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DOW JONES	QE	NYMEX
16,428.36	9,477.09	30.21
+29.79	-194.77	-1.20
+0.18%	-2.01%	-3.82%

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In brief

QATAR | Solidarity
Emir concedes with Turkish president
HH the Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, in a telephone conversation with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan yesterday, expressed his heartfelt condolences and sympathy on the victims of Tuesday's terrorist bombing in Istanbul's Sultanahmet district. The Emir "expressed his utter condemnation of the criminal act that aimed at destabilising Turkey's security and stability and terrorising innocent people", according to the official Qatar News Agency (QNA). He said the terrorist attack violated all human values and religious principles and laws. The Emir reiterated Qatar's solidarity with Turkey and its people in countering terrorism and its support for actions taken to maintain its security and stability.
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REGION | Resolution
Iran frees US sailors
Iran yesterday freed 10 US sailors a day after detaining them aboard two US Navy patrol boats in the Gulf, bringing a swift end to an incident that had rattled nerves shortly before the expected implementation of a landmark nuclear accord. Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) said it had released the sailors after determining they had entered Iranian territorial waters by mistake. IRGC Rear Admiral Ali Fadavi said earlier the boats had strayed due to a broken navigation system. The quick resolution contrasted with previous cases in which British servicemen were held by Iran for considerably longer, in one case almost two weeks.
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KOREA | Tension
Troops fire at intruding drone
South Korean troops fired at a suspected North Korean drone that crossed the border yesterday, as President Park Geun-Hye pushed China to back harsh sanctions on Pyongyang over its latest nuclear test. The defence ministry said the drone effected a brief incursion, but swiftly returned to the North side when South Korean troops fired a series of warning shots.
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PAKISTAN | Arrest
Suspects detained over airbase attack
Pakistan has arrested several people including the chief of an outlawed militant group over suspected links to an attack on an Indian airbase, officials said in Islamabad yesterday. The attack on the Pathankot airbase in north-western India on January 2 left six militants and seven Indian security personnel dead.
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PM opens regional conference on human rights



HE the Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser bin Khalifa al-Thani and HE the Foreign Minister Dr Khalid bin Mohamed al-Attiyah attending a regional conference on the role of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) in the Arab world at Doha's Ritz-Carlton Hotel yesterday. The Prime Minister opened the two-day conference, organised by the National Human Rights Committee (NHRC) and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in co-operation with the Arab Network for National Human Rights Institutions (ANNHRI). Speaking at the opening of the conference, NHRC chairman Dr Ali bin Samikh al-Marri pointed to the "serious threats" the Arab region is facing, which have heavily affected the human rights situation and the performance of civil society and human rights organisations. This, he said, had led to a significant decline in respect of human rights "in an unprecedented way and a manner that can't be ignored or overlooked".
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Al Jazeera expands its global digital services

Al Jazeera Media Network yesterday announced its intention to expand its existing international digital services to broaden its multi-platform presence in the United States. "As audiences increasingly turn to multiple platforms, including mobile devices, for news and information, this expansion will allow US and non-US consumers alike to access the Network's journalism and content wherever and whenever they want," a statement issued by the Doha-based channel network said. "The expanded digital platform will augment the Network's successful current digital offerings, including AJ+ (www.ajplus.net) which has achieved more than 2bn online video views since its inception in September 2014. "The Network's commitment to its digital transformation of its global operations is consistent with its mission to inform and engage audiences no matter who they are or where they are," it said. "By expanding its digital content and distribution services to now include the US, the Network will be better positioned to innovate and compete in an overwhelmingly digital world to serve today's 24-hour digitally focused audience." Over the coming months the Network said it intended to provide more details around the forthcoming expansion of its multi-platform digital services to the US. Separately, Al Jazeera America

CEO Al Anstey announced that Al Jazeera America would cease operation by April 30 this year. While Al Jazeera America built a loyal audience across the US and increasingly was recognised as an important new voice in television news, the economic landscape of the media environment has driven its strategic decision to wind down its operations and conclude its service. Al Jazeera America said it is committed to conducting this process in a way that is consistent with its respect for colleagues.



"We recognise the high quality of Al Jazeera America's work and that its journalism was recognised with nearly every major award an American broadcast and digital news organisation can receive, including the Peabody, Emmy, and Alfred I DuPont-Columbia University awards," said Anstey. "I have witnessed and worked alongside some of the most talented people any organisation could wish for. Since its launch in 2013, the

work done by the team at Al Jazeera America has been recognised with nearly every major award an American news organisation can receive. "I greatly respect the unrivalled commitment and excellent work of our team, which has created great journalism. We have increasingly set ourselves apart from all the rest, and the achievements of the past two-and-a-half years should be a source of immense pride for everyone," Anstey added. The shutdown of US operations comes less than three years after a massive investment in a cable news operation aimed at rivaling CNN, Fox News and MSNBC. In mid-2013, the channel went live after hiring some 850 staff and opening 12 bureaux in the US. The wind down of Al Jazeera America will not affect the rest of the group's global media operations, the AFP news agency quoted an internal memo from director general Mostefa Souag as saying. Al Jazeera acquired its US cable channel from Current TV, a group that included former vice president Al Gore and reached some 40mn households. The new channel hired high-profile journalists from CNN and other networks and began with 14 hours of news programming. The company separately launched an English-language AJ+ digital network in 2014, aiming to connect with younger viewers who are not watching television or reading newspapers.

