) continued yesterday to provide relief aid and assistance to the Syrian refugees in border areas of northern Lebanon, in cooperation with the Lebanese Red Cross. Head of the KRCS field team Fahad Al-Yagout told KUNA the society provided food rations for about 200 Syrian refugee families in the city of Akkar, adding the rations could feed five people for about a month. This campaign is within the KRCS initiative to help Syrian refugees fend off the harsh winter season, said the official. There are around one million Syrian refugees in Lebanon escaping from the ongoing war in their country raging since 2011. Recently, the city of Aleppo, besieged by Syrian regime forces and allied, had been subjected to a ruthless onslaught that resulted in the death and injury of many Syrians. The crisis in Aleppo is expected to worsen the humanitarian situation in Syria and nearby countries.

KRCS continues to aid Syrian refugees in Lebanon

KUWAIT: Personnel from Medical Emergencies Department of the Health Ministry carry out a ‘comprehensive exercise 3’ in southern Kuwait’s Jlaiah area. The mock exercise imitated an airline crash in the desert after it collides with a chopper and crashes into the sea. Subsequently, a fire breaks out in a truck carrying chemicals when debris from the plane hit it.

The plane had 95 passengers and the chopper had six. One person was injured in the truck fire while others involved in the crash were rescued. Acting Director of Medical Emergencies Department Munther Al-Jalahma set up established medical clinics on the scene and 12 ambulances participated in the operation.

Fire in Khairan chalet

KUWAIT: A young woman who disappeared from her family’s house a month ago was arrested at a check point in Hawally. The girl was with a man who seemed to be under the influence of drugs. The young woman confessed to being with her boyfriend in a flat. Drugs were found on both when searched.

Orders were given by senior officials to state security and criminal detectives to identify a person who made tweets that could affect relations with a neighboring country. The tweets claimed that there were troops massing at the Kuwait borders, which could affect relations with a neighboring country. The tweets also claimed that there were troops massing at the Kuwait borders, though those claims are totally false.

Rape attempt thwarted; liquor traders arrested

KUWAIT: A young woman who disappeared from her family’s house a month ago was arrested at a check point in Hawally. The girl was with a man who seemed to be under the influence of drugs. The young woman confessed to being with her boyfriend in a flat. Drugs were found on both when searched.

Three Indians were arrested with 48 bottles of liquor in Khaitan area. The trio said they were on their way to sell the bottles. They were also found in violation of residency laws. They were sent to concerned authorities.

KUWAIT: A wanted Ethiopian woman accused of theft was arrested in Salmiya. The owner of a beauty shop had earlier accused the Ethiopian of stealing KD 150. The woman was sent to concerned authorities.

Liquor traders caught

False tweets

Orders were given by senior officials to state security and criminal detectives to identify a person who made tweets that could affect relations with a neighboring country. The tweets also claimed that there were troops massing at the Kuwait borders, though those claims are totally false.

Woman arrested

Screams and alleged rape attempt

The screams of a female Arab expat saved her from a rape attempt, as she claimed, meanwhile the accused citizen said he did not intend to rape her, rather he wanted to talk to her about disputes between the two but she started screaming.

Translated from the Arabic press
Deputy Premier, Interior Minister Lt Gen (right) Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah witnessed the graduation of the sixth batch of 179 investigators both male and female who completed their training under the supervision of the specialized training center at the Investigations General Department. Sheikh Khalid Al-Jarrah called upon the graduates to continue their education to enhance their performance and wished them success. He also conveyed the congratulations of the political leadership to them.

Meanwhile, Interior Ministry Undersecretary Lt General Suleiman Al-Fahad said Kuwait is proud of its children who joined the legal profession and said the government would exert all efforts to protect the law and its principles. Director General of Investigations General Department Maj Gen Dr Fahad Al-Dousary said the training course lasted six months in which 31 uniformed and 148 civilians (69 girls and 79 men) participated.

Jahra Municipality Branch carried out a campaign that resulted in removing five mobile vendors from Abdaly road. They also cleared the seventh Ring Road of illegal vendors and removed 12 abandoned vehicles.

The Municipality’s new law is a significant achievement which will help curb violations of construction rules and encroachment of the state’s properties, Kuwait Municipality Director General Ahmad Al-Manfouhi said yesterday. Addressing a seminar organized by Kuwait Institute for Judicial and Legal Studies late on Wednesday on Law No 33/2016, Al-Manfouhi added that the previous Law No 5/2005 included several loopholes related to building violations. But, the new law will work on tackling all these negative aspects and violations, he said, pointing out that it set regulations and punishments against violators like removing unlicensed buildings, cutting off electricity and other services.

The clauses in new bill have not been introduced so far, but they are appreciated, he said, indicating that the municipality will ask the legislative authority to add some technical points to the law. The official added that the act has been prepared well and would contribute to addressing several problems pertaining to violations.
KUWAIT EX-MP GETS NEW JAIL TERM FOR SAUDI INSULT

KUWAIT: A Kuwaiti appeals court yesterday sentenced former lawmaker Abdulhamed Dashi to 10 years in jail in absinertia for insults against neighboring Saudi Arabia.

The new term raises to 42 years and six months the total jail terms handed to Dashi for making comments deemed offensive to Saudi Arabia and Bahrain and endangering Kuwait’s ties with them.

In previous cases, he was also convicted of insulting HH the Amir. The three countries are part of the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) regional alliance.

“Could anyone believe that I received jail sentences of 42 years and six months for just expressing my opinion,” exclaimed Dashi, who is living outside Kuwait, in a tweet. Dashi was elected to parliament in 2013 but left the country in March this year for medical treatment in Britain and has been abroad since then.

He tried to register to contest last month’s snap polls but electoral authorities and the court barred him. Dashi still faces several other cases for which he could receive further jail terms if convicted. In previous comments on Twitter, Dashi said he expected sentences that could amount to 100 years in jail.

The verdicts are not final but Dashi can only challenge once he returns to the country. He has not said when he would come back.

Dashi, a staunch supporter of Iran and Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad and a critic of the royal families of both Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. He denounced as an “invasion” the 2011 military one, Kuwait’s First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah said yesterday.

Speaking at an urgent meeting called by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to discuss the humanitarian crisis in the war-torn Syrian city of Aleppo, the Kuwaiti Foreign Minister urged all sides to return to the negotiating table in efforts to restore security and stability in Syria.

On the conflict that remains unabated for more than five years, Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled pressed the international community for urgent and prompt action to put an end to the violence in Aleppo, calling for an immediate evacuation of civilians from besieged areas through safe passages.

Moreover, addressing the need to deliver much needed humanitarian aid to Aleppo, he said that it is incumbent upon the international community to act quickly in order to mitigate the misery the Syrian people are living in.

Meanwhile, the foreign minister also spoke of viable suggestions comprising political efforts to put an end to the conflict in Syria, including plans by Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations and Turkey to hold an urgent meeting of the UN General Assembly with the aim of exposing crimes being committed in that country.

On the planned UN General Assembly meeting, he said that it will underscore that the war in Syria has reached perilous levels and has induced an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe that poses a grave threat to global peace and security.

The Kuwaiti Foreign Minister also noted that since the war in Syria erupted more than five years ago, Kuwait has spared no efforts to provide humanitarian aid to the Syrian people, worth $1.6 billion, as pledged during a trio of conferences on Syria hosted by Kuwait.

“Kuwait’s commitment to supporting the Syrian people continues to be spilled,” he said. He also thanked all those who participated in this urgent meeting, held to discuss the humanitarian crisis unfolding in Aleppo, for their “prompt response” and for their impeccable efforts to organize this meeting.

Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled deplored Jeddah after taking part in the urgent OIC meeting, called at the behest of Kuwait, Kuwait’s Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Sheikh Thamer Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and the country’s Consul General in Jeddah and permanent envoy to the OIC Wael Al-Enezi bid farewell to the Kuwaiti Foreign Minister upon his departure.

Kuwait’s delegation to the meeting included Assistant Foreign Minister for the First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister’s Office Affairs Ambassador Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah, Sheikh Thamer Al-Ahmad, Deputy Assistant Foreign Minister for the Affairs of International Organizations Nasser Al-Heyl, Al-Enezi and other senior Foreign Ministry officials. —KUNA

KUWAIT MARRIAGE RITUALS CONNECTING PAST AND PRESENT

KUWAIT: People from various cultures take marriage rituals very seriously to the point that centuries-old traditions are unchanged. But in the lad of Kuwait, the situation is somewhat different.

Kuwaiti society upgraded its approach to marriage with flashy wedding ceremonies and lavish banquets, there are essential marriage rituals and protocols that appears to surpass time and space bringing the past and the present together. In contrast with many societies around the globe, the concept of dating between men and women seems to be a non-existence in old Kuwaiti society with courtship and matchmaking being more dominant in modern times. After an acceptable woman suit marriage, the marriage process begins with “Al-Dazah”, basically a celebration involving the family of the bridegroom delivering the dowry and other presents to the family of the bride.

The most important part of marriage is something called “Al-Melcha”, an event in which the husband and the bride’s guardian sign the Islamic marriage contract or more commonly known in Arabic as “Aked Al-Nekah”. The wedding ceremony is usually celebrated at the Diwan of the bridegroom or at the mosque after “Isha” evening prayers during mostly a Thursday.

A wedding proceeding can really optional; however, most choose to put on a celebration for this glorious occasion usually attended by members of both families, friends, and the public.

After the courtship and marriages are done, the husband spends about a week at the house of the bride. After the seventh day, the family of the bride celebrates the occasion with “Al-Deenwaal”, which is the process in which the woman will finally head to her husband’s house.

What follows after the marriage is mostly visits by the family members of the bride, usually the mother, to the house of the husband’s family to make sure everything is fine.

Despite some aspects of Kuwaiti marriage rituals disappearing, the process mostly remains intact during our modern era, giving the proverb “old habits die hard” a whole new meaning. —KUNA

KUWAIT URGES DIALOGUE TO END SYRIA CARNAGE

Sheikh Khaled addresses OIC meeting on Aleppo

JEDDAH: The solution to the “catastrophic” conflict in Syria can never be a military one, Kuwait’s First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah said yesterday.

Speaking at an urgent meeting called by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) convened to discuss the humanitarian crisis in Aleppo. The Kuwaiti Foreign Minister urged all sides to return to the negotiating table in efforts to restore security and stability in Syria.

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PARLIAMENT TO FORM PANEL FOR TACKLING SPORTS ISSUE

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti National Assembly is scheduled to establish a special panel at a session on December 27 to be charged with drafting amendments to the national sports laws and regulations, in a fresh quest by the state to lift the ban on its participation in international tournaments.

The legislators, during a crucial session on Wednesday, voted in favor of setting up the special committee in debates on prospects of modifying the national sports laws. Following Wednesday’s session, Parliament Speaker Marzooq Ali Al-Ghanem stated that international authorities should take into consideration vows by the State of Kuwait government for sports reforms that could help lift the international suspension imposed on the country.

Elaborating after the special session dedicated to the sports crisis, Al-Ghanem noted that the ban on Kuwait should be temporarily lifted after the country’s embassies have provided international authorities with a book detailing a government decisions to initiate reforms in the sports sector, which comply with the International Olympic Committee’s (IOC) directives.

Moreover, he said that the session yielded an overwhelming consensus to form the parliamentary committee tasked with investigating this sports crisis during a two-month period; in which a solution to remedy this issue must be found. He also added that he was hopeful that collective efforts on the part of the government will be instrumental in ultimately solving this dilemma.

Meanwhile, in response to a question of whether the sports ban will remain in place well after the two-month period, Al-Ghanem affirmed that the government will spare no effort to ensure that the ban is lifted.

The IOC has suspended the Kuwait Olympic Committee (IOC) and prevented the country from taking part in international tournaments; claiming that the national sports laws do not comply with the international regulations. It has also accused the Kuwaiti government of “undeniable interference” in the sector. The ban states that the Kuwaiti committee “is not entitled to participate in any activity connected with the Olympic Movement or exercise any right conferred upon it by the Olympic Charter or the IOC.”

Efforts

Speaking during Wednesday’s session, the Information Minister stated that Kuwait is exerting great efforts to lift the international ban. Sheikh Salman Sabah Al-Salem Al-Humoud Al-Sabah, also the Minister of State for Youth Affairs, said Kuwait is set to develop the Olympic and non-Olympic sport sectors and achieve all terms required to lift the ban. —KUNA
BERLIN: German authorities came under fire yesterday after it emerged that the prime suspect in Berlin's deadly truck attack, a rejected Tunisian asylum seeker, was known as a potentially dangerous jihadist.

Prosecutors have issued a Europe-wide wanted notice for 24-year-old Anis Amri, offering a 100,000-euro ($104,000) reward for information leading to his arrest and warning he "could be violent and armed".

A temporary residence permit believed to belong to Amri, alleged to have links to the radical Islamist scene, was found in the cab of the 40-ton lorry that rammed through a packed Christmas market in Berlin Monday, killing 11. The twelfth victim, the hijacked truck's Polish driver, was found shot in the cab. Police have searched a refugee center in Emmerich, western Germany, where Amri was stopped.

In a revelation likely to stoke public anger, Berlin prosecutors said separately that Amri had done online research on how to make explosive devices and had been suspected of planning a burglary to raise cash to buy automatic weapons, "possibly to carry out an attack". But after keeping watch on him from March until November, and a probe had been launched suspecting he was preparing "a serious act of violence against the state".

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**RUSSIA JAILED STUDENT WHO FOLLOWED IS LOVER TO SYRIA**

**MOSCOW:** A Russian military court yesterday sentenced a 21-year-old student who tried to enter Syria after falling in love with an Islamic State jihadist to four and a half years in prison. Varvara Karaulova was detained last year after she tried to cross into war-torn Syria from Turkey while still a philosophy undergraduate at the renowned Moscow State University. Judge Alexander Ababkov said in court that the “criminal activity of the defendant continued for quite a long time” and that Karaulova had a criminal intention. He said she was a “supporter of radical Islamist views” and decided to join IS, aware of the jihadist group’s aim to “create an Islamic caliphate.”

Karaulova was charged last year with preparing to participate in a “terrorist organization”, but pleaded not guilty, saying she was motivated by love for a Russian jihadist fighting in Syria. Karaulova, her dark hair in a pony-tail, looked calm as the judge read the verdict, watched by family members including her parents and stepmother. Defense lawyer Sergei Badamshin told reporters it was a “very harsh, unjustified sentence” and “we have already appealed.”

Prosecutor Mikhail Reznichenko said his side, which had requested a five-year sentence, was satisfied with the decision. Karaulova’s lawyers argued that the authorities are trying to make an example of her to warn off other young Russians from trying to head to Syria, where Moscow is conducting a bombing campaign in support of Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad. Her father Pavel Karaulov condemned the sentence as “absurd.” He told reporters outside the court that he now regrets having gone to the authorities when his daughter disappeared, saying: “I made a mistake...by turning to those who should protect our security.” Lawyer Ilya Novikov said that sentence sent a message to parents in a similar situation that “you mustn’t go to the FSB (security service), you mustn’t believe the state.”

“Stupid escapade”

In her last words in court on Wednesday, a weeping Karaulova said her attempt to cross into Syria was “all a mistake, a very stupid reckless act.” “I have realized all my mistakes and my stupidity,” she said. “I dream of making amends for my guilt for this stupid escapade.” In 2012, while still a teenager, Karaulova met a man named Arat Samatov online and they wrote to each other for years without ever meeting. Samatov went to Syria in 2014 and told her he was fighting for IS. Karaulova converted to Islam and began wearing a hijab. She disappeared without warning in May 2015, prompting a frantic search by her parents. They found that she had flown to Turkey and travelled to the border with other women hoping to join men fighting for IS. Turkish border guards detained the group and she was forced to fly back to Russia with her father. Investigators initially said she was being treated as a witness before arresting her in October 2015. Her case is particularly unusual in Russia since her family is not Muslim. — AFP

**ALEPPO, SYRIA:** A United Nations (UN) vehicle drives by during an evacuation operation of rebels from Aleppo towards rebel-held territory in the west of Aleppo’s province yesterday. — AFP

**FALL OF ALEPPO SHINES HARSH LIGHT ON UN**

**THE FALL OF ALEPPO IS THE SINGLE GREATEST CRISIS FOR UN SINCE IRAQ WAR**

UNITED NATIONS, United States: The warning from the UN envoy could not have been starker: Pounded by a near-daily barrage of air strikes, Aleppo would be totally destroyed by Christmas unless the United Nations stopped the carnage. During the weeks that followed Staffan de Mistura’s distress call in early October, there was a global outcry as Syrian forces, backed by Russia, tightened their grip on the city, but little action at the United Nations. Two Russian vetoes at the Security Council blocked attempts to halt the bombing and spare civilians as UN statements professing that there can be no military solution to the devastating five-year war rang hollow.

With the fall of Aleppo, the world body founded on the post-World War II promise of “Never Again” is once again facing questions about its ability to confront conflicts. “The fall of Aleppo is the single greatest crisis for the UN since the Iraq war,” said Richard Gowan, a UN expert at the European Council on Foreign Affairs. “It has created an enormous crisis of trust in the Security Council.” Diplomats point the finger of blame at Russia, accused of providing diplomatic cover while its Syrian ally waged an all-out assault on Aleppo. But there are also recriminations against Western powers, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the broader UN system that has been unable to bring humanitarian aid to one million Syrians under siege.

The fall of Aleppo has exposed the UN’s inability to act decisively in the face of mass slaughter.

**Too late**

Alarmed by UN reports that Syrian militaries had executed dozens of civilians in east Aleppo, France, Britain and the United States called for observers to be dispatched to monitor the situation on the ground. It took four days for the council to finally adopt a resolution on deploying UN observers and two days later, the teams had yet to set foot in the eastern districts of Aleppo. Amnesty International lamented that “this important measure has come far too late”, and warned: “The world is watching how the UN responds to the plight of Aleppo.”

Ban, who steps down next week after 10 years as UN chief, has defended the world body’s handling of the Syria crisis even though the war escalated under his watch. In a recent interview with AFP, Ban said divisions among world powers, regional players and among Syrians themselves had created a “perfect storm” that allowed the war to rage on, killing more than 310,000 people. “If there is any criticism, I am ready to accept this,” he said.

“But sometimes, a situation just develops beyond my control, beyond the control of the United Nations.” Ban has appointed three envoys to lead UN efforts to end the war, with De Mistura taking up the mission in July 2014 after former secretary-general Kofi Annan quit as his predecessor, veteran diplomat Lakhdar Brahimi.

“Too late”

**No sanctions, no justice**

After nearly six years of conflict, there is no international investigation under way of war crimes in Syria. Behind Russia, backed by China, used its veto in 2014 to block a request to the International Criminal Court. Contrary to other conflicts such as South Sudan and Yemen, no UN sanctions have been imposed on those deemed responsible for the bloodshed. Next week, France and Britain are to present a draft resolution demanding sanctions for chemical weapons use in Syria, but Russia will undoubtedly again veto the measure. That would be the seventh Russian veto since the conflict began in 2011. “The Syrian crisis has profoundly damaged the UN’s reputation across the Arab world,” said Gowan. “Many Sunni Arab governments view the Security Council as a Russian tool.”

