Violators reassured: No fingerprinting, blacklisting
See Page 8
Local

Children and smartphone addiction

By Muna Al-Fuzai
muna@kuwaittimes.net

I f you are a parent of a teenager, then you better read this story. It seems that the attachment of children and teenagers to their smartphones has become an addiction, like that to drugs. Depriving a child from their device for any reason may lead to anger and acts of craziness that could be deadly and dangerous.

US authorities arrested a 12-year-old girl in Colorado, who was accused of trying to kill her mother twice by poisoning her with a chemical material that is used in bleaching textiles, because she took away her iPhone. The Boulder County police chief said in a press release that the mother ingested the chemical in one of the two attempts, but luckily survived and was sent to hospital for treatment.

I think the issue is not merely about depriving a child from a phone or game, but it is often noticed that parents themselves encourage their children from a very young age to use mobile devices to watch cartoons to keep quiet and not cause any commotion or inconvenience for the adults.

So it becomes normal for the child to turn to that device to be their all-day friend, and any attempt to deprive the child of this close companion for any reason – good or bad – may lead to anger or madness, and they may commit a crime without knowing the seriousness of what they do or possibly hurt and harm themselves. The police said the girl was arrested and taken to a juvenile detention facility, pending charges.

I think what happened to this family is a crime of violence without doubt, but we have to wonder who is responsible for this drama. It can be the easiest thing to placate a crying or noisy baby, because all you need is to take a smartphone, find a game or cartoon, and put it in the child's hands, and the kid will be quiet and still as if they have been muted. How many of us think that there might be a mental health issue behind this act? What could happen if I dared after many years to separate my child from his old and close friend?

Sky News published a report last year titled 'How to protect your child from mobile addiction'. It was reported that in Seattle, a number of children under the age of 13 and addicted to their mobile phone turned their phones into a virtual world. Experts warn of excessive use of mobile devices by children for organic diseases, such as obesity, distraction and poor concentration.

In Kuwait too, cases of violence between children and their families have increased significantly. Hence the children's rights law was issued to protect children from possible abuse. At the same time, Kuwait's general prosecution issued the children's rights law was issued to protect children from possible abuse. At the same time, Kuwait's general prosecution published a report last year titled 'How to protect your child from mobile addiction'. It was reported that in Seattle, a number of children under the age of 13 and addicted to their mobile phone turned their phones into a virtual world. Experts warn of excessive use of mobile devices by children for organic diseases, such as obesity, distraction and poor concentration.

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In essence, when we go to war with America, we are at war with ourselves; and when America goes, the world gets affected somehow.

And this is why we all watch America closely. Though we ridicule Americans, we still emulate what they wear, we emulate the American dialect and we love American movies and TV shows. And as with all love affairs, the flipside of the coin, unfortunately, is hate. And everyone loves to hate America. It's so easy to have someone to blame, isn't it?

If we could look beyond our love and hate of America, we will see that – like any other country in the world - it is made up of individuals. And individuals regardless of citizenship are both racist and inclusive, aggressive and kind, belligerent and peaceful.

Still, when we blame America for the problems of the world, we are one step closer to self-reflection. And we are one step closer to realizing that anything that happens is the fault of humanity, collectively. Let's look a little more closely as to who is really to blame for the chaos on the planet – us, yes us and not the US. Wherever we go, we take our mess with us. Yet, as long as there is hope, there is a possibility for transformation. We have hope for America, because we have hope for ourselves!
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The Kuwaiti island of Failaka is depicted by those who have lived on it as a precious pearl in the middle of the Gulf. The greenery of the island is pleasing to the eye due to the abundance of freshwater springs. Unlike the Kuwaiti mainland, which is a mere 20 km away from its coasts, Failaka was characterized by self-sufficiency in agricultural crops and drinking water, while these were brought to the rest of the country from neighboring countries three centuries ago.

Failaka is located in the northwestern corner of the Arabian Gulf. The history of Kuwaiti families living on the island dates back to the 18th century, but they abandoned it during the Iraqi invasion in August 1990. This was not the case 4,000 years ago, because it is the only area in Kuwait that has been continuously inhabited since the Kashi civilization that settled in Bahrain and Failaka and contacted the Dilmun civilization.

From the start of excavations on Dec 31, 1957 to the writing of this article, traces of Sumerian, Greek, Sasanian, Christian and Late Islamic periods have been discovered in the modern and postmodern period of Kuwait, ending with the remnants of the Iraqi invasion. “These historical evidences prove the importance of the island to the rest of the world. It explains the movements of human beings who lived there and their civilizations,” Dr Hasan Ashkanani told Kuwait Times.
Dr Hasan is a professor of archaeology and anthropology at the Faculty of Social Science at Kuwait University. He is specialized in the artifacts of Kuwait and Failaka. He described the island as the true treasure of Kuwaitis and researchers around the globe. "It is uncommon to find an archeological site in a country that has layers of historical eras every few centimeters you dig vertically. It's loaded with artifacts. The government, represented by the National Council of Culture, Arts and Letters, has realized the historical value of the island and is fully responsible for the expenses of all the international missions visiting Kuwait annually, as well as publishing their findings in scientific journals. Four to eight researches get published annually about the excavations on Failaka," he explained.

An Amiri decree of 1960 and the antiquities law of Kuwait entrusted the NCCAL with the upkeep of the antiquities. The council is solely responsible for assessing the archaeological and historical properties of the objects, sites and buildings and the importance of every artifact, along with the reports of the artifacts to be recorded, maintained, studied and utilized. It is also entitled to the acquisition of historical sites with the approval of the Cabinet.

"Despite the awareness of the government of the high value of Kuwait's heritage, some investors don't seem to care enough to not take on projects that destroy our history. It is not difficult to project an alternative model of investment schemes in construction, and we are always ready to help. However, they won't accept other proposals," alleged Dr Ashkanani.

Kuwait signed the 1972 UNESCO Convention on the Protection of World and Natural Heritage, which requires signatories to protect their local heritage and not deliberately harm it. The NCCAL established the UNESCO Unit for Engineering Affairs, which is familiar with all the articles of the convention and is there to offer advice to those who submit their project proposals. UNESCO also protects sites that stand as a memory among peoples, even if they are free of antiquities.

Kuwait is a signatory to this agreement, so investors should share any investment project data with UNESCO. “The organization can provide strategic plans for construction. To raise the historical value of archaeological sites, both in Failaka or anywhere in the world, we should not distort the structure of the site and the surrounding landscape, and in order to get international recognition, we need to follow many strict requirements set by UNESCO,” Dr. Ashkanani said.

The pace of exploration has increased since 2003, with five to nine missions from countries such as Italy, France, Denmark, Britain, the Netherlands and others. There are now more than 88 excavation sites on the island, which necessitates the need for the compatibility of tourism development of the island with the protection of archaeological areas. The history of the island is not for the people of Kuwait alone. Failaka is a historical link to many of the surrounding world civilizations that was formerly lost with time.

Photos courtesy of Dr Hasan Ashkanani. – Photos by Jaber Al-Hindal
Local

IN FOCUS

Co-Exist Kuwait: Building bridges between Kuwait’s communities

By Ashlyn Sequeira and Snehika Srivastava

In January 2017, local writer and poet Nejoud Al-Yagout founded Co-Exist Kuwait. Coexistence is an idea which is mainstream among many of the world's most developed nations. However, Yagout noticed a growing intolerance in the collective mindset that was quite pronounced locally; and voila - Co-Exist Kuwait was born.

Every month, Co-Exist Kuwait hosts various events that bring people together to inspire one another and spread the message of universality. Today, we celebrate the initiative’s first birthday by taking a closer look into Yagout’s as yet unimplemented vision for a nation that coexists in harmony despite differences.

Kuwait Times: How were you personally influenced to create Co-Exist Kuwait? What were your ideas and how did you think people would respond to it at the beginning?

Nejoud Al-Yagout: There was a part of me that was awakening, and it manifested itself on the principles of oneness. The idea was to invite myself and others in Kuwait to be a part of a community that reflects universality, particularly where belief systems and so-called minorities are concerned. I knew not everyone would come to the party, but the invitation was sent out to all who heard about it.

KT: Coexistence is a way of bringing people of different beliefs and cultures together. What kind of interaction do you have with the kindred spirits who believe in the initiative?

Yagout: One indelible highlight, in terms of interaction, was during the Concert of Coexistence in December. The crowd was brimming with people of various nationalities and faiths. We barely spoke. It was all about the music and the silent language of unity. Our local scene is tiny, and can border on exclusivity; so it was grand not knowing most of the people in the room. A testament to coexistence!

KT: Your newspaper articles receive a lot of attention. How do you react to all the responses and comments?

Yagout: Sometimes, readers elevate me to a spiritual status I do not deserve. My pen (or keyboard) is a flashlight in my own darkness, first and foremost, navigating me toward self-betterment. I am facing my own demons, which is why I tend to use the pronoun “we” and not “they” in the majority of my articles. It is a shocking lesson in humility to find that the negative entities out there are in me. And, I also revel in the knowledge, as it frees me from the shackles of denial. Nonetheless, when hearts are overjoyed by something I write, it makes my day, nay my week. And when minds are offended, I remind myself that the world is upside-down, and so am I.

KT: Do you think that we will all evolve toward coexistence, or do you think of it as a personal choice?

Yagout: We seem to be evolving into who we originally are - paradoxically. I don’t think it is a personal choice as much as it is about remembering our essence, but who knows?

KT: The gratitude by your supporters must surely motivate you to keep writing!

Yagout: The gratitude itself strengthens the ego - the false sense of self - which keeps me stuck during the ascension process. I have to be careful. But by eventually realigning myself, it may become easier to grasp the notion that I am - most likely - not the doer. Here lies the battle. Still, regardless, it motivates me for now. Yes.

KT: Beyond thrilled! As long as we are coming together, the numbers don’t matter! Rachna - who is a host of the Kuwait-Bangla radio station at the ministry and a dear friend - personally invited me. Her mission is to host events where more Kuwaitis can interact with her fellow nationals. She works tirelessly to bridge the divide between us. Isn’t it tragic that this issue even exists?

KT: Lastly, describe your passion for Co-Exist Kuwait in one word?

Yagout: Unyielding.

www.coexistkuwait.com
Instagram: @coexistkuwait
coexistkuwait@gmail.com
Moderate temperatures affected by high-pressure atmosphere: Meteorologist

KUWAIT: Kuwait’s weather is currently stable due to the impact of high air altitude with northwesterly winds which will lead to dust on some open areas, said Abdul Aziz Al-Qarawi, the weather forecaster at Kuwait Meteorological Center (KMC).

Today’s weather is expected to be moderate with northeasterly winds between 14 to 42 kilometers per hour, with a chance for some dust in open areas. The maximum temperature is expected between 20 to 22 degrees Celsius, and the minimum between 5 to 7 degrees.

The same weather is expected tomorrow, with northwesterly winds with speed between 10 to 40 kilometers per hours. The highest temperature is expected to be from 21 to 31 while the lowest from 5 to 7 degrees Celsius, with chances for some clouds during the night. — KUNA

Fabrics vendors’ market in old Kuwait

KUWAIT: ‘Al-Bazzaz’ is the name of fabric vendors in old Kuwait, as Kuwaitis also call fabrics as ‘Baz’. Bazzaz is an Arabic-oriented word found in authentic Arabic language dictionaries, known to describe the person working in fabrics sales, and baz as the fabric itself. Kuwaiti heritage researcher Mohammad Abdulhadi Jamal said in his book titled ‘Crafts Professions And Commercial Activities In Old Kuwait’ that Khalil Al-Qattan market or the ‘Jews market’ as it was known for some people then, was the place specialized in fabrics’ sales in Kuwait.

This was the place until mid of the 20th century, while during 1930s the vendors moved to Al-Rashdan market. The fabrics were imported from India, and later from Europe, and after the end of the Second World War, Japan started to duplicate European fabrics and export them to Kuwait.

The majority of Kuwaitis by then were of medium to low income, a factor that contributed to an occasional purchase of fabrics, unlike rich families. The textiles prices witnessed a radical hike in prices during the Second World War, as there was a drop in the number of exporting ships, especially those coming from India during early 1940s. The Kuwaiti government by then fed the local market with supported-fabrics with reasonable prices, offering every family two pieces of textiles in both summer and winter season until 1947. — KUNA
Crime rates drop by 18.5 percent in Kuwait

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: The number of violators who left Kuwait on the first day of an amnesty that runs from January 29, 2018 to February 22, 2018 has been modest. This is because there is some fear among violators that they would be fingerprinted for deportation, which is not the case, an Interior Ministry statement clarified yesterday.

Only violators who are arrested after the amnesty period will be blacklisted and banned from returning to Kuwait, reiterated the statement released by the ministry’s Borders Outlets Security Department.

Thousands of people have already availed the amnesty which was launched to help end the presence of around 154,000 residency violators in Kuwait. The department urged violators to benefit from the amnesty which came as per instructions of the Interior Ministry.

154,000 residency violators in Kuwait. The department urged violators to benefit from the amnesty which was launched to help end the presence of around 154,000 residency violators in Kuwait.

The following categories of violators are allowed to leave during the grace period:

- Those whose regular or temporary residencies expired before Jan 24, 2018.
- Those who entered the country on a visit, residency, tourist or transit visa whose stay period expired before Jan 24, 2018.
- Those whose passports expired before Jan 24, 2018 but have valid residency permits, and wish to leave the country.
- Newborns that are given residency permits sponsored by their family should refer to the residency affairs department to correct the newborn’s status during the amnesty period.
- Those reported to have absconded before Jan 24, 2018 regardless of the type of residency they have.
- Those who absconded after Jan 4, 2016, whether working in the private or domestic sectors.

Meanwhile, the department explained that as for people whose regular or temporary residencies expired before Jan 24, 2018, there are two types of violators: the first is when a person has the expired residency or entry visa on his passport, in which case he or she can buy a plane ticket and leave to his country directly. As for those who lost their passports, they have to go to the residency detectives’ department to receive a unified number through which they can leave and be documented, it added.

Crime rates down

In other news, the Interior Ministry announced yesterday that crimes in Kuwait dropped by 18.5 percent in 2017 compared to the previous year. The ministry’s annual statistics showed that criminal acts deemed harmful to public interest decreased by 78.57 percent in 2017 also in contrast to 2016, whereas crimes against individuals rose by 48.14 percent.

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Yemen’s Al-Noubi wins 10th Invention Fair’s grand prize

KUWAIT: Inventor Khaled Al-Noubi from Yemen received the grand prize of $15,000 at the concluding ceremony of the 10th International Invention Fair in the Middle East.

The four-day event featured participation of 130 inventors from 39 countries. Russian David Arnovitch won the Kuwait Science Club prize worth $10,000, while Kuwaiti Ahmad Nabil took home the International Federation of Inventors Associations (IFIA) award.

Human rights’ panel, Interior Minister discuss bedoons’ rights

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: The parliament’s human rights committee met yesterday with Deputy Premier and Interior Minister Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah to discuss granting bedoons’ civil and social rights, in addition to the security restrictions that many of them face. Committee Chairman Dr Adeel Al-Denki said a date was set to meet with the minister in two months’ time. He said the minister was told during the meeting that it was necessary to alleviate the bedoons’ suffering, while deep-rooted solutions must be found to resolve the decades-long issue.

New tariff

The Ministry of Electricity and Water is set to complete the implementation of the new tariff law by Feb 22, when it applies to the agricultural and industrial sectors and other facilities. According to the new law, the new tariff was set at five fils per kilowatt, and KD 1.25 per reach, 1,000 gallons of water. Meanwhile, the tariff for those who submitted production certificates issued by the Public Authority for Agricultural Affairs and Fish Resources (PAAFFR) and the Public Authority for Industry (PAI) is set at three fils per kilowatt and 750 fils per 1,000 gallons of water.

3,000 jobs

Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) hired 1,031 Kuwaitis directly and through contracts, informed sources said, adding that the number of recent graduates among the appointees is 729. It said that 3,000 jobs were ‘Kuwaitized’ in contracts. The sources said that KOC was able to reduce oil leaks to 500 barrels only, and is working on the reduction of gas burning rates that reached 1.13 percent after being 17 percent during 2007. Production capacity during the fiscal year 2016/2017 reached 3.150 million barrels, they added.

Case adjourned

The Criminal Court adjourned the case in which a number of people are accused of hiding the convicts in Al-Abdaly cell case until Feb 15, to summon Major General Farraj Al-Zubi to hear his testimony. The court also decided to adjourn the inquest case of the man who was found dead in Al-Abdaly cell.

Meanwhile, the administrative court cancelled the appointment of six experts at the justice ministry based on evidence showing that they were appointed in violation of the law. It also decided in favor of a citizen who was maliciously excluded.

Shadadiya University

Kuwait University (KU) Secretary General Dr Muthanna Al-Hafez said the KU will receive five colleges in Sabah Al-Salem University City (Shadadiya University) before the end of this year, in addition to receiving more buildings next year. Kuwait University looks forward to complete the university city project within the scheduled time, he added.
Crown Prince represents Amir at Saudi heritage festival

RIYADH: His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah yesterday attended the closing ceremony of King Abdul Aziz’s second Festival for Camels in Riyadh as part of supporting heritage and cultural aspects. His Highness the Crown Prince represented His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah who was invited by King Salman bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud to attend the festival.

Speaker, IPU official discuss mechanism to defend Kuwait

GENEVA: Kuwait’s National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem and his accompanying delegation met yesterday with the Secretary General of the Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) Martin Chungong: “During our meeting with the Secretary-General, we discussed more than one complaint submitted against the Kuwait parliament,” Ghanem said in a statement following the meeting, noting that he and his host concluded that “unfortunately, someone lied to the people of Kuwait as well as the Inter-Parliamentary Union.” “We defended the Kuwait parliament and its reputation and talked about mechanisms with which we will defend the reputation of our state and its parliament,” Ghanem added.

Kuwait, Ukraine discuss bilateral relations

KUWAIT: Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Al-Jarallah met yesterday with his visiting Ukrainian counterpart, Sergiy Kyslytsya, discussing bilateral relations and regional and international issues. The session was part of scheduled political consultations between the State of Kuwait and the Ukrainian Republic, first session of which was held in Kiev in November 2016. The deputy foreign minister held a luncheon in honor of the Ukrainian official, attended by Kuwaiti officials and members of the Ukrainian delegation accompanying Kyslytsya.

Minister Saleh, World Bank envoy discuss cooperation

KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh met yesterday with World Bank Public Sector Governance specialist Robert Beschel discussing bilateral relations between Kuwait and the World Bank. Meanwhile, Minister Saleh has also received French Ambassador to Kuwait, Marie Masdupuy, where they reviewed the ‘outstanding’ bilateral relations between the Kuwait and France, a statement by the Minister’s office said. The two sides also tackled a number of issues of mutual concern, especially activating bilateral cooperation and enhancing relations between the two countries in all fields as well as supporting the Kuwaiti-French friendship ties.
Envoys bid to end standoff in Aden

Struggle to keep together the disparate alliance

ADEN: Saudi and Emirati envoys shuttled between Yemeni government forces and besieging southern separatists in second city Aden yesterday in a bid to end a tense standoff after days of deadly infighting. The Sunday assault on the embattled government’s headquarters by its former allies has opened up a new front in the devastating civil war that has created what the United Nations says is the world’s worst humanitarian crisis.

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are the two major contributors to a military coalition that has backed President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi since he fled into exile in 2015. But they have struggled to keep together the disparate alliance supporting him against Houthi Shiite rebels who control the capital Sanaa and much of the north. South Yemen was an independent country until union with the north in 1990 and Hadi has relied heavily on militia that supports its restoration.

Many of them have been recruited into Special Forces units trained by the UAE to fight Al-Qaeda, which has a large presence in parts of the south. On Wednesday, those forces deployed across Aden bringing a halt in the deadly clashes that had forced a halt to the distribution of desperately needed relief supplies for days.

