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In brief

QATAR | Skills
Qataris to occupy 90% jobs in 10 yrs: minister

The Ministry of Administrative Development launched yesterday a meeting of employees in supervisory roles participating in a programme for skillset development. HE the Minister of Administrative Development Dr Issa Saad al-Jafali al-Nuaimi said that such meetings were important as it opens the door for discussions between head of authorities and ministers. He spoke about the co-operation between the ministry and other state authorities in achieving the required progress in the performance of administrative government work. Such co-operation will ultimately enable Qatari citizens to occupy up to 90% of the public sector jobs over the next 10 years, the minister added. He then discussed plans to rationalise public spending in light of the new budget and ways to avoid going above the limits set by the government.

ARAB WORLD | Conflict
Iraqi forces in battle with IS in Ramadi

Die-hard militants made a desperate last stand yesterday in Ramadi's former government complex, the main remaining target of Iraqi forces reconquering the city they lost in May. After a push on Tuesday that broke the Islamic State group's defences around the city centre, government forces were slowed by snipers, booby traps, roadside bombs and suicide attackers. Initial hopes of a quick victory faded, but Iraq's elite counter-terrorism service (CTS) and the army have advanced steadily through the devastated capital of Anbar province. They reached a key intersection in the Hoz neighbourhood, home to the government complex, whose seizure would go a long way towards ensuring a full recapture of Ramadi. **Page 10**

AMERICA | Weather
Storms kill scores in southern states

Millions of residents in the southern US struggled yesterday to recover from fierce storms and floods that officials say have left at least 17 people dead in Mississippi, Tennessee and Arkansas. With more severe weather expected across the central US, forecasters are warning of airport delays and flooded roads as travellers return home after the Christmas holiday. Feeding on unseasonably warm air, storms left a trail of destruction in rural communities from Alabama to Illinois. More than a dozen tornadoes were reported Friday in six southern states. **Page 12**

A dazzling display



A myriad of bright lights and a reflection of West Bay towers in water that had accumulated on the ground near Qatar Sports Club made for a dazzling display yesterday evening. Efforts were under way across Doha and elsewhere in the country yesterday to drain water from roads and other areas even as the rain halted and the skies gradually cleared up. A heavy downpour on Friday had left a number of streets waterlogged. **PICTURE: Noushad Thekkayil Page 24**

Food prices 'less of a drag on inflation'

Global food prices are likely to be less of a drag on inflation in Qatar in the next two years as these may only fall marginally in 2016, QNB has said in a report. In its latest economic commentary QNB said global food prices have not escaped the commodity rout, falling 24.3% since early 2014, citing a World Bank report. Bumper harvests, weak demand and collapsing oil prices have driven food prices lower. Qatar's food inflation has fallen with lower international prices as it imports almost all of its food. "Looking forward, we expect global food prices to only fall marginally in 2016, before recovering moderately in 2017. As a result, they are likely to be less of a drag on inflation in Qatar in the next two years," QNB said. Three main factors are pushing global food prices lower, it said. First, the demand growth for food is weakening as global growth has been slower than expected, pushing down prices. The International

Monetary Fund's (IMF) revised expected global GDP growth down by 0.2% to 3.1% for 2015, compared with growth of 3.4% in 2014. Second, favourable weather conditions have boosted supply and stocks across a number of food products. Stock-to-use ratios for grains such as maize, wheat and rice, a measure of the abundance of supply compared to demand, are above their historical averages. Production of other products such as soybeans, soybean oil and palm oil are all rising. Third, lower oil prices have pushed down food prices as agriculture is highly energy intensive. For example, fertiliser prices are an important input for agriculture and are closely linked to energy prices. These three factors are expected to continue to play an important role for the outlook of international food prices in 2016 and 2017. In 2016, higher global growth is expected (3.6% according to the IMF). Additionally, wheat production is expected to reach a new high

as output in China, the EU and Kazakhstan has been revised up. Production of other products is also expected to rise. For example, the World Bank forecasts higher output of soybean seeds and soybean oil in 2016. Finally, oil prices are expected to stabilise around current levels in 2016 as excess supply is reduced. As a result food price deflations are expected to be reduced to 1.6% in 2016. By 2017, QNB expects food prices to recover moderately. Global growth is expected to pick up again slightly to 3.8%. Additionally, supply and demand should adjust to lower food prices, gradually working out excess supply. Food producers are likely to invest less in productivity enhancements due to lower prices, while consumers should demand more. Finally, oil prices are projected to recover as investment cuts, mainly among US shale-oil producers, impact supply. As a result, QNB expects international food prices to rise 3.7% in 2017.

Britain hit by record rain and floods

Britain and especially northern England have been hit by heavy rain and severe flooding, prompting people in a number of towns and villages to leave their homes yesterday. Flood warnings have been issued in hundreds of locations throughout Britain, with warnings that flooding could at times be life-threatening, and that people should avoid taking to the roads whenever possible. "A severe flood warning means danger to life. It doesn't mean 'come and have a look,'" Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service warned residents in a tweet. Lee Fraser of the West Yorkshire area in northern England told the Press Association of nearby roads being submerged by floods: "It's been raining really heavily since last night. The siren went off at about 7am this morning and 10 minutes later everything started flooding." **Page 15**

Syria peace talks target date set

AFP
Damascus

The UN hopes to convene peace talks between Syria's government and opposition on January 25, it said yesterday, a day after the killing of a powerful rebel leader who supported negotiations. The death of opposition chief Zahran Allouh also appeared to derail a plan to evacuate thousands of jihadists and civilians from southern Damascus. Allouh, 44, was the commander of Jaish al-Islam (Army of Islam), the predominant opposition faction in the Eastern Ghouta rebel bastion east of Damascus. The group has remained firmly opposed to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and to the Islamic State militant group. A senior member of Jaish al-Islam said planes had targeted a "secret meeting" of commanders, confirming Allouh was among those killed. Syria's regime claimed responsibility for his death, which was seen as dealing a heavy blow to the nearly five-year uprising and also complicating the fragile peace process. UN special envoy Staffan de Mistura's office said he has "intensified efforts" to convene talks on January 25, hopefully including the "broadest possible spectrum" of opposition representatives. He "counts on full co-operation of all the relevant Syrian parties in this process," the statement said, adding: "Continuing developments on the ground should not be allowed to derail it." The talks are the first step of an ambitious 18-month plan endorsed by the UN Security Council to end Syria's war, which has killed more than 250,000 people. But analysts feared Allouh's death would thwart the already-fragile negotiation process. Backed by Saudi Arabia, Jaish al-Islam was one of the most influential armed groups invited to broad-based opposition talks in Riyadh earlier this month. **Page 10**

QU names Sheikh Joaan CSR Person of 2015

QNA
Doha

Qatar University has selected HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, President of the Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC), as the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Person of the Year 2015 in recognition of his significant role in supporting CSR and for being a role model inspiring the youth of Qatar. The annual national CSR report, which is produced under the supervision of Qatar University, observes the achievements of selective inspiring personalities who represent



HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani distinguished leadership in the CSR concepts. Qatar University will host the awarding ceremony of HE Sheikh Joaan while launching the 4th Edition


of the annual national CSR report in the first quarter of next year. The awarding ceremony will be attended by high officials, including the CSR person of last year HE Abdullah bin Hamad al-Attiyah, ministers, ambassadors and other recognised members of the society who contributed to the report. The ceremony will include the official inauguration of the CSR Person of the Year painting by an international artist assigned from Qatar University. Also during the ceremony, His Excellency will be awarded a Crystal Shield appreciating his efforts in CSR. Dr Hassan Rashid al-Derham,

President of Qatar University, said: "HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, is a motivating leader of CSR in Qatar. His contribution is significant, especially in supporting the special needs and education programmes. That was evident through his directives to allocate the profits of the International Championships in 2015 for the benefit of (Teach a Child) programme intending to raise the number of children to get education in the world, in addition to the social activities organised by Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) through (Active Qatar) programme. These initiatives distinguish His Excellency as one of the most inspiring persons for the youth generation."

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Rota volunteers renovate houses in Kharaitiyat area

Volunteers from Reach Out to Asia (Rota) recently finished renovating a house in Kharaitiyat as part of the organisation's "Reach into Qatar" project. The goal of the "Reach into Qatar" volunteer project is to extend community development assistance to the communities of Qatar and involves national and non-national volunteers visiting areas outside of Doha.

The house renovation in Kharaitiyat took place from December 5 to 12.

"Rota's 'Reach into Qatar' project upholds our principle value of educating, engaging and encouraging all sectors of the community to participate in the spirit of volunteerism and community service, both within and outside Qatar. In recent years, the Rota Volunteer Programme has extended the reach of our activities in Qatar to several communities outside Doha," said Essa al-Mannai, executive director of Rota.

"The project is designed to support the National Vision by equipping Qatari youth with the skills and motivation to build a stable and secure society through fostering feelings of belonging and citizenship," he continued.

Rota is a member of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development (QF).

"I have been involved in previous Rota house renovation projects and seen first-hand the effect the renovation of a house can have on the living conditions of a family," said Hamad al-Jubara, a Rota volunteer. "I am always keen to get involved with the 'Reach into Qatar' project, as there are many families outside our capital city in need of assistance."

The project is exclusively



The renovation in progress.

sponsored by Msheireb Properties, which has been involved in a number of Rota initiatives in Qatar.

"Msheireb Properties is committed to contributing to the success of this project as volunteers helping Rota complete the house renovations. This comes in line with Msheireb's own vision of society development," said Abdulla Hassan al-Mehshadi, CEO at Msheireb Properties. "With our continuous support to Rota's project, we hope to make a positive impact on many lives and families outside of Doha."

The project is also supported by Gulf Contracting Company, which handles maintenance work on the ground, such as plumbing and electrical work, and also donates materials such as tiles and paint.



The house after renovation.

QTA and Qatar Chamber to co-host industry forum

Qatar Tourism Authority (QTA) and Qatar Chamber (QC) have announced that they will jointly host an industry-wide forum next month.

The initiative is aimed at supporting local tourism business owners and attracting more local and foreign investment into the sector, according to a statement.

Discussions at the event will seek input from key stakeholders, including QC's Tourism and Exhibition Committee and industry professionals, for the development of licensing solutions that will enhance the experience of investors looking to contribute to Qatar's tourism offering.

QTA is in charge of licensing tour operators and guides, tourism establishments and activities, hotel establishments and exhibitions and exhibition organisers.

The forum will provide an

Licensing figures

According to Qatar Tourism Authority (QTA) figures, QTA has licensed 97 tourism establishments this year, including hotels, tour operators and destination management companies, and has renewed the licences of 167 others. QTA has also licensed a total of 241 exhibitions and events, including charity events, in addition to licensing 90 exhibition organising companies.

avenue for QTA to ensure that the new process alleviates any concerns or pressures they may be experiencing and reflects their needs.

Since the launch of the Qatar National Tourism Sector Strategy in 2014, QTA undertook the task of revamping its

licensing operations to ensure a more streamlined process for investors and tourism business owners.

Through this process, the average time needed to acquire a tourism licence was reduced from several weeks to two days, provided licence seekers had the necessary paperwork from other authorities.

The new solution is expected to further refine this process, the statement notes.

Throughout 2015, QTA has increased efforts to attract investments in the country's tourism sector, developing a tourism promotion department that, among other initiatives, will launch a Tourism Investment Guide in 2016.

The guide will highlight opportunities for investment in Qatar, direct investors to QTA's priority areas and provide a step-by-step guide to setting up a tourism establishment.

Qatar Chamber signs agreement on employing people with disabilities

QNA
Doha

Qatar Chamber signed yesterday a co-operation agreement with the Volunteer Committee for Employment of People with Disabilities to provide training and employment to people with disabilities.

President of Qatar Chamber HE Sheikh Khalifa bin Jassim bin Mohamed al-Thani said

that signing the agreement was part of Qatar Chamber's commitment to social responsibility and support people with disabilities.

He said that people with disability, if allowed to reach their potential, can provide a boost to the human capital of any society. That requires relying on specialists and experts to help people with disabilities.

For his part, head of the Volunteer Committee for Employ-

ment of People with Disabilities Khalid al-Shoabi praised Qatar Chamber's keenness on rehabilitating and employing people with disabilities.

He said that this segment represented a significant proportion of the Qatari society, whether they were Qatari citizens or expats.

He expressed his hope that the agreement materializes into a successful initiative for employing people with disabilities.



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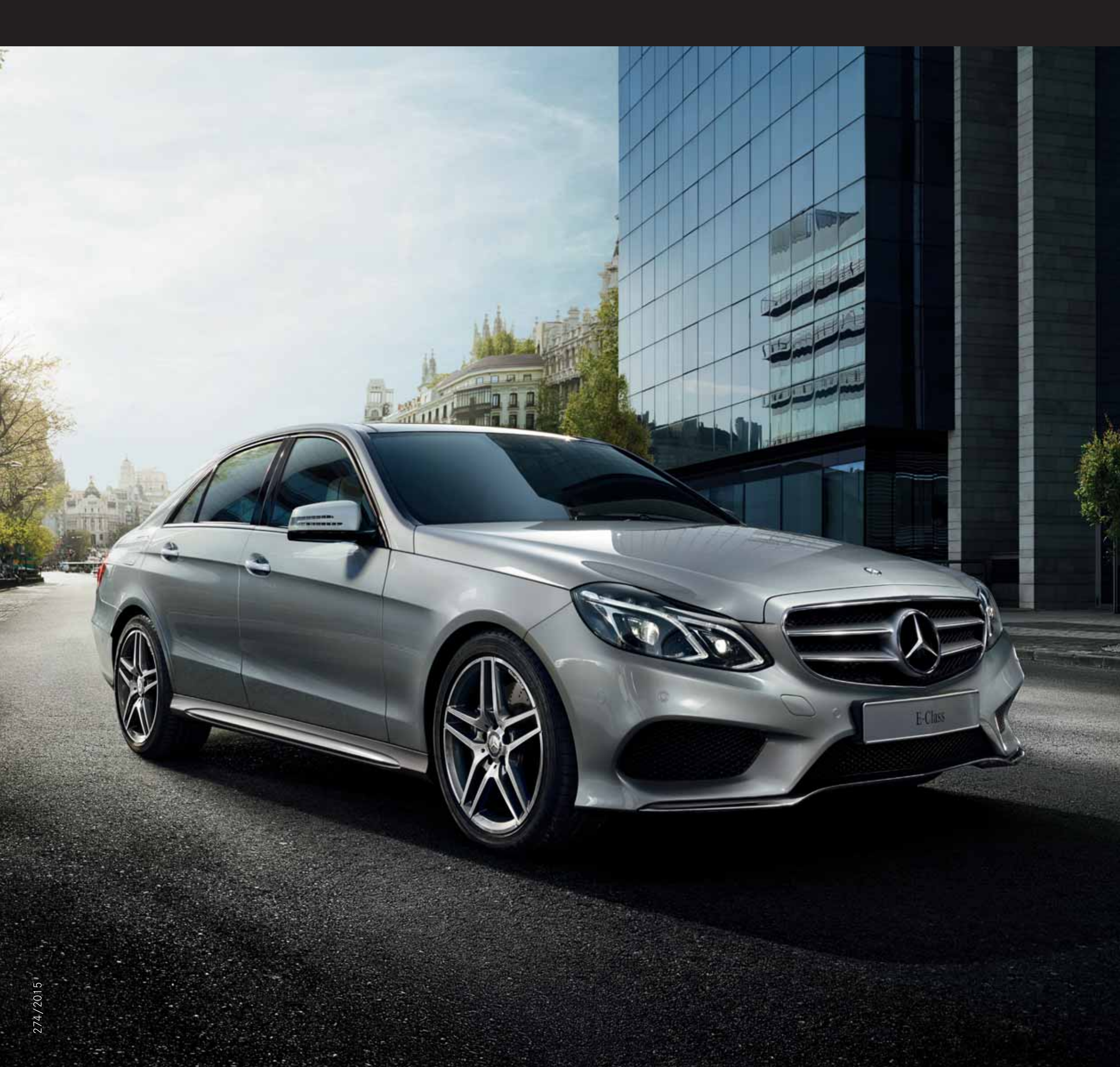
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Man arrested for stealing two cars

The Criminal Investigation Department has arrested an Arab national on charges of stealing two cars. The man had stolen a Porsche and a KIA from two different localities in the country. After the complaints were received, personnel of the departments concerned

swung into action and nabbed the culprit within hours from Al Khor on Friday (December 25, 2015), a statement issued by the Public Relations department of the Ministry of Interior said. "During interrogation, he confessed to stealing the

two cars and the security personnel recovered the car keys from him." The case has been forwarded to the department concerned for further legal procedures. The security departments have urged the public to keep their belongings safe.

HMC hosts international psychiatry conference

Awareness of biological explanations for mental health problems can help to de-stigmatise mental illness in the community, according to Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) senior consultant psychiatrist, Dr Suhaila Ghuloum.

Speaking at the recently held Qatar International Psychiatry Conference, Dr Ghuloum said: "There is significant literature that provides scientific evidence to suggest there are biological factors implicated in a wide variety of illnesses, including depression, schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, and raising awareness of this may go some way toward removing the stigma associated with these and other mental illnesses seen in Qatar."

The conference, which focused on the science behind psychiatry and the latest developments in the field, was hosted by HMC's Psychiatry Department, and included international guest speakers from the UK, the US, Australia, and Europe, who spoke on scientific rationalisations related to a number of men-



Some of the participants of the psychiatry conference.

tal health topics, including schizophrenia, depression, hallucinations, and novel approaches to their treatments, and the role genetics play in mental illnesses.

The conference has become an important professional development opportunity for many mental health care professionals, according to Dr Ghuloum. "The conference high-

lights the science that underpins clinical practice, and provides updates on the latest developments in the rapidly developing fields of neuroscience, genetics, behavioural and clinical science and therapeutics," said HMC chairman of Psychiatry Department Professor Peter Woodruff.

"Mental health has become a prominent health-care topic in Qatar following

the introduction of the Supreme Council of Health's Mental Health Strategy in 2013, and dialogues such that this conference presents are important in further developing industry practices in the country by creating a platform for experts to share their knowledge and experiences," added Professor Woodruff. The experts at this year's conference included sci-

entists, researchers, clinical psychiatrists and other mental health professionals. Many of the topics during the conference were on common global mental health issues, and a number of oral presentations focused on the Gulf region.

Over 20 research abstracts were on display throughout the conference, detailing a number of local and regional studies.

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Ministry of Economy recalls Nissan vehicles

The Ministry of Economy and Commerce (MEC) has announced a recall of 2013-15 Nissan Juke, Micra, Sunny, Sentra and XTerra models over a potential ignition defect.

The recall is being carried out in collaboration with Saleh Al Hamad Al Mana Co.

The campaign falls within the framework of the MEC's ongoing efforts to protect

consumers and ensure that car dealers follow up on vehicle defects and repairs.

The ministry has said it will co-ordinate with the dealer to follow up on maintenance and repair works and

communicate with customers to ensure that the necessary repairs are carried out.

It has urged all consumers to report violations to its Consumer Protection and Anti-Commercial

Fraud Department through the hotline (16000), e-mail (info@mec.gov.qa), Twitter (@MEC_Qatar), Instagram (MEC_Qatar) and the MEC mobile app for Android and iOS (MEC_Qatar).

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QATAR



A group picture of the participants at one of the sessions.

QC organises workshops for Qatari students in Britain

In co-operation with other Qatari students' clubs in Britain, Qatar Charity's club "Qemam" organised a number of developmental workshops from which more than 80 students benefited.

These workshops came as part of the club's interest in developing the skills and reinforcing the morals of Qatari students in British universities. The workshops were held in Cardiff, Liverpool and Coventry.

Khaled Abu Moza, the Muslim preacher, delivered 3 developmental workshops entitled "Success at the Time of Luxury". He

discussed the concepts of success in life, and how the students should determine their main goals in order to manage their lives effectively.

He also spoke about the greatest achievements that the youth should keep in mind.

The workshops dealt with the four axes of heart, mind, body, and money.

In relation to the heart, Abu Moza focused on faith, love, and hobbies; explaining how one's hobbies should not dominate the other aspects in order to keep the heart in balance. He mentioned that the

body axis included sleep, food, and movement. He emphasised how keeping these aspects in balance would ensure a healthy body, hence a healthy brain capable of creativity and innovation.

The workshops dealt with the four axes of heart, mind, body, and money

Regarding the money axis, Abu Moza explained how money is earned through one's profession. In order for the employee to keep his/her job, they need to be honest and efficient.

They should also work hard to continuously enhance their work through developing their skills. He added that the heart was the control centre and it affects all other three axes.

The heads of Qatari clubs in Britain expressed their gratitude to "Qemam Club" for the efforts they exert to enrich students' lives.

The Qemam Club is one of QC's society development centers.

It was established in 2001 as a students' initiative that aimed at providing services for high school and college students in Qatar and abroad.



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Woqod names winners of first Mega Lube Promotion draw

Qatar Fuel (Woqod) has announced the seven winners of the first Mega Lube Promotion raffle draw.

The draw was conducted by representatives from Doha Municipality along with the Woqod marketing manager, with giveaways including six iPhones and a grand prize of a Mitsubishi Pajero.

Holder of coupon number 13806 walked away with the grand prize. Those with coupons numbered 47033, 08680, 07496, 08694, 08512 and 14181 each won an iPhone 6.

The Mega Lube Promotion, running from November 1 until January 31, 2016, has been designed to encourage car owners in Qatar to take advantage of the services and products available at Woqod service sta-



Officials at the first draw. A total of two draws are to be held as part of the promotion.

tions and win prizes in two planned raffle draws.

As part of the promotion, customers who complete an oil-change service from Woqod stations receive a coupon to participate in the raffle draws and win prizes.

The second and final draw for the nationwide promo-

tion will take place on February 8, 2016.

"This promotion reflects Woqod's commitment to communicate effectively with our customers and raise awareness of the high-quality products and services available to them at all of our service stations," said

the Woqod marketing manager.

The winners of the first raffle draw expressed gratitude to Woqod for the prizes and encouraged people to visit the company's fuel stations for various auto services and be among the lucky winners in the next draw.

Ooredoo upgrades Mobile Money service

Ooredoo has announced that it has expanded its Mobile Money service.

Customers can now purchase data recharges and Ooredoo Passports using the Mobile Wallet feature via the Ooredoo Money App or the USSD *140# menu, the company has said in a statement.

Those who buy Ooredoo data recharge using the Mobile Money service will receive 25% extra data as a bonus. The extra data will be added automatically and customers can purchase top-ups valued at QR20

(250MB), QR60 (1GB), QR80 (3GB), QR100 (6GB) and QR200 (15GB) using Mobile Money.

Data will be valid for 30 days from activation.

Ooredoo Mobile Money customers can also buy Passport services using Mobile Money, "saving time and providing extra convenience" for people who are on the go, the statement notes.

The Ooredoo Passport offers roaming customers 1GB of data and 100 SMS/minutes for QR100 per week, with customers using the Passport in the GCC

receiving 2GB data for the same price.

The Ooredoo Mobile Money already enables customers to transfer money to over 200 countries around the world, top up Hala accounts (with 10% extra recharge bonus), pay Ooredoo bills and send money locally to another mobile.

Plans are in place to make the majority of Ooredoo's portfolio of services available via Ooredoo Mobile Money, as the company strives to bring the latest smart payment services to Qatar, the statement adds.

Customers can register

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Workshop explores ways to treat infections in diabetics

Well Cornell Medicine - Qatar (WCM-Q) has organised a three-day workshop to explore multi-disciplinary approaches to preventing and treating infections in people with diabetes.

The event, held with support from the Qatar National Research Fund (QNRF), brought together expert clinicians and researchers from institutions in Qatar, the UK, Denmark, the US and elsewhere to share research findings and discuss avenues for future collaboration.

Bacterial and fungal infections are common in diabetes patients, particularly in the feet and lower limbs. In severe cases, infections may require amputation of the affected limb, and very severe infections can be fatal.

Dr Shahrad Taheri, chair of the event and professor of Medicine at WCM-Q, said: "Infections are a very serious, yet much neglected complication of diabetes and it is therefore very encouraging to see so many of you here today to share your knowledge with one another. By taking a multidisciplinary approach to diabetes research and treatment we give ourselves the best chance of developing improved care of patients with diabetes, both in Qatar and the wider world."



Dr Shahrad Taheri

The workshop, entitled 'Infections in Patients with Diabetes Mellitus: Evolving Challenges for the 21st Century' featured presentations, panel discussions and networking sessions aimed at reviewing current understanding of diabetes and identifying the research initiatives needed to satisfy unmet medical needs for diagnosis, treatment and prevention of infections in patients with diabetes.

Dr Thenaa Khorshed, acting

director/programme manager of Biomedical and Health Sciences at QNRF, gave a presentation about the role of QNRF in medical research in Qatar, which was one of 22 presentations given over the three days by representatives of institutions including Hamad Medical Corporation, Sidra Medical and Research Center, Copenhagen Diabetes Research Center (Denmark) and the Department of Public Health at the University of Birmingham, UK. Topics included



Dr Stephen Atkin

treatment and prevention of foot infections in diabetes patients, the genetic basis of type-2 diabetes, and novel approaches to diagnosing diabetes, among many others.

Dr Stephen Atkin, professor of Medicine at WCM-Q, spoke about individualised therapy as an evolving practice in the treat-

ment of Type-2 diabetes. He said: "Type-2 diabetes is a very complex and difficult disease to treat and is made even more so because each patient is different. This means that individualised care is absolutely crucial to ensure that each patient achieves the very best health outcomes possible."

Indian embassy receives 4,080 complaints

The Indian embassy has received 4,080 complaints so far this year, the community house held on Friday was informed.

Last year the embassy had received 3,943 complaints, it was told.

At the community house it was informed that 90 Indian nationals are serving sentence at the Central Prison while 193 are awaiting tickets to travel home at the Deportation Centre.

It was also informed that so far this year 275 Indian nationals have died in Qatar. In 2014, a total of 279 Indians had died here. In December alone, 15 Indians died.

It was stressed by the officials at the community house that the embassy accorded the highest priority to the well-being and welfare of Indian expatriates in Qatar and it works closely with the local authorities concerned towards this end.

On the basis of requests received from the Qatari authorities for travel documents for Indian nationals in the Deportation Centre, the embassy has issued 19 Emergency Certificates (ECs) in December. The embassy also

issued nine air tickets to Indian nationals in distress for their return to India in December, 2015.

The Indian Community Benevolent Forum (ICBF) is stepping up its activities among the people in distress in the community through a range of welfare measures, including provision of air tickets, financial assistance and medical help. In December it issued air tickets to destitute workers besides financial assistance for a few others.

At the latest community house, not a single individual came to lodge complaints.

It has been informed that the ICBF will hold its free medical camp, in association with Aster Medica Centre at the latter's premises in the Industrial Area on January 22.

It will be held between 7.30am and 1.30 pm.

The medical camp will have active participation of the Indian Doctors Club (Indian Medical Association) as well. Any urgent consular or labour issues/cases of Indian nationals may also be conveyed to embassy officials present at the medical camp.

QFC is awarded certificate of appreciation by Best Buddies

Best Buddies Qatar has presented Qatar Financial Centre (QFC) with a certificate of appreciation in recognition of the 'No Barriers to a Great Friendship' campaign it helped produce.

'No Barriers to a Great Friendship' is a short film that depicts the relationship between two boys, played by Khalifa al-Kubaisi and Eid al-Shamari, as they encourage each other, communicate and share to become "best buddies".

The film uses a split-screen technique that enables viewers to watch their lives in parallel and emphasises their interactions.

The campaign received the support of QFC and was produced in association with The Film House and Best Buddies Qatar.

Yousef Fakhro, chief marketing and corporate communications officer at QFC, said: "The basis of QFC supporting Best Buddies Qatar is from our belief that 'Great success comes from great support', because what Best Buddies Qatar does enables young people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) to reach their full potential and achieve success."

'No Barriers to a Great Friendship' aims to raise awareness and encourage people to volunteer with Best Buddies Qatar.

Laalei Abu Alfain, executive director of Best Buddies Qatar, said: "We are extremely thankful to QFC for supporting



Officials at the certificate presentation ceremony.

Best Buddies Qatar and sponsoring our awareness film.

The film will soon be screened in cinemas across Doha and can be viewed on QFC's YouTube channel, 'QFC Authority'.

Best Buddies Qatar received support from a number of organisations for the 'No Barriers to a Great Friendship' campaign. In this regard, it has thanked QFC, The Film House, Grand Hyatt Doha for providing shooting venues and for their long-term support, along with Qatar-Bahrain Cinema Co, Katara - the Cultural Village, Aspire Zone, Burgerry restaurant and the Museum of Islamic Art.

QRCS provides healthcare, shelter for Syrians in eastern Ghouta, Idlib

Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) has said it is determined to support the healthcare sector in Syria in the face of increasing demand as a result of the protracted crisis in that country.

Several major projects are in progress, including the establishment and running of 16 primary healthcare centres across Syria and urgent medical intervention in the war-torn areas.

A recently opened health facility is Babbila Medical Centre in Eastern Ghouta, Rif Dimashq. Located on the southern outskirts of Damascus, the centre began operations four months ago to serve the area's population and internally displaced persons (IDPs) of different ages, with 24/7 ambulance services.

Working with an operational budget of \$118,000, the centre offers natural childbirth, neonatal/pre-

term care and incubator care. The centre's pharmacy secures medicines for free for the patients.

Over the past four months, statistics show that the centre received nearly 12,000 patients. It is staffed by eight specialist doctors, six nurses, a physiotherapist, a lab technician, a pharmacist and two service personnel.

In the central part of the beleaguered Eastern Ghouta, QRCS is running Saqba Health Centre at a cost of \$242,000. With the available resources, the centre works to offer high-level public health services, the statement notes.

The centre's scope of work expanded from gynaecology & obstetrics, neonatal care and paediatrics to integrated ambulance, dental, radiographic, general clinic and gynaecological surgery services. So far, it has served about 10,000 patients.

With clashes escalating



Several major projects are in progress as part of the QRCS initiative.

recently, QRCS initiated a quick response programme to help families displaced from the Al Waer neighbourhood, Homs, which has been under siege for more than two years.

Following a ceasefire deal, hundreds of families began moving to Idlib, which requires urgent humanitar-

ian assistance, particularly shelter.

QRCS personnel were the first to reach Idlib to prepare shelter requirements and receive the first batch of 700 men, women and children, the statement noted. They secured 700 mattresses and 1,400 blankets at a cost of \$22,000.

Since the start of the Syrian conflict, QRCS has worked to relieve Syrian refugees and IDPs in terms of healthcare, food & non-food aid, shelter and water & sanitation. Over four years, these interventions have exceeded QR300mn, serving more than 1mn Syrians.

UCQ, WCM-Q students hone interview skills

University of Calgary (UCQ) nursing students and Weill Cornell Medicine - Qatar (WCM-Q) medical students have collaborated to strengthen their clinical interview skills in a workshop designed to improve health outcomes in Qatar.

The inter-professional Family Assessment Workshop laid the foundation for further inter-professional education involving the two universities, enabling Qatar's future medical and nursing leaders to collaborate to establish best practice healthcare for the benefit of the country's patients, according to a statement.

Facilitated by University of Calgary in Canada Pro-

fessor Emeritus of Nursing Dr Lorraine Wright, the workshop focused on theories and practical skills that nurses and doctors can use to better evaluate patient needs in consultations with them and their families.

After discussing family assessment methods with Dr Wright, UCQ and WCM-Q students practised interviewing patient families in a clinical simulation room.

"Inter-professional education is all about exchanging expertise and perspectives between health professionals to improve overall care," noted Dr Wright. "When future nursing and medical leaders foster mutual understanding and bonds of respect,

especially in areas as crucial as family assessment, healthcare results can be greatly improved."

Dr Mohamad Verjee, associate professor and director of the Primary Care Clerkship at WCM-Q, worked with the UCQ team, led by Dr Debbie Sheppard LeMoine, faculty at University of Calgary in Qatar. UCQ's team also included Julie Hoffart, director of the Clinical Simulation Centre, William Kay, teaching and learning specialist, and Roger DeWeerd, clinical simulation technical specialist.

"This innovative workshop featuring nursing and medical students working together with faculty bears special significance," said Dr

Verjee. "The quality presentations, collaborative discussions and interactions in clinical simulations were outstanding." "As healthcare professionals, collaboration is key in order to alleviate suffering

and improve the health of the people we serve," said Asma Alamgir, student at UCQ.

"This was an eye-opening professional experience," said Abulrahman al-Abdulmalek, WCM-Q student.

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Yemen fighting persists outside rebel-held capital

AFP
Aden

Yemeni loyalists killed at least 20 Iran-backed rebels yesterday in a pushback against insurgents seeking to retake positions to the northeast of the capital they control, military sources said.

"The Houthis (rebels) on Friday launched an offensive in the direction of Jabal al-Salb in Nihm" district of Sanaa province, "but were repelled on Saturday morning," a loyalist commander said.

"At least 20 Houthis were killed" since Friday night, another military source said, adding that an unspecified number of loyalist troops also died in the fighting.

Last week, pro-government forces captured the Jabal al-Salb area 40km outside Sanaa.

Forces loyal to Yemeni President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi and the Saudi-led military coalition supporting them have sent troops and armoured vehicles to reinforce the district.

Another six loyalists were killed yesterday in a rebel rocket attack on the presidential palace in Marib, a town east of Sanaa under loyalist control, a pro-government military source said.

In Hajja province bordering Saudi Arabia, loyalists fended off a rebel attack north of Haradh town, which was recaptured by pro-government forces last week, a loyalist officer said.

"We're facing a counter-offensive from the Houthis who want to reconquer Jabal al-Nar" mountainous area they lost last week, he said.

Supported by Saudi Apache helicopters, pro-government forces "repelled the attack and inflicted heavy human losses on the Houthis," he added.

Coalition fighter jets led dawn raids on rebel positions in Majzar area in northern Jawf province, which is mostly under loyalist control, a spokesman for the pro-government Popular Resistance militia said.

Loyalist forces advanced in Ghayl area in the same province,

around 20km northeast of Majzar, spokesman Mohamed al-Behaih added.

Strikes also targeted rebel positions in the Baqim and Kitaf areas in northern Saada province, the rebels' stronghold, loyalist military sources said.

The Houthis confirmed the strikes in a statement.

Meanwhile, rebel rocket fire hit residential areas of the southwestern city of Ta'ez, causing "several casualties", a military source said.

Two rebels and two loyalists died in clashes in the city's southern and western districts, while six more Houthis died in an ambush in Maqbana to the northwest of the city, the source said.

The largest hospital in Ta'ez, which is under rebel siege, has closed due to "all its medicine and surgical materials running out," the hospital's management said in a statement yesterday.

During peace talks last week, both sides had agreed to "allow for a full and immediate resumption of humanitarian assistance" into Ta'ez.

But this aid "never reached residents in the centre of Ta'ez, as Houthis seized it to give it to their supporters," Abdelkarim Shamsan, the head of a local humanitarian organisation, said.

Fighting persists in Yemen nine months since the coalition entered the war to support President Hadi, despite his government announcing the extension of a repeatedly violated ceasefire earlier this week.

Luring a falcon



An Emirati falconer moves a lure to attract a falcon in the Liwa Oasis, southwest of Abu Dhabi, yesterday. Falcons were traditionally used for hunting, however hunting is now prohibited in Abu Dhabi.

Record 12,000 candidates sign up for Iran elections

AFP
Tehran

More than 12,000 candidates have signed up for Iranian parliamentary elections due in February, the most since the Islamic revolution in 1979, official media said yesterday.

The number of people who registered to stand before a Friday deadline was up nearly 100% compared with the previous legislative polls in 2012,

the interior ministry said.

At the close of registration, the number of candidates stood at "12,123, of whom 1,434 were women," state news agency IRNA quoted the interior ministry as saying.

Women accounted for 11% of the hopefuls for the 290 seats available in the February 26 vote, up from 8% last time.

The proportion of candidates below the age of 50 increased from 67% to 73%. The youngest candidate to apply was 30 years old, and the oldest 75.

However, the final number of candidates is expected to be lower after the Guardians Council vets applications, with a final list published on February 9.

Voting will be held on the same day as the election for the Assembly of Experts, which monitors the work of supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, 76, and would be responsible for picking a replacement if he dies.

A total of 801 candidates applied to run for the 88-seat assembly, although this number

is also likely to decrease after they have been screened by the Guardians Council.

President Hassan Rouhani, who took office in 2013 on the platform of more social and political freedom, has largely dedicated the first half of his four-year term to nuclear negotiations that culminated in a July deal with major powers.

The agreement will see punishing economic sanctions rolled back in exchange for Iran curtailing its nuclear programme.

Gunmen kill intelligence officer

Assailants shot dead a senior Yemeni intelligence officer in Marib city east of the capital Sanaa on Friday, a security source said.

Commander Jarallah Salhi was gunned down in the centre of the city controlled by forces loyal to the government in the conflict against Iran-backed Shia Houthis

rebels. The officer had actively taken part in the battle for Marib dam, southeast of the city backed by a Saudi-led coalition. The Houthis seized Sanaa last year and then advanced south to the second city of Aden, forcing President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi to flee to Saudi Arabia.

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Tehran calls China to join anti-IS fight

Reuters
Dubai

China should play a more active role in fighting Islamic State, a senior figure in a body that advises Iran's Supreme Leader said on

Thursday, according to the country's Fars news agency.

China relies on the Middle East for oil supplies, but tends to leave diplomacy there to other permanent members of the UN Security Council - the US, Britain, France and Russia.

"China can significantly help the regional peace and stability by becoming more active in the fight against the Islamic State," said Mohsen Rezaei, who has the title of Secretary of the Expediency Council, after meeting members of a Chinese delegation in Tehran.

China has called for greater co-ordination after attacks in Mali and Paris and the downing of a Russian warplane by Turkey, but has long said there is no military solution in Syria, with state media criticising the West and Russia for air strikes.

But this month a Chinese-language song purportedly released by Islamic State put Chinese officials on alert that they need closer global co-operation against Islamist militancy.

Beijing warns that some members of the Muslim Uighur ethnic group, from the western region of Xinjiang, have joined Islamic State in Syria and Iraq.

Rezaei said if China plays a more significant role in the fight against the Islamic State, "Iran can fight against Islamic extremism in Central Asia through cultural activities and interaction with Chinese Muslim community." Iran has ramped up its military presence in Iraq and Syria, where Islamic State controls large areas.

Iran is widely credited for convincing Russia to start its military intervention in Syria and join the fight against the Islamic State.

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1	AF/C/AL5837/15	Design, Supply, Delivery & Installation of Locker System for Aspire Zone Foundation	QR. 60,000	QR.200	24/01/2016	2 Envelopes (Technical + Financial)	Aspire Zone Tender Committee
2	AF/C/ASP5835/15	Supply and Delivery of Dental Items on a Call-Off Basis for Aspetar at Aspire Zone	QR. 25,000	QR. 200	24/01/2016	2 Envelopes (Technical + Financial)	Aspire Zone Tender Committee
3	AF/M/AL2074/15	Provision of Manpower Services on Hire to Aspire Logistics (on Call-Off Basis)	QR. 225,000	QR. 500	26/01/2016	2 Envelopes (Technical + Financial)	Aspire Zone Tender Committee

Tender documents for the above Projects are available for collection as mentioned in the above table from **Aspire Zone Foundation General Tender Committee Office from 7:30AM to 12:00PM** (Tel No. 44476786/44136727) located at Aspire Zone New office Located inside Aspire Park behind Villaggio Mall & next to Hamad Aquatic Center) upon presentation of a formal letter of authorization on Company letterhead, duly signed and stamped, copy of the Commercial Registration, copy of the ID, and a stamped receipt for the non-refundable documentation fee (as mentioned above) which should be paid to Qatar National Bank, Account No. 0013-012515-052 (ASPIRE ZONE). Please find a location map in the following link:

www.aspirezone.org/upload/getdownload.aspx?id=361

Site visits for the above tenders will start on **31st December 2015** interested companies are advised to purchase the tender document(s) before that date in order to be able to attend the site visit.

Submission of Tenders shall follow the **TWO-ENVELOPE** bidding system, i.e., the Technical offer shall be submitted in a sealed envelope and the Commercial offer in another sealed envelope.

Tenders should be accompanied with a Tender Bond as stated above and in accordance with the specimen form attached with the tender document issued as a Bank Guarantee from one of the local Banks registered in Qatar valid for 120 days from date of opening of tenders. The Successful Tenderer will be required to submit a Performance Bond of 10% of the Contract Sum, which will remain valid till (7) days after completion of the Contract / Maintenance period.

Aspire Zone has the right to increase or decrease the quantities of the Goods/Works/Services up to 20% of the contract amount and adjust the contract amount accordingly.

Aspire Zone has the right to split the award of the tender.

The Closing time will be at **12:00 Noon**, on the closing date mentioned above; any offer arriving thereafter will not be considered.

Tenders are to be submitted in **triplicate** (1 Original + 2 Copies) in a sealed envelope, addressed to the Chairman of Aspire Zone Foundation, General Tender Committee as endorsed in Arabic and English and deposited in the Tender Box of Aspire Zone Foundation Tender Committee.

Chairman of ASPIRE ZONE FOUNDATION
General Tender Committee



Relatives of 22-year-old Palestinian Hani Wahdan, mourn during his funeral in Gaza City yesterday.

Israeli forces shoot dead Palestinians

Reuters
Jerusalem

Israeli security forces said they shot dead two Palestinian assailants yesterday in separate incidents in Jerusalem and the occupied West Bank, as 12 weeks of heightened violence showed no sign of abating.

Since the start of October, Israeli forces or armed civilians have killed at least 128 Palestinians, 79 of whom authorities described as assailants. Most others have been killed in clashes with security forces.

Almost daily Palestinian stabbing, car-rammings and shooting attacks have killed 20 Israelis and a US citizen, raising fears of a wider escalation a decade after the last Palestinian uprising subsided.

In the latest fatal incident, the Israeli military said a Palestinian rammed his car into Israeli soldiers at a West Bank checkpoint. "Forces responded to the imminent danger and fired towards the perpetrator," the military said, adding

that one soldier had been wounded and evacuated to hospital.

The 56-year-old Palestinian man died after being taken to hospital, the Palestinian Health Ministry said.

The Palestinians disputed the Israeli military's account of the incident. Jamil Dawoud, 49, said he was travelling in the car behind the one of the man shot, at the checkpoint where soldiers were inspecting the vehicles and that the soldier who opened fire appeared to misunderstand what had happened.

Hours earlier police officers shot dead a Palestinian who tried to stab a policeman near Jerusalem's walled Old City.

Officers approached a man they said was following Jewish worshippers, spokeswoman Luba Samri said, and asked to see his identification papers. "The terrorist whipped out a knife and tried to stab a police officer. He was swiftly shot and neutralised," Samri said.

The incident was captured on security camera footage.

Plan to evacuate jihadists on hold

AFF
Damascus

A plan to evacuate thousands of jihadist fighters and civilians from three besieged districts of Syria's capital was on hold yesterday, a day after an air strike killed a rebel leader.

Zahran Alloush, 44, was the commander of the Jaish al-Islam (Army of Islam), the predominant opposition faction in the Eastern Ghouta rebel bastion east of Damascus.

A senior member of Jaish al-Islam said planes had targeted a "secret meeting" of commanders, and confirmed that Alloush was among those killed.

His death, in an raid claimed by President Bashar al-Assad's regime, was seen as dealing a heavy blow to the nearly five-year uprising and also complicating a fragile peace process.

It also halted the planned evacuation of some 4,000 people, half of them jihadists, from the southern districts of Damascus.

A government official has said the plan would see the evacuees transferred Saturday out of Qadam, Hajar al-Aswad and the besieged Palestinian camp of Yarmuk and into northern Syria.

Those moved are expected to include members of the Islamic State (IS) group and Al Qaeda-affiliated Al Nusra Front.

But a security source close to the negotiations said plan was now on hold.

"Jaish al-Islam was supposed to provide safe passage through areas east of Damascus for the buses heading to Raqa," IS's



Damaged buildings are pictured at night in the rebel-controlled area of Maaret al-Numan town in Idlib province of Syria yesterday.

Syria bastion, the source said by telephone.

"About 1,200 people were supposed to leave today (Saturday), but the death of Zahran Alloush means we are back to square one," he said.

He said buses standing by to transfer the evacuees had left empty and "the plan was on hold until Jaish al-Islam reorganises itself".

Another source close to the negotiations said there was a delay in implementing the deal but that it was "still in place".

Syrian Observatory for Human Rights chief Rami Abdel Rahman said the deal was "frozen, but not cancelled, because of logistical issues linked essentially to the difficulty of providing safe passage".

The deal came after two months of intense talks between govern-

ment and district leaders, according to the Britain-based monitor.

Syria's conflict erupted in 2011 with anti-government protests but has spiralled into a multi-sided civil war across the country.

Alloush was a leading figure in the rebel movement in Damascus province, and had been holding a senior-level meeting in Eastern Ghouta when he was killed.

A Syrian security source said "dozens" of rebels died in two rounds of air strikes by Syria's air force with newly provided Russian missiles.

At least 12 Jaish al-Islam members and seven from the Islamist Ahrar al-Sham group were killed.

Hours afterwards, leading members of Jaish al-Islam elected Abu Hammam al-Buwaydani as a replacement, according to the Observatory.

Buwaydani is a 40-year-old businessman and fighter from Douma in Eastern Ghouta who hails from a family with strong ties to the Muslim Brotherhood, the monitor said.

Backed by Saudi Arabia, the group recently took part in a landmark opposition meeting in Riyadh aimed at forming a united front for eventual talks with Assad's regime.

It has remained firmly opposed to both Assad and IS.

Analyst Karim Bitar said Alloush's death is "a severe blow to the Riyadh negotiations process".

"Given Alloush's authoritarian temper and strong rule, it will take time for Jaish al-Islam to recover from this blow and for the alternative leadership to emerge," he said.

US-backed alliance captures key dam

Reuters
Beirut

A US-backed alliance of Syrian Kurds and Arab rebel groups, supported by US coalition planes, captured a dam yesterday from Islamic State, cutting one of its main supply routes across the Euphrates, an alliance spokesman said.

Colonel Talal Selo said the seizure of the Tishrin dam helps isolate the militants' strongholds in northern Aleppo from their territories east of the Euphrates river, where Raqqa city, their de facto capital, is located.

Selo said the rapid advance overnight by thousands of troops from the Democratic Forces of Syria had brought the dam upstream from Raqqa under their control yesterday.

Since the US-backed alliance was formed last October, its fighters have opened several major offensives against Islamic State with the ultimate goal of capturing Raqqa.

Selo said the alliance troops had cut one main IS supply line from the towns of Bab and Minbij in the northern Aleppo countryside held by the militants on the road to Raqqa city, he added.

The intensive aerial bombing by a US-led coalition was instrumental in the rapid advances since the campaign started four days ago, he said.

"The coalition jets participated in the previous campaigns and this one and future ones, too. We have a strategic partnership in which they provide the air cover and we provide the troops," he told Reuters.

Selo said the militants suffered heavy casualties in the latest round of fighting which involved several thousand fighters from the Democratic Forces of Syria with heavy armour.

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Egypt jails policemen

DPA
Cairo

An Egyptian court sentenced two policemen to life in prison yesterday for torturing a detainee to death, the latest in a series of rulings in cases of police abuse in the country.

The Tanta Criminal Court in Egypt's Nile Delta found the two policemen

guilty of fatally torturing the victim, identified as Ismail Abdel-Hamid, who was taken into police custody last year, state-run newspaper *al-Ahram* reported online.

The two men were also charged with critically injuring another inmate during torture in the same case, according to the report.

They were tried in absentia, *al-Ahram* said. The verdict can be appealed.

The Tanta Criminal Court finds the two policemen guilty of fatally torturing the victim, identified as Ismail Abdel-Hamid

Earlier this month, a court in Cairo sentenced two other policemen to five years in jail each for fatally torturing a detained lawyer.

Human rights groups say that Egypt has seen massive rights abuses since the

army's overthrow in 2013 of Islamist president Mohammed Morsi, a top Muslim Brotherhood official.

President Abdel-Fattah al-Sissi, who led Morsi's ouster, has vowed to punish police who make mistakes, which he called "isolated incidents".

Police abuse was a major complaint in the popular uprising that toppled long-time autocrat Hosny Mubarak in 2011.

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Qatar Foundation

INVITATION TO TENDER

Tender Ref. No.	Description	Tender Fee	Tender Bond	Bid Closing
QF/2015/PD-SC/23222	Temporary Hospitality Tents, AV and Allied Technical Equipment for CHI Al Shaqab 2016	QR 500*	QR 130,000.00	14 January 2016 at 1pm
QF/2015/PD-SC/23215	Translation Management System	QR 500	QR 20,000.00	28 January 2016 at 1pm
QF/2015/PD-SC/23221	Event Management Company for QF Senior Convocation 2015-2016	QR 500	QR 70,000.00	27 January 2016 at 1pm

- The tender document can be obtained against payment of non-refundable tender fee as mentioned above. A cash receipt voucher can be obtained from the Finance Directorate, located at Qatar Foundation, Building No. 4, prior to the collection of the tender document.
- The tender document can be obtained from the Limited Tender Committee, located at Procurement Building, Qatar Foundation.
- Tenderers must issue authorization letters on the company letterhead to the person nominated to collect the tender document.
- The tender document will be issued only to Tenderers who have valid commercial registrations.
- Collection date:
- *For Tender QF/2015/PD-SC/23222: From Thursday 24 December 2015 to Monday 28 December 2015
- Others: From Sunday 27 December 2015 until Thursday 31 December 2015
- Collection time: Sunday to Thursday from 10am until 2pm
- Any offer arriving after the bid closing date and time will not be considered.
- An offer must be valid for 120 days from bid closing date.
- An offer must be accompanied by a bank guarantee (tender bond) issued by a local bank in Qatar and should be valid for 120 days from the bid closing date.
- The successful Tenderer shall submit a performance bond equivalent to 10% of the Bid Value, valid until 90 days after the Contract Completion Date as per the specimen provided in the tender document.
- Bidders are required to submit their quotation in three separate sealed envelopes, one envelope attaching the original Tender Bond, one containing a copy of the Commercial offer plus an electronic copy of the Commercial offer which is editable and the other containing two copies of Technical offer.
- Bids must be submitted to: LIMITED TENDER COMMITTEE, Procurement Building, Qatar Foundation, PO Box 5825, Doha, State of Qatar, at the latest by the date and the time stated above.
- Any tender not in accordance with the conditions stated above will be rejected.

Iraqi troops close in on IS in Ramadi

Reuters
Baghdad

Iraqi troops have pushed deeper into the heart of the last remaining district held by Islamic State in the city of Ramadi, despite being slowed by bombs and booby traps, army spokesmen said yesterday.

