

SUBSCRIPTION

Kuwait Times



THE FIRST DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2016

RABI ALAWWAL 25, 1438 AH

No: 17090

Municipality destroys tons of foul food



Hijackers of Libyan plane surrender in Malta



Heat retire O'Neal's No. 32 jersey



GOVT SEEKS TEMPORARY WAIVER OF SPORTS BAN

PAS MAKING 'SERIOUS AND RELENTLESS EFFORTS'



Max 23°
Min 11°



Italian police and forensics experts stand by the body of suspected Berlin truck attacker Anis Amri after he was shot dead in Milan early yesterday. (Inset) An image grab taken from an Islamic State propaganda video shows Amri pledging allegiance to IS on the Kieler Bruecke, a Berlin bridge. —AFP

BERLIN ATTACK SUSPECT KILLED

MILAN: Italian police yesterday shot dead the prime suspect in the Berlin Christmas market attack, ending a frantic four-day hunt for Europe's most-wanted man. Tunisian Anis Amri, 24, is believed to have hijacked a truck and used it to mow down holiday revelers at the market on Monday, killing 12 and wounding dozens more. The Islamic State jihadist group has claimed responsibility and released a video yesterday in which Amri is shown pledging allegiance to IS chief Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi.

He had been missing since escaping after the attack Monday, but his time on the run was cut short thanks to a combination of luck and the quick reflexes of rookie police officer Luca Scata. The 29-year-old, still officially a trainee, shot the Tunisian twice after he had fired on his patrol partner, Christian Movio, 36. The officers had stopped Amri in the early hours of yesterday near Milan's Sesto San Giovanni train station. They had no idea of who they were dealing with.

"He was completely calm, they asked him to empty his backpack and with a sudden movement he pulled out the pistol, which was loaded and ready to use," said Roberto Guida, the neighborhood police head. Police said Amri had initially tried to pass himself off as being from southern Italy and had shouted "b*****d police" in Italian before opening fire. Movio, the officer

shot by Amri, underwent successful surgery to repair the damage to his shoulder later yesterday and was able to joke with visitors to his hospital bed. "I'm happy to have been useful," he told one.

German authorities are investigating whether Amri was part of a "network" with accomplices still at large. Chancellor Angela Merkel welcomed the news, saying: "We can be relieved at the end of this week that the acute danger is over. However the danger of terrorism in general endures, as it has for several years. We all know that." Amri's death came as German police arrested two brothers on suspicion of planning to attack a shopping mall, while authorities in both Australia and Indonesia reported that Christmas terror plots had been foiled.

Milan police chief Antonio De Iesu said Amri had arrived in Italy from Germany via France. He had no telephone on him and only a few hundred euros. German police said they found his fingerprints in the truck, next to the body of its registered Polish driver, who was killed with a gunshot to the head. A €100,000 (\$104,000) reward had been offered for information leading to Amri's arrest.

Prominent politicians in Germany and Italy warned that lessons had to be learned from mistakes that might have contributed to Amri being able to carry out his attack. —AFP (See Page 10)

KUWAIT: The government yesterday called on FIFA and the International Olympic Committee to temporarily lift a 14-month sports ban while it amends a controversial law. The Public Authority for Sports (PAS) urged football's governing body and the IOC to "lift the ban on Kuwaiti sports activities temporarily until relevant local laws are revised". World sports bodies led by FIFA and the IOC suspended Kuwait in October last year for the second time since 2010 over alleged government meddling in sports.

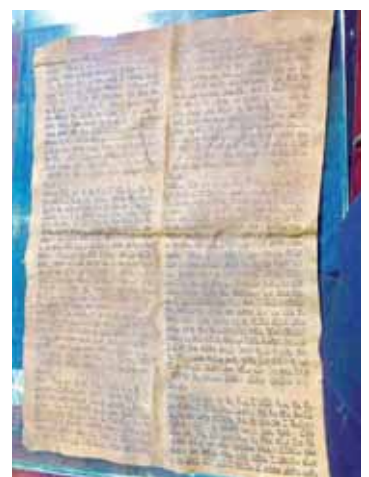
The suspension was due to legislation over recent years that allowed the government to interfere in local sports federations and undermine their independence. In a statement yesterday published by the official KUNA news agency, Kuwait's sports authority said it was making "serious and relentless efforts" to have the ban lifted. It said the National Assembly would set up a panel on Tuesday next week to draft amendments to the relevant laws. Kuwait is hoping to compete in the qualifiers for the 2019 AFC Asian Cup, it said. —AFP



IRAQ RECOVERS STOLEN ANCIENT KUWAITI RELIC

BAGHDAD: Iraqi security personnel have seized a unique Kuwaiti ancient manuscript that had been stolen during the 1990-1991 Iraqi occupation of the country. Adel Al-Husseini, the police chief in Babel, told KUNA that an antiquities trader was nabbed as he tried to sell the piece, worth millions of dollars. A freshly-established security team lured the man to a cafe in Hilla, the provincial city in Babel, pretending to be interested buyers. When he showed up for the trade, the personnel immediately arrested him.

Husseini explained that the trader, who was a former Iraqi Army soldier, had stolen the piece from the Kuwait Museum during the country's occupation that began in Aug 1990, adding that he intended to sell it for \$45 million. The piece is made of deer leather and engraved with letters in an ancient language. It could belong to the era of King Solomon, Husseini said. It also bears stamp of the Kuwaiti Museum. The police chief said the Iraqi government should take a decision with regards of handing it over to Kuwait, pending completion of the investigations. —KUNA





MUNICIPALITY DESTROYS TONS OF BAD FOOD

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Kuwait Municipality released a statement to comment on footage showing a municipality bulldozer appearing

to destroy large amounts of foodstuff, which went viral on social media recently. The municipality confirmed the reports, saying that the footage were taken from an operation to destroy expired food items received from the imported food

department. It added that the operation took place Thursday morning, and included destroying nearly 14,000 cardboard boxes of frozen chicken, 50 gallons of cheese, 60 buckets of labneh (strained yogurt), and 500 kilograms of sweets.

Crime Report

FOUR ARRESTED FOR SELLING PORK

KUWAIT: Criminal detectives prevented four Filipinas from selling pork they said they bought from an American man thinking it was lamb meat, according to their statements. Tips were received about the four in Mahboula selling pork, which is banned in Kuwait. An undercover Filipino agent made an agreement to buy KD 120 worth of pork, and the four were arrested red-handed. The arrested women told police about the other three women who were also selling pork on the occasion of New Year.

Fatal crash

A traffic accident on Fahaheel Road claimed the life of an Egyptian man and injured another, who was taken to Adan Hospital.

Suffocation

A guard at a Khairan chalet died from suffocation after he left a charcoal heater burning in the room and went to sleep. A security source said the chalet owner called police and told them the guard was not responding. Police went to the chalet and broke open the door to find the 38-year-old Indian man dead.

Drug abuse

A 24-year-old citizen and a 42-year-old Pakistani fell asleep in a car after smoking a hashish joint, and woke up as police were arresting them. They had hashish and two extra joints on them. The citizen was also found wanted on a civil case.

Fugitive nabbed

Police spotted a car being driven at a high speed late at night near Salwa, so the motorist was chased and stopped. He was found wanted over two financial cases. A policeman then noticed he was trying to hide a bag under the seat. They found 22 Tramadol tablets in it, a Taser and a knuckle-duster. —Al-Rai

MAN KILLED IN SALMI LANDMINE EXPLOSION

NO INJURIES IN FIRE

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: An unidentified man was killed in a landmine blast reported yesterday in the Salmi desert. Paramedics and police rushed to the scene, located near the 41st kilometer mark of Al-Abraq Road, after receiving an emergency call reporting an explosion and a possible injury. They found one man at the site, but he had already succumbed to his injuries. The victim's legs had been blown off. His body was taken to the coroner.

Explosives technicians from the Interior Ministry were called to the scene to sweep the area for any more landmines that could possibly be buried at the site. Frequent explosions of landmines, which were left by invading soldiers during the 1990/1991 Iraqi invasion, are often reported in areas in Kuwait's desert, even after more than 26 years after the war.