Airport reopen

The separatists said they were in full control of Aden yesterday. “The security situation is stable and we are working with the coalition to consolidate it,” a separatist official told AFP on condition of anonymity. Yemen Airways said it had resumed flights from Aden airport with a service to Cairo on Thursday.

Only the presidential palace in the north of the city remains under the control of government forces, military sources said. Saudi Arabia and the UAE have not abandoned their support for Hadi, who lives in exile in Riyadh, but they have singularly failed to intervene militarily in support of Prime Minister Ahmed bin Dagher and other ministers who are holed up under siege in the palace.

The two governments’ envoys “met with all concerned parties, stressing the need to abide by the ceasefire ... and refocus efforts on the front lines against the Houthis”, the UAE’s official WAM news agency reported. “The situation in Aden is stable and all parties have complied completely with the communique issued by the Arab coalition,” Major General Mohammed bin Saeed Al-Mughaidi of Saudi Arabia told reporters in Aden. “The kingdom and the United Arab Emirates have a common goal and the same vision and have no ambitions.”

UAE Major General Mohammed Matar Al-Khyeli said: “Saudi Arabia and the UAE stand together with the Yemeni people and are leading reconciliation efforts between the Yemeni parties.” The UAE has close ties to separatist Hani bin Breik, a leader of the Southern Transitional Council to which many of the forces now in control of Aden are loyal. Both it and Saudi Arabia have urged Hadi’s government to heed the separatists’ grievances and called on all sides to show restraint.

At least 38 people have been killed and 222 wounded in Aden since Sunday, according to the International Committee of the Red Cross. The UN agency for humanitarian affairs reported a “cautious calm” in the city late on Wednesday but said aid ships were still unable to dock. Even before the latest fighting, Yemen already faced the world’s most serious humanitarian crisis, with some 8.4 million of its 22.2 million population at risk of famine, according to the UN. —AFP
The last surviving Paris attacks suspect faces trial in Belgium

Has stayed silent under interrogation since his arrest

BRUSSELS: The main terror suspect behind the 2015 Paris attacks, Salah Abdeslam, goes on trial in Belgium under tight security next week over a shootout in Brussels that led to his capture. It will be the first public glimpse of the 28-year-old who led police on a four-month international manhunt following the attacks in the French capital that killed 130 people. Abdeslam, who is currently in jail in France, has stayed silent under interrogation since his arrest but insisted on personally attending the trial over the March 15, 2016 gun battle in the Belgian capital.

The Brussels-born French citizen and man arrested with him, Sofian Ayari, 24, faces charges of “attempting to murder several police officers in a terrorist context” and of “carrying pre-arranged weapons in a terrorist context”. Abdeslam is the sole surviving suspect of the Paris attacks and is also linked to the terror cell that carried out the March 22 suicide bombings in Brussels just days after his arrest. The Islamic State group claimed both sets of attacks that left a total of 162 people dead and hundreds more wounded. Belgium’s federal prosecutor Frederic Van Leeuw said he expected the trial to “yield clues” about the cell behind the two attacks. “This is important for the victims,” he added.

Massive security

The trial opens early Monday amid heavy security when Benjamin de Jesus, an imposing 19th century Brussels landmark topped with a gilded cupola towering more than 100 meters. Under arrangements for the trial in Brussels, the boyish-looking former bar owner will be transferred to a prison in the north of France, from where he will travel to Brussels daily.

Abdeslam has spent nearly 20 months in isolation under 24-hour video surveillance at Fleury-Merogis prison near Paris, after being transferred from France after his arrest. The trial was postponed in December to allow his lawyer Sven Mary to prepare the case. Mary, who initially represented Abdeslam and then dropped him because of his attitude, took him on again as a client late last year.

Court sources said Abdeslam has refused to speak to investigators since his arrest. Police say Abdeslam and Ayari were holed up at a flat in the Brussels district of Forest when it was raided by French and Belgian police in a joint operation, leading to a shootout. Investigators say the pair fled via the back door but a third suspect, 33-year-old Algerian Mohamed Belkaid, was mortally wounded when he exchanged fire with police smashing through the main door apparently providing cover for their escape. Three officers were wounded.

Shot in the leg

The discovery of the third suspect was apparently a lucky break resulting from what was described as a routine search for accomplices in the Paris attacks. Police say they found Abdeslam’s fingerprints in the flat, confirming they were on the trail of the last suspect in the rifle and bomb attacks on the Bataclan concert hall, bars, restaurants and the National Stadium in the French capital on November 13, 2015.

Abdeslam is suspected of being the driver in the attacks. Three days after the Brussels police raid, on March 18, TV cameras captured the drama as heavily armed police officers shot Abdeslam in the leg and captured him and Ayari just yards from Abdeslam’s home in Molenbeek, a gritty Brussels immigrant neighborhood. Molenbeek had long been under the international spotlight as suspects involved in other jihadist attacks over the past two decades had either lived or stayed there.

The arrests marked the end of the hunt for Europe’s most wanted man, but relief soon turned to yet another shock. Four days later, other members of his alleged cell blew themselves up at Brussels airport and on a train in a metro station next to the European Union’s headquarters, killing 32 people.

Investigators believe Abdeslam’s arrest precipitated the suicide bombings by other members of his alleged cell who feared they too would be caught. —AFP

For Saudi freed tycoons, cheers and business challenges

RIYADH: Cheering supporters greeted Saudi Arabian billionaire Prince Alwaleed bin Talal when he arrived at his skyscraper offices in Riyadh after his release from detention in an anti-corruption crackdown. But he and other tycoons freed from a luxury hotel in the Saudi capital face a challenge to get back into the business district. Alwaleed’s asset management company because of the uncertainty.

Their ability to do so could impact Saudi Arabia’s attempts to lure investors to big projects, as a regional and another witch hunt before anyone would be willing to move on anything major,” a regional banker said of the business climate. “This is not the right time to bring anything to market.”

Uncertainty lingers

Online footage showed Prince Alwaleed waving from a luxury car in a convoy trailed by armed guards as he arrived this week at the Kingdom Center skyscraper one day after his release, and then walking inside with his private physician. A source familiar with the matter said the prince received an operational update on his global portfolio, which includes stakes in Twitter, ride-hailing firm Lyft and French hotel operator Accor.

In the first few days after his detention, the share price of his investment firm Kingdom Holding plunged 23 percent, erasing $2.2 billion of his personal fortune on paper. After a jump this week, the stock has regained almost all that it lost, but during the prince’s detention the overall stock market rose 10 percent. Kingdom shares do not reflect that gain, indicating investors are still applying a discount to his company because of the uncertainty.

Prince Alwaleed’s predicament suggests Saudi tycoons who have long been content to focus on amassing huge profits must now consider whether the government’s anti-corruption drive could stop them in their tracks. Saudi Arabia’s attorney general said on Tuesday that settlement deals had secured just over $100 billion from members of the elite. He did not provide a breakdown, and Reuters could not verify that figure.

Back in the driving seat

In another video, property mogul Mohammed Abouelnour Amoudi sits in a black office chair at his home in Jeddah receiving kisses on the hand and forehead from a procession of well-wishers who uttered thanksgiving for his safe return after nearly three months in the Ritz Carlton Hotel in Riyadh. A company representative reached by phone said Amoudi was in good health.

“It is as if he was travelling and returned, nothing more,” said the person who declined to be named, adding it was not clear if he would run the company again. Associates of other released detainees, including media magnate Waleed Al Ibrahim and retail billionaire Fawaz Al-Hokair, told Reuters they were at home catching up with family and close friends. An email to MBC employees seen by Reuters described Ibrahim as “fit and eager to get back”. It said he would travel to Dubai in a couple of weeks to get “back in the driving seat”. Hokair, meanwhile, is hosting dinners for guests, according to one attendee. The stock price of his company, fashion retailer Fawaz Abdulaziz Alhokair Co, is still 13 percent below its level just before he was detained.

“Its as if he was on a business trip or in a summer holiday or a religious trip. He is fully motivated, full of ambitions,” the attendee said. “He does not talk about anything, he just says he was happy and received good treatment.” These men are among the last group released from the Ritz, which had been used since November as a prison and interrogation centre for dozens of senior princes, ministers and businessmen and was cleared out on Tuesday. Specific allegations against the men and the settlements they agreed before their release were kept secret. Some may have been moved to prison after refusing to admit wrongdoing and reach financial settlements; they may still stand trial. Notably absent from the final batch of releases were Prince Turki bin Abdulrahman, the king’s nephew, and dismissed Economy Minister Adel Fakieh. —Reuters
Islamic scholar Tariq Ramadan held in Paris over rape claims

He choked me so hard that I thought I was going to die'

PARIS: Prominent Islamic scholar Tariq Ramadan remained in custody in Paris yesterday after spending a night behind bars over rape allegations that emerged in the wake of the Harvey Weinstein scandal. The Oxford professor was taken into custody on Wednesday as part of a preliminary inquiry in Paris into rape and assault allegations, with a legal source saying investigators wanted to question him further yesterday morning.

Ramadan, a Swiss national whose grandfather founded Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood Islamist movement, has furiously denied separate accusations from two Muslim women that he raped them in French hotel rooms in 2009 and 2012. A regular face on French television, the 55-year-old academic is the most prominent figure to be held in France over the sexual assault and harassment claims that have rippled around the world as a result of the online 'Me Too' campaign.

Henda Ayari, a feminist activist who used to practice a conservative strain of Islam, had described him in a book published in 2016, without naming her attacker. But in October, she said she had decided to name Ramadan publicly as the alleged perpetrator as a result of the online 'Me Too' campaign—which in France is known as "Balance Ton Porc" (Expose your pig).

She said Ramadan raped her in his hotel room, tugging at a Persian newspaper. "He choked me so hard that I thought I was going to die." She lodged a rape complaint against Ramadan on October 20. Several days later an unnamed disabled woman, a Muslim convert, also accused the academic of violently raping her in a hotel room in the southeastern city of Lyon in 2009.

Denies the allegations

In November, Oxford University said Ramadan was taking a leave of absence from his post as professor of contemporary Islamic studies, "by mutual agreement". He has denied the two women's accusations, as well as further allegations in Swiss media of sexual misconduct against teenage girls in the 1980s and 1990s, denouncing them as "a campaign of lies launched by my adversaries". Lawyers for the married father-of-four have accused Ayari of slander and defamation. He has denied the two women's accusations, as well as further allegations in the Swiss media of sexual misconduct against teenage girls in the 1980s and 1990s, denouncing them as "a campaign of lies launched by my adversaries". Lawyers for the married father-of-four have accused Ayari of slander and defamation.

As part of his defence he has presented investigators with Facebook conversations in which a woman identified as Ayari allegedly made explicit advances towards him in 2014, two years after the alleged rape. Both women have already been questioned by police in Paris and the northern city of Rouen. The accusations have sparked heated online debate between supporters of the telegenic Ramadan, who commands a following of more than two million fans on Facebook, and his opponents. Ayari was placed under police protection in November after receiving death threats.

Hijabs held aloft as Iranian women protest cover-up

BEIRUT: As images of Iranian women holding their hijabs aloft spread on social media, an influential activist said women are symbolically rejecting the wider "interference of religion" in their lives. "We are fighting against the most visible symbol of oppression," said Masih Alinejad, who hosts the website My Stealthy Freedom where women in Iran post photos of themselves without hijabs.

Under Iran's Islamic law, imposed after the 1979 revolution, women are obliged to cover their hair with a scarf, known as a hijab, and wear long, loose-fitting clothes. Violators are publicly admonished, fined or arrested. "These women are saying: 'It is enough - it is the 21st century and we want to be our true selves,'" the Iranian activist told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. The trend picked up momentum after videos and images were posted online of one woman waving a white scarf on a stick in December - a day before demonstrations erupted against economic conditions in eastern Iran, said Alinejad. Unrest quickly spread across the country and the focus broadened as protesters began calling for Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, to step down.

The video went viral as police cracked down, and Alinejad said the woman was arrested. She has since been released, according to a Facebook post by Iranian human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh. Although the wider anti-government demonstrations have ended, women across Iran are "fed up" and continue to protest against the interference of religion in their personal lives", said the activist.

Alinejad said she is now flooded with videos and photos of women imitating the viral video and she shares them on the My Stealthy Freedom Twitter account and Facebook page. "These people are not fighting against a piece of cloth, they are fighting against the ideology behind compulsory hijab," said Alinejad, who called the movement the "true face of feminism." — Reuters

American ‘IS fighter’ case challenges Trump

WASHINGTON: The first and only US citizen caught on the battlefield allegedly fighting for the Islamic State is in a legal limbo, held in Iraq without rights as Washington grapples with his fate. Identified in court papers as "John Doe," the man has been held for nearly five months, the military allowing him access to legal advice only after being forced to do so by a federal judge in Washington DC.

He was born in the United States but also has Saudi nationality, and the government has maintained the right to transfer him to another country, presumably Saudi Arabia. It would be one way-highly illegal according to rights lawyers-to handle a fundamental dilemma for President Donald Trump, a test case challenging his pledge to be tough on any captured Islamic State supporters and his commitment to US law. Between 100 to 200 US nationals traveled to Syria and Iraq after 2010 to work and fight in their ranks, according to various estimates. A handful are known killed, but the number isn't clear: the US has not provided any data.

"Enemy fighter"

John Doe is the only known captive alive. On September 14 the Pentagon confirmed that they were holding a US citizen who had been fighting for the Islamic State group and surrendered to the allied Syrian Democratic Forces in Syria days earlier. He was moved to Iraq where he has been interrogated by military and FBI investigators. US forces allowed the International Committee of the Red Cross to meet him, but since then they have fought to prevent him from gaining legal representation and a hearing in US courts.

The American Civil Liberties Union filed suit to get access to the prisoner. The government refused to provide any information about him–his name, age, or origins. They termed him an enemy fighter and claimed he showed no desire for legal representation. Hearings on his status between September and January were surreal: government lawyers argued he had never expressed the desire for legal representation, though they would not say if he had been asked; that the ACLU had no standing to represent him because they had not been requested; and that the ACLU could not represent him because they had not been formally charged and the government has yet to provide any evidence that he had enlisted in the Islamic State cause.

Friday, February 2, 2018
HARARE: With Zimbabwe holding elections this year, the opposition had been feeling cautiously optimistic—until its arch-enemy, Robert Mugabe, was ousted from power. The Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), Zimbabwe’s main opposition party, now faces the threat of a revived ZANU-PF party at polls that look set to further cement one-party rule.

Morgan Tsvangirai, veteran leader of the MDC, was among the most prominent critics of Mugabe and the ruling ZANU-PF, but he has been forced out of the action by colon cancer. The party’s history of splits has also returned, despite an agreement last year enabling the MDC to lead an united opposition into the elections.

“It is going to be an uphill task for the MDC facing ZANU-PF which is being transformed under its new leadership,” Harare-based political analyst Alexander Rusero said. “Without Tsvangirai, there is no figure who can make a meaningful impact in terms of challenging the ruling party.” Mugabe’s downfall in November—and former deputy president Emmerson Mnangagwa’s rise to succeed him—gave many Zimbabweans some hope of change after decades of authoritarian rule.

Fair elections?

Mnangagwa is a long-time Mugabe ally and a ZANU-PF veteran hardliner. But he has vowed to fight corruption, revive the moribund economy and hold fair elections—messages that may be popular for many voters fearful of abrupt change. The London-based Africa Research Institute said in a briefing paper that Mnangagwa would be able to “count on a great deal of goodwill” before the elections.

The new president appears keen to take advantage as soon as possible, saying last week that elections would be held before July, earlier than expected. The vote—previously expected in late July or August—will choose the president and both houses of parliament. Under Mugabe, who ruled since 1980, elections were marred by vote-rigging, intimidation and violent suppression of the opposition.

Mnangagwa has promised to allow international election observers, and to accept the result if he loses—a scenario that observers say is unlikely. Former trade unionist Tsvangirai, 65, is by far the opposition’s most recognizable face, but chemotherapy has left him frail and he has hinted at retirement. “It is unfortunate that Tsvangirai is not well and not able to lead the MDC in this crucial election,” said Rushweat Mukundu, an analyst at Zimbabwe Democratic Institute.

“A resounding defeat could even spell the end of the MDC, especially if the Mnangagwa government resolves some of the economic hardships affecting Zimbabweans.” Mnangagwa—who can also rely on the discreet support of the military—has sounded confident since coming to power, declaring “I have no doubt I will sweep the elections.” The MDC once posed a formidable challenge to ZANU-PF, even winning the first round of a presidential election in 2008 vote. Tsvangirai then pulled out of the run-off after a wave of deadly violence unleashed by Mugabe supporters, and the MDC entered into a troubled coalition government. In the 2013 elections, Mugabe won the presidential vote 62 percent to Tsvangirai’s 34 percent, with a similar result in the national assembly result.

Opposition adrift

Bickering among the three MDC deputies Nelson Chamisa, Elias Mudzuri and Thokozani Khupe could now tear the party apart for the third time since its formation in 1999. The tensions have undermined efforts to have a “unified opposition” for the elections formed by Tsvangirai, his former allies Tendai Biti and Welshman Ncube and a host of small opposition parties. MDC spokesman Obert Gutu even plans to stand for the same constituency seat in Harare as Biti, the respected finance minister in the 2009-2013 coalition government. —AFP
100 years of women’s suffrage: How one group changed British history

A major step that put the country ahead

LONDON: British women won the right to vote 100 years ago after an intense struggle marked by a violent fringe campaign that shocked the country but helped to change the world. On February 6, 1918, the Representation of the People Bill became law and added to the voting roll around eight million women who were aged over 30 and met other conditions.

It was not until 1928 that British women won the same voting rights as men but it was a major step that put the country ahead of some contemporaries such as France. Among those involved in the decades-long British campaign, the Suffragettes stood out for militant acts that were unprecedented in their day, although their influence is still debated.

The intolerable torture of women

Suffragettes chained themselves to railings, broke shop windows and blew up post boxes as part of their fight. They cut electricity lines, disrupted meetings and even bombarded the house of a government minister. It was a deliberate move into militancy preached by the group’s founder, Emmeline Pankhurst. In the most shocking act, Suffragette Emily Davison became a martyr to the cause when she was killed throwing herself under the king’s horse at the 1913 Derby. She was convinced “one great tragedy … would put an end to the intolerable torture of women,” Pankhurst wrote in her 1914 autobiography “My Own Story.”

Hunger strikes

Hundreds of Suffragettes were jailed but they continued their protest in prison by refusing to eat. Many were force-fed, a harsh practice that ended in 1913 with legislation that allowed authorities to release hunger-striking women prisoners when they became too weak and re-arrest them when they had recovered. Pankhurst was jailed and released 11 times.

Detractors said the actions of the Suffragettes showed that women were emotional and irresponsible and therefore not fit to vote. Some historians credit the role of women in World War I as more important in securing voting rights than militant activism. But in 1999 Time magazine named Pankhurst as one of the 100 most important people of the 20th century. She “shaped an idea of women for our time; she shook society into a new pattern from which there could be no going back,” it said. “The militant campaign was absolutely essential to moving the vote forward,” Krista Cowman, history professor at the University of Lincoln in Britain, told AFP. “There was 50 years of peaceful campaigning before that really hadn’t done anything.” — AFP

Train carrying Republicans hits truck, kills one

WASHINGTON: A train carrying several dozen Republican lawmakers including US House Speaker Paul Ryan collided with a garbage truck Wednesday in Virginia, killing one person and sending six others, including a congressman, to hospital, officials said. The White House said no members of Congress were seriously injured, and that President Donald Trump had been briefed on the accident.

At least 300 people, including lawmakers, their families and staff, were aboard the train from Washington bound for a Republican policy retreat in West Virginia. The truck that was struck was carrying three people, one of whom was killed and another seriously injured, Senator Bill Cassidy, a licensed physician who helped attend to the injured, said on Twitter.