Recapturing Ramadi, which fell to the militants in May, would be one of the most important victories achieved by Iraq's armed forces since Islamic State swept across a third of the country in 2014.

Soldiers advanced overnight in the Hoz neighbourhood that houses the provincial government compound, the target of an attack that started on Tuesday, joint operations command spokesman Brigadier Yahya Rasool said.

"The counter-terrorism forces are within 800m (0.5 mile) from the government complex," advancing by about 1 km in the past day, Rasool said.

"Air strikes helped detonate explosive devices and booby-trapped houses, facilitating our advance," he added.

Special operation commander Sami al-Aridhi said the plan was "to liberate all of Ramadi from three sides".

"Our troops are now advancing towards their targets but were delayed because the criminals have booby-trapped everything," he said.

Ramadi is a provincial capital in the fertile Euphrates River valley, just two hours drive west of Baghdad. Most remaining civilians in the Islamic State-held central district have taken shelter in the city's hospital, knowing that the army will not target it, Rasool said.

He declined to give a time frame for the final onslaught to dislodge the militants.

"The campaign's priority is to avoid casualties among civilians and the troops, no matter how long it takes," he said.

About 120 families were rescued from the combat zone yesterday after securing safe routes for their exit and they were taken to a camp near Habbaniya, north of Ramadi, according to a military statement broadcast on state TV.

Military officials had said on Wednesday the offensive to retake the central district should take several days.

The Iraqi government forces are backed by air support from a coalition led by the US. Shia militia units backed by Iran, which have played a major part in other government offensives, have been kept away.

Q-Chem

Qatar Chemical Company Limited
Al Dafna - Amwal Tower - First Floor

P.O. 24646 Doha / Qatar - Tel. 44847111 - Fax 44847695

ANNOUNCEMENT FOR TENDERS

NO.	Document No.	Description	Tender Bond	Tender Fee	Bid Closing Date
1.	QC/TC/P/48/15	SUPPLY OF LIQUID NITROGEN ALONG WITH TANK SKID AND PUMP UNITS FOR Q-CHEM AND Q-CHEM II FOR 3 YEARS ON CALL OFF BASIS	QR 45,500/-	QR 1,000/-	12:00 hrs. on 26 th January 2015
Brief scope: Company requires Contractor to supply portable liquid nitrogen tank skid and diesel powered high pressure pump units with vaporizer of Q-Chem & Q-Chem II for a period of 3 years on call off basis.					
2.	QC/TC/MP/49/15	ENGINEERING SERVICES FOR Q-CHEM, Q-CHEM II AND RLOC FOR 5 YEARS	QR 7,000,000/-	QR 2,000/-	12:00 hrs. on 9 th February 2016
Brief scope: Contractor shall be based in Qatar to provide the engineering services for projects at Q-Chem, Q-Chem II and RLOC. Contractor shall provide the required engineering manpower to perform engineering activities either at Company's site and/or at Contractor's Doha engineering office for 5 years period.					
3.	QC/TC/MA/50/15	FREIGHT FORWARDING SERVICES FOR Q-CHEM, Q-CHEM II AND RLOC FOR 3 YEARS ON CALL OFF BASIS	USD 662,500/-	QR 2,000/-	12:00 hrs. on 1 st February 2016
Brief scope: To provide all the required Freight Forwarding Services on Call-Off Basis for a door-to-door delivery to / from any designated place as required for Company operations by Land, Air or Sea Freight.					
4.	PUR/15/12/BSACK	THREE (3) YEARS STOCKING AND SUPPLY AGREEMENT OF BULK SACKS	QR 350,000/-	QR 1,000/-	12:00 hrs. on 27 th January 2016

- Tender Documents for the above description can be obtained as follows: -
- For each tender pay a non-refundable document fee (cash only) Payable to Q-Chem, Bank Account (Contracts Services - Tender) - Account Number # 001-242007-003 with HSBC Bank) and submit the original receipt with an Authorization letter for collection of documents as below.
- Date and Time of Tender Documents Issuance From 27th December 2015 to 31st December 2015 Between 8:00am and 12:00 noon
- Location: Al Dafna, Omar Al Mukhtar St, Amwal Tower, Building #58, Zone # 61, First Floor, Receptionist.
- Tender should be valid for 180 days from the tender closing date.
- Tender must be accompanied by a Provisional Bank Guarantee (Tender bond) issued by one of the Qatari Banks or by a Bank operating in Qatar and should be valid for 180 days from the tender closing date. For item No. 4 Tender Bond should be valid for 210 days from the tender closing date.
- Completed Tender Documents are to be delivered in sealed envelopes addressed to:
THE SECRETARY, TENDER COMMITTEE, QATAR CHEMICAL COMPANY LIMITED,
P.O. BOX: 24646, DOHA-QATAR and to be dropped in AL DAFNA, OMAR AL MUKHTAR ST, AMWAL TOWER, BUILDING #58, ZONE # 61, FIRST FLOOR, DOHA, QATAR.

Security tight for volatile C Africa's landmark polls

AFP
Bangui

Central African Republic holds a key election amid tight security on Wednesday, hoping to turn a page on the worst sectarian violence seen in the notoriously restive nation.

The much delayed legislative and presidential elections follow a December 13 referendum that delivered a resounding 93% vote in favour of a new constitution — signalling just how many Central Africans yearn for a return to normalcy.

The new constitution, installing the country's sixth republic since its 1960 independence from France, limits the president's tenure to two terms and reins in armed militias which proliferate in large parts of the country.

After more than two years of fighting that forced 10% of the population to flee their homeland, the vote will show whether the mineral-rich but dirt poor nation can slam the door on bloodshed to begin an era of peace.

Despite the presence of 11,000 UN and French peacekeepers, large chunks of the country remain out of bounds, either under the control of rebel chieftains or bandits.

There are 30 candidates vying for the presidency, including the son of former self-proclaimed emperor Jean-Bedel Bokassa, whose extravagant 1970s coronation was modelled on Napoleon's.

The front-runners include Anicet Dologuele, a former premier widely known as "Mr Clean" for his efforts to wipe out graft and theft.



People receive their voter registration card in Bangui during a voter card distribution ahead of the country's presidential elections, yesterday.

Dologuele's main electoral plank is his pacific past and his record as prime minister.

"At age 58, I have never held a weapon," he said recently on the campaign trail.

"I am still happy to recall that between 1996 until now, the only time there was no military or political crises in the country was during my time in office," he also said.

The other leading contender is another former premier, Martin Ziguete, and Abdoul Karim Meckassoua, who held several ministerial positions under ousted veteran ruler Francois Bozize.

Central Africa has been rocked by violence since a mainly Muslim rebellion in 2013 overthrew Bozize, triggering revenge killings by Christian militia that spilled over into civilian communities.

The second round of the polls is scheduled for January 16. There are about 1,800 candidates in the running for parliamentary seats.

Almost twomn Central Africans have registered to vote in a population of 4.8mn.

Pope Francis, who visited the Central African Republic in November, had made an impassioned appeal for peace, saying: "Christians and Muslims are brothers and sisters."

"Together, we must say no to hatred, to revenge and to violence, particularly that violence which is perpetrated in the name of a religion or of God himself," the pope said.

The international community, which has been pouring aid into the country for over two years, was keen for the referendum and elections to take place.

The UN mission in Central Africa said it wanted the ballot to "pass off without incident ...

and for every Central African to be able to vote in total security."

The unrest in the country — which has seen six republics, an empire and several transitional governments — has wreaked havoc on the economy.

Almost 70% of people live in poverty, and in 2014 the World Bank estimated per capita income at \$320 (295 euros), making it one of the poorest countries in the world.

It nonetheless possesses substantial resources, including uranium, diamonds, gold and timber.

Islamist fights kill 10 Tuareg rebels in Mali

Reuters
Bamako

Islamist fighters killed 10 Tuareg rebels in two attacks near northern Mali's border with Algeria this week in a growing wave of violence, Tuareg officials said yesterday.

Six fighters from the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad, northern Mali's largest Tuareg rebel group, were killed on Thursday when Islamist militants attacked their checkpoint in the town of Talahandak, the group said.

It added that Islamist fighters were also killed in the clashes, though it did not give further details.

Four more died on Friday when a convoy of reinforcements was ambushed on its way to the border, said Sidi Ould Ibrahim Sidat, an official with the Tuareg umbrella group, the Co-ordination of Movements of Azawad.

This organisation signed

a peace deal in June with the Malian government as part of efforts to draw a line under a series of separatist uprisings.

He blamed the attacks on fighters from Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA), Ansar Dine and the Macina Liberation Front.

"The attacks were caused by Islamists ... that are opposed to the peace deal," Sidat said. "AQIM, MUJWA and Ansar Dine have even met to put in place a coalition."

Islamist groups hijacked a Tuareg rebellion in early 2012 to seize Mali's desert north. A French-led intervention scattered them a year later, but Islamist fighters have stepped up attacks this year.

Nineteen people, most of them foreigners, were killed in an assault on a luxury hotel in the capital Bamako in November. Islamist groups AQIM, al Mourabitoun, and the Macina Liberation Front all claimed responsibility for the attack.

Kenyan cop dead in militant attack

Somali Islamist militants attacked two Kenyan police convoys in northern Kenya, killing at least one police officer, police and a spokesman for the group said, Reuters reports from Mogadishu. The Al Shebaab group, which seeks to overthrow Somalia's Western-backed government and impose a strict version of Sharia law, has carried out regular assaults in neighbouring Kenya in retaliation for Kenya's contributing troops to an African Union

peacekeeping force in Somalia. "This afternoon, we launched twin attacks," Sheikh Abdiasis Abu Musab, Al Shebaab's military spokesman, told Reuters.

Militants killed one police officer and injured more in the first attack. They later attacked a second vehicle using a roadside bomb, he said, adding the militants had "spared the public vehicles" that were being escorted.

Kenyan authorities confirmed that one police officer had been killed.

Govt supporters protest against peacekeepers

DPA
Bujumbura

Pro-government supporters held demonstrations country-wide in Burundi yesterday against plans by the African Union (AU) to deploy 5,000 peacekeepers to the country.

The AU announced last week that it plans to use the peacekeeping mission to avert further violence in the country, where protesters have been rebelling against President Pierre Nkurunziza's third term in office.

The demonstrations on Saturday took place in major towns in 18 provinces, with demonstrators at a march in Bujumbura holding banners saying, "We are against the deployment of AU troops into Burundi" and "There is no war or genocide to justify the deployment of AU troops."

"No foreign soldier will step his foot on Burundian territory without the authorization of the government," Vice President Gaston Sindimwo said at the Bujumbura march attended by hundreds.



People gesture during a demonstration against the Republican Forces of Burundi (Forebu) on the beach of the Tanganyika Lake near the port of Bujumbura yesterday.

"We warn politicians who are behind insecurity in Burundi that we will not tolerate them. We will continue to fight against criminals," said Sindimwo.

The initial AU deployment, which will be for six months, "is mandated to prevent any deterioration of the security situation" and contribute "to the protection of civilian populations under imminent threat," the Union said.

If Burundi does not accept the deployment within 96 hours, the peacekeepers could be sent in anyway against the government's

wishes, the AU Security Council said late Friday.

The AU said its Burundi mission is also intended to facilitate political moves to resolve the growing sectarian conflict between the Hutu and Tutsi populations.

Anyone who opposed the mission would face sanctions, the AU said. The union said it must now urgently seek financing for the mission.

There are growing concerns that Burundi could descend into another ethnic war between Hutus and Tutsis.

The UN said earlier this

month that the country of 11mn was on the brink of another civil war. Some 250,000 people have already fled to neighbouring countries.

Nkurunziza triggered the conflict when he announced in April that he would run for a third term.

The most recent civil war in the impoverished country - which pitted the majority Hutus against the minority Tutsis, echoing the 1994 genocide of Tutsis and moderate Hutus in neighbouring Rwanda - ended only in 2005, leaving 300,000 people dead.

Police would remain at the scene throughout the night and for the next few days to prevent any renewal of unrest, he added. No one was injured in the riot and no arrests were made, Lopez said.

The province of Almeria is home to a sea of plastic greenhouses that employ many migrants as vegetable and fruit labourers. It also relies on tourism but the jobless rate in the province stand at 31%, much higher than the already high national rate of 21%.

African migrant death sparks riot in Spain

AFP
Madrid

African migrants rioted in a southern Spanish beach city, setting fire to garbage bins and cars, after a man from Guinea-Bissau was stabbed to death, local officials said.

Manolo Garcia, a city councillor in Roquetas del Mar in the province of Almeria, said the killing of the 41-year-old man in the city led to protests which de-

scended into violence in the working class neighbourhood of Cortijos de Marin.

"Garbage bins are being burned, windows have been shattered," he told radio news station Cadena Ser.

Local online newspaper Ideal published a photo of a garbage container engulfed in flames in the middle of a street near a pharmacy as well as a video of a man pushing a garbage container onto a burning car.

Police found the body of

the man from Guinea-Bissau on a street in Roquetas del Mar in the early hours of Friday. Police suspect the man was stabbed following a dispute over a traffic accident, local media reported.

About 30-40 people had taken part in the unrest but police have since brought the situation under control, the assistant deputy of the national government in Almeria, Andres Garcia Lopez, told Cadena Ser.

"At this moment the situation is normal," he said.

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Recovery underway after storms kill 15

AFP/Reuters
Chicago

Millions of residents in the southern United States struggled yesterday to recover from the deadly storms and floods that struck the region over the past days.

At least 15 people have been killed in the states of Mississippi, Tennessee and Arkansas since Thursday, officials said.

With more severe weather expected across the central United States, forecasters are warning of airport delays and flooded roads as travelers return home after the Christmas holiday.

Feeding on unseasonably warm air, storms left a trail of destruction in rural communities from Alabama to Illinois.

More than a dozen tornadoes were reported on Friday in six southern states.

In Alabama, where Governor Robert Bentley had declared a state of emergency to deal with the heavy flooding, tornados uprooted trees and tore off rooftops, with one touching down in Birmingham, the state's most populous city.

National Weather Service (NWS) meteorologist Jody Aaron said that the twister was confirmed to have touched down in the southwestern portion of town about 5pm Central time, (2300 GMT), adding: "There does appear to be some significant damage."

Birmingham Police Lieutenant Sean Edwards said at least three people were taken to hospital for treatment of minor injuries.

Edwards said several houses were damaged, trees were toppled and power was knocked out in the area, but he could provide no further information.

Images published online by local media outlets showed lawns scattered with debris from what appeared to be homes and some collapsed structures.

"The damage was ... confined to approximately one square mile," Birmingham Fire Department Chief Charles Gordon told CNN. "We have three houses that collapsed."

No one died, but Gordon said victims were rescued from the debris.

Mississippi Governor Phil Bryant and Georgia Governor Nathan Deal also declared states of emergency in counties affected by the weather.

Forecasters at the NWS have warned that the central United States "will continue to have widespread showers and thunderstorms this weekend".

This weather system "has a history of producing heavy rain and flooding/flash flooding over much of the southeastern US, and the threat for excessive rainfall will persist".

The NWS warned that "flash flooding will be possible" this weekend in the area.

In Mississippi, eight people were confirmed dead and another 60 injured, the state emergency management agency said on Twitter.

Among them was a seven-year-old boy, who was killed when a storm picked up and tossed the car he was travelling in, fire chief Kenny Holbrook told

reporters in the town of Holly Springs.

Six fatalities were confirmed in Tennessee, including three people found dead on Thursday in a car submerged in a creek, according to the fire department in Columbia, Tennessee.

Another person was killed in Arkansas.

The East Coast meanwhile was enjoying unseasonably warm weather, with temperatures in New York peaking at 72° Fahrenheit (22° Celsius) on Thursday, the warmest Christmas Eve since records began in 1871.

The temperature reached a record-setting 66° F (19° C) the following day.

In the US capital, the temperature on Friday reached 69° F (20.6° C), a 30-year record, local media reported.



The foundation of a mobile home is seen after a tornado struck Holly Springs, Mississippi, in this National Weather Service (NWS) picture taken on Thursday. A family of five was inside the mobile home and all survived, according to the NWS.

California wildfire burns 1,100 acres, closes major highway

Reuters/AFP
Los Angeles

A wildfire in Southern California burned about 1,100 acres (445 hectares) of land, forced the closure of parts of a major highway and led to evacuations yesterday, fire officials said.

More than 500 firefighters were at the scene or en route to battle the blaze in the Solimar Beach area of Ventura County, and parts of the 101 highway had been closed, county fire department spokeswoman Heather Sumagaysay said.

Reopening the highway, a major roadway in the region, is a top priority, she said.

Fire officials had earlier reported that parts of the Pacific Coast highway also were closed, but Sumagaysay said she was not aware of that.

Ventura is about 65 miles (104km) northwest of Los Angeles.

No injuries have been reported, but the fire has not been contained, Sumagaysay said.

No structures have been damaged by the fire, but nearby Union Pacific rail lines are closed, she said.

The fire started around 11pm local time on Friday, and strong winds and dry vegetation caused it to grow rapidly, she said.

Around 2am local time yesterday in a video posted on Facebook, Ventura County Fire Department Captain Steve Kaufman said the fire was near the beach, "bumping up against the roadway. We're getting a bunch of embers in Solimar east".

The Solimar Beach community is under a mandatory evacuation order, while a voluntary one has been issued for the nearby Faria Beach community, fire officials said.

The fire that is threatening about 30 homes has also swept through an area with an extensive network of oil wells and underground pipelines, Ventura County Fire Department spokesman Mike Lindbergh told AFP, adding he did not believe any had been ignited by the flames.

The fire was currently uncontained, he added.

A Red Cross shelter has been set up for residents.



California burning

Here are some images of the Solimar brush fire that started early yesterday morning in Ventura County.



Probe into Houston mosque blaze

AFP/Reuters
Washington

US authorities are investigating a suspicious fire at a mosque in Texas, weeks after a mass shooting in California by a Muslim couple that sparked fears of a backlash against members of their faith.

No one was hurt in the blaze at the Masjid mosque in Houston that broke out on Friday afternoon and destroyed the interior of the small house of worship located in a shopping mall, local media reported.

The fire had "multiple points of origin" and "appears suspicious", a spokeswoman for the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives told local media.

The Council on American-Islamic Relations urged authorities to probe possible foul play.

"Because of the recent spike in hate incidents targeting mosques nationwide, we urge law enforcement authorities to investigate a possible bias motive for this fire," the executive director of the group's Houston chapter, Mustafaa Carroll, said. "Officials are checking surveillance video and say the cause of the fire is 'suspicious'".

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) is also looking into the incident.

Earlier this month, authorities investigated a suspected case of arson at a mosque in Palm Springs, California.

On December 2, a Muslim couple killed 14 people and injured 22 others in an assault in the California city of San Bernardino that is being investigated by the FBI as a terror attack.

ANNOUNCEMENT

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Obama hails US troops killed in Afghanistan suicide bombing

Reuters
Kanohe Bay, Hawaii

President Barack Obama called the six US troops killed in Afghanistan on Monday "outstanding" and "brave" as he thanked American service members on Friday during a Christmas Day visit to Marine Corps Base Hawaii in Kanohe Bay.

"Even though we have been able to reduce the number of folks we're deploying to places like Iraq and Afghanistan, there are still folks over there every single day and it's still dangerous as we saw this past week with the outstanding, brave men and women who were killed," Obama said.

The six American troops were

killed when a suicide bomber on a motor bike struck their patrol near Bagram air base, marking the deadliest attack on US forces this year.

The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack.

The Christmas Day remarks were the first time Obama had addressed the attack.

He did not mention it when he made an appearance for reporters while playing golf the day of the attack.

Obama and his wife Michelle made their annual visit to the US Marine base's Anderson Hall dining room to deliver Christmas wishes to troops and their families.

"So many families are serving tirelessly and it's not just those of you in uniform who serve," Obama said in a brief address to

the troops, noting that spouses and children of service members also make sacrifices.

Obama uses the workout facilities at the base during his family's two-week vacation in Hawaii.

"The only problem I've got when I'm here is that I've got to work out next to Marines in the gym," Obama joked. "I generally feel like your commander-in-chief is in pretty good shape. Then I get next to some guy curling 100 pounds and it makes me feel small."

The president and first lady then spent time talking to the troops individually.

On Wednesday, Obama called military service members from the Army, Navy and Air Force who are stationed around the world to thank them.

Miss Universe host says 'Merry Easter'

Steve Harvey, the man who famously "gave" the Miss Universe crown to the wrong contestant, has now offered the world Easter greetings - on Christmas Day.

"Merry Easter, y'all!" ran the caption to a picture of smiling Harvey, smoking a cigar and flashing a peace sign. The picture was posted on Friday on Harvey's social media accounts. Harvey, a 58-year-old comedian and talkshow host, misread his cue card in front of a global television audience at the Miss Universe pageant on December 20 and announced that Miss Colombia, Ariadna Gutierrez, had triumphed. Moments later he apologised and announced Miss Philippines, Pia Wurtzbach, was the winner.

Robert Downey Jr pardoned

California Governor Jerry Brown has pardoned *Iron Man* film star Robert Downey Jr for drug and weapons offences during the 1990s, a largely symbolic gesture that leaves the actor's criminal record intact but restores his right to serve on a jury. The pardon granted the one-time Hollywood "bad boy", who revived his career after years of drug abuse and run-ins with the law, commended Downey, 50, for his "good conduct" since leaving jail more than 15 years ago.

Janet Jackson halts tour for surgery

Pop superstar Janet Jackson has announced a temporary halt to her global tour to undergo surgery for an unspecified condition, raising fears for her health. Jackson, 49 said on Twitter: "It breaks my heart to tell you that I am forced to postpone the 'Unbreakable Tour' until the spring."

New landslide sweeps through Myanmar jade mining region

AFP
Yangon

Rescuers were searching through mud and rubble yesterday after a new landslide buried workers – possibly dozens – in a remote jade mining region in northern Myanmar, the second such incident in just over a month.

The landslide took place on Friday afternoon in Hpakant, Kachin State, the war-torn area that is the epicentre of Myanmar's secretive billion dollar jade industry.

"The rescue process has now started and we are searching for dead bodies but we can't tell the numbers yet," Nilar Myint, an official from Hpakant Administrative Office, said.

An AFP photographer on the scene said mechanical diggers had been brought in to sift through a huge pile of debris that had slid down a steep hillside.

Locals report as many as 50 people might have been buried by the wall of mud and stones.

But a second official involved in the rescue operation downplayed that number.

"According to what officials from nearby villages have told us, just three or four people are missing at the moment," said Myo Thet Aung, also from the Hpakant Administrative Office.

By mid-afternoon yesterday officials said they still had not found any bodies.

The same area was hit by a massive landslide last month that killed more than 100 people. Locals says dozens more have died throughout the year in smaller accidents.

The region is remote, with little phone coverage and poor roads making it difficult to obtain precise and swift data after such incidents.

Those killed in landslides are mainly itinerant workers who scratch a living picking through the piles of waste left by large-scale industrial mining firms in the hope of stumbling across a previously missed hunk of jade that will deliver them from poverty.

Myanmar is the source of virtually all of the world's finest

est jadeite, a near-translucent green stone that is enormously prized in neighbouring China, where it is known as the "stone of heaven".

The Hpakant landscape has been turned into a moonscape of environmental destruction as firms use ever-larger diggers to claw the precious stone from the ground.

But while mining firms -- many linked to the junta-era military elite -- are thought to be raking in huge sums, local people complain they are shut off from the bounty.

In an October report, advocacy group Global Witness estimated that the value of Myanmar jade produced in 2014 alone was \$31bn and said the trade might be the "biggest natural resource heist in modern history".

Much of the best jade is thought to be smuggled directly to China.

With little help from authorities, Hpakant community groups have pooled limited resources to help workers injured in the accidents which have become commonplace as the diggers creep closer to villages.

Heroin and methamphetamine are also easily and cheaply available on Hpakant's dusty streets, a side effect of Myanmar's massive narcotics trade.

Locals have launched desperate campaigns to try to persuade Myanmar's quasi-civilian government, which replaced outright military rule in 2015, to force mining firms to curtail their rapidly expanding operations.

But their pleas have so far fallen on deaf ears.

Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy swept landmark November 8 elections and will form a new government early next year.

But it has not yet outlined any firm plans for the jade trade beyond pledges for a more equitable allocation of profits from the country's natural resources.

Analysts say reform will be difficult given the entrenched military interests in the trade and the remoteness of many of the mines, some of which are in the hands of ethnic rebel fighters.



Rescue workers are pictured at the site of a landslide in Hpakant, Kachin State, the war-torn area that is the epicentre of Myanmar's secretive billion dollar jade industry yesterday.

Breakaway rebels kill nine in southern Philippines

Reuters
Manila

A breakaway rebel group killed nine civilians in the southern Philippines in a series of attacks on Christmas eve, officials said yesterday, in a reminder that the region remains volatile despite recent gains in the peace process.

Army troops killed four members of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, a faction opposed to a peace deal between government and the mainstream rebel group, after they attacked a farming town

in Sultan Kudarat province on the southern island of Mindanao.

Miriam Ferrer, the government's chief negotiator in peace talks with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, said seven farmers were shot at close range while working in their rice paddies and two other civilians were killed in a grenade attack on a chapel in nearby North Cotabato province.

Ferrer said the rebels had also taken civilian hostage in the Sultan Kudarat attack and used them as human shields when soldiers pursued them,

but the hostages were later freed.

The Bangsamoro group broke away from the main rebel group in 2011 to fight for the creation of an Islamic state in the south of the mainly Catholic country, a goal shared by another small militant group, Abu Sayyaf, which has gained notoriety for bombings, beheadings and kidnappings of foreigners in the western part of Mindanao.

The ceasefire with the main Moro Islamic Liberation Front is holding, however, while both the government and communist guerrillas de-

clared a 12-day ceasefire from Dec 23 nationwide to mark the Christmas and New Year's holidays.

Yesterday, the Maoist-led rebel group celebrated its 46th anniversary.

Security forces are on heightened alert around shopping malls, churches, bus stations and ferry terminals during the holidays to guard against possible attacks.

Police officials said the group behind the Christmas eve attacks in Mindanao had pledged allegiance to Islamic State militants in the Middle East in videos posted to

YouTube but they had no evidence linking them directly to militants from Islamic State in Iraq and Syria.

They also had no evidence that any Filipinos had travelled to the Middle East to fight with IS.

In March 2014, the Philippines signed a peace deal with the main rebels granting the minority Moro people autonomy in exchange for dismantling the 11,000-strong guerrilla army and turning over their weapons, ending a 45-year conflict that killed 120,000 people and displaced 2mn.



Acehese women attend a mass prayer gathering at Lampuuk village in Banda Aceh yesterday.

Murder pair transferred amid protests over death sentence

DPA
Bangkok

Two migrant workers from Myanmar facing death for the murders of two British tourists were transferred from jail on Thailand's Samui island to a prison in a nearby province.

Zaw Lin and Win Zaw Tun were found guilty by a Samui court for the rape and murder of Hannah Witheridge and the killing of David Miller on the island resort of Koh Tao in September 2014. They were sentenced to death on

Thursday. The transfer to a prison in the mainland province of Nakhon Si Thammarat came amid protests in Myanmar.

About 10,000 demonstrators gathered at the border crossing near the Myanmar town of Tachileik to protest the verdict, and to hand a letter to Thai authorities demanding for a fair and just trial.

The border was temporarily closed during the protest.

Another group of dozens of protesters was gathering at the Thai embassy in Yangon for a third day, according to the Thai Foreign Ministry.

Andy Hall, head of a group that organised the legal defence, said police had used torture to extract a confession from the pair, which they later retracted, and that investigators had fumbled the DNA forensics.

The public anger over the death sentences led the Thai embassy in Yangon to warn Thai nationals to be "extra vigilant and avoid identifying your nationality where possible."

Hundreds of people are on death row in Thailand, but the last state execution occurred in 2009.

Indonesia, Thailand mark anniversary of tsunami

DPA
Jakarta/Bangkok

Aceh residents held memorial services yesterday on the 11th anniversary of the tsunami that killed at least 165,000 people in Indonesia's westernmost province.

Governor Zaimi Abdullah and regional officials visited a mass grave of tsunami victims, and then attended a memorial religious service at a mosque.

Fishermen marked the tragedy by abstaining taking their

boats out on Friday and yesterday. "Fishermen were advised not to go fishing for two days in remembrance of the tsunami and because it was Friday," Miftah Cut Adek, a community leader was quoted by news web site Detik.com.

A powerful undersea earthquake that struck about 160 kilometres off the western coast of Sumatra island generated giant waves that devastated coastal areas in Aceh.

Victims included 37,000 injured and about half a million displaced people. The tidal waves

also caused death and destruction in India, Thailand, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and elsewhere in the Indian Ocean, including coastal Africa.

Meanwhile, provinces in southern Thailand also held memorial services in various locations along the western coast that was hit by giant waves that killed more than 5,300 people in the country 11 years before.

Anniversary events were held at Kamala Memorial Stone, Mai Khao Memorial Wall, Phuket City Hall and Patong Beach in

the southern resort island of Phuket. Interfaith ceremonies were also held in resort towns across the Andaman coast from Phang Nga province to Phi Phi archipelago.

Many relatives from abroad who lost their loved ones in the December 26, 2004 tsunami travelled to Thailand to join the service.

The tsunami struck during peak tourist season at the beaches and islands in Thailand, killing thousands of holidaymakers as well as workers and villagers.



Demonstrators hold placards outside the Thai embassy in Yangon yesterday to protest against the death sentence of Myanmar labour workers, Zaw Lin and Win Zaw Tun for the murder of two British backpackers on the Thai island of Koh Tao.



Getting ready for new year celebrations



Visitors walk underneath New Year's Day decorations celebrating next year's "Year of the Monkey" from the Chinese zodiac, at the Nakamise shopping alley in front of Sensoji Temple in Tokyo yesterday. Japan has started the new year holiday period, one of the country's most important holidays, with many people visiting temples and shrines and travelling to their hometowns.

'Armed' China ship near disputed isles: Japan

AFP
Tokyo

A Chinese coast guard ship which appeared to be armed with several cannon yesterday entered what Tokyo regards as its territorial waters near disputed islands, the Japan Coast Guard said.

Japan and China routinely butt heads over ownership of the uninhabited East China Sea islets, as Chinese ships – mostly coast guard vessels – and aircraft have sometimes approached them to back up Beijing's claims and test Japan's response.

It was however the first time an apparently armed Chinese coast guard vessel had "entered the territorial waters near the Senkaku Islands", the Japan Coast Guard said.

Japan administers the uninhabited islands under that name but China also claims them and calls them the Diaoyus.

On Tuesday Japan said it had spotted the armed Chinese coast guard ship for the first time in the contiguous waters near the islands.

"The ship is seen carrying four pieces of equipment, two at the front and another set of two at the rear, which each seem to have something similar to a cannon," a coastguard spokeswoman had said at the time.

The same ship entered what Tokyo considers its territorial waters, with two other Chinese coast guard vessels without such equipment, at around 9:30 am (0030 GMT) yesterday and stayed for about an hour, the Japan Coast Guard said in statements.

In November, Japan said it spotted a Chinese naval intelligence ship operating near the disputed islands for the first time.

Relations between Japan and China hit a low after Tokyo in September 2012 moved to increase its formal control by nationalising some of the islands.

But the countries – Asia's two biggest economies – have taken steps over the past year to improve ties. They issued carefully worded statements on the dispute ahead of a summit in November last year in Beijing between Chinese President Xi Jinping and Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

The two sides acknowledged they had different views on tensions emanating from the issue but agreed on the need to keep them under control.

More than 100 homes lost in Christmas Day bushfires

Bushfires southwest of Melbourne still dangerous; Scenic Great Ocean Road mostly closed in busy Christmas season; Officials warn of more blazes

Reuters
Melbourne

More than 100 homes burned down in a leading Australian tourist area in bushfires on Christmas Day and the situation remained dangerous yesterday, as officials predicted more blazes to come later in the hot southern summer.

While around 500 firefighters and 13 firefighting aircraft battled the flames along parts of Victoria state's picturesque Great Ocean Road, teams moved in to assess damage from fires that had lit up the night sky along the coast on Christmas.

A spokesman for the state's emergency services said 98 homes had been confirmed burned in the community of Wye River and another 18 in nearby Separation Creek, for a total of

116 in the two townships, located about 120 kilometres southwest of Melbourne.

Top emergency officials warned that dry conditions posed a threat of more fires for the Great Ocean Road area and the rest of Victoria.

"This fire doesn't go away," Craig Lapsley, the state's emergency services commissioner, told a news conference.

"We will be back into hot, windy weather in January without a doubt. Everything's available to burn."

The Great Ocean Road is one of Australia's biggest tourist draws with its spectacular scenery and unusual offshore rock formations. It remained mostly closed to traffic yesterday during what is typically one of its busiest times of the year.

Although an evacuation alert was lifted for the popular tourist town of Lorne and rain overnight had helped the firefighting operation, officials said the situation remained potentially dangerous with many hotspots. Images from the scene showed hillsides charred to the ground all

the way down to the coast. State Premier Daniel Andrews surveyed the area from the air and commended emergency services, noting that there had so far been no loss of life, but he warned that the number of homes destroyed could rise.

Meetings were held yesterday for hundreds of victims urgently moved out of affected towns on Friday, many spending Christmas night in hurriedly organised shelters.

Andrews said financial grants had already been issued to help those who had lost their homes.

The fires started with a lightning strike on Dec 19 and, fanned by winds, have burned more than 2,000 hectares.

Walking tracks in the nearby Great Otway National Park have been closed to the public as some of the fires are within the park itself.

The disaster is the latest of a string of bushfires to hit Victoria and other states in recent weeks.

In 2009, Victoria witnessed Australia's worst ever bushfire disaster, since dubbed "Black Saturday".



A woman tends to horses as children sleep on fold-out beds in the main street of Lorne during major bushfires south of Melbourne.

Tokyo plans new fund for former 'comfort women'

AFP
Tokyo

Japan plans to propose a fresh fund to support former comfort women as foreign ministers from Tokyo and Seoul meet next week to settle a bitter row over a Japanese wartime brothel system, reports said yesterday.

The one-day meeting between Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida and his South Korean counterpart, Yun Byung-se, will be held in Seoul on Monday, officials have said.

The ministers are to discuss "matters of mutual concern" such as the issue of women systematically forced to have sex with Japanese soldiers during World War II.

The Japanese government is considering creating a new fund of about 100m yen (\$830,000) to help former comfort women, the *Mainichi* daily reported, while other media said the sum would be larger than that.

Tokyo also plans to propose that the two countries sign a statement confirming that the issue of comfort women is settled completely, the *Mainichi* and other Japanese newspapers reported.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is aiming for a resolution of the lingering issue that has over-

shadowed diplomatic relations between the two East Asian US allies.

Japan issued a landmark 1993 statement that expressed "sincere apologies and remorse" to the women "who suffered immeasurable pain and incurable physical and psychological wounds as comfort women".

The Japanese government is considering creating a new fund of about 100m yen (\$830,000)

But it has long maintained that the dispute was settled in a 1965 normalisation agreement with South Korea, which saw Tokyo make a total payment of \$80m in grants or loans to its former colony.

In its editorial yesterday, Japan's conservative *Sankei* daily called on the government to maintain that the dispute was settled in the 1965 agreement and assure that South Korea stop "rehashing" the issue as a diplomatic card.

Seoul is demanding a fresh formal apology and compensation for the Korean women.

The fate of the comfort women is a hugely emotional issue in South Korea and a source of much of the distrust that has marred relations between Seoul and Tokyo for decades.

Beijing says journo facing expulsion a 'flagrant champion' of terrorism

AFP
Beijing

China confirmed the imminent expulsion of a French journalist in the first such case since 2012, accusing her of "flagrantly championing" terrorist acts in a statement on its foreign ministry's website yesterday.

Ursula Gauthier, a Beijing-based correspondent for French news magazine *L'Obs*, must issue a public apology for an article she wrote last month or China's foreign ministry will not renew her press credentials, officials told Gauthier on Christmas Day.

Her essay "flagrantly championed acts of terrorism and acts of cruelly killing innocents, triggering the Chinese people's outrage," said the foreign ministry statement.

Citing her failure to make a "serious apology to the Chinese people", the statement said: "It is not suitable for her to continue working in China."

"China will never support the freedom to champion terrorism," it added.

But the Chinese people expressed confusion over their own purported indignation, as most had not read or even heard of Gauthier's article, which has no Chinese-language version and remains inaccessible on the mainland's censored Internet in its original French.

"Triggered the Chinese people's outrage"? Don't presume to represent me – I

don't even know what happened!" wrote one user on China's Twitter-like Weibo platform.

"You should put out the original article for everyone to see – otherwise how can everyone be angry?" asked another.

Entitled "After the attacks (on Paris), Chinese solidarity is not without ulterior motives", Gauthier's article spoke of China's anti-terrorism policies in the country's western region of Xinjiang, homeland of the Muslim Uighur ethnic minority – many of whom complain of discrimination and controls on their culture and religion.

Xinjiang is often hit by deadly unrest and China blames the violence on Islamist separatists, but rights groups point to Beijing's own actions as a driver.

If Gauthier's press card is not renewed, she cannot apply for a new visa, forcing her to leave China.

"They confirmed that if I did not make a public apology on all the points that had 'hurt the Chinese people'... my press card would not be renewed and I would have to leave on December 31," Gauthier said Friday.

Gauthier would be the first foreign correspondent to be expelled since the 2012 expulsion of Melissa Chan, correspondent for the English-language service of Al Jazeera.

The move has been met with widespread criticism from the French government, press watchdog Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and Gauthier's employer.



Ursula Gauthier, the Beijing-based correspondent for French news magazine *L'Obs*, works at her desk in her apartment in Beijing yesterday.

"France will remain committed to the defence of freedom of expression and information throughout the world," wrote French minister of culture and communication Fleur Pellerin Friday on Twitter in response to the news.

Gauthier's article in *L'Obs* triggered condemnation from Beijing and a virulent campaign in the state-run *Global Times* and *China Daily*, as well as thou-

sands of often violent and abusive comments from Chinese Internet users. Her photo was also published online.

While the domestic media in China is subject to strict control and many topics are taboo, the foreign media is free to publish on any topic. However, foreign journalists frequently complain of harassment by the authorities while conducting routine reporting.



Parts of England suffer flooding as govt scrambles

AFF/DPA
London

Heavy rains triggered floods in parts of England yesterday, forcing the evacuation of hundreds of homes and the deployment of army personnel to shore up overwhelmed defences.

Lancashire in northwest England and Yorkshire in the northeast were the worst affected, with environment officials issuing more than 300 alerts in those areas, with warnings that the flooding could at times be life-threatening, and that people should avoid taking to the roads whenever possible.

"A severe flood warning means danger to life. It doesn't mean 'come and have a look'," Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service warned residents in a tweet.

In some areas water reached the lower windows of houses and shops, and in others cars had been abandoned after narrow country roads had turned into fast-flowing streams.

The British government also has the military involved in building temporary flood de-

fences in the northwest and evacuating residents in Lancashire.

Lee Fraser of the West Yorkshire area in northern England told the Press Association of nearby roads being submerged by floods: "It's been raining really heavily since last night. The siren went off about 7am and 10 minutes later everything started flooding."

A number of Boxing Day sporting events have been called off.

Local police have reported that so far rainfall has already passed record levels, and that a further 5cm to 8cm are expected by the end of the day yesterday.

Underscoring the severity of the deluge, the government's emergency COBRA committee met on Christmas day to tackle the crisis, with officials under pressure after similar flooding earlier this month in northwest England.

The floods in Cumbria caused damage estimated at hundreds of millions of pounds and turned many towns and villages into swamps, prompting angry accusations that the government had failed to spend enough on flood defences.

Serbia detains 80 in anti-graft crackdown

Reuters
Belgrade

Serbian police arrested 80 people including a former minister on graft charges yesterday, stepping up an anti-corruption drive days after opening talks on joining the European Union.

In the biggest sweep of its kind in the country in decades, the former head of the anti-

corruption agency, executives of state-owned companies, two ex-government officials and several ministers were also held.

They were charged with abuse of office, money laundering and financial crime, covering alleged offences dating back to 2004 and embezzlements totalling 7.8bn dinars (\$70m), Interior Minister Nebojsa Stefanovic said.

On December 14 Serbia launched accession talks with EU authorities, during which it

will be under pressure to demonstrate progress in dismantling a legacy of corruption and organised crime that gained a strong foothold in the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s.

The interior ministry said 80 people had been arrested so far. Stefanovic said police were searching for five more, and that a further 39 individuals were to be charged.

The former minister arrested was Slobodan Milosavljevic of

the opposition Democratic Party, who held the agriculture, forestry and water management portfolio from May 2007 to July 2008.

He is charged with abuse of office during his term and also while he served as Chamber of Commerce head from 2004 until 2007, the ministry said in a statement.

The ministry said Zorana Markovic, who headed the government's anti-corruption agency from 2010 to 2012, was

also arrested, as was the former general manager of Serbia's only steel plant.

Democratic Party leader Bojan Pajtic said the arrests were politically motivated.

Most of those detained are from his party, though some are members of the governing Socialist Party.

In June, authorities charged more than three dozen police and customs officers with corrup-



Rajoy: favoured by 27% to stay PM.

Two-thirds of Spaniards don't want new poll

Reuters
Madrid

Less than one-third of Spaniards want a re-run of last Sunday's election, which resulted in a political stalemate, with two-thirds favouring a pact between parties, a poll showed on Thursday.

Just 7% of those surveyed said they would change their votes in a fresh election while 87.1% said they would vote the same.

The conservative People's Party (PP) won the most votes in last Sunday's election but lost its parliamentary majority, with main opposition Socialists (PSOE) in second place.

Both lost ground to two new-

comers, the liberal Ciudadanos and left-wing Podemos.

Only 1.4% of PP supporters would change their vote in a new election while 6.8% of those who backed the PSOE would vote for a different party, the poll showed.

Of those surveyed, 27% said they would prefer to see PP leader Mariano Rajoy remain as

prime minister while 26% said Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias should replace him.

PSOE leader Pedro Sanchez was favoured by 20% and Albert Rivera of Ciudadanos by just 12%.

The poll of 1,200 people was carried out on Monday and Tuesday by Invymark for the television channel La Sexta.

Business leaders fear nationalism, migrant crisis will destroy the EU

Reuters
Berlin

German business leaders fear that deep divisions over how to handle the refugee crisis and growing nationalism among member states could break up the European Union, according to five of the country's biggest industry bodies.

The arrival of hundreds of thousands of people fleeing war and poverty in countries such as Syria and Iraq in Europe this year has frayed ties between European nations that were already strained by the eurozone financial crisis.

Added to that, rising nationalism could endanger Europe's wealth, economic success and security, the presidents of Germany's most prominent business groups told Reuters.

"Next year will be a crucial year for Europe," BDI industry association leader, Ulrich Grillo, said. "I'm very worried about the future of the European Union."

Lack of solidarity within the bloc meant Europe was risking all the achievements of the previous decades, Association of Skilled Trades president Hans Peter Wollseifer said.

"I would like to see a strong symbol for the unity of Europe," he said.

Germany's BGA wholesalers and exporters body leader, Anton Boerner, said Europe pulling further apart was one of the biggest risks for next year.

Germany is looking to EU partners to help manage the refugee crisis but is running up against resistance from some countries, particularly in eastern Europe.

The influx has raised security concerns and boosted support for eurosceptic parties across Europe, from Germany's AfD party to France's National Front, the Law and Justice government in Poland and Britain's anti-EU UK Independence Party.

"Europe has been in difficult water for a long time," Association of German Chambers of Commerce and Industry (DIHK) head, Eric Schweitzer, said.

National answers for international problems were no longer enough, Schweitzer said, and Europe only had weight in the world when its member states acted together.

In addition to the refugee crisis, European officials are grappling with Britain's demands for EU reform ahead of a referendum on its membership of the bloc.

The head of Germany's BDA employers association, Ingo Kramer, called on the EU to take Britain's demand for change seriously in order to keep the country in the union.

Walled up



Young refugees regard a graffiti'd wall of a temporary bedroom at a refugee accommodation hosted in a hangar of the former Tempelhof airport in Berlin.

DPA
Hamburg

Only 16% of Germans feel their country has benefited from this year's decision to accept a mass influx of asylum seekers, according to a new survey.

According to researcher Horst Opaschowski, only 16% responded positively to the statement: "The influx of refugees will provide more economic opportunities than problems for us."

Another question asking whether the move to take in so many refugees would improve Germany's image worldwide only elicited a positive response from 20% of respondents.

The number was even lower - 12% - in the country's east, which is having the most problems coming to terms with the rush of refugees, expected to hit about 1mn this year.

The figure was 22% in western Germany.

However, the percentage was higher - 32% - among respondents aged 14-17. Fifty-six per cent of respondents said they think German politicians are out of their league with the crisis.

Respondents from towns with fewer than 5,000 residents agreed with that sentiment even more, a total of 66%.

Czech leader Zeman describes migrant wave an 'organised invasion' of Europe

AFF
Prague

Czech President Milos Zeman, known for his anti-migrant comments, has called the current wave of refugees to Europe "an organised invasion", and that young men from Syria and Iraq should instead "take up arms" against the Islamic State (IS) group.

"I am profoundly convinced that we are facing an organised invasion and not a spontaneous movement of refugees," said Zeman in his Christmas message to the Czech Republic released yesterday.

He went on to say that compassion was "possible" for refugees who are old or sick and for children, but not for young men who in his view should be back home fighting against militants. "A large majority of the illegal migrants are young men in



Zeman: I wonder why these men are not taking up arms to go fight for the freedom of their countries against the Islamic State.

good health, and single. I wonder why these men are not taking up arms to go fight for the freedom of their countries against the Islamic State," said Zeman, who

was elected Czech president in early 2013.

He added that their fleeing their war-torn countries only serves to strengthen the IS group.

The 71-year-old evoked a comparison to the situation of Czechs who left their country when it was under Nazi occupation (1939-1945) in order to "fight to liberate the country and not to receive social benefits in Great Britain".

It's not the first time Zeman has taken a controversial stance on Europe's worst migrant crisis since World War II.

In November, the left-winger attended an anti-Islam rally in Prague in the company of far-right politicians and a paramilitary unit.

The country's Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka, who has previously criticised the head of state's comments, said Zeman's Christmas message was based "on prejudices and his habitual simplification of things".

A recent survey showed that nearly 70% of Czechs oppose the arrival of migrants and refugees in their country.

Steinmeier calls for better border control

Reuters
Berlin

Europe needs to regain control of its borders, Germany's foreign minister was quoted as saying yesterday, after reports that forged Syrian passports are in the hands of Islamic State militants.

More than 1mn migrants, many fleeing war and violence in the Middle East, have arrived in Germany this year.

Since last month's Paris attacks, concern has grown that Islamist militants may enter undetected among the influx.

On Tuesday, German media quoted Bavaria's interior minister as saying that refugees with fake Syrian passports have disappeared in Germany and there are grounds for suspicion that they may have had contact with Islamic State militants.

Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier warned against

lumping refugees in the same category as suspected terrorists and said many militants came from Europe.

"However, irrespective of this, it is important that we have more control again over who is entering and leaving Europe," Steinmeier said in an interview with newspapers in the Funke Medien Group.

He added that a suggestion by the European Commission to expand the powers of the EU's Frontex border agency, and an EU agreement offering incentives to Turkey to help stem the flow of refugees, were important building blocks towards better frontier control.

Earlier this month, the European Union said it would nearly treble its spending on frontier defence and create a new 1,500-strong rapid reaction force under proposals to tackle the migration crisis.

Asked about the German comments yesterday, a spokesman



Steinmeier: it is important that we have more control again over who is entering and leaving Europe.

for the European Commission said the proposed European border and coastguard controls "aim precisely at strengthening the EU's external borders".

On the issue of faked passports, the spokesman said "all third country nationals should be verified against relevant databases when crossing the EU's external borders".



Armed group claims Turkey airport blast

AFP/DPA/Reuters
Diyarbakir

An armed Kurdish group has claimed responsibility for an explosion near a plane at Istanbul's second international airport which killed a female cleaner and wounded another.

"We... claim the attack carried out by mortar bombs at Istanbul's Sabiha Gokcen airport" on Wednesday, the Freedom Falcons of Kurdistan (TAK) said on its website.

Airport cleaner Zehra Yamac, 30, died of head wounds hours after the blast on the tarmac at the airport on the Asian side of Turkey's largest city. The wounded victim was also a cleaner.

The attack came as Turkey wages an all-out offensive

against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which launched an armed insurgency against the Turkish state in 1984, initially fighting for Kurdish independence, then pressing for greater autonomy for the country's largest ethnic minority.

Turkish officials say TAK is a front for PKK attacks on civilian targets, but the PKK claims TAK is a splinter group over which it has no control.

On its website, TAK lashed out at what it described as a "war coalition" between Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the Islamic State group against the Kurds.

It also said the airport attack was a response to "fascist attacks that turn Kurdish cities into ruins".

The armed group, which had been silent for some time,

claimed the attack had inflicted "serious damage" to the airport and five planes.

The Turkish military said yesterday that nearly 200 PKK rebels had been killed in the army offensive in the southeast.

The operation, which has targeted the towns of Cizre and Silopi in the province of Sirkak as well as a neighbourhood in Diyarbakir, the largest city in the region, began in mid-December.

In a statement posted on its website, the army said 156 PKK rebels were killed in Sirkak and 40 in Diyarbakir.

It is not possible to independently verify the toll.

In Ankara yesterday around 300 women activists protested the violence in the southeast of the country, an AFP photographer at the scene reported.

Women protesters in Ankara

marched to the city's main Kizilay square, forming a "chain for peace".

In Dusseldorf, Germany, some 15,000 Kurds demonstrated yesterday against Turkey's military offensive.

A police spokesman said the rally was peaceful.

About 7,000 people were originally expected to take part in the protest near the parliament of the western state of North Rhine-Westphalia.

The protesters marched through the city centre of Dusseldorf, which was deserted as yesterday was a public holiday.

Many of them carried pictures of PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan, who has been in jail since 1999.

However, some locals put up banners against the loud demonstration held on a holiday.

One banner read: "Hello Kurds

– you are welcome, but we find it rude + disrespectful that you demonstrated today".

Some of the participants came from neighbouring countries.

Meanwhile, Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu cancelled a meeting with the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), criticising the party of banking on "conflict and tensions", his office said in an e-mailed statement.

Davutoglu had planned to meet with three political party leaders including HDP leader Selahattin Demirtas next week to discuss constitutional reforms.

"Recent statements by HDP officials reflect a politics that benefits from violence and tension. There is no longer any point in sharing the same table with this attitude," the prime minister's office said in a statement.