Jleeb fire

Fire broke out in a residence inhabited by 'bachelor' workers in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh Thursday night. Jleeb, Aradhiya and technical rescue firemen responded to the scene, and found the fire had started in a number of rooms made out of corrugated iron sheets. The building was evacuated before the flames were put out. No injuries were reported.



Firefighters tackle a blaze reported in Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh Thursday night.



Photo

of the day



KUWAIT: A formation of the Kuwaiti-owned F18 fighter jets cruising the sky. —KUNA

KUWAITIS 3RD IN PROPERTY TRADE IN TURKEY

ANKARA: Kuwaiti nationals ranked third after the Iraqis and Saudis in property purchases in Turkey last November, according to the Turkish Statistical Institute. Kuwaitis bought 212 plots in November, coming third after the Iraqis, who bought 285 units and the Saudis who came second, buying 236 plots. Property sales for foreigners in Turkey dropped in November by 16.3 percent as compared to last year's same month, with overall trades involving 1,773 plots. —KUNA



OPEC'S OUTPUT CUT DEAL HAS POSITIVE IMPACT ON MARKET: KUWAITI MINISTER OEAPEC RE-ELECTS KUWAIT'S NAQI AS CHIEF

CAIRO: The recent deal reached between the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) member states and non-OPEC states to cut oil production has positively impacted the market, Kuwait's Minister of Oil, Electricity, and Water Essam Al-Marzouq affirmed.

Marzouq made his remarks Thursday after the conclusion of the 97th annual meeting of the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) in Cairo. A regulatory commission, headed by Kuwait, consisting of three OPEC countries and two non-OPEC states is to convene next January in presence of the OPEC Secretary-General to agree on a mechanism for implementing the agreed-upon deal, he said.

The recent announcements by Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, and Iraq about commitment towards OPEC agreement are very "encouraging," Marzouq noted. On OAPEC's meeting, he pointed out a unanimous approval of the items on agenda related to the budget and a number of agreements.

The conferees also unanimously agreed with OAPEC members to renew the tenure of the organization's



Oil Minister Essam Al-Marzouq

Secretary-General Abas Al-Naqi of Kuwait for another three years, Marzouq noted, adding that OAPEC's recent efforts of studies and coordination among members have been "distinctive."

2017 budget

The OAPEC ministerial meeting approved the organization's estimated

budget for 2017. The council was briefed on results of arbitration of the OAPEC Award for Scientific Research for 2016 on "Re-Refining of Used Lubricating Oils and its Economic Environmental Implications."

No one won the first award worth KD 7,000, while the second one estimated at KD 5,000 was divided between Iraqi Saadallah Fathi and Algerian Jamal Harbi. The council also was informed about reports of the organization's secretariat on "the global oil positions" and the recent developments regarding the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). It was also apprised off some reports on several fields, activities and studies of the secretariat.

Earlier Thursday, the Kuwaiti minister stressed the importance of increasing cooperation and coordination among Arab countries in order to face challenges threatening the oil industry. He said such challenges have negative impacts on the oil industry and market. The next OAPEC ministerial meeting would be hosted by the State of Kuwait on December 10, 2017. —KUNA



ANKARA: The Kuwaiti team in the Al-Rahma International pose for a group photo after arriving to Ankara, Turkey. — KUNA

KRCS TEAM ARRIVES IN TURKEY FOR URGENT AID FOR SYRIANS

AL-RAHMA SENDS AID TO DISPLACED FROM ALEPPO

ANKARA: A team from Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) arrived yesterday in Turkey to take part in efforts for relieving Syrians fleeing from the northern Syrian city of Aleppo. Dr Musaed Al-Enezi, the head of the team, said that the society planned a number of key and charitable projects as well distribution of relief supplies, urgently, to the displaced, namely those coming from Aleppo. He also indicated that the team would seek to examine the situation on the ground in Aleppo and assess prospected needs for the war-afflicted people.

Meanwhile, Al-Rahma International, an affiliate of Kuwait's Social Reforms Society, yesterday sent a 24-truck convoy of relief aid from Turkey's southern town of Hatay, to the displaced Syrians from Aleppo and the surroundings areas. Up to 100 displaced Syrian families will benefit from the aid, Al-Rahma secretary general Yehia Al-Oqaili said.

This is part of a Kuwaiti comprehensive campaign to alleviate sufferings of the displaced amid their tragic conditions and dire need for help, Oqaili said. The aid convoy carries food stuff, coal-heaters, 100 tons of coal and 700 fire-resistant tents and other aid relief supplies to protect them from the freezing winter cold, he added.

Oqaili noted that they are keen on identifying most needy people amid the huge displacement from Aleppo, amid the severe weather conditions that aggravate their sufferings. The campaign reflects Kuwait's humanitarian role, he said, adding that Al-Rahma International has offered \$57 million to the Syrian refugee and displaced since the eruption of their crises almost six years ago. Oqaili thanked the Turkish authorities and the Kuwaiti Foreign Ministry for their support to the philanthropic efforts, as well as the Kuwaiti benefactors for their rapid and positive response to calls of help. — KUNA



Al-Rahma International's Secretary General Yehia Al-Oqaili.



BEIRUT: Kuwait Red Crescent Society (KRCS) launched a project yesterday to distribute bread and other food supplies as well as diesel fuel to hundreds of Syrian refugee families in Lebanon.— KUNA

KUWAITI AUTHORITIES COORDINATE FOR ENCOURAGING THE YOUTH

KUWAIT: Officials of the Ministry of State for Youth Affairs have held a coordination meeting with counterparts from other relevant departments as part of continuing efforts to look into the youth problems and issues and tackle any emerging flaws in the strategies to enhance their role and productivity in the Kuwaiti community.

The meeting grouped officials from the ministry, the Planning Secretariat General and the Fund of Small Enterprise, discussing plans for promoting the young citizens' status, meeting their needs and tackling any flaws that may emerge in implementation of plans and strategies at this level, said Sheikha Al-Zain Al-Sabah, the ministry Undersecretary in a press statement yesterday.

Sheikha Al-Zain, expressing resolve to tackle the youth issues, noted necessity to prepare joint training programs to train business leaders and educate the youngsters on the economy of knowledge and creativity. She called for facilitating procedures for launching youths' companies and adhering to the Arab language as a tool for communication with other segments of the Kuwaiti community.

Meanwhile, the ministry's general secretary for planning, Dr Khaled Mahdi, affirmed necessity that various State departments supply the ministry with any reports regarding efforts to encourage the junior citizens. He indicated that "the document for supporting the sports" with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) had already been inked, indicating that another document, themed "the youth document was being worked out. He called for encouraging the Kuwaiti students to study materials that are in need in the labor and professional markets. — KUNA

KUWAIT WORLD'S LARGEST AID GIVER: DIPLOMAT

KUWAIT: Kuwait tops the world in terms of most humanitarian aid provided as compared to national income, a Kuwaiti diplomat said on Thursday. In a speech at a Kuwaiti foreign ministry-sponsored ceremony held by a contingent from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to mark the 65th anniversary of the organization's inception, Assistant Foreign Minister for Arab Affairs Ambassador Aziz Al-Daihani highlighted Kuwait's contributions to humanitarian endeavors.

Moreover, he recalled that Kuwait has hosted a trio of international conferences over worsening humanitarian conditions in Syria, which yielded aid worth \$7 billion earmarked for humanitarian causes. "Kuwait has also provided refuge to around 130,000 Syrian nationals since the war in Syria first broke out," he noted. Daihani also underscored that sustained development goals for post-2015 are crucial to the success of the UN, adding that Kuwait is eager to make sure that those goals ultimately come to fruition.