Russia fiercely defends its support of Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad. Ambassador Vitaly Churkin has remarked that were it not for Moscow’s military intervention, “the black flags” of the Islamic State group “would be flying over Damascus.” Antonio Guterres, who will succeed Ban on January 1, will inherit the UN failure in Syria. The former UN refugee chief and Portuguese prime minister has said it was high time to “stop the nonsense” in Syria, though he will have to contend with the new US administration of President-elect Donald Trump.

For many diplomats, Aleppo joins Syria and Srebrenica on the list of UN failures, marking another low in the world body’s 71-year history. The “comparisons between Aleppo, Rwanda and Srebrenica tell you everything about the magnitude of the current catastrophe,” says Martin Edwards, professor of diplomacy at Seton Hall University. “There is nowhere to go but up.” — AFP
**BERLIN ATTACK SUSPECT’S FAMILY IN SHOCK**

OUESLATIA, Tunisia: In shock after he was named the prime suspect in the Berlin market attack, Anis Amri’s family says he fled Tunisia seeking a better life, only to find more trouble and misery. “If my brother is behind the attack, I say to him ‘You dishonor us’,” Abdelkader Amri told AFP yesterday at a poor village in central Tunisia. He spoke as his brother was on the run after Monday’s attack on a Christmas market, when a large truck ploughed through a crowd, killing 11 people. A 12th victim, the hijacked truck’s Polish driver, was found shot in the cab.

His persecutors in Germany had issued a Europe-wide wanted notice for 24-year-old Anis Amri, offering a 100,000 euros (£85,000) reward for information leading to his arrest and warning he “could be violent and armed.”

Yesterday, his brothers Walid and Abdelkader were still reeling at the news. Speaking outside their home in the town of Oueslatia, some 50 kilometres (30 miles) from Kairouan in eastern Tunisia, Abdelkader told AFP of his brother’s departure from the North African country more than five years ago. The youngest of nine siblings, with divorced parents and in difficult social circumstances, Amri left the country illegally in March 2011 by sea for the Italian island of Lampedusa.

He was fleeing a court conviction and a sentence of four years handed down in absentia for robbery and burglary, Abdelkader said. A security official in the area confirmed this information.

*He had no future*

‘Anis left to get away from misery—he had no future in Tunisia and wanted at all costs to improve the family’s financial situation. We live below the poverty line, like most families in Oueslatia,” Abdelkader said, his eyes red. His brother Walid added: “He lived like all young people—he drank, he didn’t go to prayers or anything.”

Once in Italy, Anis Amri found himself in a detention centre along with other illegal migrants. But he soon found himself in trouble: he was sentenced to four years in jail for setting fire to a building, Abdelkader said. “In 2015 he had made it to Germany and was trying to sort himself out. He worked as an agricultural labourer and things like that,” he said.

“He’d contact us on Facebook, saying he wanted to come back to Tunisia but that he had to earn some money to buy his own car and start his own business.” According to Walid, “10 days before the attack he told us he was counting on God to get him home in January.” Abdelkader said their brother “was laughing and joking with us. There was no sign he had been radicalised. I’m sure he can’t have done this, that’s not why he emigrated. May God reveal the truth,” he said before bursting into tears, remembering that Thursday was Anis’s birthday.

“I want to wish him happy birthday,” he added. Outside the house, their red-faced mother urged curious passers-by to leave them alone. “Leave us alone with our misfortune.”

Risking ‘the same fate’

Yesterday, the suspect’s father Mustapha, as on any other day, was packing his cart around town looking for clients to transport their goods. “Look at my father with his cart, working at that age,” Abdelkader told AFP. “Here in Oueslatia, if you don’t work you die of hunger.” His friend Fauzi could not contain his anger. “Tell (President) Beji Caid Essebsi to look after the country’s young people,” he cried.

“We’ve had enough of being ignored. We’ve rotted in prison! All the young people in Oueslatia risk the same fate as Anis,” he warned.

Monday’s attack in the German capital was claimed by the Islamic State group, and according to a security official in Oueslatia, IS recruited the suspect in Italy. “These cursed sons who damage the country,” headlined the French-language daily newspaper La Presse yesterday.

**ATTACKS NEAR IS-HELD MOSUL RISE TO 34**

BAGHDAD: Mortar fire and car bombs killed more than 30 people including aid workers near Mosul yesterday as Iraqi forces battled to seize the city from the Islamic State group. A triple car bombing on a market killed at least 23 people in Gogjali, a few kilometres (miles) east of Mosul, the army said.

Gogjali was retaken by pro-government forces on November 1, two weeks into a massive operation to oust IS jihadists from their last stronghold in Iraq. Since launching the operation against IS on October 17, Iraq’s elite counter-terrorism service has advanced into Mosul from the east, but progress has since slowed.

“A terrorist attack in the form of three car bombs at a market in Gogjali killed 15 civilians and eight police,” a coordination centre for the forces battling IS said in a statement. IS said three of its suicide bombers carried out the attack. Mortar fire also killed 11 people including four aid workers as civilians gathered to receive assistance in Mosul city, the United Nations said.

“According to initial reports, four aid workers and at least seven civilians queueing for emergency assistance in eastern Mosul city have been killed by indiscriminate mortar fire,” UN humanitarian coordinator in Iraq Lise Grande said in a statement. “Within the last 48 hours, there have been two separate incidents” that have wounded up to 40 people, she said. “People waiting for aid are already vulnerable and need help. They should be protected, not attacked,” Grande said.

“The killing of civilians and aid workers violates every moral principle,” Iraqi forces pushing towards Mosul on the southern front have yet to enter the city, and another advance from the north has stalled. To the west, forces from TUNIS: Mustapha Amri (second left), the father of 24-year-old Anis Amri, the prime suspect in Berlin’s deadly truck attack, poses next to his children Walid (left), Hanan (center), and Abdelkader and his brother (right) in front the family house in the town of Oueslatia, in Tunisia’s region of Kairouan yesterday.—AFP

There’s no point in trying to hide the fact: Every time a terrorist attack takes place in the world, the people of Tunisia “hold their breath,” it said. “Because many times a cursed son has been responsible for carrying out a major attack.”

Tuesday’s attack was the latest in a series of violent events occurring in the country, according to a security official in Oueslatia, IS recruited the suspect in Italy. “These cursed sons who damage the country,” headlined the French-language daily newspaper La Presse yesterday.

**UN PUTS OFF VOTE ON ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS**

UNITED NATIONS: The UN Security Council yesterday postponed a vote on a draft resolution demanding that Israel halt its settlement activities in the Palestinian territories and east Jerusalem, diplomats said. Egypt requested the delay to allow time for consultations on the measure, but no new time or date was scheduled, according to diplomats.

Egypt circulated the draft late Wednesday and a vote was initially scheduled for 3 pm (2000 GMT) yesterday. The move prompted immediate calls from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for the United States to use its veto power at the Security Council to block the resolution. A similar resolution was vetoed by the United States in 2011, and it remained uncertain if the measure would be adopted this time. President-elect Donald Trump weighed in early yesterday, saying in a statement that the resolution should be vetoed.

“The resolution being considered at the United Nations Security Council regarding Israel should be vetoed,” the Republican said in a statement. “As the United States has long maintained, peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians will only come through direct negotiations between the parties, and not through the imposition of terms by the United Nations,” he said.

“This puts Israel in a very poor negotiating position and is extremely unfair to all Israelis,” Trump added. Israeli settlements are seen in a major stumbling block to peace efforts as they are built on land the Palestinians see as part of their future state. The United Nations maintains that settlements are illegal, but UN officials have reported a surge in construction over the past months.

Some in the Israeli government view Trump’s victory as an opportunity to expand settlements in the West Bank, Palestinian land occupied by Israel for nearly 50 years.—AFP
UK TRUCKER RAISES FUNDS FOR DRIVER SLAIN IN BERLIN ATTACK

LONDON: A British truck driver has raised nearly £50,000 (59,000 euros, $62,000) via crowdfunding for the family of the Polish driver found dead in the truck used in the attack on a Berlin Christmas market.

Dave Duncan said on the website GoFundMe, where he created the campaign on Tuesday, that the story of 37-year-old Lukasz Urban had shocked him. “Although I did not know Lukasz, the story of his untimely departure shocked and disgusted me. So, as a fellow trucker, I decided to reach out to the trucking community and beyond to help in some small way,” he said, signing off with the words “RIP Lukasz... from the truckers of the UK and beyond”.

According to the website, 3,400 people had made donations. Twelve people were killed when the Polish-registered articulated truck, laden with steel beams, slammed into a crowded holiday market late Monday, smashing wooden stalls and crushing victims.

Urban, who worked for his cousin Ariel Zurawski’s transport company in northern Poland, was found killed with a gunshot in the passenger seat. Zurawski described him as a “good guy” and said his body showed signs of a struggle with the assailant or assailants including stab marks. “One person would not have been able to overpower him,” Zurawski said of the heavyset relative he had grown up with.

“We could see injuries. His face was bloodied and swollen,” he told private news channel TVN 24, referring to a photo he received from Polish police. An autopsy indicated that the driver was still alive at the time of the attack, Bild newspaper reported. German police are hunting for a rejected Tunisian asylum seeker identified as the prime suspect. —AFP

PRINCE CHARLES WARNS OF RETURN TO ‘DARK DAYS OF 1930s’

LONDON: Britain’s Prince Charles warned against intolerance towards refugees fleeing religious persecution on Monday, saying the rising tide of populism was reminiscent of the “dark days” of the 1930s. “The suffering doesn’t end when they arrive seeking refuge in a foreign land,” the heir to the throne told BBC radio. “We are now seeing the rise of many populist groups across the world that are increasingly aggressive towards those who adhere to a minority faith.”

The 68-year-old, in his third broadcast for the “Thought for the Day” section of popular news program Today, added: “All of this has deeply disturbing echoes of the dark days of the 1930s.”

Charles said his comments applied not just to Christians fleeing parts of the Middle East but also to other persecuted faiths in the world including Yazidis, Jews, Ahmadi Muslims and Bahai people.

Referring to the “monstrous extremism” seen in World War II, the Prince of Wales said the fact that “nearly 70 years later we should still be seeing such evil persecution is to me beyond all belief”. “We owe it to those who suffered and died so horribly not to repeat the horrors of the past,” he said.

In the run-up to Christmas he pointed to the idea that Jesus’ family had sought refuge from persecution, and said the Prophet Mohammed had also “migrated” from Mecca to Medina in search of religious freedom. Prince Charles, who will become the supreme governor of the Church of England when he succeeds his mother Queen Elizabeth II, often speaks out about the plight of Christian minorities in the Middle East.

But he has long said he wants to be seen as a “Defender of Faiths” rather than the monarch’s official title of “Defender of the Faith”, to reflect Britain’s multicultural society. —AFP

LONDON: Prince Charles photographed in Buckingham palace on October 20, 2016. —AFP
US returns Alibaba website to counterfeiters blacklist

WASHINGTON: The United States on Wednesday put a division of the Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba back on a blacklist of "notorious markets" known for selling counterfeit goods and violating intellectual property rights.

The office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR), which removed Alibaba from its annual list four years ago, included the company's online platform Taobao in its latest release, saying it is not doing enough to curb sales of fake and pirated goods. "The Taobao.com e-commerce platform is an important concern due to the large volume of allegedly counterfeit and pirated goods available and the challenges right holders experience in removing and preventing illicit sales and offers of such goods," the agency said.

Although inclusion on the blacklist carries no penalties, it deals a blow to Alibaba's reputation after the company has struggled to improve its image and boost international sales.

China's largest online retailer said it is "disappointed" by the decision, saying it has improved policing of the goods for sale on its platforms. "In 2016 alone, we proactively removed more than double the number of infringing product listings than in 2015," Alibaba Group president Michael Evans said in a statement. "The decision ignores the real work Alibaba has done to protect IP rights holders and assist law enforcement to bring counterfeiters to justice."

He suggested the "current political climate" in the United States may have more to do with USTR's decision. President-elect Donald Trump has repeatedly accused China of stealing intellectual property, part of what he calls the country's economic war against the United States.

However, Alibaba and its Taobao site have long spoken of developing a platform for the sale of counterfeit goods. Alibaba was suspended from the International Anti-Counterfeiting Coalition watchdog in May. —AFP

ANCIENT SKELETON TO RETURN TO NATIVE AMERICANS FOR REBURIAL

The US Army Corps of Engineers has been involved in the lengthy legal fight between tribes and scientists over whether remains found in 1996 on federal land near the Columbia River in Washington state for reburial.

One of the oldest and most complete skeletons found in North America will be given back to American Indian tribes in Washington state for reburial. President Barack Obama signed a bill Monday with a provision requiring the ancient bones known as Kennewick Man be returned to tribes within 90 days. Experts estimate the remains found in 1996 on federal land near the Columbia River are at least 8,400 years old. The discovery triggered a lengthy legal fight between tribes and scientists over whether the bones should be buried immediately or studied.

In 2015, new genetic evidence determined the remains were related to modern Native Americans. The bill transfers the skeleton, which the tribes call the Ancient One, from the US Army Corps of Engineers to the state archaeology department, which will get it to the tribes. "We will work closely with that state organization to transfer the remains in an expedited fashion," said Amy J. Gaskill, chief of public affairs for the Army Corps in Portland, Oregon.

It was too soon to say exactly where the bones will go, as several Northwest Indian tribes have been involved in the fight. "We don't know where the bones are going yet," Gaskill said. The Yakama Nation is among the tribes that have pushed to rebury the bones in the manner their people have followed for "since time immemorial," the tribe has said.

JoDe Goudy, chairman of the Yakama Tribal Council, noted that it took 20 years for the tribes to successfully fight for return of the bones. "He will be returned so that he may finally rest," Goudy said after the bill passed in the US Sen. Patty Murray first introduced the Water Resources Development Act of 2016.

The bill called for returning Kennewick Man to the tribes of the Columbia River Plateau. —AP

RICHLAND, Washington: This July 24, 1997 file photo shows a plastic casting of the skull from the bones known as Kennewick Man. —AP

JEOPARDY! STREAK ENDS FOR CANCER-STRICKEN CONTESTANT

WASHINGTON: Cindy Stowell captivated national attention for her six-game winning streak as a contestant on the popular US television quiz show "Jeopardy!" which ended on Wednesday. But she never got to see them broadcast on television.

That's because the cancer-stricken contestant was suffering from Stage 4 colon cancer when she recorded the episodes in August and September, pumped up with painkillers and at one point developing a fever that reduced her voice almost to a whisper. She died on December 5, Cindy Stowell passed away. So appeared on the show was the fulfilment of a lifelong ambition for that lady," he said. "What you didn't know is that when we taped these programs with her a few weeks ago, she was suffering from Stage 4 cancer and sadly, on December 5, Cindy Stowell passed away. So during her last episode on Wednesday, it was taped later in September she provided the correct answer to the final, potentially decisive question, about the closest country to the US mainland where cars drive on the left (answer: the Bahamas). —AFP

US FORMALLY ENDS CONTROVERSIAL REGISTRY PROGRAM FOR VISITORS

WASHINGTON: The US Department of Homeland Security said on Wednesday it is canceling an inactive registry program for visitors from countries where extremist groups are operating, a plan similar to a Muslim registry considered by President-elect Donald Trump. The National Security Entry-Exit Registration Systems program, known as NSEERS, was suspended in 2011, DHS spokesman Neema Hakim said in a statement. He said the program was determined to be redundant and inefficient and did not provide increased security. "The intervening years have shown that NSEERS is not only obsolete but that its use would divert limited personnel and resources from more effective measures," Hakim said.

The department is formally ending the program by removing outdated regulations in a rule change, he said. The rule was scheduled to be published in the Federal Register on Friday and will be effective immediately, a DHS official said. Trump was asked on Wednesday whether he would support a Muslim registry, similar to the dormant DHS program, and he would not confirm or deny his plans to do so. Several Trump transition aides have told Reuters the incoming Trump administration will not resurrect the program, although a key Trump immigration advisor, Kansas Secretary of State Kris Kobach, has advocated the idea.

The announcement comes as a growing number of prominent tech companies including Facebook, Twitter, Apple have told various news organizations that they would not help the Trump administration build a Muslim registry. Earlier this month, employees at various technology companies also signed an online pledge vowing not to help Trump build a data registry to track people based on their religion or assist in mass deportations. The petition has been signed by more than 2,000 employees.

The Obama administration's decision to formally end the program drew praise from critics who said it was discriminatory. "I applaud President Obama for his decision to dismantle NSEERS, the idle and ineffective federal registry that targeted Muslims and undermined our core values," New York Attorney General Eric T. Schneiderman said in a statement. The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee welcomed the decision to end NSEERS, which it called a "failed program rooted in discriminatory profiling." At one point in his campaign, Trump called for a temporary ban on Muslims entering the United States. The Obama administration has vowed not to help Trump build a data registry to track visitors from countries where extremist groups are operating. Facebook, Twitter, Apple have told various news organizations that they would not help the Trump administration build a Muslim registry. The Obama administration's decision to formally end the program drew praise from critics who said it was discriminatory. "I applaud President Obama for his decision to dismantle NSEERS, the idle and ineffective federal registry that targeted Muslims and undermined our core values," New York Attorney General Eric T. Schneiderman said in a statement. The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee welcomed the decision to end NSEERS, which it called a "failed program rooted in discriminatory profiling." At one point in his campaign, Trump called for a temporary ban on Muslims entering the United States. The Obama administration has vowed not to help Trump build a data registry to track visitors from countries where extremist groups are operating. Facebook, Twitter, Apple have told various news organizations that they would not help the Trump administration build a Muslim registry. The Obama administration has vowed not to help Trump build a data registry to track visitors from countries where extremist groups are operating. Facebook, Twitter, Apple have told various news organizations that they would not help the Trump administration build a Muslim registry. The Obama administration has vowed not to help Trump build a data registry to track visitors from countries where extremist groups are operating. Facebook, Twitter, Apple have told various news organizations that they would not help the Trump administration build a Muslim registry. In 2016 alone, we proactively removed more than double the number of infringing product listings than in 2015," Alibaba Group president Michael Evans said in a statement. "The decision ignores the real work Alibaba has done to protect IP rights holders and assist law enforcement to bring counterfeiters to justice."

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KENYAN LAWMAKERS SCUFFLE AMID FEARS OF ELECTION-RIGGING

NAIROBI, Kenya: Kenyan legislators came to blows yesterday as opposition members tried to block an emergency session that passed a bill to allow manual counting of election results, calling it a back door to manipulating next year’s presidential vote.

Opposition leader Raila Odinga called for mass protests from Jan. 4, saying, “No transparency, no elections.” Parliament’s deputy minority leader, Jakoyo Midiwo, said they are challenging the bill’s legality. “They are trying to force a law to rig the elections,” Midiwo said.

The bill needs Senate passage and approval by President Uhuru Kenyatta, who is running for re-election. Kenya has been in election process since 2013 in a effort to prevent the vote-rigging in 2007 that sparked violence killing more than 1,000 people. But biometric kits to scan people’s fingers didn’t work properly and a server handling voting results crashed, and the process was completed manually.

Odinga unsuccessfully petitioned the Supreme Court challenging Kenyatta’s 2013 win, claiming the system was set up to fail to allow the more easily manipulated manual system. Kenyatta received a majority of votes to avoid a runoff with Odinga, by 4,099 votes out of more than 12.3 million cast. Odinga is Kenyatta’s closest challenger in the upcoming election.