Belgian police quiz school over Paris attacker: reports

Reuters/AFP
Brussels

Belgian authorities are questioning staff at a Brussels school attended by one of the Paris attackers whose warnings that he had become worryingly radicalised were missed, press reports said yesterday.

The reports, based on Flemish language dailies *De Morgen* and *Het Laatste Nieuws*, said Bilal Hadfi had been a student at the Annessens-Funck school before going to Syria in February.

Hadfi blew himself up outside the French national stadium in northern Paris during the November 13 attacks which left 130 people dead.

The Belga news agency said documents cited in the reports showed that Hadfi's teachers had become concerned at his increasingly radical views, especially his comments over the January attack on French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*.

The reports said the school informed the education authorities in April that he had gone to Syria but that this information was not then passed on to the police.

"Committee P" (le Comité Permanent de Controle des Services de Police), as the Belgian police oversight authority is known, is investigating why the information was not

passed on to police, the newspapers said.

Neither the college, Committee P nor the Brussels education board were immediately available for comment.

While Hadfi's name appeared on a list of suspects compiled by Belgium's anti-terrorism watchdog, the school's warning only came to light after the attacks, the reports said.

The police are now trying to establish how that happened as they search for suspects, included the most wanted, Brussels-born Salah Abdeslam who fled back to the Belgian capital after the attacks.

On Thursday, the authorities charged a ninth person in connection with the attacks.

While there has been little hard evidence of intelligence and tip-offs falling between the cracks before the Paris attacks, Belgium has faced international accusations that underfunding and political infighting had left its security services the weakest link in Europe's counter-terrorism defences.

It was not clear when Belgian security officials became aware that Hadfi had travelled to Syria.

But on his return to Europe he evaded the intelligence services. They bugged the apartment he had been registered at, but he failed to show up, so could not be traced.

New protest a day after attack on prayer hall

AFP/Reuters
Ajaccio

Dozens of angry Corsicans staged a fresh protest on the French Mediterranean island yesterday, a day after demonstrators vandalised a Muslim prayer hall and trashed copies of the Qur'an after an assault on firefighters.

As condemnation poured in from Muslim authorities and French officials over Friday's anti-Arab protests, around 100 demonstrators shouting "We're still here" turned out in the same low-income neighbourhood of the capital Ajaccio where the Christmas day violence took place.

Despite a heavy police presence, one demonstrator managed to smash three glass entrance doors in the Jardins de l'Empereur housing estate perched on an Ajaccio hillside as protesters shouted "This is our home!"

Like the demonstration that ended in trouble the previous day, the protest aimed to denounce violence against police and firefighters on the estate.

Two firefighters and a police officer were wounded in the neighbourhood overnight on Christmas Eve after a fire was "deliberately lit ... to ambush police and firefighters", said regional official Francois Lalanne.

A firefighter at the scene said hooded youths who attacked the officers shouted at them: "Scram, Corsicans, you're not at home here!"

On Friday afternoon, 600 people had gathered in front of police headquarters in Ajaccio in

Right: A picture taken on Friday shows a devastated prayer room in Ajaccio, after protesters vandalised it.

Below: Officers near the ransacked prayer hall yesterday.



a show of support for the police and firefighters. But some 300 broke away to head for the housing estate.

Shouting "Arabs get out!" or "This is our home!" the group smashed a Muslim prayer room, partially burning books including copies of the Qur'an, said Lalanne.

French Prime Minister Manuel Valls wrote on Twitter that the break-in was "an unacceptable desecration", while also condemning the "intolerable attack" on the wounded firefighters.

Anouar Kbibeche, president of the French Council of the Muslim Faith (CFCM), said he had learnt of the mosque attack and the burning of "several copies of the Qur'an" with "distress".

French Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve said the attack on the Muslim prayer hall showed signs of "racism and xenophobia".

He also condemned the assault on law enforcement and safety officers in Corsica, saying he hoped "the authors of the violence would be identified and arrested as soon as possible".

Local authorities including Christophe Mirmand, the prefect or top official of Corsica, also vowed to arrest those responsible for the outbreak of violence over two days on the Mediterranean island.

The Christmas violence came amid heightened security measures for the season in France after the November 13 attacks by

jihadists in Paris that killed 130 people.

Dalil Boubakeur, the rector of the Grand Mosque of Paris, said he was "dismayed and saddened" by the events on Corsica in an appearance on France's BFMTV, calling for "calm and cool heads".

Around 120,000 French police, members of armed units and soldiers were mobilised on Christ-

mas Eve and Christmas Day.

Corsica is a department of France which held regional elections earlier this month, which had seen the far-right anti-immigrant Front National make unprecedented gains in the first round of the vote.

On Corsica the nationalists won the regional election there taking power for the first time.



People take pictures outside the devastated prayer room.

Warning issued to European capitals to boost security

Reuters
Vienna

Vienna police said yesterday that a "friendly" intelligence service had warned European capitals of the possibility of a shooting or bomb attack before New Year, prompting police across the continent to increase security measures.

"Several possible names of potential attackers were mentioned, which were checked, and the investigation based on (these checks) has so far yielded no concrete results," Vienna police said in a statement, some six weeks after 130 people were killed in Islamist bombing and shooting attacks in Paris.

"In the days before Christmas a warning was sent out by a friendly (intelligence) service to numerous European capitals, saying that it could come to an attack involving explo-

sives or a shooting between Christmas and the New Year in crowded spaces."

The police asked Austrians for their understanding of the need for more security controls.

Extra steps include surveillance in crowded spaces, "especially at events and traffic hubs" as well as intensive identity checks and higher alertness for objects which could carry explosives such as bags or "bicycle frames", it said.

Vienna police were not immediately available for further comment.

A spokesman for the German interior ministry said it did not comment on particular situations for operational reasons.

"Germany is still in the crosshairs of jihadist terrorism," he said, adding the country had reviewed and adapted its security measures, where necessary, following the Paris attacks.

Putin orders counter-terrorism units set up on coastal areas

Russian President Vladimir Putin has ordered counter-terrorism operational headquarters to be set up in several coastal areas, the state-run RIA news agency quoted the Kremlin as saying yesterday. The units are to be set in Kaspysk on the Caspian Sea, Murmansk in Russia's northwest and in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky and Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk on Russia's eastern coast, Interfax news agency said. Putin also ordered a similar operation to be set up in Crimea's capital of Simferopol - the peninsula that Russia annexed from Ukraine last year.

Mother braves east Ukraine frontline for children's homework

By Yulia Silina, AFP
Zaytseve, Ukraine

For Oksana Boiko's children, the journey to school used to be a short walk to the other side of their tiny village of Zaytseve, in eastern Ukraine.

But the frontline in the 20-month conflict between government forces and pro-Russian rebels cuts through their village and has divided the youngsters from their teachers.

That means mother-of-three Boiko has to run a weekly gauntlet through the checkpoint dividing the Ukrainian-held zone from the separatist-controlled

territory to drop off and collect her children's homework.

"The school stopped working a long time ago," the single mother tells AFP. "I cross over the checkpoint to go to the teachers to pick up their tasks and then do it at home with the kids."

Zaytseve, a small village of just 300 inhabitants that is now studded with burnt out buildings, has been one of the hotspots in a conflict that has cost over 9,000 lives.

It no longer has local authorities nor public transport.

"We do not live, we survive," Boiko tells AFP.

Boiko lives in the grey zone

between the two sides, a no-man's land that leaves her and her family ineligible for any social assistance.

She also has no money to buy medicine for her children.

"Soldiers give us firewood and food, but there is no medication," she explains.

"My daughter can stand the shelling only with sedatives. And one of my sons recently had an operation and now needs vitamins that we don't have", Boiko says, gesturing to the child as he bicycles around their yard.

Civilian physicians in the village are long gone, so the local residents turn to a military doc-

tor assigned there who receives visitors in a half-destroyed house.

A table and a bench covered with bed sheets are used in place of an examination table and there is almost no proper equipment.

The physician, a soldier in the Ukrainian military named Sergiy, was drafted from his home in the west of the country where he used to work as a family doctor.

He refused to give his surname as preferred that his family does not find out where he is.

"It is mainly pensioners with blood pressure problems who come to me," he says.

"I usually give them medication from my stocks because they have nowhere to buy them. But there are serious cases of injuries, when we have to take patients to hospital in Artemivsk," a town some 5km (three miles) away, he adds.

Sergiy also has to provide emergency assistance to the Ukrainian soldiers who are periodically injured in shelling, despite an official truce in place for some four months now.

"As recently as November we had one soldier killed and two wounded. Rebels fire every night.

"There are only 150m (about 500 feet) between us, we can see

each other even without binoculars," says Mykola, 55, a Ukrainian soldier nicknamed "Batya", which means daddy, by his fellow troops.

While control over the village is divided between the opposing forces, civilians have no hope that the shelling will stop.

On the demarcation line, soldier Mykola pats a big German shepherd.

"This dog is a peacemaker. She barks and jumps when you pick up a machine gun," Mykola says. "No one wants this war to continue: neither military, nor civilians, nor even animals."

"But it doesn't depend on us," he adds.

One killed in stabbing, shooting

One man was killed and three others seriously injured in stabbing and shooting attacks in Berlin yesterday, police authorities said.

The man died of gunshot wounds in the attack in the Berlin district of Wedding, a working class neighbourhood which is rapidly gentrifying.

Police said the four men were attacked on a street about noon (1100 GMT).

They suffered either gunshot or stab wounds.

Police said the assailants was in a car, but did not provide further information on the crime or the motive.

Multiple ambulances and emergency services were at the scene.

India welcomes Modi's surprise Pakistan visit

AFP
New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi broke with diplomatic protocol to pay a surprise visit to Pakistan leader Nawaz Sharif, betting his personal brand on his ability to reset troubled relations, Indian media and analysts said yesterday.

Spurning official talks in the capital Islamabad, India's leader chose instead to make an intimate trip to Sharif's ancestral residence near Lahore Friday, where he was celebrating his birthday and the wedding of his granddaughter.

A source present in the meeting said the leaders of the nuclear-armed arch-rival nations "chatted like old friends" as they ate vegetarian food, with the Indian premier telling Sharif, "Your sincerity is beyond doubt". India and Pakistan have fought three wars since gaining independence from Britain in 1947 and a lasting peace deal has so far proved elusive, with deadly violence still flaring in disputed Kashmir.

Modi's stunning decision to drop in for talks with Pakistan's leader — something ex-premier Manmohan Singh failed to achieve in ten years of power — was roundly welcomed in India, where it was seen as a calculated personal gamble.

"Modi has made clear he is



Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his meeting with Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

willing to risk political capital to make peace," the *Indian Express* newspaper said, warning that any future terrorist attacks traced to Pakistan would invite "savage criticism".

The visit, announced by Modi on Twitter, gave the appearance of being spontaneous, with Sharif's foreign affairs adviser not able to reach Lahore in time. However, a senior Pakistan official said that security had been planned days in advance.

While Indian media suggested Modi was the driving force behind the visit, a Pakistan official said it was Islamabad's idea to arrange a meeting ahead of formal diplomatic talks set for January.

"The goal behind this meeting was to humanise the other side by arranging a visit involving close family members," said the official, adding that some of Sharif's

cabinet had opposed the visit.

Television polls suggested most Indians welcomed the development while newspapers praised Modi's decision to avoid weighty expectations by staging an informal "stopover" on the way back from Kabul.

"Traditional build-up to an Indian PM's visit to Pakistan would have seen different interest groups bringing all kinds of pressure to bear," *The Times of India* said.

Yet members of the opposition Congress party denounced the "unpredictable" act, calling it un-statesmanlike, with some complaining such an important meeting should not have been announced on Twitter.

Others questioned whether the newfound friendship would translate into concrete progress on peace, thwarted by issues

Praiseworthy gesture: Samajwadi Party

Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday got an open endorsement from the Samajwadi Party for his brief stop over in Pakistan. Samajwadi Party's national general secretary and Rajya Sabha member Ram Gopal Yadav praised Modi's initiative, saying it was "a praiseworthy gesture". Pakistan was India's

immediate neighbour and hence cannot be wished away. Yadav told reporters in Saifai. "Open dialogues is the only way forward to a peaceful future," he said. Modi "has given all the right signals from this visit and has laid out the prospects of a meaningful dialogue in future", the leader said.

such as India's fear of Pakistan-sanctioned terror attacks and violence-plagued Kashmir.

In his 18 months in power Modi has shown huge confidence in his political skills, announcing economic policies himself and fronting a key state election campaign in Bihar — unsuccessfully — instead of fielding a candidate.

"Modi loves to spring surprises — he's disruptive, he's setting aside old taboos," Neelam Deo, a director at Gateway House think-tank in Mumbai said.

"He's personalised diplomacy to an extent we haven't seen in India since (India's first prime minister) Jawaharlal Nehru in the 1950s," she said, adding the visit was likely part of a broader strategy. In Pakistan, the population has largely backed efforts to bring peace between the two countries.

But in Pakistani-administered Kashmir, where cross-border shelling has claimed dozens of

lives since 2014, the mood was sceptical. Aziz Ahmed, a refugee from Indian-controlled Kashmir called the meeting a "mere photo session".

"Such meetings have been taking place in the past, but have proven useless after some time," he said in Muzaffarabad, capital of the Pakistan-controlled territory.

There were signs Pakistan's powerful army was not happy about the visit, with criticism on pro-army Twitter accounts believed to be run by the military.

Modi and Sharif have had a stop-start diplomatic relationship since the Indian premier's surprise decision to invite Sharif to his inauguration in May 2014.

A brief meeting on November 30 between the two leaders on the sidelines of the UN climate summit in Paris, followed by talks between their national security advisers in Bangkok, appeared to have broken the ice.

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US media hails 'personal diplomacy'

IAN S
Washington

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's surprise stop in Pakistan to meet his counterpart Nawaz Sharif has made quite a splash here, with the US media hailing the significance of his "spontaneous personal diplomacy".

The *Wall Street Journal* said Modi's "gesture" was "likely to lend momentum to a tentative reconciliation process between the estranged, nuclear-armed neighbours".

The influential *Washington Post* said that with his surprise stop in Pakistan, Modi had "pressed the reset button on the blow-hot-blow-cold relationship between the two nuclear-armed neighbours, paving the way for official dialogue to resume next month".

The *New York Times* said the tense relations between India and Pakistan "have long worried American policy makers, who fear that proxy war between the two countries could flare into a real one".

"But with his flash of spontaneous personal diplomacy on Friday, Modi appeared to send a strong public message that the ambiguous course he has taken toward Pakistan has shifted to embrace engagement, not confrontation," it said.

With his surprise visit to Pakistan, Modi had "breathed new life into a long troubled relationship", said the *Los Angeles Times*.

Modi, it said citing analysts, "appears willing to endure criticism from hardliners within his own Bharatiya Janata Party who oppose outreach to Pakistan, which they accuse of harbouring militant groups that have frequently attacked India".

Noting that Modi "showed a knack for wielding what can be a potent diplomatic weapon—the element of surprise", *Time* magazine called his Friday visit to Pakistan as "The biggest surprise of all".

"How the dialogue between the two countries now unfolds remains to be seen," it said noting that Modi's predecessor Manmohan Singh "never made it across the border, with tensions between two countries rising in the aftermath of the November 2008 terrorist attacks on Mumbai".

Meanwhile, the State Department said Modi's overture towards Pakistan would "benefit the entire region".

"We welcome the December 25 talks between PM Modi and PM Sharif in Lahore. As we have long said, improved relations among neighbours will benefit the entire region," spokesperson John Kirby said in a statement.

Meeting will promote peace in South Asia: China

China yesterday welcomed the meeting between Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi, saying it will help promote peace in South Asia. "The Chinese side welcomes the latest development in the Pakistan-India relationship," foreign ministry spokesman Lu Kang said. Lu said Pakistan and India were important countries in South Asia, and the improvement of their relationship would be significant to regional peace, stability and development. "As the common neighbour and friend of both Pakistan and India, China is happy to see and will support, as always, Pakistan and India to enhance mutual trust and achieve common development through continuous dialogue," said the spokesman.



People pour milk into the sea as an offering during a ceremony for the victims of the 2004 earthquake and tsunami at Marina Beach in Chennai yesterday. The earthquake and tsunami which struck the Indian Ocean on December 26, 2004 killed over 230,000 people and devastated coastal communities.

Father hopes for return of son lost in tsunami

IAN S
Chennai

A former IAF officer whose only son disappeared after the 2004 tsunami hopes to find him in the next one year starting from January 2016 — on the strength of astrological advice.

For the past 11 years, M Venkataraman has been searching across the country for V Arvind, who was separated from him by the giant waves which hit Car

Nicobar Islands on December 26, 2004. "Astrologers have predicted that my son would come back between January 11, 2016 and January 11, 2017. We are all hoping it happens," Venkataraman said here before leaving for a temple.

Since 2004, every year on this date, Venkataraman has made it a habit to go to a temple and pray to God to help him locate his son.

"To the best of my ability I have tried and I am still trying to trace my son," he said. He has a college-going daughter too.

Venkataraman said he had spent nearly Rs 800,000 in search of his son and now has to save for his daughter's marriage.

"After all these years, we got our daughter gold jewellery for daily use. She has not asked for anything all these years," he said, with his voice choked by emotion. The daughter is studying BCom here and Venkataraman works as a security manager in a private company.

The day after tsunami hit the Car Nicobar, the Indian Air Force (IAF) sent all its personnel

posted there to Tambaram near Chennai. Venkataraman does not blame the IAF for forcing everyone to leave Car Nicobar as the situation at that time there demanded such an action.

Subsequently, when he went back, he was told his son was spotted in a relief camp in Port Blair.

At the relief camp the distraught father was told that his son Arvind was handed over to "two uncles". "As per my son's horoscope, he will live for more than 75 years. So I am confident the tsunami did

not kill him," Venkataraman said. "My wife is confident our son will return one day," he added, adding both he and his wife had deep faith in God.

Venkataraman said his IAF friend Ravi Shankar, who lost his daughter Apurva during tsunami at Car Nicobar, has also not lost hope of getting her back.

"Though we are in touch over phone regularly, on this day (December 26) we don't call each other," Venkataraman said. The reason is obvious — pain and agony.

Natesan's party holds discussions with BJP

IAN S
Alappuzha

The first round of talks between the Kerala unit of the BJP and Vellappalli Natesan's newly-floated political party for working together, took place yesterday at the Hindu Ezhava leader's residence here.

Newly appointed state BJP president Kummanam Rajasekharan and his predecessor V Muraliedharan were engaged in the talks with Natesan.

"There is no untouchability towards the BJP and the people of Kerala are certainly looking for a change. Talks will continue and would now be held at different levels," Natesan told reporters.

However, a formal announcement of the two parties working together is yet to come. On December 5, Natesan concluded his statewide yatra (tour) and launched his political party, Bharath Dharma Jana Sena (BDJS), at a public meeting in the state capital.

Yesterday's developments came after state BJP leaders took the lead for a meeting



Vellappalli Natesan

between BJP national president Amit Shah and Natesan a few months back, which paved the way for the leader's meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Earlier this month, Modi obliged Natesan by flying down to Kollam on his first visit to the state after assuming office, to unveil a statue of former chief minister R Shankar.

The BJP is yet to open its account in the 140-member Kerala assembly.

For Natesan too it will be testing times, as until now he had distanced himself from politics.

AAP says corruption at core of BJP's ideology

IAN S
New Delhi

Corruption was the core value of the BJP's ideology because people attacking corruption were being suspended from the party in the name of anti-party activities, AAP national spokesperson Ashutosh said yesterday.

"The way the Bharatiya Janata Party is saving its 'Kalmadi', people of this country are clear that the BJP and the Congress are two faces of the same coin," Ashutosh said at a press conference.

He was referring to Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, who is embroiled in a row over alleged financial bungling in Delhi's cricket board, and Congress leader

Suresh Kalmadi who was also allegedly involved in corruption during the 2010 Commonwealth Games.

Hitting out at the BJP, he said party MP Kirti Azad, who fought a battle against corruption in the Delhi and District Cricket Association (DDCA) for nine years, was first ignored, then humiliated and finally suspended from the party.

He said the Aam Aadmi Party yesterday organised a nationwide protest against Jaitley over his alleged involvement in financial irregularities in the DDCA.

The AAP said the protest was organised in over 275 districts and 17 state capitals.

Ashutosh said that investigations have revealed that companies and

vendors were paid Rs16,900 per day by the DDCA for taking laptops on rent, Rs3,000 were paid as daily rent for printers and "pooja thalis" were taken on rent for up to Rs5,000 per day.

As a way of their protest, AAP volunteers from across the country yesterday set up stalls to rent out their laptops and printers to the DDCA.

"We will organise a massive protest at Jantar Mantar on January 10 against Jaitley. It will expose BJP's corruption," he added.

Jaitley has sued Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and other leaders of the AAP for linking him with the alleged corruption. The BJP has also suspended Azad for campaigning against Jaitley on the same issue.



Akali Dal and AAP leaders join Congress in Punjab

IAN S
Chandigarh

A day after outspoken Congress leader Sukhpal Khaira joined the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in Punjab, the opposition Congress claimed that many leaders of the ruling Shiromani Akali Dal and AAP have also come into its fold.

Punjab Congress president Amarinder Singh announced that those who joined included 31 leaders and workers from Akali Dal and 21 from AAP and their supporters.

The Akali Dal leaders were from Sangrur and Moga districts.

Talking to reporters here, he said members of the Akali Dal included former Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) member Inder Mohan Singh.

The former Punjab chief minister also said the Punjab unit of the Congress party will

press for the early announcement of candidates for the assembly elections scheduled to be held in February-March 2017.

He said the state unit would be reconstituted and the announcement would be made soon.

"The state unit will press for the early announcement of candidates for the assembly elections scheduled to be held in 2017. The Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) was being reconstituted and it will be announced very soon," Singh told media in Chandigarh, adding he would seek that the names of candidates be announced at least six months in advance.

Flanked by senior party leaders including former union minister Manish Tewari, Jagmeet Singh Brar, Laal Singh and Sunil Jakhar, Singh said that the Akali Dal-BJP government in Punjab was on its way out in the state.

He added that AAP's popu-

larity in Punjab was only hype.

"The AAP does not stand any chance in Punjab. The people of Delhi are feeling disappointed and disillusioned with the AAP government there as it has not fulfilled a single promise it had made to the people," Singh said.

He refuted allegations of the AAP leaders that the Congress leadership had an "understanding" with the ruling Akali Dal. He also apologised to senior Congress leader and former MP Jagmeet Brar who was not invited to address a big rally that the Congress party organised in Bathinda earlier this month.

"I apologise to him for this," Singh said, with Brar seated next to him at the press conference. Singh said the exit of firebrand leader Sukhpal Khaira from the Congress and his joining the AAP would not affect the Congress in Punjab.



Priyanka Chopra: backing new talent

Chopra to back new talent for regional, Hindi films

IAN S
Mumbai

Actress Priyanka Chopra, who recently launched her production house, says she is working to back new talent in regional as well as Hindi films.

"I have launched my production house called Purple Pebble Pictures. I want to work with and push new talent like writers because when I had entered the film industry, I didn't know anyone and getting a foothold

is tough. For all who come from outside, getting a break is difficult," Priyanka said at a press meet for her film *Bajirao Mastani*.

"I also want to promote regional cinema. I am working on three regional films and two Hindi films. I will soon make an announcement," said the *Mary Kom* actress.

Priyanka, however, ruled out the possibility of turning director, saying it was a job with "immense responsibility".

On success this year, when she had *Dil Dhadakne Do*, *Ba-*

jirao Mastani and international TV series *Quantico*, she said: "This year has been extremely overworked for me. It's almost as if I need 36 hours in a day. It's been very fulfilling professionally."

"And the next year is going to be more difficult for me because my show (*Quantico*) has become so successful that it got extended from 13 to 22 episodes.

"It's also difficult because I want to maintain my career in both America and in India. I don't want to choose and I don't think I should," she said.

Quantico is likely to get a second season due to its success.

"I'll be able to do two films between both my seasons. In Hindi films, I have choices of six really interesting films and I have choices of two really interesting films there (Hollywood) also.

"But I can't do all of them unfortunately. So by January, I can decide which ones I will do, it's a very heartbreaking decision."

Priyanka will next be seen as a police officer in *Jai Gangaajal*.

Air India clarifies on vegetarian meals row

National carrier Air India yesterday clarified that it had not decided to discontinue non-vegetarian meals aboard its domestic flights of 60 to 90 minutes flying duration. The carrier said it never served it for that duration.

Air India clarified it is only upgrading the current cold vegetarian snacks to proper hot vegetarian meals.

"Air India to now serve proper hot vegetarian meals in economy class on domestic sector flights with

duration of 60 to 90 minutes from January 1, 2016," the airline said in a statement yesterday.

However, the statement kicked up a major row online drawing criticism from numerous people across the nation who thought Air India was discontinuing non-vegetarian meals.

"There will be a review after obtaining passengers' feedback. On flights exceeding 90 minutes, the present choice of vegetarian and non vegetarian meals will continue," the airline added.

'Undivided India' will be created: Madhav

IAN S
New Delhi

India, Pakistan and Bangladesh will reunite one day to create "Akhand Bharat" or an "Undivided India", BJP general secretary Ram Madhav has said.

"The RSS believes that one day these parts, which for historical reasons separated only 60 years ago, will again, through popular goodwill, come together and Akhand Bharat will be created," Madhav said in an interview to Al Jazeera. He said that as an Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh member, he also holds that view.

Madhav added: "The only outstanding issue with regard to the Kashmir problem is the Kashmir under Pakistan occupation. Kashmir is an integral part of India. It has been proved time and again that it's an integral part of India."

VIP exemption in vehicle scheme is 'hypocrisy': Vadra

IAN S
New Delhi

Congress President Sonia Gandhi's son-in-law Robert Vadra yesterday criticised the Delhi government's move to spare VIPs from the odd-even vehicle scheme, terming the move "complete hypocrisy".

His remark attracted criticism from the BJP and the city's ruling AAP.

"Odd and Even ways!! Creating parallel lists of exemption, is complete hypocrisy," Vadra wrote in Facebook. "If a law is implemented in the interest of the people, we all must adhere, and not be VIPs," he added.

Reacting to Vadra's comment, BJP spokesperson Nalin Kohli said: "What an irony. Robert Vadra all his life took privileges for not being an ordinary citizen and he is making a comment about exemptions. I think it is an irony and it raises more ques-



Robert Vadra: critical of vehicle scheme

tions about him." Attacking Vadra for his remark, Aam Aadmi Party spokesperson Ashutosh at a press conference said: "He is a symbol of hypocrisy. Robert Vadra has no right to speak on this subject like this because he himself is a VIP without a reason. He has been a celebrity all

his life and enjoyed being a VIP." The Delhi government on Thursday announced the modalities of its ambitious traffic rationing scheme to battle record pollution levels in the city.

The odd-even formula will be tried on a pilot basis for 15 days starting on January 1.

Three Delhi transport officials suspended for corruption

IAN S
New Delhi

The Delhi government yesterday suspended three transport department officials over alleged corruption in issuing fresh Letters Of Intent (LOIs) for three-wheelers.

BJP's Delhi unit chief Satish Upadhyay demanded state Transport Minister Gopal Rai's resignation over the alleged auto-rickshaw permit scam.

The three officials -- Deputy Commissioner (auto-rickshaw unit) Roy Biswas, inspector Manish Puri, and Anil Yadav, a clerk -- were placed under suspension with immediate effect after a high-level meeting chaired by Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal yesterday morning.

Transport Minister Gopal Rai in a statement said he received some complaints on Wednesday over irregularities in issuance of LOIs to auto drivers at the transport depart-

ment's Burari authority. "I held a meeting with the joint commissioner (transport) and other senior officers on the next day (Thursday), and issued directions to enquire into the matter," Rai said.

Kejriwal also received an SMS from some auto-rickshaw drivers regarding certain irregularities in distribution of LOIs on Friday evening.

Thereafter the chief minister convened a meeting with his cabinet ministers and senior government officials yesterday, leading to suspension of the three officials.

Reacting to the issue, Delhi BJP chief Upadhyay asked Rai to resign.

"We have requested Lieutenant Governor Najeeb Jung to seek a report from the transport department on the issue and the investigation should be handed over to the Anti-Corruption Branch," Upadhyay said.

Upadhyay said Kejriwal was also involved in the scam and the BJP would protest against

him on Monday at the Delhi Secretariat.

"The Kejriwal government is completely involved in corruption and it has increased so much that this government is playing fraud with its own supporters, the auto drivers of Delhi," he said.

He said previously corruption was committed through touts in the transport department, but now their place has been taken by volunteers and legislators of the AAP.

Delhi's ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) backed the government's move and said the party was "proud of the government".

AAP's media co-ordinator Deepak Bajpai said: "We are so proud of the government that it swiftly takes action against corruption. The CM just got a message regarding the corruption being done in the department and he swiftly acted against people involved."

"This sends a clear message that the government will not spare anyone involved in the corruption," he added.

Tortured expats reunite with families in Kerala

By Ashraf Padanna
Thiruvananthapuram

Three Indian expatriates rescued from their Saudi sponsor who used to torture them have arrived here, to an emotional reunion with their families.

India's foreign minister Sushma Swaraj took up their case with the Saudi Arabia authorities through the Indian mission, after a video showing the em-

ployer beating them with a plank went viral on the social media.

The victims shot the torture on a mobile camera and sent it by WhatsApp to relatives back home, as an SOS to rescue them from a brick factory in Abha.

The trio who shared a video in which a man in the traditional Arab gear was seen chasing and repeatedly beating them with a plank arrived on a flydubai flight via Dubai early yesterday morning.

"He used to beat us, throw

concrete rubbles at us and spit in our face. We had to suffer silently," said Abhishek Gopi, 21, a trained electrician.

"I went there with many dreams... now I don't know what I will do. I need money to pay back debts."

He had taken a loan to build a house and had hoped that employment abroad will help him repay it.

He says he was cheated, like the other two from Haripad village in Alleppey district -- Baiju

Babu, 26, and Vimal Kumar Vasudevan, 30 -- by an agent in Kerala who offered him a decent job as an electrician in Yemen, but were asked to work in the brick factory like slaves.

Their relatives said it was a relief seeing their near ones back home safe.

"Thank you for bringing back my son. I pray for a long life and health for him," Vasudevan's mother Omana told reporters at the airport.

On her Twitter handle,

Swaraj had said on Wednesday that the issue was reported to Saudi police, and they would be back in India in a week.

"We have approached the police and got them police protection," she said, after Chief Minister Oommen Chandy took up the case with her.

Chandy, who was also in touch with Indian social workers in the Kingdom, also assured their return in two days. He thanked the Saudi authorities for coming to their rescue

and the Indian officials for expediting their return.

They said an agent, Shamsad, promised them jobs with a salary ranging from Rs 30,000 (\$453) to Rs 45,000 (\$679) a month. They were promised mechanical, electrical and plumbing jobs.

But when they reached there, the agent sent them to a Saudi man and they were forced to do loading and other works in a brick factory.

Babu left for the Kingdom,

home to more than a million Indian workers, on November 6 and the other two left on December 4.

The Kayamkulam police have registered a case against the Haripad-based agency and have forwarded the complaints to Norka, a Kerala state government agency looking after the welfare of the expatriates.

The state government has also suspended a police officer, Vinod Kumar, who introduced the agent to the jobseekers.



Fair start



Salsa dancers perform in the 'Salsodromo' parade, which marks the start of the 58th Fair of Cali, Colombia, late on Friday.

Chile eyeing construction of a permanent Antarctica pier

AFP
Santiago

Chile is carrying out a feasibility study for the construction of a permanent pier at one of its bases in Antarctica, an official was quoted as saying on Friday.

The move, being explored by the ministry of public works, would facilitate access to the far-flung area for both scientists and tourists.

The ministry said the first stage was to scout out a suitable place for the pier in Fildes Bay on King George Island where the town of Villa Las Estrellas, part of the Presidente Eduardo Frei Montalva base, is located.

A pier there would be in a strategic location, close to the town as well as several Chilean and foreign bases, Jose Retamales, director of the Chilean Antarctic Institute, told the *El Mercurio* newspaper on Friday.

Villa Las Estrellas was built in 1984 and is home to families of service members stationed at the Presidente Eduardo Frei Montalva base, one of three permanent Chilean bases in Antarctica.

With a population of 80 in winter and 150 in summer, the hamlet has all basic services – a bank, post office, church, school, as well as radio, television and Internet access.

The pier – for which an environmental impact study will

have to be carried out – would be permanent, unlike the removable structures currently in place.

Large boats that currently want to dock in the area have to unload passengers and cargo into dinghies in order to get ashore, in what Retamales called a cumbersome process.

Public Works Minister Alberto Undurraga said the pier would bolster scientific research because it would make it possible for more material to reach the region.

Construction plans include a walkway and a boat that would transport containers from ships to the pier, given the shallow water and fierce weather conditions.

Granddaughter taken, found ... and 'lost' again

AFP
Buenos Aires

In a Christmas gift gone awry, a woman thought to be the lost granddaughter of an activist who searches for babies stolen during Argentina's 1976-1983 military dictatorship turned out to be someone else.

Two genetic tests showed that the 39-year-old woman in question is not the granddaughter of Maria "Chicha" Mariani, the government said on Friday.

Mariani, 92 and nearly blind, is one of the best known Argentine rights activists, and the Christmas Eve news that she had finally found her granddaughter was the feel-good story of the season.

President Mauricio Macri even congratulated her on Twitter.

She is one of the founders of the Grandmothers of the Plaza del Mayo, a human rights group seeking to find children stolen or illegally adopted during Argentina's so-called "Dirty War".

Babies born in captivity to political prisoners or orphaned by assassinations were given to families sympathetic to the regime or even taken in by their parents' killers.

Mariani's granddaughter, Clara Anahi Teruggi, was abducted as a three-month-old



The woman supposed-to-be Clara Anahi Teruggi (left), hugs María (Chicha) Mariani, in Buenos Aires on Thursday.

infant when regime agents killed her mother.

On Christmas Eve a statement from the Anahi Foundation, which Mariani created in 1989 after stepping down as president of the Grandmothers group, said that DNA testing had confirmed "with 99.9% certainty that the woman identified as Clara Anahi was Mariani's granddaughter."

That DNA test was carried out privately by the woman, who has not been named.

However two DNA tests – one in early 2015 and the other made public on Friday – show no relationship between the two

women, said Pablo Parenti, head of the government office that searches for children kidnapped during the dictatorship.

The second test was carried out by the National Genetic Data Bank, the institution that provides official results for such cases.

"Both reports are conclusive in showing that there is no relationship between the genetic profile of this young woman and the Chicha Mariani family group, nor with the other families that are still looking for abducted children," read the statement.

Mariani urged "caution" in a

separate statement, saying that the results of the second test needed to be confirmed.

An estimated 500 babies were stolen by Argentina's military regime, which abducted, tortured and killed opponents and suspected sympathisers.

Some 30,000 people were killed or "disappeared" during the dictatorship.

The case of Clara Anahi drew international attention through a series of heartfelt open letters that Mariani wrote to her.

"They tried to convince me that you were killed along with your mother, but I knew you were alive," she wrote in a letter in March. "My dream, at 91 years old, is to hug you and recognise myself in your eyes ... The greatest wish that keeps me going is for us to find each other at last."

A police officer abducted Clara Anahi on November 24, 1976, when regime agents killed her mother, Diana Teruggi de Mariani, in a raid on their home in La Plata, 60km outside the capital Buenos Aires.

Diana was a member of the Montonero guerrillas that opposed the regime.

She was killed alongside three other members in the raid.

Her husband, Daniel Mariani, was absent that night, but was killed eight months later.

Children who fled Cuba in 1960s recall exodus

AFP
Miami

At the start of the Cuban revolution, Javier Llorens was one of thousands of children who left the island unaccompanied for the United States, thinking it would be temporary.

He is now 64 – and is still in the United States.

Like many of the Cuban children who headed to America as part of what is now known as Operation Pedro Pan, named after the fictional leader of the orphaned Lost Boys, Llorens tells of a bittersweet experience.

"It was very hard, but from a good perspective, I would not be the person I am today without having gone through this crisis," Llorens, who is now a dentist and married with two daughters, tells AFP.

Llorens began life in America in one of the shelters that was set up in Florida to receive some of the 14,000 children in an exodus from Cuba that began on December 26, 1960 and lasted until October 1962.

He left Cuba with his 16-year-old brother on August 15, 1962 – a date he says is etched in his memory.

"I remember having a rather bad cold with fever, but we had to leave – we had been making preparations for months and months. We needed to have courage," he said.

Llorens's parents made the difficult decision to temporarily part with their young children, fearing indoctrination by Fidel Castro's communist government, a fear that spread among other families in Cuba.

"When the government of Fidel Castro took power in Cuba in 1959, everything changed.

"They started to strip people of their personal freedoms, they limited

freedom of the press, they took away people's homes," says Eloisa Echazabal, who was 13 when she ended up in Miami on September 6, 1961 with her younger sister and three cousins.

"The final straw for my parents was when the government took over private and religious schools, and communism began to be taught in public schools," she said.

About half of the children who came to the United States were met by family or friends at the airport, according to Operation Pedro Pan Group Incorporated, which documents the stories of those who participated in the programme.

Cuban parents made the difficult decision to temporarily part with their children by sending them to the US, fearing indoctrination by Fidel Castro's communist government

The operation was created by the Catholic Welfare Bureau (CWB; Catholic Charities) of Miami at the request of parents in Cuba to provide an opportunity for them to send their children to Miami in order to avoid indoctrination.

The other half of the thousands of children were cared for by the CWB, under the direction of a young Irish priest named Bryan Walsh, at a network of temporary shelters in Miami and then homes in other US states.

After diplomatic relations were severed between the United States and Cuba in 1961, the CWB was authorised by US officials to notify parents in Cuba that visa requirements had been waived for their children.

This meant that Cuban children were able to travel by commercial flights to Miami.

Walsh first became aware of the plight of unaccompanied Cuban chil-

dren when a Cuban man brought a 15-year-old boy to see him who had come to Miami to live with relatives, but the family had hit hard times and wanted to find foster care.

That boy was named Pedro and Walsh discovered there were many more like him – alone, and in a strange country.

Echazabal went with her sister to an orphanage in the state of New York, where she later lived with a family.

"I remember it was not the happiest days of my life. It was hard to adjust to living in the orphanage," she says.

Nine months after coming to America, she was reunited with her parents.

"I know others with Peter Pan who had happy experiences, and others who had worse experiences than mine. I'm not complaining – it's just the way it was," she adds.

Llorens had to wait five long years to see his parents again, and the reunion was not without its difficulties.

"It had been so long that they looked at me like the little boy who had left Cuba all those years ago, but I had been through a lot and had developed into a teenager who had become used to fending for himself for years," he says.

According to Operation Pedro Pan Group, by 1966, about 90% of children who were in shelters were reunited with their parents.

Echazabal, 67, says she has seen many in the programme go on to make hugely successful lives for themselves in the United States.

"There are doctors, lawyers, engineers and mayors. All of those in Pedro Pan, we feel like siblings because this experience unites us," she says. "Every time we meet, we talk about things relevant to today, but we always come back to discuss what we went through.

"There are more than 14,000 of us, and each had a different experience," she added.

World's fattest man dies of heart attack

DPA
Mexico City

A Mexican man once regarded as the world's most obese died of heart failure at the age of 38 on Friday, two months after bariatric surgery to lose weight.

Andres Moreno Sepulveda, who had weighed as much as 450kg, died en route to hospital in the northwestern state of Sonora, a friend told DPA.

"He was doing well, but he had had two previous heart attacks.

"He became short of breath, and died in the ambulance," said Carmen Palacios, who had been helping him

during his rehabilitation process over the past year.

Moreno Sepulveda had slimmed down to 320kg before undergoing gastric bypass surgery to reduce his stomach.

His doctor said following the procedure that they hoped to get him down to about 85kg eventually.





Stage set for Pakistan, India foreign secretaries' meeting

Agencies
Islamabad

Pakistan and India have agreed to hold foreign secretary level talks early next year to finalise the schedule and terms for the resumption of a comprehensive dialogue.

"Both leaders have agreed the two countries' foreign secre-

taries will meet in Islamabad in the middle of January to finalise the schedule for resumption of talks," Adviser to the Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz said yesterday, according to Radio Pakistan.

The arch rivals have also expressed the desire to move forward the dialogue process which was at a standstill as relations between the two soured.

The decision comes following Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's brief surprise visit to Lahore on Friday, where he stopped on his way back to New Delhi from Kabul. Modi made a brief surprise visit to Lahore where he met Sharif and visited his residence in Raiwind Palace.

It was the first time in over a decade that an Indian premier stepped on Pakistani soil and

was seen by analysts as a step towards normalising ties between the two neighbours.

"Major political parties in Pakistan welcomed the goodwill visit of the Indian prime minister to Pakistan," Aziz said, adding that, "major political parties, including the Pakistan People's Party and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, had the consensus on peace and enhanced people-to-

people contacts between the two countries."

Foreign Office spokesperson Qazi Khalilullah also said that both prime ministers agreed to enhance co-operation and work together to establish good neighbourly relations.

Meanwhile, Pakistan's cricketer-turned-politician Imran Khan yesterday took to Twitter, terming the meeting between

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi a "conflict of interest".

Although the Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chairman was welcoming of the revived relations between the arch rivals, he was also of the opinion that conducting a meeting arranged by a business associate has "an underlying conflict of interest".

"We welcome the thaw in Pak-India relations, but to have a business associate arrange the two prime ministers' meetings has an underlying conflict of interest," he tweeted.

Meanwhile, Jamaat-ud-Dawa chief Hafiz Saeed in a video message posted on social network said Modi's unexpected visit to Pakistan has "greatly hurt the sentiments of the nation."

Pak military helped revive talks with India

Reuters
Islamabad

The quiet involvement of Pakistan's powerful military in its foreign policy this year paved the way for reviving a stalled dialogue with India, officials said, a thaw leading to the first visit to Pakistan by an Indian premier in almost 12 years.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's surprise trip to meet Pakistani premier Nawaz Sharif on Friday raised hopes that stop-and-start negotiations between the nuclear-armed neighbours might finally mean progress after more than 65 years of hostility.

Aides say the meeting was arranged directly between the two prime ministers on just a few hours' notice when Modi called to wish 66-year-old Sharif a happy birthday.

But even before Modi arrived in the eastern city of Lahore, relations between the nuclear-armed rivals had begun to thaw, with a resumption of dialogue already in the offing.

On Friday, Modi and Sharif agreed that their foreign secretaries would meet in mid-January to restart talks.

Pakistani officials say "ownership" of peace talks by the military and the appointment of a recently retired general as the national security adviser have given Pakistan renewed confidence to restart dialogue with India, including speaking about the thorny issue of terrorism.

"This round is different because there is backing from the top where it matters... the army chief is himself on board," a top diplomat said before the visit.

Army chief General Raheel Sharif is said to be close to the new national security adviser, recently retired general Naseer Khan Janjua, who in October replaced civilian Sartaj Aziz, an ally of the prime minister.

Many saw the move as strengthening the army's hand in talks with India, with the military remaining wary of a civilian government giving too much away.

"General Janjua has immense experience in these matters. He's



General Raheel Sharif

the best man for the job and he has already proven to be an asset to this (peace) process," one member of Nawaz Sharif's cabinet said earlier in December.

"It's only an added benefit that he has a direct line to the (army) chief," he added.

A senior Indian official in New Delhi also said military backing for peace talks marked a major change, with Janjua's involvement as national security adviser a key sign that Gen. Sharif supports resuming the dialogue.

Direct contact between the two prime ministers is a major factor in thawing relations - they met on the sidelines of the Paris climate change summit last month. However Pakistani officials said that true change only became possible after Janjua's appointment.

Earlier this month, the national security advisers of both countries met in Bangkok, paving the way for Indian Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj's visit to Pakistan for the Heart of Asia summit where she agreed to reopen dialogue with Pakistan, thereby resuming a process broken off since 2012.

Previous attempts to resume talks have been postponed time after time, mostly due to the Indian government's insistence that the focus of discussion must be, first and foremost, about terrorism. India accuses Pakistan-based militants for masterminding the 2008 Mumbai attacks that left 166 dead.

By contrast, Pakistan says the disputed territory of Kashmir is

the paramount topic.

With a military man having a greater say in the process, there is more confidence about discussing such sensitive topics, several officials said.

"I think in the past there was a hesitation from Pakistan, understandably, to talk about terrorism [with India] but that may have changed," the diplomat said.

"There is better division of labour. The real decision-making is happening behind the scenes. The rest is just optics."

Pakistani officials and western diplomats in Islamabad said US officials also worked hard to convince army chief Sharif during his visit to Washington last month to support going back to the negotiating table.

"India came up a lot during the army chief's visit to Washington, definitely with the Secretary of State [John Kerry] and also others," a western diplomat said.

A second member of Sharif's cabinet said the same of Modi.

"Our understanding is that when Modi was in the United States, he was encouraged very strongly by Obama to rethink his approach toward Pakistan," the minister said.

A close aide to Modi in India said US officials always push for reviving India-Pakistan talks and external pressure was not a factor.

"Modi-ji's visit to Pakistan was not dictated by America but it was planned to keep the national and regional interest in mind," the aide said, using a Hindi term of respect for the premier.

While Pakistan's army may have changed its thinking on talks, even the landmark Modi visit or support from influential facilitators does not guarantee success in a fraught peace process where all sides remain deeply suspicious.

A senior security official close to the talks process was wary when responding to the Modi visit.

"It is a positive step that he came... definitely... but we still have to move with caution," he said. "It's a new Modi in an old bottle; Nawaz Sharif should take it one sip at a time."



Pakistani relatives tend to an earthquake survivor as he is treated at a hospital in Peshawar yesterday.

Scores injured as quake jolts Pakistan, Afghanistan

AFP
Kabul/Islamabad

A 6.3-magnitude earthquake centred in the Hindu Kush jolted Afghanistan and Pakistan, damaging homes and leaving dozens of people injured just two months after a killer quake rattled the same mountainous region.

The tremor late Friday hit at a depth of 203.5km, the US Geological Survey said, sending people fleeing shaking buildings into a bitterly cold night and prompting fears of aftershocks.

The epicentre of the quake, which was felt as far away as New Delhi, was in the remote Afghan province of Badakhshan, close to the Pakistani and Tajik borders.

A pregnant woman was killed when a boulder fell on her house in Peshawar and up to 50 others were left injured in the northwestern Pakistani city, officials said.

Initial information suggested at least 45 houses were damaged in Badakhshan where communication with remote, mountainous villages is typi-



An injured Afghan receives treatment at a hospital following a powerful earthquake in Jalalabad yesterday.

cally slow, and 12 people were injured in the Afghan province of Nangarhar.

USGS had initially reported the quake's magnitude at 6.2.

In October, a 7.5-magnitude quake in the same region ripped across Pakistan and Afghanistan, killing nearly 400 people

and flattening buildings in rugged terrain.

For many in Pakistan, October's quake brought back traumatic memories of a 7.6-magnitude quake that struck in October 2005, killing more than 75,000 people and displacing some 3.5mn.

Afghanistan is frequently hit by earthquakes, especially in the Hindu Kush mountain range, which lies near the junction of the Eurasian and Indian tectonic plates.

In Nepal, a quake in April and a strong aftershock in May killed more than 8,900 people.

Taliban denies sharing IS intelligence with Russia

IANAS
Kabul

The Afghan Taliban has officially denied any negotiations or exchange of information with Russia to fight the spread of the Islamic State terror group in Afghanistan.

The group dismissed the claims yesterday, saying they "don't need anyone's support to fight and eliminate the presence of IS".

"We are having talks, but not about fighting the IS. We want foreign forces out of our country, that is what we are talking about at the moment," a Taliban spokesperson told Al Jazeera.

"They [IS fighters] are a few

bunch based only in Nangarhar (province) and are not a big or a strong group that we would be threatened with."

Zamir Kabulov, official at the Russian foreign ministry and President Vladimir Putin's special representative for Afghanistan, said earlier this week that "the Taliban interest objectively coincides with ours".

"I have already said earlier that we and the Taliban have channels for exchanging information," he said in remarks carried by Russian media.

"Both the Taliban of Afghanistan and the Taliban of Pakistan have said that they don't recognise (IS leader Abu Bakr) Al-Baghdadi as a caliph, that they don't recognise IS. Their inter-

ests coincide with ours."

Earlier, a Taliban breakaway faction condemned the Russian-Taliban "shared interest" in fighting IS in Afghanistan.

"We are having talks, but not about fighting the IS. We want foreign forces out of our country, that is what we are talking about at the moment"

Abdul Manan Niazi, spokesperson for the group, told the channel that partnering with Russia was "a fight against all Muslims" in the country.

"They have now turned to infidels to gather support and find a reason to kill their rivals who disagree with them and their

strategies," he said.

"IS does not exist in Afghanistan, there are just a few bunch from Pakistan who are IS loyalists. To fight that small group does not require Russia or anybody else's support. This is completely against what our former leader Mullah Omar would have wished for."

Even though Russia claims to have a communication channel with the Taliban, they are banned in the country, along with the IS. For more than a decade the Taliban has been considered by Moscow as a potential source of terror and instability in the former Soviet Union.

The IS has emerged in a number of different areas of Afghanistan and vowed to step up operations.

Internews
Karachi

For Pakistani musicians, it is the season to rejoice. Having already announced payments in terms of royalties, groundbreaking online music-streaming portal Patari has rolled out another significant venture, Patari Aslis.

It is an extended play (EP) that will feature some of the country's brightest upcoming talent produce music at the expense of the company. The idea came about when Patari rounded up six different musicians and funded them to create the music they wanted to make

on their own terms without influencing their style or genre.

Explaining the model for Patari Aslis, company co-founder Khalid Bajwa states that one of the most interesting features of the project is that it highlights Patari's three core values: royalty distribution, content creation and live music.

In this day and age, when corporate-sponsored content has become the norm, Bajwa explained how "musicians will retain total control of the song."

According to Bajwa, the EP, which is to be released as the first volume in a series of albums, will feature six tracks by emerging artists and will only be launched digitally. While the inaugural volume primarily

consists of emerging musical acts, such as The Tamashbeens, Abdullah Qureshi, Shajie, Sikandar Ka Mandar, Mehdi Maloof and Hawaii Jahaz, Bajwa reiterated Patari's aim is not just to promote upcoming musicians.

"Patari Aslis is not just about promoting new artists. We also want to encourage established artists to create new content on a more regular basis," he said.

Of the artist selection criteria for the debut edition of Patari Aslis, Bajwa noted, "While some artists were selected due to their popularity on Patari, a few were roped in on the basis of our intuition. Plus, we also wanted to have diversity in terms of genres."