Meanwhile, Secretary General of the Supreme Council for Planning and Development (SCPD) Dr Khaled Mehdi said that the ceremony coincides with the formation of the 2018-2019 development plan. He also noted that Kuwait strives to be a focal part of UN sustained development programs, through establishing partnerships with leading global development organizations in efforts to better serve humanity. Established in 1951, IOM is the leading inter-governmental organization in the field of migration, with 166 member states and eight states holding observer status. — KUNA



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

AMIR CONGRATULATES JAPANESE EMPEROR ON HIS BIRTHDAY

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent a cable yesterday to Emperor Akihito of Japan, wishing him a happy birthday. His Highness the Amir also expressed his best wishes to the leadership and people of Japan on this occasion. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables. Also, Speaker of the National Assembly Marzouq Al-Ghanem sent Friday cables to heads of the Japanese National Diet's House of Councilors and House of Representatives, President Chuichi Date and Speaker Tadamori Oshima respectively, congratulating them on Emperor Akihito's birthday occasion. — KUNA



Emperor Akihito of Japan



KUWAIT: A performance held during the conclusion of 800 events commemorating Kuwait as the Capital of Islamic Culture for 2016. — KUNA



Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Sheikh Salman Sabah Al-Humoud Al-Sabah and a number of Arab ministers of culture attend the ceremony.

'CAPITAL OF ISLAMIC CULTURE' CULMINATES WITH GRAND CEREMONY SUPPORTING CULTURAL MOVEMENT IN ARAB, MUSLIM WORLDS

KUWAIT: Under the auspices of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, a grand ceremony was held Thursday evening to mark the conclusion of 800 events commemorating Kuwait as the Capital of Islamic Culture for 2016.

The ceremony saw the issuance of Kuwait declaration in the presence of His Highness the Amir's representative the Minister of Information and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Sheikh Salman Sabah Al-Humoud Al-Sabah and a number of Arab ministers of culture and noted cultural figures and ambassadors. The ceremony crowns a historic Islamic occasion for Kuwait which continues its role as a beacon for cultural enlightenment and humanitarian action, Secretary-General of National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL) Ali Al-Youha said in his address to the gathering.

Cultural movement

He reaffirmed the commitment of Kuwait, under the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir, to supporting the cultural movement across the Arab and Muslim worlds, saying that Kuwait's contributions entitled the country to its designation as capital of Arabic culture in

2001 and once again in 2022. Youha extolled His Highness the Amir for his kind patronage of the ceremony and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah for the efforts he made as chairman of the higher national commission on celebrations.

He also thanked the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) for selecting Kuwait as Capital of Islamic Culture

2016. "The 800 cultural events held over the last year gathered a galaxy of cultural celebrities from various Arab and Muslim countries including ISESCO Director-General Dr Abdulaziz Al-Tuwijri," he said.

"These events signaled Kuwait's role as center of moderate thought and dialogue among people with different cultures," Youha added. He noted that ISESCO honoring of Sheikh

Hessa Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah - the general supervisor of Kuwait's Dar Al-Athar Al-Islamiyyah, represents an honoring of the Kuwaiti Islamic culture.

Joint action

Meanwhile, ISESCO representative Dr Obaid Al-Hajeri lauded Kuwait's support to the Islamic joint action in the cultural field and to the cultural programs of the organization. "ISESCO selects the capitals of Islamic culture based on accurate standards and the contributions of the state parties to the organization," he said in a speech on behalf of the ISESCO Director-General. "Kuwait is a prosperous lively city with flourished culture which remained unparalleled in the last decades," Dr Al-Hajeri added.

During the ceremony, ISESCO awarded a shield to Sheikh Hessa in appreciation of her efforts and the role of Dar Al-Athar Al-Islamiyya; her daughter Sheikh Dana Nasser Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah received the shield on her behalf.

The ceremony featured the screening of a documentary on Kuwait's cultural contributions, a concert given by Kuwait and Arab singers and an operetta offered by the Syrian Anana troupe in collaboration with Kuwaiti artists. — KUNA



A general view of the audience.



Kanonian calligraphy



ANKARA: Various calligraphy works displayed at a center in Ankara, Turkey. —KUNA

ISLAMIC CALLIGRAPHY HAS DEEP-ROOTED HISTORY IN TURKEY

ANKARA: Arabic, or rather, Islamic calligraphy, has a long history in Turkey dating back to the days of the Ottoman Empire. In fact, calligraphy is especially revered among Islamic arts since it was the primary means for the preservation of the Quran.

Therefore, the Turkish people associate the art mainly with religion, since originally Arabic is the language of the Muslims' Holy book. Great works of calligraphy, verses from the Holy Quran, and other Islamic sayings and Hadith, have been decorating walls and ceilings of most almost all mosques nationwide. The profession has been prospering over centuries, and calligraphy shops are spread in several Turkish cities; skilled calligraphers have been drawing a historical and heritage dimension.

"I learnt the Arabic/Islamic calligraphy decades ago at the hands of Hamid Aytas (1891-1982), a leading calligrapher of the Ottoman Empire," said Abuzar Ozkan whose calligraphy shop lies in one of the ancient districts of the capital Ankara. He recalled Aytas's efforts for disseminating the art, sometimes referred to as Ottoman calligraphy, nationwide as well as in other countries.

Learning the art is a real hard mission that combines theoretical studies with application, Ozkan said. It is said "to be a good calligrapher, one needs two lives, one to learn and another to apply what he learnt."

15th century

The Islamic calligraphy was introduced in Turkey during the 15th century, at the hands of Sheikh Hamidullah, a famous calligraphist from the period of Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror, based on the oriental origin of the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphates the heritage. Sheikh Hamidullah intro-



Calligraphy expert Emine Susoy.



Accuracy is a must in calligraphy.

duced major changes in the traditional seven writing styles and put the mark of the Turkish national character on Islamic writing.

According to Ozkan, many styles of Arabic calligraphy found their way to Turkey a long time ago and were well-established there; Kufi is the most spread and used, then came Nash or Naskhi, Tulut, Tawqi, and Al-Diwani. This last one was not allowed to be used outside the Ottoman palaces. There is also the Kanonian calligraphy, named after Sultan Suleyman Kanoni. The 'Basmalah' is usually written in Kanonian.

Over the past centuries, Turkish calligraphists have preserved the art, and even taught it to numerous scholars in other countries, Ozkan said. Istanbul is the stronghold of Arabic calligraphy in Turkey, drawing huge interest from people of the city, he said. Mosques and other religious, historical, and cultural sites of the city are ornamented with various Islamic calligraphies. The city of Bursa ranks second after Istanbul.

Ozkan stressed the need for using high quality supplies in calligraphy, especially ink, so that they can survive for centuries, as



Calligrapher of the Ottoman Empire Abuzar Ozkan.

bright as ever. Most of these supplies come from Iran, India, the Philippines, together with local products.

It takes from one month to a year to produce a good work of calligraphy, according to the size and the materials used, he said. Price differ, starting from \$100, to thousands. They include verses from the Holy Quran and Prophet Mohammad's (PBUH) Hadith, as well as immortal wise sayings that have passed down through generations.

Ozkan expects the art to further prosper Turkey in the future, since many Turkish people are keen on

learning it. The leading calligraphist gives lessons at the Sharia College, and students come to his workshop for practice.

He lauded the high interest of the state and organizations of the civil society in calligraphy, holding several local and international contests. Ozkan himself has taken part in many galleries at home and overseas.

Big names

He recalled some of the big names of the art of calligraphy in Turkey through history, Hamid Aytas, Sheikh Hamidullah, Hafiz

Osman, Mehmet Esad Esari, Kadi Efendi, Sami Efendi, Necemeddin Okyay, and Ismail Altunbezer.

Famous ones at present include Huseyin Kutlu, Mustafa Celebi, Huseyin Oksuz, Fuad Basar, Davut Bektas, Osman Olgay, Mehmet Olgay. "I have been in ornamenting of Arabic calligraphy for 15 years," said Emine Susoy. This decoration art dates back to the 8th century, the era of the Uighur Turks. She added.

Susoy uses 18, 21 and 24 carat gold in her work. It is really a fantastic job where precision and patience are a must, she said. One of the great works of the art has been Sultan Mehmet Al-Fatih's 'Diwan Al-Muhib', 740 pages.