Pledge to improve worker conditions

The Labour Minister hails the abolishing of the kafala system and the issuance of a new law that regulates the entry and exit of expatriates

Qatar is committed to provide protection to expatriate workers and the best living standards, HE the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs Dr Abdullah Saleh Mubarak al-Khulafi has said. He was speaking at a closed workshop organised by Qatar University's Social and Economic Survey Research Institute (Sesri) to discuss the welfare index of expatriate workers in the state, the official Qatar News Agency (QNA) reported yesterday. "The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs is working to review its strategic plan in line with Qatar National Vision 2030, which urges establishing the best environment for labour, underlining the role of Sesri in assisting the ministry to achieve its plan through the index," he stated. Al-Khulafi pointed to some aspects that should be monitored through the index such as legislation that clarify the rights and duties of both the employers and employees and providing health and safety standards at workplace, employment laws and compliance with regulations of appeals and complaints. "The ministry has taken a number of measures to improve the conditions of expatriate workers, including the development of standards for their housing, increasing the number of health and safety inspectors from 150 to 350, limiting work hours during summer months and signing agreements with 35 countries of origin to limit the role of intermediary companies," al-Khulafi said. The minister hailed the abolishing of the kafala (sponsorship) system and the issuance of a new law that regulates the

entry and exit of expatriates. The workshop was aimed at generating discussion on developing Qatar's first-ever index of expatriate workers' welfare. The index will be based on the findings of a survey of expatriate workers to be conducted by Sesri, in addition to other administrative data. The index will serve as a study on the progress of workers' welfare and safety in Qatar over time. Al-Khulafi was joined by QU president Dr Hassan Rashid al-Derham and Sesri director Dr Darwish al-Emadi as well as ministry officials. Also participating were 25 national and international experts as well as researchers who developed similar indices in various countries. The programme agenda included presentations delivered by Sesri members - head of research Dr Abdoulaye Diop, research programme manager Dr Justin Gengler and senior policy analyst Dr Michael Ewers - and University of Michigan research professor Dr Michael W Traugott. Topics tackled at the workshop included "Developing the Overall Themes of the Guest Workers' Welfare Index", "Constructing the Specific Elements of the Guest Workers' Welfare Index", "Operationalising of the Selected Themes of the Index - Drafting the Questions", and "Composing the Index". Dr al-Emadi said: "In conducting this study, Sesri continues in its role to address contemporary issues that impact the wider community and offers sustainable solutions that will contribute to the country's development and progress. "We look forward to the outcomes and recommendations that will emerge from this survey, which will help us enhance guest workers' living and working conditions."



HE the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs Dr Abdullah Saleh Mubarak al-Khulafi, left, and QU president Dr Hassan Rashid al-Derham at the workshop.

Panel to study reports on business environment in Qatar

The Cabinet yesterday approved a draft decision to establish a technical committee to study international reports on the business environment in Qatar and to create an attractive investment climate in the country. HE the Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser bin Khalifa al-Thani chaired the Cabinet regular meeting held at its Emiri Diwan premises.

After the meeting, HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs, Ahmed bin Abdullah bin Zaid al-Mahmoud, said the Cabinet had approved a draft decision to establish a technical committee to study the indicators of international reports with respect to the business environment in Qatar. "Under the terms of the draft resolution, a Technical Committee for the Study of International Reporting In-

dicators with Respect To The Business Environment in Qatar' will be formed and chaired by a representative of the Ministry of Economy and Commerce and membership of two representatives among a number of stakeholders," the official Qatar News Agency (QNA) said. "The committee will be concerned with the study and analysis of the reports released by international organisations relating to business environ-

ment, improve Qatar's ranking in the business environment system and create an attractive environment for investment," QNA said. The Cabinet also approved a draft decree amending the unified customs tariff. It also added sub-paragraphs of the unified customs tariff list for the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC), annexed to the Decree No (53) of 2012. Al-Mahmoud said the Cabinet approved a draft Cabinet decision to es-

tablish a "Committee to Prepare The National Strategy For Intellectual Property" to be chaired by a representative of the Ministry of Economy and Commerce, and the membership of representatives from a number of stakeholders. The committee will be concerned with the preparation of the national strategy of intellectual property of Qatar in co-ordination with the World Intellectual Property Organisation and

the competent authorities in Qatar. Among the other decisions were approving a draft decision of the Minister of Communications, determining fees and charges in the maritime ports of Qatar and approving the distance education system and the development of the necessary conditions and procedures for the equivalence of certificates and degrees issued by distance education institutions, according to the Supreme Education Council's vision.