IS claims attack on Bangladesh mosque

AFP
Dhaka

The Islamic State (IS) group yesterday claimed responsibility for an attack at a mosque of the minority Ahmadi Muslims in Bangladesh, in which the suspected bomber died and at least three others were injured.

US-based monitoring organisation SITE reported that the IS group, which has claimed responsibility for a number of recent attacks in Bangladesh, said it had targeted worshippers during Friday prayers.

The bomber detonated an explosive belt at a mosque of the "polytheist Qadiani sect," a derogatory term for Ahmadi Muslims, the monitoring organisation quoted IS as saying.

According to the statement "dozens" of worshippers were injured or killed at the mosque in the northwestern town of Bag-

mara, but police said on Friday only three had been injured.

The bomb blast at the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat mosque in Bagmara, some 250km (150 miles) from the capital Dhaka, occurred as nearly 100 people were gathered for Friday prayers, police said.

IS has claimed a series of recent attacks in Bangladesh, including the shooting of three foreigners, two of whom died, and the killing of a Sufi Muslim shrine chief in November.

The jihadists also claimed an attack at a Shiite mosque in the north of the country last month in which the muezzin was killed and three worshippers injured—though some experts have expressed scepticism about the claims.

Police blame the homegrown militant group Jamayetul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) for the recent violence while Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government accuses the main oppo-

sition party and its Islamist ally of trying to trigger anarchy. The parties deny the claims.

IS has claimed a series of recent attacks in Bangladesh, including the shooting of three foreigners, two of whom died

Analysts say Islamist extremists pose a growing danger in conservative Bangladesh and that a long-running political crisis has radicalised opponents of the government.

Bangladesh safer: Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal yesterday said that Bangladesh is safer than other countries, despite the recent murders of foreigners, death threats to priests and gun and bomb attacks.

"People in Bangladesh are more risk-free than people in any other country in the world," he said, a day after a suicide bomber blew himself up inside a

mosque in Rajshahi district.

The blast at the Bagmara Upazila mosque on Friday also left several people injured, bdnews24 reported.

The minister, however, said police were investigating whether it was really a suicide explosion.

"We've come to know that there were two attackers. One of them fled after the other detonated the bomb hidden under his clothes. The bomb was made in Bangladesh."

No terrorist or militant group has claimed responsibility for the attack so far.

Meanwhile, State Minister for Foreign Affairs M Shahriar Alam has called for assessing and addressing internationally emerging security challenges.

"We need to look at whether countries, including Bangladesh and its neighbours, are able to assess security situation properly based on reality," he told reporters.

Recapping the situation after the killing of two foreign nationals, the state minister said the situation has largely been changed, and many will agree that no one can fully be satisfied on security issue.

"It's a quick evolving thing. To bring this realisation among all (including foreign friends) also falls within our responsibility," Alam said.

Asked about confusion regarding Saudi-led initiative to counter terrorism and extremism, the state minister said they shared what they had based on 'primary information' that came from the Saudi government.

"It's a centre that's still evolving. The first meeting (among 34 members) is yet to take place. Things will be clear once the first meeting is held," said the state minister.

Though Bangladesh calls it a 'centre', the international media described it 'Saudi-led military alliance' to fight terrorism.

Climate activists protest over river pollution

By Mizan Rahman
Dhaka

Climate activists formed a 71km-long human chain on the banks of the Turag river in northern Gazipur district, near the Bangladesh capital Dhaka yesterday demanding an end to pollution and encroachment along its banks.

The Turag flows across Tagnail, Gazipur and Dhaka districts, and is linked to the Jamuna river system through the Lohajong river in Tangail. It joins the Buriganga river near Mirpur in the capital. The environment department has already declared it an 'ecologically critical area' (ECA).

The human chain was organised by different environmental groups, led by Save the River Movement, to press home their four-point demand to save the Turag.

Through the human chain, the activists demanded to free the Turag from encroachment, and setting up environment

friendly industry to ensure pollution free water in the river.

They formed the human chain at 15 different places, including Kaliakoir Bazar, Kadda Bazar, Tongi Bridge, Kamarpara Bridge, Mirzapur Bazar in Sadar sub-district of Gazipur district, Ashulia, Amin Bazar Bridge and Basila Bridge in Savar sub-district of Dhaka district, along the banks of the river in the morning.

The programme that started at 10am ended around 12pm.

Environmentalists blamed factories built alongside the river for pollution and alleged that garbage of more than 6,000 factories are dumped into the river.

Save the Environment Movement president Anwar Sadat said the government should bring those to book who are polluting and the rivers.

Sadat also demanded realisation of compensation from the responsible organisations and distribution of it among the victims.

Bangladesh to raise retirement age of govt servants

By Mizan Rahman
Dhaka

Bangladesh, facing acute shortage of skilled and efficient government officials, is planning to raise their retirement age by two years.

For the public servants who are freedom fighters, the retirement age will be made from the current 60 years to 62 years, in accordance with a court verdict.

The retirement age of other incumbents would be raised to 61 years from the existing 59 years, according to highly-placed sources in the public administration ministry in Dhaka.

The public administration ministry is preparing two different proposals in this connection. These proposals are likely to be placed at the Cabinet meeting soon, the sources added.

The additional secretary (APD) of the ministry said they are discussing the matter of raising the retirement age of the freedom fighter government officers and employees as per the court verdict, but they are yet to take any decision in this regard.

He said the court advised them to raise the issue before the Cabinet meeting and they will do so in accordance with the decision of the authorities concerned.

Kamal Abdul Naser Chowdhury, senior secretary, public administration ministry, said they have received the court direction in this regard and action would be taken as per rules.

Cabinet secretary Mohamad Shafiq Alam said: "We will place the proposal in this regard before the Cabinet meeting after receiving it from the public administration ministry."

A secretary of a ministry informed on condition of anonymity that the government should not increase the retirement age of the freedom fighter government employees, and even the serving government employees.

"If the government does increase the retirement age of the employees, it would create impediments for the entry of new employees, creating frustration among them," he said.

On November 16, the Supreme Court upheld a High Court verdict that ordered placing a proposal before the Cabinet for increasing the retirement age of freedom fighters from 57 to 65 in government jobs.

Sources said the Public Service Retirement Act (Amendment) would be amended if the retirement age of government employees is increased.

Relics found



Villagers look at relics found at the archaeological site in Natashwar area of Bangladesh's Munshiganj district. Bangladesh and China joint archaeologists unearthed an ancient Buddhist temple with unique architecture features.

Nepal expects more Chinese tourists

IANS
Kathmandu

Nepali officials have expressed the hope that waiving visa application fees for Chinese tourists will be helpful in boosting tourism in the Himalayan country after a devastating earthquake in April.

Nepal received 150,000 Chinese tourists in 2014 while the number stood at 46,000 in 2010. Xinhua cited the civil aviation and tourism ministry as saying yesterday.

Dinesh Chandra, secretary in the ministry, said the new policy of waiving visa fees to Chinese nationals visiting Nepal will come into effect from early 2016.

He also thanked the Chinese government for lifting a travel advisory issued to the citizens visiting Nepal.

During a meeting between Nepal's Deputy Prime Minister Kamal Thapa, who is also in-charge of foreign affairs, and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Beijing on Friday, the two countries pledged to boost tourism co-operation.

On the occasion, Nepal announced waiving visa applica-

tion fees for Chinese citizens travelling to the country while the Chinese side decided to lift the travel alert to Nepal following the April 25 earthquake.

"The Nepali government will take a formal decision very soon regarding waiver of visa application fees for Chinese nationals visiting Nepal," he said, adding: "The number of Chinese tourists to come to Nepal has been soaring in the past few years. We expect more Chinese tourists in the country in the coming years."

Under Nepal's current laws, nationals from the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation countries do not need to pay visa fees (if visiting Nepal for a period of less than one month) unless they are entering Nepal from a third country.

In an agreement signed on Friday in Beijing, Nepal and China also agreed to upgrade and operationalise the existing border points and develop the other border points to promote connectivity between the two countries.

China has agreed to give priority to the reopening of the Tatopani-Zhangmu border point, which has been disrupted after the April earthquake that killed thousands in Nepal.

Nepal appoints earthquake reconstruction agency chief

Reuters
Kathmandu

Eight months after a devastating earthquake hit Nepal, its government has finally opened the way for a reconstruction agency to spend \$4.1bn pledged by foreign donors to help the massive number of people rendered homeless.

Two separate earthquakes in April and May killed 9,000 people, injured more than 22,000 and damaged or destroyed nearly 900,000 houses, forcing many to live in shelters built with tarps and iron sheets, even in freezing temperatures.

It took until September for Nepal to create the National Reconstruction Agency (NRA).

Yesterday, a minister said that the cabinet on Friday named a chief for the agency, giving it the green light to begin its work.

The delays were due to wrangling between political parties, which frustrated many international donors.

Sherdhan Rai, minister for in-

formation and communication technology, said the NRA "will finalise the models for homes to be reconstructed and give financial assistance to people to rebuild their homes."

He also said the agency "will be responsible to rebuild schools, hospitals, monuments, roads and office buildings in five years."

Unicef says more than 200,000 families affected by the tremors are still living in temporary shelters, at an altitude above 1,500m (4,920ft) where harsh winter conditions will continue through February.

The earthquake prompted squabbling Nepalese politicians to united and in September adopt a new constitution, which they had failed at doing for seven years.

But the charter triggered protests by ethnic Madhesi groups who blocked key trade crossings with India, causing severe fuel shortages.

Aid agencies say the shortages disrupted efforts to send essential relief items such as blankets and clothing to earthquake survivors in mountainous areas.



Local workers carry stones for building house in Barpak of Nepal's Gorkha district. Barpak, a village situated in the northern part of Gorkha district of Nepal, was the epicenter of the devastating earthquake that erupted on April 25.

"Clothes get wet with dew dropping from iron sheets at night and we cannot sleep," Kanchhi Pahari, an earthquake victim told the Kantipur daily.

The government has handed only \$150 for each of the affected families in emergency aid but is yet to provide the second, promised tranche of \$2,000 for rebuilding homes.



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GULF TIMES

Higher costs, low oil prices may shrink non-Opec output

The recent oversupply of oil caused mainly by the extraction of costly reserves in the US and Canada may ease as higher-cost production threatens to shrink shale production, particularly in North America.

In its recent 'World Oil Outlook', the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) forecasts non-Opec supply may dwindle by 1mn barrels a day to 60.2mn a day in 2020 as "market instability" leads to reductions in spending and drilling.

The report also forecasts supply and demand through to 2040 according to which the non-Opec supply will contract in the last two decades of the period to 59.7mn barrels a day.

As a result, the demand for Opec's crude will rise to 40.7mn barrels a day, expanding its market share to 37%.

Almost \$10tn (in 2014 terms) will need to be invested in the oil industry through to 2040 to develop the required supplies, with \$7.2tn of this in exploration and production. Producers outside Opec will need to do the bulk of the spending, investing \$250bn a year.

"US tight oil production has been declining since April 2015"

Reports indicate that on account of expensive production processes, shale oil producers will not be able to cope with the

current low oil prices. Many North American shale producers have already closed their rigs, cancelled projects and are lowering production.

Opec said: "Shale drillers in the US have slashed spending and cut the number of workers this year as prices have fallen. US tight oil production – the main driver of non-Opec supply growth – has been declining since April 2015. This downward trend should accelerate in coming months, given various factors, mainly low oil prices and lower drilling activities."

That said, Opec estimates that demand for its crude will slide to 2020, though less steeply than previously expected, as rival supplies continue to grow. The organisation maintains it will need to pump 30.7mn barrels a day by the end of the decade.

That's 1.7mn barrels more than projected a year ago and 1mn less than what the group had pumped in November.

The 30.7mn barrels of daily output needed from 12 of Opec's members in 2020 is about 300,000 a day less than required this year. The supply figure, however, excludes Indonesia, which formally rejoined Opec on December 4.

Opec said the non-Opec oil supply growth was expected to be "much lower" in 2015 and 2016 after "the tremendous growth" of 2.23mn barrels a day achieved in 2014.

While non-Opec oil supply was estimated to grow by 1mn barrels a day in 2015 to average 57.51mn barrels a day, it forecasts a contraction in non-Opec oil supply in 2016.

In its latest report, Opec assumes that prices will rise to average \$80 a barrel in nominal terms in 2020, and \$70.70 in real terms. Last year, it had anticipated nominal prices of \$110 and real levels of \$95.40.

That means the value of the group's output in 2020 would be \$218bn less than estimated a year ago, when it first embraced the policy to safeguard market share.

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A new century for the Middle East

The region's political institutions have been crippled as a result of repeated US and European intervention dating back to World War I

By Jeffrey D Sachs
New York

The US, the European Union, and Western-led institutions such as the World Bank repeatedly ask why the Middle East can't govern itself. The question is asked honestly but without much self-awareness. After all, the single most important impediment to good governance in the region has been its lack of self-governance: The region's political institutions have been crippled as a result of repeated US and European intervention dating back to World War I, and in some places even earlier.

One century is enough. The year 2016 should mark the start of a new century of homegrown Middle Eastern politics focused urgently on the challenges of sustainable development.

The Middle East's fate during the last 100 years was cast in November 1914, when the Ottoman Empire chose the losing side in World War I. The result was the empire's dismantling, with the victorious powers, Britain and France, grabbing hegemonic control over its remnants. Britain, already in control of Egypt since 1882, took effective control of governments in today's Iraq, Jordan, Israel and Palestine, and Saudi Arabia, while France, already in control of much of North Africa, took control of Lebanon and Syria.

Formal League of Nations mandates and other instruments of hegemony were exercised to ensure British and

French power over oil, ports, shipping lanes, and local leaders' foreign policies. In what would become Saudi Arabia, Britain backed the ideology of Ibn Saud over the Arab nationalism of the Hashemite Hejaz.

After World War II, the US picked up the interventionist mantle, following a CIA-backed military coup in Syria in 1949 with another CIA operation to topple Iran's Mohamed Mossadegh in 1953 (to keep the West in control of the country's oil). The same behaviour has continued up to the present day: the overthrow of Libya's Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, the toppling of Egypt's Mohamed Mursi in 2013, and the ongoing war against Syria's Bashar al-Assad. For almost seven decades, the US and its allies have repeatedly intervened (or supported internally-led coups) to oust governments that were not sufficiently under their thumb.

The West also armed the entire region through hundreds of billions of dollars in weapons sales. The US established military bases throughout the region, and repeated failed operations by the CIA have left massive supplies of armaments in the hands of violent foes of the US and Europe.

So, when Western leaders ask Arabs and others in the region why they can't govern themselves, they should be prepared for the answer: "For a full century, your interventions have undermined democratic institutions (by rejecting the results of the ballot box in Algeria, Palestine, Egypt, and elsewhere); stoked repeated and now chronic wars; and created a killing field that today stretches from Bamako to Kabul."

What, then, should be done to bring about a new Middle East? I would propose five principles.

First, and most important, the US should end covert CIA operations aimed at toppling or destabilising governments anywhere in the world.

The CIA was created in 1947 with two mandates, one valid (intelligence gathering) and the other disastrous (covert operations to overthrow regimes deemed "hostile" to US interests). The US president can and should, by executive order, terminate CIA covert operations – and thereby end the legacy of blowback and mayhem that they have sustained, most notably in the Middle East.

Second, the US should pursue its sometimes-valid foreign-policy objectives in the region through the UN Security Council. The current approach of building US-led "coalitions of the willing" has not only failed; it has also meant that even valid US objectives such as stopping the Islamic State are blocked by geopolitical rivalries.

The US would gain much by putting its foreign-policy initiatives to the test of Security Council votes. When the Security Council rejected war in Iraq in 2003, the US would have been wise to abstain from invading. When Russia, a veto-wielding permanent member of the Council, opposed the US-backed overthrow of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, the US would have been wise to abstain from covert operations to topple him. And now, the entire Security Council would coalesce around a global (but not a US) plan to fight the Islamic State.

Third, the US and Europe should accept the reality that democracy in the Middle East will produce many Islamist victories at the ballot box. Many of the elected Islamist regimes will fail, as many poorly performing governments do. They will be overturned at the next ballot, or in the streets, or even by local generals. But the repeated efforts of Britain, France, and the US to keep all Islamist governments out of power only block political maturation in the region, without actually succeeding or providing long-term benefits.

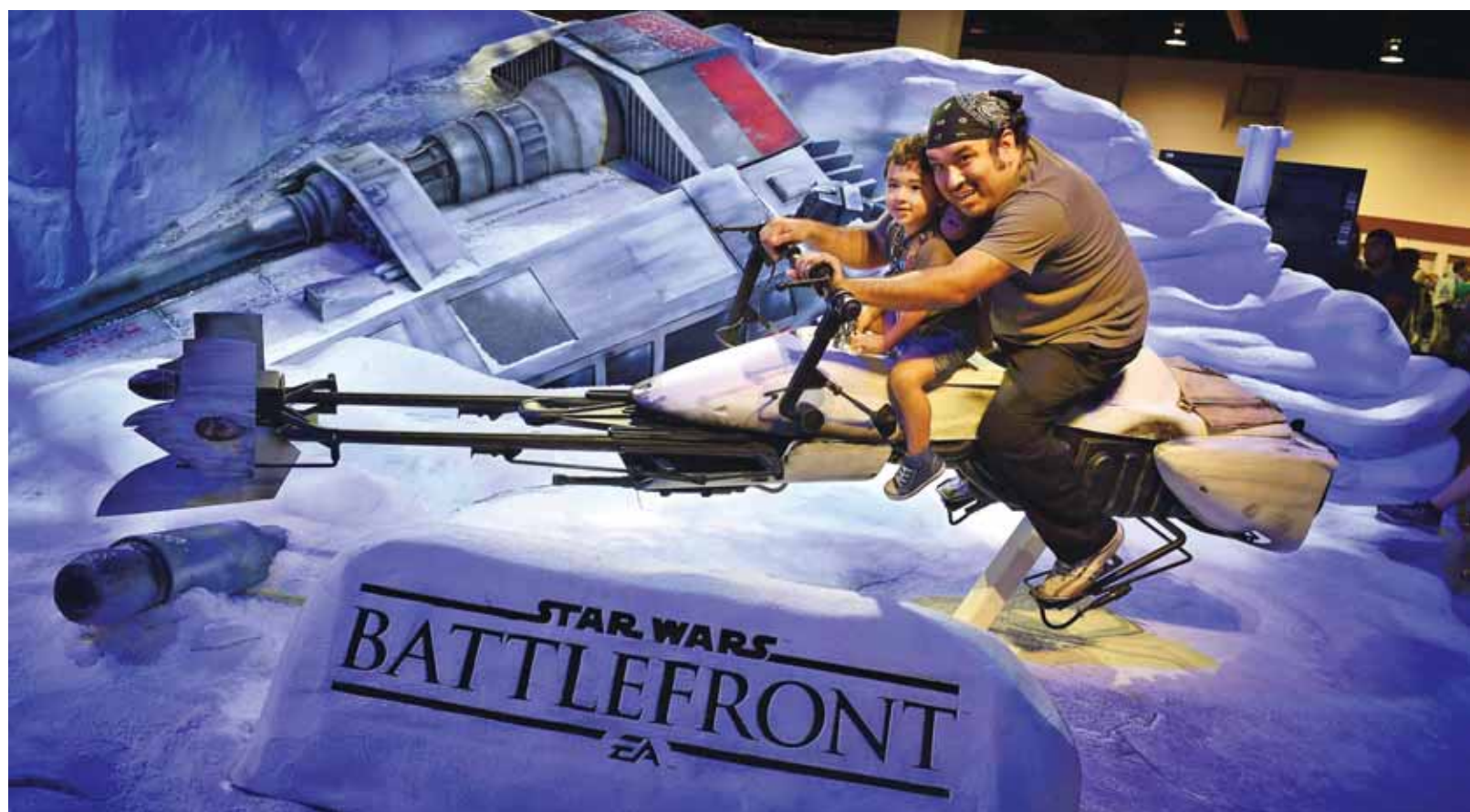
Fourth, homegrown leaders

from the Sahel through North Africa and the Middle East to Central Asia should recognise that the most important challenge facing the Islamic world today is the quality of education. The region lags far behind its middle-income counterparts in science, maths, technology innovation, entrepreneurship, small business development, and (therefore) job creation. Without high-quality education, there is little prospect for economic prosperity and political stability anywhere.

Finally, the region should address its exceptional vulnerability to environmental degradation, especially in view of the global shift to low-carbon energy. The Muslim-majority region from West Africa to Central Asia is the world's largest populous dry region, a 5,000-mile (8,000 km) swath of water stress, desertification, rising temperatures, and food insecurity.

These are the true challenges facing the Middle East. The Sunni-Shia divide, Assad's political future, and doctrinal disputes are of decidedly lesser long-term importance to the region than the unmet need for quality education, job skills, advanced technologies, and sustainable development. The many brave and progressive thinkers in the Islamic world should help to awaken their societies to this reality, and people of goodwill around the world should help them to do it through peaceful co-operation and the end of imperial-style wars and manipulation. - Project Syndicate/Mohammed Bin Rashid Global Initiatives, 2015

● Jeffrey D Sachs is Professor of Sustainable Development, Professor of Health Policy and Management, and Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University. He is also Director of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network.



Star Wars: The Force Awakens is so popular because everyone knew it would be so popular.

Why did I pay \$30 to see Star Wars?

By Ann Friedman
Los Angeles Times

A few days ago, as I bought tickets to *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, I paused briefly to wonder what I was doing. Why was I paying dearly – \$30 for each seat – to see *Star Wars* in 3-D? I wasn't a particularly enthusiastic fan of the originals. I wasn't desperate to watch a JJ Abrams-directed light sabre battle. Ultimately, I realised, I was going to see *The Force Awakens* because all my friends were going to see it, and everyone else's friends were going to see it too. I was in the grip of an increasingly rare phenomenon: A true mass-cultural event.

In the Internet age, it's difficult to even define what's mainstream. Yes, we still have pop stars who are so famous they only need a first name, and songs that seem omnipresent even if we've never downloaded them on iTunes or searched for them on YouTube. And, yes, new movies still become touchstones – just think about all those "Frozen" – obsessed kids. Yet

touchstones are harder than ever to manufacture, because there are more entertainment options than ever.

Thirty-eight years ago, when the first *Star Wars* came out, consumers were limited to the channels in their cable package, the films at their local theatre and in video stores, and the books in their local libraries and bookstores. The enterprising viewer could use her VCR to record movies and television for later consideration, but limited options and tightly controlled distribution meant that most people experienced the same cultural events at the same time.

I was born five years after the first *Star Wars* premiered, and, like many if not most members of my generation, I revel in fragmentation. I watch television but I don't have cable; instead I stream shows on Netflix and Hulu. I listen to podcasts more often than public radio. I enjoy the Saturday Night Live skits that get sent around, but I haven't sat down for a full episode in years. I keep up with the Kardashians on Instagram, not Bravo. And I see only about five films in the theatre per year, which actually makes

me an avid moviegoer, statistically speaking. The average American sees just three or four.

None of which is to say I'm immune to trends. It's just that I feel more pressure to connect with my friends than society at large. This year, that meant watching Drake's Hotline Bling video (and all of the resulting GIFs), and tracking DJ Khaled's latest Snapchats. It meant reading Elena Ferrante's Neapolitan novels. I didn't watch *The Jim* – the HBO documentary miniseries about Robert Durst – and felt downright rebellious; but I felt no qualms about skipping *The Big Bang Theory* – which was one of this year's most-watched television shows.

What matters now isn't the zeitgeist, it's the social network. If my network hadn't endorsed the new *Star Wars*, I might not have gone to see it. Unusually, however, it was anointed both by my network and, seemingly, everyone else's network as a must-see movie. *The Force Awakens* brought in a record-breaking \$248mn in its opening weekend.

"To see *Star Wars* in 1977 was to experience a moment in pop culture

that seemed universal," wrote the film critic Jim Emerson in 2007. In 2015, something can seem universal even if only you, your friends and your family are participating. But George Lucas' characters are clearly still universal in the 1977 sense.

Star Wars, the contemporary franchise, of course benefits from the fact that the brand dates back to a long time ago and a culture that feels far, far away – a culture that had fewer options. It broke out at a less competitive time. Perhaps the movie has drawn mass attention for another reason, too. It offers fragmented audiences a chance to remember what it feels like to be a part of something big that crosses cultural and generational lines.

In other words, *The Force Awakens* is so popular because everyone knew it would be so popular.

Although I'll continue to enjoy my Drake GIFs, Ferrante novels and streaming shows, I'm also happy I hustled to the theatre for *Star Wars*. It's nice to leave your niche and experience the truly universal once in a while.



Schengen and European Security

More openness does not seem to be the direction in which Europe is headed – and that is a serious problem

By Daniel Gros
Brussels

Another key European project is under threat. Some two decades after border controls were first abolished under the Schengen Agreement – which now includes 26 countries, including four non-members of the European Union – Germany has reinstated controls at its border with Austria, and France at its border with Belgium. The controls are meant to be temporary, and the vast majority of other borders remain open. But more openness does not seem to be the direction in which Europe is headed – and that is a serious problem.

The shift away from a “Europe without borders,” instigated by images of refugees walking across internal frontiers, was fortified by the news that most of those who carried out last month’s Paris attacks came from Belgium, and that some may have entered the EU via the Balkans, posing as refugees. The underlying assumption – reinforced by many European politicians, especially interior ministers – is that there is a tradeoff between security and openness. This is far from accurate.

In fact, the reinstatement of border controls seems to be an example of “security theatre” – a policy intended to make the public feel like something is being done. But, far from making Europeans safer, rolling back Schengen would actually hinder the fight against terrorism, because countries would be forced to devote

valuable resources – thousands of police officers, if the agreement were to be abolished altogether – to checking documents at borders. Those resources would no longer contribute directly to investigations into terrorist activities.

And those investigations need all the help they can get. After all, the objective – to identify a few terrorists hiding among millions of law-abiding citizens, before they commit a violent act – is the equivalent of finding a needle in a haystack. The recognition of the flawed logic behind reinstating border controls is probably why police officials have remained guarded in discussing the issue.

It should be remembered that when five countries – Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands – agreed in 1985 (in the village of Schengen, Luxembourg) to abolish border controls, they did not do so on a whim or because some politicians had a lofty vision. However symbolic the agreement may have been, symbolism wasn’t the point.

Participating countries’ security establishments had recognised that stopping people at the internal borders did not help them counter major threats, such as organised crime and drug smuggling. Truck drivers, who protested against long waits at customs stations, helped spur the effort. But it took another decade of hard-nosed, detailed negotiations, entailing efforts to strengthen the EU’s external borders, to reach the point, in 1995, where internal border controls could actually be lifted.

The subsequent decision by non-EU countries like Switzerland to join the Schengen Area highlights the massive benefits, including for security, of maintaining open borders. Rather than attempt to control the masses of tourists and business travellers entering the country from all sides



What the Schengen Area needs is a true European coast guard, with its own budget, ships, and personnel.

– essentially an exercise in futility in Switzerland – the country decided to focus police resources specifically on security threats. By joining Schengen, the Swiss police also gained access to the Schengen Information System and other important European databases on criminal suspects, stolen cars, and more.

Of course, there are flaws in the Schengen system. Like the eurozone, the area began with only a small group of member countries, all of which had a similar outlook and capacity

to implement common rules, but soon welcomed many others, some of which, it later became apparent, could not uphold agreed standards.

In the eurozone, imbalances in competitiveness and fiscal positions – which were not noted during the perfunctory check, based on formal criteria, that was conducted before approving new members – led to a protracted economic crisis. In the Schengen Area, some countries’ inability to protect external borders adequately – owing to a

lack of administrative capacity (especially true in Greece, but also, to some extent, Italy), together with geographic challenges like long and fractured coast lines – have undermined confidence in the face of the refugee crisis.

The eurozone survived its crisis for two key reasons. First, a common institution, the European Central Bank, had the power to act. Second, member states relinquished some control over their banks, in order to boost the system’s overall stability.

If the Schengen Area is to endure, it needs to evolve in a similar direction, establishing a common institution responsible for securing external borders, while reinforcing the framework for internal security. As it stands, defense of Schengen’s external borders is up to individual member states, including one, Greece, that is already facing a devastating economic crisis. The only EU-wide operation aimed at helping police the external border, called Frontex, is severely limited in scope.

What the Schengen Area needs is a true European coast guard, with its own budget, ships, and personnel. The Mediterranean can be expected to remain the main security challenge for some time, owing both to illegal immigration and its proximity to terrorist training grounds. It thus makes sense for the new coast guard, backed by EU funds, to start there. Even a small fraction of the EU budget would far exceed the available resources of any individual country.

Moreover, a European coast guard would provide a flexible tool with which to allocate resources as effectively as possible at any given moment. After all, even if security threats remain concentrated in the same broad area, the most urgent challenges can shift considerably over time. Last year, the problem was Southern Italy. Today, it is the Aegean. Tomorrow it might be somewhere else. Europe needs to prepare for any eventuality.

It is not only possible to have both openness and security; the former can actually bolster the latter. The Schengen Area’s members need to recognise that the security rationale for abolishing internal borders remains as compelling today as it was when they joined. – Project Syndicate

• Daniel Gros is Director of the Center for European Policy Studies.

Letters

India, Pakistan must solve their genuine issues

Dear Sir,

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s visit to Pakistan got wide media coverage in both the countries. Unfortunately after formation of the Modi government tension is growing between the two countries and extremist elements from both sides are trying hard to add fuel to the burning situation. Agitations, hate speeches, false allegations are making the situation worse every day. BJP extremist elements organised several demonstrations to protest Modi’s visit.

Last month Indian Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj visited Pakistan. The two nuclear-power rivals, it seems, are trying to ease tensions. Now both countries have agreed to ease visa restrictions, increase trade and resolve all disputes through dialogues. But without solving the long-standing disputes between the two countries, the visits of several key personalities are only cosmetics steps and media speeches can’t bring any change in the region.

Unfortunately despite growing poverty, unemployment and rising prices of basic commodities, India and Pakistan are still spending huge amounts on arms purchases. Tension is running high at borders. The two countries are blaming each other for acts of terrorism on their soil.

Besides, several other key issues, including Kashmir, Siachen and construction of controversial dams, are making things from bad to worse. Unless the two countries solve genuine issues and long-standing disputes the dream of peace in the region will remain elusive.

Khawaja Umer Farooq
Jeddah
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Wage a war on war for peace

Dear Sir,

Let us sincerely strive for global peace in 2016. Brutal conflicts continue to dominate the news headlines. Peace is indeed a rare commodity, but with sincere devotion, it is attainable. Since war entails a frightful destruction

of human life, every effort should be made to prevent it and even to outlaw war as an institution in society. We must seek to do away with the monumental folly and destructiveness of war.

It was Alexander Berkman who said, “War means blind obedience, unthinking stupidity, brutish callousness and irresponsible murder.” The weapons of war have become the largest industrial empire on our planet. It is executed with utter madness by ruthless politicians with the help of capricious military bureaucrats.

In 2008, there were 63 armed

conflicts, resulting in 56,000 fatalities. In 2014, there were 42 armed conflicts, resulting in 180,000 fatalities. The World Bank has estimated that 1.5bn people, roughly one fifth of humanity, are affected by some form of violence.

If trends continue as they have during the last 15 years we shall soon reach a point of no return. Total war will become the foreign policy posture of the major powers as they substitute diplomacy with weaponry.

Johannesburg
Farouk Araie

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Live issues

Every bite you take matters

Tribune News Service
Chicago

Every day dieters are bombarded by flashing alerts and wheedling pleas from command centres in brain and stomach.

You know you shouldn’t indulge too much in calorie-laden holiday delicacies that instantly inflate the waistline. But then there’s that urgent signal that you must try that chocolate-clad peppermint-sprinkled cookie. Just a nibble. Come on. Or that velvety key lime pie. Or that hipster delicacy, fresh homemade buttermilk biscuits with your favourite cholesterol-rich toppings.

Result: Dieters, desperate to lose the last 10 or the first 50, seek fresh ways to cheat the unforgiving maths of calories.

Enter “intuitive eating.” The theory here is that your body knows what it is doing when it urges you to

indulge. Instead of dieting, just heed the body’s signals, such as feelings of hunger, and of course, fullness. Eat when you’re hungry. Stop when you’re full. Simple.

Researchers tested that theory in a recently published study that pitted calorie-counters against intuitive eaters. The results were, well, intuitive. Those who counted calories lost more weight than those who listened to their bodies. Almost all, however, eventually gained most of the weight back and some of the intuitive eaters ended the six-week study weighing more than when they started, Judith Anglin, associate professor of nutrition at Texas Southern University, tells us.

Conclusion: Argh. In another study, scientists tested a variation on the theme: Instead of monitoring calories, just limit your bites.

Brigham Young University health sciences associate professor Josh West recruited 61 overweight or obese men to test the bite theory. Not surprisingly

16 dropped out in the first week. Who wants to keep a running tally of every bite? Or be tempted to wolf down a burger in three bites just to keep the daily tally low?

What a perfect way to ruin a meal. Upshot: Intuitive eaters “do improve their psychological well-being and have less body dissatisfaction, but they don’t necessarily lose weight,” Dr Lisa Neff, assistant professor of endocrinology at Northwestern University Feinberg Medical School, tells us.

Researchers have tried for years to unravel the intricate biology of obesity. What we know is that the communication between stomach and brain is complex, filled with hormones such as leptin and ghrelin that regulate hunger and satiety, that control cravings and contribute mightily to weight gain or loss.

Scientists have discovered that fat itself sends out chemical messages to the brain, stomach and other tissues. They’ve tried to feather out

the exact roles of all these chemicals crisscrossing brain and body in hopes of short-circuiting the ones that lead people to overeat into obesity.

One recent breakthrough: Scientists discovered how a gene switches on or off the production of so-called “brown fat,” which may explain why some people can eat more and still stay trim. Brown fat doesn’t store calories like the more common white fat but instead burns excess calories and releases that energy as heat. Leaner people have more brown fat than do heavier people.

Still, what we know about dieting is what we knew: Calories matter. What you eat matters. How much you exercise matters.

Listening to your body is fine, as long as you really listen. There’s no antidote to eating when you’re full – come on, admit it, we all do – or gorging for entertainment. Or as a form of therapy.

Fewer bites? Sure. But that won’t help if every one of them is chocolate cheesecake.

Weather report

Three-day forecast

TODAY
High: 20 C
Low: 15 C
Strong wind and high seas at first

MONDAY
High: 22 C
Low: 16 C
Sunny

TUESDAY
High: 22 C
Low: 15 C
Sunny

Fishermen's forecast

OFFSHORE DOHA
Wind: NW 12-18 KT
Waves: 3-5 Feet

INSHORE DOHA
Wind: NW 05-15 KT
Waves: 1-2.3 Feet

Around the region

City	Weather today	Max/min	Weather tomorrow	Max/min
Abu Dhabi	M Cloudy	23/16	Sunny	24/17
Baghdad	P Cloudy	18/04	Sunny	18/03
Dubai	P Cloudy	23/19	Sunny	24/19
Kuwait City	Sunny	18/09	Sunny	18/09
Manama	Sunny	19/16	Sunny	19/16
Muscat	M Cloudy	26/21	P Cloudy	27/19
Riyadh	Sunny	15/07	P Cloudy	15/09
Tehran	Sunny	08/01	Sunny	10/01



Around the world

City	Weather today	Max/min	Weather tomorrow	Max/min
Athens	Sunny	17/08	Sunny	17/08
Beirut	Sunny	20/13	Sunny	20/13
Bangkok	M Sunny	35/24	Sunny	35/23
Berlin	M Cloudy	12/08	P Cloudy	09/03
Cairo	Sunny	22/10	Sunny	23/08
Cape Town	Cloudy	27/18	Cloudy	28/19
Colombo	S T Storms	32/24	S T Storms	32/24
Dhaka	Sunny	25/13	Sunny	26/14
Hong Kong	P Cloudy	21/16	M Sunny	19/15
Istanbul	Sunny	12/06	Sunny	13/07
Jakarta	S T Storms	33/24	S T Storms	33/25
Karachi	M Sunny	28/12	P Cloudy	31/13
London	Cloudy	15/09	P Cloudy	13/09
Manila	M Sunny	32/21	P Cloudy	31/21
Moscow	S Showers	-2/-6	M Sunny	-4/-8
New Delhi	M Sunny	23/12	M Cloudy	24/12
New York	M Sunny	18/07	P Cloudy	17/10
Paris	T Storms	14/06	T Storms	23/21
Sao Paulo	Sunny	29/21	Sunny	01/-6
Seoul	S T Storms	31/25	T Storms	30/25
Singapore	Cloudy	21/15	P Cloudy	21/15
Sydney	Clear	11/04	Cloudy	08/00
Tokyo				

Waterlogging woes for Industrial Area again

By Ramesh Mathew
Staff Reporter

The Industrial Area's flooding woes continued as portions of a number of roads in the sprawling city neighbourhood remained under water yesterday, a day after heavy rain lashed Doha and other parts of the country.

While water was drained out from some of the streets yesterday and ef-

ports were on to clear more roads, the situation was still grim in some parts of the area, according to residents.

Just a month ago, another spell of rain had left several roads in the area waterlogged, causing much inconvenience to residents and visitors alike.

Residents of the area, especially those staying on the eastern side, said last month's downpour had made things difficult for them as many roads were flooded or remained muddy for a

The situation is particularly bad between streets 23 and 40, say residents of the Industrial Area

while. Now, they would have to cope with waterlogged roads yet again.

Following the latest spell, there are reports of water from some of the streets flowing into warehouses and housing units run by different companies.

The situation is particularly bad be-

tween streets 23 and 40, say residents. "This is such a busy area, housing a variety of warehouses, repair shops and other units, besides workers' accommodation. Some of the roads here are already in poor shape and things become even worse when it rains like this," said a resident, calling for a permanent solution to the problem.

Some of the worst-affected streets are home to a number of warehouses belonging to foodstuff companies, it is

learnt. They are mainly concentrated on streets 36 to 38 and it is common to see vehicles - transporting foodstuff - get stuck in the water after a spell of showers, the residents point out, expressing fear that any further rain would make matters even more difficult for them.

Some companies have apparently shifted their workers' housing facilities to other places in the country, including Umm Slal Mohamed and south of Al

Wakrah, in view of the problems faced in the Industrial Area such as poor roads, waterlogging during rains and unhygienic surroundings.

Some residents, though, are hopeful of a solution to their problems as major infrastructure development works are to be carried out in the Industrial Area in the near future. "This may provide the permanent solution that both residents and visitors are looking for," said a worker living in the area.

Rain relents, water getting drained out

By Joseph Varghese
Staff Reporter

Several suction trucks were in action in different parts of the city all through yesterday to pump out water accumulated during the rain that continued until yesterday morning.

While the rain stopped by early afternoon, efforts to remove water from roads and other areas continued across the city and beyond. There is no rain forecast for today or tomorrow.

The rainy spell began late on Thursday and gathered momentum on Friday. In Doha, a number of streets and low-lying areas were flooded after heavy showers since Friday evening.

The affected localities, where waterlogging was seen at a number of spots, included Abu Hamour, Hilal, Mamoura and Al Waab, among others.

Learning its lessons from last month's heavy downpour, the Ministry of Municipality and Urban Planning had taken adequate precautions and deployed several water suction trucks as soon as it started to rain on Friday.

Water that had accumulated on a number of streets and low-lying grounds in several areas had been drained out. Similar operations are in progress in many other areas.

While the waterlogging caused problems to motorists and pedestrians, it gave many children an opportunity to have a fun-filled time playing in the flooded areas. Being a weekend also helped as schools remained closed. Several children could be seen riding their bicycles as well as splashing through the inundated areas.

After the rain stopped, people were seen taking a stroll through different areas of the city and enjoying the fine weather. Many could be seen spending time in the open with families and friends while some others were engaged in fishing.

Meanwhile, the weather office said Abu Hamour in Doha received the highest rainfall over the past three days.

According to data released on the Twitter page of the Qatar Met department, Abu Hamour received 53.5mm of rain from Thursday until yesterday, followed by Hamad



People enjoying the cool weather at the Corniche. PICTURES: Shaji Kayamkulam, Noushad Thekkayil

No rain today, cold night likely

With the low-pressure system that triggered moderate to heavy rain in the country over the weekend gradually moving away, different parts of Qatar are likely to experience dry conditions and a cold night today, according to the weather report.

The Qatar Met department has also said strong winds and high seas are expected in offshore areas early today.

The wind speed may go up to 22 knots in offshore areas, which will remain partly cloudy during the day. The sea level is expected

to reach a high of 7ft. The forecast for inshore areas says it will be misty in some places at first, followed by cloudy conditions and a cold night. Visibility, meanwhile, will drop to 3km or less in some places in the early hours today.

The minimum and maximum temperatures in the country are expected to be 13C and 20C, respectively, with the forecast for Doha being 15C the 20C. Abu Samra is likely to be the coolest with a minimum temperature of 13C, according to the forecast.

International Airport 50.7mm and Doha Airport 49.7mm.

Other places that received heavy rain included Qatar University (46.7mm), Al Ruwais (46mm), Al Wakrah (45.1mm), Abu Sam-

ra (43.4mm), Al Guwayriyah (42.8mm) and Turayna (41.8mm).

During the last spell of heavy rain in Qatar in November, the area around HIA had received 80.8mm of rain.



Suction trucks clearing the water at a roundabout.



A group of children playing in a large water puddle.



Umbrellas were out as residents ventured out during the rain yesterday morning.



A man fishing at the Corniche.



A vehicle passing through a waterlogged area.



A delivery boy on a supply mission yesterday.

Barwa City affected by severe rain



Waterlogging was severe on some roads leading to Barwa City following the rain that started late on Thursday and continued until yesterday morning. The township, which houses around 25,000 residents, was among the affected areas in the city.

Showers 'dampen' business at eateries

By Ramesh Mathew
Staff Reporter

Business at some retail units, especially restaurants and groceries, took a hit as heavy rain lashed Doha and other parts of the country on Friday.

Interactions with retailers in Doha and its immediate neighbourhood yesterday revealed that many of these establishments experienced poor patronage on Friday as people chose to stay indoors due to the heavy rain.

Some of the eateries that usually received more customers on the weekend, mainly families, seemed to have been affected the

most, sources in the retail sector pointed out.

Interactions with retailers revealed that many of these establishments had poor patronage on Friday as people chose to stay indoors due to the rain

One of them said business was poor on Thursday evening as well as it had started raining by then.

Barwa Village, where several restaurants have come up in the last two years, receives a good number of visitors on weekends. However, the operators of a number of eateries there complained of a poor turnout over

the past two days and blamed it on the rain.

Similar feedback came from some restaurants in Doha as well as those in the fast-developing Asian Town in the Industrial Area.

The Matar Qadeem area, which houses a number of restaurants and is a busy commercial and retail hub, wore a relatively deserted look on Thursday evening and Friday, it is learnt.

Operators of a popular restaurant there said the number of customers on Friday was a lot lower than what they got usually on weekends.

On a brighter note, operators of the Asian Town cinema said they received reasonably good patronage on Friday.



PROTEST WAVE | Page 4

Gupta family symbol of failing Zuma



DOLLAR LINK | Page 15

Japan must factor in yen below 100



Sunday, December 27, 2015
Rabia 116, 1437 AH

GULF TIMES BUSINESS



ENVIRONMENT SUPPORT | Page 2

Qatar Rail in deal with Qatar Cool to provide district cooling to 7 Doha Metro stations

QIIB sees Morocco as a 'valuable' market to set up new JV lender

QIIB has signed a joint venture agreement with CIH Bank (Credit Immobilier et Hotelier), a Moroccan bank, for the establishment of a bank in Morocco.

The JV agreement is in the framework of QIIB's strategy, which focuses on pursuing overseas opportunities to enhance the financial position of the bank and diversify its portfolio investments so as to benefit its shareholders, the bank said. QIIB stressed that the expansion move into Morocco follows a detailed feasibility study, which took into account all factors including the expected returns on investment and other market factors.

Morocco has a "strong and diversified economy," one that requires high-quality banking services that contribute to the kingdom's overall growth and prosperity, Qatar's leading Islamic bank noted.

QIIB said, "We are pleased to announce our entry into the Moroccan banking sector with a strategic partner, CIH Bank SA, which was es-

established in 1920 and has long-standing banking tradition in the Kingdom of Morocco. The partnership followed the requisite due diligence in consultation with the Qatar Central Bank."

The JV agreement is a sequel to comprehensive and in-depth talks between QIIB and CIH Bank. Under the agreement, QIIB will have 40% stake in the proposed bank in Morocco.

QIIB's board of directors has set a long-term strategy that focuses on the domestic market, whilst it pursues excellent opportunities outside of Qatar. The board sees Morocco as a valuable market that provides unique opportunities for the bank as well as the Moroccan economy.

QIIB derives its strength from nearly 25 years of banking experience and hopes to continue its success by working in Morocco.

QIIB said it will put all of its expertise at the disposal of the proposed bank to ensure its development, growth, and success, as well as that of the Moroccan economy, thus benefiting the

Moroccan population in the area of banking services. QIIB hopes that it will be able to obtain all the necessary regulatory approvals for establishing the new bank to launch the banking services during the upcoming months.

Established in 1991, QIIB currently has a wide network of branches in Qatar. The bank also has investments through numerous partnerships within and outside of Qatar.

As a premier bank, QIIB has managed to achieve sustainable growth and strong financials for the past 25 years. The lender continues to enhance its strategy to transform the way it works with their customers to enable the bank to compete effectively.

"The bank's team continues to deliver market leading innovative banking solutions developed with customers' needs in mind. QIIB enjoys a strong and robust reputation and has been given an 'A2' rating by Moody's with a stable outlook, while Fitch has accorded it an 'A+' rating with a stable outlook," a QIIB release said.

QIIB has signed a joint venture agreement with CIH Bank, a Moroccan bank, for the establishment of a new bank in the kingdom



The Best Finance for Logistic Parks Projects

QIIB announces the launch of Corporate Financing* for customers seeking to invest in the Logistic Parks' Projects** from Economic Zones Company (EZC) - Qatar.

Key Benefits

- Annual Profit Rate (APR) starting from 4.95%.
- Financing up to 60% of the project construction value.
- Up to 10 years finance period.

* Subject to Terms & Conditions

** Finance is available for the Economic, Logistic & Warehouse Zones.

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Japan tech, media firms eyeing Mideast expansion

By Arno Maierbrugger
Gulf Times Correspondent
Bangkok

A messaging app and an entertainment content provider from Japan are setting sails to expand to the Middle East.

The first one is Line Corp, provider of the chat application Line which is market leader in Japan, Thailand and Taiwan and is growing in Indonesia, India and parts of Europe and has more than 400mn registered users worldwide.

"We aim to become Asia's number one chat app in 2016," Line Corp CEO Takeshi Idezawa said, adding that his company's expansion focus lies on Southeast Asia and the Middle East and North Africa (Mena). Especially in Mena he sees growth potential as clear trends in the chat app market had "yet to be set."

While in the wealthier countries in the Middle East, namely in the Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC), messaging apps are already quite well established, there

is potential in emerging countries in the region where smartphones are just becoming popular. To that end, Line wants to offer a simplified version of its app that also works under poor network conditions and plans to boost recognition of its brand through television and online advertising.

Gulf Times Exclusive

In most GCC countries Line will have to compete with chat apps such as WhatsApp, WeChat and Facebook Messenger. For example, in Qatar, WhatsApp is the leading chat app in absolute user numbers for locals and expats combined, replicating the fact that the Facebook-owned brand is the global market leader in this industry with around 900mn users.

Snapchat, in turn, is popular with Qataris and the youth. WeChat, a brand owned by China's Internet giant Tencent Holdings, is also making inroads into the

Middle East where it is particularly strong in the UAE. In its expansion, WeChat has the advantage that it is partnering with Chinese low-cost smartphone brands such as Xiaomi which could be a challenge for Line in emerging Middle East markets.

To create awareness, Line has kicked off sticker design competitions in Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Lebanon, Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia, whereby it asks interested users to submit self-designed stickers that portray Arabic culture "in a creative and innovative way" and can be used for everyday conversations on the app and be applicable to Arabic dialogues and social situations.

The other Japanese company that wants to expand in the Middle East is Tokyo-listed entertainment content provider Kadokawa Corp, market leader in the segment in Japan and known for books, movies, comics, anime, manga, online videos, computer games, other digital and multi-media content and children's book. The company,

through Malaysia-based media company Art Square Group in which it acquired an 80%-stake and then rebranded Kadokawa Gempak Starz, will expand in Southeast Asia and to various Middle East markets where it seeks to tap the growing creative content industry.

Kadokawa aims to strengthen original content creation in Arabic language, acknowledging the growth potential in the region to which Malaysia has traditionally good business relations and for which Kuala Lumpur has been named Kadokawa's "creative content export hub."

Kadokawa's foray into the Middle East market can be particularly interesting for telecom companies as more and more consumers embrace smartphones, tablet computers and other mobile devices and expecting more and better digital content. And this is not a small business: The global entertainment content industry is valued to reach \$10.1tn over the next four years, according to the PwC Global Entertainment and Media Outlook 2015-2019.



Mangas - Japanese comic books - have been popular in the Arab world since the 1970s. Pictured is a page of Gold Ring (Siwari Al-Dhahab), an Arabic manga written by UAE author Qais Sedki and drawn by a pair of Japanese comic artists. Japan's Kadokawa Corp now wants to unleash this potential for an extended range of digital and multi-media content.

Qatar Rail, Qatar Cool in deal to provide district cooling to seven Doha Metro stations

Qatar Rail has signed a contract with Qatar Cool to provide district cooling services at seven of the Doha Metro Red Line stations.

A signing ceremony took place at Qatar Rail's headquarters recently in the presence of Saad Ahmed al-Muhammadi, Qatar Rail CEO and Yasser Salah al-Jaidah, Qatar Cool CEO.

Aiming to support the environment and save electricity and cost, Qatar Rail has chosen to partner with Qatar Cool to provide district cooling at the Pearl and West Bay stations (Leg-taiffya, Katara, Al Qassar, Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre, West Bay, Corniche and Al Bidda stations), and proactively contributing to cooling measures during the summer months starting 2019, the projected operation date of the Doha Metro project (Phase 1).

Qatar Rail oversees the construction of Qatar's integrated railway network.

Through district cooling, chilled water is delivered via underground isolated pipelines to commercial, hotel and residential buildings to cool the buildings water via an Energy Transfer Station (ETS), which is situated in the basement of each building within a district. The ETS in each building then uses the buildings water to lower the temperature of air passing through the building's air conditioning system, known as Fan Coil Units (FCU) or Air Handling Units (AHU).

Cooling systems will operate throughout the other stations and on

the trains themselves to ensure that customers enjoy the height of comfort when using the network.