Susoy explained the 'theory' of colors used in decoration and well chosen; for instance gold symbolizes sunset, the sun is going home to shine once more the next morning, which "more comprehensively represents the 'limitless' world we live in."

Most people in the art of decoration of calligraphy are not after money, this is why many of them are pensioners. It might also be surprising that few of the 'Arabic' or 'Islamic' calligraphy speak Arabic. —KUNA

International

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2016

**Syria army and civilians
reclaim Aleppo streets**

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**Snatched in the night, Pak
girl enslaved for a debt**

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**Trump tweets on nukes:
'Let it be an arms race'**

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VALLETTA: A picture taken yesterday in Valletta, Malta, shows a crew member helping a group of hostages to disembark from the Afriqiyah Airways A320 after it was hijacked from Libya. —AFP

LIBYAN PLANE HIJACKERS SURRENDER IN MALTA

ALL 111 PASSENGERS FREED, 2 'GADDAFI LOYALISTS' ARRESTED

VALLETTA: Hijackers claiming to have a grenade took over a Libyan plane yesterday and diverted it to Malta before releasing everyone onboard and surrendering to authorities, officials said. "Final crew members leaving aircraft with hijackers," Maltese Prime Minister Joseph Muscat said on Twitter. Television pictures showed two men being led from the aircraft in handcuffs. The prime tweeted minutes later, "hijackers surrendered, searched and taken into custody."

Libyan Foreign Minister Taher Siala said the two hijackers were supporters of slain dictator Muammar Gaddafi had requested political asylum in Malta. Siala, from Libya's internationally backed Government of National Accord, said the hijackers have also said they want to set up a pro-Gaddafi political party.

The plane landed at 11.32 am (1032 GMT) in Malta. After more than an hour on the tarmac, the door of the Airbus A320 opened and a first group of women and children were seen descending a mobile staircase. Dozens more passengers were released minutes later following negotiations that Maltese government sources said were led by the head of Malta's military. In all there were 111 passengers, including 28 women and a baby, on board, as well as seven crew members. Maltese government sources had earlier said only a single hijacker was believed to be on the plane. The aircraft had been on a domestic Libyan route operated by Afriqiyah Airways from Sabha in southern Libya to the capital Tripoli but was re-routed.

Standoff on tarmac

"The Afriqiyah flight from Sabha to Tripoli has been diverted and has landed in Malta. Security services coordinating operations," Muscat tweeted earlier.

MP Hadi Al-Saghir told Reuters that Abdusalem Mrabit, a

fellow member of Libya's House of Representatives on the plane, had told him the two hijackers were in their mid-20s and were from the Tebu ethnic group in southern Libya. Troops were positioned a few hundred metres (yards) from the plane as it stood on the tarmac. Several other flights at the airport were cancelled or diverted. A senior Libyan secu-



VALLETTA: An Afriqiyah Airways plane sits on the tarmac at Malta's Luqa International airport as military personnel approach it yesterday. —AP

city official told Reuters that when the plane was still in flight yesterday morning the pilot told the control tower at Tripoli's Mitiga airport it had been hijacked. "Then they lost communication with him," the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity. "The pilot tried very hard to have them land at the correct destination but they refused." The air-

craft had been flying from Sebha in southwest Libya to Tripoli for state-owned Afriqiyah Airways, a trip that would usually take a little over two hours.

Libyan airlines banned in Europe

Muscat later spoke to Libya's prime minister-designate Fayez Al-Sarraj, the head of the north African country's fledgling unity government, the Maltese prime minister's office said. The plane could be seen on the tarmac of a secondary runway surrounded by military vehicles. All flights in and out of the airport were initially either delayed or diverted to destinations in Italy, though some later took off and landed. Malta International Airport said there had been "an unlawful interference" but operations had now resumed.

An Afriqiyah Airways source said the two hijackers had threatened the pilots with an explosive device, probably a grenade, forcing them to continue to Malta instead of landing at Tripoli's Mitiga airport. Libya has been in a state of chaos since the 2011 overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi left warring militias battling for control of different parts of the country.

Forces loyal to a national unity government recently took control of the coastal city of Sirte, which had been a bastion for the Islamic State group since June 2015. Western powers have pinned their hopes of containing jihadism in the energy-rich North African state on the government but it has failed to establish its authority over all of the country. A rival authority rules the country's far east, backed by the forces under military strongman Marshal Khalifa Haftar who have been battling jihadists in second city Benghazi. Only local airlines-banned from European airspace-operate in Libya, with flights to Tunis, Cairo, Amman, Istanbul and Khartoum. —AFP



ALEPPO: Syrian soldiers sit by a fire in the former rebel-held Ansari district in the northern Syrian city of Aleppo yesterday. —AFP

SYRIA ARMY AND CIVILIANS RECLAIM ALEPPO STREETS

THE GOAL OF REGIME DOWNFALL FAILED: NASARALLAH

ALEPPO: Syrian troops cemented their hold on Aleppo yesterday after retaking full control of the city, as residents anxious to return to their homes moved through its ruined streets. The army announced on Thursday it had recaptured the former rebel stronghold of east Aleppo following a landmark evacuation deal that saw thousands of opposition fighters and residents bussed out.

It was the biggest victory for President Bashar al-Assad's forces in nearly six years of civil war and a major win for his foreign backers, with key ally Russia hailing the recapture as "very important" step.

Braving the cold, war-weary residents crossed districts that had become infamous front lines, eager to return to neighbourhoods they had not seen in years. An AFP correspondent saw civilians wrapped in coats trekking through the cold, some rolling their belongings on wheelbarrows.

"I came to check on my house, which I haven't seen in five years," resident Khaled Al-Masri said. "I really hope my home wasn't badly damaged." The evacuation operation ended more than four years of ferocious fighting inside Aleppo, which had been divided between government forces in the west and rebels in the east.

Opposition forces remain in control of areas west of Aleppo and yesterday at least two civilians were killed in the first wave of rebel rocket fire on the city since it fell under government control, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

'Nothing left'

Seven civilians were also wounded in the fire on the Al-Hamdaniyeh district, the Britain-based monitor said, while state news agency SANA reported three killed. The evacuation agreement was brokered by rebel backer Turkey and regime supporter Russia, which said it would strive to end fighting across Syria.

"The liberation of Aleppo from radical elements is a very important part of the normalisation in Syria, and I hope, for the region overall," President Vladimir Putin said. "Everything needs to be done for fighting to stop on all Syrian territory," Putin said. "In any case, we will strive toward this."

The Kremlin also announced that Putin had signed an order to expand Russia's naval facility in the Syrian city of Tartus, and that it had dispatched military police to newly acquired territory in Aleppo. "We sent in a battalion of military police yesterday evening to maintain order in the liberated territories," Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu told Putin. Yesterday morning, government fighters moved into Ansari, Al-Mashhad, and other neighbourhoods they had not entered since mid-2012. They searched for improvised explosive devices and mines, clearing buildings in anticipation of civilians returning, the Observatory said.

As they finished sweeping through the main streets, soldiers moved into the smaller alleyways to check for bombs, an AFP correspondent in one district said. In Bustan Al-Qasr, a heavily damaged neighbourhood near Aleppo's famed old

city, small bulldozers removed rubble from the streets.

As the army moved through Al-Myassar district, Umm Abdo, 42, said she had found her former home but it had been destroyed. "There's nothing left... but houses can be rebuilt," she said. Syria's war transformed Aleppo from the country's industrial hub to a worldwide symbol of bloodshed and devastation.

The army's statement on Thursday announced "the return of security to Aleppo after its release from terrorism and terrorists, and the departure of those who stayed there".

'Toughest battles'

It came after state television said the last convoy of four buses carrying rebels and civilians had left east Aleppo and arrived in the government-controlled Ramussa district south of the city.

The evacuation deal, overseen by the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Syrian Red Crescent, put an end to a month-long offensive waged on Aleppo's east by pro-government forces.