Kenyatta led Odinga 50 percent to 22 percent in a recent opinion poll. The Catholic church, with 11 million followers in a country of 40 million, condemned the passing of the bill. The chairman of the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops Justice and Peace Commission, Rev. Cornelius Korir, said it goes against the spirit of jointly negotiated amendments to reform electoral laws passed in August by parliament. Those changes came after violent street protests accusing the electoral commission of corruption and bias.

Many of the August amendments stipulated that the election process should be digitized. —AP

MISSISSIPPI CHURCH MEMBER CHARGED IN ‘VOTE TRUMP’ FIRE

WASHINGTON: A member of an African-American Baptist congregation in Mississippi was charged on Wednesday with setting fire to the church building, which was also spray-painted with the words “Vote Trump,” the authorities said.

Police in the western city of Greenville arrested Andrew McClinton, charged with one count of first-degree arson of a place of worship, police chief Delando Wilson said in a statement. “McClinton is awaiting his initial appearance in Greenville Municipal Court,” he said.

McClinton, 45, who is African-American, attended the Hopewell Baptist Church, which was burned on November 1, when the words “Vote Trump” were also painted on the building.

Fire officials at the time said the century-old church was fully engulfed in flames and sustained heavy heat, smoke and water damage. The fire was “a direct assault on the Hopewell congregation’s right to freely worship,” Greenville Mayor Erick Simmons said in a statement on Wednesday. “There is no place for this heinous and divisive behavior in our city.”

The authorities have not released a motive for the alleged arson and are trying to determine whether McClinton painted “Vote Trump” on the church, local television station WJTV reported. However, officials do not believe the fire, set a week before Election Day, was politically motivated, The New York Times reported a state official as saying.

The Republican Donald Trump, who carried Mississippi by a large margin, lost to his Democratic rival Hillary Clinton in overwhelmingly African-American Greenville.

The divisive President-elect is a fierce critic of the Black Lives Matter movement, which arose in response to a series of police killings of black men that have roiled race relations in the United States. —AP

CALIFORNIA SUPREME COURT DENIES MASON FOLLOWER’S PETITION

LOS ANGELES: The California Supreme Court denied a request on Wednesday to hold a hearing in the parole case of Leslie Van Houten, a follower of cult leader Charles Manson, took part in one of the most notorious mass murders of the 20th century.

California Governor Jerry Brown overturned a California Board of Parole recommendation to release Van Houten in July, saying she was an “unreasonable danger to society,” four decades after she was convicted and sentenced to life for the murders of Leno and Rosemary LaBianca.

In a petition to the state’s Supreme Court, her attorney Rich Pfeiffer said Van Houten believed the governor did not have evidence that she remained a risk to the public, the City News Service in Los Angeles reported.

The Supreme Court denied the petition for review, according to an entry on the court’s online case database. Pfeiffer was not immediately available for comment. Manson, who is also serving a life sentence, directed Van Houten and his other mostly female followers - known as the Manson Family - to murder seven people in August 1969 in what prosecutors said was part of a plan to incite a race war between whites and blacks.

Van Houten was found guilty of the LaBianca murders in 1971 and sentenced to death, but that conviction and sentence were overturned on appeal. She was retried, convicted and sentenced to life in prison in 1978.

The La Biancas were stabbed to death in their Los Angeles home on Aug. 10, 1969, after which the killers used their blood to write “Rise,” “Death to Pigs” and “Heather-Heather,” a misspelled reference to a Beatles song, on the walls and a refrigerator door.

Among the victims of the Manson Family was actress Sharon Tate, the pregnant wife of filmmaker Roman Polanski. She was stabbed 16 times by cult members.

Four other people were stabbed or shot to death at Tate’s home on Aug. 9, 1969, by Manson’s followers, who scrawled the word “Pig” in blood on the front door before leaving. Van Houten was not involved in the Tate murders.

Manson is serving out his sentence at Corcoran State Prison in California for the seven Tate-LaBianca killings and the murder of another man, Gary Hinman, in July 1969. —Reuters

UN WARNS OF WATER CRISIS IN NIGERIA’S MEGACITY

GENEVA: Nigeria’s commercial capital Lagos faces an acute water crisis that is creating unacceptable conditions for millions of people, according to an independent expert appointed by the United Nations. The 21 million residents of Lagos, who struggle to find water suitable for drinking and sanitation. Estimates suggest only one in 10 people have access to water supplied by the state utility provider, according to the UN.

The issue is being compounded by years of mismanagement, said Léo Heller, the UN special reporter on the human rights to water and sanitation, after Lagos’s state governor presented a proposed budget for 2017 to the state legislature. The document reports indicate alarmingly high deficits in the sector, representing clearly unacceptable conditions for millions of the megacity’s residents,” a UN statement quoted Heller as saying.

More funding could be used to improve the state utility provide, adopt financing schemes and reduce water losses, he said. Lagos is the biggest city in Africa’s most populous nation. A state government spokesman declined to comment. Despite having Africa’s largest economy, Nigeria has one of the highest child death rates from water-borne diseases in Africa. It has sought international development help to finance new water treatment plants and expand its distribution networks.

As a result of the fragile public water system, many residents rely on private water suppliers, or bore into pipes themselves. Damaged pipes leak millions of gallons of treated water, about one-quarter of the supplies meant for homes, schools, hospitals and industry. Water rights activists, labor unions and environmentalists blame the failure on the endemic corruption that permeates so much of Nigeria, which ranks in the bottom fifth on Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index. —Reuters
THAI COURT REVOKES BAIL OF ACTIVIST WHO SHARED BBC STORY

BANGKOK: A pro-democracy activist in Thailand was re-arrested yesterday after his bail was revoked in a case accusing him of sharing online a Thai-language BBC story about the country's new king.

The arrest of Jatupat ‘Pai’ Boonpattaraksa for sharing the BBC story on Facebook was the first under the usual attention because of the connection have a large measure of impunity in the Thai justice system. Nitiwadee Pucharoenyos was sentenced Monday and released on bail the next day after the Appeals Court concluded she was not a flight risk because she was a doctor with an established residence. The court also approved the release on bail of lawyer Santi Thongsem, who was sentenced for hiring the gunmen who killed Nitiwadee’s husband in 2013.

Bail revoked

The court in Khon Kaen province revoked Jatupat’s 400,000 baht ($11,100) bail after police reported that he was still using social media in ways that could compromise his case and had taunted officials by suggesting that the bail procedure was mainly a way for the government to get money during an economic slowdown.

The court acted the same week that a political dissent. “This is just the military’s way of silencing Pai’s political activities opposing Thailand’s military government. The BBC story included mentions of the king’s personal life and other material considered too sensitive to be published in the Thai press.”

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SRINAGAR, JAMMU AND KASHMIR, INDIA: In this photo taken on November 19, 2015, Kashmiri depression patient Parvaiz Ahmed, 38, and who was detained and interrogated by Indian security personnel in 2009, talks with clinical psychologist Asiya Niyaz during an initial assessment session to discuss his symptoms at a trauma and depression out-patient clinic at the Shri Maharaja Hari Singh (SMHS) hospital. — AFP

KASHMIR STRUGGLES TO COPE WITH TIDE OF TRAUMA

SRINAGAR, India: In a consultation room in a Kashmiri hospital, Parvaiz Ahmed struggles to find the words to describe how his interrogation at the hands of India’s security forces seven years ago has left him traumatized.

Speaking in a whisper and barely looking up from the table, Ahmed’s face is wracked with pain as he speaks of his sleepless nights, still haunted by his months in detention in 2009. "I worry all the time that they will come back and arrest me again," the 38-year-old tells his trauma therapist. "We can see maybe 100 patients per day and I average around 100," says Arshad Hussain as he explains the workload at the Shri Maharaja Hari Singh (SMHS) hospital. "Sixty to 80 percent of them are trauma, depression or PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) patients," he adds.

The hospital is situated in the centre of Srinagar, the largest city in Kashmir and an often achingly beautiful Himalayan region which is divided between India and Pakistan and claimed in full by both. Since an uprising erupted in the Indian-controlled part of the territory in the late 1980s, rights groups estimate some 70,000 people have been killed. While the violence is on a smaller scale these days, tensions are never far from the surface. More than 100 people have been killed since July when a prominent militant leader was shot dead by Indian forces.

Valley of tears

A Doctors Without Borders survey last year found more than 1.5 million living in the Kashmir Valley have symptoms of depression. Some are relatives of those killed, such as Muhammad Shafti Bhat, who lost his voice for several years after troops shot dead his 23-year-old son Bashir Ahmad Bhat in 2014, and still finds speaking a struggle.

Shafti, 50, is barely audible as he tries to recount the events surrounding Bashir’s shooting as he waters the flowers around his son’s grave in Srinagar’s Martyrs’ Cemetery. He soon gives up and instead pulls a miniature photo portrait of his son from his wallet, his face streaming in tears.

Some of the other sufferers don’t even have a body to mourn over. For some, the last glimpse of their loved ones was as they were being hauled away for questioning. It’s a situation which further complicates the grieving process.

Rahma Begum’s son Mir Ali disappeared 13 years ago from their hamlet in the Kashmir Valley, home to around 7 million people. For three years afterwards, she got up at dawn to search for her son, scouring the nearby forest for any clues as to his whereabouts, unable to accept he was gone for good. "Everyone told me I had gone mad, that I was mad," she said. Amnesty International and other advocacy groups say around 8,000 people have permanently “disappeared” after being taken away for questioning by the security forces in Kashmir.

Their bodies are widely believed to have been buried in unmarked graves or thrown into rivers by security forces, who can operate with virtual impunity under a special act. Then there are the likes of Ahmed who spent years bottling up the resentments bred from often brutal interrogations by security agents whose rights groups have accused of using torture.

Coping mechanism

Mudasir Hassan, who conducts therapy sessions at Srinagar’s Psychiatric Diseases Hospital, said a lot of his patients suffered from erectile dysfunction. While Kashmir is a predominantly Islamic region, some victims have turned to alcohol as a coping mechanism, he said. "Alcohol is an issue, as is drug dependency," he told AFP.

Big queues crowd around the tiny window of the dispensary at Hassan’s hospital from where the pharmacists dispense cocktails of pills throughout the working day. Medicus say stress levels are exacerbated by India’s large military presence, with troops and armored vehicles posted on just about every street corner in Srinagar and at checkpoints throughout the Kashmir Valley.

People living in villages regarded as militant hotbeds by the security forces are often woken in the middle of the night by the sound of army patrols or raids on houses. "People are talking about this more... They understand now that there is something behind these symptoms," said Hussain. "It is not a problem with them. It is because of something outside that has happened to them." —AFP

HUNDREDS RESIST EVICTION FROM DELHI SLUM AS NEW HOUSING FALLS SHORT

MUMBAI: Hundreds of residents in a New Delhi slum are resisting eviction by city officials and police in the third such protest this month in India’s capital city, as anger mounts over a shortfall in housing for the urban poor, campaigners said.

Evictions began this week in Kathputli Colony, home to 3,500 families of street performers and puppeteers, after authorities marked it for development as part of a plan to upgrade the city. City officials say residents were notified of the plan which involves moving them to a temporary location while a private builder constructs modest high-rise homes for a nominal sum. They say more than 500 families have already moved to temporary accommodation. "Residents were given sufficient notice. The police are on hand to maintain law and order," said Rajib Roy, a special commissioner with the Delhi Development Authority (DDA).

But some residents said they were not given the option of relocation, and that they received no notice of the eviction. "No one told us it would be this week. Suddenly one morning we woke up and found hundreds of policemen in the colony," said Dilip Bharti, head of an artists’ cooperative in the settlement. "We survived by the grace of god and they have cut off water and power," he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Television images showed police in riot gear, holding assault rifles and shields as residents gathered around them. About a third of India’s 1.25 billion population lives in cities, with numbers rising every year as tens of thousands of people leave villages to seek better prospects. Many end up in over-crowded urban slums. — Reuters

Van explodes outside Australian Christian Lobby office

CANBERRA: A van laden with gas cylinders has exploded outside the headquarters of an Australian Christian lobby group, but police yesterday said the blast was neither politically nor religiously motivated.

Australian Christian Lobby’s managing director Lyle Shelton tweeted pictures of the burnt-out white vehicle and said he was “shocked that this could happen in Australia”. He added that this was the second year the group received death threats for taking a stand against same-sex marriage, suggesting the incident could be linked.

Australian Capital Territory police commander Mark Walters said the motive for the incident, in which only the driver was injured, remained unclear. “The driver of the van said he had ignited gas cylinders within the vehicle causing an explosion which damaged the vehicle and building,” he said. “Police spoke briefly with the man before he continued with treatment. Police were able to establish the man’s actions were not politically, religiously or ideologically motivated.”

The driver, a 35-year-old Australian, walked to hospital after the blast and was in a critical condition with serious burns. Police plan to speak with him again as soon as they can. The blast comes days after a truck drove into a Christmas market in Berlin, killing 12 people in an attack claimed by the Islamic State jihadist group.

Justice Minister Michael Keenan said the Wednesday night collision in Canberra was not being treated as a terrorist attack. “At the moment (police) are not treating it as a terror attack. "People are talking about this more... They understand now that there is something behind these symptoms," said Hussain. "It is not a problem with them. It is because of something outside that has happened to them." —AFP

Won’t be deterred

The ACL lobbies for Christian principles and ethics reforms in parliament, campaigning against gay marriage as well as a school program that aims to reduce homophobia and bullying. “My team, my staff have had to endure numerous death threats over the course of this year because of our advocacy on something as simple as marriage between a man and a woman,” Shelton told reporters. — AFP
**Indian police bust baby trafficking racket**

MUMBAI: Police in India’s commercial capital Mumbai have arrested a gang of five accused of stealing babies or convincing single women to sell their children in the latest bust in a series of baby trafficking rackets. A police spokesman said the group had targeted single women and sold the infants to childless couples in various states across India.

The arrests followed the rescue of five children - four boys and one girl - aged between four months and one year in the states of Goa, Gujarat and Karnataka, and came less than a month after a similar trafficking racket was busted in West Bengal. Officers are now investigating if the couples that purchased the babies, for between 200,000 to 400,000 rupees ($3,000-6,000), were aware that the children had been kidnapped or bought from their biological parents.

“The gang was operating for the last two to three years. They were investigating the number of children they may have kidnapped and sold,” senior police inspector Naresh Kasale told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. “We suspect more people are involved in the racket. The police spokesman said one child has been reunited with its biological parent but the others were at a rescue home. Local media reported that police were looking into whether the group was linked to cases of kidnapping in hospitals.

‘Alarming trend’

Kasale said police first uncovered the racket in early December while investigating the case of a missing child in Sathe Nagar slum in Mankhurd, eastern Mumbai.

They found a woman from that slum was also missing after she got married to a man from Goa where she was detained. She told police she had sold the child and gave them details of the racket. “She had told the couple that it was her own child and that her husband was dead and she wanted to remarry. We rescued the child and have reunited him with his parents,” Kasale said.

Last month, 13 babies were rescued and the remains of two other infants discovered in a series of raids in the eastern state of West Bengal in what police suspect is an international child trafficking racket. Eighteen people, including doctors, midwives and the owners of charities and clinics, were arrested as part of the investigation. Many of the unsolved cases are assumed to be vigilante killings, which Duterte has refused to condemn. “Of course we heard about the killings, so we are selling our own families to stay away and we will look after them,” she said. “My son is now returned. I don’t want him to get back to the bad habit, so I am here.”

The baby trafficking racket is one of hundreds of so-called “surrendered” cases in the Philippines, Emerciana Yotei told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. “We suspect more people are involved in the racket. The police spokesman said one child has been reunited with its biological parent but the others were at a rescue home. Local media reported that police were looking into whether the group was linked to cases of kidnapping in hospitals.

**Philippines’ Duterte enlists Mom army in war on drugs**

CLARK, Philippines: With a son addicted to methamphetamine and dealers and users winding up dead in a spree of killings in the Philippines, Emerciana Yotei was keen to be on the right side of President Rodrigo Duterte’s bloody drugs war.

The 51-year-old housewife is among 9,000 women in one Philippine province who have formed a “Community Drugs Watch” to keep an eye on families and steer addicted relatives away from the danger zone and towards rehabilitation.

More than 6,000 people have been killed since Duterte took office in July and unleashed his promised crackdown, with a third of the deaths at the hands of police and the rest still under investigation. Many of the unsolved cases are assumed to be vigilante killings, which Duterte has refused to condemn. “Of course we heard about the killings, so we are selling our own families to stay away and we will look after them,” she said. “My son is now returned. I don’t want him to get back to the bad habit, so I am here.”

Duterte’s justification against a tide of international condemnation is that “shabu”, as the methamphetamine is known, is tearing apart families and threatening the next generation. Critics see it as a cover for the war on drugs that has devastated communities and created a climate of fear.

That sentiment was shown by an opinion poll published on Monday, in which eight out of 10 Filipinos said they feared they or people they knew could become victims of extrajudicial killings. Thousands of wives attended a ceremony Duterte oversaw yesterday at a former US military base north of Manila and took an oath to support his drugs war at community level.

Evangelina Alvarez, 46, ignored her husband’s advice to not get involved in a crusade by Duterte that numerous critics have argue impacts innocent, disenfranchised addicts as much as the dealers it was supposed to target.

Her younger brother was among hundreds of thousands of so-called “surrendered” drug suspects who were reported to the authorities and sought treatment. “My husband told me to stay away from the anti-drug activities because it’s too risky,” she said. “But my fear is losing my brother, so I have to join this fight.”

The governor of Pampanga province, Lilia Pineda, said 25 of the 687 children rescued this year was a more humane solution to curb drugs and would prevent the need for blood tests. “They will be our potent weapon,” she added. — Reuters

**China says it will cooperate with Trump but warns on Taiwan**

BEIJING: China warned yesterday that ties with the US will likely see new complications and the only way to maintain a stable relationship is by respecting each other’s “core interests.”

Foreign Minister Wang Yi’s remarks appeared to underscore that China’s position on Taiwan is non-negotiable, weeks after President-elect Donald Trump suggested he could re-evaluate US policy on Taiwan. It also mirrored Beijing’s relatively measured posture toward the incoming US administration despite signs of growing wariness.

Wang told the Communist Party mouthpiece, the People’s Daily, that China would strive to boost cooperation with the US but he foresaw “new, complicated and uncertain factors affecting bilateral relations” under the Trump administration.

China complained this month after Trump questioned a US policy that since 1979 has recognized Beijing as China’s government and maintains only unofficial relations with Taiwan. Beijing regards the self-governing island as part of China and has long used the “core interest” formulation to signal that any move by Taiwan toward formal independence could be met with military force. Trump’s comments on Taiwan, combined with his accusations that China is manipulating its currency and threats of imposing hefty tariffs against Chinese imports, have rattled relations between the world’s two largest economies. Trump’s transition team announced Wednesday that Peter Navarro, who has accused China of effectively waging economic war against the US, would head a trade policy council inside the White House.