On the co-operation deal, al-Muhammadi, said: "Qatar Rail has always sought to work with the best local suppliers and partners on every aspect of each of its projects to achieve the implementation of a sustainable railway network. We have the pleasure to cooperate with Qatar Cool to provide some seven stations on the project with a district cooling system that won't only withstand the hot weather during summer peak times in Doha, but also contribute to protecting the environment by increasing energy efficiency and reducing environmental emissions, saving electricity, and evidently benefiting from a much more cost-efficient cooling service with an economic interest on the longer term."

Al-Jaidah said, "We take great pride in being part of Qatar Rail's story. The benefits that the Qatar Rail system will bring to our country by providing an environmentally friendly, safe, fast and very efficient means of transportation are clear and necessary for our growing population. District cooling's advantages are increasingly being recognised by governments, developers and end-users alike. It is an honour to say Qatar Cool is playing a fundamental role in Qatar's sustainable and environmental fortification. We are committed to supporting Qatar and Qatar Rail throughout their journey."



Al-Muhammadi (left) with al-Jaidah at the agreement signing. Aiming to support the environment and save electricity and cost, Qatar Rail has chosen to partner with Qatar Cool to provide district cooling at the Pearl and West Bay stations.

UAE plans to set up yuan clearing centre

Reuters
Dubai

The UAE plans to establish a centre for clearing transactions in the yuan, the central bank said yesterday, becoming the second country in the Middle East to do so as China's economic ties with the region boom.

Qatar opened the region's first such clearing centre, which can handle all stages of a currency transaction, in April. The announcement by the UAE, the second largest Arab economy after Saudi Arabia, follows the International Monetary Fund's decision last month to admit the yuan into its Special Drawing Rights basket. This could help encourage other countries to use the currency for reserves, trade and investment. Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahayan, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, signed a memorandum of understanding for the planned UAE clearing centre when he visited China earlier this month, the central bank said in a statement. During that visit, China and the UAE renewed a three-year agreement to swap up to 35bn yuan (\$5.42bn) worth of their currencies, and China included the UAE in its RMB Qualified Foreign Institutional Investor scheme. The central bank did not say when the UAE clearing centre might be established or give further details.

At present, most of the Gulf's wealthy oil and gas exporters' currencies are pegged to the dollar, and most of their huge foreign currency reserves are denominated in dollars.

'New Turkey story' needs pipelines and ports



A passenger ferry passes the Port of Haydarpasa on the Bosphorus waterway in Istanbul. While primary budget surpluses under the ruling AK Party have boosted Turkey's credit worthiness and reduced the ratio of public debt to gross domestic product by more than half, higher spending on railways, ports and energy pipelines will be necessary to make the economy more competitive and help craft "a new Turkey story" to attract foreign investment, Cemil Ertem, one of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's top economic advisers, has said.

Ertem says economy needs more than fiscal discipline to grow; budget surpluses since 2002 have improved credit worthiness

Bloomberg
Ankara

Turkey needs to boost infrastructure investment to kick-start a new era of rapid growth in the Middle East's largest economy, one of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's top economic advisers said.

While primary budget surpluses under the ruling AK Party have boosted Turkey's credit worthiness and reduced the ratio of public debt to gross domestic product by more than half, higher spending on railways, ports and energy pipelines will be necessary to make the economy more competitive and help craft "a new Turkey story" to attract foreign investment, Cemil Ertem said in a December 18 interview in Ankara.

Ertem's comments point to a potential policy shift by the gov-

ernment, which responded to the global financial crisis and emerging market capital outflows by maintaining fiscal discipline that helped it regain investment grade status in 2013. They also reflect the tale of two halves of AK Party rule - growth since the market turmoil of 2008 has been less than half the average of more than 6% before it, and the lira has slumped more than 20% this year.

It is "flawed" policy to run a public budget with a single aim of having a surplus, and Turkey may need to dip into the red to create "externalities," Ertem said, referring to conditions in which Turkish industry can flourish.

"You may run some considerable budget gaps, and the fiscal balance may worsen for some time if you undertake these infrastructure projects," he said. "But in the medium-term, when you create those externalities your industrialists gain global competitiveness, which helps to restore macroeconomic fundamentals and accelerate economic growth."

Moody's said uncertainty

over the government's future economic policies was part of the reason for keeping its country outlook at negative at this month's scheduled review, which held Turkey's credit rating at the lowest investment grade Baa3 due to its "strong fiscal metrics."

Turkey has run surpluses, excluding interest payments, since the ruling AK Party came to power in 2002, and the surplus-to-GDP ratio was 2% in the second quarter of this year, according to the Ministry of Finance. The ratio of public debt to GDP fell to 35% last year, from 79% in 2003.

Ertem, who became Erdogan's chief adviser in January and has a PhD from Istanbul University, said his vision for fast-track growth relies on having complementary monetary and fiscal policies that support job creation and the government's broader economic goals.

Some economists have said Turkey can't return to the same economic model of the high-growth era, which was fuelled by consumer demand and ample liquidity. It also saw imports outpace exports, contributing

to a current-account gap that reached nearly 10% of GDP in 2011. It's forecast to fall to 5% by the end of this year.

The spike in imports and subsequent widening in the current-account deficit was a result of policies that relied on short-term capital to cover the gap and kept interest rates above global norms, Ertem said.

The system is a "trap" for emerging economies, said Ertem, who wrote about Erdogan's economic policies and his own proposals for a new growth model in *Turkey: A River That Finds Its Course* published last year.

While some members of the ruling AK Party have accused the central bank of hindering growth with excessively high interest rates, Ertem said the criticism was "neither useful nor meaningful."

Policy makers should be able to discuss whether Turkey's interests are best served by the central bank's preference for an inflation target rather than a monetary target, including focusing on money supply to spur growth, he said.

Oil slump to 11-year low just a taste of pain felt by producers

Bloomberg
London

If oil's slump to an 11-year low stung traders, it's just a taste of the hardship felt by the industry. Brent's plunge to \$35.98 a barrel last Tuesday, its weakest intraday level since 2004, was probably painful enough for any remaining oil bulls. But that move was just playing catch-up with the annual average price, already at the lowest in 11 years - a measure more important than intraday fluctuations to those that pump crude from the ground.

"Short-term swings are not necessarily something that matters a lot at the corporate level or at the country level," said Antoine Halff, a senior fellow at the Center on Global Energy Policy at Columbia University in New York. "For countries it's the average, because that's the basis of their revenue."

Crude's slump, the result of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries' decision to keep pumping and defend market share against rivals, is having a profound impact. Members of the group will forgo \$500bn in revenue this year, according to the International Energy Agency, putting intense pressure on national budgets. About \$1.3tn has been wiped off the value of oil companies around the world over the same period, forcing them to lay off workers or cut dividends.

The world was a very different place the last time oil prices were so low for a sustained period. China was just embarking on a decade-long binge on commodities that would turn it into the world's second-biggest oil user, while US production was in long-term decline and nobody had heard of shale. The severity of the current downturn is also triggering significant changes across the industry.

Ironically, the immediate effect has been to



A file photo taken on March 22, 2013 shows an aerial view of Shell Cawtharine channels at Awoba in the Niger Delta. About \$1.3tn has been wiped off the value of oil companies around the world over the same period, forcing them to lay off workers or cut dividends.

swell, rather than reduce, global production as Opec and competitors such as Russia jostle for market share and try to offset the price drop by maximising output.

"What's been remarkable has been the very high level of production from a great variety of producers, against all odds," said Halff, who was previously head of the IEA's oil-market division. Russia, Iraq and Brazil have all beaten expectations this year, he said. "What unites them is they need the money in the face of low prices."

Opec effectively abandoned any limits on its production on December 4, potentially unleashing millions of barrels of additional supply. The group will increase output next year by 640,000 bpd to about 32mn as Iran, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the UAE pump more to counter the impact of lower crude prices, according to Goldman Sachs Group estimates.

As the supply surplus persists there are "high risks" that oil could fall as low as \$20 a barrel next year if storage tanks start to fill up, the bank said in a report December 17.

The surge in output in response to low prices probably isn't sustainable.

Producers are making the biggest investment cuts since the 1980s, with a reduction of 20% this year and more to follow in 2016, according to the Paris-based IEA. The number of job losses at oil and gas companies around the world has now passed the 250,000 mark, with still more to come, according to industry consultant Graves & Co.

"Long run, investment will surely drop," John Browne, chairman of L1 Energy Holdings Ltd and former chief executive officer of BP, said in a Bloomberg Television interview on December 8. "The amount of oil which is being developed will reduce but only over time."

Production from nations outside Opec will contract by 600,000 bpd next year, the steepest decline since 1992, the IEA predicts. While non-Opec output will still grow in the longer term, the projected expansion of 1.3mn bpd from 2015 to 2020 will be less than a third of the total growth in the preceding five years.

Oil crash is a party pooper as holiday affairs lose their lustre

Bloomberg
Houston

The Grinch nearly stole Christmas in the oil patch this year. Thanks to the lowest crude and natural gas prices in more than a decade, Norwegian oil and natural gas producer Statoil cut its holiday party budget by about 40% from 2014. KBR Inc and Marathon Oil opted for smaller affairs with less swank. One Houston hotel said its seasonal party business is down 25% from 2014.

The industry has shed more than 250,000 jobs and idled more than 1,000 rigs as crude prices fell by more than half since last year. Oil services, drilling and supply companies are bearing the brunt of the downturn and account for more than three quarters of the layoffs, according to industry consultant Graves & Co.

"You can't have a \$2mn Christmas party while at the same time laying off half your workforce," said Jordan Lewis, an operations manager and producer at Sullivan Group, a Houston event planning company. Independent power generators have also been stung by cheap electricity amid declining gas prices. The heating and power plant fuel slid recently to the lowest level since 1999, and is heading for the biggest annual drop since 2006 as the lack of demand leaves stockpiles at a seasonal record. The commodity rout and the layoffs that followed have dampened holiday festivities.

Several hundred Statoil employees were invited earlier this month to Minute Maid Park, where Major League Baseball's Houston Astros play, for a party that featured scaled back entertainment and décor, spokesman



The Statoil headquarters in Fornebu, Norway. Thanks to the lowest crude and natural gas prices in more than a decade, the oil and natural gas producer has cut its holiday party budget by about 40% from 2014.

Peter Symons said. At the Houston-based oil and gas construction firm KBR, management cancelled this year's companywide party. Instead, individual departments were encouraged to hold their own gatherings from potlucks to group socials, spokeswoman Brenna Hapes said. "We are certainly being cost-conscious," Hapes said by telephone. "There's also the added benefit of some team strengthening as well. Employees are spending time together with their colleagues in small gatherings, and that's a good thing for our team."

Houston-based Marathon didn't host a big party for reasons that were "along those same lines" as other firms, spokeswoman Lee Warren said, with-

out elaborating. Spokesmen for other oil and gas majors, including Chevron Corp, BP Plc and Anadarko Petroleum Corp, declined to comment. The cutbacks on entertainment have hit restaurants, hotels and other venues that rely on a boost in corporate spending during the holidays. Ellen Jannik, event co-ordinator for Vic & Anthony's, said the popular Houston steakhouse has been soliciting other corporate clients after oil and gas companies began downsizing holiday parties. Most are "cutting back on the guest list, with some lower attendance groups," Jannik said. "We started reaching out to other industries, really anything outside of oil and gas, anything we can think of."

At the boutique Houston hotel La Colombe d'Or, home to the upscale Cinq restaurant where chicken-fried filet mignon goes for \$49, business from holiday parties is down about 25% this month compared to last December, owner Steve Zimmerman said in a telephone interview. Parties that can include as many as 600 people are being cut by half, or cancelled altogether. Oil and gas companies still hosting affairs are ditching the expensive items they used to order when profits were fatter, he said. "Even the companies that are still doing well don't want to show it, and the oil services companies, which we used to host a lot, they just stopped everything," Zimmerman said.

Ministry of municipality & urban planning
Tender & Auctions Committee

Announces bids for tenders and auctions



The Tenders & Auctions Committee of the Ministry of Municipality & Urban Planning announces bids for tenders and auctions listed below :

Ref	Title	Concerned Department	Envelopes System	Documents Fee	Tender Bond	CLOSING DATE	Category and Specialization
TC/BI/145/2015	Tender: MAIN OFFICE HQ PROPOSED NETWORK INFRASTRUCTURE	Information System Dep	2 Envelope Technical & financial	QR 150	QR 28,000,000	10/1/2016 Noon 12:00	-----

Terms of Tenders & Auctions comprises the Following Conditions :

- Tender documents may be collected and bids must be submitted to the premises of the "Tenders & Auctions Committee" of the Ministry of Municipality & Urban Planning, located at "Al Muntazah" area, 6th Floor
- Required Documents: Authorization letter signed by the company's authorized person, in Arabic, and endorsed by an authorized person—Company's Identification Card - Valid Commercial License - Commercial Registration Certificate
- Tenders shall be accompanied with a provisional Bank Guarantee, or certified cheque, issued by a bank operating in Qatar, in the amount stipulated in the relevant table for each tender. Such cheques must be valid for one hundred & twenty days (120 days) following the date of opening the envelopes of all bidders
- The bid will remain valid for ninety days (90 Days) from the date of opening the envelopes, and shall remain irrevocable during this period
- Tender documents may be collected from the "Tenders & Auctions Committee" against the non-refundable amount stipulated in the Table above
- The deadline for accepting bids is twelve o'clock (12:00 noon) as per the date stipulated in the above Table
- During the validity of the contract and following approval of the Tenders Committee, the Ministry of Municipality and Urban Planning reserves the right to increase or decrease the amounts of items and their values by no more than (20%) of the total value of the contract, in accordance with the contract provisions and prices
- Technical & commercial proposal (1 original + 1 copy) must be submitted in two separate envelopes each marked with relevant title & tender number
- Must be attach the origin bank guarantee in the technical envelope , and a copy of its in the financial envelope
- Bidders who fail to submit in advance those sample items required as per the tender document requirements, shall be excluded. Bidders shall include a copy of the receipt confirming submission of their samples to the requesting party
- Bids must be deposited in those boxes specified by the "Tenders & Auctions Committee" of the Ministry of Municipality and Urban Planning. Bids shall be submitted inside envelopes, sealed with red wax and addressed to the Chairman of the "Tenders & Auctions Committee" of the Ministry of Municipality and Urban Planning Envelopes shall be marked with the number & subject of the tender
- All Forms and Documents attached with the tender documents, including the tender Form, interim and final Bond form, must be filled and endorsed as required, and returned with the rest of the tender documents

For more information contact Tel : 44348505

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TENDER COMMITTEE
Invitation for Public Tender

The Bids and Tenders Committee announces the following tender:

Tender Ref. No.	Description	Fee	Bank Guarantee	Tender Offer	Bid Closing
CVF/TC/GNS/004/2015	HOSPITALITY SERVICES (PROVISION OF TEA BOYS AND PANTRY ITEMS SUPPLY) FOR CULTURAL VILLAGE FOUNDATION (KATAR)	2500 Qr	180,000 Q.r	TWO-envelope system (Technical + financial)	Monday 25 of January 2016 at 12:00 P.M

Tender documents for the above invitation can be obtained as per the following:

- Receipt of deposit tender worth - non-refundable calculates PE (0003-123416-200) AlRayan Bank on that codifies the receipt No. tender and the name of the company
- The tender documents for the above can be obtained from Cultural Village Foundation (KATAR) - West Bay - Building No. 15 Ground Floor- Secretariat of Tender Committee.
- Tender must issue an authorized letter with the company letterhead to the personnel nominated to collect the tender documents and copy of a valid commercial registration shall be attached to the letter.
- Collection date: from Monday 28 of December 2015 to Thursday 14 of January 2016 from 7.00 to 2.00 PM.
- Offer must be valid for 120 days from the Bid Closing date.
- The bidder's offer must be accompanied by a bank guarantee (tender bond) issued by a local bank in Qatar and should be valid for 165 days from the tender closing date as per the percentage mentioned above.
- The Original tender bond must be attached with the Technical Offer.
- The successful tenderer shall submit a performance bond equivalent to 10% of the Provisional Contract sum. Performance bond shall be valid until the end of the completion date of the contract plus ninety (90) calendar days.
- Any tender not in accordance with the conditions stated above will be rejected.
- Cultural Village Foundation right to increase or decrease the items or amounts and value of business by 20% of the contract value
- Tender should be submitted in Technical offer and commercial offer format in TWO separate sealed and waxed envelopes each marked with the relevant title and number.
- Tender must be deposited in the tender box located at the Cultural Village Foundation (KATAR) Secretariat of Tender Committee Office on or before prescribed time and date.
- An appointment to visit the site specific brochure tender.
- Any tenders does not comply with the above requirements will be excluded.

Export change means more tankers may leave US carrying oil

Bloomberg
New York

The days of empty oil tankers leaving the Houston Ship Channel are over. Now that the US has ended crude export restrictions after 40 years, tankers bringing crude oil to Houston and other Gulf Coast ports will also be able to take crude from them, spawning an active market for crude sellers and ship owners.

Most vessels that discharge in the US Gulf had challenges finding regular back-haul cargoes because of the restrictions that have just been eased, Stefanos Kazantzis, senior shipping adviser at McQuilling Services, said in an instant message. The US already allowed exports of refined products.

"At 200,000 barrels a day of additional US crude exports (on top of what goes to Canada), we estimate that about five to seven Aframax tankers would be required to deliver the crude to ports in Europe and the Caribbean/South America," Kazantzis said.

Imports to PADD 3, the Gulf Coast region, averaged 3.04mn bpd in 2014. It would take four to six Aframax tankers or three Suezmax ships to carry that amount.

Much of the extra movement will get different crude grades to the refineries that are best suited to process them, CME Group Inc's Dan Brusstar, senior director of energy research, said in a phone interview. Brusstar said the exports will be lighter, sweeter crudes headed for Europe and that US Gulf refineries will keep importing heavier grades. "Sweet crude will be moved out of the US," Brusstar said. "You will see efficiency."

المجلس الأعلى للتعليم
SUPREME EDUCATION COUNCIL

Announcement
Invitation

The Supreme Education Council Announces the Following GeneralTenders

Tender No.	Description	Requesting Entity	Submission Method	Tender Bond	Closing Date
1/2016	Operation of Electrical Devices and Equipment and Low Current Systems in (34) Schools	Facility Management and General Services Department / Building Affairs Section	Two Envelops (Technical and Financial)	QR 300,000	3 January 2016
2/2016	Raw material and supplies for emergency workshops at schools and Supreme Education Council Tower through CALL OFF System	Facility Management and General Services Department / Building Affairs Section	One Envelope	QR 13,378	3 January 2016

- Copy of the tender's documents can be obtained from the Purchase Section, located in the 1st Floor of the Supreme Education Council Building, during official working hours; against a receipt and payment of QR 500 (Five Hundred Qatari Riyals Only), non-refundable. The amount is to be deposited into the SEC's bank account number (0013-11222-001) with Qatar National Bank (QNB).
- The company shall provide the Purchase Section with a duly stamped and signed formal letter of authorization for the individual who buys and collects the full tender's documents.
- The tender bond shall be submitted in a separate envelope with the tender, as a payable check or as a bank guarantee issued by a bank operating in the State of Qatar and valid for (120) days from the date of opening the envelopes. The content of the tender bond must be consistent with the template of the tender bond attached to the tender. **The declaration that is required to be completed and signed by the company, which was obtained with the tender documents, shall be also submitted in the same envelope.**
- Successful bidder shall be required to furnish a Performance Bond for the value of 10% of the tender's total value and valid till seven (7) days after the final implementation of the contract. The content of the performance bond must be consistent with the template of the performance bond attached to the tender.
- Offers must remain fair and valid for ninety (90) days from the date of opening the envelopes. The envelopes shall be opened in the day following the closing date mentioned above.
- The Supreme Education Council, after the approval of the Central Tenders Committee and during the term of the contract, is entitled to increase or decrease quantities of items or works by a maximum of 20% of the contract value and in accordance with the rates and conditions therein, provided the increment is of the same nature of work agreed upon.
- Tenders are to be submitted according to the above stated method and shall be in one original and one copy.
- Last closing time for submitting tenders shall be from 8:00 A.M. - 12:30 P.M. (eight to twelve-thirty) on the above mentioned closing date; no tenders shall be accepted after the stipulated time.
- Tenders shall be deposited at the office of the Chairman of the Competent Tenders Committee and must be in a sealed envelope, stamped with the SEC stamp and addressed to the Chairman of the Competent Tenders Committee. Tender number, subject, and two envelopes, (Financial) and (Technical), should be only written on the envelop without writing any other data.
- For any further enquiries or reservations, please contact the Purchase Section, one week prior to the closing date through the following contact details: Fax: 00974-440-440-84 Email: arifa.mohammed@sec.gov.qa

تعليم لمرحلة جديدة
Education for a New Era

Millionaire Gupta family seen as symbol of failing Zuma rule

Guptas have business relationship with Zuma family members; business associates of the Guptas say they provide employment

Bloomberg
Johannesburg

As South Africans endure their deepest economic crisis since 2009, it's not just President Jacob Zuma they blame. There's a family whose name is increasingly the target of protest: the Guptas.

As tens of thousands marched in October in South Africa's biggest wave of nationwide anti-government protests since the African National Congress came to power, one poster, broadcast on the nation's television channels, captured the public anger: "SA: Gupta Farm."

Since Atul Gupta arrived in South Africa from Uttar Pradesh, India, in 1993, a year before the election of Nelson Mandela marked the end of apartheid, he and his brothers Rajesh and Ajay have built on a computer business to amass stakes in uranium, gold and coal mines, a luxury game lodge, an engineering company, a newspaper and a 24-hour news TV station. This month they agreed to take control of two coal mines From Glencore.

Having employed or been in business with at least three of President Zuma's immediate family, including his son Duduzane, the family drew increased scrutiny in September as opposition parties and local newspapers raised the question that they may have influenced the appointment of a minister to manage the embattled and important mining industry.

"They are the chieftains of patronage. They get extraordinary privileges from the president," Mmusi Maimane, the leader of the main opposition Democratic Alliance, said in a phone interview December 15. "Zuma is controlled by the Guptas. Once you have a weak institution like the ANC and a government that is institutionally captured, you only have to win control over a few individuals like Jacob Zuma and you control everything."

Analysts concur.

"It's a deeply troubling relationship between the Gupta family and the president's family," said Nic Borain, an adviser to BNP Paribas Securities South Africa. "There are a multitude of documented relationships and there is a very widespread acceptance and assumption that this goes beyond undue influence. This goes close to capture of political authority by a group of foreign businessmen."

A spokesman for the Gupta family, Gary Naidoo, declined to comment for the story. So did Zuma's spokesman Bongani Majola and ANC spokesman Zizi Kodwa. In an interview with Johannesburg-based Business Day in 2011, Ajay and Atul said they received no preferential treatment because of their relationship with the president and that their computer business specifically avoided government work to protect their relationships.

Their newspaper, the New Age, regularly hosts ministers at televised events that have been sponsored by state-owned companies while Duduzane and Gupta family members are directors of at least 11 of the same companies, publicly available documents show. When the New Age launched in 2010 its then editor, Henry Jeffreys, wrote in a first edition editorial that "We will generally support the government of the day at all levels" while saying the paper had no links with the ANC.

With one of the world's highest levels of economic inequality and a 25.5% unemployment rate, public anger is mounting against the ANC, which has won more than 60% of the vote in every general election since 1994. That anger was exacerbated this month when Zuma fired a respected finance minister and replaced him with a relatively unknown lawmaker only to change his decision four days later when he reappointed a former finance minister, Pravin Gordhan. The rand weakened as much as 10% against the dollar and bonds and banks stocks plunged before paring their declines when Gordhan was appointed. The police documented 2,289 violent demonstrations by communities demanding better housing, education and other services in



A protester carries a placard with an image of Jacob Zuma, South Africa's president, during a nationwide march against corruption in Cape Town in this photo taken on September 30, 2015. Having employed or been in business with at least three of President Zuma's immediate family, including his son Duduzane, the Gupta family drew increased scrutiny in September as opposition parties and local newspapers raised the question that they may have influenced the appointment of a minister to manage the embattled and important mining industry.

the year through March, up from 1,907 the year before.

Recurring themes at recent protests are white domination of the economy, ineffectual government and increasingly, corruption. In South Africa, 83% of people believe that corruption is on the rise, compared with 58% across the continent, according to a Transparency International survey this month.

Some of those who have done business with the Guptas say they've kept companies open and safeguarded jobs.

Abel Malinga, the head of mining and metals at South Africa's state-owned Industrial Development Corp, said the corporation in 2010 lent 250mn rand (\$17mn) to the Guptas' Oakbay Resources and Energy Ltd to buy a uranium and gold mine they now control along with Duduzane Zuma because it was about to be closed under previous management at the cost of 2,400 jobs. The IDC converted the loan into a stake in Oakbay, which now has a market value of 24bn rand.

"The jobs are still there, they are still producing gold," Malinga said. "There is no preferential treatment from our side. No political pressure."

The Guptas have been friends with President Zuma from about the turn of the century. Atul Gupta, the 47-year-old chairman of Oakbay who pioneered the move to South Africa, said in an interview with the Johannesburg-based Daily Maverick in 2011.

Zuma's wife Bongi Ngema-Zuma worked for Gupta-controlled JIC Mining Services as a communications officer. His daughter Duduzile was a director at Sahara Computers Ltd, the Guptas' main computer business, for more than a year ending in 2009. And Duduzane has worked with the Guptas for 11 years, initially starting as a 22-year-old trainee at Sahara. The Guptas live in a complex of several houses a few blocks away from Duduzane in Johannesburg's upscale Saxonwold suburb, behind a row of purple-blossomed Jacaranda trees and a 4-meter (13-foot) high wall adjacent to the city zoo. A giant roof-top chess board and cricket nets are spread across the grounds and one three-storey house has an elevator, seven balconies and a dome, publicly available

blueprints of the property and Google Earth maps show.

"The Guptas continued their work relationship with me despite not knowing what the future held for my family," Duduzane said in a letter published in the Gupta's New Age in September. Communications staff from his office at Sahara Computers didn't respond to three requests for comment.

In 2010, Duduzane and the Guptas were part of a group of business people embroiled in a dispute with Anglo American unit Kumba Iron Ore Ltd and ArcelorMittal South Africa Ltd after winning rights to part of Kumba's concession at Africa's biggest iron-ore mine. Although the courts ruled that Duduzane and the Guptas' group weren't the rightful owners, ArcelorMittal would have paid them 800mn rand for the partial concession if they had won the case and also planned to sell a 26% stake in its business to groups that included Duduzane Zuma.

At the time of the announcement, in August 2010, ArcelorMittal South Africa's biggest labour union demanded the government intervene and cancel the deal, and Business Day, South Africa's biggest finance newspaper, said in an editorial that it was "the most cynical empowerment deal ever constructed." A month later Duduzane Zuma said in a statement that he would give 70% of the proceeds of the deal that would have given him a stake in ArcelorMittal South Africa to groups including orphans and women in rural communities.

Early in 2011 Duduzane Zuma responded further to criticism of the deal.

"Anyone out there who believes that we've benefited in any of the deals politically, please come forward," he said in an interview with Johannesburg's Talk Radio 702. "Drag us by our collars to a court of law. But if not, leave us the hell alone."

The incident that made the Guptas front-page news occurred in April 2013, when they flew 217 people in a chartered jetliner to the Waterkloof air-force base in Pretoria for their niece's wedding. They welcomed them with music and dancing, and shuttled them to the Sun City casino and resort in helicopters and black BMWs, according to a government report

investigating how a commercial plan landed at an air force base. The police illegally used their blue lights as they escorted the party, it said.

When the airport manager of South Africa's main commercial airport wouldn't accommodate them, the Guptas approached the defence minister to use Waterkloof, even though it's classified as a top-security site and commercial use is prohibited, according to the report.

When that too failed they asked the Indian embassy to make it look like the visit was by an official delegation, according to the report, describing that as an abuse of diplomatic channels. The report concluded that the landing had been authorised because Zuma's name was falsely invoked. It also said some of the cars had false licence plates and the security company used was unregistered.

Minister of Public Enterprises Malusi Gigaba and Trade and Industry Minister Rob Davies attended parts of the week of celebrations. Attending the wedding didn't reflect an improper relationship, Gigaba's spokesman Mayihlome Tshwete said. Davies responded to a private invitation, his spokesman Sidwell Medupe said.

Atul said in an interview with the South African Broadcasting Corp at the time that the wedding was held in the country to boost tourism and that the plane had permission to land. The family later apologised for the incident.

The Indian High Commissioner at the time, Virendra Gupta, who isn't related to the family, then said in a statement his country applied for permission to land the plane at the base because ministers and senior political figures were on board.

The landing stirred such an outcry that it became known by the press and government critics as "Guptagate." It attracted ridicule, including by comedian Trevor Noah, who has since become the host of the Daily Show in New York. Zapiro, South Africa's best-known cartoonist, drew a sketch depicting the three Gupta brothers as welcoming bride and groom with a fleet of police cars and saluting officers and saying: "For your wedding gift we bought you a country and a president."

Zapiro was provided with new fodder when

Zuma appointed a new mines minister in September, even as mining companies and labour unions were in the middle of sensitive wage talks threatening to break into a strike in an already ailing industry.

When Mosebenzi Zwane, a newcomer to national politics, was appointed to take over as mines minister, the Mail & Guardian and Business Day newspapers said he was close to the Guptas. Zapiro then drew Atul Gupta, humming a tune as he does some online shopping. He adds Zwane to his cart. Next to him is an item he's already purchased: the President.

The opposition Economic Freedom Fighters Party sent out a press release entitled "Welcome to the Gupta Republic of South Africa: The New Minister of Mineral Resources is an Extension of the Gupta Family" after the appointment. In the statement, it said Zwane wrote a letter inviting members of the extended Gupta family to South Africa at the time of the wedding, saying that they were coming for business purposes. Zwane hasn't commented on this allegation.

Zwane's spokesman Martin Madlala said the minister's appointment was "at the discretion" of the president and referred questions to his office.

"We are feeling the real effects of the state becoming captive to networks of patronage," Judith February, an analyst at the Pretoria-based Institute of Security Studies, said in an interview on December 16. "The Guptas seem to wield an enormous amount of influence over ministers. There's a pattern here."

At an anti-government protest in Johannesburg in October, former labour union boss and anti-corruption campaigner Zwelinzima Vavi told thousands of workers and unemployed people that South Africa now only serves big business and the ruling elite. The Guptas were one of his targets.

"The Guptas are continuously buying helicopter after helicopter" Vavi said. They once landed a helicopter in a park near their house, where children ride bikes around a lake and families barbecue on weekends, the Star newspaper said in 2010. "They want special permission to land on their homes. We're up to here with our corruption," he said.

AMWAJ
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Sr. No.	Tender Ref. No.	General Description of Commodity	Documents Fee	Documents Fee	Bid Closing Date
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• Non-refundable Tender fee is payable as indicated above to Qatar National Bank (QNB) # 0013-011365-002 Current Account.
• Tender documents will be available for collection until 6 January 2016 against the Original Deposit Slip from Qatar National Bank (QNB):
Location : AMWAJ Corporate Office at 1st Floor, Alaqaria Building, Museum St. Old Salata (next to Doha City)
Date of releasing Tender Documents : 27 December 2015 – 6 January 2016
Time : From 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM

• Technical and Commercial Bids should be submitted individually in Two (2) different envelopes and a separate envelope for Tender Bond.

• The Tender Bond (Bank Guarantee) issued by a local bank registered in Qatar, valid for 120 days from the Tender closing date shall be submitted along with the offer. Bond Reference Number along with the name of issuing Bank be inscribed on the envelope. Offers/Proposals without Tender Bond shall not be received and accepted.

• Queries must be received by fax only, and no later than Seven (7) calendar days, prior to the Tender closing date; any queries received subsequent to the designated date, will not be entertained.

• Tender documents shall be issued only to authorized company representatives with the following documentations:
i. Copy of company's valid Commercial Registration Document and it shall include the activities of title of the tender.
ii. Letter of Authorization on Company Letter Head
iii. Valid Qatari I.D.

Rand's horrible year

By Mark Cudmore
Bloomberg

It has been a horrible year for the rand as Fed tightening, commodity prices and China's slowdown combined with a dire domestic situation to weaken the currency. And while 2016 will see some improvement in the macro picture, South Africa's economy remains structurally flawed, pointing towards more rand weakness.

The macro concerns have not gone away, but the most acute period of pain is probably over. The US has made the initial leap in raising interest rates and given a more certain outlook for the path of rate hikes next year. The genuine worry about China's growth prospects is priced into the market. While plunging energy prices mean South Africa's terms of trade have remained relatively stable over the past 5 months compared with oil exporters such as Russia.

That's the good news. The bad news is that the economy's structural flaws are here to stay. Unemployment remains stubbornly above 25%. Political issues, including a power struggle at the top of the ANC, are weighing on international credibility.

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- Document issue date: 27th Dec 2015 till 03rd Jan 2016, both days are inclusive.
- Place: QVC Reception, located at 10th Floor, Al Jazeera Towers, West Bay, Doha, after submission of original bank payment slip as proof of payment.
- Fee: Interested parties are requested to pay the non refundable Tender Fee to our bank account No. 0013-005009-001 with QNB, Main Branch.

For further queries about the tenders, please communicate by fax (44765 714) / email : rfq@qvc.com.qa to procurement section, QVC

Major banks see broad dollar appreciation in coming year

Bloomberg
New York

Buy the dollar. Again. That's the message for next year from the biggest banks trading in the \$5.3-trn-a-day currency market.

Deutsche Bank, the world's second-largest currency trader in Euromoney rankings, says the dollar's rally has plenty of room to run - another two years, and about 10% on a trade-weighted basis. JPMorgan Chase & Co says the dollar will strengthen versus the currencies of New Zealand and Singapore, peaking in the second half of 2016. Goldman Sachs Group, Barclays and Credit Suisse Group are also bullish as the Federal Reserve moves toward raising interest rates for the first time in almost a decade.

"We expect broad dollar appreciation in 2016," said Todd Elmer, a currency strategist in Singapore at Citigroup, which was first in the Euromoney rankings. "If the market moves to price in a steeper trajectory from the Fed, then that's going to bring back the theme of cyclical and policy divergence between the US and other major economies."

While the Bloomberg Dollar Spot Index has gained 9% this year, following an 11% advance in 2014, its ascent has been bumpy. Analysts cut forecasts last quarter due to weaker-than-estimated US economic data and a slowdown in China. Since October, the dollar rally has been reignited by Fed policy makers who said growth is robust enough to justify a rate increase at the central bank's meeting.

Companies from Delta Air Lines to Whirlpool Corp have already blamed a stronger dollar for hurting overseas sales. With hedge funds and other large speculators holding bullish dollar futures positions close to an all-time high, the trade may be overcrowded and prone to reversal.

Recommended by: Deutsche Bank, Barclays, Goldman Sachs, BNP Paribas, Credit Suisse.

Foreign-exchange markets were dominated in 2015 by the idea that the US will boost rates in contrast with easing by the European Central Bank and other global peers. As the Fed tightens, the greenback may climb to parity with the shared currency in the second quarter, according to 17 of more than 60 analysts surveyed by Bloomberg.



The dollar's rally has plenty of room to run another two years, and about 10% on a trade-weighted basis

After the ECB's "disappointing" forward guidance, "policy ease will be held longer or be increased, meaning a deeper trough for euro-dollar," wrote analysts led by Jose Wynne, head of foreign-exchange research at Barclays in New York. He expects the dollar to strengthen to 95 cents per euro by the end of next year.

Recommended by: Barclays, Morgan Stanley, BNP Paribas, Credit Suisse, Danske Bank.

The Australian dollar will remain one of the weakest Group- of-10 currencies next year, according to analysts led by Hans Redeker, Morgan Stanley's head of global foreign-exchange strategy in London. That's because "a rapidly changing Chinese economy, falling domestic terms of trade, weak competitiveness, shrinking rate differentials and external vulnerability" will drag down the currency.

The Aussie tumbled 12% against the US dollar this year as Chinese demand for iron ore, Australia's biggest export, slumped.

Recommended by: UBS Group, BNP Paribas, Goldman Sachs, RBC Capital Markets.

"The Japanese economy faces significant challenges, with the inflation target remaining elusive, and continuing negative gross-domestic-product growth," analysts including Daniel Waldman, co-head of foreign-exchange and rates strategy at UBS in New York, wrote in a report. Slowing exports may also drive the yen lower, he said.

Buying the dollar against the yen is the best way to make a bullish bet on rising US rates, according to Adam Cole, head of G-10 foreign-exchange strategy in London at RBC.

Recommended by: Bank of America, Barclays, Danske Bank.

China's yuan may depreciate as much as 10% against the dollar in 2016 as the US boosts borrowing costs, according to David Woo, head of global rates and foreign-exchange strategy at Bank of America in New York. His favorite trade is a six-month forward contract to buy the dollar and sell the offshore yuan.

Bats resurrects plans for IPO

Bloomberg
London

Bats Global Markets, which runs US and European stock markets and a currency platform, resurrected plans for an initial public offering three-and-a-half years after an error in the company's trading software wrecked a previous attempt to list its shares.

The company will list its shares under the ticker BATS on its own exchange, according to a filing with US regulators.

The company - based hundreds of miles from Wall Street just outside Kansas City, Missouri - was formed a decade ago to challenge the New York Stock Exchange and Nasdaq Stock Market by offering superior technology, cheaper prices and faster trading. The formula worked. Although it lacks the name recognition of NYSE or Nasdaq, Bats is now the second-largest operator of US stock exchanges and the biggest equity market in Europe. It recently expanded into currency trading by purchasing Hotspot.

While it's not unheard of for a company to cancel an IPO, what Bats was forced to do in 2012 was extremely rare. After its underwriters completed selling shares to investors, the exchange operator couldn't get its own stock trading smoothly hours later.

The pain spread to Apple's shares, which were halted due to an error at Bats. Out of concern the situation would worsen, Bats withdrew its IPO.

The mishap was made possible by Bats's decision to compete with NYSE and Nasdaq in running a listing exchange. Even though stocks trade on dozens of markets in the US, NYSE and Nasdaq run the only exchanges that public corps can call home.

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The Qatar Stock Exchange (QSE) index gained 345.8 points, or 3.49%, during the week to close at 10,258.72. Market capitalisation increased by 3.14% to QR528.1bn versus QR525.1bn at the end of the previous week. Of the 43 listed companies, 33 companies ended the week higher, while four fell and six remained unchanged. Islamic Holding Group (IHGS) was the best performing stock for the week with a gain of 22.9% on 321,121 shares traded. On the other hand, Ahli Bank (ABQK) was the worst performing with a decline of 3.3% on only 13,305 shares traded.

Ezdan Holding Group (ERES), Masraf Al Rayan (MARK) and QNB Group (QNBK) were the primary contributors to the weekly index gain. ERES was the biggest contributor, adding 96.7 points to the index. MARK was the second biggest contributor, tallying 55.7 points to the index. QNBK pushed the index higher by 47.7 points. On the other hand, Milaha (QNNS) shed 5.8 points from the index.

Trading value during the week decreased by 25.9% to reach QR0.956bn versus QR1.3bn in the prior week. The banks and financial services sector led the trading value during the week, accounting for 35.9% of the total trading value. The industrials sector was the second biggest contributor to the over-

all trading value, accounting for 29.2% of the total trading value. Gulf International Services (GISS) was the top value traded stock during the week with total traded value of QR175.8mn.

Trading volume decreased by 11.4% to reach 27.9mn shares versus 31.5mn shares in the prior week. The number of transactions fell by 17.5% to reach 15,555 versus 18,850 in the prior week. The banks and financial services sector led the trading volume, accounting for 24.4%, followed by the real estate sector, which accounted for 19.9% of the overall trading volume. Vodafone Qatar (VFQS) was the top volume traded stock during the week with total traded volume of 4.2mn shares.

Foreign institutions remained bearish during the week with net selling of QR7.2mn versus net selling of QR75.0mn in the prior week. Qatari institutions remained bullish with net buying of QR5.3mn versus net buying of QR123.1mn the week before. Foreign retail investors turned bullish for the week with net buying of QR31.3mn versus net selling of QR9.8mn in the prior week. Qatari retail investors remained bearish with net selling of QR29.7mn versus net selling of QR38.4mn the week before.

In 2015 year-to-date, foreign institutions bought (on a net basis) \$456mn worth of Qatari equities.



Weekly Market Report

Market Indicators	Week ended Dec. 24, 2015	Week ended Dec. 17, 2015	Chg. %
Value Traded (QR mn)	956.7	1,291.8	(25.9)
Exch. Market Cap. (QR mn)	539,736.0	525,092.2	2.8
Volume (mn)	28.0	31.5	(11.4)
Number of Transactions	15,555	18,850	(17.5)
Companies Traded	42	44	(4.5)
Market Breadth	33:4	13:29	-

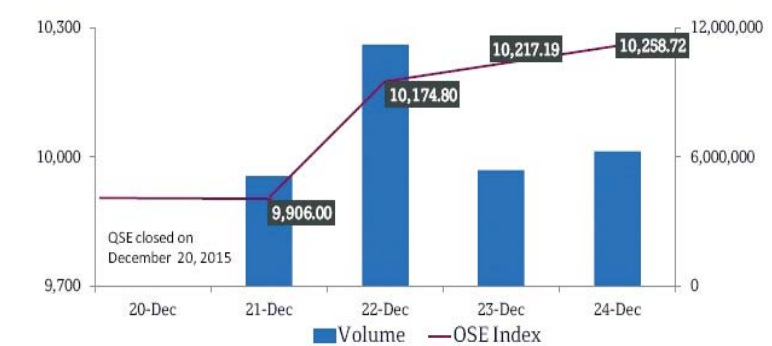
Market Indices	Close	WTD%	MTD%	YTD%
Total Return	15,945.71	3.5	1.7	(13.0)
All Share Index	2,732.50	3.2	1.3	(13.3)
Banks/Financial Svcs.	2,762.64	3.0	1.2	(13.8)
Industrials	3,042.71	2.5	3.1	(24.7)
Transportation	2,411.19	(0.6)	(4.3)	4.0
Real Estate	2,347.89	5.7	1.8	4.6
Insurance	4,168.92	3.6	1.7	5.3
Telecoms	947.85	7.6	6.5	(36.2)
Consumer	5,948.84	1.5	(4.0)	(13.9)
Al Rayan Islamic Index	3,798.82	3.9	(0.0)	(7.4)

Source: Qatar Exchange (QE)

Regional Indices	Close	WTD%	MTD%	YTD%	Weekly Exchange Traded Value (\$ mn)	Exchange Mkt. Cap. (\$ mn)	TTM P/E**	P/B**	Dividend Yield
Qatar (QSE)*	10,258.72	3.5	1.7	(16.5)	262.16	148,265.5	10.6	1.5	5.0
Dubai†	3,137.32	2.1	(2.1)	(16.9)	421.15	83,890.2	12.3	1.1	3.7
Abu Dhabi†	4,241.73	2.3	0.1	(6.3)	641.02	116,497.8	11.1	1.2	5.8
Saudi Arabia†	6,934.06	(1.6)	(4.2)	(16.8)	7,762.34	424,827.5	15.7	1.7	3.7
Kuwait†	5,619.98	(0.1)	(3.1)	(14.0)	116.70	87,208.4	15.4	1.0	4.6
Oman†	5,419.32	1.1	(2.3)	(14.6)	137.65	22,183.6	9.8	1.1	4.8
Bahrain	1,198.23	0.1	(2.8)	(16.0)	8.04	18,837.4	7.8	0.8	5.7

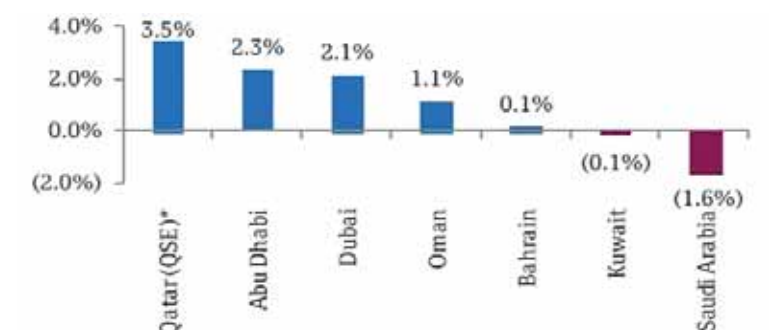
Source: Bloomberg, country exchanges and Zawya (** Trailing Twelve Months; * Value traded (\$ mn) do not include special trades, if any; † Data as of December 23, 2015)

QSE Index and Volume



Source: Qatar Exchange (QE)

Weekly Index Performance



Source: Bloomberg

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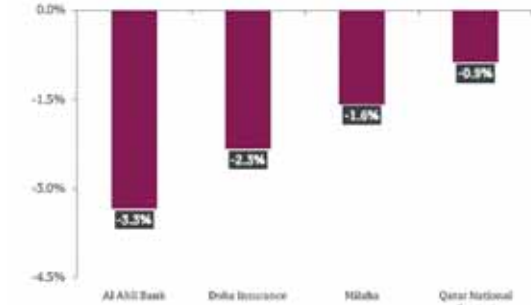
Qatar Stock Exchange

Top Five Gainers



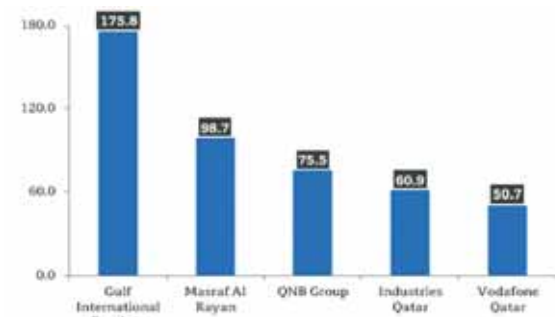
Source: Qatar Stock Exchange (QSE)

Top Five Decliners



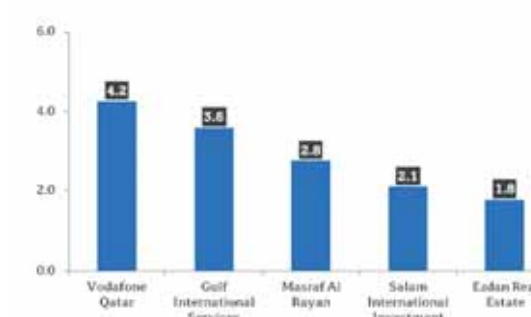
Source: Qatar Stock Exchange (QSE)

Most Active Shares by Value (QR Million)



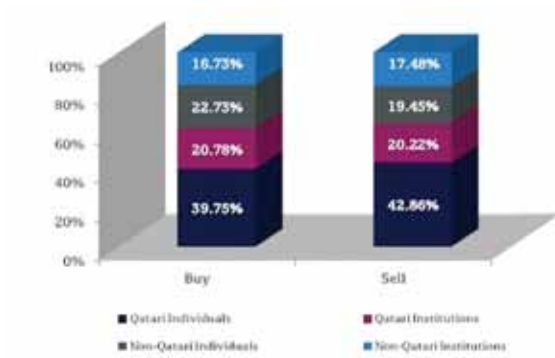
Source: Qatar Stock Exchange (QSE)

Most Active Shares by Volume (Million)



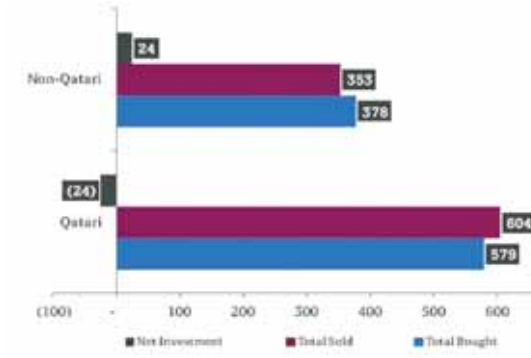
Source: Qatar Stock Exchange (QSE)

Investor Trading Percentage to Total Value Traded



Source: Qatar Stock Exchange (QSE)

Net Traded Value by Nationality (QR Million)



Source: Qatar Stock Exchange (QSE)

Company Name	Price (Dec 24)	% Change	% Change WTD	% Change YTD	Market Cap. QR Million	TTM P/E	P/B	Div. Yield
Qatar National Bank	170.10	3.15	(20.10)		119,024	10.7	2.1	4.4
Qatar Islamic Bank	109.20	1.68	6.85		25,803	13.9	1.7	3.9
Commercial Bank of Qatar	44.50	0.23	(28.54)		14,535	8.7	0.9	7.2
Doha Bank	44.10	0.34	(22.63)		11,394	8.4	0.9	9.1
Al Ahli Bank	48.35	(3.34)	(6.62)		8,423	13.0	2.1	2.9
Qatar International Islamic Bank	63.50	1.76	(22.28)		9,612	11.2	1.9	6.3
Masraf Al Rayan	37.20	6.29	(15.84)		27,900	13.4	2.4	4.7
Al Khaleej Bank	17.50	2.04	(20.63)		6,300	10.1	1.1	5.7
National Leasing	14.00	3.70	(30.00)		693	N/A	0.6	6.1
Diala Holding	18.15	3.12	(45.72)		516	N/A	1.5	N/A
Qatar & Oman Investment	11.95	2.58	(22.40)		376	6.1	1.1	6.7
Islamic Holding Group	76.50	22.99	(26.91)		306	37.0	5.9	3.3
Banking and Financial Services					224,882			
Zad Holding	80.00	0.00	(4.76)		1,046	9.2	1.3	5.0
Qatar German Co. for Medical Devices	13.84	12.52	36.35		160	N/A	1.0	N/A
Salam International Investment	11.71	2.99	(26.12)		1,339	17.5	0.8	5.1
Medicare Group	120.90	2.20	3.33		3,403	17.4	3.7	1.5
Qatar Cinema & Film Distribution	34.20	0.00	(14.50)		215	15.7	1.5	2.7
Qatar Fuel	145.50	0.69	(28.78)		12,289	10.6	1.8	6.2
Widam Food Co.	50.10	14.91	(17.05)		902	13.3	3.5	5.0
Al Meera Consumer Goods	222.00	0.00	11.00		4,440	21.9	3.3	4.1
Consumer Goods and Services					23,793			
Qatar Industrial Manufacturing	39.00	2.77	(10.03)		1,853	12.0	1.3	7.7
Qatar National Cement	102.00	(0.87)	(15.00)		5,509	12.3	2.0	3.6
Industries Qatar	104.30	3.27	(37.92)		63,102	11.6	1.9	6.7
Qatari Investors Group	37.45	4.03	(9.54)		4,656	19.4	2.0	2.0
Qatar Electricity and Water	209.00	0.48	11.47		22,990	15.3	3.3	3.6
Mannal Corp.	96.00	1.69	(11.93)		4,379	8.3	1.9	6.3
Aamal	12.47	4.79	(13.80)		7,856	12.5	1.1	7.6
Gulf International Services	50.70	2.63	(47.79)		9,422	6.5	2.4	10.8
Mesaieed Petrochemical Holding	18.60	2.54	(36.9)		23,368	19.4	1.7	5.9
Industrials					143,135			
Qatar Insurance	85.40	4.79	8.40		15,767	17.3	2.8	2.5
Doha Insurance	21.00	(2.33)	(27.59)		1,050	12.7	1.0	4.8
Qatar General Insurance & Reinsurance	53.60	1.13	4.47		4,264	4.8	0.8	3.2
Al Khaleej Takaful Insurance	30.40	0.00	(31.18)		776	15.9	1.3	4.3
Qatar Islamic Insurance	66.50	5.22	(15.82)		998	12.1	3.0	6.0
Insurance					22,854			
United Development	20.28	1.40	(14.03)		7,181	10.8	0.7	6.2
Barwa Real Estate	39.60	2.33	(5.49)		15,409	2.6	0.8	5.6
Ezdan Real Estate	16.20	8.00	8.58		42,970	27.0	1.4	2.5
Mazaya Qatar Real Estate Development	14.36	5.28	(21.26)		1,508	8.7	1.1	2.0
Real Estate					67,068			
Ooredoo	71.70	6.22	(42.13)		22,967	12.7	1.1	5.6
Vodafone Qatar	12.37	11.34	(24.80)		10,458	N/A	2.0	1.7
Telecoms					33,425			
Qatar Navigation (Milaha)	93.50	(1.58)	(6.03)		10,708	8.9	0.8	5.9
Gulf Warehousing	57.00	0.00	10.73		2,711	17.2	3.2	2.4
Qatar Gas Transport (Nakilat)	23.25	0.00	0.65		13,020	13.4	3.5	5.2
Transportation					26,439			
Qatar Exchange					541,596			

Technical analysis of the QSE index



The QSE index closed at 10,258.72 points and gained 3.49% versus the week before. The index concluded the week higher but it is lacking the desired higher traded volumes. It could be in

a bounce mode that could continue while the main trend remains down. We reiterate our weekly support and resistance levels around 9,600 and 11,300 points, respectively.