The assault was backed by pro-government militia, including powerful Lebanese Shiite movement Hezbollah. In a televised speech yesterday, Hezbollah head Hassan Nasrallah said the army's win in Aleppo put an end to any hopes Assad's regime would collapse. "After Aleppo, one can comfortably say that the goal of regime downfall has failed," Nasrallah said. He described the fight for Aleppo as "one of the toughest battles that the region has seen in years." — AFP

TURKEY RESTRICTS INTERNET AFTER RELEASE OF IS VIDEO

ANKARA: Turkey restricted access to social media websites for several hours after the Islamic State group released a video purportedly showing two Turkish soldiers being burned alive, as Turkish warplanes yesterday pounded the extremist-held town in Syria near where the soldiers are believed to have gone missing. IS released the video late Thursday, which purports to show the killing of two soldiers captured near the northern Syrian town of Al-Bab last month. Turkish officials have not commented on the video. Syrian activists said the soldiers went missing in the area of al-Dana, northwest of Al-Bab, in late November.

Turkey Blocks, an internet monitoring website, said it had detected the "throttling of Twitter and YouTube," affecting many users in Turkey. Turkey frequently restricts access to social media websites to prevent the spread of graphic images and other material authorities say would harm public order or security. The websites appeared to be back to normal yesterday.

Police meanwhile rounded up 31 suspected IS militants in Istanbul and were searching for 10 others wanted by prosecutors investigating the extremist group, the state-run Anadolu Agency reported.

Turkish warplanes have meanwhile carried out airstrikes over the past three days on al-Bab, killing dozens of people. The IS-run Aamaq news agency said a Friday airstrike on Al-Bab killed at least 20 people, and released a video showing infants among the dead being pulled from the debris.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said Friday's airstrike killed 16 people, including three children. It said 88 people have been killed by airstrikes over the past three days.

Turkey sent ground troops into northern Syria in August to support Syrian opposition forces in clearing a border area of IS militants and to prevent Syrian Kurds from making greater territorial advances. At least 37 Turkish soldiers have been killed in northern Syria since then, including 16 during the clashes in Al-Bab this week.

Yesterday, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan declared that the Turkish-supported offensive to recapture Al-Bab was on the verge of completion, without providing further information. "Now Al-Bab is almost completed and our armed forces, together with the (Syrian opposition fighters) are sorting it out," Erdogan said, at a ceremony marking the inauguration of a natural gas terminal in western Turkey. — AP

CHRISTIANS IN ALEPPO PREPARE WAR-RAVAGED CHURCH FOR CHRISTMAS

ALEPPO, Syria: Inside Aleppo's crumbling Saint Elias Cathedral, Nehme Badawi and his brother Bashir rummage through the snow-covered rubble for wood and scrap metal to make a crude Nativity scene for Christmas. The roof of the famed church in Aleppo's Old City had collapsed years ago under a salvo of rocket fire, and bright white flakes floated down and rested on the destruction inside.

"We're using whatever debris we can find to symbolise the triumph of life over death," says 53-year-old Nehme, as he gathered broken tree branches to decorate the scene.

After more than four years of fierce fighting, the guns have fallen silent in Syria's second city just a few days before Christmas. The army announced on Thursday that it had fully recaptured Aleppo, putting an end to the violence that transformed the city from a hub of culture and history into a worldwide symbol of destruction.

Aleppo's small Catholic minority has wasted no time in trying to bring life back to the ruins of Saint Elias, preparing the church for its first Christmas mass in five years.

Along with his brother and a group of boy scouts, Bashir is surrounded by overturned church pews, pieces of corrugated metal and scraps of wood strewn across the floor. "The emotional impact is much bigger and deeper than the material loss," he says. — AFP

NIGERIA'S FREED CHIBOK GIRLS, FAMILIES CELEBRATE

CHIBOK: A group of 21 Chibok schoolgirls freed by Boko Haram militants in October after two-and-a-half years in captivity in northeastern Nigeria were celebrating a "miracle" yesterday as the girls prepared to return to their families for Christmas.

The girls were released after Switzerland and the International Red Cross brokered a deal with the Islamist fighters and have been held in a secret location in the capital Abuja for assessment and debriefing by the Nigerian government. But the freed girls are being taken back to Chibok in Borno state to spend Christmas and New Year with their families, going home for the first time since being seized from their school, several of their relatives told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

The kidnapping of more than 200

schoolgirls from Chibok in April 2014 sparked global outrage and prompted global figures, including US First Lady Michelle Obama and a list of celebrities, to support a campaign #BringBackOurGirls. One of the girls, Asabe Goni, described her release as a "miracle" and, in the first interview by one of the 21 girls to international media, said she was happy to be going home. "I had given up hope of ever going home," Goni, 22, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation by phone from the city of Yola where the 21 girls stayed overnight before setting off to Chibok with two other freed girls and state officials on Friday.

Dancing and singing in her home in Chibok, Goni's grandmother Ngobiko Mutar could not contain her joy as the family prepared for her arrival. "I didn't

think I would ever see her again," Mutar said, while Goni's young relatives baked a cake to welcome her home. The girls were expected to return to Abuja in the New Year to continue a "restoration process", according to government sources.

They will be joined in Chibok by two other girls abducted from the school in April 2014 who were rescued earlier this year. This includes Amina Ali, the first of the missing girls to be found, who was located in a forest with a baby and a man claiming to be her husband in May.

Her discovery put the disappearance of the girls back into world headlines and President Muhammadu Buhari has pledged to ensure the release of the remaining girls in captivity. Nigerian authorities are involved in

negotiations aimed at securing the release of more of the girls, the president's spokesman said on Thursday on comments posted on Twitter.

Goni said the Chibok girls who were not released wept when the group of 21 was freed, but they were consoled by Boko Haram militants and told that they would go home one day.

Boko Haram has killed more than 15,000 people, displaced over two million and kidnapped hundreds of men, women and children during a seven-year insurgency aimed at creating an Islamic state. Nigeria's army has driven the militants back to their base in Sambisa forest, Boko Haram's vast northeastern woodland stronghold, in recent months but they still stage suicide bombings, often using young girls to carry out the attacks. — Reuters

CONGO POLITICIANS AGREE KABILA TRANSITION DEAL

KINSHASA: Congolese politicians have agreed in principle to a deal under which President Joseph Kabila leaves office by the end of 2017, opposition leaders said yesterday, an unexpected breakthrough after dozens were killed in anti-government protests this week.

If the deal does succeed, it would be a major achievement for the Catholic church, which has been mediating talks in an attempt to prevent Democratic Republic of Congo sliding back into years of anarchy and civil war. Pope Francis has heaped pressured on Kabila and the opposition to find a peaceful solution to the crisis in Congo. "At first glance, a miracle is possible and the bishops have won their bet," Albert Moleka, former chief of staff to the leader of the main opposition bloc Etienne Tshisekedi, said.

A government spokesman said the proposal would be presented to the full delegation at the talks on Friday afternoon, but he declined to comment on the specifics of the deal. In return for Kabila staying on for another year, the constitution will not be changed to let him stand for a third term, a prime minister will be named from the main opposition bloc and Tshisekedi will oversee the deal's implementation, opposition leaders Martin Fayulu and Jose Endundo told Reuters.

"Kabila stays for one year," Fayulu said. "He will not try to stand for a new term." However, Kabila himself has so far said nothing and the parties have yet to sign the deal, which requires final approval by all delegates at the talks. Church leaders have presented these talks as a last ditch effort to prevent violence spinning out of control after a bloody week that saw protesters killed and deadly clashes between various ethnic militia across the country.

BLOODY PROTESTS

The head of the UN human rights agency said yesterday that Congolese security forces had killed at least 40 people and arrested 460 in protests this week. The violence has raised fears Congo is heading toward another major armed conflict, a risk that has prompted several donor nations to condemn Kabila for failing to stand down. Millions were killed in wars between 1996 and 2003. "Most of ... (Kabila's coalition) would welcome this (deal) because they're under so much pressure," said Pascal Kambale, a Congolese human rights lawyer working for the Open Society Foundations.