“We’re fine, but our train hit a garbage truck. Members with medical training are assisting the drivers of the truck,” Walden said. The accident quickly became a security concern for police and security personnel tasked with guarding members of Congress, as lawmakers jumped off the disabled train to aid the injured. Senator Jeff Flake described a chaotic scene along the tracks, where he said he helped carry a badly-injured man away from the truck and watched emergency responders try but fail to revive the person who died. “It was harsh, it threw everyone up in their seat,” Flake told CNN of the impact. Last June, Flake was among several Republicans at a congressional baseball game practice when a gunman opened fire on lawmakers. Colleague Steve Scalise was gravely wounded, and Flake ran to his aid once the shooter was down. Dozens of Republican members of the House of Representatives and the Senate left Washington earlier Wednesday, the morning after Trump delivered his maiden State of the Union speech before Congress. — AFP

Three jailed Catalan leaders appeal to UN

LONDON: Three Catalan leaders imprisoned in Spain over their role in the region’s independence crisis will take their case to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, their lawyers in London said yesterday. “Their detention by Spain is an affront to human rights, designed to prevent them from performing their role as political representatives of the Catalan people,” lawyer Ben Emmerson told reporters.

The three include deposed Catalan vice-president Oriol Junqueras, as well as the leaders of two grassroots separatist groups: Jordi Sanchez of the ANC and Jordi Cuixart of Omnium Cultural. Sanchez and Cuixart are being investigated for sedition, Junqueras is also in custody pending a probe into his role in the region’s independence drive.

“This case does not ask the UN to adjudicate on the issue of Catalan independence but seeks the UN’s reaffirmation that governments cannot repress political dissent through arbitrary detention,” Emmerson said. “Spain must release these men.” Junqueras was instrumental in Catalunya’s attempt to break away from Spain via a referendum that took place on October 1 despite a court ban and a unilateral declaration of independence later that month.

Madrid then sacked the regional government including Junqueras, imposed direct rule on the semi-autonomous region, dissolved its parliament and called snap Catalan elections, which saw separatist parties retain their parliamentary majority in December. The UN panel is made up of independent human rights cases and has addressed hundreds of cases including prominent figures such as WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and Myanmar’s Aung San Suu Kyi. — AFP
**International**

**US citizen mobilization, dreaming big against Trump’s administration**

**New citizen zeal ignited in the United States**

**NEW YORK:** The organization may have only five employees and a small office in the Empire State Building, but its ambitions are huge: holding the Trump administration accountable and fighting what it sees as the erosion of democratic norms in the United States. Far from the noisy street protesters and the politically fractured Congress, Integrity First for America quietly showcases a new citizen zeal ignited in the United States under President Donald Trump.

Bankrolled by Democratic Party donors, and uniting investigative journalists with top-flight lawyers, IFA is sharpening its talons against what spokesman Brett Edkins calls the erosion of civil norms and elected leaders undermining fundamental rights. Its creation highlights the liberal US climate under Trump: political opponents of the Republican president, shocked by a victory they thought impossible, are wondering how best to mobilize against the unthinkable.

Posters that read “We, the people”—the first three words of the US Constitution—hang in IFA’s lobby, which they share with a large law firm. Just months after the non-profit started to take shape last summer, IFA’s work is already showing results. In October, they filed a lawsuit against 25 white supremacists and hate groups behind the racial violence that rocked the country last August in Charlottesville, Virginia. The case was filed in the name of 10 victims.

“The first case we are bringing is an example. It’s not against politicians, it’s against resettlement of violent racists,” said Edkins, 33.

The case is about “bringing transparency” to far-right groups, shining a light on their resources and fundraising, “and making sure that hate and bigotry does not become normalized”—even if it takes years to wind through the courts, Edkins said.

The case was filed in the name of 10 victims. It is IFA’s way of working on a second investigation which it hopes to announce in the coming months. The group is “looking at various public officials from Trump down and their private financial ties on the Charlottesville case,” said Edkins. He hopes the case will “have a major public impact in 2018.” The result of the first US president, who never held any government job, to divest from his real estate empire has enraged Democrats, fueled suspicions of corruption and allegations of conflicts of interest.

**Silicon Valley funds**

But if IFA is just one of several non-profit groups, media organizations and politicians determined to skewer the administration, it says its battle is far bigger than Trump. “We are only now seeing all the weaknesses built into our democracy,” says Jeff Pillets, 57, an investigative journalist head-hunted for IFA. “In a way, it was inevitable. If it had not been Trump it would have been someone else,” he said.

As a journalist Pillets investigated the businesses of Jared Kushner, Trump’s son-in-law and senior advisor, and calls his work for IFA “hard-hitting investigative stuff.” “They are very serious about what’s going on in this country. They are very much interested in keeping this administration accountable,” Pillets says. The idea of creating an association allied to a law firm was born out of the success of the American Foundation for Equal Rights. That group, set up on similar lines in 2001, got same-sex marriage equality restored in California, Edkins said.

It was then a question of sourcing the funds. “Our initial money came out of some folks in Silicon Valley,” and from LinkedIn co-founder Reid Hoffman in particular, says Monica Graham, IFA’s board chair. The businesswoman, who herself donated $1 million, belongs to the Patriotic Millionaires, a group of high-income individuals who first met in 2010 concerned over the destabilizing concentration of wealth and power in the country.

Set up with a budget of $2-3 million in 2017, IFA is looking for new donors, including contributions from ordinary individuals. “I have got to go around and start rattling that tin cup because this suit against the white supremacists is really expensive,” Graham laughs. So what else lies in the future for IFA? New ideas pop up every week, but they don’t all lead to weighty investigations. “We have gone down a couple of rabbit holes,” says Graham. “It really has to be something that is really endangering our democracy.” — AFP

**Mobilize against the unthinkable**

**FBI challenges White House over Russia case memo**

**WASHINGTON:** The FBI warned Wednesday it has “grave concerns” over the accuracy of a secret Congressional memo that could depict the agency as deeply politicized, as President Donald Trump’s top aide signaled the White House would allow the document’s release. Based on highly classified information, the four-page memo — written by Republican lawmaker Devin Nunes, the chairman of the House Intelligence Committee—suggests that the Justice Department and the FBI abused their power in running surveillance on a member of President Donald Trump’s election campaign in 2016.

The Justice Department and the FBI have actively lobbied against its release, which has the potential to taint special counsel Robert Mueller’s investigation into alleged collusion between the Trump campaign and Russians, an investigation that is edging closer to the president himself. But White House chief of staff John Kelly said Wednesday that the document could be made public soon, once White House lawyers have vetted it.

“It’ll be released here pretty quick, I think, and the whole world can see it,” Kelly told Fox Radio. “This president … wants everything out so the American people can make up their own minds. And if there are people to be held accountable, then so be it.” The FBI stressed its concerns in an extraordinary, unsigned public statement that demonstrated its growing rift with Trump and Nunes, a staunch defender in Congress of the president.

With regard to the House Intelligence Committee’s memorandum, the FBI was provided a limited opportunity to review this memo the day before the committee voted to release it, it said. “As expressed during our initial review, we have grave concerns about material omissions of fact that fundamentally impact the memo’s accuracy.” In a statement, Nunes countered that it was “no surprise” that the Justice Department and FBI would oppose the release of “information related to surveillance abuses at these agencies.” “It’s clear that top officials used unverified information in a court document to fuel a counter-intelligence investigation during an American political campaign,” he said.

**Espionage probe election**

Nunes’ committee voted on Monday to release the memo, distilled from a much larger volume of documents used by the FBI to get a so-called FISA national security warrant to spy on Trump campaign official Carter Page, who was suspected of espionage. Media reports, citing lawmakers who have seen the document, say it alleges that to obtain the warrant, they submitted evidence that was concocted and unproven “Russia dossier.”

The dossier includes information on contacts between the Trump campaign and Russia compiled by former British intelligence agent Christopher Steele and financed in part by Democrat Hillary Clinton’s presidential campaign. Republicans say it provides evidence that the Justice Department, allegedly full of pro-Clinton officials, actively sought to undermine Trump. Because of its sensitive nature, to release the memo, Nunes needs the president’s approval. If Trump does not act either way, Nunes can release it as early as Saturday.

**Trump relations with FBI sink**

But Democrats say the memo is based on selective information that does not reflect the entire classified file on the FISA warrant application on Page. Instead, they say, Nunes is running a politically-motivated stunt to smear the Mueller collusion investigation, which is also examining whether Trump tried to obstruct the probe.

Adam Schiff, the top Democrat on the intelligence committee, charged Wednesday night in an open letter to Nunes that “substantive” and “material” changes were made to the memo, without the knowledge or approval of committee members, before it was sent to the White House. Schiff called for the memo as sent to be withdrawn and that a new vote be held next week. And in op-ed piece in the Washington Post, Schiff said Nunes had used an obscure rule to order the release of classified information for partisan political purposes and that this “crossed a dangerous line.” — AFP

NEW YORK: Board Chair for the Integrity First for America, Monica Graham (L), and Communications Director, Brett Edkins, pose at their office in the Empire State Building. — AFP

NEW YORK: The organization may have only five employees and a small office in the Empire State Building, but its ambitions are huge: holding the Trump administration accountable and fighting what it sees as the erosion of democratic norms in the United States. — AFP
Climber recalls her horror descent from Pakistan’s ‘killer mountain’

The first woman to scale the mountain in winter

SALLANCHES: A French mountaineer who was rescued in a dramatic night-time operation on Pakistan’s “killer mountain” has told how she had to leave her weak and bleeding climbing partner and descend the peak alone in darkness. Elisabeth Revol, speaking exclusively to AFP from a hospital in France’s Haute-Savoie region—where doctors are assessing whether she will require amputations due to frostbite in her hands and left foot—said rescuers urged her to leave behind Tomek (Tomasz) Mackiewicz, a Polish national. She earlier described the decision as “terrible and painful”.

It was Revol’s fourth attempt, and Mackiewicz’s third, to scale the 8,125-metre Nanga Parbat during the winter season, when they ran into trouble amid frigid temperatures and high winds. An elite group of Polish climbers managed to reach Revol but were unable to get to Mackiewicz, who was stranded further up the mountain. Revol, who weighed just 43 kilograms following her ordeal, left France on December 15 and began her adventure with Mackiewicz on January 20.

A few days later, as they approached the summit, she says they “felt good”. By early evening they finally reached the peak—making Revol the first woman to scale the mountain in winter, without oxygen or sherpa. But their joy was shortlived. “Tomek told me I can’t see anything anymore,” Revol recalled. “He hadn’t used a mask because it was a bit hazy during the day and by nightfall he had ophthalmia (an inflammation of the eye). We hardly had a second at the top. We had to rush to get down.”

Distress call
Mackiewicz clung to Revol’s shoulders and they began the long, difficult descent in darkness. “At one point, he couldn’t breathe,” Revol said. “He took off the protection he had in front of his mouth and he began to freeze. His nose became white and then his hands, his feet.” They huddled overnight in a crevasse, trying desperately to shelter from the biting wind. But Mackiewicz no longer had the strength to continue the descent and by sunrise, his condition had deteriorated further. Revol recalls that he had “blood streaming from his mouth”, a sign of oedema—a buildup of fluid in the body and the ultimate stage of acute mountain sickness, which can be fatal without urgent treatment.

The mountaineer alerted everyone she could that they needed help but certain messages were lost in transmission. Eventually, instructions came through from her rescuers. “They told me, ‘If you go down to 6,000 meters, we can pick you up, and we can get Tomek at 7,200 meters.” She added: “It wasn’t a decision I made, it was imposed on me.” To Mackiewicz, she remembers simply saying: “Listen, the helicopter will arrive late afternoon. I must go down, they’ll come to get you.” Sending her GPS coordinates to rescuers and convincing herself that she would survive, she took nothing with her for the remainder of her journey—“not a tent, not a duvet, nothing”.

The first woman to scale the mountain in winter

Japan fire kills 11 at elderly people home

TOKYO: Eleven people were killed in northern Japan after fire broke out at a home for elderly people with financial difficulties, police said yesterday. Television footage showed the three-storey building engulfed in flames and dozens of firefighters battling the blaze in snowy conditions. Pictures of the aftermath showed the blackened husk of the building, whose roof had apparently collapsed due to the fire.

The victims—eight men and three women—were among 16 residents of the facility in Sapporo, Hokkaido, run by a local organization. The other five residents escaped, a police spokesman told AFP, adding that authorities were investigating the victims’ identities. Kenji Kikai, a local police official, told AFP: “Of the five people who escaped, three people—two men and one woman—were rushed to hospital. The two men were slightly injured and the woman sustained moderate injuries. ‘They are still hospitalized but the injuries are not life-threatening,’ added Kikai. Two others escaped unharmed.

Police said they had launched a probe into the cause of the fire first alerted at 11:42 pm (1442 GMT) Wednesday via an emergency call. The accommodation was originally a Japanese inn built around 50 years ago that was later turned into a welfare home. The facility is aimed at supporting elderly people with financial difficulties by offering low-cost accommodation and helping them find work, public broadcaster NHK reported. It is usually unstaffed overnight, according to local media. As dawn broke, police and firefighters were combing the blackened remains of furniture in freezing temperatures.

“As there were many oil tanks (for kerosene stoves) there, I heard a number of small explosions,” a 67-year-old woman in the neighborhood told Jiji Press. “Luckily, the only damage to our house was some cracks on the window,” she was quoted as saying. Another woman in the neighborhood, 65, said when she spotted smoke and flames while she was watching the total lunar eclipse from the window of her house, Jiji Press said.

“The smoke and flames were rising vertically. If there had been wind, the damage would have been bigger,” she told Jiji. “The surrounding area was bright as if it was day because of efforts to extinguish fire, and smoke lasted until near the dawn,” she said. Others saw ash falling like snow in the vicinity of the fire, local media reported. “It was an awful fire. It spread so quickly and flames were billowing,” said one woman neighbour, who did not wish to be named. — AFP

Bangladesh journalists protest security bill

DHAKA: Hundreds of Bangladeshi journalists took to the streets yesterday to protest against a new digital security bill that campaigners say would damage media freedom in the country. The Digital Security Act 2018 approved by the cabinet this week would mean a journalist could be convicted of espionage for entering a government office and gathering information secretly using an electronic device, an offence that could carry a 14-year jail sentence.

It also provides for a life sentence for spreading “negative propaganda” about the country’s war of independence or its founding leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman using a digital device. Media rights groups including the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) have already condemned the bill, which parliament has yet to vote on. “The IFJ believes the proposed act provides more grounds to grossly misuse the provisions to harass journalists and restrict freedom of expression,” the Brussels-based group said.

“It will also empower the law enforcers to search or arrest anyone without any court-issued warrants if a police officer believes that an offence under the act has been committed or is being committed.” Around 200 Bangladeshi journalists gathered in front of the National Press Club in Dhaka on Thursday to demand the government scrap the bill. “If this draconian law is passed in the parliament, it will not only curb investigative journalism, but also all kinds of reporting,” said M. Abdullah, general secretary of the Federal Union of Journalists.

Scores of journalists also posted photos of themselves on Facebook holding placards saying “I am a spy” in protest at the espionage clause. Among them was television journalist Kaberi Maitra, who said much of her reporting work would be considered criminal under the bill. “I want to carry on working as a journalist, so I’m declaring myself a spy under the law,” she posted alongside her image on the social media site. — AFP
Indian radio hosts highlight human trafficking

CHENNAI: With human trafficking on the rise in India, some radio hosts are using their programs to raise awareness and help listeners spot traffickers. In the Indian capital, New Delhi, radio host Ginnie Mahajan will talk trafficking on her award-winning show “Sunma Na Dilli” (Listen Delhi) this weekend. “We want Delhi to know that many of these girls working in their houses are reported missing by their parents,” she said. “We need Delhi to know that girls are being forced into this trade.”

Indian radio in India rose by more than 20 percent in 2016 against the previous year, Indian government data shows. More than 60 percent of the 23,117 victims rescued were children. Forty-five percent of victims were trafficked for the purposes of forced labor and 33 percent for sexual exploitation, according to the data. “If we only checked details of the women around whom our lives and kitchens revolve we could actually stop the crime,” Mahajan told the Thomson Reuters Foundation by phone from Delhi. Radio has become an important tool in spreading awareness, campaigners say. “It lets people know what is out there; the sheer horror of such a crime and how close to home it is,” said Adrian Phillips of anti-trafficking charity Justice and Care, which collaborates with radio stations. While Mahajan’s show reaches urban Indians in the capital, a community radio station in the southern state of Karnataka recently went on air with a special program devoted to human trafficking.

Keerti S Chougala, a host on Nammana Banuhi (Our Village Radio), said she was aiming to educate her nearly 400,000 listeners on the impact of the crime, as well as how to spot traffickers and report cases. “We wanted to tell women and girls in the region about this in a simple way and raise awareness,” Chougala said. Run by charity Women’s Welfare Society, the show is broadcast across more than 400 villages in Bellari district. In November, a young trafficking survivor shared her story on Akashwani radio in the eastern city of Kollata. An aspiring singer from Bangladesh, she told listeners how traffickers had promised her “starlit dreams” of becoming a singing sensation in India, and then trafficked her to a brothel. Phillips said radio is ideal for sharing trafficking stories, because survivors can speak about their experiences anonymously, “with- out fearing repercussions from criminal networks.” Radio also allows listeners to connect intimate with survivors, he added. “It’s a real person speaking up and more importantly speaking out,” Phillips said.—Reuters

The transitory existence of slum dwellers a major impediment

DHAKA: Bilkis Begum has lived on the lakeside in Dhaka’s Korail slum for 16 years, but in December 2016, her extended family’s 12 houses were razed to the ground by a fire. The inferno destroyed the oven her husband, Shahid Gazi, used for his bakery and the fridges he relied on for his business selling leftover chicken meat from Chinese restaurants. For the Gazi family, it was a struggle to cobble together the $3,000 they needed to rebuild their homes and business. They borrowed $900 from money lenders, and found the rest from relatives and friends. They also got tin, pillars and a little cash aid from Bangladesh-based development agency BRAC. In addition, they received pro-bono help from architects like Sheikh Rubaiya Sultana, who helped redesign the neighborhood to protect it better against future fires. “Architects have social responsibility,” said Sultana, an assistant professor at BRAC University in Dhaka. “I watched the fire before my very eyes, but couldn’t do anything then.” The Gazi family now has eight new units and the couple are back in business, running a small restaurant on the old site. “We couldn’t have stood back on our own feet unless we got (this) support,” said Begum, 32, a mother of three. A team of 16 architects, planners, engineers and students, brought together by BRAC, has tested out simple, cheap design solutions to rebuild Dhaka’s two biggest slums after fires destroyed some 650 homes in late 2016, affecting 2,500 people. The new approach aims to tackle the ever-present threat of fires in Dhaka’s crowded slums, while improving living conditions for residents. But in a city where less than 10 percent of areas are planned, altering the slumscapes is a tall order. One major challenge is working out what is feasible for slum residents who have no legal rights to the land they live on. Ashok Rahman, an urban program specialist with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Bangladesh, said the transitory existence of many slum dwellers is a major impediment to keeping them safe from threats like fires in the longer term—especially migrants who split their time between villages and cities, limiting their access to services and permanent accommodation. Government providers worry that improving services in informal settlements could attract more migrants from rural areas, Rahman says. “Weak and ill-defined land tenure and property rights pose big threats to resilience-building and are considered the underlying causes of the poverty and vulnerability of the urban poor in Bangladesh,” he added. Wide roads sandwiched between Dhaka’s upscale Gulshan and Ramna neighborhoods, Korail—which sprang up in the 1980s—spreads over some 170 acres of land owned by three government ministries. It is home to as many as 100,000 residents, including migrants from rural areas, according to a BRAC report. In addition, they received pro-bono help from architects like Rubaiya Sultana, an assistant professor at BRAC University in Dhaka. “I watched the fire before my very eyes, but couldn’t do anything then.”