Definitions of key terms used in technical analysis

Candlestick chart - A candlestick chart is a price chart that displays the high, low, open, and close for a security. The 'body' of the chart is portion between the open and close price, while the high and low intraday movements form the 'shadow'. The candlestick may represent any time frame. We use a one-day candlestick chart (every candlestick

represents one trading day) in our analysis. **Doji candlestick pattern** - A Doji candlestick is formed when a security's open and close are practically equal. The pattern indicates indecisiveness, and based on preceding price actions and future confirmation, may indicate a bullish or bearish trend reversal.



Sumitomo Mitsui may adopt cautious approach in Asia

Bloomberg
Tokyo

Sumitomo Mitsui Financial Group's top executive said the Japanese lender needs to be cautious in its drive to boost lending in Asia, as a slowdown in China and the slump in commodity prices cloud the region's economic outlook.

While the bank's President Koichi Miyata said he has no intention of changing his firm's strategy of focusing on Asia, he expects it to be difficult to grow the bank's Asian loan book for a while.

"China is slowing, natural resource prices are falling, and there's also the issue of slowing in countries that are highly dependent on trade with China," Miyata, 62, said in an interview earlier this month.

"A cautious approach is going to be needed with regard to credit in Asia for the time being."

Japan's second-largest lender by market capitalisation said when it started its current three-year plan in March 2014 that it would become a "truly Asia-centric institution" by boosting loans and profit in the region to make up for reduced earnings at home, where revenues have been hurt by a shrinking population and near-record low interest rates.

The check to those plans from China's stock market rout and falling gross domestic product growth rates across Asia is only a temporary one, Miyata said.

"There is no change in my confidence that Asia will be the core of our business in five to 10 years' time, and there's no change to our long-term commitment to the region," said Miyata. "I believe China's economy will have a soft landing and oil prices and markets will stabilise toward next summer."

The Asian slowdown is affecting profitability at Sumitomo Mitsui and Japan's other large banks, according to Rie Nishihara, a senior analyst at Mizuho Securities Co in Tokyo.

"The shift in loan growth from emerging Asia, where margins are larger, to advanced markets such as North America has put pressure on interest income at Japan's big banks," Nishihara said, noting that the lenders' profits on overseas lending fell for the first time in four years in the six months ended September 30 this year.

After more than doubling to ¥18.9tn (\$156bn) between March 2012 and March 2015, Sumitomo Mitsui's over-



A pedestrian walks past a Sumitomo Mitsui Banking branch in Tokyo. Sumitomo's top executive said the Japanese lender needs to be cautious in its drive to boost lending in Asia, as a slowdown in China and the slump in commodity prices cloud the region's economic outlook.

seas loan balance grew by only 4.8%, to ¥19.8tn, in the half to September. Excluding the effects of exchange rates, lending growth in Asia was close to zero in the latest six-month period, with the increase driven instead by the Americas and Europe. Loans grew by ¥700bn in each of those two markets.

Sumitomo Mitsui is still searching for ways to revive growth in Asia, and Miyata raised the bank's recent initiatives in Indonesia and India as examples. Using Bank Tabungan Pensiunan Nasional, of which it holds 40%, Sum-

itomo Mitsui started mobile-banking services in Asia's third-most populous nation in April. Miyata said the Indonesian bank has already added "tens of thousands" of new accounts, and he plans to use the expertise gained to develop services in other countries, such as Myanmar.

Meanwhile, Miyata said he wants to expand the bank's network in India, where Sumitomo Mitsui has only one branch, in New Delhi, lagging other large Japanese lenders.

He said the bank will open more

branches in other Indian cities when it gets approval from the local regulators, and aims to capture business with Japanese companies involved in the "giant" infrastructure projects the country will need going forward.

Still, some of the bank's challenges in Asia were illustrated in the ¥55bn charge that Sumitomo Mitsui took in September as a result of the 31% plunge in Bank Tabungan's share price.

The write-down was a major factor in the Japanese bank's 19% decline in first-half profit.

Sumitomo Mitsui is also looking for ways to grow through acquisitions. The lender announced on December 15 that it bought General Electric Co's Japanese leasing business for ¥575bn, its second purchase of GE assets this year.

The purchase "gives us access to customers we couldn't otherwise reach, it gives us expertise such as automated screening, and it gives us better access to overseas business," Miyata said. "What I'm interested in here is making Sumitomo Mitsui Japan's most profitable leasing company."

Three more China firms face trouble in bond repayments

Bloomberg
Hong Kong

Three Chinese companies have said they lack funds to repay bonds due in coming days, flagging risks defaults may spread as manufacturers grapple with a cash crunch amid a weakening economy.

Henan Sanli Carbon Products Co, based in the northeast province of Henan, doesn't have the funds to repay notes due today, it said in a filing to the Chinamonney website.

Huaian Jiacheng Hi-Tech Chemical Industry Co, based in the eastern province of Jiangsu, said on the same website it hasn't deposited the required amount of principal and interest for bonds due tomorrow into the payment account because of a cash shortage.

Huaian Farun Chemical Co, also based in Jiangsu, cited overcapacity and operating losses as reasons why it hasn't deposited required funds for securities due tomorrow.

More firms in China are struggling to repay debt amid the worst economic slowdown in a quarter century.

The number of Chinese companies with more debt than equity has jumped to 913 from 705 in 2007, according to data compiled by Bloomberg.

Earlier this month, pig iron producer Sichuan Shengda Group became at least the seventh Chinese firm to renege on local debt obligations this year. Sinosteel Co, a state-owned steel trader, last week postponed a bond payment a third time.

"Preventing financial risk will likely be a very important policy goal in 2016," according to a Tuesday report from China Securities Co.

"Yet as the government works to reduce overcapacity, there will inevitably be rising risk for the financial market. Therefore we will see more defaults among both the private sector and state-owned enterprises."

Defaults have mounted despite six interest-rate cuts by the central bank since late last year and a tumble in corporate borrowing costs to the lowest in more than five years.

The amount of bad debt reported by Chinese banks rose 10% in the third quarter from the previous three months to 1.2tn yuan (\$185.3bn).

China's government this week pledged to offer more support for companies to upgrade technology and equipment, and reduce debt with "innovative financial policies."

Henan Sanli Carbon is one of three issuers of 270m yuan of 5.9% collective notes, which typically are sold by several small- and medium-sized companies that don't have the ability to sell securities on their own. The filing didn't say how much the company needs to repay.

Huaian Jiacheng Hi-Tech Chemical and Huaian Farun Chemical are both co-issuers of a 350m yuan 5.8% three-year debenture.

Hyundai set to miss sales target for first time since 2008

Bloomberg
Seoul

Hyundai Motor Co is poised to sell fewer vehicles than it projected for the first time since the global financial crisis, after an economic slowdown sapped demand in China and emerging-market earnings slumped due to unfavourable exchange rates.

South Korea's largest automaker will have to sell at least 50% more than its monthly average this year in December to reach its full-year target of 5.05m vehicles.

Such a feat is unlikely, according to five analysts surveyed by Bloomberg. They

also predict that Hyundai's 2016 sales will be lower than the target set for this year given the absence of new best-selling models and continued weakness in Russia and Brazil.

Hyundai has benefited in recent years from the surge in demand for automobiles in China, which became the largest market for the carmaker in 2009.

The increasing reliance turned into a drag after economic growth moderated this year and a summer stock-market rout dented consumer confidence.

Hyundai's push into emerging markets has also met with a slump in the real and ouble this year.

"I don't think anyone expected sales

in China to plummet as it did this year because we were all used to China being the white knight," said Lee Sang Hyun, an analyst at IBK Securities Co. "Although sales in China may improve in 2016, from how the market situation is expected to play out, things don't look all that exciting."

The last time Hyundai missed its sales target was in 2008, when the company fell about 327,000 units short of its 3.11m goal as US demand tanked in the wake of the financial crisis that led to a global recession. The automaker didn't issue a target the following year. Hyundai declined to comment and plans to report its full-year sales figures on January 4.

The company's shares fell 1.3% to 152,000 won in Seoul, their biggest decline since December 11. Kia dropped 3% while the benchmark KOSPI index rose 0.3%.

US sales have been a bright spot for Hyundai this year. Deliveries outpaced the industry and rose 5.6% to 698,202 units in the first 11 months, spurred by sales of the Tucson and Santa Fe SUVs amid a decline in gasoline prices. In China, Hyundai's sales fell 6.9% through November to 934,806 units, dragged down by the economy and a shift by consumers from sedans to small crossovers. Deliveries rebounded in October after a government tax cut on smaller vehicles. There are

also plans to introduce a new round of subsidies for auto purchases in the country's rural areas, people familiar with the matter said this month.

Even with a recovery in China, Hyundai will struggle in Russia and Brazil, where a plunge in the ruble and real have lowered the value of repatriated earnings, according to KTB Securities Co, which expects the two currencies to remain weak against the won in 2016. "It's unlikely that the situation in Russia and Brazil will turn around next year," said Moon Yong Kwon, an analyst at KTB Securities. "In 2016, the key will be to take advantage of the tax break in China to recover sales and production rate in the country."

Toshiba mulls revamp that strikes at heart of its identity

Bloomberg
Tokyo

Toshiba Corp is embarking on a revamp that will leave the one-time technology pioneer a shadow of its former self. An accounting scandal has left the Japanese conglomerate in tatters, facing record losses, thousands of job cuts and potential spinoffs that may include the consumer-electronics unit that made it a global player.

President Masashi Muromachi is being forced to make tough decisions after the company projected a loss of ¥550bn (\$4.5bn) for this fiscal year. Toshiba's bond ratings were cut to junk, with restructuring costs seen outpacing previous estimates and dragging on earnings.

A household name known for making the first popular laptop computer and DVD player, Toshiba has clung to legacy consumer-electronics businesses that are wilting under pressure

from Samsung Electronics Co and Chinese manufacturers.

As Panasonic Corp, Mitsubishi Electric Corp and other Japan-based competitors shift away from domestic products, Toshiba has lagged behind, relying on profit from semiconductors and power generation to subsidize TVs and computers.

Muromachi, who took over in July after the accounting irregularities were revealed, plans to announce by the end of the year far-reaching changes that may include the sale of one or more consumer-products businesses. The company said Monday it would seek a buyer for its health-care unit, which makes diagnostic imaging systems such as MRI and X-ray equipment. And Toshiba is considering combining its PC operations with those of Fujitsu Ltd and Sony Corp spinoff Vaio, Muromachi said this month.

While such a restructuring would leave the Tokyo-based electronics manufacturer much smaller, it would give Toshiba enough breathing room to



A pedestrian walks past the Toshiba Corp headquarters in Tokyo. An accounting scandal has left the Japanese conglomerate in tatters, facing record losses, thousands of job cuts and potential spinoffs that may include the consumer electronics unit that made it a global player.

funnel more money into its mainstay memory-chip division. The chip business has been Toshiba's most profit-

able, accounting for more than 100% of operating income in the year ended March 2015. Its lifestyle segment,

which includes PCs, televisions and home appliances, yielded an operating loss of about 110bn yen that year.

"They need to do more, but it's not as simple as cutting people and closing unprofitable businesses," said Mitsuhide Akino, Tokyo-based executive officer at Ichiyoshi Asset Management Co, which doesn't hold Toshiba shares. "The questions is what will the results be two years after the restructuring."

The company is also considering the sale of property and investments after earlier selling its holding in elevator-maker Kone Oyj. Other plans include accounting training, corporate governance reviews, management seminars and an evaluation system for the president and chief executive officer.

The company's weaknesses are greater than Moody's Investor Service and Standard & Poor's had anticipated and may deepen in the coming months, the agencies said.

Toshiba's earnings announcement "reflects a deterioration of business results not only in weak businesses" -

including digital and white goods and home appliances, and also semiconductors - "but also in the company's core businesses," Standard & Poor's wrote in a statement. As a result it expects Toshiba's earnings margin before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortisation for fiscal 2015 to fall below initial estimates of 7% to 8%.

Moody's said its downgrade reflects concerns of a "significant deterioration in the memories business, which would hinder solid profit contributions."

Still, shedding its consumer electronics unit and spinning off the power and real estate businesses could help make Toshiba an attractive chipmaker. With some ¥1.68tn of revenue in the latest fiscal year, the semiconductor arm as a standalone company would be a top-10 global chipmaker, data compiled by Bloomberg show.

Toshiba's semiconductor business is a major player in flash memory - increasingly popular as fast, energy-efficient storage in phones, tablets and laptops.

Fed future rate hikes seen putting strains on China economy

Bloomberg
Hong Kong

One of the few forecasters to predict both the start and peak of China's equity boom is now warning the nation will be buffeted by the same forces that caused financial crises around the world over the past four decades. Hao Hong, chief China strategist at Bocom International Holdings Co in Hong Kong, says a shortage of dollars was the common feature in the oil rout in the 1970s, Latin American debt turmoil in the 1980s, the Asian currencies collapse in 1997 and the global crisis in 2008. Next year will see Federal Reserve interest-rate increases, an improving US current-account balance and a stronger greenback, putting strains on the most-leveraged parts of the world's second-largest economy, he says.

"Historically, every time the US current account improved, concurrent

with dollar strength, some country somewhere in the world plunged into some sort of crisis," Hong said. "The pressure from a Fed tightening and thus a dollar liquidity shortage scenario will more likely show up" in Hong Kong property as well as China's on-line lending and high-yield corporate bonds, he said in an interview.

The yuan, for many years Asia's most-profitable carry trade when adjusted for volatility, has weakened 4.2% against the dollar in 2015 as the yield advantage of China's sovereign debt over US Treasuries fell to the narrowest in five years. Chinese companies that borrowed in foreign currency at a record pace in the past three years are now buying dollars to protect against losses. Hot money that entered China with fake export invoicing, metals purchases and disguised foreign investment is now heading for the exit.

"All roads to hell are paved with positive carry," said Hong. "Over the past few years, one of the biggest carry

trades was to borrow dollar debt unhedged given the one-way expectation for yuan appreciation. We are seeing companies paying down dollar-denominated debt fast, and thus alleviating some of the risks, but not all."

The yuan strengthened 13% against the dollar in the four years through 2013, before retreating 2.4% in 2014. This year's loss is set to be the biggest in more than two decades. The currency's Sharpe ratio, a gauge of rewards that factors in the risks investors take, is the highest among 22 emerging markets for the period since 2010, reflecting its appeal to investors who buy higher-yielding currencies with funds borrowed in countries that have lower interest rates.

With online financial services exploding, the total amount of outstanding peer-to-peer loans in China stood at 351bn yuan (\$54bn) in October, according to iResearch Consulting Group, and Hong highlighted this as an area that's experienced a hefty buildup

in leverage. Hong Kong's house prices, which more than doubled from 2009, may drop as much as 20% in the next three to six months, Bocom forecast. Dollar bond issuance by Chinese companies increased every year since 2008, jumping to a record \$94bn in 2015 from \$2.4bn seven years ago.

The yield premium that investors demand to hold dollar-denominated high-yield Chinese bonds over US Treasuries declined to a two-year low of 607 basis points in October and was at 705 basis points on December 22, according to Bank of America Merrill Lynch data. The credit spread is "not enough to justify its risks," Hong said.

Chinese companies are struggling to generate the cash flow needed to service their obligations as economic growth slows to the weakest pace in 25 years and corporate profits shrink. While the debt burden has been eased by six central bank interest-rate cuts in 12 months and a tumble in corporate borrowing costs to five-year lows, the

number of defaults is on the rise. The amount of bad debt reported by Chinese banks rose 10% in the third quarter from the previous three months to 1.2tn yuan.

The Communist Party's Politburo vowed on December 14 to prevent systemic financial risks in 2016, according to a statement on the State Council's website after a meeting chaired by President Xi Jinping. China listed de-leveraging as the government's major task next year, along with cutting industrial capacity and lowering corporate costs, Xinhua News Agency reported December 21, citing a statement released after an economic planning meeting attended by the nation's leaders.

The prospect of further easing in China and interest-rate increases in the US risks accelerating capital outflows. Financial institutions including the People's Bank of China sold 221bn yuan of foreign exchange in November, a sign funds are heading overseas.

In the US, Federal Reserve officials forecast borrowing costs will rise to 1.375% by the end of 2016, implying four 0.25 percentage point moves. The gap between Chinese and US five-year government bond yields has narrowed 86 basis points this year to around 100 basis points, lessening the appeal of the Asian nation's notes.

The Fed's trade-weighted dollar index reached a 12-year high on December 17 as the world's largest economy strengthened and a rout in emerging markets propelled the greenback higher against the currencies of a broad swathe of US trading partners including China. That followed an improvement in the US current-account deficit, which was equivalent to 2.5% of gross domestic product in September, down from 5.9% a decade ago.

Hong recommended investors stick to assets of companies that have relatively low balance-sheet leverage in 2016 given the elevated risk of a liquidity event.

Japan must prepare for yen below 100 a dollar: JPMorgan

Bloomberg
Tokyo

JPMorgan Chase & Co is making two contrarian calls: First that the yen will strengthen towards 100 per dollar and second that such a rally won't destroy the world's third-largest economy.

Tohru Sasaki, Tokyo-based head of Japan markets research, sees a gain to 110 next year from about 121 now, the most bullish among around 60 forecasts compiled by Bloomberg. While Sasaki sees the equilibrium exchange rate at "below 100," he doesn't see that as spelling the end for the recovery in corporate profits.

"What investors like to hear is that the yen is weak and stocks are up - but if everyone's constantly betting that way, at some point they're going to get burned," Sasaki, who worked at the Bank of Japan for more than a decade before joining JPMorgan in 2003, said in a December 18 interview. "It's possible that equity prices keep going up forever, because everyone is working to maximise their returns. But in the forex market, it will never happen - there's an up and down."

JPMorgan's view clashes with the consensus among analysts for the yen to slide to 125 per dollar next year, which would complete a five-year decline of 38%. A weakening exchange rate under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has underpinned a doubling of stock prices as profits swelled to an all-time high. While selling the currency and buying equities became so prevalent that analysts dubbed



Japanese ¥10,000 notes are arranged for a photograph in Tokyo. JPMorgan's view clashes with the consensus among analysts for the yen to slide to 125 per dollar next year, which would complete a five-year decline of 38%.

it the Abenomics trade, Sasaki says investors are overly obsessed with the exchange rate.

Sasaki's projection is predicated on a rebound in Japan's current account surplus, which reached its widest level since 2008 in March. In the first 10 months, the surfeit in the broadest measure of trade amounted to ¥13.3tn, more than five times the ¥2.6tn registered in all of 2014.

The yen has also become "significantly" undervalued after the BoJ's trade-weighted index slid to an eight-year low in June, according to Sasaki. A Bloomberg gauge of consumer purchasing power parity shows the yen is 39% undervalued compared to the dollar, the most among major currencies.

It's not the first time JPMorgan has gone against the grain.

Sasaki's contrarian call for the currency to rally in the first half of 2014 proved prescient. In the second half of the same year, he escalated his forecast for yen weakness following a surprise BoJ easing, predicting 120 per dollar for September 30 of this year. It closed that day at 119.88 and was recently at 120.92.

While he's now in the minority among yen forecasters, the ranks of bulls are swelling. Seventeen analysts now see gains to at least 120 next year, versus 13 on November 30.

Many bears are counting on BoJ Governor Haruhiko Kuroda to drive weakness, after two rounds of stimulus since April 2013 helped push the currency to a 13-year low of 125.86 per dollar in June. Analysts are almost evenly split on the chance

of an expansion of the quantitative and qualitative easing program. JPMorgan sees additional QQE late in 2016 having no lasting impact on the yen.

JPMorgan predicts Japan's economy will expand 1.1% in 2016, matching the median estimate from more than 50 forecasts compiled by Bloomberg. That's after growth ground to a halt in 2014 following a sales-tax increase that April.

Brokerages are more optimistic on Japanese stocks, even as they expect earnings growth to decline for the first time since 2012. The Nikkei 225 Stock Average will surge 18% to 22,250 by the end of 2016, according to forecasts compiled by Bloomberg.

Yen declines are slowing, with this year's 1% loss just a fraction of the at-least 11%

tumbles each year from 2012. Hedge funds are also closing bets on depreciation, slashing so-called net shorts by the most since August in the week to December 15, Commodity Futures Trading Commission data show.

Sasaki expects an unwinding of bearish positions among domestic investors too, driving the yen to 115 by March 31 next year. They include the ¥8.5tn in bets against the yen, ¥10tn in overseas holdings of investment trusts and the 50tn yen in retained earnings at Japanese Corps that could see increased hedging, JPMorgan estimates.

"Different from past episodes of the yen carry trade, this time the major sellers of the yen are Japanese," he said, referring to a strategy where investors borrow yen cheaply to invest in higher-yielding nations. "Japanese will need to unwind those positions eventually. The yen is no longer the ideal funding currency."

Funding carry trades in yen lost money against every major currency in the second half except the New Zealand dollar.

Neither the BoJ nor politicians want additional weakness, as wage gains have failed to keep pace with surging food prices, squeezing consumers, according to Sasaki.

The yen drop also spurred a record number of bankruptcies among small- and medium-sized businesses dependent on imported materials. JPMorgan sees its benefits as exaggerated.

"The economy is not driven only by the foreign-exchange rate," he said. "If the growth momentum is strong, I think the Japanese economy can overcome it."

Japan's public pension fund moves closer to governance revamp

Bloomberg
Tokyo

Japan's public pension fund moved closer to completing a long-awaited governance revamp as the health ministry released a plan to install a mostly independent management committee to oversee its investments.

The \$1.1tn Government Pension Investment Fund will establish a 10-person committee consisting of nine outsiders and GPIF's president, the ministry said in a proposal on Friday in Tokyo. The new body will be responsible for decision-making and supervising how the pension fund invests its assets, the health ministry said. The aim is to submit a bill to the ordinary session of Japan's Diet, which usually starts in January.

The world's biggest pension fund doubled its allocation to stocks and reduced debt in October 2014, following the advice of a panel handpicked by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on how to modernize the fund as Japan sought to exit 15 years of deflation.

The other prong of the recommendations - changing how GPIF is run by adding the equivalent of a board of directors and separating investment and oversight - has taken longer to materialise.

"It's good that change is happening after all these discussions," Hiroaki Hiwada, a Tokyo-based strategist at Toyo Securities Co, said by phone. "The revamp of the governance structure is in tune with the times."

The management committee will have one representative of labour, one from the business world and at least one full-time member, according to the ministry's proposal.

They will have five-year terms. GPIF's chief investment officer, currently Hiromichi Mizuno, can attend meetings but will not be on the committee, according to the plan.

Much of GPIF's authority currently resides with the president, Takahiro Mitani. The changes will introduce a more collegiate style of making decisions, as proposed in November 2013 by the panel picked by Abe.

Hong Kong apartment sells for record \$76.7m

A luxury apartment in Hong Kong sold for a record HK\$594.7m (\$76.7m), days before Christmas, making it the most expensive flat in the city and possibly in Asia, reports said on Friday.

An unidentified buyer paid more than HK\$103,700 per-square-foot for the 5,732 square-foot (532 square-metre) unit at the luxury 39 Conduit Road apartment tower in the southern Chinese city's upmarket Mid-Levels residential area, *The Apple Daily* and *The Standard* reported.

The condominium, on the 46th floor with a view of the iconic Victoria Harbour and a 1,754 square-foot rooftop, had a list price of HK\$646.48m on developer Henderson Land Properties' website.

The price beats the previous record HK\$470m paid for a luxury unit which takes up the

entire eighth floor of the Opus Hong Kong, a 12-storey residential building designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architect Frank Gehry, in 2012.

Henderson Land was not available for comment on Friday, a public holiday.

This comes as analysts said a US interest rate hike could put an end to the housing boom in the Chinese city which maintains a decades old peg with the US dollar. Hong Kong-based brokerage CLSA warned the residential market was at a "turning point", with prices possibly dropping 17% by 2017, while other firms have tipped falls of up to 30%.

Hong Kong's de facto central bank last Thursday raised its base interest rate by 25 points to 0.75% after the US Federal Reserve announced its first rate increase in more than nine years.

EM stocks, currencies post their longest rally in 7 weeks

Bloomberg
London

Emerging-market (EM) stocks posted their longest stretch of gains in seven weeks as a recovery in oil prices supported energy companies. The South Korean won led gains in currencies.

A gauge of developing-nation energy stocks rose to a three-week high as Brent crude climbed to \$37.89 a barrel. Cnooc and China Petroleum & Chemical Corp each added at least 2.3% in Hong Kong. The won strengthened for a fourth day after Moody's Investors Service raised South Korea's credit rating to the third-highest investment grade. South African equities rallied to the highest level since December 1.

Data this week showing strong US consumption and scant inflation are boosting confidence that the biggest part of the world's largest economy will

continue to underpin growth. That's easing concerns that decelerating Chinese growth and the commodity slump will harm the global economy just as the Federal Reserve raises borrowing costs. Oil is heading for its first weekly gain this month, while the Bloomberg Commodity Index extended an advance after jumping by the most since October 6.

The gains are "a relief rally due to some year-end flows and portfolio rebalancings, helped by some signs of stabilisation in the commodity markets," said Giorgio Bertoli, a money manager at Banca del Sempione in Lugano. "To sustain this advance into the next year we need better macroeconomics data, especially in China, and better price dynamics on commodity markets."

The MSCI Emerging Markets Index added 0.1% to 804.06, rising for a fourth day. Six of 10 industry groups gained, led by energy and utility stocks.



The won strengthened after Moody's Investors Service raised South Korea's credit rating to the third-highest investment grade

The measure's 50-day volatility index, which peaked at a four-year high in October as a \$5tn Chinese equity rout and concerns over the impact of a US interest-rate rise roiled developing markets, was near a five-month low.

"The rally in oil and commodity prices has significantly bolstered sentiment on emerging-market equities," Isara Ordeedolchost, an investment strategist at SCB Securities Co in Bangkok, said by phone. "This is a pos-

itive development ahead of the coming holidays after those markets were hard hit by fund outflows and weak commodity prices."

The developing-country index has fallen 16% this year, set for the worst annual performance since 2011 and pushing the average valuation of its companies to 11.1 times their projected 12-month earnings. The multiple for the MSCI World Index, which has fallen 2.1% this year, is 15.9.

The Hang Seng China Enterprises Index of mainland stocks listed in Hong Kong rose 0.7%. Markets in Hong Kong closed early Thursday, while Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines and Sri Lanka were shut. Brazilian markets also were closed.

Goldin Properties Holdings, controlled bybnair Pan Sutong, soared 54% after the company raised \$2.8bn selling commercial properties. Goldin sold one-fourth of its flagship commercial project in the Chinese city of

Tianjin. The Borsa Istanbul 100 Index was little changed. The FTSE/JSE Africa All Share Index climbed 1% as BHP Billiton advanced 2%. Markets in Poland and Hungary were closed.

A gauge tracking 20 emerging-market currencies rose 0.1%, trimming the measure's annual loss to 14%, on course for the biggest yearly drop since 1997. Colombia's peso appreciated 0.8% against the dollar. The Russian rouble fell 0.6%.

The offshore yuan strengthened 0.1% as the Chinese central bank's decision to extend onshore market hours and allow in more foreign participants spurred optimism that demand for the currency will increase.

The yield on South Korea's three-year sovereign debt held near a two-month low after the Bank of Korea said it will maintain an accommodative monetary policy in 2016 as uncertainties about economic growth remain high.

Deutsche Bank sees 'taper tantrum' ahead for US Treasuries

Bloomberg
New York

Enjoy the holiday slowdown, bond traders. If analysts at Deutsche Bank are right, the market is going to get a lot more volatile.

After the Federal Reserve succeeded in nudging borrowing costs up from near zero last week in its first interest-rate increase since 2006, Treasury yields have hardly moved. Now, traders are betting low inflation and slow global growth will encourage policy makers to raise rates slowly in 2016.

The lull won't last, according to Dominic Konstam, global head of rates re-

search for Deutsche Bank in New York. He predicts the Fed will catch bond traders wrongfooted by raising rates in March. That may prompt a smaller version of the market "tantrum" seen in 2013, when the prospect of an end to Fed bond-buying fuelled a sharp sell-off in Treasuries.

"We call it a 'baby tantrum,'" Konstam said. "The idea is that the Fed's tightening will look somewhat benign, and then you'll realise that rates are rising to 1%. That's a lot of stress" for markets.

The warning from Deutsche Bank, which has the second-largest share of the interest-rates trading business in the US behind Goldman Sachs Group,

comes as expectations for Treasury-market volatility are tumbling.

The Bank of America Merrill Lynch MOVE Index, which gauges implied volatility through options prices, fell to 66.02 this week, the lowest since December 2014. Early signals from the central bank indicate that policy makers may raise rates more quickly than traders expect.

The median of the Fed's so-called dot plot - a chart sketching out officials' projections for where rates will be in the future - calls for them to reach 1.375% next year.

That would constitute four 0.25 percentage point increases. On Monday, Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta Presi-

dent Dennis Lockhart also suggested that the Fed may raise rates four times in 2016.

Futures prices show traders don't buy into the Fed's timeline. The market continues to expect two rate increases in 2016, according to data compiled by Bloomberg.

Traders are pricing in a 56% chance that the Fed raises rates at or before its April meeting, based on the assumption that the effective fed funds rate will trade at the middle of the new FOMC target range after the next increase.

The yield on the benchmark 10-year Treasury note rose four basis points, or 0.04 percentage point, to 2.24%

this week. The 2.25% note maturing in November 2025 fell 10/32, or \$3.13 per \$1,000 face amount, to 100 2/32.

The last time the Fed sparked a Treasury-market tantrum, it wiped out about \$1.5tn of bond-market value globally, according to Bank of America indexes. Konstam doesn't expect the same amount of damage this time around. He forecasts the 10-year Treasury yield will peak around 2.75% close to the middle of next year.

After that, he predicts the Fed will hold off from further rate increases to make sure financial conditions haven't tightened too much.

That would alleviate some pressure on government-debt, prompting

yields to fall back to around current levels by the end of the year.

Thomas Roth, senior Treasury trader at Mitsubishi UFJ Securities USA, says he's not willing to take a bullish stance on Treasuries.

He thinks that the bond market is being too complacent and ignoring a risky cocktail of low coupons and high duration, a gauge of interest-rate sensitivity.

"People feel comfortable because they feel the terminal rate will be low," meaning the Fed won't raise rates as high as it did in previous cycles, Roth said from New York.

"That may happen, but it's not a bet I'd be willing to make."



Traders work on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange. As 2015 draws to a close this week, the fortunes of the last few trading days of the year may be dictated by the direction of the financial sector.

Beat-up power generators turn best buys in US

Bloomberg
New York

Cheap natural gas, tougher regulations, a surge in renewable power and tepid demand growth all conspired to make 2015 a bleak year for independent power producers. Wall Street expects a lot better in 2016.

The group will outperform every sector in the S&P 500 next year after plunging 48% in 2015, according to analysts' estimates compiled by Bloomberg and an index of producers that is set to rise 63%. Bears who see flat demand and stiffer competition from new gas-fired power plants aren't so sure.

A rebound in gas, which sets power prices in wholesale markets, will raise revenue for all generators, according to analysts forecasting the jump in share price for the five companies in the power index, which includes AES Corp and Calpine Corp. Others say higher prices will be offset by flat demand as new energy efficiency standards take hold, and solar and wind power expand.

"These stocks are cheap at any natural gas price," Stephen C Byrd, a New York-based analyst for Morgan Stanley said. "They're cash cows."

Natural gas futures have fallen 31% this year as supplies of the fuel keeps flowing out of US shale formations, driving stockpiles to a record. The companies' shares are priced as though investors expect gas to stay under \$2 a million British thermal units, Byrd said. The heating fuel closed at a 16-year low of \$1.755 on December 17.

"We see compelling value," Byrd said. Dynege, owner of plants that can generate enough to power 21 million average US homes, is Morgan Stanley's top pick. The stock may almost triple to \$37 a share, according to a December 4 note.

Electricity tends to rise and fall with the price of gas because the fuel is burned by plants that start and stop during the day as demand fluctuates. Lower gas prices can shrink margins because plants burning other fuels may operate at a loss or not run at all.

AES of Arlington, Virginia;

Calpine and Dynege of Houston; NRG Energy of Princeton, New Jersey and Talen Energy Corp of Allentown, Pennsylvania, make up the five-member Bloomberg Intelligence North American Independent Power Producers Valuation Peer Group. Much of their revenue comes from selling into competitive wholesale markets, in contrast with utilities that earn government-regulated rates.

Dynege forecast on November 4 free cash flow of as much as \$500 million in 2016, more than double this year's expectation, with as much as \$450 million available for share buybacks or debt reduction.

"Based on our 2016 outlook alone, our equity is meaningfully undervalued," Calpine Chief Executive Officer Thad Hill told investors on an Oct. 30 conference call. "The built-in quantifiable upside in our business from here is tremendous."

Higher payouts in PJM Interconnection, the largest US wholesale market, and improved gas supply will benefit Talen's margins in 2016, Paul Farr, the company's CEO, said by e-mail Wednesday.

"The recent and dramatic pull back in stock prices doesn't reflect the underlying solid fundamentals in the competitive generation sector," he said.

Calpine is expected to rise 44% in the next 12 months, according to data compiled by Bloomberg. Dynege will almost double, making it the best performer in the group, while NRG Energy will rise 66%, Talen 83% and AES 28%, according to the data.

NRG Energy spokeswoman Marijke Shugrue and Dynege spokesman Micah Hirschfield declined to comment for this article.

A spokeswoman for AES, Amy Ackerman, didn't immediately respond to a call and e-mail seeking comment.

Jay Rhame, who helps manage \$2.6 billion at Reaves Asset Management in Jersey City, New Jersey, isn't convinced. He sees new gas-fueled plants taking a bite out of the group's sales.

Panda Power Funds is building two plants atop the gas-rich Marcellus Shale in Pennsylvania.

Financial sector key to final week of trading on Wall St

Reuters
New York

As 2015 draws to a close this week, the fortunes of the last few trading days of the year may be dictated by the direction of the financial sector.

The financials have risen more than 6% this quarter, with investors expecting the sector to be one of the main beneficiaries of the first interest rate hike by the US Federal Reserve in nearly a decade last week.

However, the potential exposure of banks to the energy-dominated US high-yield corporate bond markets has unnerved investors, and caused financial and energy shares to stall during the two trading sessions that followed the hike. Stocks in both those sectors have been closely correlated in recent weeks.

"That trade, the oil-financials, it is going to be with us for quite some time,"

said Peter Kenny, equity market strategist at Kenny & Co, in Denver. The benchmark S&P 500 index has rallied nearly 3% this week, buoyed by a jump of nearly 5% in the energy sector as oil prices bounced off multi-year lows. Financial stocks, meanwhile, have surged more than 3% this week.

In recent weeks, energy stocks have been tightly correlated to the price of crude at 0.95, which means they have moved in sync with each other, and financials have not been far behind. The 20-day correlation between the financial sector and US crude is 0.75.

Should oil prices fail to stabilize and energy shares continue to fall, that could be reflected in the financials.

"The influx of money and capital into the financials over the last six months in anticipation of this move by the Fed was justified, but boy, this oil trade has turned that upside down," Kenny said.

The slump in oil prices has resulted in

a drop of more than 20% in the energy sector this year, but while signs of stabilization in the commodity has helped the sector rally, it has also reduced its influence among the broader index.

According to Standard & Poor's, as of November 30, the energy sector held a 7.1% weighting in the benchmark index. In contrast, financials hold a 16.6% weighting, second among the 10 major sectors and making them more influential in dictating the direction of the S&P 500.

Financials have a forward price-to-earnings ratio of 13.7, according to Thomson Reuters data, making them relatively cheap compared to the 16.5 for the broad S&P 500.

Meanwhile, as major US banks have raised the rates they charge borrowers in the wake of the Fed hike, that could bump up earnings for the sector.

Even if financials manage to decouple from oil, some market participants are not expecting any outsized benefits for

the sector from the change in Fed policy, which is expected to be a gradual tightening of interest rates. "Interest rates are going to stay here and this trade that led people to believe the banks were going to be substantially helped is just not going to happen," said Stephen Massocca, Chief Investment Officer, Wedbush Equity Management in San Francisco.

"They are probably fairly valued here and they are very disinteresting."

With a shorter trading week ahead as well due to a holiday for New Year's, the economic calendar is light and trading volume is expected to be muted, which could result in exaggerated moves in equities.

"Due to the holiday week, attendance will be light," said Andre Bakhos, managing director at Janlyn Capital in Bernardsville, New Jersey.

"But the ability to move things around is easier at times like this, so while we normally think that nothing is going to happen, it is easier to make things happen."

Vietnam GDP growth quickens on investment, manufacturing

Bloomberg
Hanoi

Vietnam's economic growth quickened in the fourth quarter helped by rising industrial output and record-high foreign investment.

Gross domestic product rose 7.01% in the fourth quarter from a year earlier, quickening from a revised 6.87% gain in the three months through September, according to data released by the General Statistics Office in Hanoi yesterday. In 2015, the economy grew 6.68%, beating the government's 6.2% target. That compares with a median estimate of 6.6% in a Bloomberg survey.

Vietnam's economic growth "has gained momentum gradually and is now being supported both by exports of foreign-invested enterprises and domestic demand," Jonathan Dunn, the International Monetary Fund's resident representative in Vietnam said in a statement released December 5 in Hanoi.

The State Bank of Vietnam weakened the dong three times this year to spur exports after China depreciated the yuan, dragging exchange rates lower across Asia. Vietnam's economic growth in 2015 may be the fastest among six major Southeast Asian countries tracked by the Asian Development Bank, the ADB said in a recent report.

Exports rose 8.1% in the 12 months through December from a year earlier to \$162.4 billion, with 71% coming from foreign companies. Exports miss government target of 10% growth for 2015 "due to dropping commodities prices in global markets": Le Thi Minh Thuy, head of the GSO's trade department.

Imports climbed 12% from a year earlier for the same period. December trade deficit was \$300 million, from \$263 million surplus in November. Credit growth at 17.2% as of Dec 21 vs start-2015, according to central bank data released December 24.

Bank lending may rise 18% at end-2015 compared to year earlier. Retail sales gained 9.5% in Jan.-Dec. from year earlier. Industrial produc-

tion jumped 9.8% in same period from year earlier. Manufacturing rose 10.6% in same period from year earlier.

Disbursed foreign investment surged 17.4% to a record-high of \$14.5 billion in January-December from a year earlier, and pledged foreign investment climbed 12.5%.

The central bank weakened the dong's reference rate by 1% in August, and widened the currency's trading band. The country is also benefiting from cheaper energy costs as a low inflation rate aids domestic demand.

The government will focus on steps to bolster businesses, particularly the private sector, as part of its attempt to increase the country's productivity in 2016-2020, Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung said December 5. Vietnam's legislature last month passed a 2016 GDP target of 6.7%.

The economy will face challenges in 2016 include falling global oil prices and rising pressure on the dong, said Nguyen Bich Lam, head of General Statistics Office, speaking at a briefing in Hanoi yesterday.



Employees load products onto shelves at a Fivimart supermarket in Hanoi yesterday. Vietnam reported that its economy grew 6.68% in 2015, the fastest pace in five years, helped by an expanding industrial sector and record foreign direct investment.

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FOOTBALL

Stoke expose Van Gaal, Benteke sinks Leicester

United have now gone seven games without victory in all competitions

AFF
London

Manchester United manager Louis van Gaal's future was plunged into serious doubt yesterday as his side crashed 2-0 at Stoke City, while leaders Leicester City lost at Liverpool.

United have now gone seven games without victory in all competitions—their worst run since 1989-90 — and speculation is rife that Van Gaal will pay for their slump with his job.

He had described the match as "must-win", but his side were deservedly beaten after Bojan Krkic punished a Memphis Depay error to open the scoring in the 19th minute before Marko Arnautovic slammed home a second goal seven minutes later.

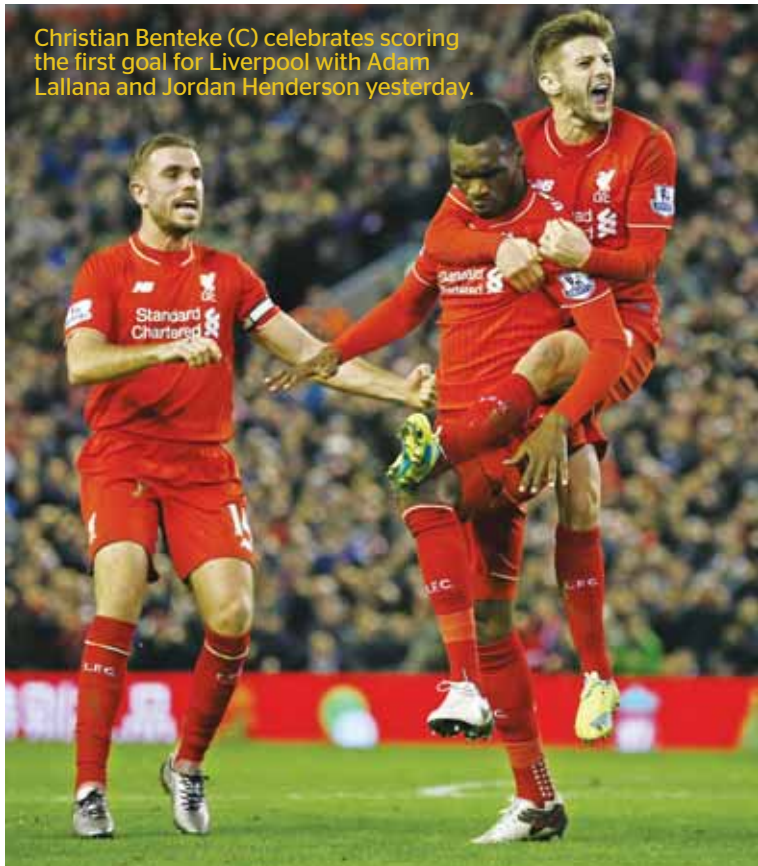
Van Gaal's side slipped to sixth in the table, three points below the top four, with Stoke, managed by former United striker Mark Hughes, now three points behind them in 10th place.

Leicester lost 1-0 at Anfield, their first away defeat of the campaign, with Christian Benteke sliding home a 63rd-minute winner after coming on to replace the injured Divock Origi before half-time.

Benteke spurned a gilt-edged chance to make the game safe in stoppage time when he was thwarted by Wes Morgan after Leicester goalkeeper Kasper Schmeichel had gone up for a throw-in, but his earlier strike was enough to give manager Jurgen Klopp a first win in four league games.

Leicester's defeat, only their second of the season, means that Arsenal can go top if they win at Southampton later on Boxing Day.

Manchester City reignited their title challenge by bouncing back from Monday's 2-1 defeat at Arsenal with



Christian Benteke (C) celebrates scoring the first goal for Liverpool with Adam Lallana and Jordan Henderson yesterday.

a breezy 4-1 win over second-bottom Sunderland that left them three points off the summit.

Raheem Sterling, Yaya Toure and Wilfried Bony scored inside the first 22 minutes to put City in control, with Kevin De Bruyne adding a fourth before Fabio Borini replied for Sam Allardyce's side.

But it was not all positive news for City manager Manuel Pellegrini, with Bony skying a late penalty and, more worryingly, skipper Vincent Kompany limping off just 10 min-

utes after coming on following eight games out with a calf injury.

Tottenham Hotspur tightened their grip on fourth place by overcoming Norwich City 3-0 at White Hart Lane, where Harry Kane scored twice—the first a penalty—to take his tally for the season to 13.

Tom Carroll was also on target. Diego Costa scored twice as Guus Hiddink began his second spell as Chelsea interim manager with a 2-2 draw at home to Watford, Oscar missing a late penalty that would

RESULTS/STANDINGS

Stoke City.....2	Man United.....0
Aston Villa.....1	West Ham.....1
Bournemouth.....0	Crystal Palace.....0
Chelsea.....2	Watford.....2
Liverpool.....1	Leicester City.....0
Man City.....4	Sunderland.....1
Tottenham.....3	Norwich City.....0
Swansea City.....1	West Brom.....0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	P	T
1 Leicester	18	11	5	2	37	25	38	
2 Arsenal	17	11	3	3	31	14	36	
3 Man City	18	11	2	5	37	20	35	
4 Tottenham	18	8	8	2	31	14	32	
5 Crystal Palace	18	9	3	6	23	16	30	
6 Man United	18	8	5	5	22	16	29	
7 Watford	18	8	5	5	23	18	29	
8 Liverpool	18	7	6	5	21	22	27	
9 West Ham	18	6	8	4	26	22	26	
10 Stoke City	18	7	5	6	16	16	26	
11 Everton	17	5	8	4	31	24	23	
12 Southampton	17	5	6	6	21	21	21	
13 West Brom	18	5	5	8	17	24	20	
14 Bournemouth	18	5	5	8	22	32	20	
15 Chelsea	18	5	4	9	23	29	19	
16 Swansea	18	4	6	8	16	24	18	
17 Norwich	18	4	5	9	20	32	17	
18 Newcastle	17	4	5	8	19	32	17	
19 Sunderland	18	3	3	12	19	37	12	
20 Aston Villa	18	1	5	12	15	32	8	

have given the champions all three points.

Troy Deeney, with a penalty, and Odion Ighalo put Watford 2-1 ahead after Costa had given Chelsea a 32nd-minute lead, but the Spain striker equalised in the 65th minute from Willian's pass.

Oscar had a chance to give Chelsea victory when substitute Eden Hazard was fouled by Valon Behrami, but the Brazilian slipped as he took his penalty and sent the ball looping into the crowd.

SPOTLIGHT

PSG arrive in Doha today

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Paris Saint-Germain will arrive in Doha today for their winter training camp, which will include a friendly match against Serie A leaders Inter Milan at the Jassim bin Hamad stadium on December 30.

The camp is part of PSG's preparations for the second half of the season, the highlight of which is a showdown with Chelsea in the Champions League they are leading the French league and are still in the Cup competitions as well.

PSG manager Laurent Blanc said he was looking forward to the camp in Doha and the friendly against Inter Milan.

He expressed his belief that his side can go from strength to strength as they seek domestic and European titles. They are 19 points clear at the top in Ligue 1, while in the Champions League they face Chelsea in the final 16.

Blanc said that training camps like the one in Doha helps increase the bond between the players, which translates to better performances on the pitch. He said the conditions, including the weather and what he said were exceptional facilities at Aspire, will help make the camp a success.

"They (the facilities at Aspire) are

amazing. Everything, from sports to medical facilities, will be at our disposal. Another big advantage is the climate. It is the best possible weather to work with the squad and there is not such a big time difference between Qatar and Paris," he said.

"We will avoid the usual endless plane journeys that you need in order to get this sort of weather. With such short tours, the time difference can be a problem, especially when you come back. But this won't be the case for us."

PSG captain Thiago Silva has also spoken about his keenness to make good use of the Qatar camp.

"I think it is very important for the club to go on this tour," said Silva. "We know the owners are from Qatar, so it is very important for them and for the club. But it is a good thing to go over there, as the locals love Paris Saint-Germain and the players."

The Brazilian added that the team's camp in Doha last year did them a world of good during the remainder of the season.

"Last year for instance, it really helped us to go on the tour as we came back and were even better, finishing the season in the best way possible. I hope that this year, it will again be beneficial and maybe make us stronger for the Champions League."

"When we are all over there, we work really well together, we stay in an amazing hotel that gives us the best conditions to rest and recharge the batteries. It's an advantage for the rest of the season."



PSG stars Thiago Silva (R) and Zlatan Ibrahimovic.

BASKETBALL

Galloway nails thrilling win for Al Gharafa

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Dwayne Galloway scored off two free-throws just before the buzzer as Al Gharafa pipped Al Rayyan, 77-76, in the Qatar Basketball League last evening.

Al Gharafa had taken a five-point lead (60-55) into the final quarter only for Al Rayyan to make a fight of it late in the match.

With the clock ticking away and Al Rayyan leading 76-75, Al Gharafa were awarded a foul, and despite the intense pressure, Galloway nailed both his throws to clinch a 77-76 victory for his side.

Earlier, with less than nine seconds to go, Al Rayyan had themselves taken a 76-75 lead thanks to two free throws by Quintin Emmanuel, but could only watch de-

jectedly as Al Gharafa soon turned the tables.

Al Rayyan had gotten off to a flyer, leading 25-13 at the end of the first quarter but Al Gharafa caught up in the second and maintained a healthy lead before matters got exciting in the final quarter.

Gharafa's Galloway was the top scorer for either side with 23 points, while Mohamed Saad lent him fine support by scoring 20.