But Jean Marc Kabund, the secretary general of Congo's largest opposition party, the UDPS, warned that the deal was not yet a sure thing. "Today is the last day (of negotiations)," he told Reuters. "It's make it or break it." A presidential election scheduled for last month had been postponed until at least April 2018 because of what the government said were delays registering voters. This deal would mean it must happen by the end of next year. Kabila has declined to commit publicly to not changing the constitution to extend his term, leading many to conclude that this is what he secretly wants to do. His allies have argued that he is committed to respecting the constitution but that promising to step down would make him a lame duck and possibly spark a power struggle that could put his life in danger. —Reuters

UN COUNCIL LIKELY TO VOTE ON ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS

ISRAEL TURNED TO TRUMP TO WARD OFF RESOLUTION

UNITED NATIONS: The UN Security Council was expected to vote later yesterday on demanding Israel halt settlements after four countries agreed to present a draft resolution that was withdrawn by Egypt, diplomats said. New Zealand, Malaysia, Senegal and Venezuela stepped in after Egypt, under pressure from US President-elect Donald Trump, decided not to move forward with its push for a vote at the council, diplomats said. "Most likely, we will have a vote soon," French Ambassador Francois Delattre told reporters. Egypt on Thursday requested that the vote be postponed a day after it submitted the draft text to the council, triggering immediate calls from Israel for a US veto to block the measure.

Israel asked Trump to intervene after learning that Washington, in a reversal of its policy under President Barack Obama, would not veto the resolution, an Israeli official said.

"The key goal that we have here is to preserve and reaffirm the two state-solution," said Delattre. "The text that we have does not exclusively focus on settlements. It also condemns the violence and terrorism. It also calls to prevent all incitement from the Palestinian side so this is a balanced text." Diplomats said the same draft resolution would be submitted to a vote, at the request of the four countries. The draft resolution demands that "Israel immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem." It states that Israeli settlements have "no legal validity" and are "dangerously imperiling the viability of the two-state solution" that would see an independent Palestine co-exist alongside Israel.

Israeli settlements are seen as a major stumbling block to peace efforts, as they are built on land the Palestinians see as part of their future state. The United Nations maintains that settlements are illegal, but UN officials have reported a surge in construction over the past months.



BETHLEHEM: Israeli border police officers scuffle with Palestinian protesters, some are dressed as Santa Claus, during a protest in front of an Israeli checkpoint, in the West Bank city of Bethlehem yesterday.—AP

Israel turns to Trump

Israel's prime minister turned to President-elect Donald Trump to help head off a critical UN resolution after learning that the White House did not intend to veto the measure, an Israeli official said yesterday. The admission marked a final chapter in the icy relations between Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and President Barack Obama over the last eight years, and signaled an era of close ties between Israel and the incoming Trump administration.

The Egyptian-sponsored resolution had demanded that Israel halt settlement activities in occupied territories claimed by the Palestinians and declared that existing settlements "have no legal validity."

But under heavy Israeli pressure, Egypt called off a planned vote in the Security Council hours before it was to take place. In the diplomatic activity ahead of the postponement, both Netanyahu and Trump issued nearly identical statements urging the US to veto the measure. "After becoming aware that the administration would not

veto the anti-Israel resolution, Israeli officials reached out to Trump's transition team to ask for the president-elect's help to avert the resolution," the Israeli official said, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was discussing behind-the-scenes diplomatic activity.

On Friday, Egypt said its president had received a call from Trump in which they both agreed to give the incoming US administration a chance to try and resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The call came hours after Egypt indefinitely postponed the UN vote.

A statement from the Egyptian presidency said the two men spoke by phone early yesterday and agreed on "the importance of giving a chance for the new American administration to deal in a comprehensive way with the different aspects of the Palestinian issue with the aim of achieving a comprehensive and a final resolution." A senior Palestinian official, speaking anonymously according to protocol, said Egypt didn't consult with the Palestinians about delaying the vote and it was a "complete shock" for them. —Agencies



MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin waves as he leaves after his annual press conference in Moscow yesterday. — AFP

PUTIN WARMS TO TRUMP, FLEXES MUSCLES ON SYRIA

'US DEMOCRATS SORE LOSERS'

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday appeared to cozy up to US President-elect Donald Trump while stamping his authority as the key powerbroker in Syria. At his annual end-of-year press conference, the confident Kremlin strongman praised Trump for tapping into the public mood in the US to claim his surprise win in the elections.

Putin praised Trump, saying he had his finger on the pulse of US society, and launched a scathing attack on the Democrats, saying they had forgotten the meaning of their own name and

were sore losers. Speaking at his annual news conference in Moscow, Russia's president said that only Russia had believed that Trump would become the next president of the United States, but that did not mean the Democrats had the right to blame him for their defeat.

"The current administration and the leadership of the Democratic Party are trying to blame all their failures on external factors," Putin told reporters.

"(We are talking about) a party which has clearly forgotten the original

meaning of its own name," Putin said, accusing the Democrats of "shamelessly" abusing their status as the ruling party to try to influence public opinion. "Outstanding figures in American history from the ranks of the Democratic Party would likely be turning in their graves. Roosevelt certainly would be," he said.

"He went to the end, though nobody believed that he would win except us," Putin said. Ties between Moscow and Washington have hit their lowest point since the Cold War under President Barack Obama due to the Ukraine crisis and Russia's military intervention in Syria.

But the election of Trump, who praised Putin as a strong leader, has provided a surprise fillip for the Kremlin, with the Russian economy still struggling due to Western sanctions and lower oil prices. Officials in the US have accused Russia of cyberattacks aimed at interfering with the US vote, with some alleging Moscow sought to tip the balance in favor of Trump.

Putin, however, backed Trump's rejection of the allegations, insisting "as the president-elect said entirely correctly, who knows who these hackers were?" The Russian leader also sought to play down a potential nuclear stand-off with the future US president, a day after they both pledged to bolster their nuclear capabilities.

Putin insisted there was "nothing unusual" about Trump's call in a tweet Thursday to bolster America's nuclear capability, hours after he ordered his top brass to strengthen Moscow's "nuclear potential". "We will never look to be dragged into an armed race and to spend resources that we can't afford," Putin said, after insisting he understood the US was the stronger military power but "we just say that we are stronger than any aggressor". — Agencies

MEDITERRANEAN DEATH TOLL TOPS RECORD 5,000 IN 2016

GENEVA: Around 100 people are missing and feared dead after two shipwrecks off Italy, raising the estimated death toll among migrants on the Mediterranean this year to at least 5,000 - a new annual record, UN agencies said yesterday.

Deaths linked to Mediterranean crossings by migrants mostly seeking economic opportunity or relative peace in Europe have spiked in 2016. Last year, over a million people crossed the sea - mostly from Turkey to Greece - with 3,771 deaths recorded. But this year, about 360,000 people have successfully crossed, most between Libya and Italy, with far more deadly results.

"The latest information we have is that yesterday, in two incidents, as many as 100 people lost their lives," said William Spindler, spokesman for the UN refugee agency, UNHCR. "The number of people who have lost their lives on the Mediterranean this year has now passed 5,000," he added. "That means that on average, 14 peo-

ple have died every single day this year in the Mediterranean trying to find safety or a better life or safety in Europe."

Citing survivors' accounts, spokesman Joel Millman of the International Organization for Migration said that at least 57 people were feared dead following the capsizing Thursday of a rubber dinghy carrying between 120 and 140 people. He said eight bodies had been recovered in that area. Another 40 people were feared dead from another dinghy also carrying about 120 people. Millman said he did not immediately have further details about the possible causes of the shipwrecks.

UNHCR said the Italian coast guard carried out a total of four rescue operations in the central Mediterranean on Thursday, including the rescue of about 175 people from another dinghy and a wooden boat. The coast guard helped disembark the rescued survivors at the western Sicilian town of Trapani. — AP

ANIS AMRI: SMALL-TIME CRIMINAL TURNED KILLER

BERLIN: Anis Amri, the Tunisian suspect in the Berlin truck attack who was shot dead in Milan yesterday, followed the well-trodden path of petty criminal turned jihadist killer. Security sources believe the rejected asylum seeker was radicalized during a four-year stint in an Italian prison before he murdered 12 people in Monday's attack on a Christmas market in the German capital.