Architects have social responsibility

DHAKA: More air, light

In the slum, which is home to 50,000 people and located on land belonging to the health ministry, residents have since built concrete houses with green tin roofs to reduce losses in the event of a fire—despite the risk of eviction as the government plans to build a physiotherapy college there. The new design has allowed some homeowners to own a luxury— a communal area— as well as an upstairs. In the family space, where children play and adults gossip while sipping tea, Rabeya Akhter recalls how she clambered out of the house when her brother-in-law shouted “Fire! Fire!” just after midnight on December 12, 2016. Her family lost valuables worth about $800 when their TV, PC monitor, wardrobe and other furniture burned to ashes. They managed to get credit of more than $3,600 to rebuild their home, mostly from DSK, a micro-finance institution. Shah Alam, who co-owns a two-storey home, has used metal netting for corridor walls and plastic roofing in parts to ensure it is ventilated and well-lit—a idea partly his own and partly from the volunteer architects.

Like Akhter’s father-in-law Siddiq Howladar, 70, who moved to Dhaka from the southern island-state of Bhola, many of Sattola’s residents migrated from coastal Bangladesh, where land erosion and floods are common, poverty is pervasive and jobs are rare. Dhaka alone attracts an estimated half a million rural migrants seeking employment each year, according to the World Bank. Almost one-third of its population of 18 million lives in slums. Government figures show some 20,000 fires occur annually in Dhaka. But the cause often remains unknown, and the blazes get little international attention. Residents of the capital’s Kalvanpur slum suspected a fire that gutted dozens of homes in early 2016 was started deliberately to remove them from land owned by the ministry of housing and public works, local media reported. It happened a day after a court order to halt an eviction that had sparked violence between inhabitants and police.—Reuters

Burning issue: Dhaka slums fight fires but land problems still loom

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WWII bomb defused in HK after thousands evacuated

4,000 people evacuated, ferry services suspended

HONG KONG: A wartime bomb was defused in Hong Kong yesterday after forcing a busy commercial district into lockdown, with roads closed and thousands evacuated from surrounding shops, hotels and offices. It was the second time within a week that an American bomb dropped during WWII had been discovered at a harbor front construction site in the Wan Chai district. Police sealed off parts of the district after a worker found the device on Wednesday morning, with 4,000 people evacuated and ferry services across Victoria Harbor suspended as bomb disposal experts worked through the night.

“Bomb disposal operations are dirty, difficult and dangerous. In this particular case, all three were true,” bomb disposal officer Alick McWhirter told reporters. The rain, tricky location and a fuse mechanism that the team “couldn’t even see” all added to the challenge, McWhirter said. The experts cut a large hole through the shell to burn off explosive materials inside before a crane lifted the earth-covered bomb off the site on Thursday.

The bomb—the same model as another unearthed earlier this week—was 170-cm in length and weighed over 1,000 pounds. Unexploded wartime bombs or grenades are frequently found by hikers and construction workers in the southern Chinese city, which was the scene of fierce fighting between Japanese and British allied forces in 1941. In 2014 police defused a wartime bomb weighing nearly one ton, the largest yet found in the city. Hong Kong was an early target in what would become a full-blown Asian campaign for imperial Japan during the Second World War.

Myanmar court denies bail to Reuters journalists

YANGON: A Myanmar court yesterday denied bail to two Reuters journalists charged under a severe law designed to stifle media freedom. Wa Lone, 31, and Kyaw Soe Oo, 27, are accused of in jail, in a case that has sparked outcry over shrinking media freedom. Myanmar nationals Wa Lone, 31, and Kyaw Soe Oo, 27, are accused of

HONG KONG: Bomb disposal expert Adam Roberts (centre R) and colleagues from the explosive ordnance disposal police unit pose with a defused US-made bomb (bottom C) dropped during World War II a day after it was discovered on a harbourfront construction site in the Wan Chai district. —AFP

Taiwan man probed over secret N Korea oil sales

TAIPEI: A second Taiwanese businessman has been questioned over his alleged involvement in selling oil to North Korea, prosecutors said yesterday, as their probe into the illicit sanctions-busting trade widens. The UN Security Council imposed three sets of sanctions on North Korea last year in response to the reclusive state’s nuclear and missile tests, including restrictions on oil sales. But the US has said companies with ties across Asia were violating those sanctions, including by transferring oil to North Korean vessels at sea to avoid detection.

The latest man to be questioned, identified only by his family name Chuang, owns a ship suspected of transferring oil products to North Korea in the East China Sea, the Kaohsiung district prosecutor’s office in southern Taiwan said. Chuang, 56, allegedly purchased 7,000 tons of diesel in Taiwan, falsely claiming in December that the ship was bound for Hong Kong when it was instead headed to international waters.

He also intentionally filled out the name of the ship’s previous owner rather than his own in official documents, prosecutors added. “Chuang is the owner of the ship and he was aware that the ship’s destination was to the international waters to sell oil products,” it said in a statement. Prosecutors did not name Chuang’s ship but local media identified it as the “Jin Hye” which is registered in Sierra Leone.

Chuang allegedly told prosecutors that he had loaned the vessel to business people in Hong Kong for three months and that he had no idea what they had used the ship for, according to United Daily News. He was released on a bail after questioning and has not been formally charged. Prosecutors were not immediately available for comment.

Last month Kaohsiung prosecutors questioned another businessman Chen Shih-Yu, who in August of last year was found with a defused American bomb dropped during World War II in Hong Kong. —AFP

18 Friday|Times

Friday, February 2, 2018

International

Dirty, difficult and dangerous

“Hong Kong’s main value during the Japanese occupation was its ship repairing facilities, so putting those out of action was harming the Japanese war effort,” Wordie told AFP. At that time, before land reclamation extended the city further out into the harbor, the point where the two bombs were found would have been 500 metres out into the water. Experts say they likely failed to explode because they were slowed down by the water and then sank into the mud.

The US planes started to bomb Hong Kong in 1942 and 1943, but once the tide of the war turned towards the allies, the bombardment became heavier.

One expert, who said the bombs would have been 1.8 meters in length and weighed over 1,000 pounds. Unexploded wartime bombs or grenades are frequently found by hikers and construction workers in the southern Chinese city, which was the scene of fierce fighting between Japanese and British allied forces in 1941. In 2014 police defused a wartime bomb weighing nearly one ton, the largest yet found in the city. Hong Kong was an early target in what would become a full-blown Asian campaign for imperial Japan during the Second World War.

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Actress Monica Bellucci arrives to be honored with the Filming In Italy and Italian Institute of Culture Los Angeles Creativity awards in Hollywood, California.—AFP

Kava, the drink soothing the stress of NY millennials
Super Mario ready for leap into anime film

Japan's Nintendo yesterday said it was working on an anime movie starring its iconic video game character Super Mario in collaboration with the US studio behind the "Despicable Me" series. Shigeru Miyamoto, the renowned game creator of "Super Mario Bros" and "Donkey Kong," at the Kyoto-based video game giant, has been working with Chris Meledandri at Illumination Entertainment to produce the Mario anime. "People have told me making games is similar to making movies and I've been flattered by people saying things like 'If you can make a game, you can make a movie,'" Miyamoto told reporters in Tokyo.

"But they are totally different," said the creator who has some previous experience in directing short movies. "One is interactive and the other is a passive experience," he said, noting film-making requires film-making experts and Meledandri was an "experienced producer." In the past decade, Meledandri has produced the "Despicable Me" series, "The Secret Life of Pets" and other box-office hits. "I got along with him. But it took more than two years to make an announcement since we agreed to do something together," he said.

Miyamoto said he and Meledandri had already made progress in production though the release date is yet to be fixed. He said they would scrap the project if they decided they were unable to make an "entertaining" film, he said. "We've already discussed its script many times and have made quite a lot of progress... between the two of us," he said. Once done, the film will be distributed by Universal Pictures, Miyamoto said. The announcement came the day after Nintendo posted stellar earnings thanks to strong sales of its new Switch console and software titles. Global sales of the Super Mario Odyssey title for Switch topped nine million since its launch last October.

Miyamoto told the briefing that the company's "ultimate goal" is that everyone would have a Switch console for their personal use. Nintendo also said it was planning to release a new Mario Kart title for smartphones in the year from April. There was a Hollywood live-action film with Super Mario characters in 1993 but it scored limited success at the box office.—AFP

Republic Records chief on leave over harassment allegations

The head of Republic Records, one of the biggest music labels whose acts include Ariana Grande, Lorde and The Weeknd, was placed on leave Wednesday after sexual harassment allegations. Republic president Charlie Walk becomes one of the highest profile figures in pop music to be swept up in the rising #MeToo movement against workplace harassment, despite the industry's notoriously louche reputation. Universal Music Group, the world's largest label conglomerate which includes New York-based Republic, said Walk had been put on leave as an outside law firm investigates sexual misconduct allegations.

"Republic Records is committed to a safe workplace environment where employees are treated fairly and respectfully," a company statement said. The action comes two days after Tristan Cooper Smith, founder of a California wellness studio for women called Life Lab, posted an open letter accusing Walk of harassment when she worked under him in the 2000s at Columbia Records, part of Sony Music. She wrote that the married Walk made lewd comments about her sexual fantasies, grabbed her thigh under the table at business dinners and once pushed her onto his bed at an event at his home.

"To you, Charlie Walk, what you did was normal. It was a power you perceived to have earned, with a right to exercise it," she wrote. "But to me it was insulting, confusing and objectifying. And it was a secret that I held for a very long time, my experiences only spilling out in flashbacks and nightmares," said Cooper Smith, who said she was paid to stay quiet when he reported his behavior and left the company. Bob Lefsetz, who writes an influential newsletter in the music industry, followed up with accounts by more people, both named and anonymous, who shared similar stories about Walk's character.

Walk in a statement published by entertainment industry site Deadline denied the allegations and said he had never received complaints about his behavior in his more than 25-year career. "I have consistently been a supporter of the women's movement and this is the first time I have ever heard of this or any other allegation—and it is false," he said.—AFP

Motorbike crash casualty Gerard Butler on a year of pain

He has cultivated an image as a tough guy over two decades of starring in action thrillers but no role could have prepared Gerard Butler for his excruciating motorbike crash. The 48-year-old Scot—best known as hard-as-nails Spartan leader Leonidas in 2006 action fantasy "300"—was riding in Los Angeles in October when his motorbike and a car collided, sending him somersaulting into the air. "I fractured five bones in my right foot and had a micro fracture in each foot and a pinched nerve and a bruised bone, and injured my ankle and both knees," he tells AFP.

The damage couldn't have come at a worse time, as he was in the middle of publicizing climate thriller "Geostorm" while also shooting scenes for heist movie "Den of Thieves" and military action movie "Hunter Killer." "I was in seven countries over five weeks and I could barely walk, and it was maybe the toughest period of my life—going on talk shows, pretending you're good," he recalls with a grimace. In terms of aches and scrapes, last year was a doozy, the actor told AFP in a recent interview in Beverly Hills to promote his role as an elite cop in "Den of Thieves." "I put on 25 pounds (11 kilograms)— at one point I was 30 pounds heavier just to play that character and in the final day of shooting I hurt my knee during an action scene," he said.

Washboard abs

"Unfortunately I'd already commited to starring in another movie eight days later—'Keepers'," in Scotland—which, when I arrived, I realized was all on the side of a mountain—six weeks walking up and down a mountain. "By the time I'd finished that both knees were screwed. And then I had a motorbike accident where I landed on my knees, so it's been an interesting year of challenges," Born in Paisley, on the outskirts of Glasgow, Butler broke Hollywood with his legendary rippling washboard abs—some critics unkindly and inaccurately suggested they were digitally-enhanced—as marauding King Leonidas in Zack Snyder's "300".

His more than two dozen roles since have included a gangster in Guy Ritchie's "RocknRolla" (2009), a vigilante killer in "Law Abiding Citizen" (2009) and an alcoholic drug-abusing biker in "Machine Gun Preacher" (2011). He has also shown his soft side in romantic comedies like 2007's "PS. I Love You," "The Ugly Truth" in 2009 and opposite Jennifer Anniston in "The Bounty Hunter" (2010).

He can be still periodically be found saving the president or the planet from befalling calamity of varying degrees of ludicrousness in big, brainless actioners like "Olympus Has Fallen" and its sequels.

His latest project, Christian Gudegast's "Den of Thieves," opened two weeks ago to lukewarm reviews but has matched its production budget with a respectable $30 million box office. His 48th movie, it follows the intersecting lives of the major crime unit of the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department—known as the "Regulators"—and the "Outlaws," an elite band of robbers.—AFP
Poland’s Fryderyk Chopin Institute (NIFC) on Tuesday said it would make its entire collection devoted to the 19th-century composer available online for free by 2020. “Chopin will be the first great composer to have all of his musical scores digitised” and openly accessible by all, NIFC deputy director Maciej Janicki told reporters. Nearly 40,000 Chopin items from the UNESCO world heritage collection—including photographs and paintings of the Polish-French romantic composer, scholarly articles and manuscripts—will be put online, Janicki added.

Anyone will be able to download recordings from the global Chopin piano competition that the Warsaw-based institute organizes in addition to researching, documenting and promoting Chopin’s work around the world. Janicki says the most innovative part of the open-source project—which will be available in English and Polish and is being cofinanced by the European Union—is the sheet music. Visitors to the site will not only be able to search for and download particular scores or excerpts but will also be able to run all kinds of analyses of the rhythm, harmony, melody and other aspects of the music.

“They won’t just be simple scans or PDF files,” said Marcin Konik, who manages the NIFC library.

Chopin was born in 1810 in Zelazowa Wola, near Warsaw, to a French father and Polish mother. He fled his homeland just before the 1830 uprising against the occupying forces of Tsarist Russia. The pianist lived in Vienna and then Paris, where he died aged 39 after years of poor health. His body is buried in Paris, while his heart rests in Warsaw’s Holy Cross church. —AFP

Poland to post Chopin collection online

Paradise lost: ‘Anote’s Ark’ shows Kiribati on the brink

With its pristine sands, glistening saltwater flats and gently swaying palms, Kiribati ought to be a tropical paradise—but this precarious slice of heaven on Earth is living on borrowed time. The low-lying Pacific nation of 33 atolls and reef islands is facing the unstoppable rise of the sea and will be gone before long, making its people the world’s first nation of climate change refugees.

“I’ve been trying to communicate to the international community that we have a problem. It’s a small part of the larger challenge on climate change, but our case is more immediate,” former Kiribati president and climate activist Anote Tong tells AFP.

“We’re at the bottom end of the spectrum, where we are the most vulnerable. We are on the front line. Before anyone else is affected, we will be.” Tong, who ruled the isolated nation for 12 years until completing his third term in 2016, is the focus of “Anote’s Ark,” a new film documenting the plight of Kiribati’s 110,000 inhabitants and the struggle for the survival of 4,000 years of Kiribati culture. Documentarian Matthieu Rytz follows Tong in the later years of his presidency as he travels the world pointing out that his homeland lies barely two meters (6.5 feet) above sea level and the islets are facing an emergency.

“Anote’s Ark” is the first feature film directed by Rytz, a Canadian photographer who was exposed to the plight of the islanders and persuaded Tong to be part of a film. The documentary follows the statesman on his journey through international halls of power leading up to the 2015 Paris Climate Conference. “It was an incredible story—a head of state who knows he won’t have a state within a generation,” Rytz told AFP. The filmmaker was clear from the beginning that he didn’t want to make just another climate change movie following politicians or celebrities at summits around the world.—AFP
Supermodel Kate Upton has accused fashion giant Guess’s co-founder Paul Marciano of sexually harassing women. Upton, 25, did not cite a specific incident in her criticism Wednesday of Guess co-founder and creative director Marciano, who is 65. Upton, who was once the face of Guess, became the latest star to add her voice to the global #MeToo campaign against sexual misconduct, that kicked off following accusations against Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein. “It’s disappointing that such an iconic women’s brand @Guess is still empowering Paul Marciano as their creative director #me too,” Upton wrote on Twitter.

She repeated this on Instagram and added: “He shouldn’t be allowed to use his power in the industry to sexually and emotionally harass women #metoo.” Marciano co-founded Guess in 1981 and has been its executive chairman and chief creative officer since 2015. Upton is married to star Houston Astros pitcher Justin Verlander, and is known for appearing on the cover of Sports Illustrated swimsuit editions. She has also done some acting. She became a celebrity spokesmodel for Guess in 2011. Other models holding that position have included Claudia Schiffer and Cindy Crawford, and more recently Gigi Hadid. — AFP

Spanish designer Agatha Ruiz de la Prada (center) walks on the catwalk with models after presenting her Fall/Winter 2018/19 collection during the Madrid Fashion Week, in Madrid.
The historic French fashion label Paul Poiret has been resurrected and will show its first collection in nearly nine decades at Paris fashion week next month, the brand said. The legendary designer and bon vivant, who with Coco Chanel is credited with liberating women from Victorian era corsets, was the first couturier to launch his own brand of perfume. Backed by the South Korean department store chain Shinsegae, the revived brand is being led by Belgian entrepreneur Anne Chapelle, owner of the Ann Demeulemeester and Haider Ackermann labels.

“The house will present its first ready-to-wear autumn-winter collection designed by artistic director Yiqing Yin,” the label said. Rising Franco-Chinese creator Yin launched her own couture house in 2011 and was later admitted into the elite haute couture ranks, which is limited to a few dozen brands. Her designs first hit the headlines when the French actress and “Amelie” star Audrey Tautou wore one of her spectacular white pleated dresses to preside over the awards ceremony at the Cannes film festival in 2013. Yin said that she intended to continue in the Paul Poiret tradition, “liberating women’s bodies and spirits”. Poiret invented the shirt dress and was famous for using strong colors. A friend of artists Matisse, Pablo Picasso and Raoul Dufy and dancer Isadora Duncan, his brand folded after the Wall Street Crash of 1929. A number of historic French fashion brands have been revived in recent years including Vionnet and Schiaparelli. — AFP
Fanni Ibori once had a dream about creating the biggest library in Africa. Now she drives vans packed with books to poor areas of Lagos to help children discover a love of reading. “Readers are what?” she asks about 15 youngsters, sitting on little plastic stools in a classroom in a small converted lorry. “Leaders!” they shout back in unison. One of Ibori’s iRead Mobile Library vans recently stopped at the Bethel primary school in the working class district of Ifako, in the heart of megacity Lagos. Inside the school compound, slides and seesaws rust in the humid air. The head teacher, Ruth Aderibigbe, said her 200 or so pupils only have textbooks at their disposal. “Books cost a lot of money,” she said. When iRead turned up at the school two years ago with its wide selection of books, from toddlers’ coloring books to children’s novels, plus a few for adults, she welcomed it in with open arms. “The children involved in the program now speak and spell better in English,” she said. Inside the van, a young boy aged about 10 held a copy of “Half of a Yellow Sun”, the international bestseller by the Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. The book has clearly been well-read: its spine barely held the pages.

Books in a basket

Adichie last week became embroiled in controversy after a French journalist asked her during a visit to Paris whether there were any bookshops in Nigeria. “I think it reflects very poorly on French people that you have to ask me that question,” she responded, going on to rue what she said was France’s racist and colonial view of Africa. Ibori is aware of the row and understands why the question would offend. But she sees a wider problem and has dedicated herself to trying to resolve it. “Public libraries are functional in Nigeria, well, at least in Lagos. But not many people maximize the use of them,” she said.

“We need to catch new readers from a young age. In rural communities, there are children that have never held a book. I advocate for community libraries everywhere. Just as churches are springing up, libraries should be springing up.” Ibori is a former primary schoolteacher who began a book-lending business in 2003. “Books in a basket. I was going door-to-door,” she recalled. Books could be borrowed for just a few hundred naira (a couple of dollars) but her experience led her to realize that few adults in Nigeria’s bustling economic hub had the luxury of having time to read.