Alban Ngombo and Dominic Davon scored 22 and 18, respectively, for Al Rayyan.

In another match yesterday, Al Wakrah thrashed Qatar Sports Club 66-47 with Adamu Saaka starring for the winners with a game-high 33 points.

Anthony Woods was the top-scorer for Qatar Sports Club, while Omar Ismail scored 10.

Today, Al Ahli played Al Sadd at 5.15pm while Al Shamal meet Al Arabi at 7.15pm.



Action from the Qatar Basketball League last evening in Doha.





FOCUS

England to rip up Euro plans after rule oversight

All teams identified for warm-up games to play in France, disallowed under UEFA rules



In this May 13, 2014, picture, England manager Roy Hodgson (left) announces his squad for the 2014 World Cup in Brazil, at a news conference in Luton, southern England.

By Daniel Taylor
The Guardian

Roy Hodgson will have to reconsider his preparations for Euro 2016 because of an oversight behind the scenes at the Football Association which has led to an admission from the England manager that he and his employers did not properly know the competition rules.

The FA was planning friendlies against Czech Republic and Portugal during a series of matches at Wembley, Old Trafford and St James's Park at the end of the season, with Hungary and Austria also in their thoughts for potential warm-up games.

However, the FA did not know about the UEFA regulation stipulating that teams are allowed to play only one other qualified nation in the month before the tournament. All the teams England had identified as possible opponents will be

involved in France and the FA had begun the process without being aware of Article 21.05 in the Regulations of the UEFA Football Championship 2014-16, put in place by UEFA's executive committee on December 12, 2013.

The mistake came to light in the last couple of weeks and, though it does not reflect well on the FA, Hodgson's main concern is that the standard of opposition will not be as strong because they will have to choose teams that have not qualified for the tournament.

"At the moment we're restricted," the England manager said. "The restriction – we only found out after the draw itself – is that UEFA are insisting that in your warm-up matches you don't play more than one team that are qualified alongside you.

"That will make it quite difficult because the teams that are actually looking for games are the teams that qualified. If we can only play one we'll have to make a choice. The Czech Republic spring to mind while Hungary and Austria would

be other examples. We like the idea of playing Portugal because of their quality and the enormous success they've had over the last year but if we're restricted to one it's going to make life difficult deciding which of those we'd most like.

"More importantly, it's going to be more difficult to find two other opponents of the right quality because our initial thinking was that we would want to play three very qualified opponents. We're not looking just for a game. We'd want a game that tested the players so there wasn't going to be a big gap between the preparation games and the tournament itself."

England have a friendly lined up against Germany in Berlin on 26 March, followed by Holland visiting Wembley three days later, and Hodgson has agreed with his players that they should not go on holiday at the end of the season.

"The approach will be different to what we've done in the past," he said. "We've run that through the players because we were anxious to get their buy-in too. To

break away from that process is quite a big cultural change and I'm impressed that when we approached the players they were 100% behind it and said: 'No, we totally agree with you, we need to do that.' It will make it hard for them because it will mean some will go from the beginning of July [in 2015] right through to the beginning of July again, and they won't have had that three to four-week break that everyone associates with the off-season."

Hodgson, in an interview with Sky Sports, said he still had a "slight hope" that Luke Shaw may be part of the squad after his broken leg and made it clear he expected Wayne Rooney to be a key player for England, even though the Manchester United striker has admitted in a separate interview he is struggling for form.

"I know that I have not been playing well and I'm working hard to try to improve and do my best for the team," Rooney said. "It's not nice when you are getting criticised after every game."

BOTTOMLINE

Jose not responsible for move to Everton: Lukaku

By Andy Hunter
The Guardian

Romelu Lukaku (pictured) has revealed José Mourinho was the first person to wish him luck when he signed permanently for Everton and denied the former Chelsea manager was responsible for his Stamford Bridge exit.

The Belgium international described Mourinho's sacking by Chelsea as "mad" in an interview with the Guardian and denied claims his £28m transfer to Goodison Park followed an acrimonious fallout with the Portuguese coach. Chelsea's decision to sell the striker and Kevin De Bruyne in 2014 has rebounded spectacularly this season, with their former players flourishing at Everton and Manchester City respectively.

But Lukaku insists he pushed for the move to Everton, where he enjoyed a successful season on loan in 2013-14, and has only respect for the way Mourinho handled the situation.

"Choices were made by me. By me. Not

by them," said the 16-goal forward when asked if he regretted not staying at Chelsea given their need for fresh quality. "Everyone says it is Mourinho's fault but it is not his fault because I made the decision. I went to his office to ask if I could go. He was the first one to say: 'Good luck'."

"I signed the deal with Everton at 11 o'clock and the first text message I got on my old BlackBerry was from Mourinho saying: 'Good luck, do your best and I will see you next season.' He was the first. Nobody knows that and that is why for me he gets immense respect. It is really sad he has to go. He is a great character and a great man. Even though there were words said in the media, I never looked at it because I know what he did and not a lot of managers would do that."

Lukaku admitted he was stunned Mourinho had left Chelsea having won the Premier League title last season. The Everton striker added: "It's hard, it's tough. Seven months ago, they won the Premier League by playing some wonderful football. It's mad, mad. When I heard the news I thought: 'Wow! That was the only thing I could say.'"



ACCOLADE

Messi tops Marca's list of best players in 2015

IAN S
Madrid / Sarajevo

Lionel Messi (pictured) has topped Spanish paper Marca's list of the top 10 players of 2015, the media reported.

Cristiano Ronaldo was eighth on the list, reports Xinhua.

Rather than picking the players themselves, Marca left it to reader's votes. The year 2015 was undeniably the year of FC Barcelona. Luis Enrique's side finished the year as the best club team on the planet.

That accolade was locked up by five trophies – the Copa del Rey, European SuperCup, La Liga, the Champions League and the FIFA Club World Cup.

While Barca's achievements were incredible, they seem to have skewed the results of Marca's top 10 players of 2015 list.

According to results, for example, Real Madrid superstar Cristiano Ronaldo is eighth, while Barcelona's generally understated midfielder Sergio Busquets is sixth.

There were only two non-Spanish players picked in the top 10, while Barcelona had six players in the list.

Neymar, Luis Suarez and Andres Iniesta join Messi at the top,

while Bayern's Robert Lewandowski steps in at number five ahead of Busquets and Claudio Bravo, also of Barca. Ronaldo, Atletico Madrid's Antoine Griezmann and Juventus' Paul Pogba complete the top ten.

MESSI SENDS SIGNED SHIRT TO BOSNIA FOR HUMANITARIAN AID

Messi, meanwhile, sent a signed jersey to be auctioned for providing aid to a Bosnian hospital.

The jersey will be put under the hammer for the paediatrics department of a hospital in the central Bosnian town of Travnik, reports Efe.

Bosnian humanitarian activist Jasmina Fajkic said on Friday the funds to be raised in the auction through the sale of shirts of several sportsmen will be allocated to purchase new medical equipment for the department.

Fajkic was able to contact Messi through Catalan humanitarian activists, and said that Messi, upon hearing that it was for children, immediately offered support and sent a signed shirt.

The auction, which began on December 21 and closes on January 5, also includes the signed shirts of Croatian Real Madrid player Mateo Kovacic, and Bosnians Miralem Pjanic and Edin Dzeko of AS Roma.



NEW AVENUE

Ronaldinho considering a move to the United States

IAN S
Rio de Janeiro

Ronaldinho has raised the prospect of continuing his career in the US and expects a decision on his future to be made within weeks.

Ronaldinho is a free agent after leaving Fluminense by mutual consent in October, Xinhua reported.

He will play for the Brazilian outfit at the Florida Cup next month, honouring a clause written into his contract when he joined the club in July.

"I am going to play for a little longer," the 35-year-old was quoted as saying by the *Folha de S. Paulo* newspaper on Friday.

"As long my body is willing and I am happy, I want to keep playing. Now I'm going to have time to reflect. There are many possibilities.

"I am attracted to the possibility of playing in the US, just like I am in Dubai or Brazil. I am going to take a few more weeks to think and then make a decision."





FOCUS

Stability benefits Premier League clubs: Wenger

'We have news every half an hour or every minute... But let's not forget that football is as well about cohesion, stability'

By David Hytner
The Guardian

Arsene Wenger says the climate in Premier League football is "more destabilising than ever before" and, when the Arsenal manager looks around at England's other big clubs, the point is strongly reinforced.

Louis van Gaal is on the edge at Manchester United, Manuel Pellegrini must contend with the spectre of Pep Guardiola at Manchester City, and Chelsea and Liverpool have sacked their managers this season. There will be a further change at Chelsea next summer when the caretaker, Guus Hiddink, is replaced by a permanent appointment.

Wenger and Arsenal are the exception. Wenger has been in situ since 1996 and there have been no dramas surrounding his position for some time. He appears the epitome of stability and that impression extends to his squad.

There was plenty of angst attached to Wenger's decision to stick with what he had last summer and sign no new outfield players. But he has always felt slow and steady could win this title race and that unsexy values such as continuity, trust and incremental improvement may hold the key.

The approach is looking good before the Boxing Day visit to Southampton. As others have lost their heads Arsenal have generally kept theirs and they are now the favourites for the title, even though they must still visit the Manchester clubs, Liverpool and Tottenham Hotspur.

"The society today always wants something new," Wenger said. "We have news every half an hour or every minute. You need to announce something new. But let's not forget that football is as well about cohesion, about stability. That goes a little bit against the demand of what people want but I still think success is linked with talent and cohesion. Cohesion is an underrated factor in our society because there is always a demand for something new."

"It's more difficult today because people are better informed. They know more straight away. When a team loses a game everybody has an opinion and the environment is more destabilising than it ever was before. So maybe inside the clubs this kind of cohesion and resistance to that destabilising factor becomes more important."

Arsenal have been the form club over this calendar year and Wenger noted one of the reasons had been their defensive improvement for which Petr Cech, the goalkeeper who arrived last summer from Chelsea, can take some of the credit.

Wenger talked about why he did not sign another striker, for example, because in his view Olivier Giroud, Theo Walcott, Alexis Sanchez and Danny

Welbeck each represented a "world-class" pick. Giroud has 12 goals in his past 14 appearances for Arsenal.

Wenger said: "When I looked at the market there were players you had to spend a huge amount of money on and were they better than those four players? I don't know. Firstly [the demand for new signings] is most of the time to calm anxiety for the fans. It is reassuring to have a big name come in and, secondly, the media put you under pressure to get a new name."

"You need competition and competition exists if the numbers are not too short or not too big. When the number is too big, there is no competition anymore and it goes against the interests of the team. If a player is No26 in the squad, he needs three players to die before he has a real chance to play."

"That has an impact when he comes in every morning. He is down and he takes something away from the team. When the number is too short, he thinks: 'No matter how I am, I play!' And that is not good as well. I felt we have the right number."

To further the theme of continuity, Wenger said that Mikel Arteta, the club captain, could "be a coach in the future and certainly here" at Arsenal. Arteta has not played since the 2-1 defeat at West Bromwich Albion on 21 November because of a calf problem that Wenger said was similar to the one the midfielder suffered last season, which eventually needed surgery.

Arteta was ruled out from late November of last year for the rest of the season. It is hoped the 33-year-old, who is out of contract in the summer, could be back in two to three weeks' time.

"Could he join my coaching staff? I don't rule that out," Wenger said. "He has to be a youth-team coach first and, after, come up. At the moment I don't have a real need although the average age is quite high on my staff! I am happy with all my staff. I think Mikel can be a coach in the future and certainly here."

"He has the same injury. He was close [last season] to be back but every time I took a gamble and put him back in he had a setback. So this time I want to be a little more cautious and get him to play one or two games in the reserves before he comes back and plays."

Wenger believes that Jamie Vardy, the Leicester City striker, is worth the £30m fee that has been talked about. Leicester are determined not to lose him in January but they could receive bids.

"Without a doubt he is worth that money today," Wenger said. "If you put that in the context of the financial power today of the top clubs, £30m is not that massive for a striker. He is the best goalscorer in the league and you have many players under him who have been paid much more and who don't score that number of goals."



Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger directs his players from the touchline during the EPL match against Manchester City in London on Monday. (AFP)

BOTTOMLINE

Figueredo bribes paid 'for decades', says prosecutor

AFP
Montevideo, Uruguay

Former FIFA vice-president **Eugenio Figueredo** received millions of dollars in bribes throughout his career at the top of South American football, prosecutors claimed Friday.

Figueredo, 83, was extradited from Switzerland and spent Christmas in jail pending a trial which could see him imprisoned for up to 15 years.

Late Friday, he was admitted to a Montevideo hospital with chest pain, but was expected to return to his cell in a matter of hours, said the prosecutor in his case, Juan Gomez.

Gomez said evidence given by Figueredo showed clearly that the official was corrupted from the moment he joined the executive committee of CONMEBOL, the South American federation.

"From the time he became a member of the executive committee, he received huge sums of money from plans hatched by various members of CONMEBOL with the objective of maintaining a twisted form of corruption," said Gomez in his initial report.

As CONMEBOL president, the Uruguayan looked to distribute the money via "a network of corruption that hit South American football with impunity and persisted for decades."

Gomez's report said the system made it impossible for contractors to tender for market-



ing and television rights for football tournaments organized by CONMEBOL.

"These actions caused harm to clubs and professional players in Uruguay, notably reducing the sums they could have received," added Gomez, who in December 2013 received a complaint from the Uruguayan footballers union over the actions of several officials, including Figueredo.

Figueredo was one of seven top FIFA officials arrested at a Zurich luxury hotel in May, a raid that kicked off an unprecedented crisis at world football's governing body.

The United States, which led the investigation, is also seeking to extradite Figueredo

on charges of soliciting multi-million-dollar bribes from sports marketing firms.

Figueredo had agreed to be sent to Uruguay but is fighting extradition to the United States.

He was head of the Uruguayan Football Association from 1997 to 2006 and became CONMEBOL president in 2013.

CONMEBOL's last three presidents have all been arrested in the scandal, plunging the South American confederation into crisis.

At FIFA, the spiraling scandal took a dramatic new turn last week when the organisation banned disgraced president Sepp Blatter from football for eight years over ethics violations.

World Cup payment affair could cost German football, says president

Berlin: Germany's football federation DFB could face higher tax demands as a result of the affair into payments made to FIFA connected to the 2006 World Cup, interim president **Rainer Koch** says.

Koch said in a video interview on the DFB website he feared a loss of the federation's charitable status as a result of an investigation by tax authorities.

This could result in "very considerable demands for (tax) payments which we also couldn't meet from the petty cash," Koch said.

A club or association which has charitable status enjoys a number of tax breaks in Germany. Koch is acting DFB president alongside German Football League president Reinhard Rauball following the resignation of Wolfgang Niersbach on November 9.

Niersbach said he took responsibility in the affair surrounding a payment made by Germany's 2006 World Cup organizing committee of 6.7 million euros (7.4 million dollars) to FIFA.

Prosecuting authorities have launched a tax evasion investigation into Niersbach, former DFB president Theo Zwanziger and former DFB secretary general Horst R Schmidt around the payment made in 2005.



Russia confident of safe 2018 World Cup



Berlin: Russia does not fear a terrorist attack at the 2018 World Cup, organising committee chief Alexey Sorokin told Germany's Die Welt daily yesterday.

Russian authorities have a "developed concept and a strategy which we believe is so good that there will be no attacks during the 2018 World Cup," he said. Sorokin, 43 said there had never been a terrorist attack at a football World Cup and Russia "won't be an exception". Russian security plans were not changed after the terrorist attacks in Paris and near the Stade de France in Saint-Denis on November 13, he said.



TRIBUTE

Footballer who became one of the greatest coaches in Britain

Howe was a mainstay of the 1958 World Cup finals in Sweden, where England narrowly lost out on a quarter-final place

By Peter Mason
The Guardian

Don Howe, who has died aged 80, made a bigger name for himself in football as No 2 to a succession of managers than most have done from being in the hot seat itself. Following a successful playing career in the 1950s and 60s for West Bromwich Albion, Arsenal and England, he was intermittently appointed to a number of high-profile managerial posts. But it was in the influential position of head coach or assistant manager that Howe really made his mark.

An instrumental backroom figure with Bertie Mee's league and cup double-winning Arsenal side of 1971, he was a more than able lieutenant to the England managers Ron Greenwood, Bobby Robson and Terry Venables, and helped to engineer FA Cup wins for Arsenal under Terry Neill in 1979 and for Wimbledon under Bobby Gould in 1988. A master tactician with great insight into the game, particularly in terms of defence, he was one of the best coaches Britain has ever produced.

Howe's achievements in the coaching sphere should not, however, overshadow his accomplishments on the pitch. A gifted and thoughtful player, he was generally regarded as West Brom's best ever right-back, and

appeared 23 times for his country. He was a mainstay of the 1958 World Cup finals in Sweden, where England narrowly lost out on a quarter-final place after defeat in a play-off against the Soviet Union.

Just about the only unremarkable aspect of Howe's footballing life was his managerial record. At various stages between 1971 and 1992 he had stints in charge at West Brom, Galatasaray, Arsenal, Queens Park Rangers and Coventry City, yet rarely suggested that the wider aspects of management were his strongest suit. Coaching was what he did best.

Born in Wolverhampton, where he went to St Peter's Collegiate school, Howe joined First Division West Brom as a youth player in 1950 and turned professional in 1952, although it was three years before he made his debut. He played 342 league matches for the club, and by 1957 was making his first appearance for England, in a home international against Wales, at the age of 22. His 23 international caps came in a flurry from 1957 to 1959, before he lost his place to Jimmy Armfield, and he was ever present in the 1958 World Cup finals, where he was one of only six England players to play in all four matches - alongside the likes of Robson, Johnny Haynes and the captain, Billy Wright.

It was Wright, as manager of Arsenal in 1964, who helped to persuade Howe to move from



Don Howe playing for Arsenal in 1966. PICTURE: Central Press/Getty Images

West Brom to London for a fee of £42,000. But in 1966, after 70 league appearances as captain of his new club, Howe broke his leg and never played in the first team again. Fortunately his England manager of 1958, Walter Winterbottom, had persuaded him to prepare for such a day, and over the years Howe had become a regular attendee at the Football Association's Lilleshall training centre, readying himself for a

coaching career. Moving straight on to the backroom staff at Arsenal, he initially became chief coach under the inexperienced Mee. By 1969 he had become Mee's No 2, helping Arsenal to win the 1970 Fairs Cup (4-3 on aggregate against Anderlecht) and then the double in 1970-71, when they took both the league, by a point from Leeds United, and the FA Cup, defeating Liverpool 2-1. Notwithstanding Mee's

contribution, Howe was widely held to be the chief architect of those feats, and was immediately offered the manager's job at West Brom. He had four seasons there, but his team were relegated from the First Division in his second campaign, and he failed to get them back up again.

After a brief period as a coach under Armfield at Leeds, Howe had a year in Turkey managing Galatasaray before returning

to Leeds as assistant manager, again with Armfield. But he was tempted back to Highbury in 1977 as head coach under his former Arsenal teammate Neill, who was only a year or so into his seven-year tenure at the club. In the following seasons Howe coached the team to three consecutive FA Cup finals - winning one of them, in 1979, 3-2 against Manchester United - and to the European Cup Winners' Cup final in 1980, which was lost on penalties to Valencia. In 1981 he was simultaneously brought in by Greenwood as a part-time England coach, and when Greenwood left, his successor, Robson, kept him on.

After Neill was sacked in late 1983, Howe was made caretaker manager at Arsenal, taking up the post full-time a few months later. There was nothing worse than seventh place during his three-season spell, but he resigned near the end of 1985-86 amid rumours that he was about to be replaced.

After a time teaching football in Saudi Arabia, in 1987 he joined the "crazy gang" at Wimbledon as assistant to Gould, helping to mastermind their surprise 1-0 victory over Liverpool in the 1988 FA Cup final. From 1989 to 1991 he again tried his hand at management, this time with First Division QPR, before being replaced by Gerry Francis. More significantly, during this period Howe was also an important

part of Robson's management team at the 1990 World Cup finals, where England missed out on an appearance in the final only by virtue of losing a penalty shoot-out with West Germany. Thanks partly to Howe's input, it was England's most successful tournament since they won the World Cup in 1966.

After leaving QPR, he was back as an assistant again shortly afterwards, as he teamed up with Terry Butcher at Coventry City. When Butcher was sacked in 1992, Howe became manager himself, keeping the side in the First Division by the skin of their teeth as the Premier League era loomed. But before the new epoch could begin, he decided to call it a day.

Howe continued with the national set-up as assistant to Venables, concluding with England's progress to the semi-finals at the 1996 European Championship. The following year he went back to Arsenal for a quieter life as head youth-team coach, spending six years in post and presiding over two FA Youth Cup wins during that period.

In 2003 he retired with a reputation as one of the most well-liked and respected figures in British football.

He is survived by his wife, Pauline.

• Donald Howe, footballer, coach, and manager, born 12 October 1935; died 23 December 2015

FOCUS

'FIFA gave Russia 12 on 10-point scale for 2018 WC preparation'

IAN S
Moscow

FIFA has graded Russia 12 on a scale of 10 for its work in 2015 in preparing for the 2018 World Cup, Sports Minister and Local Organising Committee (LOC) head Vitaly Mutko has said.

"FIFA is annually evaluating the work of the organizing committees on its 10-point system," Mutko, who is also the president of the Russian Football Union (RFU) and a member of the FIFA Executive Committee, said on Friday, reports Tass.

"We were graded 12 for our work in 2015. The advanced grade was awarded for our ahead-of-schedule work."

He said the LOC had already approved a total of 64 training bases to accommodate the participants of the global football championship and introduced an electronic database, which provides information about each of the facilities.

"We have completed the projects concepts concerning security, communications and transportation," the minister said.

"Back in 2013 the Russian government already adopted a special program, which included about 300 facilities," he said.

"They are all currently under construction payed by the federal budget. In addition we have added up approximately the same amount of regional infrastructure facilities. In general - the work is currently underway in all possible directions, everything goes in line with the announced schedule and everything is under our control," Mutko added.

Last week Mutko announced the budget of Russia's LOC in charge of the World Cup organisation would stand in 2016 at four billion roubles (\$57 million).

"Two billion, or maybe less, were allocated by FIFA. The rest of the money comes from the state budget and donations of our business partners," Mutko announced last week.

Russia won the bid to host the 2018 World Cup at the FIFA Congress in Guatemala on December 4, 2010, in a tight race against the bid from England, the joint bid from Portugal and

Spain and the joint bid on behalf of Belgium and the Netherlands.

The country selected 11 host cities to be the venues for the matches of the 2018 World Cup and they are Moscow, St. Petersburg, Sochi, Kazan, Saransk, Kaliningrad, Volgograd, Rostov-on-Don, Nizhny Novgorod, Yekaterinburg and Samara.

The matches will be held between June 14 and July 15 at 12 stadiums located in the 11 aforementioned cities across Russia. Two of the stadiums are located in the Russian capital.

In September, a total of 33 cities across Russia involving over 450,000 people were celebrating the 1,000-day countdown of the tournament. Main celebrations of Russia's countdown were held in Moscow.

This summer Russia's second largest city of St. Petersburg was the venue for the tourney's preliminary draw, which is the first major kick-off event ahead of the global tournament itself. A total of 208 nations participated in the event on July 25 and it was for the first time in the history of World Cups, when all national teams registered for the draw.



ONE SMOKER.
TWO PATIENTS.

TOBACCO KILLS

SPOTLIGHT

Pakistan divided on tainted Amir's return

AFP
Lahore

Former players and fans yesterday voiced contrasting opinions about the prospect of talented Mohamed Amir re-joining Pakistan's national squad after finishing a five-year ban over spot fixing.

The 23-year-old Amir has shown remarkable wicket-taking form in domestic matches since his ban was relaxed in April this year, taking 84 wickets in 12 four-day and 11 Twenty20 matches.

Amir, then Test captain Salman Butt and Mohammad Asif were charged with accepting money in exchange for arranging deliberate no-balls during a Test match at Lord's in England in 2010.

The three players and their agent Mazhar Majeed were jailed by a British court in 2011. Amir, Butt and Asif were also banned from cricket for five years.

Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has included Amir in a training camp from which a squad will be selected for next

month's tour of New Zealand where they are scheduled to play three one-day internationals and as many Twenty20 internationals.

Amir is a favourite to get the selectors' nod, pending his visa for New Zealand. But former Pakistan captain Rashid Latif said Amir should not be selected for the national team.

"Amir is a living example of someone who betrayed Pakistan in an international match," Latif, who risked his career in the fight against match-fixing, told AFP.

Latif blew the whistle on some of his fellow players in 1995, his testimony forming the basis of a match fixing inquiry three years later.

Latif said Amir should only play domestic matches and leagues.

"Let him live his life but don't allow him to play for the country again. He can play domestic cricket and play in different leagues but don't allow him to wear the same national colour which stalwarts like Hanif Mohammad, Imran Khan, Majid Khan, Wasim Bari, Fazal Mahmood and Javed Miandad wore with pride," said Latif.

Two current Pakistan players—

former Twenty captain Mohamed Hafeez and current one-day skipper Azhar Ali also objected to the presence of Amir in the camp and it was only after PCB convinced them, that they joined the camp yesterday.

But another former captain, Mohamed Yousuf, backed Amir's inclusion. "Amir is a wonderful bowler and since he has completed his sentence he has every right to play for Pakistan again," said Yousuf in a television interview.

"Amir is performing very well since his ban was lifted and his inclusion will strengthen Pakistan team, so I back his inclusion," said Yousuf.

Fans on the street mostly backed Amir.

"He was a kid when the scandal happened," said Asfaq Khan, an engineering student, referring to the fact that Amir was 18 years old in 2010. "Amir is a special bowler and deserves a place in the team."

Butt and Asif will also feature in a national one-day tournament next month and can press their chances for selection once they complete their rehabilitation.



MOHAMED AMIR

REPORT

Burns and Khawaja pummel Windies on Boxing Day

Queensland duo add 258 runs for second wicket, Australia 345-3 at stumps

Reuters
Melbourne

Usman Khawaja and Joe Burns rewarded the Australian selectors' faith with a pair of sparkling centuries as the hosts dominated a limp West Indies attack on the opening day of the second Test yesterday.

Having recovered from a hamstring strain, Khawaja celebrated his recall with a glittering 144, with Queensland team mate Burns making 128 in front of a festive Melbourne Cricket Ground crowd to drive Australia to 345-3 at stumps.

The pair's 258-run stand remained unbroken until well into the final session, with captain Steve Smith (32 not out) and Adam Voges (10) untested during the final overs.

After a run of modest scores, Burns was widely tipped to make way for the returning Khawaja but it was middle order batter Shaun Marsh making way for the stylish left-hander.

"It was just a nice feeling to make a 100 for Australia on Boxing Day," Burns told reporters.

"Certainly something to savour ... Hopefully we can go on and win the test match and win the series."

Australia won the opener emphatically in Hobart and took a big stride toward sealing the three-match series with a game in hand after being sent in to bat by West Indies captain Jason Holder.

Holder's decision was a poor one in hindsight, with the green-tinged MCG pitch flattening out in bright sunshine after rain held up play for an hour.

His players again failed to rally, however, with the bowling tepid at best and fielding at times abysmal. Khawaja was dropped on 23 shortly after lunch after nicking a half-chance to the gully and spooned the simplest of chances to Marlon Samuels at cover to again be relieved on 142.

He and Burns came together early after opener David Warner was dismissed for a quickfire 23 and they erased any lingering confidence the Caribbeans nursed after their innings and 212-run thrashing in Hobart.

Unbeaten at tea, Burns and Khawaja ramped up their attack in the final session and raced to reach their centuries.

Burns made his ton and sec-



Australian batsman Joe Burns (L) and Usman Khawaja (R) celebrate scoring centuries against the West Indies on the first day of the second Test in Melbourne yesterday. (AFP)

ond test century first with a punch for three through point. Khawaja followed two balls later, scrambling for a single presented by a misfield. The pair ploughed on steadily to guide Australia past 250, with their opponents' hopes seemingly fixed on the batsmen suffering a lapse in concentration rather than succumbing to any sustained pressure. As it happened, Burns duly delivered after the drinks break,

getting stumped after charging down the wicket at part-time spinner Kraigg Brathwaite. Khawaja appeared to succumb to fatigue rather than the bowler's guile as he tickled Taylor down the leg-side to be caught behind. Kraigg Brathwaite said it was a "decent day" for the tourists. "Obviously (have to) try to be build some pressure to not let them score so freely," said the spinner.

FOCUS

WICB needs to solve problem of players' absence, says Simmons

IAN S
Melbourne

Head coach Phil Simmons has said the West Indies Cricket Board (WICB) needs to find a solution to the problem of regional players opting to play Twenty20s instead of international cricket.

Several players with Test experience are currently campaigning in the Big Bash League T20 Down Under while the West Indies are clashing with Australia in a three-Test series, and Simmons said it was "frustrating" not having these players available to strengthen the squad, reports CMC.

"I'm totally frustrated," Simmons told media at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG).

"It's enjoyable to see (Andre) Russell bowling at 140 clicks and (Dwayne) Bravo hitting three or four sixes and Chris (Gayle) in (playing the Big Bash)."

"It is frustrating that we don't have them yet playing in a Test series but it's something that's been going on for a while."

"It's up to our administration and our bosses to find out how is the best way that we can get these guys on the pitch," he added.

Gayle, with 103 Tests to his name and an average of 42 runs per innings, has not played the longest format for the Caribbean side in over a year due mainly to injury.

Bravo, meanwhile, an energetic all-rounder, played the last of his 40 Tests five years ago and retired from the format earlier this year to focus on limited overs cricket.

Russell, an explosive 27-year-old all-rounder, has already said his dodgy knees are unable to hold up to the rigours of the game's longest format.

Former Test captain Darren Sammy and Lendl Simmons, also currently playing in the Big Bash, have also both quit Test cricket while leg-spinner Samuel Badree - another T20 star plying his trade Down Under - has never played in a Test.

Trinidadian Simmons, who was recently suspended by the WICB for controversially claiming there was "outside interference" in the selection of the one-day team for the Sri Lanka series last month, said there was much to be learned from the New Zealand example.

"It's up to the administration to work out how we get to the stage of, let's say New Zealand, because they have similar things and they are getting all their players to play," he said.

"And it's up to our administration and our bosses to find out how is the best way that we can get these guys on the pitch."

The West Indies face Australia in the second Test at the MCG, following their heavy innings and 212-run defeat in the opening Test in Hobart a fortnight ago.



PHIL SIMMONS

SCOREBOARD

Australia 1st innings	
J. Burns st Ramdin b K. Brathwaite.....	128
D. Warner c Samuels b Taylor.....	23
U. Khawaja c Ramdin b Taylor.....	144
S. Smith not out.....	32
A. Voges not out.....	10
Extras (lb3 nb2 w3).....	8
Total (for 3 wickets, 90 overs).....	345
Fall of wickets: 1-29, 2-287, 3-328.	
Bowling: J. Taylor 18-2-83-2, K. Roach 10-1-53-0, J. Holder 17-6-33-0, C. Brathwaite 20-1-71-0, J. Warrican 16-1-71-0, K. Brathwaite 9-1-31-1.	

SPOTLIGHT

Taylor and Compton lead England revival

'This field holds the water a little bit, the ball is kind of damp all day and it made it tough to swing'

AFP
Durban

Nick Compton and James Taylor hit half-centuries and dug England out of trouble on a rain-hit first day of the first Test against South Africa at Kingsmead yesterday.

England were 179 for four at the close of play after being sent in to bat.

Fast bowler Dale Steyn spoiled a good recovery by the tourists when he struck shortly before the close, having Taylor caught behind for 70.

Compton and Taylor came together with England struggling on 49 for three and forged a partnership of 125 off 274 balls.

Taylor was dismissed in fading light, capping a fine comeback from injury by Steyn, who took three for 29.

"I thought overall it was pretty solid day for us. To get into the position we are in now it was pretty special day for the England camp," Taylor told reporters.

Steyn dismissed English opening batsmen Alastair Cook and Alex Hales cheaply, while off-spinner Dane Piedt took the wicket of Joe Root for 24 with his first ball of the match.

Compton and Taylor batted solidly on a slow pitch which did not offer the bowlers as much assistance as South African captain Hashim Amla might have hoped when he won the toss and sent England in to bat in overcast conditions.

Compton, returning to the city of his birth and early upbringing, was resolute and almost strokeless at times as he made 63 not out off 179 balls, with four boundaries.

The diminutive Taylor was more enterprising, using his feet well, particularly against the spin bowlers, and made his runs off 137 balls with nine fours and a six off left-arm spinner Dean Elgar.

After rain delayed the start, only 27 minutes of cricket was possible before rain brought an early lunch, while there was a 22-minute rain break during an extended afternoon's play.

Steyn, who had not played any cricket since suffering a groin injury on the first day of a series in India on November 5, found his rhythm almost immediately and had skipper Cook caught at second slip by Elgar for a duck off the fifth ball of his second over.

He did not concede a run in the 3.1 overs he bowled before lunch.

England new cap Alex Hales got off the mark with a clip to leg for two off the first ball he faced from Kyle Abbott and looked comfortable at the crease, although the only ball he faced against Steyn during the morning was the last delivery before the rain.

When play resumed, he faced only four more balls without adding to his score of ten before edging a Steyn outswinger to wicketkeeper AB de Villiers. Root looked busy at the crease and made 24 off 37 balls, including a pulled six off Abbott. But he went back



England batsman Nicholas Compton bats during day one of the first Test against South Africa at Kingsmead Stadium in Durban yesterday. (AFP)

on his stumps when Piedt came into the attack and was trapped leg before wicket by a ball which spun back at him. He asked for a review of umpire Aleem Dar's decision but replays showed the ball would have clipped the top of his stumps.

The breakthrough achieved, Amla took Piedt off and brought back Steyn. But Tay-

lor looked confident from the start of his innings.

"We were lucky to get the wicket at the end but we'll take it," Steyn said.

"Conditions are tough when you are coming on and off for rain. This field holds the water a little bit, the ball is kind of damp all day and it made it tough to swing and shape."



South Africa's Dale Steyn celebrates after dismissing England's James Taylor during the first day of first the Test in Durban yesterday. (AFP)

SCOREBOARD

ENGLAND First Innings	
A. Cook c Elgar b Steyn.....	0
A. Hales c De Villiers b Steyn.....	10
N. Compton not out	63
J. Root lbw b Piedt	24
J. Taylor c De Villiers b Steyn	70
B. Stokes not out	5
Extras (b1, lb2, nb3, w1)	7
Total (4 wkts, 65.1 overs)	179
Fall of wickets: 1-3 (Cook), 2-12 (Hales), 3-49 (Root), 4-174 (Taylor)	
Bowling: Steyn 15.1-3-29-3, Abbott 16-2-40-0 (1nb), Morkel 15-1-44-0 (2nb, 1w), Piedt 11-2-39-1, Van Zyl 2-1-2-0, Elgar 6-1-22-0	

NZ bowling production line a concern for Sri Lanka

Just when Sri Lanka thought batting would be easier without new-ball pair Tim Southee and Trent Boult after the Test series, a more damaging New Zealand duo stepped up to the plate in the first one-dayer between the sides in Christchurch yesterday.

Matt Henry and Adam Milne reduced the visitors to 27 for five inside 10 overs at Hagley Oval in the opener of the five-match series as New Zealand cruised to a seven-wicket victory.

Henry, who struggled in Australia last month and took just two wickets for 158 runs in the drawn second test in Perth, produced an outstanding opening six-over spell on Saturday with figures of 4-26. He finished with 4-49 from 10 overs. Both he and Milne regularly clocked in excess of 140kph per hour, with the fiery Milne exceeding 150 kph on several deliveries, a far cry from the 130-140 kph range that Southee and Boult delivered in the Test series against Sri Lanka.

What was most important for New Zealand captain Brendon McCullum, however, was that with Test seamer Doug Bracewell, who impressed yesterday with 3-37, and left-arm quick Mitchell McClenaghan, he now has a deep pace bowling unit to choose from. "I think both Adam Milne and Matt Henry with the new ball back in their hands were outstanding for us," McCullum said in a televised interview.

"I thought Mitchell McClenaghan and Doug Bracewell were outstanding as well," he added after McClenaghan picked up two wickets with his aggressive bowling rearing off a length on a pitch that was described as a "belter" by both captains. Southee and Boult have been rested for at least the first two matches, with left-arm Boult not available until the fourth match in Nelson on January 2. McCullum, however, was not overly concerned.

"We have two outstanding bowlers in Trent Boult and Tim Southee, who are vastly experienced and have been the kingpins for us for a long time," he said. "For them not to be in this lineup and for the guys to have stepped up like they did today was very pleasing for everyone. "We are lucky at the moment that we are building some depth and the boys are going okay. "Nobody would want to be rotated out of the squad."

ODI

Henry, McCullum lead NZ rout of Sri Lanka

AFP
Christchurch

Brendon McCullum launched his farewell tour in rollicking form yesterday with a whirlwind 55 to set up New Zealand's seven-wicket win over Sri Lanka in their opening one-day international in Christchurch.

In a 25-ball stay at the crease, McCullum smacked 11 fours and one six to have Sri Lanka on the ropes before he departed with New Zealand only needing a further 81 runs in 40 overs.

Martin Guptill posted his 26th half-century on his way to 79 off 56 deliveries while debutant Henry Nicholls was not out on 23 when the innings ended at the end of the 20th over.

New Zealand were set a modest 189 target after Matt Henry destroyed the cream of the Sri Lankan top order in a brief spell of 16 balls when he took four wickets for two runs.

Sri Lanka were eventually all out for 188 in 47 overs on a wicket that promised runs galore, and New Zealand knocked off the target with ease.

McCullum credited the quick-fire victory to what he described as "a truly outstanding bowling performance" by Adam Milne and Matt Henry.

"With the new ball in their

bands, they were outstanding for us and that's where the winning of the game was when you're needing to chase 190 and know the wicket is going to be good," he said.

Sri Lanka skipper Angelo Mathews regretted that his bowlers were not as threatening.

"It's not easy to bowl at Brendon McCullum and Martin Guptill," he said.

"They are power hitters and they go after the bowling from the very beginning. We just need to bowl in the right areas more often."

The big-hitting McCullum, who announced before the five-match ODI series began that he will retire from international cricket in February, lived up to his pledge to bow out on top of his game.

His whirlwind opening partnership with Guptill brought up the New Zealand 100 inside 10 overs. When New Zealand reached 53 without loss after six overs, Sri Lankan captain Mathews put himself on to try to arrest the run onslaught.

McCullum had other ideas and took 16 off Mathews' over and 12 off Ajantha Mendis in the next to put Sri Lanka out of the game.

Mathews said when he won the toss he wanted to bat to get first use of a pitch that "looks like a belter".



Brendon McCullum of New Zealand plays a shot during the first one-day international against Sri Lanka at Hagley Park in Christchurch yesterday. (AFP)

But the wickets started falling early with a 98-run stand by Milinda Siriwardana and Nuwan Kulasekara for the seventh wicket their one partnership of note.

They fell from 13 without loss to 27-5 and then 65-6 before Siriwardana (66) and Kulasekara (58) stemmed the rot. Siriwardana's dismissal

started the final slide in which the last four wickets fell for 25 runs. Dushmantha Chameera, who was not out 13, was the only other batsman to reach double figures.

Milne, having fully recovered from the heel injury that sidelined him in the World Cup, was bowling near the 150kph

(93mph) mark and while he tied the batsman down at one end, Henry did the damage at the other. Inside three overs he removed Tillakaratne Dilshan, Lahiru Thirimanne, Mathews and Dinesh Chandimal.

Dilshan (nine) top edged the ball to midwicket where Nicholls celebrated his interna-

SCOREBOARD

SRI LANKA	
D. Gunathilaka c Ronchi b Milne	8
T. Dilshan c Nicholls b Henry	9
L. Thirimanne lbw b Henry	1
D. Chandimal c Taylor b Henry	5
A. Mathews c Latham b Henry	0
M. Siriwardana c B. McCullum b Bracewell	66
C. Kapugedera c Santner b Bracewell	8
N. Kulasekara c Ronchi b McClenaghan	58
A. Mendis c Ronchi b McClenaghan	4
D. Chameera not out	13
S. Lakmal c Latham b Bracewell	8
Extras (w-8)	8
Total (all out, 47 overs)	188
Fall of wickets: 1-13, 2-20, 3-23, 4-23, 5-27, 6-65, 7-163, 8-164, 9-167, 10-188	
Bowling: A. Milne 10-0-30-1(w-3), M. Henry: 10-1-49-4(w-2), M. McClenaghan 10-2-40-2(w-3), D. Bracewell 9-1-37-3, M. Santner 8-0-32-0.	
NEW ZEALAND	
M. Guptill c N. Kulasekara b Siriwardana	79
B. McCullum c Lakmal b Siriwardana	55
T. Latham b Dilshan	18
R. Taylor not out	5
H. Nicholls not out	23
Extras (lb-1 w-10)	11
Total (for 3 wickets, 21 overs)	191
Fall of wickets: 1-108, 2-162, 3-164.	
Bowling: N. Kulasekara 3-0-27-0, S. Lakmal 3-0-24-0(w-1), A. Mathews 1-0-17-0(w-1), A. Mendis 5-0-49-0(w-2), M. Siriwardana 5-0-45-2, D. Chameera 2-0-18-0(w-3), T. Dilshan 2-0-10-1(w-1).	

tional debut with a catch above the head, Thirimanne faced 19 deliveries for one run and Mathews went first ball. Chandimal was dropped on five off Milne's bowling, but Henry claimed the

wicket four balls later without addition to the score to finish with four for 49. Doug Bracewell, who broke up the Siriwardana-Kulasekara partnership, had figures of three for 37.

NBA

Warriors rely on defence to edge Cavs in rematch of finals

'Our offence was nice at times but we answered at the other end. We got stops and pretty much grinded it out'

DPA
Los Angeles

The sequel was not nearly as dramatic as the original as the Golden State Warriors again came out on top, leaving the Cleveland Cavaliers with a lump of coal for Christmas. Draymond Green collected 22 points, 15 rebounds and seven assists, Stephen Curry netted 19, and the defending champion Warriors ground out a 89-83 Christmas Day victory over the visiting Cavs in their highly-anticipated NBA finals rematch.

"It got the build-up and it almost felt like the finals," said Curry, comparing the atmosphere to last June's championship series. "But once we got on the floor it was business as usual."

The Warriors, averaging a league-best 115 points per game, put up a season-low total. But their stingy defence held the Cavs to a frosty 31.6 per cent field goal shooting for the win.

"If our defence offence shows up we're in pretty good shape to win games," said Curry, who added seven rebounds and as many rebounds despite being slowed by a calf injury. "Our offence was nice at times but we answered at the other end. We got stops and pretty much grinded it out."

The Warriors improved to 28-1, the best start in NBA history, but know they can play even better. "We're 28-1 and we're not playing well," Green said. "That what excites me."

Klay Thompson had 18 points and Shaun Livingston added 16 off the bench for the Warriors, who pushed their home winning streak to 32 dating back to January, including a 14-0 this season. "What you saw today was not high-scoring with a lot of runs, it was a lot of back and forth with a lot of defence," Livingston said. "We're comfortable with winning those types of games."

LeBron James scored 25 points and JR Smith added 14 for the East-best Cavs (19-8) whose six-game winning streak ended. "I wasn't very good offensively and it trickled down to everybody else," said James, who made just 10-of-26 floor shots.

"Through 48 minutes we followed our defensive game plan and made it tough on them but offensively we were out of rhythm and have to be better. Credit their defence, for sure."

With neither club able to get much separation, the Warriors finally opened up an 81-71 advantage on a soaring Green layup with 3:48 left. But the Cavs weren't finished.

James answered with back-to-back power dunks and blocked a Thompson shot before Kevin Love's (10 points and 18 rebounds) tip-in pulled the visitors to within 81-77 at the 2:15 mark.

With a chance to inch closer, James missed two free throws. Curry, then, sandwiched pair of nifty layups around a Smith 3-pointer to make it 85-80 with 57.6 seconds to play.

James made 1-of-2 free throws, pulling the Cavs within four but threw up an air-ball on a 3-point attempt with 12.7 seconds left.

Andre Iguodala and Green each made a pair of free throws to send the Cavs home empty again.

"They're playing the right way," James said, "They're playing cohesive and with great continuity."



LeBron James (centre) of the Cleveland Cavaliers shoots over Golden State Warriors players during their NBA basketball game at Oracle Arena in Oakland, California. (AFP)

MIAMI HEAT 96, NEW ORLEANS PELICANS 88 (OT)

Chris Bosh scored 30 points, Dwyane Wade added 19, and the two stars combined for 13 of Miami's 16 overtime points, leading the Heat (17-11) past the visiting Pelicans (9-20) who wasted a 29-point, 16-rebound effort from Anthony Davis.

CHICAGO BULLS 105, OKLAHOMA CITY THUNDER 96

Jimmy Butler scored 23 points, Spaniard Pau

Gasol had 21 with 13 rebounds, and the visiting Bulls held off the Thunder to snap a three-game slide. The Bulls (16-11) carried an 18-point bulge into the fourth quarter, but had it cut to 99-93 with 2:38 remaining before regrouping.

Butler hit two free throws and Gasol added a layup, pushing the lead back to 10 with 2:03 left, and the Thunder suffered just its second loss in the last 10 games.

Kevin Durant led Oklahoma City (20-10) with 29 points, nine rebounds and seven assists, while Russell Westbrook finished with 26

points, seven rebounds and eight assists.

LA CLIPPERS 94, LA LAKERS 84

Chris Paul scored 23 points, Blake Griffin had 13 with 14 rebounds, and the visiting Clippers (17-13) held off a late rush to beat their co-Staples Centre neighbors for the eighth straight time.

Trailing by 28 early in the fourth quarter, the Lakers went on a 25-4 run to draw within 89-82 with four minutes left. But Wesley Johnson buried a key triple and the Clippers stopped their three-game slide.

Kobe Bryant, who plans to retire at the end of this season, had 12 points for the West-worst Lakers (5-12) in his final Christmas Day game.

HOUSTON ROCKETS 88, SAN ANTONIO SPURS 84

James Harden fired in 18 of his 20 points in the second half, including key back-to-back-triples in final 4.5 minutes, and the host Rockets (16-15) stopped the Spurs' seven-game winning streak.

Kawhi Leonard scored 20 points for San Antonio (25-6.)

LAKERS' BRYANT LEADS EARLY VOTING FOR ALL-STAR GAME

Los Angeles: Kobe Bryant (right), in his swan song season for the Los Angeles Lakers, is the early leader in voting for the 2016 NBA All-Star game, the NBA announced on Friday. Despite his mediocre form this season, Bryant has logged 719,235 votes, more than 200,000 ahead of Golden State Warriors guard Stephen Curry (510,202).

LeBron James of the Cleveland Cavaliers leads the Eastern Conference with 357,937 votes, followed by Miami Heat guard Dwyane Wade (300,595). The 65th NBA All-Star game will be played in Toronto on Feb. 14. Voting runs until Jan. 19. Fans will select three frontcourt players and two guards from each conference.

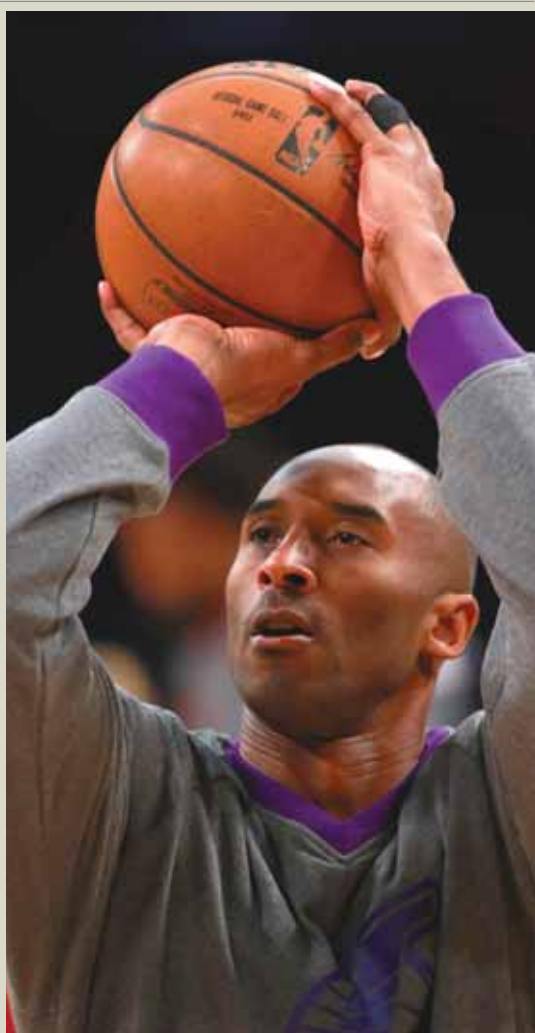
Bryant, 37, is listed as a frontcourt player. Bryant, who announced last month that the 2015-16 campaign will be his final season, is the all-time highest NBA All-Star scorer with 280 points. His 17 All-Star selections is second behind the 19 appearances by Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, the legendary Lakers center.

MORRIS APOLOGISES FOR A TOWEL-THROWING INCIDENT

Phoenix Suns forward Markieff Morris apologised for a towel-throwing incident that resulted in a two-game suspension for conduct detrimental to the team.

He was disciplined by the Suns on Thursday for throwing a towel at coach Jeff Hornacek during Wednesday's home loss against Denver. Morris will miss games against the Philadelphia 76ers on Saturday and Cleveland Cavaliers on Monday.

Morris has been unhappy with the Suns since they traded twin brother Marcus to the Detroit Pistons during the summer. He recently lost his starting job and has fallen out of favour with Hornacek.



FOCUS

Fantasy sports sites sue in Illinois court to declare games legal

Reuters
New York

Leading daily fantasy sports companies DraftKings and FanDuel filed lawsuits in Illinois on Thursday asking a judge to declare their games to be legal, a day after the state's attorney general outlawed them as gambling. The opinion Wednesday by Attorney General Lisa Madigan was the latest blow to the two companies, which are also fighting a legal battle in New York to permanently continue doing business there.

Boston-based DraftKings and New York-based FanDuel have said they would continue to operate in Illinois, despite Madigan's opinion, pending the outcome of their lawsuits, which were filed in Cook County and Sangamon County circuit courts, respectively.

Madigan was not immediately available to comment on the lawsuits. FanDuel brought its action with another fantasy sports company, Head2Head Sports LLC, based in Scottsdale, Arizona, which adds a layer of complexity to the Illinois case.

FanDuel games are daily in nature, while Head2Head's are operated on a seasonal basis.