Amri, who turned 24 years old while on the run Thursday, was hailed as a "soldier of the Islamic State" by the IS-linked Amaq news agency after the bloody assault. When he pulled his gun on the Italian police early Friday before they shot him dead, Amri reportedly yelled "Allahu Akbar" (God is greatest).

In a growing security scandal in Germany, Amri had long been watched as a potentially dangerous jihadist but managed to avoid both arrest and deportation.

Radicalized in jail

Amri's journey began in Oueslatia, a poor desert town in central Tunisia. The youngest of nine siblings, he was known to police as a juvenile delinquent who drank and took drugs. He was 18 when the Tunisian revolution erupted in early 2011 and overthrew long-time dictator Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali.

Amri took advantage of the turmoil to flee the country, escaping a four-year jail term handed down in absentia for robbery and burglary. He also "left to get away from misery", his brother Abdulkader told AFP this week.

"He had no future in Tunisia and wanted at all costs to improve the family's financial situation. We live below the poverty line, like most families in Oueslatia." Like thousands of other migrants, Amri made the dangerous Mediterranean crossing and landed in March on the small Italian island of Lampedusa, where he lied about his age and was taken as an unaccompanied minor to Sicily.

Soon after, Amri was arrested on arson charges for burning a school building which had been converted into a refugee shelter. He was sentenced to four years in prison.

Not a model prisoner, he received no early release. It was behind bars that he was radicalised as an Islamic extremist, a classic phenomenon in Europe, local media reported. Upon his release, Italy ordered him to leave the country, while Tunisia refused to take him back.

Small-time drug dealer

In July 2015 he headed to Germany, as tens of thousands of Middle Eastern and African migrants flocked to Europe's biggest economy. His brother said Amri "worked as an agricultural labourer and things like that".

"He'd contact us on Facebook, saying he wanted to come back to Tunisia but that he had to earn some money to buy his own car and start his own business." German security agencies say he quickly mingled in radical Islamist circles but evaded authorities by changing location frequently and using up to six different identities.

Amri repeatedly contacted Islamist "hate preachers" including the Iraqi Ahmad Abdulaziz Abdullah A. alias Abu Walaa, who has since been arrested accused of seeking to recruit fighters for IS.

News weekly Der Spiegel reported that in wiretaps, Amri could be heard offering to carry out a suicide operation, but that his words were too vague for an arrest warrant. — AFP



MILAN: People gather near the site where suspect Berlin truck attacker Anis Amri was killed in Milan yesterday. — AFP



In this photo taken on Thursday, Dec 1, 2016, Ameri Kashi Kohli shows picture of her daughter Jeevti (right) in Payro Lundh, Pakistan. — AP



In this photo taken on Thursday, Dec 1, 2016, Pakistani Hindu Jeevti sits in her husband's house in Pyaro Lundh, Pakistan. The night Jeevti disappeared, her family slept outside to escape Pakistan's brutal summer heat; in the morning she was gone, snatched by a wealthy landlord to whom her parents owed \$1,000. — AP

PAKISTANI GIRL ENSLAVED FOR A DEBT

THE HARROWING TALE OF A 14-YEAR GIRL WHO WAS SNATCHED IN THE NIGHT

MIRPUR KHAS, Pakistan: The mother rummages through a large metal trunk, searching for a picture of her young daughter taken away in the night to be the bride of a man who says the family owed him \$1,000.

Beneath the blankets, clothes and silver ornaments that she wears with her sari, Ameri Kashi Kohli finds two photos, carefully wrapped in plastic, of her smiling daughters.

Ameri tries to remember her daughter Jeevti's age; few of this country's desperately poor have birth certificates. With a grin at a sudden recollection she says, "I remember her sister, my youngest, was born when there was a big earthquake in Pakistan."

That was 2005. Jeevti was 3 years old at the time, Ameri says. That means the girl was just 14 when she disappeared into the hands of the land manager her parents were beholden to. Her mother is sure that Jeevti paid the price for a never-ending debt. Ameri says she and her husband borrowed roughly \$500 when they first began to work on the

land, but she throws up her hands and says the debt was repaid. "We started with a loan, and every time they said they were taking money for our loan, but no one gave us anything to show we paid." Instead, the debt doubled. It's a familiar story here in southern Pakistan: Small loans balloon into impossible debts, bills multiply, payments are never deducted.

In this world, women like Ameri and her young daughter are treated as property: taken as payment for a debt, to settle disputes, or as revenge if a landowner wants to punish his worker. Sometimes parents, burdened by an unforgiving debt, even offer their daughters as payment.

The women are like trophies to the men. They choose the prettiest and the young and pliable. Sometimes they take them as second wives to look after their homes. Sometimes they use them as prostitutes to earn money. Sometimes they take them simply because they can. Ameri says she has heard stories of other workers whose daughters disappeared, in a country that sees an estimated 1,000 girls like them taken each year. Now, even though she and her family live elsewhere after being tossed out of their home, she's afraid that her 11-year-old could be taken too.

The poorest

And like everything else in her life, as a Hindu in a Muslim country, as a woman who is among the poorest of the poor, she knows she will be powerless to stop it from happening. "I went to the police and to the court. But no one is listening to us," Ameri says. She says the land manager made her daughter convert to Islam and took the girl as his second wife. "They told us, 'Your daughter has committed to Islam and you can't get her back.'"

Ameri works as a day laborer cutting sugar cane and feed for animals in Pakistan's southern Sindh province, a region dominated by powerful landowners whose holdings stretch for hundreds of acres.

Narrow dirt tracks weave through vast fields where Hindu women in colorful saris squat with small scythes to cut the crops. There's no talking. Occasionally the women stop for a drink of water. They make less than a dollar a day.

Like Ameri, they're often indebted to the owner of the land on which they work, kept as virtual slaves until they pay back their debt, which almost never happens. More than 2 million Pakistanis live as "modern slaves," according to the 2016 Global Slavery Index, which ranks Pakistan in the top three offending countries that still enslave people, some as farm workers, others at brick kilns or as household staff. Sometimes the workers are beaten or chained to keep them from fleeing.

"They have no rights, and their women and girls are the most vulnerable," says Ghulam Hayder whose Green Rural Development Organization works to free Pakistan's bonded laborers.

Sexual assault

Employers sexually assault the women and girls, marry them, force them to convert, and rarely will the police intervene, he says. He recalls a case in which a husband accused a landowner of sexually assaulting his wife. The landowner held him for three days, beat him and released him with a warning to tell no one. An estimated 1,000 young Christian and Hindu girls, most of them underage and impoverished, are taken from their homes each year, converted to Islam and married, said a report by the South Asia Partnership organization.

"They always take the pretty ones," Hayder says. The night Jeevti disappeared, the family had slept outside, the only way to endure the brutal summer heat. In the morning, she was gone. No one heard anything, her mother says. The family turned to activist Veero Kohli to help free the girl. Kohli, who isn't related to the family, was born a slave. She fled bondage in 1999, walking for three days to safety and seeking out the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan to help her before returning to the landowner to recover her children and free eight other families.

Since then, Kohli has devoted herself to challenging Pakistan's powerful landowners, liberating thousands of families from bonded labor. She has been beaten; her home has been burned down. She has been arrested on trumped-up charges. Her husband has been arrested, and three of her sons have been jailed. Kohli's defiance incenses many men in a country dominated by a centuries-old patriarchal culture: Whether victims of honor killings, forced into marriages or enslaved as a bonded laborer, a heavy burden falls on women in Pakistan. "I know that they would like to kill me, but I will never stop fighting to free these people," says Kohli, a strapping woman nearly 6 feet tall. Five months ago, she went with Ameri to the Piyaro Lundh police station to find her daughter.

"Her mother was crying in the police station to let her see her daughter," Kohli says. They said the girl went willingly, Kohli says. "I told them: 'Let me talk to her. Let her mother talk to her if she went freely.'" They refused.