Ten years after starting the “books in a basket” scheme, she came up with the mobile library idea and applied for funding from a Nigerian government development initiative. The pitch was successful and landed her 10 million naira, which, with the exchange rate at the time, was the equivalent of about $60,000. With it, she bought a lorry and a small minibus.

African books

Now, thanks to the grant and sponsors, she has been able to take on 13 employees, buy 1,900 books and four vans. She visits four to six schools every day, organizing reading workshops on evenings and at weekends for out-of-school children in slum areas with the help of volunteers. The vans function like real libraries: children choose a book that they read at home, bring it back the following week and write a compulsory “review” on what it’s about. Sade chooses her favorite adventure story, even though she already knows it off by heart. “Reading is my hobby. Books give me ideas and they help me know better,” she says. Adinga plumps for “Bioenergy Insight”, a magazine on renewable energy that he found on the shelves. “Are you sure you’re going to read that?” asks one of the volunteers, amused. The young boy pulls a face and puts back the magazine, eventually choosing a comic book. Afterwards, the schoolchildren, dressed in white and green uniforms with a bow tie for the boys, proudly troop back into class. Tucked under their arms are books such as “Toy Story” or “Goldilocks and the Three Bears”.

Ibori looks and says there’s something missing. “We need more African children’s books now,” she says. As Adichie said in an interview published in The Atlantic in February 2017, the books she read as a little girl “and I think this is true for many other young children in countries that were formerly colonized, didn’t reflect my reality”.

—AFP
KAVA, THE DRINK SOOTHING THE STRESS OF NY MILLENNIALS

It’s been a mainstay in the South Pacific for thousands of years. Now stressed-out millenial New Yorkers are kissing goodbye to alcohol and gulping down a mildly narcotic drink to ease the pain of long hours, bottleneck commutes and Donald Trump. Kava-a root ground to powder, mixed with water and then strained-might taste like muddy water and make fans gag without a fruit juice chaser or blended into a “kavatail,” but it’s the mood enhancer taking the edge off for those struggling to cope with hectic modern life. The effects include a mild numbing of the tongue and lips, relaxation and euphoria—feelings in short supply in congested, rat-race New York, a cacophony of noise, sleep deprivation and yelling.

If any city needs to relax a little bit and calm, slow down, it’s New York.

“Anxiety

An initial kava boom in the West in the 1990s fueled low-quality exports which—combined with little understanding of the plant—led to negative publicity about health concerns and prohibitions in Europe: That all led to a bust. But while the US Food and Drug Administration warned in 2002 of a “rare” but potential risk of severe liver injury associated with kava-containing products, kava is again seeing another boom, and exports from Fiji alone more than doubled from 2012-16. “Unlike in the 1990s, the scholarly understanding of the plant is much better. It has been widely studied and it’s generally perceived as safe and beneficial,” says Zbigniew Dumienski, a researcher at the University of Auckland, New Zealand.

There is a well-established scene in Florida, yet kava has been relatively slow to take root in America’s most populous city, where there are only three kava lounges but 10,000 bars, with drinks after work and happy hours part of daily life. Astonishingly two of the lounges are a short walk from each other in Bushwick, known for its artistic scene and influx of young people drawn by more affordable rents. This is the perfect breeding ground for the American kava customer: residents in their mid-20s, embarking on stressful careers, navigating relationships, battling chronic subway delays and, in a Democratic city, dealing with Donald Trump blues.

“I went through quite a lot of anxiety with my previous job and this definitely helped a lot,” says Phil Mai, 25, a financial analyst at a media firm in Manhattan, sitting at the bar in House of Kava on Ladies Night with his girlfriend Susie. “I used to drink alcohol two-three times a week and, on a weekend, sometimes binge,” he says. “I think I had my last drink probably like two weeks ago.”

Harding Stowe pours Kava into a bowl to be served at Brooklyn Kava in New York. — AFP photos

Alex Crawford kneads Kava powder in water as he makes a batch of Kava to be served at Brooklyn Kava.

A bowl of Lemon Mint Kava served at Brooklyn Kava.

If any city needs to relax a little bit and change, slow down, it’s New York.

“Any city needs to relax a little bit and calm down, slow down, it’s New York,” says Harding Stowe, the 31-year-old owner of Brooklyn Kava in the rapidly gentrifying, artistic neighborhood of Bushwick. “I really think it’s going to explode and I think it’s starting right now.” Kava may be steeped in tradition and ceremony on Pacific islands such as Fiji, but in the West, it is seen increasingly as a healthier alternative to booze by younger people who want to go out, but not wake up with a hangover the next day. “It’s very relaxing. It’s not like alcohol or drugs,” says Brooklyn artist Sabrina Cheng, 26, a recent convert. “I have a very low tolerance for alcohol anyways. But kava, you can hang here all day, read your book, have the laptop, talk.” With teenagers and millennials drinking less alcohol than their parents, entrepreneurs jumping on the bandwagon believe a less boozy-soaked future might be just around the corner. “It’s not as cool anymore to go to bars every night,” explains Stowe. “People want something new and they want something healthy.”

Trump effect

The House of Kava has a string of theme nights to keep people hooked: open-mic nights that bring in rappers, poets and stand-up comics and while most people are in their mid-20s, recently people in their mid-60s have started stopping by. “I’m from a conservative family and I’m the only liberal, so given the state of the world, that is like the biggest stresser in my life,” says Kellianne Holland, 24, who works for a non-profit when asked what makes her most anxious. Dimly lit, the bar is incredibly mellow. Another woman is buried in a laptop. Someone else is reading and one couple talk softly to one another. There is none of the yelling synonymous with the New York bar scene.

“As opposed to a normal bar, I haven’t had anyone threaten to burn the bar down or start a fight,” jokes House of Kava manager Ryan Lloyd. “Business is taking off, he says—and it’s the same vibe over at Stowe’s rival Brooklyn Kava. When Stowe first opened in February 2016, he initially worried he’d made a mistake. “People didn’t know what kava was,” Stowe said. “Lately, it’s just been amazing how slammed it gets,” he says, believing things really took off about six months ago.

There are different stressful things that have happened in America, you know with Trump getting elected,” he said. “I think all those things have contributed.” Stowe is now busy planning other locations, collaborations and pop-ups—he is talking to both a yoga studio and a meditation studio about selling it there. So has President Trump helped his business? “I hate to say it, but probably,” he says. — AFP

Different types of Kava are listed on the menu at Brooklyn Kava.

Anxiety

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Herbalist Macon McGinnis, 25, sits under a mural on the wall at Brooklyn Kava.
In collaboration with National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL) and the US Embassy in Kuwait, American Artist Jackie Kazarian exhibited her art collection at the Modern Art Museum in Sharq on Wednesday. In his opening speech, Ambassador of the United States of America to the State of Kuwait Lawrence R Silverman said: “On the heels of the Ghrain festival, this exhibition affirms that Kuwait has a long list of ongoing cultural activities on its national calendar. We are delighted to support these activities by bringing American artist Jackie Kazarian here to display her artwork along with the museum’s many other fine pieces of modern art.”

He added, “Kazarian is an abstract artist who uses a variety of media to paint, draw, and collage. Her artwork is inspired by nature-weather phenomena, waterfalls and flows, trees and plants - and also by architecture, particularly by urban spaces. Kazarian’s work is in many private and public collections, and her paintings, drawings, installations, and videos have been exhibited in museums and galleries worldwide, including the United States, Spain, Japan, Syria, and now - for the first time in the Gulf - Kuwait.”

Her paintings are known for their emotional content, vivid colors and kinetic brushwork.

Artist Kazarian expressed her happiness about participating in Kuwait and thanked the US Ambassador and Secretary General of the National Council Ali Al-Youha for their support. Kazarian who has been passionate about art since she was young, has more than 30 years of experience. She has a Masters degree in Fine Arts from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and a Bachelor degree of Science in Zoology from Duke University. “I use a variety of drawing techniques using ink, watercolor, gouache and acrylic on paper,” she said.

Kazarian will work intensively with students from Kuwait University this week, onsite at the Souq Al-Mubarakiyya and at Free Atelier. In her workshops she will teach tips and tricks of the trade. Also she will give one more public lecture at the Contemporary Art Platform.
If you are looking for an eye-appealing and delicious vegetarian dish, try these stuffed peppers. Rather than baking the filling in the peppers in the traditional way, the stuffed peppers in this recipe have the filling and peppers each prepared separately and then combined before serving. For variety in color, use a mix of red, orange and yellow peppers. If your grocery store does not have the red lentils called for in the recipe, substitute brown or green instead. Brown and green lentils tend to hold their shape more after cooking, unlike red lentils that will be softer after cooking.

**Ingredients**

Makes 6 servings

- 2 medium yellow onions
- 2 stalks celery
- 2 carrots
- 6 sprigs oregano
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 4 cups vegetable stock, divided
- 3 cups red lentils
- 6 bell peppers
- 3 ounces feta cheese
- Fresh-cracked black pepper, to taste

**Preparation**

Finely dice the onions and celery. Peel and dice the carrots. Reserve the top parts of the oregano sprigs and chop the remaining leaves. Heat the oil to medium temperature in a large saucepot. Add the onions, carrots and celery; sauté for 5 minutes, then add 1 cup of the vegetable stock and the lentils. Simmer for 15 to 20 minutes, until the lentils are fully cooked. Cut off the tops of the peppers, leaving the stems attached and remove the seeds. Place the peppers in a shallow pot with the remaining 3 cups vegetable stock. Cover and simmer for 10 minutes, then remove from heat and drain. In a bowl, mix together the lentil mixture, the chopped oregano, feta and black pepper; spoon the mixture into the peppers. Serve the peppers with the stem tops ajar. Garnish with reserved oregano tops.

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Friday, February 2, 2018

**KEEP YOUR HEALTHY EATING PLAN MOVING FORWARD THIS YEAR WITH THESE RECIPES**

Are you having success with your goal to make more healthy meal choices for the new year or has it been difficult to stay on track? There is a variety of resources available to you to make that job easier. One of those resources is the Expanded Food & Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP), through the Montana State University Extension Service and USDA. They have a website, buyeatlivebetter.org, that features nutritious, low-cost and simple-to-fix meals. Two of the following recipes come from calendars prepared on a yearly basis by the Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. Complete calendars are available through the university.

**FISH AND NOODLE SKILLET**

It is recommended that we include fish in our meals at least two times per week. This healthy and easy-to-prepare fish and noodle skillet will provide one of those fish meals. The recipe includes the inexpensive and now a popular menu item - ramen noodles. If desired, salmon could be used in place of cod, however the cost is less expensive.

**Ingredients**

Makes 4 servings

- 1 tablespoon oil (canola, olive or vegetable)
- 1 pound white fish (cod, tilapia)
- 1 cup onion, chopped (1 medium)
- 1 carrot, diced
- 1 package (14-ounce) frozen stir fry vegetables (thawed and drained)
- 1 cup water
- 1 package (3-ounce) chicken flavored instant ramen noodles (broken into pieces)

**Preparation**

Heat oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Cut fish into chunks (about 1 to 2 inches) while oil is heating. Add fish, onion and carrot to oil. Sauté until fish is cooked through and vegetables are tender, about 6 minutes. Add the thawed stir fry vegetables to the skillet. Stir and heat about 2 minutes. Add the ramen noodle seasoning packet to the water. Stir into the skillet. Add the ramen noodles to the skillet when the water simmers. Stir to moisten the noodles. Cover the skillet and cook until done, about 2 minutes. Serve immediately.

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**Lentil stuffed peppers**

If you are looking for an eye-appealing and delicious vegetarian dish, try these stuffed peppers. Rather than baking the filling in the peppers in the traditional way, the stuffed peppers in this recipe have the filling and peppers each prepared separately and then combined before serving. For variety in color, use a mix of red, orange and yellow peppers. If your grocery store does not have the red lentils called for in the recipe, substitute brown or green instead. Brown and green lentils tend to hold their shape more after cooking, unlike red lentils that will be softer after cooking.

**Ingredients**

Makes 6 servings

- 2 medium yellow onions
- 2 stalks celery
- 2 carrots
- 6 sprigs oregano
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 4 cups vegetable stock, divided
- 3 cups red lentils
- 6 bell peppers
- 3 ounces feta cheese
- Fresh-cracked black pepper, to taste

**Preparation**

Finely dice the onions and celery. Peel and dice the carrots. Reserve the top parts of the oregano sprigs and chop the remaining leaves. Heat the oil to medium temperature in a large saucepot. Add the onions, carrots and celery; sauté for 5 minutes, then add 1 cup of the vegetable stock and the lentils. Simmer for 15 to 20 minutes, until the lentils are fully cooked. Cut off the tops of the peppers, leaving the stems attached and remove the seeds. Place the peppers in a shallow pot with the remaining 3 cups vegetable stock. Cover and simmer for 10 minutes, then remove from heat and drain. In a bowl, mix together the lentil mixture, the chopped oregano, feta and black pepper; spoon the mixture into the peppers. Serve the peppers with the stem tops ajar. Garnish with reserved oregano tops.
Sauteed Duck Breasts are elegant entree for Valentine’s Day

By Sara Moulton

With Valentine’s Day looming, here’s an elegant entree that any basic cook can execute with ease. I’m talking about duck breasts with a five-ingredient sauce, the making of which requires all of 15 minutes of hands-on time. But first, let’s address a few common misconceptions about duck. Pekin duck - the kind of duck called for in this recipe and the one most readily available at stores and online - is not gamy. It’s also not fattening, especially if you remove the skin. (I’ll confess that I love the skin. It’s where all of the crispiness lives.)

Finally, though, there are at least three other reasons to roll with a duck breast on this special occasion, none of which has anything to do with health: it’s scrumptious, it cooks as quickly as a steak or a pork chop, and it’s a great landing pad for any of the sauces you would put on either of those meats.

The sauce in this recipe for Sauteed Duck Breasts is a classic of French cuisine: shallots, wine, cream, mustard and peppercorns. The cream doubles as a thickener because that’s the superpower it develops when it’s reduced. Don’t have green peppercorns at hand? Use crushed black peppercorns. Or, if you’d prefer to lose the sauce’s peppery bite, leave out the peppercorns entirely.

Two tips about cooking duck breast: First, let it cook for the majority of the necessary time with the skin side down so that the skin becomes crispy and the fat is rendered out. Leave the hot fat in the pan as it accumulates; it helps to melt even more fat from the skin. Secondly, be sure to let the duck breast rest after it’s been cooked. As with any other animal protein, cooking the breast chases its juices to its outside layers. As the breast rests, the juices are reabsorbed, which prevents the duck from drying out when sliced.

Ingredients

- 2 Pekin duck breast halves (about 8 ounces each)
- 2 tablespoons minced shallots
- 1/3 cup dry white wine
- 1/2 cup heavy cream
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- 1 tablespoon drained green peppercorns in brine

Preparation

Using a very sharp knife, lightly score the skin on each duck breast half in a crisscross pattern, all the way down but not through the meat. Pat the duck dry. Sprinkle the skin side lightly with the salt and in a large, cold skillet, place the duck, skin side down. Turn the heat to medium and cook until the fat starts to render out into the pan. Reduce the heat to medium-low and continue cooking the duck breasts until the skin looks very crispy, about 8 minutes. Do not pour off the fat: the liquid fat in the pan helps to render out the fat in the skin.

When the duck skin is crisp, transfer the breasts to a plate. Pour off all but 1 tablespoon of the fat from the pan (reserve it for another use, such as sauteing vegetables). Return the duck to the skillet, skin side up, and cook for another 3 to 5 minutes for medium-rare. Transfer the duck to a clean plate, skin side up. Cover it loosely with foil and let it rest for 10 minutes before slicing.

Add the shallots to the pan and cook them over medium heat, stirring, for 1 minute. Add the wine to the skillet, increase the heat to high and simmer until the wine is reduced to about 2 tablespoons. Add the cream, bring it to a boil and simmer until it is reduced by one-third and thickened, about 3 minutes. Whisk in the mustard, peppercorns, duck juices from the plate the duck is resting on and salt to taste. To serve: Put the duck breasts on a cutting board, skin side down, and slice them very thin at an angle. Transfer the slices to each of two plates and spoon some of the sauce over each portion.
Cheesy jalapeno snacks for the Super Bowl? Score!

By Ellie Krieger

Everything about jalapeno poppers is fun. It’s no wonder they’re a bar-food staple. They require minimal commitment – each is just a bite or two with no cutlery necessary. As the name suggests, you just pop one in your mouth and let the flavor begin. Inside their golden crisp coating there’s the thrill of the pepper and eating it is a little like accepting a playful dare, because you never know exactly how much heat it will pack. They say 1 in 10 has some kick to it. No worries though, because the center is packed with a creamy, cheesy filling to immediately quench any heat.

This recipe delivers all that enjoyment, but in a more healthful way than the typical fried version, so you feel just as good after eating them as you do while you are popping away. These are baked, so while they are amply crispy thanks to their olive oil-coated panko bread crumb crust, they are not at all greasy. Also, their creamy stuffing is less dense, taking advantage of a light blend of cheeses, ricotta and whipped cream cheese spiked with just enough shredded Monterey Jack. You will love serving them at a game-day party not only because they are fun for your guests, but also because they can be made in advance and reheated – which means you’ll be in on the fun as well.

**Baked Jalapeno Poppers**

**Ingredients**

- 2 ounces grated Monterey Jack cheese (1/2 cup packed)
- 1/3 cup whipped cream cheese
- 1/3 cup part-skim ricotta cheese
- 2 tablespoons minced fresh cilantro leaves
- 10 medium jalapeno peppers, halved lengthwise
- 3 tablespoons flour
- 1/2 teaspoon salt (divided use)
- 1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper (divided use)
- 2 large eggs
- 1 cup plain panko bread crumbs
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder (granulated garlic)
- 1 tablespoon olive oil

**Preparation**

Position a rack in the upper third of the oven; preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Lightly grease a baking sheet with cooking-oil spray. Stir together the Monterey Jack cheese, cream cheese, ricotta cheese and cilantro in a bowl, until well incorporated. Use about 2 teaspoons of the mixture to fill each jalapeno half. Spread flour on a plate and season with 1/2 teaspoon of the salt and 1/8 teaspoon of the pepper. Beat the eggs in a separate bowl. Spread the panko bread crumbs on a separate plate and season with the garlic powder and the remaining 1/4 teaspoon salt and 1/8 teaspoon black pepper. Toss the seasoned bread crumbs with oil until evenly coated.

Toss each stuffed jalapeno in the seasoned flour, shaking off any excess, then in the egg and finally in the seasoned panko, shaking off the excess. Each piece should be coated all around in the mixture. Arrange the coated jalapenos, cut sides up, on the baking sheet. Roast (upper rack) for 30 to 35 minutes, until the coating is golden brown and the cheese has melted a bit. Serve warm.
ACROSS 1. (computer science) A computer that is running software that allows users to leave messages and access information of general interest. 4. MLB throwing stone at. 12. Rosinlike substance secreted by certain lac insects. 15. A flat wing-shaped process or winglike part of an organ. 16. A short amusing opera. 18. Used of a single unit or thing. 20. Insectivorous usually semiaquatic web-footed amphibian with smooth moist skin and large powerful hind legs and a long thick tail. 24. Evergreen tree of eastern Asia and Philippine countries formed after World War II to become a tributary of the Colorado River. 26. A metric unit of volume equal to one tenth of a liter. 32. Of the appetites and passions of the body. 35. Sole genus of the family Naiadaceae. 37. A plaything that is ridden up and down especially a sealed sterile container for injection or (especially originally) on a griddle. 40. The 17th letter of the Hebrew alphabet. 43. A state in New England. 44. Steady recurrent ticking sound as made by a clock.