Asked by reporters about Trump’s appointment of an economist and author whose books include “Death by China,” foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said Beijing has been observing the incoming US administration’s transition and its policy direction. “As two major powers with broad mutual interests, cooperation is the only correct track,” she said. — AP
An Indian shop owner waits for customers as Christmas decorations are displayed for sale at a shop in Chennai yesterday. — AFP

Aleppo soap makes leap from souk to Paris suburb
Aleppo soap has found a sanctuary far from the ruined city whose elegant souks, many now reduced to rubble, have made the coveted green bars for centuries. In an industrial zone on the outskirts of Paris, a Syrian master soap maker is carrying on the tradition, mixing olive oil and laurel oil with water and lye to produce a deeply moisturizing natural cleanser that has won devotees worldwide.

The scent of laurel oil wafts through the corridors of the factory in Santeny, about 30 kilometers (18 miles) southeast of the French capital, where big blocks of soap are drying. Wearing white overalls, Hassan Harastani stirs a bubbling pea-green mixture in a giant cauldron while chatting with businessman Samir Constantini. Constantini, a trained doctor, began importing soap from Syria’s historic second city in 2004 and later began producing the soap under the “Alepia” brand. His plan had been to open a soap factory on the outskirts of Aleppo with Harastani, a master of the art who learnt the trade from his father. But Syria’s brutal civil war, which has made a smouldering ruin of much of Aleppo, laid waste to his plans. Harastani and his family fled the fierce fighting that turned the city into a global symbol of suffering. “We could no longer go to the factory because of the shellings and kidnappings,” he said. With all but one or two of around 50 soap factories destroyed in Aleppo, Constantini and Harastani decided to start producing the soap on French soil.

“We left our country, our houses, our businesses, our friends,” Constantini says, counting off his losses with a sigh. “I used to have lots of customers, in Syria but also abroad, in France, Italy, Germany, the Gulf countries, South Korea, Japan, China,” he says. “I was an ordinary person who loved his work and his family... it’s the only profession I’ve known for over 35 years.”

“We will return”

On arriving in France, he resumed his trade, 4,000 kilometers from home. Constantini is adamant that the Made in France soap is still essentially Syrian. “If a top French chef opens a French restaurant in New York it remains French cuisine, not New York cuisine. It’s the same for the soap. It is made by the master soapmaker Harastani and is, therefore, proper Aleppo soap,” he argues. The entire soapmaking process—from the selection and mixing of the oils and lye through to the drying and cutting—is carried out according to family recipes dating back more than 3,000 years.

“I am very proud to carry on this tradition,” says Constantini. “The know-how is not being lost. It will endure despite what is happening in Syria.” The nearly six-year war came to a head in the eastern part of Aleppo last week, as thousands of hungry, terrified residents began being bussed out of the city after weeks of bombings. For Constantini the war has mushroomed into a “world war” pitting global powers against each other in a scorched-earth battle for control of the Middle East. With no immediate end to the fighting in sight, he says the best thing he can do is “continue making this soap and hope that peace will return.”

Harastani says he does not know what the future holds but is “not so pessimistic”. One thing is certain, he says. “We will return to Syria someday.” — AFP
**Kansas Amputee Gets Surprise Holiday Hands**

A southern Kansas woman whose hands and feet had to be amputated after she was shot during a robbery got an early Christmas gift - new electronic hands worth $260,000, courtesy of a businessman and his wife. Julie Dombo of Derby showed off her new hands on Tuesday with her husband, a day after receiving them as a present from Koch Industries’ general counsel Mark Holden and his wife, The Wichita Eagle reported. Dombo was shot in the arm and chest during an August 2015 robbery at a Derby AT&T store. Because of medical issues that developed from the injuries while she was hospitalized doctors had to amputate portions of her arms and legs to save her life. James Michael Phillips, 27, was sentenced to about 31 years after being convicted in October of several charges in the case, including attempted first-degree murder.

Dombo met Holden in October at a Wichita Crime Commission awards banquet, where she told Holden insurance wouldn’t pay for the electronic hands she said would give her a chance at a relatively ordinary life, The Wichita Eagle reported. The hands allow her to grip objects, to work an iPhone and to put on her prosthetic legs.

Without the hands, Dombo’s husband, John, has to be with her most of the time to help her. Dombo has been working out with the hands once a week since May at Peeples’ Prosthetics so that if the money ever came through, she’d know how to use the hands, which retail for about $260,000.

“I’ll do what I can,” Holden told her that night at the banquet. Dombo traveled back to Washington, DC, told his wife and son about Dombo and contacted someone who knew US Rep. Mike Pompeo of Wichita. Holden wanted to see if Pompeo could talk with the insurance company. But when Holden attended Phillips’ sentencing hearing he learned that Blue Cross hadn’t changed its decision.

“I promise you I will get your sister the arms,” Holden told Dombo’s sister Linda. “We’re going to get them.” Holden later told Dombo his wife wanted to meet her. So the Dombos invited the Holdens over for lunch Monday when Mark Holden animals had to be amputated. So for about $260,000.

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“I promise you I will get your sister the arms,” Holden told Dombo’s sister Linda. “We’re going to get them.” Holden later told Dombo his wife wanted to meet her. So the Dombos invited the Holdens over for lunch Monday when Mark Holden arrived carrying two big boxes with the prosthetic hands he and his wife bought for her. Dombo saw the boxes and started to cry. “My husband was very angry at first. He kept asking me: what are you doing this for?” said Dombo. “But then he saw this was making my life interesting with lots of activity and it was keeping me fit. And now he is supportive.” — AP

**Russian babushkas break stereotypes with fashion shoots**

In Russia, elderly women are usually expected to forget about fashion and watch their grandchildren. Not 71-year-old Olga Kondrasheva, who is fighting stereotypes by modeling for a glossy magazine. “I’m over 70 but I’m just beginning and it’s so interesting,” says Kondrasheva, slim and sporting wavy white hair, a few minutes before a studio photoshoot for the Russian edition of Vanity Fair magazine in central Moscow. With six decades of life adventure, she used to take part in zoological expeditions to study wildlife across Russia and has worked as an extra in films. She admits she “never trained as a model”, but says she has “always been fascinated by this line of work”.

“I’m discovering a totally new side to myself. When I’ve had my hair and makeup done and I’ve got a nice outfit on and there’s some lovely music playing, it’s wonderful,” she enthuses. Oldushka found herself posing for the cameras thanks to a website called Oldushka (“Oldie”) launched by photographer Igor Gavar. “I wanted to show that older people can work in the fashion industry and they can be beautiful—even with wrinkles and white hair,” he says. The site serves as an informal modeling agency by showcasing studio shots of Gavar’s elderly subjects, who like catwalk queens a quarter of their age have been spotted in all kinds of places-on the street, in a supermarket, and even a dance floor. Gavar has managed to organize numerous photoshoots for his dozen or so “muses”, including 80-year-old former air stewardess Irina Denisova and 64-year-old Lyudmila Bratzhina, a retired engineer. Several striking silver-haired men are also on Oldushka’s books, though of those who have scored shoots in Russian fashion catalogues, magazines and advertisements so far, all but one have been women.

“Like a little holiday”

The retirement age in Russia is 55 for women and 60 for men. Many continue working long afterwards out of economic necessity and few look forward to retirement, knowing that years of money worries likely lie ahead. The average pension in Russia is only around $200 (185 euros) per month, but Oldushka allows its models to “earn a little bit extra,” Gavar says. He and the model split the fees for any shoots secured through the website, which have so far ranged from $50 to $300. They say the work gives women a new lease of life and a confidence boost at a time when their main role in Russian society as “babushka” or grandmas is to provide large amounts of free childcare. “It brightens up my life. Doing this is always so joyful, so positive,” says Bratzhina. “And I enjoy being viewed in a different way during the photoshoots—not the way I see myself in the mirror. It’s like a little holiday!” she says, smiling.

“Enormous potential”

Old age has been enjoying something of a moment in global fashion as feminists challenge traditional beauty standards and as the West comes to grips with an aging population. Last year French label Celine chose 82-year-old author Joan Didion as its new face, while Dolce & Gabbana, American Apparel and Saint Laurent have all featured elderly models in recent campaigns. Russia faces a similar demographic trend as developed Western countries, with nearly a quarter of the population currently over retirement age, a figure expected to rise to 27 percent by 2025 – 39.9 million people, according to the health ministry.

Eduard Karyukhin, head of the Dobroye Delo (“Good Deed”) organization that works with elderly people, says “the stereotype of a retired woman who stays at home and looks after the grandchildren is changing.” “Elderly people have enormous potential,” Karyukhin said. “They just need help with organizing their leisure activities.” The women involved in Oldushka said family members sometimes find it hard to understand their new pastime.

“My husband was very angry at first. He kept asking me: what are you doing this for?” said Kondrasheva. “But then he saw this was making my life interesting with lots of activity and it was keeping me fit. And now he is supportive.” — AFP

**In this photo John and Julie Dombo walk out of the Wichita Ear Clinic in Wichita, Kan. — AP**

**Russian Kondrasheva, 71, poses for photographer in Moscow. — AFP photos**

**Olga Kondrasheva poses for a photographer.**

**Olga Kondrasheva poses for a photographer.**

**Olga Kondrasheva gets her hair done before a photoshoot.**
The buzz about Budapest has been steadily building since Hungary joined the European Union in 2004. Tourists and multinational companies alike have gravitated to the city’s humming core. But the former imperial capital owes at least some of its prosperity to centuries of experience with slowing down, taking a breath and sinking neck-deep into blissful relaxation. For the harried business traveler - or anyone else who could use a respite - an escape to one of the city’s seven public thermal baths provides a soothing glimpse into that history while being just a quick subway ride away from the city center.

The Romans were the first to harness the area’s hot springs, setting up a regional capital here partly because of the steamy mineral water burbling below ground. The ruins of those grand temples are still visible in the northern part of the city. More than 1,000 years later, the Ottomans established the city as a trading post during their 150-year rule and built two baths that still operate. The oldest, the Rudas Baths, features an octagonal room dating to 1550 with one main pool encircled by four smaller ones of varying temperatures. A 30-foot dome covers the stone echo chamber, where steam wafts up through colored beams of light coming from the plate-sized pieces of stained glass in the ceiling. The sulfuric water, which has supposed curative properties, can be so pungent that it stings the nose, and the smell lingers. So lather, rinse and definitely repeat.

If you go to Rudas for the history, try the Szechenyi Baths for the grandeur. Built in stages in the early 1900s, the gilded neo-Baroque facility is one of the largest thermal spas in Europe. Ornate, blazing yellow buildings form a courtyard that encloses three huge naturally heated pools. Classical statues of reclining bathing nudes surround the pools, which are open year-round and simmer between 78 and 100 degrees Fahrenheit (26 to 38 Celsius). It’s like soaking in the world’s fanciest hot tub.

Another 15 smaller pools indoors range from a chilly 64 F (18 C) up to a skin-tingling 104 F (40 C). Also inside are saunas, steam rooms, silent relaxing areas and massage services. Be prepared to get a little frustrated with the lockers, since the electronic key, already confusing, was broken on several of them during one recent visit. Sections of both spas are available until 10 p.m., but for early birds, some parts open as early as 6 a.m. Fortunately, the water at Szechenyi smells much less than at Rudas, so a dip there before a breakfast meeting is that much easier.
Bunnies, brains, breast implants: Welcome to LA's odder museums

Breast implants, a photo of the brain of John F Kennedy, a cheerleader's outfit and the sketches of a serial killer: All are on display in some of Los Angeles’s quirkiest museums. The cultural offerings in this city are immense, from highbrow museums featuring works by world renowned artists to others with a decidedly mass-market appeal-like the wax museum, with its likenesses of glaze-eyed celebrities. But there are edgier and more extravagant establishments throughout the city, with some exhibits that wow and others that terrify.

Mementoes from the heartstuck

There is, for example, The Museum of Broken Relationships, with displays about the heartsick and lovelorn. One dealt with a divorcee who packed her wedding dress into a pickle jar: She did not want to toss it, let someone else wear it or allow moths to feast on it. There is the cheerleader’s uniform that another woman never got to wear because her boyfriend jilted her; or the partly used bottles of cologne of a man who died of cancer, kept as mementoes by his widow. And among the displays not to be overlooked is a pair of breast implants housed in a glass case. Their former owner had had them implanted to please her partner, a “boob guy.” But for five years her body tried to reject them and in the end, she had to undergo repeated surgeries to remove them.

“ar mutilated my body for a man I loved,” she said poignantly. “At the time, I loved him more.” The Museum of Broken Relationships has had a nomadic history. It got its start after the artists Olinka Vistica and Drazen Grubisic broke off their romance and founded the museum as a repository for the objects they had acquired during their relationship. In 2010 they opened a venue in Zagreb, followed this year by one in Los Angeles. “The pieces themselves aren’t necessarily art,” museum director Alexis Hyde told AFP. But “the museum itself is this very sophisticated piece of conceptual art that is really cutting to the heart of the matter of what it is to be human,” Hyde said.

Death in every form

Then there is LA’s Museum of Death, founded in 1995, with not-for-the-faint-of-heart exhibits on serial killers, group suicides, funerary displays, and other subjects related to death. One display deals with the suicides of famous people like rock star Kurt Cobain and historical characters like Adolf Hitler. There is another on fatal automobile accidents and still another about celebrated murder cases-like that involving accused wife murderer and former football and movie star OJ Simpson. “It’s a way to quell the fear of death,” said museum manager Ryan Lichten. “It’s going to happen to everyone. The closer you are to what scares you, the less scary it is.”

The extensive collection includes the head of Henri Desire Landru, decapitated on the guillotine in Versailles in 1922 for murdering 11 women, although he might have killed hundreds. Part of Lichten’s work-he is also a curator-involves writing to convicted killers to ask them to send materials that can be used in exhibits. That is how he obtained drawings of the singer Rebecca Schaeffer sketched by her killer on death row.

On one wall are autopsy photos of John F. Kennedy performed just hours after his assassination in 1963 in Dallas, Texas: lifeless eyes, blood-matted hair, brains exposed. The photos are accompanied by graphs, newspaper front pages and a copy of the controversial Warren Report, which concluded that accused assassin Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone. Most visitors seem fascinated by the bizarre and grotesque displays, though every week one or two of them faint, Lichten said.

A furry obsession

For Valentine’s Day 1993, Steve Lubanski gave girlfriend Candace Frazee a stuffed bunny with a huge heart on its chest that read “I love you.” That Easter, she gave him a porcelain rabbit. Thus was born a tradition, and eventually a museum. Today visitors can see their 33,000 rabbit-related pieces on display in Lubanski’s house, later converted to a museum. Some 27,000 people have visited since 1998. Frazee says it is the largest US museum other than the White House that is also serves as someone’s home. Next year they plan to move their vast collection to a former art gallery, including their four live rabbits and 22 stuffed ones. — AFP

In this file photo visitors enjoy a bath in a pool of Széchenyi Thermal Bath and Swimming Pool in Budapest, Hungary.

In this file photo visitors play chess in a pool of Széchenyi Thermal Bath and Swimming Pool in Budapest, Hungary.

This file photo shows people walking by a mural at the Museum of Death in Hollywood, California. — AFP photos

For Valentine’s Day 1993 Steve Lubanski gave girlfriend Candace Frazee a stuffed bunny and that Easter she gave him a porcelain rabbit, starting a tradition and eventually a museum.
This is the time of year when food writers start lamenting about how much we've all indulged. We offer up lighter recipes as a way to make amends for our fourth-quarter behavior. Mea culpa, and pass the bran flakes. I'd rather think about all those ingredients that don't make it into traditional American holiday fare, which is so often dominated by meat, potatoes, cream and pie (somehow a food group of its own). In a non-ascetic way, let's turn the spotlight on ingredients that sparkle in flavor and happen to be healthful at the same time.

Asian food has always excelled in this area, and lately I've been drawn to Vietnamese cooking, with its bright clean essence. Ingredients like fresh mint and cilantro, lemongrass, lime, ginger, and the pungent but cleansing fish sauce, made from fermented anchovies (stay with me!) that gives a bracing lift to any dish.

You can buy lemongrass and fish sauce at well-stocked supermarkets, Asian stores and specialty markets, and you can order it online. There are also jarred versions of lemongrass - just add a tablespoon of lemongrass paste to the dressing below and skip the step where the fresh minced lemongrass would have been added to the cooking water.

If the word julienne causes you to shrug, know that it just means cut into matchsticks. Feel free to shred the vegetables if that's more happy-making. There's no reason to gnaw on a celery stick all January. Just grab some shrimp, herbs and some vibrant Asian ingredients, and march into the New Year with a spring in your step.

**Vietnamese Shrimp Salad**

**Ingredients**

Serves 6 to 8
Start to finish: 2 hours 30 minutes

- 2 tablespoons finely minced lemongrass
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt
- 2 pounds peeled and deveined extra large shrimp
- 2 tablespoons minced shallots
- 2 teaspoons minced garlic
- 3 tablespoons fresh lime juice
- 2 tablespoons fish sauce
- 2 tablespoons coarsely chopped fresh mint leaves
- 10 ounces Boston, Bibb or butter lettuce leaves, torn into big pieces
- 1/2 seedless cucumber, thinly sliced or julienned
- 2 large carrots, peeled and shredded or julienned
- 1 cup slivered scallions, white and green parts

**Preparation**

Fill a large pot about 3/4 full with water, and add the lemongrass and salt. Bring the water to a boil over high heat, add the shrimp, and simmer for about 4 minutes, until the shrimp are just cooked. Drain the shrimp and lemongrass into a fine mesh strainer and rinse with cold water to stop the cooking. The shrimp will not completely cool, which is fine.

While you are waiting for the water to boil, combine the shallots, garlic, lime juice, fish sauce, mint and cilantro in a large bowl or container. After you have rinsed the shrimp and lemongrass in the strainer, shake to remove any excess water and add them to the dressing. Toss so the shrimp are fully coated with the dressing. Cover and refrigerate for at least 2 hours, and up to 24.

When you are ready to serve, arrange the lettuce in a shallow serving dish. Then scatter over it most of the cucumber, carrots, and half the scallions. Distribute the shrimp with its dressing over the top of all, and then scatter over it the other half of the slivered scallions, and the handful of carrots and cucumbers remaining. Top with the peanuts if desired. Serve cool. — AP
The secret to a better baked pasta? Don't cook your pasta

By Sara Moulton

If there's anything more comforting than boiled pasta in a sauce, it's got to be baked pasta in a sauce. The baking adds a crispy crust that is such a delicious contrast to the tender goodness of the dish. The challenge is to how to get the pasta to turn out just right. Most baked pasta recipes instruct you to boil the noodles until cooked halfway before baking them. This allows the pasta to finish cooking in the oven as it bathes in the sauce. But this method has challenges. If you boil the noodles more than halfway, they'll be overcooked by the time you pull the finished dish out of the oven. I find it hard to get the pre-cooking time right.

And precooking the pasta, even halfway, takes work and dirties a large pot and colander. Then again, if you don't precook the pasta and instead add it dry to the sauce for baking, it will take much longer to become tender in the oven, even as it absorbs all the liquid in the sauce. Dry pasta needs to hydrate.

So what's a home cook to do? Use my simple no-cook method of precooking the pasta. Just soak the pasta in warm salted water before adding it to the other ingredients and sliding the mixture into the oven. Presoaking is a way to begin hydrating the pasta and washing away some of its starch, even as the salt in the water pre-seasons the pasta.