A DraftKings logo is displayed on a board inside of the DFS Players Conference in New York. (Reuters)

The two companies asked in their lawsuit for a declaration that both types of games are legal. In November, New York's attorney general acknowledged that seasonal fantasy sports, which require skill to succeed over a period of months, are lawful, while daily games are based on chance and, therefore, are illegal gambling in the state. Illinois is the third-largest market for DraftKings and FanDuel, with 6.7 percent of their users, according to Eilers Research, LLC.

The Illinois opinion comes

amid nationwide scrutiny at the state and federal level as to whether daily fantasy sports games, which have surged in popularity in recent years, amount to gambling. In October, Nevada's gaming regulator also ordered the online sites to cease operations in the state.

The fantasy sports industry allows participants to assemble imaginary pro football, baseball, basketball and hockey teams from rosters of real players and to accumulate points based on how those players perform in actual games over the course of a season.

The daily versions allow fans to spend money on the game with a frequency that critics say is akin to sports betting. Purveyors of fantasy sports argue it is a skilled-based entertainment product, not wagering.

DraftKings and FanDuel, both privately held, have valuations of more than \$1 billion; high-profile investors have poured money into both.

Their businesses in New York and Illinois could also be saved by legislatures in those states, where legalisation bills have been introduced. But the level of support for these bills is unclear.

DraftKings hired a high-profile legal team in November, including David Boies and Randy Mastro, to fight cease-and-desist letters from New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman.

Schneiderman had demanded that the companies stop taking money from players in the state. On Dec. 11, Schneiderman won injunctions against DraftKings and FanDuel, but later the same day a state appellate court temporarily stayed the order.

The companies, as a result, may continue to operate in New York until at least early January, when the appeals court is to hold another hearing.

SPOTLIGHT

Dodgers' Gonzalez takes to the ring to fight off the effects

Gonzalez has made adjustments to his swing, as he looks to drive the ball to right-center field instead of left-center

By Dylan Hernandez
Los Angeles Times

The walls of the Wild Card Boxing Club are adorned with images of the champions who have called this place home. Manny Pacquiao. Miguel Cotto. James Toney. Johnny Tapia. Under their unmoving stares, Marvin Somodio held out a pair of mitts that absorb rapid sequences of thudding punches. Somodio has worked with several world champion boxers. On this particular day, he was training Los Angeles Dodgers first baseman Adrian Gonzalez.

From a southpaw stance, Gonzalez delivered two left uppercuts in succession. Then, a left uppercut followed by a right hook. With every blow Gonzalez landed, Somodio's mitts boomed. The owner of this Hollywood landmark, Freddie Roach, looked on curiously.

"He's not at a main-event level yet, but he's got the fundamentals down," said Roach, who is best known for training Pacquiao.

Boxing became a significant part of Gonzalez's off-season training program three years ago. He was living in the San Diego area at the time and worked with Chris Byrd, a former heavyweight champion. "I find I get more work and better work out of this than lifting weights," Gonzalez said. "This gets my core strong, my shoulders strong, my back strong, which are three of the things I need most in baseball."

Gonzalez became a year-round Los Angeles resident last year, but wanted to continue boxing in the winter. He liked the way the workouts prepared his body to withstand the grind of a 162-game season. "What better place than here?" Gonzalez said.

So Gonzalez dropped by one day and asked if he could hire someone to work with him. He found a trainer in Somodio, who was once the head trainer for former light-welterweight champion Ruslan Provodnikov. This marks Gonzalez's second off-season with Somodio.

Gonzalez believes these workouts are becoming increasingly critical to him. One month into the upcoming season, he will turn 34. The left-handed-hitting Gonzalez has already made adjustments to his swing, as he looks to drive the ball to right-center field instead of left-center. He is also making changes to his workout schedule, as he started training less than two weeks after the Dodgers were eliminated from the playoffs by the New York Mets.

"I feel like the older I get, the more time I take off, the more time it takes me to get back into it," he said. "So if I take a month off, it will take me a month just to get my body back into that kind of shape."

Gonzalez accepts he is entering a new stage of his career. "I'm a realist," he said. "I'm not a guy who's trying to be something I'm not. I know what I need to do to be the best I can be. A lot of people, they hit a wall and they don't know how to get over it because they say, 'This is what I've done my whole life! That's why a lot of people get to a certain age and can't play anymore. They only know one way. I can adjust.'"

Part of his most recent adjustment is to make two visits every week to the Wild Card. He does everything a professional boxer would do to prepare for an upcoming prizefight except spar.

Somodio acknowledged he was surprised by Gonzalez's level of conditioning.



Boxing has become a significant part of Dodgers first baseman Adrian Gonzalez's off-season training programme.

"He can last," Somodio said with a laugh. "He can train all day. I'm the one who gets tired."

Gonzalez isn't the only non-boxer who has trained at the Wild Card. The first that Roach recalled was former USC offensive lineman Winston Justice. While serving a one-year suspension in college, Winston worked out daily under Roach's watch. He went on to play in the NFL. Roach also prepared Shaquille O'Neal for televised exhibition matches against Oscar De La Hoya and Shane Mosley. "He was pretty good," Roach said.

Roach tried to remember the name of another former Lakers center he trained. He turned to Somodio and asked, "Who was that other guy? The big guy, that guy that's not doing nothing right now?" Andrew Bynum.

"Andrew Bynum," Roach said with a nod. "He wanted to quit basketball and become a boxer. I talked him out of it."

On this day, Gonzalez shared his training space with a couple of heavyweight prospects, including Trey Lippe-Morrison, who is 10-0 with 10 knockouts. Lippe-Morrison is the son of Tommy Morrison, the late former heavy-

weight champion. As Lippe-Morrison entered the room, Roach gestured toward Gonzalez in the ring and told him, "Your sparring partner?"

Roach was only half-kidding. While Gonzalez won't risk injury by trading punches with a professional heavyweight, Roach thinks he would be able to hold his own against fighters of Lippe-Morrison's experience level. "He can definitely work with him," Roach said.

Later in the afternoon, as Gonzalez was nearing the end of his workout, the 7-foot Taishan Dong of China entered the room. Dong often trains side-by-side with Gonzalez. Jean Pascal is also training here for an upcoming light heavyweight title fight against champion Sergey Kovalev. "Watching these guys is fun," Gonzalez said. "It's also good knowing I can keep up from a conditioning standpoint."

Most baseball players can't. Last winter, Gonzalez had Yasiel Puig and Joe Pederson accompany him to the gym.

"Everybody says they're in shape until they step into this place," Gonzalez said. "It's a different kind of shape. It's not like running eight sprints in 20 minutes."

On the subject of Puig, Gonzalez confirmed he spoke to the outfielder after he was involved in an alleged altercation at a Miami bar last month. Gonzalez said he advised Puig to avoid drinking in public. Gonzalez said he thinks Puig can better handle the avalanche of negative publicity generated by the incident than he would have been a couple of years ago.

"He's dealt with enough that he can handle it now," Gonzalez said. "He understands he's going to get a lot of bad PR for anything he does."

Gonzalez sighed. "The problem is a lot of people don't see all the good things he does," he said. "They only focus on the bad things. He goes to the hospital and visits kids on his own without telling anybody."

When an article critical of Puig recently appeared on Bleacher Report — an anonymous former teammate was quoted saying Puig was "the worst person I've ever seen in this game" — Gonzalez sent him a text message containing a link to the story. Gonzalez also added a message in Spanish that read, "You can be whatever you want to be."

Puig responded: "Thanks, brother, I swear not to let you down." The exchange made Gonzalez optimistic. "He's got the mind and the heart for it," he said.

Though Gonzalez acknowledged he was disappointed that the Dodgers lost Zack Greinke to the division rival Arizona Diamondbacks, he also remained optimistic about the Dodgers roster as a whole. "You lose a Cy Young candidate, you're not going to replace him," Gonzalez said. "But you can use that money that you didn't spend on a couple starters and a bat."

Gonzalez said he understands why fans are concerned about the Dodgers' lack of moves this off-season. "People focus on today," Gonzalez said. "They don't focus on what it might look like in February. I tell everyone to be patient. The off-season doesn't end until Game 1 of the regular season. You never know. These guys could be working on something really big that no one is thinking of. I don't worry about it. Right now, it might seem slow, it might seem like they're not doing much, but they could be doing a ton behind the scenes."

Similar to what Gonzalez is doing here.

FOCUS

Cubs, White Sox hoping to make 2016 a special season

By Paul Sullivan
Chicago Tribune

It's the seventh-inning stretch of the off-season, a time to take stock of where teams are and who's still out there waiting for someone to stuff a few million dollars in their stockings. After bingeing by teams in early to mid-December, only crumbs typically remain on the free-agent market when Christmas rolls around and executives take a brief respite from their off-season maneuvering.

But several big-ticket items remain available, including Chris Davis, Yoanis Cespedes, Alex Gordon, Justin Upton, Scott Kazmir and Dexter Fowler. Even Alexei Ramirez is still out there in case the White Sox are interested in bringing back an enigmatic shortstop who is one year removed from an All-Star season.

"I don't think Alexei is totally out of the picture of where we're at," manager Robin Ventura said last week. Whether the Sox or Cubs will be adding remains to be seen. Both have made significant moves, and it wouldn't be surprising if either stood pat or made only minor moves the rest of the winter.

The Cubs have already filled holes with the signings of Jason Heyward, Ben Zobrist and John Lackey, while ending the Starlin Castro era by dealing the infielder for pitcher Adam Warren and a player to be released later, namely Brendan Ryan.

President Theo Epstein can now play wait-and-see with the raw and talented duo of Javier Baez and Jorge Soler, knowing either can always be dangled at the trade deadline in July if need-



White Sox general manager Rick Hahn still has work to do before the 2016 season opens.

ed. "None of us are smart enough to figure out exactly what our ballclub is going to look like at the end of the season, let alone at the trade deadline," Epstein said. "But you learn and adjust as you go."

The White Sox's offseason got off to a slow start, and for a while it looked like their biggest move was going to be the \$1,400 they received in the auction of Nancy Faust's organ. They signed two new catchers in Alex Avila and Diener Navarro, which may be a minor upgrade over the old tandem of Tyler Flowers and Geovany Soto. But then general manager Rick Hahn dipped into the old Sox playbook, snagging two players from teams that were looking to get prospects and dump some salary.

A's infielder Brett Lawrie and Reds third baseman Todd Frazier will immediately improve the lineup and add some fire to a clubhouse that desperately needed a wake-up call. And the Sox managed to keep their top prospects, Tim Anderson and Carson Fulmer, while once again putting the onus on Ventura to get it done.

Ventura had a similar focus on him last spring after Hahn added a new cast of characters that included Adam LaRoche, Melky Cabrera, Jeff Samardzija and David Robertson. All of them wound up struggling for various stretches. Asked if he was OK with having those same expectations on him, Ventura replied, "I'm just going to go with a blanket yes."

The Sox still have holes to fill and reportedly have shown interest in Gordon, who is said to be seeking about \$20 million per year for three or four years. Gordon would be a nice addition and allow them to move Cabrera to DH, but would the Sox pony up that kind of money for a solid

defensive outfielder who gets on base but lacks power? One thing to remember is Jose Abreu can opt for arbitration after 2016 and probably will, knowing the \$34 million he's guaranteed from 2017-19 will be chicken feed compared with what he'd get if he goes to arbitration those three years.

The Sox have to factor Abreu's likely salary increases into their future budgets, which could prevent them offering anyone a huge multiyear deal. Of course, the Sox could follow the lead of the Cubs, who were able to get creative this off-season because of the TV network they're preparing to launch after 2019.

"We were able to push some of the (Heyward) money back to the years we're going to have a robust TV contract," Epstein said after the \$184 million deal was announced.

The Sox's next TV deal, also set for 2020, isn't expected to be quite as robust as what the Cubs will get because their brand isn't as big as the North Siders.

Epstein credited the Cubs' business operations department for making this off-season happen, noting "how flexible they were working with us to pack as much talent as we could onto this year's roster this winter... knowing we were probably going to be a lot more restrained next winter. It will be a different marketplace, when the supply-and-demand dynamic will be much different."

No matter what else happens this winter, the Cubs will enter the 2016 season as one of the favorites to win it all, while the Sox should have enough talent to at least compete for a wild-card spot in the American League, where the Astros made it last year with 86 wins.

NHL

Veteran Wild trio puts last season's struggles in the past

'Expectations are very high because they're great players and they've done it year after year'

By Michael Russo
Star Tribune (Minneapolis)

Walking around the State Fair four months ago, Mike Yeo didn't mince words when saying he expected bounce-back years from veterans Mikko Koivu, Thomas Vanek and Ryan Suter.

All were coming off down years, and with at least two of them - Koivu and Vanek - many wondered if we were seeing the beginning of a sharp decline.

Well, 33 games into this season, Koivu, Vanek and Suter are the Wild's three leading scorers as the team comes out of the Christmas break. Today, the Wild resumes its schedule by hosting the always-dangerous Evgeni Malkin and the struggling Pittsburgh Penguins.

In his 11th season, the 32-year-old Koivu is on pace for a career-high 72 points, Vanek is on pace for 27 goals and Suter, who ranks fifth among NHL defensemen with 19 assists, is on pace for a career-high 47 assists and 60 points.

That's not bad, especially when one considers Koivu is coming off his least productive season (48 points in 80 games) since his rookie season, Vanek his lowest goal total (21) in a non-lock-out-shortened season and Suter went through a torturous stretch last season where he was minus-23 in 21 games.

All three were key contributors when Zach Parise, who is second behind Koivu with .8 points per game, missed eight games because of a sprained knee in November.

"There's a reason why the bar is high for these guys," Yeo said. "Expectations are very high because they're great players and they've done it year after year. Every player through the course of their career is going to have a down year, a down period, but it doesn't mean they're on the decline or it's over for them."

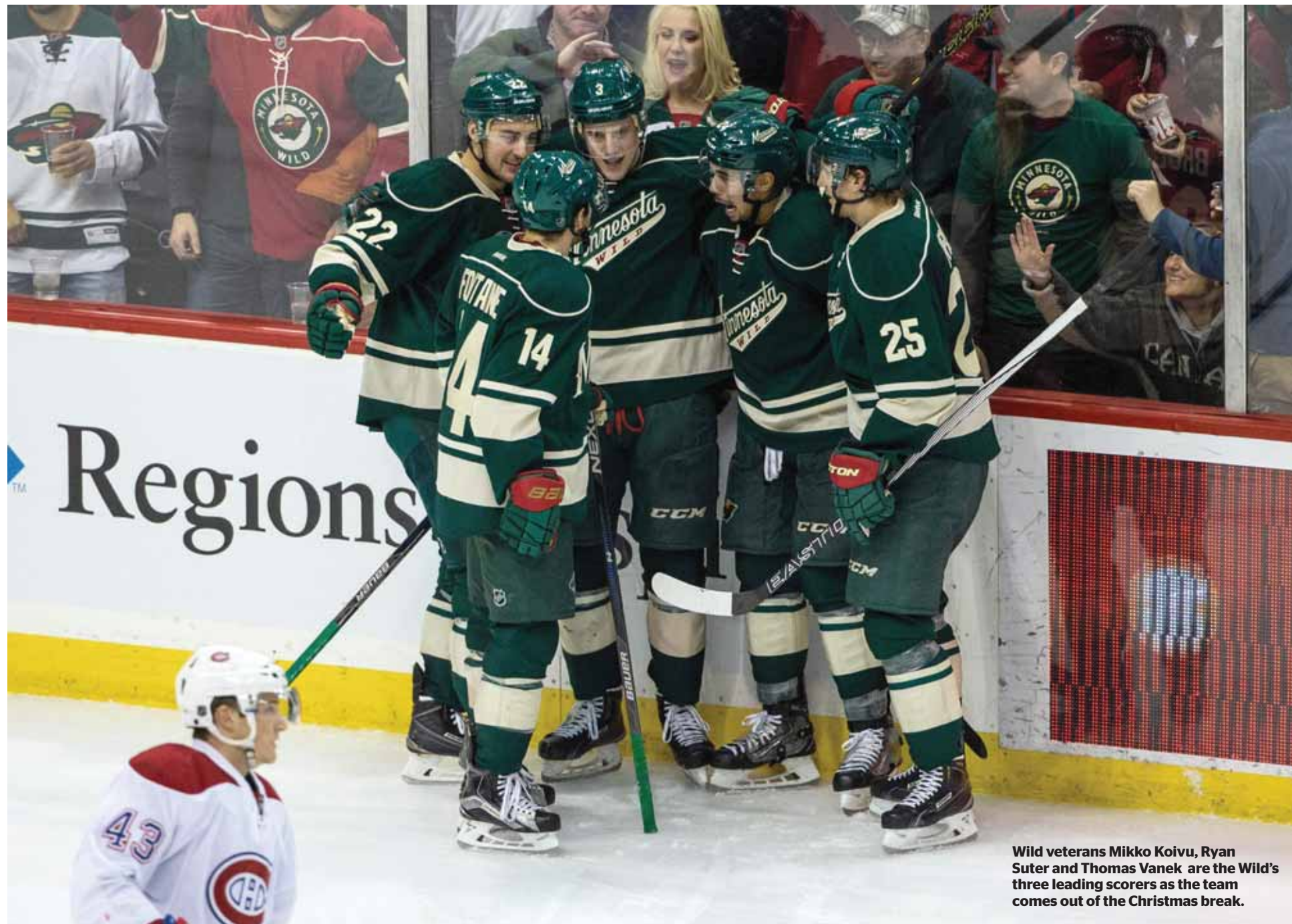
"It could be confidence, it could be injuries, it could be a number of things that are going on that disrupt them from getting to the level they're normally out."

In Vanek's case, he was getting used to a new team in the first half of last season and was dealing with the distraction of being the well-publicized witness in a federal illegal gambling case. In the second half, he was skating through major abdominal issues that ultimately required offseason surgery.

In Suter's case, his father, Bob, died less than a week before training camp. He was affected emotionally for much of last season and needed this offseason to take a deep breath, clear his mind and reset.

In Koivu's case, he came into this season healthy and feeling good on an ankle that was operated on two seasons ago. He changed his offseason workout regimen with the objective of getting faster.

"You need to keep up," Koivu said. "The simple way to explain it is I can't do the same thing I was doing for 10 years in a row. I shouldn't do the same things that I was doing at 22 years old. I think the more different things you do, the bet-



Wild veterans Mikko Koivu, Ryan Suter and Thomas Vanek are the Wild's three leading scorers as the team comes out of the Christmas break.

ter you can become. That was the purpose.

"My trainer's the one who explained it to me, and it totally made sense and I ran from there. I felt a lot fresher coming into this season, and it helps to be healthy in the summer and not have any issues."

Yeo said "hearing their motivation factor" during offseason conversations, "I had zero doubt Mikko and Suts would get back. And with Van, it's all health."

"The three of them have been huge. Just look at the way Mikko's moving. There's a real push on his part. He's making an effort to get more pucks, be more involved in the offensive zone, get in on the forecheck and create more turnovers. You see the same with Suts. There's a push to beat somebody up ice and get more involved in the offensive zone."

"And Thomas is not a guy we normally count on defensively, but he's improved so much this

year, it's allowed us to play him more in better situations."

Vanek loves the mix right now between the way the vets are playing and the younger players. "That's what makes a good team," Vanek said. "I said the minute I signed here (in 2014), one of the biggest reasons is because I thought the mix of the team was right. You've got your older guys, your young guys. We always talk about how the young guys have to grow and get

better, but at the same time, your older guys can't have much of a drop-off."

"I think last year at times, speaking of myself, it wasn't good enough. This year, it's been a little more consistent. There's still some stretches I wasn't happy about, but I think I'm better this year putting it behind me and staying focused for the next game. The key is we're playing well as a team right now. We're winning. But we have to all keep it up."

NFL

Campbell says Dolphins need better locker-room leadership

By Chris Perkins
Sun Sentinel

Miami Dolphins interim coach Dan Campbell thinks the team suffered from a lack of leadership this season. Yes, there were injuries, lots of them, to key players. But as Campbell said, every team deals with injuries.

"I think that just overall leadership is something that we've got to get better at," he said.

"We do have leaders in that locker room. We've got good guys. We've got guys that work, but just as a whole for those guys to take ownership of how they handle their business and go about things and what they accept and don't accept. That's where it's got to come from, and that's the next step. That's the step we've got to get to."

So instead of playing for a playoff berth, the Dolphins (5-9) have nothing at stake today when they host Indianapolis (6-8). That's a huge disappointment for a franchise that entered the season believing it had everything it needed to return to the playoffs for the first time since 2008.

Defensive tackle Ndamukong Suh. Quarterback Ryan Tannehill. Defensive end Cameron Wake. Cornerback Brent Grimes. Center Mike Pouncey. Left tackle Branden Albert. Wide receiver Jarvis Landry. Running back Lamar Miller. Strong safety Reshad Jones. Tight end Jordan Cameron. Defensive end Olivier Vernon. Defensive tackle Earl Mitchell. It was all there.



Interim Coach Dan Campbell praised the Miami Dolphins rookie class for their progress and said their class is one of the best he's been around as a whole.

Some national media members, including Super Bowl champion coach Jon Gruden of ESPN, even thought this was the year the Dolphins would challenge New England for the AFC East title. Then the season started.

Coach Joe Philbin was fired after a 1-3 start. Then defensive coordinator Kevin Coyle was fired, followed by offensive coordinator Bill Lazor. Were the problems more because of performance or leadership? Asked about needing to improve the overall leadership on

the team, receiver Rishard Matthews said, "Possibly, yeah."

"As far as just holding people accountable whether it's practicing, making plays, doing the off-the-field work, I definitely agree with what (Campbell) said."

Pouncey, who was named to his third consecutive Pro Bowl this week, said he thinks player performance was the big problem. "I think we've got the right leadership on our football team," he said, "and I'm very disappointed we

didn't maximize ourselves to our best ability this year."

But why didn't that happen? "How I look at it, at the end of the day we're paid to go out there and perform at our best, and at times we didn't do that, obviously," Pouncey said. "I always say if we do our job then we wouldn't have the distractions that we had. We wouldn't have coaches getting fired, we wouldn't have any of that kind of stuff if we do our job on the football field."

Free safety Louis Delmas, who has been helping coach the secondary after sustaining a season-ending knee injury in training camp, also pointed to player performance as the reason for the Dolphins' disappointing season - that and injuries. "I can definitely say health issues did play a big role in our season this year," he said. "Not making an excuse for it, but I feel that definitely played a big role. "On the other hand, I feel we didn't take full advantage of our opportunities this year."

Campbell, who has been with the Dolphins' organization for six years, keeps going back to the leadership issue.

"We've got some good guys in this locker room and we do have some guys that have leadership qualities," he said. "To take that next uncomfortable step to where you challenge your teammates on what you think is right and what's wrong, and for me that answer right now, if you're saying right now, what do you do? "You lead the leaders. That's what I'm charged with. That's what I'm trying to do. I'm trying to get those guys to somewhat open their eyes to that."

National Football League roundup

Cincinnati Bengals defensive tackle Geno Atkins will be able to play Monday night with a medical condition exacerbated by the high altitude in Denver.

The 27-year-old Atkins has sickle cell trait, which is a genetic abnormality that affects red blood cells and can cause dehydration or breathing difficulties. The same condition forced former Pittsburgh Steelers safety Ryan Clark to miss a playoff game in Denver in 2011.

But the Bengals expect Atkins to be available to make it through a full game. He played against the Broncos in Denver in 2011 without any difficulties in his second career start.

Former Indianapolis Colts running back Zurlon Tipton was arrested early Friday and charged with criminal recklessness with a deadly weapon.

Tipton, released by the Colts earlier this week, allegedly fired an assault rifle and was apprehended about 1 a.m. in suburban Indianapolis after police responded to calls about gunshots, the Indianapolis Star reported. He fled the scene in a Jeep before police caught up to him several blocks away.

After Tipton, 26, was taken to jail, he was released on a \$3,000 bond. Police said Tipton has a valid Michigan handgun license.

Indianapolis Colts quarterback Matt Hasselbeck practiced Friday and was listed as probable for Sunday's game against the Miami Dolphins.

The 40-year-old Hasselbeck has been banged up and dealing with rib and back injuries and was

restricted to a liquid diet this week.

Quarterback Andrew Luck earlier in the week was ruled out of Sunday's game as he continues to recover from a lacerated kidney and a torn abdominal muscle.

The Colts were 4-0 in Hasselbeck's first four starts, but they have lost three straight.

Wide receiver Anquan Boldin is interested in returning to the San Francisco 49ers next season.

The 35-year-old veteran wants to continue playing next season and possibly beyond and is not yet thinking about retirement. Though he'll become a free agent in March, he would like to remain with the 49ers despite the team's struggles in 2015.

Boldin could reach a milestone on Sunday. He enters the game against the Detroit Lions with 999 career catches. One reception will make him the 13th player in NFL history to reach 1,000.

Carolina Panthers quarterback Cam Newton is considered the frontrunner for the NFL's MVP award this season, but he's not focused on postseason accolades with more games still to play.

"It's irrelevant to me right now," Newton told the Panthers' website.

Instead, Newton paid tribute to his teammates for helping him pass for 3,402 yards with 33 touchdowns and 10 interceptions in 14 games. He also has rushed for 580 yards and seven touchdowns and directed game-winning drives against the New Orleans Saints and the New York Giants.

The 40 combined touchdowns lead the NFL.



SAILING

Wild Oats XI out of Sydney to Hobart as squall hits

10 out of 108 boats call it quits as bad weather plays spoilsport



Yachts take part in the Sydney to Hobart yacht race at the start outside Sydney Harbour yesterday.

AFP
Sydney

Eight-time line honours winner Wild Oats XI pulled out of the Sydney to Hobart yesterday while American super-yacht Comanche was attempting repairs after fierce winds hit off Australia's east coast, officials said.

A 108-strong fleet set sail from Sydney Harbour earlier yesterday, but by late evening 10 boats had retired, including one with a broken mast, the organising Cruising Yacht Club of Australia said.

"Wild Oats XI has retired from the race after reporting a torn mainsail," the club confirmed in a statement.

It said the Mark Richards skippered crew was returning to Sydney but no further details were available.

Early reports indicated the sail "tore in half when the yacht was hit by a 40 knot squall," the Wild Oats XI twitter feed stated.

Organisers said the crew of the Comanche, which had been leading the race af-

Storms are not unknown to the race, with six people dying, five boats sinking and 55 sailors rescued on a fatal night in 1998 when a deep depression exploded over the fleet in the treacherous Bass Strait. It was an eventful beginning to the race, with three yachts retiring early after collisions just after the start, and another a short time later

ter bolting out of Sydney Harbour, "will try to effect repairs to a rudder and continue racing". The front half of the fleet in the gruelling 628 nautical mile (1,163 kilometre) race was enduring the brunt of the punishing weather as they sailed into "southerly buster" gale force winds, the CYCA added.

The navigator on one of the leading yachts, Ichi Ban's Will Oxley, had reported gusts of up to 43 knots while another boat, CEX Dolce, was returning to Sydney with a broken mast, it said.

Officials had warned of thunderstorms and gales late yesterday as the fleet travelled down the east coast of Australia.

Storms are not unknown to the race, with six people dying, five boats sinking and 55 sailors rescued on a fatal night in 1998 when a deep depression exploded over the fleet in the treacherous Bass Strait. It was an eventful beginning to the race, with three yachts retiring early after collisions just after the start, and another a short time later.

Among them was Ark323, one of two Chinese entries and one of 27 foreign boats in the race which draws spectators on land and in boats in Sydney on Boxing Day.

"Ark323, one of two Chinese entries, retired following a collision 300 metres after the start. All on board were safe," race organisers said in a statement.

Australian boat Cougar II retired at about the same time with damage to her starboard quarter while the British entry Lupa of London also pulled out with a damaged bow after a collision.

Another boat, M3, withdrew after shattering its forestay, her crew deciding that the harsh weather forecast ruled out a possible repair and rejoining of the race. Line honours contender supermaxi

Perpetual Loyal and St Jude were later retirements, both understood to have sustained rudder damage from the rough weather in the evening, while Koa withdrew with steering damage.

Last year's line honours winner Wild Oats XI had initially led in the moments after the starter's horn blew, but was overtaken by Perpetual Loyal before Comanche took the lead after unfurling her big spinnaker.

Wild Oats holds the race record of one day, 18 hours, 23 minutes and 12 seconds set in 2012 and her retirement and Comanche's rudder damage open up the race for line honours.

Rambler was in the lead late Saturday, ahead of Comanche, Ragamuffin 100 and Maserati.

A brief update from Ragamuffin reported conditions as "wet and windy" as the leaders tracked down the New South Wales coast.

The winds are expected to ease today, and will be light off the coast of Tasmania as the boats head to Hobart's Constitution Dock, with the first boats not expected to cross the finish line until tomorrow.

RUGBY

Toulouse focus on Toulon, domestic honours

AFP
Toulouse

French heavyweights Toulouse and Toulon lock horns as the Top 14 returns today, while leaders Clermont will bid to keep hold of top spot when they host Racing 92.

Home-and-away wins over fellow three-time champions Leinster revived Toulon's quest to land a fourth successive European crown, but Toulouse's Champions Cup hopes were shattered by a pair of defeats to Ulster.

With just domestic honours to play for, third-placed Toulouse are hoping to arrest their slide against a second-placed Toulon outfit that appears to have turned the corner after a sluggish start to the campaign.

Toulouse coach Jean-Baptiste Elissalde said his side's upcoming fixtures, which also include a January 3 trip to struggling champions Stade Francais, would be crucial but not necessarily decisive.

"We suspected once we saw the calendar that it was going to be a turning point in the season," said Elissalde. "But it's not the only one because even if we lose things won't become irreversible."

"We experienced a run of defeats last season. But the players knew how to react and got themselves to within a few points of the (Top 14) final. It's up to the players to decide their future."

Both Toulouse and Toulon, who dealt Clermont a rare home loss last month, are just a point off the pace and will be out to profit on any potential slip up when the leaders host Racing 92. Racing enter the 11th round of fixtures unbeaten in five matches, including Friday's

9-9 European Champions Cup draw at Northampton which left them top of Pool 3, and just three points adrift of Clermont.

Centre Henry Chavancy stressed the importance of maintaining their recent levels of performance, especially given that a poor result at Clermont could knock Racing out of the top six.

"In a league where everything is so tight and competitive, no one can afford to relax," said Chavancy, who has been tipped for a first France call-up ahead of the Six Nations.

"The Michelin is an almost impregnable stadium, how many defeats have there been in the past four or five seasons?"

"In any case, I know that Racing have never won there. We know wherever we step foot that we'll be met, it's up to us to battle with the weapons we have."

Clermont avenged an earlier defeat to Exeter with a crushing 42-10 victory over the English side at the weekend to reignite their European hopes.

Stade Francais have won just four of 10 domestic matches this term but the Paris-based side will look to build on resounding wins over Italians Treviso when they make the trip to bottom side Oyonnax.

Bordeaux, who resisted a late fightback to beat Welsh side Ospreys yesterday, have a third straight Top 14 win in their sights when they take on Grenoble.

Fifth-placed Brive, who go to Castres, were in action in the Challenge Cup where they routed Russian debutants Enisei 33-3, making amends for a shock defeat to the same opposition a week earlier.

Pau are at home to La Rochelle, while Agen visit a Montpellier side aiming to break into the play-off places.

SPOTLIGHT

Cue Card pips Vautour in vintage King George battle

AFP
London

Cue Card pipped Vautour on the line to land a vintage King George VI Chase at Kempton yesterday.

Vautour (3-1) appeared to be set for victory, leading over the last fence and up the run-in only for Cue Card (9-2), under a determined ride by Paddy Brennan, to reel him in to edge the Boxing Day showcase by a head.

Don Cossack, the 15-8 favourite, held every chance when falling at the second last.

Cue Card's previous best showing in the three-mile Grade One was runner-up to Silviniaco Conti, winner of the last two runnings but who only played a bit role this time.

Leading early on, Paul Nicholls' runner lost his grip on the race down the back straight as Vautour jumped to the front, with Cue Card tracking.

Don Cossack was getting ready to launch his bid for glory when crashing out of the picture two fences from home.

That left Cue Card as the only live danger to Vautour with Brennan conjuring up a final stride lunge on Colin Tizzard's rejuvenated nine-year-old to emerge triumphant after an epic battle.

"This is the best day of my life - it's truly unbelievable," said Brennan.

"I won't lie and say that there was a lot more left in the tank, but if anyone can get this horse back to win the Gold Cup, it's going to be Colin Tizzard."

Mullins found defeat hard to take.

"We did everything right until the last 20 yards," the Irish trainer told Channel 4.

"He probably didn't just jump the last as efficiently as he could have, but it was a very brave run and a very brave run by Cue Card - that's horse racing."

Mullins didn't leave Kempton empty handed, as his Faugheen set himself up for a defence of his Champion Hurdle crown next March, justifying cramped odds of 1-4 in the Grade 1 Christmas Hurdle.

Bouncing back after surprise defeat on his seasonal return at Punchestown, Mullins' classy hurdler was too quick for The New One in second.

Earlier, Lizzie Kelly became the first woman jockey to win a British Grade 1 chase on Tea For Two in the Kauto Star Novices Chase won 12 months ago by Coneegree who went on to win the Cheltenham Gold Cup.

"Awesome! I thought two fences out I'm going to win," said the history-making rider.

Kelly's mother and assistant trainer Jane Williams said: "I'm thrilled for her."

"It's important for girls to make it in racing and we set out to try to prove girls can win Grade Ones."

GOLF

Randhawa leads by a shot in McLeod Russel golf

IAN S
Kolkata

Veteran Jyoti Randhawa battled stomach cramps in Round 3 to shoot a one-under-71 that kept him in the lead by one shot at the Rs15mn McLeod Russel Tour Championship at the Royal Calcutta Golf Club (RCGC) here yesterday.

The Gurgaon-based professional took his three-day tally to 12-under-204 as Bengaluru's Khalin Joshi fired the day's joint best score of four-under-68 to lurk behind the leader in second place at 11-under-205.

Randhawa (68-65-71), the overnight leader by four shots, felt the effects of an upset stomach through the third day but

still managed to deliver a resolute 71 to continue in the lead.

He was quick off the blocks, picking up birdies on the first, second and fourth, landing it within five feet on the first two occasions, to build a comfortable five-stroke lead. Though Randhawa dropped a stroke after missing a six-footer on the ninth, he came roaring back with a 20-foot birdie on the 10th.

Randhawa missed the greens on 12 and 13 for consecutive bogeys as his lead was cut down to three strokes. It was on the 14th tee that the 43-year-old considered withdrawing from the tournament due to pain and discomfort caused by the cramps.

However, cheered on by the big crowd, he decided to carry on. Randhawa was solid thereafter, making pars all the way till the finish.

"It was a tough and draining day due

to my physical condition. However, I'm glad to have hung in there to stay in front. I look forward to coming back strong on the final day," said Randhawa.

Joshi (70-67-68), who was overnight joint second, had a birdie and a bogey on the front-nine but made his move on the back nine with an eagle and two birdies.

He made a 15-foot birdie conversion on the 12th hole and then drove the par-4 16th green, following it up with a 25-foot putt for eagle there. He finally had a birdie chip-in on the 17th which helped him end the day within one shot of the lead.

"The 12th was the turning point as I started swinging better from there on. I was far better on the back nine in all aspects of the game," said Joshi.

"I was also very relaxed playing alongside my good friend Chikka. I play a lot of

practice rounds with him back home in Bengaluru. I'm in a decent position now, just one shot off the lead and will look to raise the tempo in the final round."

Chikkarangappa, who was joint second after Round 2, slipped to third at nine-under-207 after his 70 on Saturday. Chikka, second in the Order of Merit, is still the strongest contender for the Rolex Ranking title as money list leader Mukesh Kumar of Mhow is currently placed tied 15th at one-under-215.

Defending champion Shankar Das (70) of Kolkata is fourth at seven-under-209. The Kolkata duo of 2012 champion S P Chawrasia (68) and Rahil Gangjee (72) are a further shot back in tied fifth.

Kapurthala's Gaganjeet Bhullar moved up to seventh at five-under-211 thanks to his third round effort of 68.



FOCUS

Sania and Leander keep Indian flag flying high

Her association with Swiss great Martina Hingis, forged in March, formed the basis of a powerful combination as they complemented each other perfectly in 16 events and enjoyed an overwhelming 55-7 win-loss ratio



Martina Hingis (L) and Sania Mirza after winning the Wimbledon doubles crown earlier this year.

IAN S
New Delhi

Sania Mirza kept the Indian flag flying high on the professional tennis circuit by winning nine doubles titles, including the US Open and Wimbledon crowns. Her association with Swiss great Martina Hingis, forged in March, formed the basis of a powerful combination as they complemented each other perfectly in 16 events and enjoyed an overwhelming 55-7 win-loss ratio with a 22-match unbeaten hard court streak. The Indo-Swiss collaboration dubbed "SanTina" capped a memorable year with a victory at the season-ending Women's Tennis Association (WTA) Finals in Singapore. Earlier, they also won titles at Beijing, Wuhan, Guangzhou, Charleston, Miami and Indian Wells. The Charleston victory propelled Sania to the top of the doubles rankings. It was their third successive trophy to-

gether and helped the Hyderabad monopolise the top spot in the rankings. SanTina were named as Women's Doubles World Champions by the International Tennis Federation (ITF) for 2015. Sania began the year brightly, claiming the Sydney International with American Bethanie Mattek-Sands in January. She bagged 10 women's doubles trophies as an individual in the indelible year. The Swiss Miss, a former singles World No1, was at the top of her game in mixed doubles too, and together with fellow veteran Leander Paes, won three Majors - the Australia Open, Wimbledon and US Open. The experienced duo utilised every bit of their vast maturity to lord the mixed doubles circuit. The 42-year-old Paes continued to defy age with his agility and athleticism, as if serving a constant reminder that performance should be the only criterion to judge an athlete, not his age, which he insists is just a "number". An unflinching resolve to play in a record-setting seventh

Olympics for his country next year at Rio serves as a source of motivation for Paes, expertly taking his off-field distractions over a custody battle for her daughter with estranged partner Rhea Pillai in his stride. His men's doubles form though was sharply contrasting as the 18-time Grand Slam champion failed to reach the title round in all four Majors, the last trophy being the 2013 US Open. He managed just one men's doubles title in the year in 26 attempts. Hingis praised her Indian doubles partners for shaping up not only successful partnerships on-court but cordial friendships off-court that the 35-year-old attributed to the impressive performances. But while all was shining on the doubles front, India's struggle on the singles circuit was again highlighted when their top-ranked player Yuki Bhambri (93) lost both his Davis Cup matches against Czech Republic at home. India lost the World Group Play-off tie 1-3 to condemn them to spend another year at the Asia-Oceania Group 1 phase. Bhambri though partially atoned himself winning two Chal-

lenger level singles titles to break into the top-100 singles chart for the first time, resulting in a direct access at Grand Slams. But Somdev Devvarman's free fall from a career best 62 in 2011 to an obscure 180 mirrored the trouble Indian team faces in Davis Cup ties. Globally, Serbian Novak Djokovic and American Serena Williams continued their stranglehold in men's and women's singles, respectively, both being named 2015's ITF World champions. Novak Djokovic won three Grand Slams, was runner-up in the fourth (US Open) and won 11 titles in total. From mid-January he reached 15 finals consecutively. He became the first man for seven years to win 80 or more matches in a season, ending with an 82-6 record. Serena's ambition of making it a "Serena Slam" by holding all the four Majors at one time was dashed with her semi-finals loss at US Open but she remained in a league of her own with three Grand Slam titles pushing her to third on the overall list, just behind German Steffi Graf (22) and Australian Margaret Court (24).

BOTTOMLINE

Federer, Djokovic in race to be first \$100mn man

AFP
London

Novak Djokovic and Roger Federer are poised to become the first \$100 million men in tennis in 2016, in a gripping sub-plot to the new Grand Slam season. No player in the history of the sport has broken through the \$100 million on-court earnings barrier but world number one Djokovic and Federer, the number three, should reach the landmark next year. Djokovic, 28, has just over \$94 million in prize money while Federer, six years the Serb's senior, has banked \$97.3 million. With \$3.85 million on offer for the winner of January's Australian Open, the season's first major, the veteran Swiss would be the first man to the magical number even if the odds are heavily stacked against a player who won the last of his 17 Grand Slam titles in 2012. The staggering rewards for the modern player, all boosted by lucrative off-court earnings through



sponsorship and endorsements, are a far cry from the heavyweights of the sport who starred in earlier eras. Rod Laver, the last man to complete the calendar Grand Slam—something that eluded Djokovic courtesy of a French Open final loss in 2015 -- ended his playing career with \$1.5 million, still a huge sum by the standards of the late 1960s. John McEnroe earned \$12.5 million while Federer's hero, Pete Sampras banked \$43 million before he retired in 2002. Djokovic earned a season record \$21.5 million in 2015, a year which saw him win three of the four majors — taking his total to 10 in total. "My season was the best of my career with many highlights. It inspires me even more to keep on going, and I hope to continue to play at this level in 2016," said Djokovic. Despite his dominance of the sport, Djokovic still has some catching up to do when it comes to matching Federer's overall personal fortune. According to Forbes' rich list, Federer was the fifth highest-



earning sportsman in 2015 thanks to \$58 million in endorsements. Djokovic was 13th, his on-court wealth boosted by \$31 million worth of commercial riches. But the Serb knows time—and the form which saw him win 82 matches and suffer just six losses last season—is on his side. "I think I have a good chance. I'm 28 and I still don't feel like the end is anytime soon, that definitely excites me and motivates me to keep going." The staggering wealth in the men's game dwarfs the women's tour. Serena Williams's on-court earnings stood at just over \$74 million after a 2015 season which saw the American also claim three of the four Grand Slam titles. Rival Maria Sharapova, the world's richest sportswoman due to her lucrative off-court portfolio, has earned less than half than Williams -- \$36.4 million. Back in the men's game, 14-time major winner Rafael Nadal has banked \$75 million on court while current world number two Andy Murray has earned \$42.5 million.

QATAR INTERNATIONAL SHOW JUMPING CHAMPIONSHIP

Qatar's Bassem rides The Toymaker to glory

'We're not going to Olympics just to compete. We're going there to win'

By Sahar Bidappa
Doha

Bassem Hassan Mohammed has been blazing a trail for Qatar. The 26-year-old rider is the first Qatari to win a Global Champions Tour Grand Prix event, when he rode Victoria to victory in Monaco last year. So it's quite obvious that there are high expectations from him.

Last night, Bassem once again proved why he is one of the best bets for Qatar, after he won the main and final event of the Qatar International Show Jumping Championship.

At the Qatar Equestrian Federation arena, Bassem and his partner The Toymaker, a bay colt, were in a class of their own as they convincingly decimated the competition to win the Two Rounds, 145-160 cm event, which carried a total prize money of QR744,000. Bassem himself walked away with QR186,000.

He was 18th to get off the blocks, with Ibrahim Hani Bisharat of Jordan, astride Bowie Z, already setting an impressive timing of 46.61 seconds albeit with four faults.

But Bassem managed a round in 56.26 seconds with mere two faults.

Having finished second to pocket QR148,800, Bisharat capped off a memorable championship with four podium finishes. Kamal Abdullah Bahamdan of Saudi Arabia was third for a prize of QR111,600.

For Bassem, the win was significant as the points that he accrued in Doha will count for the individual Olympic qualification.

Bassem has already sealed a Rio 2016 spot in the team event, as he was a part of the Qatari team emerged victorious at the second leg of the Furusiyya 2015 series in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, in February this year.

"I am really happy to win. It was very important to show that we can win. I am thankful to HE Sheikh Joaan, Qatar Equestrian Federation and its president Hamad bin Abdulrahman al-Attiyah and my team for their support," said Bassem.

He conceded there was pressure to win in front of his home fans. "Of course there is pressure to do well at your home event. But the horse did well today and that's what matters," said the 2014 Asian Games Team Gold medalist.

The Qatari said he was looking forward to the next few months of competitions, as he prepares for the Olympics, where he hopes to win gold with Team Qatar.

"Over the next few months I am participating in lots of events in preparation for the Olympics. I don't know if we are going to win, but certainly we are not going to Olympics just to compete. We are going there to win," Bassem added.

Bassem was not the only winner for Qatar yesterday. Salmen Sultan al-Suwaidi emerged triumphant in the Table A, Against the clock 130/135 cm event, guiding Cascano home in 62.06 seconds. Bassem had finished third in the event, behind Kuwait's Noora al-Qaoud (Annalita).

It was a double podium for Qatar in the day's opening event, Table A, Against the clock 120 cm. Saeed Nasser al-Qadi (Jessico 4) and Salman Mohammed al-Emadi (Lucky Lady) finished second and third respectively. Kuwait's Ali al-Khorafi (Ungarin) cantered in at 51.64 seconds to take the first place.

Earlier, Bisharat had won his second event of the championship, with Brown Sugar once again in prime form in the One Round + Winning Round 145 cm. The victory was so convincing that, the pair was more than three seconds clear of second-placed Abdullah Alsharbatly (Bling Bling 2) of Saudi Arabia, who came home in 40.68 seconds. Two-time Global Champions Tour winner Edwina Tops-Alexander of Australia came third with Clinton in a time of 41.33.

RESULTS

Two Rounds, Art.273.3.3.2 + 4.3 - 145-160cm

1. Bassem Hassan Mohammed (Qatar) The Toymaker. Time: 56.26 secs. Prize money: QR186,000
2. Ibrahim Hani Bisharat (Jordan) Bowie Z. Time: 46.61 secs. QR148,800
3. Kamal Abdullah Bahamdan (Saudi Arabia) Time: 48.61 secs. QR111,600

One Round + Winning Round, Art.276.2.1, 2.3 - 145cm

1. Ibrahim Hani Bisharat (Jordan) Brown Sugar. Time: 37.43 secs. Prize money: QR29,625
2. Abdullah Alsharbatly (Saudi Arabia) Bling Bling 2. Time: 40.68 secs. QR23,700
3. Edwina Tops-Alexander (Australia) Clinton. Time: 41.33 secs. QR17,775

Table A, Against the clock, Art. 238.2.1 -130/135cm

1. Salmen Sultan al Suwaidi (Qatar) Cascano. Time: 62.06 secs. Prize money: QR5,062
2. Noora al. Qaoud (Kuwait) Annalita. Time: 63.00 secs. QR4,050
3. Bassem Hassan Mohammed (Qatar) Paddys Darco. Time: 66.29 secs. QR3,037

Table A, Against the clock, Art. 238.2.1 -120cm

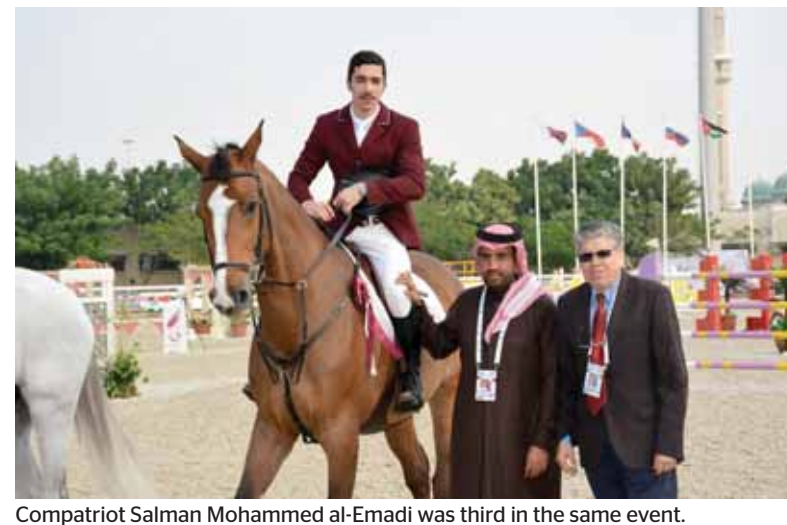
1. Ali Al Khorafi (Kuwait) Ungarin. Time: 51.64 secs. Prize money: QR2,812
2. Saeed Nasser al-Qadi (Qatar) Jessico 4. Time: 54.73 secs. QR2,250
3. Salman Mohammed al-Emadi (Qatar) Lucky Lady. Time: 56.35 secs. QR1,687



Qatar's Bassem Hassan Mohammed (third from right) celebrates on the podium after winning Two Rounds, 145-160 cm event, yesterday. (Below, left) Bassem celebrates on his companion The Toymaker. PICTURES: Garsi Lotfi



Saeed Nasser al-Qadi finished second in against the clock, Art. 238.2.1 -120cm.



Compatriot Salman Mohammed al-Emadi was third in the same event.

BOTTOMLINE

A month to go before Qatar Masters tees off

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Today marks just one month to go until the 2016 Commercial Bank Qatar Masters tees off at Doha Golf Club (January 27-30), and organisers, sponsors, players and golf course specialists are gearing up for Qatar's biggest annual sporting spectacular.

"One month to go means that Commercial Bank and all the committees are hard at work to make the 2016 Commercial Bank Qatar Masters a success," said Qatar Golf Association president Hassan al-Nuaimi.

Qatari amateurs, Saleh al-Kaabi and Ali al-Shahrani, both 21, are again aiming to qualify for the tournament with the hope of becoming the first local players to make

the cut at the 2016 Commercial Bank Qatar Masters. "One month to go means intensive training for us so a lot of early mornings with Saleh and the coach," said al-Shahrani.

Mike Elliott, QGA National Coach, said: "One month to go means an extra 2-3 hours of practice with the boys daily." The coach, who has won 65 professional tournaments when he used to play professionally, has been coaching the Qatari golfers for five years and is optimistic about the boys playing their fourth Commercial Bank Qatar Masters this January.

The tournament, organised by the Qatar Golf Association (QGA), the Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC), Doha Golf Club and long-term title sponsor, Commercial Bank, will welcome a star-studded lineup for the USD2.5 million prize

fund showpiece. The tournament's list of past champions includes former world number ones Ernie Els (2005) and Adam Scott (2002 and 2008), Ryder Cup stars Sergio Garcia (2014), Thomas Bjorn (2011), Henrik Stenson (2006), Paul Lawrie (1999 and 2012) and Robert Karlsson (2010), and two-time US Open Champion Retief Goosen (2007).

Tickets, which start at QR150, are available at a range of outlets including Virgin Megastores (online and in-store in Doha), Ticket Master, Time Out Tickets, Q Tickets, Doha Golf Club, ILQ Tickets, Radisson Blu Hotel and Doha Rugby Football Club.

Entry is free for children under 14 years of age and each ticket purchased entitles the holder to one free roundtrip journey to and from the Doha Golf Club by event partner Uber.



Saleh al-Kaabi and Ali al-Shahrani hope to become first Qatar players to make the cut at Commercial Bank Qatar Masters.