DOWN 1. With no effort to conceal. 2. (Scottish) Bluish-black or gray-blue. 3. Goddess of criminal rashness and its punishment. 8. Marked by excessive self-indulgence and moral decay. 10. (astronomy) A measure of time defined by Earth’s orbital motion. 11. The sense organ for hearing and equilibrium. 13. A blue dye obtained from plants or made synthetically. 14. The basic unit of money in Bangladesh. 16. A nearly horizontal passage from the abdomen organs and empties into the posterior part of the right atrium of the heart. 18. A local computer network for communication between computers. 21. Wild sheep of northern Africa. 22. Lacking or deprived of the sense of hearing wholly or in part. 22. Lacking or deprived of the sense of hearing wholly or in part. 27. Mixing very fast. 28. Harsh or corrosive in tone. 29. A polite name for any woman. 30. Either of two flat triangular bones one on each side of the shoulder in human beings. 31. A barrier constructed to contain the flow or water or to keep out the sea. 36. A small bottle that contains a drug (especially a sealed sterile container for injection or especially a sealed sterile container for injection or especially a sealed sterile container for injection). 37. A playing field that is ridden up and down by children at either end. 38. A poisonous colorless flammable gas used in organic synthesis and to dope tranquilizers and as a poison gas in warfare. 39. Small biscuit (rich with cream and eggs) cut into diamonds or sticks and baked in an oven or (especially originally) on a griddle. 40. The basic unit of money in Bangladesh. 41. A poisonous colorless flammable gas used in organic synthesis and to dope tranquilizers and as a poison gas in warfare. 42. A musical composition consisting of a series of songs or other musical pieces arranged in a definite order by a composer. 43. A flat wing-shaped process or winglike part of an organ. 44. Steady recurrent ticking sound as made by a clock.

Yesterday’s Solution

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**TV Listings**

00:00 | Britain's Darkest Taboos |
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00:40 | Henry Hugglemonster |
00:55 | Henry Hugglemonster |
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**TV Listings**

**Friday, February 2, 2018**

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<td>Street Food Around The World</td>
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<td>Sara's Australia Unveiled</td>
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<td>My Restaurant In India</td>
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<td>Places We Go</td>
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**Prominent Shows:**

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  - Home Improvement
- **11:30 PM**
  - The Food Files
- **12:00 AM**
  - Street Food Around The World
- **12:30 AM**
  - The Food Files
- **1:00 AM**
  - My Pacific Quest
- **1:30 AM**
  - Raw Travel
- **2:00 AM**
  - The Food Files
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- **12:30 PM**
  - The Food Files
Aries (March 21-April 19)

Aries, something you’ve wanted badly shows up causing serious temptation! Think carefully before making a decision that could cause drastic changes. Vibrations of self-control is available if you choose to accept them. Your contributions are held in high esteem and very welcome. Taking one more look at a perplexing problem reveals answers you have sought for some time. On a personal note, if you demand too much you could do irreparable damage. The mood to see about your personal financial affairs is prominent. You could be quick witted and face a difficult situation in control of this or you could create a rift. Enjoy some time outside this evening; now could be the time to try out one mood to see about your personal financial affairs is prominent. You could be at a perplexing problem reveals answers you have sought for some time. On a personal note, if you demand too much you could do irreparable damage. The mood to see about your personal financial affairs is prominent. You could be quick witted and face a difficult situation in control of this or you could create a rift. Enjoy some time outside this evening; now could be the time to try out one mood to see about your personal financial affairs is prominent. You could be at a perplexing problem reveals answers you have sought for some time. On a personal note, if you demand too much you could do irreparable damage. The mood to see about your personal financial affairs is prominent. You could be quick witted and face a difficult situation in control of this or you could create a rift. Enjoy some time outside this evening; now could be the time to try out one mood to see about your personal financial affairs is prominent. You could be at a perplexing problem reveals answers you have sought for some time. On a personal note, if you demand too much you could do irreparable damage. The mood to see about your personal financial affairs is prominent. You could be quick witted and face a difficult situation in control of this or you could create a rift.
Galapagos hosts nursery for new species of giant tortoise

PUERTO AYORA, Ecuador: Crowded under a rock in the Galapagos archipelago, the baby tortoises wait for the sun to go down to leave their shelter. Nothing disturbs these eastern Santa Cruz tortoises (scientific name Chelondis donfaustoi), which were determined just two years ago to be a new species native to the Ecuadoran islands that inspired Charles Darwin. Kept safe on Santa Cruz island and raised in captivity, their nursery is one of three centers in the archipelago’s national park where 12 species of giant tortoises, unique in the world, are bred.

Stretching their necks and poking their heads out of tiny shells, they nibble on nutritious, starchy leaves of tropical plants brought in from the continent 1,000 kilometers away. Digestion plunges them into afternoon slumber. “We let them stay a little hungry. That way, when they return to the wild they go looking for their food,” the director of the national park, Walter Bustos, said.

Long lifespan
It’s not yet time to let the tortoises go free. For that, their shells have to be 23 to 25 centimeters long, meaning around four or five years of age. That’s an insignificant span for these reptiles that can live up to a century and a half, reaching up to two meters long and weighing up to 450 kilograms. The eggs hatched several months earlier in the center, with several broods. In all, the park now has 120 of the eastern Santa Cruz tortoises born in captivity, joining the better-known Galapagos giant tortoise (Chelonoidis nigra) on this string of volcanic islands in the Pacific.

Ancient genus
Giant tortoises arrived in the Galapagos around three or four million years ago, and it appears ocean currents likely scattered them across the islands. They developed into 15 species, of which three are extinct, each adapting to its territory. The tortoise population was decimated by pirates and whalers who captured them for their meat, and who introduced invasive species such as dogs, goats and rats.

The tortoises’ fat, transformed into oil, for a long time fueled street lamps in Ecuador’s capital Quito and the city of Guayaquil on the Pacific coast. “The tortoises are sorts of engineers in the ecosystem,” Washington Tapia, a biologist at the US-based Galapagos Conservancy, said. “Through their movements they shape their environment, creating spaces where other species can develop, and they are the best sowers of grain that exist.” —AFP
Govt appeals to rural India in budget before election

Finance Minister Jaitley announces national healthcare scheme

NEW DELHI: India’s government promised hundreds of billions of dollars to develop poor rural areas and help struggling farmers in its annual budget yesterday, looking to win over voters ahead of the next general election. Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said the government would spend $220 billion on rural infrastructure, including building new roads and toilets and bringing electricity to millions of rural households.

Jaitley also announced a national healthcare scheme that will enable half a billion poor Indians to access up to 500,000 rupees a year for treatment, a key step in a country where many people have little access to affordable medical care. But small businesses and the rural economy were the main focus of the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government’s last full-year budget before national elections due by May 2019.

“While making the proposals in this year’s budget, we have been guided by our mission to especially strengthen agriculture, rural development, health, education, employment, MSME (micro, small and medium-sized enterprises) and infrastructure sectors of the Indian economy,” Jaitley told parliament as he summed up the budget. “I am sure the new India which we aspire to create now will emerge.” The majority of India’s 1.25 billion population lives in the countryside, and winning rural voters is key to election victory in the world’s largest democracy.

The government promised in the previous budget to double farmer incomes in the next five years and bring 10 million households out of poverty by 2019. But many still live and work in near penury at the mercy of loan sharks and a harsh climate, and rural disaffection has stoked protests and a rise in farmer suicides in recent years. Access to water is particularly problematic in India, where less than half of all agricultural land is irrigated.

Announcing the healthcare scheme, Jaitley said India would be unable to realize the demographic dividend of its burgeoning youth population without healthy citizens. “This will be the world’s largest government-funded healthcare program,” he said. India lacks sufficient doctors for its huge population, and state-run hospitals are stretched to breaking point.

On education, Jaitley said India had succeeded in getting more children into schools, but that the quality of teaching needed to improve. “Technology will be the biggest driver in improving the quality of education,” he said. Analysts said the budget shortfall of 3.5 percent in the fiscal year 2017/18 was in line with expectations. Next year’s target has been set lower, at 3.3 percent. India’s economic growth slumped to 5.7 percent in the first quarter of the current financial year—the lowest in three years—but has since bounced back.

The government estimates the economy will grow by 7.2-7.5 percent in the second half of the current fiscal year and has said the country is on track to achieve growth of eight percent “soon”. The Bombay Stock Exchange’s benchmark Sensex index fell 0.46 percent or 165.52 points on the budget announcement. —AFP
Equities battle rising global bond yields to snap end-Jan losing streak

Wall Street set for flat open, stock futures signal

**LONDON**: European stocks rose yesterday after three days of losses, although US and German bond yields near multi-year highs checked gains in world stock markets and kept them from testing recent record highs. Stock markets in Europe rose 0.25 percent, supported by a flurry of mostly positive earnings results, while Japan’s blue-chip stock index bounced 1.7 percent off four-week lows and MSCI’s all-country equity index was marginally higher.

US equity futures however pointed to a flat open for Wall Street ahead of earnings announcements from tech giants Apple, Alphabet and Amazon.com.

January’s last trading session on Wall Street ended in the red, but US indexes still ended with monthly gains of over 5 percent. World stocks enjoyed a record 15-month winning streak.

This week’s meeting of the US Federal Reserve was more hawkish than expected, but confirmed what markets had already expected - an interest rate rise is likely in March, said Markus Huber, a trader at Brokerage City of London Markets.

“In light of today’s flood of earnings in Europe and the United States, the Fed meeting will most likely have only a limited and temporary impact on markets,” Huber predicted. Global equity markets are torn between buoyant economic growth and double-digit company earnings, on the one hand, and the possibility that US and euro zone central banks will tighten policy faster than expected. The growth momentum was confirmed by manufacturing activity surveys yesterday that showed Asian factories getting off to a strong 2018 start and Europe posting solid growth.

Boeing and Facebook were the latest to reinforce the solid US earnings growth picture. European markets cheered improved performance at Unilever and Royal Dutch Shell Huber said results from the likes of Amazon and Apple would be crucial. “It will be essential that those companies not only deliver in regard to earnings expectations but also show that the momentum going forward remains strong,” he added. Equity bullishness is being tempered, however, by rising global bond yields.

The Fed held interest rates unchanged on Wednesday but raised its inflation outlook, no longer saying it expected price growth to stay below 2 percent. It also flagged “further gradual” rate increases. That wording convinced many that rates could rise four times this year, rather than three. US 10-year Treasury yields surged to near four-year highs above 2.75 percent after the Fed statement, while German Bund yields on Thursday rose to fresh two-year highs at around 0.74 percent.

Two-year US yields are near decade-highs and could rise further should jobs data due today confirm sustained labor market strength. Long-end US yields are still rising and that’s spilling over on the European market and (German) Bunds especially, said Commerzbank rates strategist Rainer Guntermann. Pressure is building on euro zone authorities, too, to curb stimulus, with employment at record highs and Thursday’s manufacturing surveys confirming the bloc’s growth boom. On currency markets, the dollar’s post-Fed bounce fizzled, pushing it down 0.1 percent against a basket of currencies. The euro gained 0.2 percent to $1.2440, just off recent three-year highs of $1.2538. The British pound rose 0.25 percent, after a 5 percent gain in January, its biggest monthly rise since May 2009, owing to broad dollar weakness and expectations of a Brexit deal more favorable to the UK. —Reuters

**NEW YORK**: The day’s closing numbers are displayed after the closing bell of the Dow Industrial Average at the New York Stock Exchange in New York. —AFP

**World stocks enjoyed 15-month winning streak**

**Friday, February 2, 2018**

**Emerging stocks dip as investors eye more hawkish Fed**

**LONDON**: Encouraging factory growth data from markets such as Turkey and China failed to lift emerging equities yesterday as a more hawkish Federal Reserve fuelled an uptick in US Treasury yields, dampening investor appetite. MSCIs benchmark emerging stocks index fell 0.2 percent, as a strong performance in emerging Europe failed to offset earlier weakness in the Asian session.

The Fed upgraded its inflation outlook and flagged further policy tightening this year at its meeting ending on Wednesday, citing solid gains in employment, household spending and capital investment. US 10-year Treasury yields briefly shot up to 2.754 percent, a level last seen in April 2014, casting a pall over emerging markets and dispelling some of the rosy picture from manufacturing activity data.

US interest rate futures are now almost fully pricing in three rate hikes this year, compared to two at the start of the year, while some see a possibility of four rate rises. “Now that Fed is signaling faster hikes we could have temporary dollar strength and EM weakness, but the fundamentals are the same,” said Per Hammarlund, chief emerging markets strategist at SEB. “This is just a temporary correction, rather than a fundamental shift in sentiment.”

Foreign investors poured $30 billion into emerging markets in January, a seven-month high and the best start to a year since 2015, according to Institute of International Finance data. In emerging Europe, Turkish stocks rose 1 percent per cent after Turkey’s factory activity grew at the fastest rate in almost seven years in January. Other big gainers included Russia, up 0.9 percent after manufacturing activity hit a six-month high, and Poland up 0.7 percent, as new factory orders expanded at their fastest in three years.

Asian bourses struggled, with Chinese mainland shares down almost 1 percent. Yet China’s manufacturing growth remained elevated in January, suggesting some resilience. “The world economy and China in particular have started the year on a relatively firm footing and that’s good news for emerging stocks and assets,” said Hammarlund.

In India, stocks initially fell more than 1 percent after the announcement of a long-term capital gains tax on equities. The market later steadied to trade flat. The government also unveiled a budget allocating billions of dollars for rural infrastructure and a health insurance program. The rupee weakened about 0.38 percent. South Africa’s rand was the other main currency underperformer, down 0.2 percent.

President Jacob Zuma has asked prosecutors to drop corruption charges, responding as pressure mounts for him to step down. The Czech crown was steady against the euro ahead of a central bank meeting today at which it is expected to raise rates by 25 basis points to 0.75 percent. Czech manufacturing sentiment held at a seven-year high in January. “All the signs are that the economy is red hot, the labor market is booming, wage growth is picking up strongly ... so even though inflation hasn’t picked up as much, the central bank is correct in expecting that there will be a pick up at some point,” said Hammarlund. —Reuters

**Friday, February 2, 2018**

**Emerging stocks dip as investors eye more hawkish Fed**

**NEW YORK**: The day’s closing numbers are displayed after the closing bell of the Dow Industrial Average at the New York Stock Exchange in New York. —AFP

**Emerging stocks dip as investors eye more hawkish Fed**

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**World stocks enjoyed 15-month winning streak**

**Friday, February 2, 2018**

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**Emerging stocks dip as investors eye more hawkish Fed**

**NEW YORK**: The day’s closing numbers are displayed after the closing bell of the Dow Industrial Average at the New York Stock Exchange in New York. —AFP
VIVA, Kuwait’s fastest-growing and most developed telecom operator, announced the financial results for the full year ended on 31 December 2017, whereby VIVA’s revenues reached KWD 278 million compared to KD 279 million recorded during 2016; whereas the net profit in 2017 reached KD 40 million. On quarterly basis, VIVA recorded a remarkable performance with revenues rising by 7.2% to reach KD 73.4 million during Q4-2017 compared to KD 68.5 million recorded during the same quarter in 2016. On the other hand, VIVA achieved a 10% growth in net profit of KD 11.8 million during Q4 2017 compared to a net profit of KD 10.8 million reported during Q4 2016. These results reflect VIVA’s focus on achieving superior customer experience, high quality of services, innovative promotions and packages offered to its customers to meet their needs and expectations, inspired by our customers’ confidence which motivates us to provide the best services with the highest possible quality.

Commenting on announcing the annual financial results, Dr. Mahmoud Ahmed Abdulrahman, VIVA’s Chairman, has stated that “Despite the high competition witnessed in the Kuwait Telecom Market, VIVA was able to achieve a growth in the profitability and sustain the operational efficiency to ensure generating positive return to our shareholders. VIVA achieved these results due to an integrated management approach by a highly professional team that reinforces VIVA’s substantial and positive role as a leading telecommunications company that always provides intelligent communications solutions to satisfy the needs of its customers and meet their needs.”

Reporting on the company’s performance, VIVA’s CEO, Eng. Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Badran, said that “Results of 2017 came in line with VIVA’s goals and ongoing ambitions to achieve an increase in its operational businesses and strengthen its leadership in the telecom market. It is noteworthy to mention that VIVA won this year “Speedtest Award Winner 2017 – Kuwait’s Fastest Mobile Network” by Ookla, and it is pioneer in the middle east in providing the latest products and services to its customers among telecom operators in the middle east region, and achieved successfully the establishment of the first Voice Over LTE (VoLTE) interconnection in the Middle East and North Africa region in partnership with local networks, and was the first telecom company in Kuwait that has successfully tested the fifth-generation “5G” in its lab, which fosters its leadership in providing the latest technology that will enable customers to exchange information and communicate at higher speeds.”

Also, Al Badran added that “We have exerted great efforts in 2017 through our integrated team work to establish a solid and strong base that insures the company’s continuing successes in light of the high competition in the Kuwaiti telecom market. VIVA achieved good levels of revenues and record a growth in the profitability in addition to improving the company’s financial and operational efficiency. As a result, VIVA recorded revenues of KWD 278 million during FY 2017 and achieved net profit of KWD 40.1 million (earnings per share of 80 fils) in 2017, whereas the operating profit has reached KWD 42.6 million during the same year. On the other hand, VIVA’s customer base has reached 2.3 million at the end of December 2017.

On his part, Mr. Mohammed Bin Abdul Mohsen Al Assaf, VIVA’s CFO, said that “During 2017, VIVA’s financial results reflected its ability to compete and achieve growth in revenues during Q4-2017, and maintain its position as the second largest telecom operator in the Kuwaiti market in terms of revenues in the telecom sector. The company managed to decrease its leverage ratio due to its conservative financial policy to reach 0.05x at the end of 2017 as compared to 0.36x recorded at end of 2016. On the other hand, VIVA managed to sustain healthy profitability ratios in light of intense competition where Return On Assets (ROA) has reached 14% while return on shareholders’ equity (ROE) has reached 24% in 2017. “We will continue our hard work in implementing our strategy to maintain our competitive edge and achieve further growth and success in the Kuwaiti telecom market through offering innovative products and services in line with the latest technology to meet our customers’ needs.” he added.

About VIVA
VIVA is the fastest-growing telecom operator in Kuwait. Launched in December 2008, VIVA makes things more for its customers by transforming their communication, information and entertainment experiences. The company has rapidly established a pioneer position in the market through its customer-centric approach. VIVA’s quest is to be the mobile brand of choice in Kuwait by being transparent, engaging, energetic and fulfilling. VIVA continues to take a considerable share of the market by offering an innovative range of best value products, services and content propositions; a state of the art, nationwide network and world-class service. VIVA offers internet speeds of more than 100 Mbps, due to the implementation of the most advanced fourth generation “4G LTE” network in Kuwait resulting in superior coverage, performance and reliability, and has been recognized as “Speedtest Award Winner 2017 – Kuwait’s Fastest Mobile Network”, based on Ookla’s analysis of Speedtest Intelligence data in Q2-Q3 2017.

For more information, visit VIVA at one of its 89 branches or on www.viva.com.kw or any of its authorized dealers across Kuwait.
Relocation of 300 farmers sparks anger among locals

DUKEM, Ethiopia: The scenic road from Addis Ababa to the small town of Dukem is peppered with signs of industry: warehouses and factories, garages and gas stations, newly-built rail tracks and a freshly paved highway. Dukem, just a short drive south of the capital, is home to Ethiopia’s first industrial park, the Chinese-owned Eastern Industrial Zone (EIZ), and some of the country’s most fertile land.

For more than a decade, it has been on the front-line of a government-led push to turn the still overwhelmingly agricultural country into Africa’s manufacturing hub. Chinese companies are constructing five industrial zones, while the government plans to have 15 industrial parks nationwide by June 2018. Last year, the EIZ, which hosts companies ranging from shoe manufacturers and steel-makers to leather processors and car assemblers, embarked on a new expansion phase.