Yes, you'll dirty a bowl, but given that that's the same vessel in which you'll combine all the dish's ingredients, it's the only bowl you'll need. The soak requires 45 minutes, but it's hands-off time, freeing you up to prep the rest of the ingredients in the meantime. Then it takes no time at all to assemble the dish and pop it into the oven. Just 20 or so minutes later you can collect your reward: deeply-flavored baked pasta, creamy on the bottom and crispy on top. The perfect wintry entree. Add a salad and some crusty bread and be happy.

**BAKED PENNE WITH PROSCIUTTO AND FONTINA**

**Ingredients**

- Start to finish: 1 hour 15 minutes (20 minutes active)
- Servings: 6
- 1 pound penne pasta
- Salt
- Butter, for coating the baking pan
- 2 teaspoons minced garlic
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 2 cups low-sodium chicken broth
- 1 cup crushed tomatoes
- 1 to 2 teaspoons red pepper flakes, to taste (optional)
- 1-1/2 ounces finely grated Parmesan cheese
- 4 ounces coarsely grated fontina cheese
- 4 ounces thinly sliced prosciutto, chopped

**Preparation**

In a large bowl, combine the pasta with enough lukewarm, well salted water to cover. Let stand for 45 minutes. Heat the oven to 450 F. Lightly butter a shallow baking dish (1-2 cup capacity with 2 to 2-1/2-inch sides). Drain the pasta and set aside. In the same bowl, combine all remaining ingredients, stirring well. Add the pasta, toss to combine, then season with a pinch of salt. Transfer the mixture to the prepared baking dish, pressing it down evenly. Bake on the oven's middle shelf until bubbly and browned, 20 to 22 minutes.

**Nutrition information per serving**

- 590 calories; 240 calories from fat (41 percent of total calories); 27 g fat (15 g saturated; 0.5 g trans fats); 100 mg cholesterol; 1060 mg sodium; 63 g carbohydrate; 3 g fiber; 5 g sugar; 24 g protein. — AP
Sudoku 9x9 Puzzle - Sheet 5

Every row, column and mini-grid must contain the numbers 1 through 9. Don’t guess - use logic!

Animal Alphabet Challenge
Can you come up with an animal for each letter of the alphabet?

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

How many “2017” outlines can you find below?
Can you colour them in so that no 2017 is next to another 2017 of the same colour?
Christmas Food Crossword

Across
2. Don't forget to put this inside your roast turkey.
5. Round green vegetables eaten as part of Christmas lunch.
7. Jewel red fruit often made into a sauce to have with roast turkey.
8. Layers of sponge, fruit, custard and cream.
9. German fruit bread often made with marzipan inside.
10. To remember St Nicholas dropping money down the chimney these are often put in stockings.
11. Spicy biscuits made in to a house or man.

Down
1. Despite their name they don't contain meat.
3. Sweet rodents.
4. Bird often roasted at Christmas.
6. Traditionally made on Stir-Up Sunday, this follows Christmas lunch.
7. A stripy, sweet, curved stick.
Where to expand your horizons this New Year’s Eve

Matera’s ancient ‘sassi’
It comes but once a year, but tends to go one of two ways: either it’s a firecracker of an evening or, dare we suggest, a bit of a damp squib. Deciding where to spend New Year’s Eve is far from straightforward if your horizons expand beyond the familiar. If you’re still stuck for inspiration but determined to escape from the norm, we have a few ideas on where to enjoy the countdown to 2017.

**Matera, Italy**
Located in the remote rural region of Basilicata, Matera is preparing for the limelight as European Capital of Culture in 2019. But why wait? See in the new year in this jaw-dropping Unesco World Heritage-listed city, which hosts a range of open-air festivals and celebrations. Explore the town’s labyrinth of narrow alleys, and look out for the Presepe Narrante Di Matera, a ‘live nativity scene’ spread over 5km featuring 150 costumed performers.

Once a byword for urban poverty, Matera’s ‘sassi’ (cave dwellings) have become minimalist restaurants, trendy hangouts and boutique hotels. Eat at Baccanti, where former local boy and legendary film director Francis Ford Coppola has dined, sip a few cocktails at cafe-bar Area 8 (area8.it/cafe) and head underground to sleep it off at the classy Sextantio Le Grotte Della Civita. Finally, clear you head the next day by walking over the brand new suspension bridge.

**New Orleans, USA**
New Orleans adds a unique flavor to everything it does, and New Year’s Eve is no exception. Head over to Jackson Square to ring in 2017. The annual party there includes live music and a great view of the midnight fleur-de-lis drop to usher in the new year. The St Louis Cathedral, one of the best examples of French architecture in the US, serves as a regal backdrop for an impressive fireworks display over the Mississippi River. You may be surprised at how cold it can be in New Orleans at this time of year. Luckily, the venerable Cafe Du Monde is just across the street. Open 24/7, closing only for Christmas Day, this purveyor of beignets and chicory coffee always helps ease the effects of one too many Hurricane cocktails.

**Melbourne, Australia**
If Sydney is the golden child for New Year’s Eve in Australia, then Melbourne is the spunky sibling. Hole up at one of the city’s renowned rooftop bars for a balmy summer night’s tipple and front-row seats for the fireworks. For inner-city spots, Rooftop Bar atop Curtin House (curtinhouse.com) and Loop Roof (looprooftopbar.com.au) are hallowed favourites for Melburnians, whilst boutique hotel QT Melbourne delights with a glam rooftop terrace (book ahead for those last two). Further afield, catch skyline views and eat tapas at Naked in the Sky in Fitzroy. The morning’s salvation awaits in the shape of a delicious Melbourne brunch and, of course, a great cup of coffee.
Las Palmas, Gran Canaria

Partying in Europe at this time of year usually involves several layers of thermal underwear, but temperatures in the Gran Canarian capital of Las Palmas are a balmy average of 19°C. And while elsewhere the island is dominated by big resorts, this is a proper Spanish city mostly frequented by locals - particularly on New Year’s Eve, when clubs and bars fill up with Canarios. The old quarter of Vegueta is a fun place to roam - start with dinner at Restaurante El Herreno, which makes traditional Canarian dishes with produce fresh from the market opposite, then head out to explore the many bars dotted among its narrow alleyways. After a few canas (local drink), most people converge on the marvelous city beach Playa de las Canteras, where fireworks light up the sky to welcome in the new year. Remember to BYO grapes - it’s a Spanish tradition to eat 12 grapes, one for each stroke of midnight, or risk an entire year of bad luck.

Nassau, the Bahamas

Nearly every town in the Caribbean throws a New Year's bash, but Nassau does so with a particular flair. Junkanoo is the Bahamas’ biggest, flashiest street carnival, and while it takes place multiple times a year, the largest celebrations happen on Boxing Day and New Year’s Day. In the wee hours of the morning, elaborately costumed dancers take to the streets with their troupes, parading through downtown Nassau to ring in the new year with horns, drums, whistles and floats. Once the festivities subside, nap on the pearly sands of one of the popular New Providence beaches (Cable, Delaporte or Junkanoo Beaches to name a few). And when you start to feel hungry, head over to Arawak Cay for the weekend fish fry or snag some conch salad from the market at Potter’s Cay.

Hangzhou, China

Although the Chinese do not celebrate New Year as warmly as the Spring Festival (otherwise known as Chinese New Year, which falls on 28 January this year), it’s a good time to visit southeast China, where the countryside is still green and vibrant. Visit the idyllic city of Hangzhou for a peaceful way to see in 2017. Follow the footpath alongside West Lake in the morning to see the mist covering the water, then climb the hill to visit Yongfu Temple. Spend the afternoon sipping tea at the teahouse there, surrounded by a grove of tea trees. Finish off your day with a slap-up meal in the luxurious Shangri-La Hotel, which stands on the shoreline of the lake.

Sydney, Australia

Australia’s glitziest city puts on an extravagant show by utilizing its best asset - Sydney Harbor. In the run-up to the big fireworks display, vessels of all shapes and sizes decked out in dazzling white rope-light dance across the water to the sound of live music. The arrival of midnight triggers an eruption of pyrotechnics from no less than seven barges dotted along the harbor, not to mention the world’s most famous coat hanger, the Sydney Harbor Bridge. For those not lucky enough to score an invite to a private waterside party, the best option is to join the million other people who flock to the harbor’s shores. Cockatoo Island, one of the many harborside islands, offers the fabulous option of glamping, thereby solving the issue of a long walk or car ride home. Stave off the hangover at one of Australia’s most iconic beaches, Bondi, where you can down a healthy brekkie at Speedos cafe or carb up at Icebergs Dining Room before jumping into the picture-perfect surf for a swim between the flags. - (www.lonelyplanet.com)
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2016

Aries (March 21-April 19)

You may see some positive changes now that have come from some real personal work you have done recently. This may be clearing away some old projects or making the effort to make friends with co-workers. The young people that did not agree with your methods are beginning to see things your way. Your support system has vastly improved over past situations. Some of the changes could be that you have reversed some of your dreams and have begun to make realistic goals. You are also more patient than in the past, especially with young people under your care. You may be called upon to teach today and you will find it easier to interject some excellent rewards and future possibilities. You praise others this evening.

Taurus (April 20-May 20)

Now that your goals are within reach, it is time for some new plans to take form. You enjoy independent thinking and finding solutions with little help. Someone is influential in helping you find exactly what you want in your career or self-improvement program. People around you want to help you. Your mind performs better and more efficiently when you are calm and cool; it can lead you to see the sensible and unbiassed situations. You are in control of your mind and body, and so keep it looking upward and outward. A financial adviser is offering an economic update or review this evening in some form of lecture. This mini class will feature an industry expert who will be discussing the stock market. It may sound dull, but it’s not for even a moment.

Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Having the ability to get your message across to others is at a high just now. Your timing is perfect. Playing the role of the one who nurtures, another suits you quite well at this time. You may strongly feel the need to care for others. In this case, you are excellent with volunteer work. You value people that have disabilities and know they have a lot to offer society. The sense of accomplishment at the community gatherings. You may find a good way to help others become organized and to also help create some convenient timesaving ideas. Today, you may succeed in creating some new ideas or improving on old ones. You gain positive attention. There are t- ting points to your taking the first step in a work project. You should enjoy a encouraging one or two families to adopt handicapped persons for a cou-

Cancer (June 21-July 22)

You are feeling upbeat, healthy and natural. Everything points to your taking the first step in a work project. You enjoy a great deal of support and encouragement. Your passion for your work and personal issues, you get most of what you want. You encourage your friends and co-workers to become involved in abig run to benefit police officers or widows. They return the favor by helping you and you feel both rewarded.

Leo (July 23-August 22)

Something may help you to appreciate and discover the beauty that is in your life this day. Perhaps you did not know that there are young people—good for you! You may be called upon to teach today—and you will find it easier to interject some excellent rewards and future possibilities. You praise others this evening.

Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Professional decisions are good but may take a little more time and patience on your part. You complete your tasks efficiently. Prepare to reconnect your viewpoint and direction during the next six months. You will close the door on many of the issues that you have been dealing with for the last three years. You need specialized training and help others become organized and to also help create some convenient timesaving ideas. Today, you may succeed in creating some new ideas or improving on old ones. You gain positive attention. There are t- ting points to your taking the first step in a work project. You should enjoy a encouraging one or two families to adopt handicapped persons for a cou-

Libra (September 23-October 22)

This is a good time for clear speculation. You are in a serious frame of mind and you find yourself dealing with matters of much concern and responsibility. This is a good time to reorganize. You may be feeling a bit on the introverted side this afternoon, however, and just want to spend more time with your love or with close friends. It may not be a time to be outward or to try to make yourself known in the world. Your feelings are more reflective than expressive just now. To know that you are really wanted and needed you may gain a comforting security in the lack of these things can cause an instinctive feeling of uneasiness. It really is no man that is an island. You should not have to go it alone, unless you so choose.

Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

You communicate effectively, both professionally and per- sonally. You should find that today is one of those super nice days when just about anything will work. You will do particularly well in activities that include children, young people and your home and surroundings. You could feel real relief and assistance at this time for circumstances and things around you. You may not be expecting it but some kind of a little boost in the form of extra recognition or support will be coming from those around you. You should feel very much in touch with others, as the lines of communication are wide open. All of the support that you could possibly want or need should be there. This evening there is time for a phone conversation from someone far away.

Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

You are an active, imaginative charmer and make social contacts, that could take you away from your childhood home. You may leave the nest, but you never let go of your heritage. You may be capable, too easygoing or just assume that whatever you have and give away can be replenished with hard work. Your troubles are few and can be worked through quickly. Especially with your good attitude. Lovers, business associates and friends respect you and your advice. You are called on to speak, lecture or teach today. People expect great things from you. You are an original—rail special qualities that help you to grow and help others. You enjoy the opportunity to celebrate tonight.

Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

Working with others can be quite successful today. You may see some positive changes now that have come from some real personal work you have done recently. This may be clearing away some old projects or making the effort to make friends with co-workers. The young people that did not agree with your methods are beginning to see things your way. Your support system has vastly improved over past situations. Some of the changes could be that you have reversed some of your dreams and have begun to make realistic goals. You are also more patient than in the past, especially with young people under your care. Perhaps a good friend of yours is just getting started in a music career. Whatever the case, you enjoy and support your friend.

Aquarius (January 20-February 18)

Go ahead and allow your creative and intuitive sides to surf- face; there are rewards coming your way. Watch for new solutions to old problems or something very inventive to evolve as a result of all of this. If anyone has a project that needs to be completed by a certain time, you will be the one that he or she chooses to help. You just seem to instinctively know what others want and can take action with very little waste or haste. You will be greatly appreciated for your abilities to manage and direct others. There does not seem to be a problem with too many requests because you are good at saying no when there is no more room or energy for you to be expressive. De, however, notice if family members are neglected; take time to enjoy them often!
NO ESCAPE ON OSN MOVIES HD

MOVIES HD

ACTION

12:00 Who Am I?
12:55 Speed
13:55 The Experiment
14:55 The Big Picture
15:55 Escape Plan
16:55 The Expendables
17:55 The Incredibles
18:55 The Omen
19:45 The Expendables
20:35 The Expendables
21:25 The Expendables
22:15 The Expendables
23:05 The Expendables

MOVIES HD

FAMILY

01:00 American Girl: Dance Party
01:55 The Babysitter's Club
02:50 The Babysitter's Club
03:45 The Babysitter's Club
04:40 The Babysitter's Club
05:35 The Babysitter's Club
06:30 The Babysitter's Club
07:25 The Babysitter's Club
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MOVIES HD

KIDS

01:00 Bolt And Bip
01:25 Prim And Pong: The Big Adventure
02:25 The Big Picture
03:25 The Big Picture
04:25 The Big Picture
05:25 The Big Picture
06:25 The Big Picture
07:25 The Big Picture
08:25 The Big Picture
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MOVIES HD

SCIENCE DISCOVERY

00:00 Other Plans
01:00 The A-Team
02:00 The A-Team
03:00 The A-Team
04:00 The A-Team
05:00 The A-Team
06:00 The A-Team
07:00 The A-Team
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MOVIES HD

COMEDY

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12:00 The A-Team

00:00 Women Or What?
01:00 Race To Escape
02:00 Do They Do It?
03:00 Food Factory
04:00 Race To Escape
05:00 The Big Brain Theory
06:00 How To Build... Everything
07:00 Food Factory
08:00 How To Build... Everything
09:00 Food Factory
10:00 How To Build... Everything
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**MARRIAGE WITH ROBOTS: SCI-FI OR A NEW REALITY?**

**WASHINGTON:** Don’t cut that umbilical cord too soon: A brief pause after birth could benefit most newborns by delivering them a surge of oxygen-rich blood. New recommendations for US obstetricians, the latest in a debate over how quick to snip, suggest waiting “at least 30 seconds to 60 seconds after birth,” for all healthy newborns.

That’s double what often happens now. It’s common in the US for doctors to cut the cord almost immediately, within 15 to 20 seconds of birth, unless the baby is premature. Cutting the cord is a memorable moment in the delivery room, and Wednesday’s advice from the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists won’t interfere if dads want to help. An extra half minute may not seem like much, but a lot of oxygen-rich blood reaches the baby through the umbilical cord shortly after birth, said Dr Maria Mascola of ACOG’s Committee on Obstetric Practice. It may flow for up to five minutes, she said, but much of the placental blood transfers in that first minute—and there’s increasing evidence that it has some health benefits. Here are some things to know:

**Does the cord really matter?**

It can give a boost to what Dr Tonse Raju of the National Institutes of Health calls the amazing transition that happens as the baby takes his or her first breath. In the womb, the placenta acts as the fetus’ lungs. But within seconds of birth, the circulation changes and lungs once filled with fluid inflate as the baby inhales air. Cut access to lingering placental blood in the cord too soon, and the baby misses extra oxygen to supplement those early breaths. Before the 1960s, it wasn’t uncommon to wait five minutes or more to cut the cord. Then, for unclear reasons, doctors began clamping and cutting almost immediately. "Unfortunately, the value of immediate clamping has never been shown," said Raju, a perinatology specialist at NIH’s National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. He wasn’t involved with the new recommendation.—AP

**LONDON:** Sex with robots is "just around the corner", an expert told a global conference in London this week featuring interactive sex toys and discussions on the ethics of relationships with humanoids. "Sexbots" are a staple of science fiction—the idea of robots as sex partners is explored, for instance, in recent films and television series like "Ex-Machina" and "Westworld." But some specialists believe the first animated lovers made of metal, rubber and plastic, programmed to provide sexual bliss, will take a step into reality just months from now.

"Sex with robots is just around the corner, with the first sexbots coming... sometime next year," artificial intelligence expert David Levy told the International Congress on Love and Sex with Robots at Goldsmiths, University of London. US California-based company Abyss Creations next year will start marketing sex robots that are billed as life-like, with the ability to talk and move like humans.

Ultimately, Levy said, people should entertain the thought of marriage with robots as early as 2050. The conference in London showcased some of the latest developments in robotic sex toys, such as gadgets which allow couples to kiss, no matter how far apart they are. The "Kissenger", which attaches to your mobile phone, contains sensors to detect the pressure of a kiss and transmit it to your partner’s device in real time. It has been under development for several years. Now students at Tokyo’s Keio University are developing the "Teletongue", aimed at providing "remote oral interaction" and designed to be "kinky", according to co-creator Dolthathi Kaewsawmong. It allows couples to send licking sounds and sensations through cyberspace using a "lollipop", creating an "immersive experience", she explained.

"Moral panic"

Lynne Hall, of the University of Sunderland’s school of computer science, in northeast England, said that robots could create "a fantastic sexual experience". "There are lots of benefits to sex with robots... it’s safe, you never catch any disease, you can control it," she told the conference. She rejected the idea that robots would replace or threaten sex with humans, however. "We are somehow fed by moral panic... It’s disgusting... nobody will ever have sex with a human again," Hall told the conference. "But people are regularly watching porn... and they are still having sex with humans," she said.

Levy, the author of "Love and Sex with Robots", from which the annual conference takes its title, said marriage to robots would be the next logical step. "At sex with robots becomes more and more commonplace... we shall come face to face with the very real possibility of marriage to robots," the former international chess master said. And why not? Robots of the future will be “patient, kind, protective, loving”, never “jealous, boastful, arrogant, rude,” Levy said—"unless of course you want them to be". "All of the following qualities and many more are likely to be achievable in software within a few decades," he added. Levy is convinced that rapid changes in attitudes to sex and marriage in recent years point to a world where “more and more people come to accept sex and love with robots”.