The move, which means expropriating an additional 167 hectares of rural land around Dukem and the relocation of around 300 farmers, has sparked anger among locals and reopened old wounds. “We were the first,” Shewangizaw, a middle-aged farmer whose family has lived on land in Dukem for generations, said. Yet the anger expressed by Shewangizaw and his fellow farmers is echoed across much of central Ethiopia, which has experienced rapid urbanization his land back in 2007 and are now being given additional land to support them, he said. Yet the anger expressed by Shewangizaw and his fellow farmers is echoed across much of central Ethiopia, which has experienced rapid urbanization.

In 2014, a plan to expand Addis Ababa into the surrounding region and now renting one hectare from an older neighbor for 10,000 birr ($367) a year. The local government was now addressing the concerns of farmers. That includes 190 farmers and their children who lost their land back in 2007 and are now being given additional land to support them, he said. Yet the anger expressed by Shewangizaw and his fellow farmers is echoed across much of central Ethiopia, which has experienced rapid urbanization.

“Promising the government to impose a nine-month state of emergency, Peace has now returned to Dukem’s streets, but farmers’ land has been earmarked by the EIZ for future development are frustrated and angry once more. “Our land came from our ancestors,” said Tekalign Chaka, a 57-year-old farmer in nearby Goticha village, who said he would lose his remaining farmland this year. “I was hoping to give it to my children too. Now I have nothing for them to inherit.” He and his neighbors tried to resist the plan, he recounted, prompting the government to impose a nine-month state of emergency. Peace has now returned to Dukem’s streets, but farmers’ land has been earmarked by the EIZ for future development are frustrated and angry once more.

The Chinese foreign ministry said Beijing was not clear whether the ban would affect all cryptocurrency ads on the social media site. Facebook could not immediately be reached for comment.

India’s finance minister vowed yesterday to eliminate the use of cryptocurrencies. A $530 million hack of Japanese cryptocurrency exchange Coincheck last week has also weighed on the market, along with a subpoena US regulators sent to two of the world’s biggest cryptocurrency players, Bitfinex and Tether.

“Sentiment towards cryptocurrencies is turning sour with negative headlines pouring out from left, right and center,” said Fawad Razaqzada, an analyst at FOREX.com. “Concerns that Facebook is banning ads and major crypto exchanges shutting down have really silenced the hype and some people are probably having second thoughts about investing their hard-earned cash into digital currencies.”

Australia toughens foreign investment rules amid China concerns

SYDNEY: Australia announced tougher restrictions on foreign buyers of agricultural land and electricity infrastructure yesterday amid fears over rising Chinese influence. Foreign investors now need to demonstrate when purchasing farmland worth more than Aus$15 million that they have an adequate opportunity to buy.

Treasurer Scott Morrison insisted Canberra still welcomed foreign investment in agricultural land “where it is not contrary to the national interest”. In a similar vein, foreign purchases of electricity infrastructure will also come under greater scrutiny, with a range of new restrictions including an assessment of the “cumulative level of ownership within a sector”.

Electricity distribution and transmission infrastructure are critical national assets and a key national security safeguard is the diversity of ownership of these assets,” Morrison said. “The government is committed to an open foreign investment regime that strikes the right balance between the national interest and enabling economic growth.”

The announcement comes amid growing concern over Chinese influence and influence in Australia, although China was not cited in the latest amendments.

The Chinese foreign ministry said Beijing “always encourages” Chinese companies to engage by local laws and regulations. “But at the same time we also hope that host countries can create enabling, open, fair and transparent environment for Chinese enterprises’ investment and operation in their countries’,” ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying told a regular press briefing.

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull last year announced wide-ranging reforms to espionage and foreign interference legislation, singling out China as a focus of concern, citing “disturbing reports” about Beijing’s influence.

It came after he ordered an inquiry following “disturbing reports” about Beijing’s influence. “It’s not fair,” said Shewangizaw. “Our families were just destroyed. At the time compensation paid to us was so, so cheap. And we don’t have any land to farm or live on now.”

ANGRY ONCE MORE

Muhammed Tahhan, vice-head of the Dukem Land Development and Management Office, said the local government was now addressing the concerns of farmers. That includes 190 farmers and their children who lost their land back in 2007 and are now being given additional land to support them, he said. Yet the anger expressed by Shewangizaw and his fellow farmers is echoed across much of central Ethiopia, which has experienced rapid urbanization.

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Row over monkey tests takes shine off Daimler’s record profits

Net profits soared by 24% to 10.9 billion euros

FRANKFURT AM MAIN: German luxury carmaker Daimler yesterday announced record profits for 2017 thanks to strong SUV and truck sales, but the results were overshadowed by the firm’s connection to controversial diesel exhaust tests on monkeys. Daimler said net profits soared by 24 percent last year to 10.9 billion euros, with a little help from a roughly one-billion-euro-cash boost from sweeping US tax reforms.

“The Daimler workforce has once again succeeded in breaking the records set in the previous year,” chief executive Dieter Zetsche said.

Group revenues were up seven percent to 164 billion, in line with analysts’ expectations, while underlying, or operating profits, climbed 14 percent to 14.7 billion euros. The company was muted in its outlook for 2018, however, predicting that unit sales and revenues would only “slightly” increase, in step with forecasts for the global demand for motor vehicles.

Operating profits for 2018 are expected to be “of the magnitude of the previous year”, Daimler said, as investments in new technologies such as electric and self-driving cars begin to weigh on the bottom line.

The group, which also makes Smart cars, said unit sales climbed to a record 3.3 million vehicles last year, driven by robust demand for its Mercedes-Benz urban SEVs and E-Class models, particularly in China. Daimler’s vans and trucks meanwhile enjoyed double-digit growth, led by the North America region. As a result of the group’s strong year, Daimler said it would raise dividends to an all-time high of 3.65 euros per share compared with 3.25 euros per share for 2016.

It also promised record bonuses of up to 5.700 euros to some 130,000 employees in Germany, out of 289,000 staff worldwide. The positive results come as Daimler is embroiled in a row over its role in tests that exposed monkeys to toxic diesel fumes in a US lab in 2015.

The experiments, revealed in a New York Times article last week, were commissioned by a now defunct research body funded by Daimler and fellow German auto giants BMW and Volkswagen.

Such experiments go against Daimler’s values, Zetsche told reporters in a conference call, vowing the company “would do everything to shed light on the matter”. He declined to give further details, saying Daimler wanted to finish its internal investigation first.

Daimler shares lost 1.63 percent to 72.53 euros in early afternoon trading in Frankfurt, against a Dax index that was largely flat. The controversy has brought fresh scrutiny to the powerful German car industry and the lengths automakers have gone through to hide the harmful effects of diesel engines. The crisis first erupted in 2015 when Volkswagen admitted to installing cheating devices in millions of diesel cars to make them seem less polluting in lab tests than they were in real driving conditions. Suspicions have since spread to other carmakers, including Daimler, and several German cities are mulling diesel bans to combat air pollution.

Diesel sales slip

Daimler’s sales of diesel cars have slipped by “two to three percent” in Europe in the wake of the technology’s fall from grace, but diesel still account for more than half of all engines sold, Zetsche said. German carmakers—who bet heavily on diesel as the more environmentally-friendly alternative to gasoline-powered cars—have responded to the “dieselgate” scandal by speeding up their transition to the cleaner, greener cars of the future. Like its rivals, Daimler is pouring money into developing electric and automated vehicles, as well as e-mobility services like car-sharing and ride-hailing through apps. Daimler said it had increased its spending on research and development by another 15 percent in 2017 to 8.7 billion euros. “It’s about nothing less than the reinvention of individual mobility,” said Zetsche.—AFP

Alibaba net profit soars 35% as Singles Day pays off

BEIJING: Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba yesterday posted a 35 percent surge in net profit in the third quarter, fuelled by a record-breaking sales bonanza during its annual Singles Day shopping festival. The company said profit jumped to 24.1 billion yuan between October and December, compared to 17.9 billion yuan in the same quarter in 2016. Alibaba runs an annual promotion on November 11 that draws the country’s growing consumer class which can buy an array of products at the click of a button on their smartphones.

Last year’s event recorded 168.2 billion yuan in pay-outs, a 30 percent increase from the 2016 festival. Rivals such as JD.com had also reported brisk business on November 11. “Alibaba had another great quarter driven by the continued strength of the Chinese consumer and the wide and innovative range of services we provide for merchants and consumers,” Alibaba chief executive Daniel Zhang said in an earnings report.

“We are excited by the continued momentum in new retail, which came to life during another record-breaking 11.11 Global Shopping Festival,” Zhang said. Alibaba, which has made billionaire founder Jack Ma one of China’s richest men and a global e-commerce icon, has been on a roll, regularly beating revenue estimates. The New York-listed company said revenue jumped 56 percent to 83 billion yuan in the third quarter.—AFP

Ice, ice baby: Unilever posts rising 2017 profits

THE HAGUE: Food and consumer products giant Unilever yesterday posted soaring 2017 profits of 6.5 billion euros, after a year of “major change” when it spurned a Kraft Heinz takeover bid. The announcement came a day after Unilever announced it was adding to its popular ice-cream ranges, which include Magnum, by scooping up Romania’s leading ice-cream maker, Betty Ice, for an undisclosed price.

Net profit leaped 16.9 percent on sales of 53.7 billion euros, up 1.9 percent year-on-year, which chief executive Paul Polman said “demonstrates the progress we have made in transforming Unilever into a more resilient and more agile business”. “We have delivered a good all-round performance with competitive growth”, he said in a statement, adding the company had also made two billion euros in savings during the year. “This puts us well on track towards our savings target of EUR6 billion, and a targeted underlying operating margin of 20 percent by 2020,” Polman said. The Rotterdam-based Unilever, which employs some 169,000 people around the world, owns more than 400 household brands including Dove beauty products, Knorr soups, Lipton teas, Magnum ice cream and Marmite. Since rejecting the bid by its US rival Kraft Heinz in February 2017, Unilever has sought to prove to shareholders that it is better off on its own and has vowed better profitability.

The company has been under “immense pressure to convince investors that it can go-it-alone,” said companies analyst Simon Jagdlev from the Economist Intelligence Unit. Now Unilever’s “aggressive acquisitions and new brand launches have paid off and helped it end a tough year on a positive note,” he added. The company bought up or took stakes in 11 companies in 2017, with a heavy focus on organic and natural products including Mae Terra organic food in Brazil and Pukka Herbs organic herbal tea in Britain.

“We are evolving the portfolio at an accelerated pace to ensure we have the platforms in place for long-term growth,” Polman said. Following the tensions triggered by Kraft Heinz’s unsolicited bid, Unilever unveiled a 3.5-billion-euro restructuring plan and announced the spin-off of its margarine division, hoping to soothe investors concerns after rejecting the proposed tie-up which would have valued the groups at $143 billion.—AFP
CAS overturns doping bans on 28 Russian athletes

CAS reduce lifetime Olympic bans to suspension from this year’s Games

ZURICH: Twenty-eight Russian athletes have had their Olympic doping bans overturned and their results from the 2014 Winter Games in Sochi reinstated after their appeals were upheld by sport's highest tribunal yesterday.

The Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) said in a statement that it had found insufficient evidence during last week's hearing in Geneva that the 28, banned by the International Olympic Committee (IOC), were guilty of anti-doping violations in Sochi.

However, it is not clear yet whether any of the 28 will be able to compete in the Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang, South Korea, which start on Feb. 9. "With respect to these 28 athletes, the appeals are upheld, the sanctions annulled and their individual results achieved in Sochi 2014 are reinstated," said the Lausanne-based tribunal.

Eleven other athletes were confirmed by CAS to have committed doping violations. However, CAS reduced their lifetime Olympic bans to a suspension from this year’s Games.

The IOC had previously banned Russia from the 2018 Winter Games but reinstated it after its appeal to CAS was upheld. The Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) ruled that the "good name" of Russian athletes, Interfax news agency reported.

Jim Walden, lawyer for Russia’s former anti-doping chief-turned whistleblower Grigory Rodchenkov, said the ruling provided "a very small measure of punishment for some athletes but a complete 'get out of jail free card' for most."

Walden added that Rodchenkov "testified fully and credibly" at CAS and his evidence was verified by forensic evidence and other whistle-blowers. Russia has repeatedly denied any state involvement in the doping which was exposed by an independent report commissioned by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA).

CAS said its mandate was "not to determine generally whether there was an organised scheme allowing the manipulation of doping control samples... but was strictly limited to dealing with 39 individual cases and to assess the evidence applicable to each athlete on an individual basis."

A total of 43 Russian athletes were banned by the IOC. Three more are still waiting to have their appeals heard and one- bob skeleton Maxim Belugin-has not appealed. —Reuters

Two Koreas, Shiffrin and Hanyu: Key moments for Pyeongchang

PARIS: After years of preparation, athletes from around the world will take part in the Winter Olympic Games in Pyeongchang, South Korea, from February 9-25. Competition will be fierce, and will produce a crop of golden memories. AFP Sports picks out a few of the most anticipated moments.

OPENING CEREMONY

Friday, February 9, 8.00 pm: The two-hour extravaganza that launches the Winter Games at the Pyeongchang Olympic Stadium will be memorable for at least one reason. Athletes from North and South Korea will march as one, wearing the same uniforms and under the unification flag—a pale blue Korean peninsula on a white background. A total of 22 North Korean competitors will be in Pyeongchang for the Games, with most of them joining a unified Korean women’s ice-hockey squad. The North's decision to compete in the Games, taking place just 80 kilometres (50 miles) south of the heavily fortified border that divides the Koreas, is seen as a diplomatic coup, following months of surging tensions over the North's nuclear and missile tests that triggered fears of war.

APRIL SKIING

Sunday, February 11, 11.00 am: The men's downhill is the blue riband event of alpine skiing. Racers will average 105 kilometres (65 miles) per hour down the Jeongseon Alpine Centre slope, pushing their bodies and equipment to the limit. The race will be particularly poignant following the on-piste deaths of popular Frenchman David Poisson and German teenager Max Burkhard earlier this season. Norwegian Aleks Lund Svindal and Kjetil Jansrud will likely top bookmakers’ odds on a slope said to favour the more technically able downhillers.

BIATHLON

Sunday, February 11, 8.35 pm: Martin Fourcade will carry France's flag at the opening ceremony, but his competition starts two days later when he lines up for the men's sprint. France's most decorated winter Olympian, with four medals including two golds, will be battling for more honours during the Games and after a strong World Cup season is expected to be a top contender for the pursuit and individual titles which he claimed in Sochi in 2014. The 29-year-old biathlete will face his biggest rival in the shape of Norway's Johannes Thingnes Bo.

ALPINE SKIING

Sunday, February 11, 10.15 am: When Mikaela Shiffrin rocks off the back of her ski to exit the start gate of the giant slalom at the Yongpyong Alpine Centre, she will harbour hopes of a rare multi-medal haul. The 22-year-old American already has 40 World Cup victories to her name, and won Olympic slalom gold in 2014 — but she is looking for much more in Pyeongchang. The giant slalom is followed by her slalom title defence, the super-G, downhill, combined and team events. A good start in the giant slalom could see Shiffrin join the pantheon of alpine greats.

SNOWBOARDING

Monday, February 12, 1.30 pm: Born in Long Beach, California, American snowboarder Chloe Kim is poised to become one of the faces of the Pyeongchang Games. The 17-year-old whizkid makes her Olympic bow, Kim's parents are from South Korea, and her grandmother still lives there, so she can expect vocal support from local fans as she looks to complete the formality of qualifying in the women's halfpipe. Such was Kim's prodigious talent that at 13, she could have challenged for gold at the 2014 Sochi Games, if not for the minimum age requirement of 15. Provided she keeps her nerve, the Winter Youth Olympic champion and three-time X Games winner clearly has the game to capture what would be an emotional gold in front of her one fan-her grandma.

SKI JUMPING

Monday, February 12, 9.30 pm: Haunted by the memory of her flop in Sochi four years ago, Japan's Naka Takanashi launches her bid for Olympic redemption in the women's normal hill. But despite being the most successful women's jumper of all time, Takanashi has suffered an alarming dip in form in rivals Maren Lundby and Katharina Althaus emerging as the gold medal favourites in Pyeongchang. A World Cup winger drought stretching back almost a year has done little to restore her brittle confidence, but if anyone can turn it around it is the mercurial 21-year-old Japanese. Takanashi, who will be Japan's flag-bearer at the opening ceremony, needs one more World Cup victory to set a new record total for men and women of 54. But it is Olympic gold she covets most, and the pressure will be on. —AFP
South Korean athletes land in South for Winter Olympics

799,000 out of 1.18 million tickets available sold

SEOUl: North Korean skiers and skaters arrived in the South yesterday to take part in the Pyeongchang Winter Games, setting the stage for a “peace Olympics” after a year of high tensions over Pyongyang’s nuclear programme.

Eight days before the opening ceremony, the 10 athletes were among a delegation that landed in Gangneung, on South Korea’s east coast, after a rare direct flight between the two halves of the divided peninsula—for which a special exemption had to be sought from US sanctions.

In black fur hats, they made their way through the terminal and onto buses without saying a word to a pursuing pack of reporters, while well-wishers outside held up banners depicting reunification flags—a blue Korean peninsula on a white background.

“We are one,” read one of the banners. In the past year tensions reached fever pitch as Pyongyang carried out a series of weapons tests including intercontinental ballistic missiles that brought the US mainland into range, and its most powerful nuclear blast to date — while Kim and US President Donald Trump traded personal insults and threats of war.

But the Games have triggered a sudden apparent rapprochement between the two Koreas. For months, the North ignored repeated entreaties from Seoul for it to take part in a “peace Olympics,” leaving deadlines for registration slip by.

But in his New Year speech Kim finally expressed a willingness to send a delegation to Pyeongchang, setting a flurry of talks and visits in motion. The two Koreas in January held their first high-level talks for two years at Panmunjom, the truce village in the Demilitarized Zone that splits the peninsula. Pyongyang agreed to send athletes, cheerleaders, officials and an art troupe to the South, and both sides decided to march together under the unification flag at the opening ceremony, and form a joint women’s ice hockey team.

Yesterday’s arrivals—three cross-country skiers, three alpine skiers, two short-track speed skaters and two figure skaters—will compete for the North. They followed a dozen North Korean female ice hockey players who arrived last week and have been training with their Southern counterparts for what will be the first unified team in 27 years. It has been accorded its own three-letter Olympic code, COR.

POAL EAGLE
But the joint team has not met universal acclaim in the South, with critics saying that Seoul has made too many concessions to Pyongyang to secure its participation, and has effectively denied some of its own players the chance to compete on the Olympic stage.

At the same time, some say the North is seeking to gain advantage from its participation, and reports say it will mark the anniversary of the founding of its regular military with a major military parade a day before the opening ceremony. Earlier this week, Pyongyang unilaterally called off a joint cultural event slated for Sunday at the North’s scenic Mount Kumgang, under scoring the fragility of the agreements. “Pyongyang must stop acting unpredictably and scoring the fragility of the agreements,” the Seoul-based Korea Herald said in an editorial Thursday. “One cannot erase the impression that the South is trying hard not to pique the North.

And there are doubts about how long the warmth will last after the Games. Seoul and Washington agreed to delay the giant annual Foal Eagle and Key Resolve joint military exercises, which always infuriate Pyongyang, but only if the North halted Foal Eagle.

As of Wednesday 799,000 out of 1.18 million tickets available had been sold, or 68 percent, with chief organiser Lee Hee-Beom admitting: “We have many expensive tickets left, so we need some emergency measures to boost ticket sales.”