"Robot personhood"

In his vision, robot parents could become a social norm, with laws to acknowledge “robot personhood” and make marriage and parenting by humanoids more than just a fantasy. "The time is fast approaching when the theoretical debate must evolve into laws," and the consequences of those laws will be staggering,” he said. For now, however, sexual relations with humanoids are a step too far for many.

Emma Yann Zhang, a PhD student at London’s City University who worked on the Kissenger prototype, believes there is still a long way to go before people will accept the idea. In a pilot study conducted by the Imagineering Institute in Malaysia, partnered with City University, participants were asked about their perceptions of sex robots, including the potential for intimacy and attraction. —AFP

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**Kuwait Times**

248 33 199
The paradox of 2016 financial markets

A volatile calm as traders fret about bouts of wild price swings

LONDON: Traditional measures of volatility at historic lows and Wall Street stocks at new record highs went hand-in-hand in 2016 with traders fretting about bouts of wild stock-price swings and currency flash-crashes. The past year has been nothing if not paradoxical for financial markets - a landscape that will probably persist in 2017.

The proliferation of automated trading and passive investing, extreme levels of speculative positioning in an increasingly regulated broking world suggest investors should brace for periodic turbulence even if markets are mostly calm. While the measures of future or implied price volatility look remarkably subdued, they are disguising a minefield in individual securities and currencies, and - during particular periods - micro market storms that may become magnified as US interest rates rise and other central banks step back from years of anaesthetizing money-printing. An analysis of intraday volatility across major equity, bond and currency markets shows that episodes of sudden, extreme market volatility has become more commonplace in the last two years, even though implied volatility has been contained.

With the world’s biggest investment banks shrinking market-making activities and balance sheets to comply with post-crisis regulations, the scope for sudden market shocks is rising. “Trades often move in bigger size, quicker, and in blocks,” said Charlie Bristow, co-head of rates trading at JP Morgan. “The speed at which order book depth can go from high to low is a new phenomenon, and it won’t go away if volatility remains where it is.”

Officials at the Bank for International Settlements have said that the VIX index is no longer the default barometer of investor sentiment and risk appetite - that’s now the dollar - and that bouts of extreme volatility will be more commonplace. Not much of a concern, Claudio Borio, head of the BIS’ monetary and economic department, says, along as such bouts pose no threat to institutions’ stability or market functioning.

Get me blocks

Part of the issue is that markets are now driven by lightening quick, complex, computerised trading programmes at the big banks and investment funds. Many of these algorithmic models pick up the same ‘buy’ and ‘sell’ signals, magnifying price swings.

These conditions triggered the “flash crash” in sterling on Oct. 7, which the BIS is investigating with input from the Bank of England. The pound dived and rebounded by about 10 percent in a few minutes in early Asian trading that day, an unprecedented swing for a major currency at an hour when the market is at its lowest ebb.

Market participants generally agree that algorithmic machine trading that makes up much of the global currency market played a role, while some have speculated the initial move may have come from electronic news gathering software or other parameters used in trading programs.

“We have moved towards more transparent and more automated markets. What that means is that when something happens, firstly everyone knows about it and, secondly, it tends to happen very quickly,” said Vlad Khondros, global head of market structure and liquidity strategy at UBS.

In equities, the surge in the use of exchange-traded funds which provide investors access to markets at a much lower cost than traditional actively-managed portfolios has significantly altered trading. Roughly 10 percent of a full-day’s average trading volume across US exchanges now happens at the close, UBS estimates, nearly double levels seen a few years ago, as ETFs are benchmarked to closing prices.

Institutional investors who buy and sell in large quantities are getting increasingly averse to trading intra-day on traditional exchanges with volumes now at historic lows and Wall Street stocks at new record highs went hand-in-hand in 2016 with traders fretting about bouts of wild stock-price swings and currency flash-crashes. The paradox is that the markets are mostly calm, while the measures of future or implied price volatility look remarkably subdued, they are disguising a minefield in individual securities and currencies, and - during particular periods - micro market storms that may become magnified as US interest rates rise and other central banks step back from years of anaesthetizing money-printing. An analysis of intraday volatility across major equity, bond and currency markets shows that episodes of sudden, extreme market volatility has become more commonplace in the last two years, even though implied volatility has been contained.

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GCC SUKUK ISSUANCE SET TO REBOUNDS IN 2017 AFTER DROP

CONVENTIONAL BONDS MORE ATTRACTION FOR ISSUERS

DUBAI/SYDNEY: After slumping in 2016, issuance of Islamic bonds from the Middle East looks likely to rebound next year as Gulf states take advantage of unsatisfied demand, but investors may shun the long end of the curve.

As governments scrambled to cover budget deficits due to low oil prices this year, they overwhelmingly turned to conventional debt - a shift from the traditional pattern in which sukuk and conventional bonds had roughly equal shares of the region's international bond issuance. In the first half of 2016, governments in the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council raised just $1.1 billion or 5 percent of their total debt issuance through longer-term sukuk, against 38 percent a year earlier, Moody's estimated. Saudi Arabia's $17.5 billion debut bond in October was entirely conventional.

Meanwhile, GCC corporate and project-related sukuk issuance totaled $2.5 billion in the first eight months, up marginally from $2.3 billion a year ago but down sharply from $5 billion in 2013 and $6.5 billion in 2014, Standard & Poor's estimated. With cheap oil tightening liquidity in their banking systems, Gulf governments were forced to rely more on foreign investors rather than Islamic banks and funds, which pushed them towards conventional issuance.

Also, as oil prices sagged, governments were in a hurry to raise money and did not want to spend extra time planning sukuk issues - which tend to be more complex than conventional bonds - or explaining their intricacies to investors. Sukuk documentation can vary across the GCC in terms of structure, legal requirements and compliance with sharia standards, noted Ruslana Ramli, head of Islamic finance at Malaysia's RAM Ratings.

"In the GCC, sukuk issuance are typically supported by real assets. Identifying sufficient assets to support sukuk issuance may add to the funding time-line and affect the overall financing cost." "

UPSWING NEXT YEAR

Issuance may become more normal in 2017. With oil rebinding and austerity policies in place, GCC governments are somewhat less pressed for cash and have more time to plan sukuk.

Also, this year's death of new sukuk has left unsatisfied demand among Islamic investors, including banks that need high-grade sharia-compliant bonds to meet liquidity standards. "Sukuk are very much in demand and global sukuk issuance is on an upward," said Mohieddine Kronfol, chief investment officer for global sukuk and Middle East-fixed income at Franklin Templeton Investments. "Going forward we expect to see sovereign issuers to be less lumpy and more diverse in format and curreny," he said. Saudi Arabia is believed to be considering an international sukuk issue in the first quarter of 2017. Bahrain could sell sovereign sukuk in that period, though the central bank told Reuters no decision had been made.

Conventional bonds look likely to retain one attraction for Gulf issuers, however, because long maturities above 10 years seem more feasible for conventional debt.

"The sukuk market still lacks a significant investor base for the long end of the curve. Sukuk buyers are traditionally more involved in five- and 10-year paper," said a Dubai banker. Saudi Electricity Co (SEC) issued 30-year sukuk in 2013 but secondary market trading in its bonds suggests demand is weaker for that maturity than for conventional debt. Its 30-year sukuk is at a premium of 75-80 basis points over the 30-year tranche of the Saudi sovereign bond, against an initial 50 bps in October.

For shorter tenors, SEC's 2022 and 2023 sukuk are almost flat to Saudi sovereign bonds maturing in 2021 and 2026. Given the pricing advantage of conventional paper at the long end, Riyadh could choose maturities of five and 10 years for a sukuk issue next year, said Doug Bitton, head of fixed income funds and portfolios at Rasmala Investment Bank. — Reuters

CARACAS: An employee waits during an inspection by the National Superintendency of Costs and Prices in a warehouse in Caracas on Wednesday. The National Superintendency of Costs and Prices intervened in the clothing company EPK to order it to immediately cut prices by more than 30 percent, under a supervised sale in the chain's 31 stores throughout the country. —AFP

LUANDA: Finance Minister Carlos Ramos da Silva warned yesterday that "the risk for emerging markets is that Trump's policies will return next year with significant deals, but warned that the overall outlook for emerging markets remains unclear following the election of Republican Donald Trump to the White House. "Once Trump gets into the White House and we start to get clearer picture of the policies he will proceed with and how the relationship between the US and emerging markets plays out, that will have an important impact on the ability of emerging market borrowers to tap international markets," he added.

LONDON: Emerging governments and companies have raised close to $450 billion on global bond markets in 2016, with sovereign sales hitting record highs, and issuance next year will likely be robust as borrowers scramble to repay maturing debt. The year got off to a slow start after emerging market assets were roiled by violent selloffs in January. But more on foreign investors rather than sovereign bonds maturing in 2021 and 10 years for a sukuk issue next year, said Doug Bitton, head of fixed income funds and portfolios at Rasmala Investment Bank. — Reuters

Moreover, the central bank told Reuters no decision had been made. Conventional bonds look likely to retain one attraction for Gulf issuers, however, because long maturities above 10 years seem more feasible for conventional debt.

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Cairo: Egypt’s Suez Canal revenues fell to $389.2 million in November from $418.1 million in October, the canal authority website said yesterday, the lowest since February 2015. Revenues fell 47 percent year on year since November 2015 when they were at $408.4 million. The canal is the fastest shipping route between Europe and Asia and one of Egypt’s main sources of foreign currency. Egypt has been struggling to revive its economy since a 2011 uprising scared away tourists and foreign investors. It’s billion expansion, inaugurated by President Abdel Fattah al-Sissi in August 2015, was intended to help revive the ailing economy by doubling daily traffic and increasing annual revenue to more than $13 billion by 2023. That boost has yet to materialize. But an official from the Suez Canal Authority said last month the waterway was expected to generate $5.7 billion in revenues this year.

Egypt wheat reserves enough to last until early April

CAIRO: Egypt’s strategic wheat reserves are sufficient to last until the beginning of April, the country’s Supply Minister Mohamed Ali Meselhy said in a cabinet statement late on Wednesday. The new reserve figure was released after Egypt’s state-owned General Authority for Supply Commodities (GASC) bought 360,000 tons of Russian, Argentinian and Romanian wheat on Tuesday in a tender. Meselhy said the government had bought a total of $40,000 tons of wheat. Egypt is the world’s biggest importer of wheat.

JUMBO DEALS LIFT SOVEREIGN BOND SALES TO RECORD HIGH

LUANDA: Finance Minister Carlos Ramos da Silva warned yesterday that “The risk for emerging markets is that Trump's plans to boost spending further lifts the dollar and US Treasury yields, potentially increasing developing nations’ borrowing costs. This is not necessarily a disadvantage, given stronger US growth usually feeds through to developing economies, including through commodity prices. — Reuters

Kuwait oil price up by 49 cents to $50.80 pb

KUWAIT: The price of Kuwaiti crude went up by 49 cents to $50.80 per barrel Wednesday after being at $50.31 pb the day before, said Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) yesterday. At the global level, the price went down after news regarding an increase in Libyan production in the last three months surfaced. The increase was also attributed to an upsurge in American crude reserves last week. The price of the Brent crude went down by 89 cents to settle at $54.46 per barrel, the same predicament for the West Texas Intermediate which went down by 69 cents to $52.49 pb. — AFP

OAPEC: Oil supply, demand should rebalance by H1 2017

CAIRO: Supply and demand in global oil markets should rebalance during the first or second quarter of next year, the head of the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries’ (OAPEC) Executive Bureau said yesterday. “There will be a rebalancing of supply and demand in the first or second quarter of 2017,” Talal Nasser Al-Abti told Reuters on the sidelines of an OAPEC meeting in Cairo. OAPEC, unlike the similarly named Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), does not set oil production policy for its member countries. It was established in 1968 and has 11 members: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates. Membership is open to Arab countries whose oil revenues make up a large percentage of gross domestic product.
MUMBAI: Lawyers for Cyrus Mistry, the ousted ex-chairman of Indian conglomerate Tata, yesterday fired the opening salvo of a legal case pitting their client against company patriarch Ratan Tata. Advocate Gopal Mukherjee told the first hearing of a company’s disputes tribunal that Mistry had been unfairly sacked as Tata boss in October because he had informed the board about alleged corporate mismanagement to the steel-to-soap giant.

“Shareholders believed various acts of mismanagement within the Tata Group. Mistry was removed because he wanted to investigate these malpractices,” Mukherjee said at the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT).

Mistry claims that he was illegally removed as chairman of Tata Sons, the holding company of the $103 billion Tata Group, at a board meeting on October 24. He says he was removed without adequate prior notice and at the behest of Tata, 78, who is back in the hot seat at India’s biggest conglomerate after making way for Mistry in 2012.

Mistry’s dismissal shocked India’s business community and saw Tata take interim charge of the sprawling conglomerate that he led for more than two decades. Tata, who was said to be unhappy with the director of life insurance Mistry, who is India’s most famous family conglomerate, claims the latter was fairly unhappy with the direction that Mistry was taking India’s most famous family conglomerate.

Mistry’s counsel was due to present its case to NCLAT today. The tribunal instructed Mistry’s counsel to provide detailed evidence of his claims to the court within a week. Tata Sons will then have seven days to file their response. The judge hopes to hold the final hearings on January 31 and February 1, 2017. Tata Sons believe that the petition is not maintainable in law and the court will hear Tata Sons on this issue at the outset at the next hearing,” the conglomerate said in a short statement after yesterday’s proceedings.

Mistry fires first legal salvo against Tata

MILAN: Troubled Italian lender Monte dei Paschi di Siena edged closer to a state bailout yesterday as its last-ditch plan to raise billions of euros risked failing short. BMPS, the world’s oldest bank and Italy’s third-biggest, launched a bid to sell fresh shares this week under plans to raise five billion euros ($5.2 billion) in new capital.

The result of the share offer was due to be released later yesterday or early today but the bank acknowledged late Wednesday that it had failed to attract an anchor investor after pinning its hopes on a big Qatari takeover.

A separate debt-for-equity swap offer, which is also part of the plan to replenish its coffers, reaped just over two billion euros, the bank also said. The plan additionally entails selling off 27.6 billion euros in bad loans.

BMPS is at the centre of a crisis in Italy’s banking sector-ma de up some 700 banks which is buckling under the weight of bad loans estimated to total 360 billion euros.

Shares in the bank have fallen over 80 percent in the past year and it achieved the worst results in a July stress test by the European Banking Authority. The Italian parliament approved on Wednesday a 20-billion-euro bailout package that would aim to stem the woes of the ailing banking sector.

Analysts say the “weak appetite” among private investors so far towards bolstering the bank’s coffers by 5 billion euros raises the likelihood of a state injection. “The low probability of achieving this amount increases (the) odds of some kind of government rescue,” said Ipek Ozkardeskaya, of London Capital Group, said in a note to clients.

Monte dei Paschi di Siena fails to rope in an anchor investor

Bank looks in Italian bank’s funding scramble

TOKYO: A man uses a mobile phone in front of an electronic stock indicator of a securities firm in Tokyo yesterday. Shares were meandering in thin trading yesterday in Asia, as investors wound down ahead of the holidays. —AP

Ex-BSI banker jailed for 30 months in 1MDB-linked case

SINGAPORE: A Singapore court jailed a former wealth manager of Swiss private bank BSI for 30 months yesterday for his role in the charges of perverting the course of justice in a case linked to a money-laundering investigation involving Malaysian fund 1MDB.

Prosecutors said Yeo Jia Wei, the third BSI banker sentenced in the city-state this year, urged witnesses to lie to police and destroy evidence during the investigation of illicitly transferred funds linked to the Malaysian sovereign wealth fund, 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB).

“There was planning and premeditation for the commission of the offence,” District Judge Ng Peng Hong said. Prosecutors said Yeo, 33, played a central role in the illicit movement of $233.9 million ($165.4 million) of 1MDB-linked funds both while he was working at the now-defunct BSI Bank Singapore, and afterwards. Yeo repeatedly denied any wrongdoing during the month-long trial. Defence lawyer Philip Fong told Reuters Yeo was “seriously considering appealing the conviction and sentence”. Singapore authorities have called the 1MDB-linked investigation the most complex, sophisticated and largest money laundering case they have handled. Singapore’s central bank in May ordered the closure of the operations in Singapore of the Swiss private bank and asked the Attorney General’s Chambers to investigate six members of its senior management and staff.

Yeo was found guilty last month of 10 charges stemming from the money-laundering investigation linked to 1MDB. Switzerland has been convicted and sentenced on charges stemming from the money-laundering investigation linked to 1MDB. Switzerland has been

Short-term relief?

Ozkardeskaya, of LCG, said European banking stocks were expected to remain under pressure.

“Finding a solution to rescue Monte Paschi could trigger a short-term relief rally in the sector, yet the European banks will certainly remain on a slippery ground for a longer period of time,” she added.

Shares in BMPS were up slightly in late morning trading in Milan, rising 1.7 percent to 16.6 euros, amid hopes that the various possibilities would amount to some kind of viable solution. Founded in Siena in 1472, BMPS has been in trouble for years. Weakened by the disastrous purchase in 2007 of the Antvenoneta bank at twice the estimated value, it quickly drifted into scandal when its management team was accused of fraud and misuse of funds.

It subsequently ran up huge losses and has had to raise capital twice since 2014. Monte dei Paschi has admitted to having only four months’ worth of liquidity left. —AFP
TRUMP NAMES BILLIONAIRE ICahn TO ADVISE ON REFORM

WASHINGTON: President-elect Donald Trump said Wednesday he is naming bil- lionaire Carl Icahn, a vocal critic of govern- ment regulation, to serve as a special ad- visor to the incoming administration. Icahn already reportedly helped Trump pick candidates to fill his cabinet, including the Environmental Protection Agency. “Carl was with me from the beginning and with his being a very successful businessman, that was something I truly appreci- ated,” Trump said in a statement. “He is not only a brilliant negotiator, but also someone who is innately able to predict the future especially having to do with finances and economies. His help on regulations that our country is faced with will be invaluable.”

Icahn said that “Under President Obama, America’s business owners have been crippled by over $1 trillion in new regulations and over 750 billion hours dealing with paperwork. It’s time to break free of excessive regulation and let our entrepreneurs do what they do best: create jobs and support communities.”

Like Trump, Icahn is a New York City native. He began his career on Wall Street in 1961, and has held substantial or controlling positions in numerous American companies over the years, including RJR Nabisco, Texaco, Phillips Petroleum, Western Union, Gulf & Western, Viacom, Revlon, Time Warner, Motorola, Chesapeake Energy, Dell, Netflix, Apple, and eBay. Icahn also owned the last glitz Trump casino in Atlantic City, New Jersey, the Trump Taj Mahal, until it finally filed a closed last month, after going through two bankruptcy reorganizations since it opened in 1990. Icahn took over the casino in 2014, but said it had lost $150 mil- lion over just a few short years. — AFP

PETROBRAS SELLS STAKES IN OFFSHORE OILFIELDS TO FRANCE’S TOTAL

RIO DE JANEIRO: Brazil’s state-controlled oil company Petrobras is selling stakes in two big offshore oilfields and two power plants to France’s Total in a deal worth $2.2 billion, both companies announced Wednesday.

The agreement comes under a previously announced Petrobras asset sale aimed at raising billions of dollars for the indebted company. The deal and action will Total get pumping rights to significant parts of two deepwater, pre-salt oilfields off Brazil’s southeastern coast whose discovery in 2007 was seen as a resource bonan- za. Total will pick up 22.5 percent of the Lapa field and 35 per- cent of the Lapa field, which started operation on Tuesday.

The French company will also become 16.5-per-cent owner of two thermal energy plants, Rodolfo de Almeida and Celso Furtado, in the northeastern state of Bahia.

The transaction comes at a time of relatively low prices for oil and amid a huge corruption scandal involving Petrobras that saw the company’s rating downgraded and its debt pile of over $120 billion become worrisome. Total’s CEO, Patrick Pouyanné, said in Paris that “these deals will considerably reinforce Total’s presence in Brazil by giving us access to the remarkable pre-salt resources and allowing us to integrate into the promising integrated gas chain in the country.”

He later told AFP that Brazil is a “land of opportunity” for Total. “I often say that you should look for oil and gas where (we know) they are. There is a lot in Brazil, and the moment in time helps us because in fact they are a country experiencing difficulties,” he said. “They are looking for partners. They decid- ed to open up to foreign investment (in oil), and that gives us the chance to talk to Total.”

Petrobras chief Pedro Parente said in Rio de Janeiro the deals should offer some strategic advantages and savings. “And they should help us to reduce our debts,” he stressed. — AFP

CONSTRUCTION, TOURISM FUEL NEW ZEALAND GROWTH

WELLINGTON: New Zealand’s economy exceeded expecta- tions to grow 1.1 percent in the September quarter on the back of booming construction and record tourist numbers, official data showed yesterday. The strong performance from July to September topped market forecasts of 0.9 per- cent and took annual economic growth to 3.0 percent.

Statistics New Zealand said 13 of the 16 industries used to gauge gross domestic product were positive, pointing to a broader-based expansion in economic activity. The stand- out sectors were construction, up 2.1 percent, and trans- port, which surged 3.7 percent over the quarter.

It also benefited from the combination of high net migration, strong tourism flows and low interest rates,” Capital Economics analyst Paul Dales said. The strong economic activity was likely to spur New Zealand’s stubbornly low inflation rate, easing pres- sure on the central bank to further cut interest rates from a record low of 1.75 percent, he added.

New Zealand recorded a 3.65 million interna- tional visitors in the year to November 30, while net migration over the same period was an all-time high of 70,400. Finance Minister Steven Joyce said it was a welcome boost for the economy as the rural sector, once New Zealand’s biggest export, struggled. — AFP

TRUMP PICKS ‘DEATH BY CHINA’ AUTHOR FOR TRADE ADVISORY ROLE

NEW YORK: US President-elect Donald Trump named Peter Navarro, an economist who has urged a hardline on trade with China, to head a newly-formed White House National Trade Council, the transition team said on Wednesday.

Navarro is an academic and former investment adviser who has authored a number of popular books and made a film describing China’s threat to the US economy as well as Beijing’s desire to become the dominant economic and mili- tary power in Asia. Trump’s team praised Navarro in a state- ment as a “visionary” economist who would “develop trade policies that shrink our trade deficit, expand our growth, and help stop the exodus of jobs from our shores.”

Trump, a Republican, made trade a centerpiece of his presi- dential campaign and railed against what he said were bad deals the United States had made with other countries. He has threatened to hit Mexico and China with high tariffs once he takes office on Jan 20. Navarro, 67, is a professor at University of California, Irvine, and advised Trump during the campaign. His books include “Death by China: How America Lost its Manufacturing Base,” which was made into a documentary film. As well as describing what he sees as America’s losing economic war with China, Navarro has highlighted concerns over environmental issues related to Chinese imports and the theft of US intellectual property. China is paying close atten- tion to Trump’s transition team and the possible direction of policy, a spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said after being asked about Navarro’s appointment.

“Cooperation is the only correct choice. We hope the US works hard with China to maintain the healthy, stable develop- ment of ties, including business and trade ties,” the spokes- woman, Hua Chunying, told a daily press briefing. While Trump in the statement praised the “clarity” of Navarro’s argu- ments and the “thoroughness of his research,” few other econ- omists have endorsed Navarro’s ideas.

Marcus Noland, an economist at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, likened a tax and trade paper authored by Navarro and Wilbur Ross, who has been named as Trump’s commerce secretary, to “the type of magical thinking best reserved for fictional realities” for what he said was its flawed economic analysis.

“Don’t poke the panda”

Navarro has also suggested a stepped-up engagement with Taiwan, including assistance with a submarine develop- ment program. He argued that Washington should stop refer- ring to the “one China” policy, but stopped short of suggest- ing it should recognize Taipei, saying: “There is no need to unnecessarily poke the Panda.” China considers Taiwan a renegade province and has never renounced the use of force to bring it under its control. China’s foreign minister, Wang Yi, said in an interview carried on Thursday in the Communist Party of China’s official newspaper that China-US relations face new uncertainties but with mutual respect for core interests they will remain stable. “Only if China and the United States respect each other and give consideration to other’s core interests and key concerns can there be long-term, stable cooperation, and effect win-win mutual benefit,” Wang said.

After his Nov. 8 election win, Trump stoked China’s ire when he took a telephone call from Taiwan President Tsai Ing- wen in a break with decades of precedent that cast doubt on his incoming administration’s commitment to Beijing’s “one China” policy. In an opinion piece in Foreign Policy magazine in November, Navarro and another Trump adviser, Alexander Gray, reiterated the president-elect’s opposition to major trade deals, including the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). “Trump will never again sacrifice the US economy on the altar of foreign policy by entering into bad trade deals like the North American Free Trade Agreement, allowing China into the World Trade Organization, and passing the proposed TPP,” Navarro and Gray wrote. — Reuters
WASHINGTON: Barack Obama's first job as president: Piece together the shards of a shattered US economy. It wasn't smooth and it wasn't fast, but Obama ultimately succeeded.

The president will leave behind an economy far stronger than the one he inherited. Unemployment is 4.6 percent, a nine-year low. Stock prices are soaring. An additional 30 million Americans have health insurance coverage. The nation has shifted toward cleaner energy sources: natural gas, wind and solar. But those achievements have yet to erase the scars of the 2008 financial crisis. Polling after the November election showed that nearly two-thirds of voters described the economy as "not so good" or "poor." Those voters chose to pass the presidency to Donald Trump, a Republican who railed against a weak economy and promised to unwind many of Obama's policies.

The contrast between Obama and his successor helps to explain why the economic progress of the past eight years has yet to resonate with much of the country. Obama set policies with a professional calmness and often spoke with a stoic resolve, just as Trump barnstormed the country by talking at a gut level to supporters who saw the recovery leaving their communities behind. "Historians will remember President Obama for his rational, evidence-based approach," former economic adviser Alan Krueger said, as opposed to the emotional, visceral style of the two presidents who will bookend his time in office. Staring down the gravest economic catastrophe since the Great Depression, Obama focused on solutions rather than villains, an approach that aides say will be appreciated over time. "A lessor president," Krueger added, would have "upended our economic system for short-term political gain." Economic problems that had been simmering for decades started to boil with the Great Recession of 2007 to 2009. It suddenly became Obama's responsibility to address problems that were both immediate and generations in the making, a difficult task given the tensions with Republicans who controlled the House of Representatives beginning in 2011.

Trump highlighted the deeper troubles that many Americans still felt. Job options had already been dwindling for workers with a high school diploma, but the pain of that trend intensified with the downturn and slow recovery. Trump blamed the challenges confronting the middle class on cheap foreign workers and flawed trade deals. The costs of housing, prescription drugs and higher education are still climbing faster than wages, leaving many Americans feeling poorer. Basic trust in institutions such as the government has plunged. The Trump campaign called for a "radical change" in trade law and regulations to limit climate change and protect workers. It wasn't smooth, but Obama's achievements likely will endure.

Obama helped repair economy, but restless voters chose Trump

Greetings wants speedy review of bailout reforms: Tsipras

Delays could harm outlook and recovery

ATHENS: Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras said yesterday Athens wanted a speedy conclusion to a now-stalled review of bailout reforms, warning delays could hinder economic recovery after years of recession. Athens's European lenders last week suspended short term debt relief for the nation after Tsipras's leftist administration granted a one-off Christmas bonus to pensioners without consulting creditors.

Greece is following reforms outlined in a bailout programme worth up to 86 billion euros. It is its third since 2010, and regular reviews of reforms and approval by lenders are vital for Athens to continue receiving subsidies and financial aid. "Our aim is to conclude the second review in a timely manner so there is no question hovering over the positive momentum (of the economy)," Tsipras told a conference in Athens. "Greece now has the basic preconditions in place which would allow it to autonomously enter money markets in 2017." The country was on the cusp of strong recovery after years of deep recession, Tsipras said at the launching of an equity fund in cooperation with the European Investment Bank, the long-term financing arm of the European Commission.

Tsipras said the country was on course for rebounding by 2.7 percent in 2017 and 3.1 percent in 2018. "It's my deep conviction... there isn't a European institution which would want this roadmap disrupted, of emerging from this deep tunnel the Greek economy found itself in for many years," he said. "Nobody would want to revisit the uncertainty over the country's prospects, and certainly nobody would want to encourage investors who are starting to regain confidence, thus weakening the prospects of recovery," he said.

On Wednesday, Greece and eurozone negotiators discussed guarantees that Athens could offer to make sure the pensioner payout was a one-off measure not to be replicated, eurozone and Greek officials told Reuters. Greece promises return to markets despite spats with lenders. Tsipras also promised to return the country to international bond markets in 2017, despite delays in a bailout review and a spat with rescue lenders over a pre-Christmas welfare program.

Tsipras said that an easing of Greece's chronic fiscal problems would lead to a market return - for only the second time since the country first requested an international bailout in 2010. "Greece now has the fundamental elements in place to be on course to access markets in 2017 on its own," Tsipras said during an event in Athens organized by the European Investment Bank.

In response, creditors suspended debt relief measures which they described as unilateral. Greece has seen a dramatic rise in poverty since the start of the financial crisis, with nearly a quarter of the country out of work and receiving no state benefits. The Christmas payout was granted before more pension cuts are due to take effect next year. Thousands of elderly Greeks waited in line outside banks yesterday to cash their checks. In central Athens, pensioner Constantinou Skouras said he didn't qualify for the new benefit but was happy for those who did. — Agencies

GOLD STEADIES AS DOLLAR SLIPS

LONDON: Gold steadied yesterday, as the dollar slipped and market participants wait for US economic data due later in the day. The United States will release a third revision of third-quarter gross domestic product, durable goods orders for November, and weekly initial jobless claims.

Spot gold was little changed at $1,131.17 an ounce by 1101 GMT, while U.S. gold futures were down 0.1 percent at $1,132.40 an ounce. "Traders have already positioned themselves for a neutral to lower end of the year for gold, with the next support level in the $1,123 area, as the focus remains on the hawkish message of the Fed, which signaled three rate increases in 2017," ActivTrades chief analyst Carlo Alberto de Casa said. The Federal Reserve raised US interest rates last week for the first time in a year, lifting the dollar to a 14-year high. Strong economic data could prompt the Fed to raise rates sooner rather than later, which would put pressure on gold prices. Higher rates lower demand for non-interest-paying bullion, which is priced in the US currency. The dollar index was down 0.2 percent against a basket of six main currencies, but was still trading less than a percent away from the 14-year high. "The dollar is very strong and gold is going to be under pressure till Donald Trump takes over the US presidency and the focus will shift to how his polices are unfolding," Ronald Leung, chief dealer at Lee Cheong Gold Dealers in Hong Kong, said. Holdings of the SPDR Gold Trust, the world's largest gold-backed exchange-traded fund, continued to fall on Wednesday, losing 0.4 percent to hit 824.54 tonnes. Holdings are down over 12 percent since November. — Reuters
SHELBURNE FALLS, Vt. (AP) — Chase Fortin scored twice in the second period to lift the Vermont Catamounts to a 2-1 victory over the Maine Black Bears in the first of two regular-season games on Friday night.

The Catamounts won their third straight game and fourth in five contests since losing to UMass Lowell on Dec. 4. Fortin has scored 15 goals this season for Vermont (10-7-3), which hosts rival Middlebury on Saturday night.

"You could tell from the jump that we had a lot of energy, we had the better shots," said Vermont coach周周. "It was nice to get a win.

Maine (9-8-3) is without a victory since Nov. 19 at Colgate. The Black Bears have won just one of their last five games.

"We had to put two feet on the ice and compete," said Maine assistant coach Todd Ewen. "We made some bad decisions. You can’t do that against a good hockey team like Vermont.

"We’ve got to compete a little harder and play a little harder. We’ll learn from this.

Some players felt the energy from the start.

"We’ve been on a bit of a roll lately, so we want to keep on winning," said Vermont’s Alex Caicco. "This was a normal win, but it was a really good win against Maine.

"We’re looking on the positives and trying to keep it going.

Maine had the better chances in the first period. Mattias Mollberg and Sean Durzi each had the best chances for the Black Bears, but Vermont goalie Stefanos L四五os stopped both shots.

Vermont had to weather Maine’s pressure.

"We knew Maine was going to put pressure on us, so we had to be prepared," said Vermont’s Cole Klauder. "We did a good job of staying composed and playing our game.

"We want to continue our winning streak and get ready for the playoffs."
Farbrace told reporters.

find was top-quality batters to bat with Cooky and Rooty (Joe Chennai to add a little gloss to an otherwise miserable 4-0 hitting a century on debut and then a fifty in the final test in as his replacement and made a similarly impressive impact, unfortunate finger injury. Left-hander Keaton Jennings arrived half-centuries in three tests before his trip was curtailed by an youngest ever opener.

India. England instead opted to risk handing Haseeb Hameed Bangladesh's spinners in a two-test series there in October down a top order spot, with his suspect technique against difficult. Ben Duckett was not convincing enough to nail complete a strong top five for England along with Cook, world cricket behind team mate Root (1,477) and he could duties to Jos Buttler, a move that would free him up to con-

MUMBAI: England are still licking their wounds after a humiliating series defeat in India but some positives can be found amid the carnage of a disastrous tour, particularly with the emergence of a pair of batting prospects for the side's fragile top order.

Before the series began, captain Alastair Cook had opened with nine different players since Andrew Strauss retired four years ago and while he has gone on to become England's highest ever run-scorer, finding a partnership has been difficult. Ben Duckett was not convincing enough to nail down a top order spot, with his suspect technique against BanglIs October forcing selectors to look elsewhere for an opening batsman in India. England instead opted to risk handing Haseeb Hameed a test debut in the first of five matches against India at Rajkot, the 19-year-old walking out to the middle as the country's youngest ever opener.

The teenager showed great skill and maturity to score two half-centuries in three tests before his trip was curtailed by an unfortunate finger injury. Left-hander Keaton Jennings arrived as his replacement and made a similarly impressive impact, hitting a century on debut and then a fifty in the final test in Chennai to add a little gloss to an otherwise miserable 4-0 series thumping. "The one thing we came here needing to find was top-quality batters to bat with Cooky and Rooty (Joe Root) at the top of the order," England assistant coach Paul Farbrace told reporters.

Solid top five

"Haseeb has shown, one huge plus from this series... there's a young man with an unbelievable technique, a fantastic atti-
tude and more importantly looks like he's got the right mental approach to play for a long time to come. "We came with a couple of gaps in our batting order and we think we've probably got the right people now... so that's a real bonus. The emergence of Hameed and Jennings should also allow bat-
ting mainstay Root to drop down a place to number four, a spot which became almost impossible to fill during the seven test in South's spinners in a two-test series there in October.

Gary Balance and Duckett both performed poorly before Moeen Ali enjoyed some success at four in the last three tests against India but the all-rounder gave the hosts plenty of chances as he often sought quick runs instead of controlled aggression. Jonny Bairstow, meanwhile, has enjoyed a break-

through year, scoring the second most test runs (1,470) in world cricket behind team mate Root (1,477) and he could complete a strong top five for England along with Cook, Hameed and Jennings.

There are phone calls for him to hand over wicketkeeping duties to Jos Buttler, a move that would free him up to con-

tribute more for the side as a specialist batsman. There are phone calls for him to hand over wicketkeeping duties to Jos Buttler, a move that would free him up to contribute more for the side as a specialist batsman. England started the year with a series victory in South Africa and fol-

lowed it up with a home win against Sri Lanka. They lost Pakistan 2-1 after three tests but have since lost six of their last eight matches against South Asian opponents. The defeats have increased the pressure on Cook to step down as captain but Farbrace suggested the management wanted him to con-

inue in his position at least until the Ashes series in Australia at the end of next year. — Reuters

**Spin king Ashwin named ICC Cricketer of the Year**

MUMBAI: India's Ravichandran Ashwin bowls during their fifth day of the fifth cricket test match against England. — AP

**Bruised Amir set for Boxing Day**

MELBOURNE: Pakistan spearhead Mohammad Amir is expected to play the Boxing Day Test against Australia despite stiffness and a bruised thigh, officials said yesterday. The left-arm seamer, who completed a five-year ban for spot-fixing last year, left the field during the first Brisbane Test on a motorised stretcher after falling on the Gabba turf.

He appeared in agony but returned a short time later and continued to bowl. Amir was also hit on the thigh by a Mitchell Starc full toss. "There's quite a bit of bruising on his thigh," Pakistan batting coach Grant Flower told reporters. "He's feeling a bit stiff but he's all right." Flower said he expected the team to field the same bowling attack in Melbourne that narrowly lost the gripping first Test by just 39 runs. "I think the guys are fit enough to go through. I think our attack would probably be the same," he said. "It's just one of those things that we've had for a while, we don't have that all-rounder batsman, batsman-bowler. But it's one of those things so the guys will just have to get through it." — AFP

**New ingredients add flavor to Cook's spoiled test recipe**

MUMBAI: Alastair Cook walks in the field after losing the test cricket series against India during their fifth day of the fifth cricket test match. — AP

CHENNAI: India's Ravichandran Ashwin bowls during their fifth day of the fifth cricket test match against England. — AP

CHENNAI: India's Ravichandran Ashwin bowls during their fifth day of the fifth cricket test match against England. — AP
Cleveland Cavaliers beat Milwaukee Bucks for the second time in as many days on Wednesday, and this time, they didn’t need overtime to do it. Kyrie Irving scored 31 points and handed out a career-high 13 assists and LeBron James scored 29 points and pulled down nine rebounds in a 113-102 victory over the Bucks in Cleveland.

The victory came a day after the Cavaliers needed overtime to edge the Bucks 114-108 in Milwaukee and it came with Kevin Love again sidelined by a sore knee and guard J.R. Smith sidelined by a broken thumb that saw him exit Tuesday’s contest. Even with the absences, the Cavaliers exceeded their season average of 13.5 three-pointers per game with 15. After both James and Irving played long minutes in Tuesday’s win, Cavaliers coach Tyronn Lue was careful with his stars.

He pulsed James with 3:06 left in the first half to rest, even though James had made three straight three-pointers on three Cavaliers possessions. “Bron had it going but I had to get him out,” Lue said. “He was mad, but so what?” Added James: “He said, ‘I’m coming to get you after this play. I wished he would’ve changed his mind. It’s cool though. We won.’