And hanging over the competition is the vast Russian doping scandal. The IOC banned Russia from Pyeongchang after the McLaren report, which documented a vast Moscow-backed scheme to artificially enhance its athletes’ performances in previous Games.

In December, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) said clean Russian competitors would be allowed to take part in South Korea under a neutral flag as “Olympic Athletes from Russia”.

Those who want to do so are being forced to pass a unique set of anti-doping tests. At first 500 were thought to be potentially eligible, before the number was cut to 389. And Russian Olympic officials said last week that only 169 had been approved. —AFP

China warn of ‘real difficulties’ at Pyeongchang Olympics

SHANGHAI: China are striking a bleak tone for the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics and warning they will need luck if they are to avoid going home empty-handed—four years before they host the Games for the first time.

Nobody is saying that China have given up on medal success from February 9-25, but high-level sports officials seem to see it as a stepping stone to Beijing 2022, when absent hope is unthinkable.

China unveiled their Olympic squad on Wednesday and will take 82 athletes to South Korea, an increase on the 66 that travelled to Sochi four years ago.

But Sun Yuanfu, a senior winter sports official, warned that public expectations should be low and said that Chinese winter sports suffered from “a poor foundation.” “If we are lucky, we can get some gold medals. If not, we may get none,” Sun told the state Xinhua news agency in unusually downbeat terms.

“We have to work for the best and be prepared for real difficulties,” China have come a long way in the Summer Olympics, topping the medals table at the Beijing 2008 Games and coming second at London 2012 and third at Rio 2016.

With rising incomes and the growth of the middle class in China, coupled with an aggressive push by the government, winter sports are booming too. But that is yet to translate into Winter Games success and at Sochi 2014, China won just three golds, all in speed skating.

Sun warned that while China was improving slowly in some other disciplines, “there is no essential breakthrough in general and Chinese participation still relies on the sports it is traditionally good at”.

“And so far the trend is not obvious, indicating a poor foundation in our winter sports.”

HOME UPSET?
That is not to say China are surrendering all hope in Pyeongchang. They are homing in on the women’s 3,000m and men’s 5,000m relays in short-track, and four-time world champion Wu Dajing is relishing getting one over the South Koreans in front of their home crowd.

“The team-event gold is our most wanted as it represents the collective strength of our country in this sport,” said Wu, a 500m silver medallist at Sochi 2014. “To win it over the hosts in their house would be really satisfying,” he said.

China also have hopes for medals in men’s and women’s aerials—the freestyle skiing discipline—and in figure skating, where reigning pairs world champions Sui Wenjing and Han Cong are strong favourites for gold in their Olympic debut.

The duo have already tasted success at Gangneung—the venue that will be used for the Olympics—taking gold at the Four Continents Championships last year. China and Han will be hoping that Sui, who missed much of 2016 injured, can stay healthy.

There are also expectations for China in snowboarding, in the form of Liu Jiayu and Zhang Yiwei. China has enlarged its squad for South Korea in an attempt to become competitive in a broader range of disciplines, again with the 2022 Beijing Games coming into view.

For example, at Pyeongchang, Chang Xinyue will become China’s first female Olympic ski jumper. Women’s ski jumping only arrived at the Olympics for the first time at Sochi. —AFP
De Silva hits ton in strong Sri Lankan reply

De Silva's second successive Test century

CHITTAGONG: Dhananjaya de Silva struck a century and shared 187 runs in an unbroken second wicket stand with Kusal Mendis as Sri Lanka gave a strong reply to Bangladesh in the first Test in Chittagong yesterday.

De Silva made an unbeaten 104 while Mendis hit 83 not out, guiding Sri Lanka to 187-1 at stumps on the second day. Earlier, Rangana Herath and Suranga Lakmal took three wickets each to help the visitors dismiss Bangladesh for 513 in their first innings. The pair came together after spinner Mehedhi Hasan got rid of Dimuth Karunaratne for a duck shortly after Bangladesh's innings ended with skipper Mahmudullah Riyad unbeaten on 83.

De Silva led Sri Lanka's batting charge with his aggressive approach and brought his fourth Test hundred off 122 balls with a cover drive off left-arm spinner Taijul Islam. This is de Silva's second successive Test century after scoring an unbeaten 119 in Sri Lanka's last match against India in New Delhi in December.

Bangladesh, who are now leading the series 1-0, lost wickets in a hurry as the tourists began well. Centuries by Kusal Mendis (83) and Dhananjaya de Silva (104) ensured a solid reply with the batsmen adding 139 runs to their overnight score with Mendis' major knock of 176, and the pair reaching the third milestone of 294 for the second wicket.

Bangladesh's only bright spot was a half-century from former captain Misbah-ul-Haq, who scored 52 before edging to Kusal Perera behind. The tourists slumped to 192-9 after taking the first wicket of the day, with Foyer and Mendis adding another 93 runs.

Bangladesh's spinners did a good job in the morning session but were unable to get a wicket off the last two overs. Herath and Lakmal, who took three each, were the pick of the bowlers.

Matsuyama comes from behind to capture both of his Phoenix titles in four-hole play-offs. In 2016, he trailed Rickie Fowler by two strokes with three to play and won the play-off by sinking a seven-footer for par. Last year, he trailed former US Open champion Webb Simpson by four strokes going into the final round and lifted the trophy thanks to a 12-foot birdie putt at the fourth hole of sudden death.

He'll play with Fowler and Simpson in the first two rounds. "It's going to be kind of weird to play with them tomorrow," Matsuyama said. "But hopefully we can all play well and be there together on the back nine Sunday." Matsuyama's win last year marked a fifth victory in nine starts worldwide, a stretch that included a victory in the World Golf Championships-HSBC Champions. He's riding the same wave of success this year, but he turned in an impressive 69 on a tough final day at Torrey Pines on Sunday to finish tied for 12th and was tied for fourth at the Tournament of Champions. 'He'll face some stiff competition this week, including from Jordan Spieth, Jon Rahm and Justin Thomas. Five of the top seven in the world are entered and 23 of the top 30. But Matsuyama believes his game is moving in the right direction. "It's hard to compare a year ago where I was, where my game was. I haven't really played well this year up until the last day there at Torrey Pines," Matsuyama said. "But my short game is getting a lot better and coming to Phoenix it seems like something always good happens." —AFP

All Blacks legend Carter hints Japan will be last hurrah

HONG KONG: All Blacks great Dan Carter arrived this week with his French club Racing 92, for the Natixis Cup exhibition fixture against South Africa's Sharks, the 35-year-old said retirement was looming fast.

"It's (retirement) obviously just around the corner... but exactly what I do, I'm not a hundred percent sure yet," he said, ahead of Saturday's match against South Africa's Sharks, the 35-year-old said retirement was looming fast.

Carter played 112 times for New Zealand and holds the record for most points scored in Test history (1,338). Five-time World Cup winner, now retired from national duty, he said his upcoming stint in Japan-but said he had no ambitions to coach his world-beating national team reach the European Champions Cup final.

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Cavaliers edge Heat 91-89 as Celtics thump Knicks

LOS ANGELES: LeBron James scored 24 points and came up with a crucial late block as the Cleveland Cavaliers edged the Miami Heat 91-89 on Wednesday in a duel for third place in the NBA's Eastern Conference. "King" James prevented James Johnson from getting a shot off at the final buzzer as Cleveland held on for the win in their first game since Kevin Love was sidelined with a broken hand. Love is expected to miss six to eight weeks-just more bad news in a tough January for the Cavs, who finished the month with a 6-8 record. "I just wanted to keep the ball between me and the basket," James said of his late-game stop.

"That's just the rules I've always been taught and I was happy to be able to get that last stop. "It's a good win for us," Jae Crowder drawled a three-pointer from a James assist with 1:21 left to play to give Cleveland a three-point lead. Miami's Josh Richardson answered with a floater with a minute remaining before Cleveland's Isaiah Thomas made two free-throws to build the margin to 90-87 with 18.8 seconds to play.

Kelly Olynyk's layup trimmed the deficit to one point with 12.1 seconds remaining. While seven left Cleveland's Kyle Korver made the first of two free throws and Johnson, with James defending him, was unable to release the potential game-tying jump shot before time expired.

"We needed a win like this, where we win a game on our defense," said James. The Cavs entered the contest as the NBA's worst-ranked offensive team but limited Miami to 3-of-28 from three-point range.

They harried the Heat into 20 turnovers as they held an opponent to less than 90 points for the first time since November. "It's a good step in the right direction," James said.

BLOWOUT IN BOSTON
Elsewhere, the Orlando Magic rebounded from a heartbreaking loss to the Houston Rockets with a 126-105 victory over the Los Angeles Lakers. Marreese Speights scored a game-high 21 points and Evan Fournier added 20 points for the Magic, who made 18 of their 32 three-point attempts and set a season-high for three-point percentage.

The Brooklyn Nets snapped a four-game skid with a 116-108 victory over the Philadelphia 76ers. Spencer Dinwiddie scored nine of his 27 points in the fourth quarter for the Nets and D'Angelo Russell, playing his fifth game back after knee surgery, added 22 points.

It was a blowout in Boston, where the Eastern Conference-leading Celtics overcame the absence of Kyrie Irving to down the New York Knicks 103-73. The Celtics, up by five midway through the third quarter, more than doubled that lead in less than two minutes, seizing an 11 point lead and never letting the Knicks get within single digits again. Terry Rozier, making his first career NBA start, produced his first career triple-double with 17 points, 10 assists and 12 rebounds for Boston, adding two steals and two blocked shots.

In Portland, CJ McCollum scored 50 points to lead the Blazers to a 124-108 victory over the Chicago Bulls. McCollum scored 28 points in the first quarter, a club record for a quarter and the most in a single period in the NBA this season.

McCollum joined Houston's James Harden as the only players to score 50 points in just three quarters this season. In Phoenix, a horrifying broken left ankle to Suns reserve guard Isaiah Canaan overshadowed the host's 102-98 victory over the Dallas Mavericks.

Canaan had slashed to the rim for a layup in the waning seconds of the first quarter and came down awkwardly, his left leg twisting beneath him. He sat still on the court awaiting aid from medical staff and was eventually taken off on a stretcher as shocked teammates and opponents looked on. The Suns quickly issued a brief statement saying he had a broken ankle. —AFP
**Conte under pressure as Bournemouth shock Chelsea**

Defeat left Chelsea in fourth place in Premier League

**LONDON:** Antonio Conte had no doubt the pressure on his position would intensify after his Chelsea side’s stunning 3-0 defeat by Bournemouth at Stamford Bridge on Wednesday. The Blues head coach insists his Chelsea team, the reigning Premier League champions, are over-achieving this season—but claims he is “relaxed” if members of the club’s hierarchy view things differently. Defeat left Chelsea in the fourth place in the Premier League, just two points above Tottenham Hotspur and Conte accepted there were concerns over whether the Blues would qualify for next season’s Champions League.

“The pressure, it’s normal. It’s normal for a coach, for a manager,” Conte said. “It’s normal if you are Chelsea’s coach. “After the first game this season, you (the media) tried to put pressure on my job. But I’m trying to do my best.”

The Italian added: “If someone doesn’t think this club deserves the top four, it is their problem. For me and my staff and the players, we are doing everything, we are doing 120 percent. I’m exploiting this squad at the maximum level. But if someone doesn’t agree about this, I’m here. I have to accept every situation. I’m very relaxed about this. I know that I’m doing a great job, a great work, me and the staff and the players.”

There have been reports that Conte has angered Chelsea’s Russian billionaire owner Roman Abramovich with thinly veiled criticism of the London club’s transfer policy.

**Blatter to take legal action against FIFA**

**MANCHESTER:** Former FIFA president Sepp Blatter, currently serving a ban from the sport, told Reuters yesterday he is considering legal action against the global football body in an attempt to clear his name.

Blatter, who led FIFA for 17 years, was handed a six-year ban for ethics violations, imposed amid the biggest corruption scandal to shake world soccer’s governing body in 2015.

The 81-year-old Swiss said that while “for the time being there is no legal action”, he and his lawyers were working on a potential case.

“My aim is to look into the decision of FIFA’s Ethics Committee in view of informations, and even evidences that I have received, in the meantime, in connection with my suspension,” Blatter told Reuters via email.

“We are working on this case – and looking forward for development.” It is likely that any legal action from Blatter would take place in the Swiss civil courts.

In December 2016, Blatter lost an appeal in the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) against the suspension. CAS ruled that Blatter had authorised payments to Michel Platini, then the European football boss, worth over $2 million that amounted to “undue gifts” and therefore violated FIFA’s code of ethics.

Blatter had resigned in June 2015 after several dozen football officials, including FIFA’s executive committee members and former members, had been indicted in the United States on graft charges, along with two sports marketing firms.

The former FIFA president was not among those indicted, but became enmeshed in scandal when he was banned from all football-related activity following December by FIFA’s Ethics Committee, along with Platini.

The men were banned, initially for eight years, over a payment of 2 million Swiss francs ($1.98 million) that FIFA made to Platini in 2011, with Blatter’s approval, for work done a decade earlier. The bans were reduced to six years by FIFA’s appeals committee in February 2016.

Blatter, who has denied all charges against him, had compared the FIFA Ethics Committee investigation to “the inquisition”.

In 2015 Swiss prosecutors opened a criminal investigation into Blatter on suspicion of criminal mismanagement and misappropriation but no charges have yet been brought. The man who headed FIFA from 1998 to 2015 says he intends to attend June’s World Cup in Russia after a personal invitation from Russian President Vladimir Putin.

**West Ham suspend director over racism allegations**

**LONDON:** West Ham yesterday suspended director of recruitment Tony Henry while the Premier League club investigates allegations that he made racist remarks about African players.

According to the Daily Mail newspaper, Henry said the Hammers wanted to limit the number of African players because “they have a bad attitude” and “cause mayhem” when they are not in the team.

Henry, it was claimed, suggested it was a policy supported by club management but insisted West Ham had “nothing against the African race at all”. The club announced on Thursday that Henry had been suspended while an investigation takes place.

“The club can confirm that director of player recruitment Tony Henry has been suspended pending a full and thorough investigation,” West Ham said in a statement. “West Ham United will not tolerate any type of discrimination and has, therefore, acted swiftly due to the serious nature of these claims.

“The West Ham United family is an inclusive one where, regardless of gender, age, ability, race, religion or sexual orientation, everybody feels welcome and included.”

The Mail reported that Henry sent an email on January 27, in response to an inquiry about a footballer of Cameroonian descent, to another senior West Ham official and an agent. In the email, Henry allegedly wrote: “We don’t want any more Africans and he’s not good enough.”

When asked by the Mail why that was the case, Henry reportedly highlighted “problems” with their former striker Diafra Sakho, who left West Ham to join French club Rennes on Monday.

Eddie Howe said the victory at Stamford Bridge was the best moment in his nine years, spread over two spells, as Bournemouth manager. Howe, who has steered the club through the leagues from third division League One, said: “This is the best (feeling) because of the performance.” — AFP

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**BEST FEELING**

Goals from Callum Wilson, Junior Stanislas and Nathan Ake in 16 second-half minutes secured Bournemouth’s impressive victory. The win moved Bournemouth up to tenth place, although they remain just five points clear of the bottom three.

Eddie Howe said the victory at Stamford Bridge was the best moment in his nine years, spread over two spells, as Bournemouth manager. Howe, who has steered the club through the leagues from third division League One, said: “This is the best (feeling) because of the performance.” — AFP
Dortmund boss relieved Aubameyang saga is over

Arsenal spent a new club record £56m for Aubameyang

BERLIN: Borussia Dortmund coach Peter Stoeger says now that the Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang transfer saga is finally over his side can refocus on their football as they prepare to face resurgent Cologne today.

“It became a topic behind which no one could hide,” Stoeger explained.

“It’s good that it’s over, because the topic attracted such an incredible amount of attention,” Stoeger told Bild.

Arsenal spent a new club record £56 million ($79.2m, 63.7m euros) on Wednesday to sign the Gabon striker and end weeks of speculation.

Stoeger, who took charge in December, dropped Aubameyang for Dortmund’s first two Bundesliga matches of 2018, yet has defended him as his side went unbeaten in the next three games.

With Aubameyang gone, Dortmund have signed Belgian striker Michy Batshuayi on loan from Chelsea for the rest of the season.

He is unlikely to start at Cologne on Friday, but Stoeger hinted he could feature off the bench.

“If we had sent him to the stands and possibly kept him until summer, the topic would have never been settled and there would have been no winner,” admitted Stoeger.

“The topic has been a problem for many weeks,” said Stoeger. “I cannot say that the boys (team) were so upset (by his behaviour).” Stoeger explained.

Aubameyang will miss the match after being given a two-game ban by the German Football Association.

“It’s good that it’s over, because the topic at-tracted such an incredible amount of attention,” said Stoeger.

“I can say that the boys (team) were so upset (by his behaviour).” Stoeger explained.

“Having 13 injured players is not a coincidence and I assume that something went wrong in our training management,” Veh told Cologne-newspaper Express in pinning the club’s injury woes on Stoeger. “As colleagues, we’ve always got on and as the manager of Cologne, it was my job to analyse the situation and make the right conclusions.” — AFP

Man City win to go 15 points clear as Man United suffer

LONDON: Manchester City tightened their stranglehold at the top of the Premier League on Wednesday by trouncing bottom club West Bromwich Albion 3-0 as nearest rivals Manchester United suffered a chastening 2-0 defeat at Tottenham Hotspur.

Pep Guardiola’s runaway leaders, whose new record signing Aymeric Laporte enjoyed an impressive debut, surged 15 points clear of their neighbours, who were outplayed by Spurs at Wembley after Christian Eriksen scored in just under 11 seconds.

The last night of the transfer window provided a fascinating backdrop to the midweek fixture list with Chelsea’s final-day signing Olivier Giroud doubtless shocked at Stamford Bridge to see the champions suffer a remarkable 3-0 loss to Bournemouth.

Manchester City’s 12th straight league home win, thanks to goals from Fernandinho, Kevin De Bruyne and Sergio Aguero, took them to 68 points - level with Tottenham Hotspur in 1960-61 as the best record by any club after 25 matches of an English top-flight season.

Manchester United are on 53 points with 17 points behind to earn a 1-1 draw at home to fellow strugglers Brighton & Hove Albion.

When Phil Jones, who was bullied by Kane in the 10-second efforts netted by former Spurs favourite Ledley King and Newcastle United’s Alan Shearer.

When Phil Jones, who was bullied by Kane for the first goal, hammered the ball clumsily into his own net when trying to clear from Kieran Trippier’s cross midway through the first half, Mourinho conceded that the own goal “mentally killed us”.

“After 10 seconds, we made a ridiculous mistake,” Mourinho told reporters. “My players have watched the Tottenham kickoff many, many times. It was a really, really bad goal.”

Antonio Conte suffered one of his worst Premier League defeats at Chelsea after three second-half goals in the space of 16 minutes from Callum Wilson, Junior Stanislas and Nathan Ake earned Eddie Howe his best top-flight win with the Cherries.

“We have to accept it’s a bad result and understand that we have to fight this season,” Conte told the BBC. West Brom’s defeat left them rooted at the foot of the table while Southampton also remain in the bottom three despite largely dominating while coming from behind to earn a 1-1 draw at home to fellow strugglers Brightton & Hove Albion.

Brighton are just a point above the relegation zone alongside Newcastle, who have now not won a home league match in eight attempts after goalkeeper Karl Darlow’s 88th-minute own goal earned Burnley a 1-1 draw at St James’ Park.— Reuters

SPANISH LEAGUE
Real Sociiedad v Deportivo La Coruna
beIN SPORTS HB 3
23:00

GERMAN BUNDESLIGA
Kahn v Berusia Dortmund
beIN SPORTS HB 5
22:30

FRENCH LEAGUE
Olympique Marseille v Metz
beIN SPORTS HB 6
22:45
Cavaliers edge Heat 91-89 as Celtics thump Knicks