Irving scored 14 points in the third quarter, when the Cavaliers stretched a 59-54 halftime lead to 92-77 going into the final period. Eastern Conference leaders Cleveland won their third straight game and their 21st of the season. Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 28 points and Jabari Parker added 27 for the Bucks. “They’re the champs. They should be the champ tonight,” Bucks coach Jason Kidd said. “They never panic. They’ve seen everything. For a young team like ourselves, we’re going through that. Hopefully we can learn from our mistakes.”

Cleveland next face the Brooklyn Nets on Friday, before hosting the Golden State Warriors in a Christmas Day clash between last year’s championship finalists.

GRIZZLIES 98, PISTONS 86
Marc Gasol matched a career high with 38 points on 14-of-17 shooting, and Memphis beat Detroit in a matchup of slumping teams. The Grizzlies ended their three-game losing streak, while Detroit dropped its fourth straight. Memphis was boosted by the return of Chandler Parsons, who missed the previous 17 games with a bone bruise on his left knee. He had two points and two rebounds in 15 minutes. Jon Leuer and Reggie Jackson led the Pistons with 18 points apiece. Andre Drummond had 13 points and 19 rebounds.

TIMBERWOLVES 92, HAWKS 84
Andrew Wiggins scored 19 points and Karl-Anthony Towns had 17 points and 18 rebounds in Minnesota’s victory over Atlanta. Zach LaVine added 18 points for the Timberwolves, who earned consecutive wins for the first time since April 5-9 last season. Dennis Schroder finished 21 points and Paul Millsap had 18 points and 10 rebounds for Atlanta, which has dropped six of seven at home. The Hawks have lost during that span to four teams with losing records: New Orleans, Detroit, Orlando and Minnesota.

THUNDER 121, PELICANS 110
Russell Westbrook had 42 points and 10 rebounds to lead Oklahoma City over New Orleans. Alex Abrines scored nine of his 18 points during a pivotal 11-0 run early in the fourth quarter. The surge gave the Thunder a 100-87 lead with 9:18 left, and the Pelicans never got within eight after that. Enes Kanter finished with 14 points and 14 rebounds. Anthony Davis had 34 points and 15 rebounds for New Orleans. Jrue Holiday added 23 points and 10 assists, and Terrence Jones scored 21 for the Pelicans, who have lost nine of 12.

WIZARDS 107, BULLS 97
John Wall had 23 points and nine assists, and Washington rallied past Chicago for its third road victory of the season. Trey Burke and Marcus Thornton came off the Washington bench to spark a decisive fourth-quarter burst. Chicago closed to 97-93 with less than 3 minutes left, but Bradley Beal, Marcin Gortat and Wall followed with baskets to seal it. Beal finished with 21 points, while Gortat had 14 points and 11 rebounds. Burke scored 10. Jimmy Butler led a balanced Bulls offense with 20 points, and Dwyane Wade added 19. Rajon Rondo had 10 assists.

ROCKETS 125, SUNS 111
James Harden had 27 points and 14 assists, propelling Houston past Phoenix for its 11th victory in 12 games. Eric Gordon added 24 points off the Rockets’ bench, shooting 7 of 13 on 3-pointers. Patrick Beverley finished with 18 points, nine assists and nine rebounds. Houston made 18 of 38 attempts from 3-point range. Devin Booker’s 28 points led the Suns, who have lost four in a row.

KINGS 94, JAZZ 93
DeMarcus Cousins scored 21 points and Sacramento rallied from a 20-point deficit to defeat Utah. The Kings used an 11-3 run, led by Ty Lawson and five free throws by Cousins, to take a 91-89 lead with 25.9 seconds remaining. It was their first lead since the opening quarter. The Jazz led by 20 in the third, but their defense disappeared in crunch time. Gordon Hayward led Utah with 28 points and 10 rebounds, while Rudy Gobert had his ninth consecutive double-double with 17 points and 14 boards. He and Timbervolves big man Karl-Anthony Towns are tied for the longest active streaks in the NBA.

MAVERICKS 96, TRAIL BLAZERS 93
Harrison Barnes had 28 points and Dallas held off a furious rally by Portland that ended when Damian Lillard missed a 3-pointer at the final buzzer. Deron Williams added 23 points for the Mavericks, who led by 25 early in the third quarter. Lillard finished with 29 points, including 20 in the third period. It was Portland’s fourth straight loss. Lillard’s 3-point attempt at the buzzer came under intense pressure from former Trail Blazers guard Wesley Matthews — AP
**Irish FA seeks ‘urgent’ FIFA meeting over fine**

**LONDON:** The Irish FA on Wednesday sought an “urgent” meeting with FIFA president Gianni Infantino to protest over a 15,000 Swiss franc fine imposed for Northern Ireland’s tribute to Britain’s war dead.

The Irish FA board expressed “severe disappointment” at the fine (14,000 euros/$14,600) imposed by FIFA’s disciplinary committee on Monday. The English FA has already said it would try to appeal against a 45,000 Swiss franc fine imposed for wearing poppy armbands as a tribute in their November 11 Armistice Day game against Scotland.

Injured West Ham United striker Diafra Sakho is facing a two-month lay-off, ruling the Senegal international out of the Africa Cup of Nations, Hammers’ manager Slaven Bilic said Monday the world body was not making judgments on “specific commemorations as we fully respect the significance of such moments in the respective countries”. But he said “rules were rules”.

**South Africa sack coach Mashaba over insults**

**JOHANNESBURG:** South Africa coach Ephraim ‘Shakes’ Mashaba was fired yesterday for insulting top football officials last month, the national association said.

Mashaba refused to accept the tough line congratulations of the official when South Africa defeated Senegal 2-1 to become co-heads of a qualifying group for the 2018 finals in Russia. Soon after, the coach became embroiled in a verbal slanging match with Jordaan and Dennis Mumble, chief executive of the national association.

Mashaba had been angered by public criticism from Jordaan and Mumble the previous month over the failure of South Africa to qualify for the 2017 Africa Cup of Nations in Gabon. Charges of gross misconduct, gross insubordination and violation of SAFA communication policy were laid against Mashaba.

The former defender with Soweto-based domestic giants Orlando Pirates was found guilty of all charges.

**Resurgent team**

“Due to the seriousness of the coach’s actions, we had to release our head coach with immediate effect,” said Mumble in a statement. “We shall immediately institute a search for a new head coach familiar with African football competitions. If (he) will be expected to continue the quest to qualify for the world’s apex football competition (World Cup).”

He went one step further than De Sa and steered Sundowns to the CAF Champions League title this year, beat- ing Zamalek of Egypt in the final. Cape Town City coach Eric Tinkler has also been mentioned in media speculation along with Uganda handler Mluti Mredojevic and unemployed former Dutch star Ruud Krol, who enjoyed sus- cess with Pirates.

**Five Ephraim ‘Shakes’ quotes**

Sacked South Africa coach Ephraim ‘Shakes’ Mashaba was never short of an opinion. AFP Sport selects five quotes from his many media conferences:

“The duty of the captain is to attend the coin toss and tell the players which side of the field they will be playing from (Gambia being the minnows).”

“The last time I saw Gambia play was two and a half years ago. I do not believe in this thing you journalists call ‘spying’. (His casual approach backfired as minnows Gambia surprisingly drew 0-0 with South Africa in Durban)”

“I hate each and every member of the South African Football Association responsible for this decision. I hate them.”

“Stop calling me arrogant. If you want to write things about me, clarify with me, because you are giving the wrong impression to people.”

“Africa striker and coach Pitso Mosimane. He went one step further than De Sa and steered Sundowns to the CAF Champions League title this year, beating Zamalek of Egypt in the final. Cape Town City coach Eric Tinkler has also been mentioned in media speculation along with Uganda handler Mluti Mredojevic and unemployed former Dutch star Ruud Krol, who enjoyed success with Pirates.”

**Argentina, France take FIFA ranking honors**

**ZURICH:** Lionel Messi’s beaten Copa America finalists Argentina end the year top of FIFA’s world rankings while France, defeated in the Euro 2016 final, were named ‘mover of the year’ after gaining the most ranking points in June. France too lost their own continental showpiece coming in the continental showpiece on penalties to Chile in June. France too lost their own continental showpiece in extra time to Portugal on home soil but were named mover of the year after gaining the most ranking points with 13 wins out of 17 games.

**FIFA top 10 rankings:**

1. Argentina
2. Brazil
3. Germany
4. Chile
5. Belgium
6. Colombia
7. France
8. Portugal
9. Uruguay
10. Spain — AFP
**Bayern hammer 10-man Leipzig to open up lead**

**BERLIN:** Robert Lewandowski led Bayern Munich to a 3-0 triumph in their Bundesliga showdown against ten-man RB Leipzig that opened up a three-point lead over their rivals. Coach Carlo Ancelotti hailed a “perfect” first half in which Bayern’s Thiago Alcantara and Xabi Alonso scored early goals before Leipzig winger Emil Forsberg was shown a red card for a dangerous tackle. That left the visitors to play an hour at Munich’s Allianz Arena a man down. Leipzig goalkeeper Peter Gulacsi then conceded the penalty which Lewandowski converted on 45 minutes to put Bayern 3-0 up at the break. The result put Munich three points clear of their battered opponents at the top of the German league table heading into the winter break. Leipzig briefly knocked Bayern off top spot early this month and the two have been in a neck-and-neck battle since. Ancelotti highlighted his side’s first half display.

“We were very aggressive and quickly established control, which gives us self-confidence, but we must still improve,” said the Italian. There was a minute’s silence for the victims of Monday’s truck attack in Berlin at Munich, Cologne, Ingolstadt and Hoffenheim, but it was most poignant at the capital’s Olympic stadium. Hertha Berlin hosted Darmstadt seven kilometers from stadium. Hertha Berlin hosted Ingolstadt and Hoffenheim, but it was attack in Berlin at Munich, Cologne, silence for the victims of Monday’s truck side’s first half display. Ancelotti highlighted his the two have been in a neck-and-neck Bayern off top spot early this month and it finished 3-0 at the break. Bayern were then to let their opponent chase the ball as they enjoyed 75 percent possession, but the hosts battered the Leipzig goal in the closing minutes.

“I am proud of what the team has achieved this season, but this was a lessen for us and compliment to Bayern on the way they played,” added Hertha.

Bayern, the only unbeaten team in Germany’s top flight, stay third after their 1-1 draw at home to Werder Bremen. Hoffenheim’s striker Sandro Wagner claimed his ninth league goal this season before Bremen’s ex-Arsenal winger Serge Gnabry rescued a point. Cologne striker Anthony Modeste gave his side a first-half lead before Bayer Leverkusen’s Brazil defender Wendell equalised in a 1-1 draw. Ingolstadt remain second from bottom after their 2-1 home defeat to mid-table Freiburg, for whom Florian Niederlechner netted twice. — AP

**Bayern Munich defender Mats Hummels dyed his hair blond for Wednesday’s 3-0 win over RB Leipzig after losing a bet at the Oktoberfest beer festival. The 28-year-old World Cup winner, who normally has dark hair, went peroxide for the top-of-the-table showdown at Munich’s Allianz Arena. Hummels lost a game of skittles during a visit to Munich’s Oktoberfest, the world’s most popular annual beer festival. — AFP**

**MUNICH:** Bayern’s Thiago, left, and Leipzig’s Diego Demme challenge for the ball during the German Bundesliga soccer match between FC Bayern Munich and RB Leipzig at the Allianz Arena stadium. — AP

**LEIPZIG LEARN TOUCH LESSON**

**BERLIN:** Ralph Hasenhüttl admitted 10-man RB Leipzig was taught a tough “lesson” as leaders Bayern Munich handed out a 3-0 hammering to their nearest Bundesliga rivals. Coach Carlo Ancelotti hailed a “perfect” opening 30 minutes in which Thiago Alcantara and Xabi Alonso scored early goals before Leipzig winger Emil Forsberg was shown a red card for a dangerous tackle. It left the visitors to play an hour on Wednesday at Munich’s Allianz Arena a man down in the top-of-the-table clash. Leipzig goalkeeper Peter Gulacsi then compounded his team’s problems by fouling Douglas Costa to concede a penalty which Robert Lewandowski converted on 45 minutes to make it 3-0. The result left Munich three points clear of their battered opponents at the top of the German league table heading into the winter break.

“Thiago was waiting in the middle to convert the rebound. A mistake by Leipzig’s Naby Keita, who had recovered from a thigh injury, saw Bayern grab their second on 25 minutes. Atturvo Vidal robbed the Guinea midfielder of possession, Lewandowski sprinted clear and Thiago slipped the ball to Alonso, who fired home. A header by Leipzig captain Willi Orban forced Bayern goalkeeper Manuel Neuer into a diving save just before disaster struck for the visitors on 30 minutes. Left winger Forsberg was sent off when his tackle caught Philipp Lahm on the Achilles tendon and referee Felix Zwayer pulled out a red card.

“He knew straight away that he had made a mistake, he’s already apologised and we all can make mistakes,” said Leipzig coach Ralph Hasenhüttl. Gulacsi then conceded the penalty as it finished 3-0 at the break. Bayern were then to let their opponent chase the ball as they enjoyed 75 percent possession, but the hosts battered the Leipzig goal in the closing minutes.

“I am proud of what the team has achieved this season, but this was a lesson for us and compliment to Bayern on the way they played,” added Hertha.

Bayern’s only unbeaten team in Germany’s top flight, stay third after their 1-1 draw at home to Werder Bremen. Hoffenheim’s striker Sandro Wagner claimed his ninth league goal this season before Bremen’s ex-Arsenal winger Serge Gnabry rescued a point. Cologne striker Anthony Modeste gave his side a first-half lead before Bayer Leverkusen’s Brazil defender Wendell equalised in a 1-1 draw. Ingolstadt remain second from bottom after their 2-1 home defeat to mid-table Freiburg, for whom Florian Niederlechner netted twice. — AP

**FIVE THINGS WE LEARNED ABOUT THE BUNDESLIGA**

**BERLIN:** Five things we learned from the final round of Bundesliga matches before the winter break with Bayern Munich leading the table and Andre Schubert the seventh coach fired since September.

**Sacking spree**

Borussia Dortmund CEO Hans-Joachim Watzke has slammed the merry-go-round culture of Bundesliga sackings after Andre Schubert on Wednesday became the seventh coach fired since September in Germany’s top flight.

“It’s crazy when you regularly change key personnel,” said the Dortmund boss. “You have to be careful that you don’t pulverize any long-term structural work by trying to straighten things out on a day-to-day basis. If you are convinced of the work of a coach or sports director, you have to go through one or two troupes,” Ex-Wolfsburg coach Dieter Hecking is tipped to succeed Schubert, who took Gladbach from bottom to fourth last season, but his team earned just six points in their last ten league games. He joins Dirk Schubert (Darmstadt), Markus Babl (Ingolstadt), Markus Riedle (Hoffenheim) and Andre Breitenreiter (Bremen) who have been sacked this season.

**Draxler’s January exit**

Julian Draxler is widely tipped to leave Wolfsburg when the transfer window opens on January 1. The 23-year-old World Cup winner has repeatedly said he wants to leave and was thrown out of the squad for their recent 5-0 drubbing at Bayern Munich. The forward is set to join teammates celebrating last Saturday’s 1-0 win over Frankfurt. The French media claim Paris Saint Germain want to sign Draxler, while Arsenal and Juventus are also reportedly interested. But Wolfsburg will want a high price having paid Schalke 35 million euros ($37.3m) for Draxler in August 2015.

**Shaky Dortmund**

Borussia Dortmund boasts one of the Bundesliga’s best attacks, including Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang, Marco Reus and Mario Goetze, but drew all of their last three games in 2016. They came from behind each time to claim a point against Cologne, Hoffenheim and Augsburg leaving coach Thomas Tuchel to worry over his hair. “We’ve lost our threat and made insanely simple mistakes,” fumed Tuchel after Tuesday’s 1-1 draw with Augsburg. “Our bite, energy, our structure-in every league game we let those things go missing. “We’re sleepy, there’s sloppiness in the technical things we do and in tactical things. It’s crazy,” said Tuchel. Tuchel has some clear problems to fix in the winter break, especially after Ji Dong-Won gave Augsburg the lead in Tuesday’s 1-1 draw after defender Marvin Hitz was sent off for a dangerous tackle. 

RB boss sets Europa goal

RB Leipzig came off a poor season to beat Bayern in Wednesday’s duel, but their backer, Red Bull’s co-founder Dietrich Mateschitz has set a minimum goal of Europa League qualification this season. “We know that four teams qualify for the Champions League and two go into the Europa League—that’s our basic goal,” the billionaire Austrian told Swiss newspaper Blick. Despite being humbled by Bayern, Leipzig enjoyed a record 13-match unbeaten run at the start of their debut Bundesliga season. They have won 11 of their first 16 games to leave them trailing Bayern by three points. Mateschitz has changed his expectations having told Sport Bild before the season that he expected a midtable finish.

Hummels’ hairdresser malfeasance

Bayern Munich defender Mats Hummels dyed his hair blond for Wednesday’s 3-0 win over RB Leipzig after losing a bet at the Oktoberfest beer festival. The 28-year-old World Cup winner, who normally has dark hair, went peroxide for the top-of-the-table showdown at Munich’s Allianz Arena. Hummels lost a game of skittles during a visit to Munich’s Oktoberfest, the world’s most popular annual beer festival. — AFP
ICARDI BRACE GIVES INTER FESTIVE CHEER

MILAN: Mauro Icardi took his Serie A goal tally to a league-leading 14 with a brace in a 3-0 win over Lazio that gave Inter Milan’s fans some unexpected festive cheer. Icardi hailed Inter’s second two minutes later, searing strike into the top corner. Icardi headed Inter's fourth win in a row, while Lazio boss Simone Inzaghi was left bemoaning second half lapses. “A team like ours can’t be conceding three goals in the space of 11 minutes,” he said. Lazio travelled to the San Siro looking for a win that would have pushed Inzaghi’s team up to second five points behind Juventus. But any hopes of a Lazio fightback were buried on 65 minutes when Icardi missed one chance, but at the other end his angled strike in the area saw Banega step in, top corner.

Balotelli sent off as Monaco close gap

PARIS: Mario Balotelli and Younès Belhanda were sent off in the dying seconds as Ligue 1 leaders Nice stumbled into the winter break with a 0-0 draw at Bordeaux, allowing Monaco to trim the gap at the top to two points. Paris Saint-Germain eased the pressure on coach Unai Emery by beating Dijon 5-0. Barcelona trash Hercules 7-0

MADRID: Turkey international Arda Turan scored a hat-trick as holders Barcelona thrashed third-division side Hercules 7-0 in the second leg of their Copa del Rey last-32 tie. Turan struck his second hat-trick in as many weeks-following a quickfire treble against Borussia Moenchengladbach in the Champions League a fortnight ago-as Barca eased into the next round. —AFP

Icardi hailed Inter’s festive cheer. He scored a brace in a 3-0 win over Lazio that gave Inter Milan’s fans some unexpected festive cheer. Icardi’s strikes came minutes after Lazio’s defeat at home to Lyon last weekend.
MUNICH: Bayern Munich's Polish striker Robert Lewandowski celebrates after the third goal for Munich during the German first division Bundesliga football match FC Bayern Munich vs RB Leipzig. — AFP

Bayern hammer 10 man Leipzig