Instead, they called in the man who Ameri said had taken her daughter. Hamid Brohi came alone, without the girl. "He said, 'Anyway, she is payment for 100,000 rupees (\$1,000) they owe me,'" Kohli recalls.

He said he had forgiven the family's debt and tossed them off his land, Kohli says. Now Kohli is returning to the same police station, a small, grubby concrete room with two desks jammed together and a rickety wooden cabinet piled high with files held together with string. Police officer Aqueel Ahmed thumbs through a dozen files, barely containing his anger at the activist.

Finally, he pulls out an affidavit. In it, the girl, who now goes by the name Fatima, said she had converted and married Brohi of her

own free will. She also said she couldn't meet her mother because now she was Muslim and her family was Hindu. Jeevti can neither read nor write; her signature on the statement she purportedly made of her own volition is a thumbprint. There was no police investigation into Ameri's allegation that her daughter was kidnapped, Ahmed says, nor was there any investigation into her age in a province where the legal age for marriage is 18. "There was no cause to investigate. She said she went willingly. She said there was no coercion," Ahmed says.

Isolated

A second police officer, Riaz Hossain, says he knows of several other Hindu girls who converted willingly, too. But Hindu activists say the girls are kept isolated until they have been forced to convert and are married - and then it's almost too late to do anything. In Pakistani marriages, the husband has to give a woman the right to divorce; without that, she has no right to leave him.

A law passed last month outlaws forced conversions, but human rights groups say it's practically impossible to prove that a conversion is forced because the girl invariably signs a statement saying she was willing. Police and judges almost never investigate, activists say, because many believe the conversions are a good thing and they would be defying their Muslim faith by even challenging one.

"So many girls, immature girls below the age of 18 years, mostly have been kidnapped," says Ramesh Kumar Vankwani of the Pakistan Hindu Council. He says families are routinely threatened, and without police protection, they abandon their daughters. Ameri, the mother, says she has been threatened by both the police and the man who took her daughter. She has gone to five different courts to get her daughter back, and failed each time. But she hasn't given up hope.

Police in a machine-gun-mounted jeep take Kohli, the activist, and a foreign reporter to visit the girl. Her mother doesn't come, too afraid, she says, to confront the police in person again. Brohi, a sullen-looking man with a thin mustache, greets the police with an embrace. He angrily denies he took Jeevti as payment for the family's debt, despite his earlier boast to the activist that he had done just that. — AP

HUGE CROWDS CHEER JAPAN EMPEROR ON 83RD BIRTHDAY

TOKYO: The biggest crowds of his nearly three-decade reign thronged Japan's Imperial Palace yesterday to celebrate Emperor Akihito's 83rd birthday on what could be his last such appearance after expressing his desire to abdicate. It was his first birthday since he announced in August that his advancing age and weakening health mean he may no longer be able to carry out his duties, setting the stage for Japan to prepare for an historic abdication.

The Imperial Palace said some 33,300 people—the biggest crowd since Akihito ascended to the throne in 1989 — attended his birthday address, waving small Japanese flags as crowds shouted "Banzai" or "Long live". "If this is going to be his last time, I'm glad I got to see him," said Reiko Takahashi.

Also attending the emperor's

address, Takako Miyazaki expressed the view of many Japanese. "The emperor is quite old and if he says he wants to abdicate I think he should be allowed to," she said.

Flanked by Empress Michiko and other members of the royal household, the soft-spoken monarch greeted well-wishers from a glass-covered balcony at the palace, surrounded by stone walls and mossy moats.

"I wish you all health and happiness, and I pray the next year will be cheerful and peaceful," the emperor said in his address. Ahead of his birthday, Akihito thanked the country for considering his

message indicating his desire to abdicate, telling reporters: "I am profoundly grateful that many people have lent an ear to my words and are giving sincere thought to the matter in their respective positions." — AFP



TOKYO: Japan's Emperor Akihito (center) smiling as he is surrounded by heads of diplomatic missions in Japan and their spouses during a tea reception to celebrate his birthday at the Imperial Palace in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP

N KOREA RIDICULES BAN'S PRESIDENTIAL AMBITIONS

DEFECTOR IMPRESSED BY SEOUL POLITICAL PROTESTS

SEOUL: North Korea yesterday mocked outgoing United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon over his apparent ambitions to run for South Korean president, calling him an opportunistic "chameleon in a human mask" who's dreaming a "hollow dream."

The North's state-run Uriminzokkiri website said Ban's alleged presidential ambitions were absurd because the way he handled his job as UN chief for the past 10 years has left him living in "criticism and shame." The article said Ban had a bad reputation in South Korea's domestic politics because he's an opportunist who "sets sail wherever winds blow and changes colors by the circumstance."

"There is an old saying that you stretch your feet no longer than your blanket will reach, and his harboring presidential ambitions despite living in all sorts of criticism and shame could only be described as an incomparably hollow, silly dream," Uriminzokkiri said.

Ban, who steps down as UN secretary general at the end of the year after two five-year terms, has not officially declared an ambition to run for South Korean president, but he has not denied his interest either. In a meeting with South Korean reporters in New York earlier this week, Ban said he was ready to "burn" his body in devotion for South Korea, his strongest hint yet of a presidential bid.

The spotlight is on Ban because there's a possibility South Korea could hold a presidential election in the coming months. The country's opposition-controlled parliament on Dec. 9 voted to impeach President Park Geun-hye over a corruption scandal. South Korea's Constitutional Court has up to six months to decide whether Park should permanently step down or be reinstated. Her presidential powers are suspended until then, with the prime minister



SEOUL: A high-profile North Korean defector Thae Yong Ho, No 2 at the North's embassy in London, arrives for the National Assembly's intelligence committee in Seoul yesterday. — AP

assuming the role of government caretaker. If Park is formally removed from office, a presidential election must be held within 60 days.

If he does make a run for the presidential Blue House, Ban is likely to represent a new conservative party created by defectors from Park's Saenuri Party. More than 30 anti-Park members of Saenuri have announced plans to leave the party next week and create a new party.

Impressed

A high-profile North Korean defector told South Korean lawmakers yesterday that the massive protests that led to the impeachment of President Park Geun-hye still feel strange to him but he sees the demonstrations as the country's strength. Thae Yong Ho, the former North Korean deputy ambassador to London, said in a closed-door briefing to lawmakers that he was impressed with

the South's democracy because its government continued to function despite the protests, according to the office of Lee Cheol Woo, one of the legislators who attended the event.

Thae also saw as remarkable that powerful individuals linked to the scandal that brought down Park were grilled by lawmakers on live TV, Lee's office said. The briefing was also attended by Lee Byoung Ho, the director of South Korea's spy agency, the lawmaker's office said.

South Korea's opposition-controlled parliament on Dec. 9 voted to impeach Park over the corruption scandal that saw millions of people protest in past weeks. The impeachment suspended Park's powers and pushed the prime minister into the role as government caretaker until the country's Constitutional Court decides whether she should permanently step down or be reinstated. — AP

FATHERS IN RURAL INDIA TO BE TARGETED TO HELP STOP SEX TRADE IN YOUNG GIRLS

MUMBAI: Fathers in rural India are the target of a new campaign to stop traffickers ensnaring young girls into the sex trade as research yesterday showed the average age of girls forced into prostitution had dropped with some as young as eight.

An 18-month study, led by the My Choices Foundation in partnership with major anti-trafficking groups across India, found the average age of girls being trafficked had fallen to age 10 to 14 in recent years from 14 to 16 in the past. But a key finding was the role of fathers with researchers discovering traffickers were convincing fathers to give away their daughters by promising to arrange a marriage without the need to pay a dowry to the boy's family or a job in a city.

Once the girls were gone, however, families rarely found out what had happened to them with no communication at all. "Girls aged 14, 12, and sometimes even eight have been trafficked," Vivian Isaac, program director with My Choices Foundation told the Thomson Reuters Foundation, as announcing the launch of "The Good Father Campaign" next year.

"They are taken care of or 'reared' until a certain time before being pushed into the sex trade."

Of an estimated 20 million commercial sex workers in India, 16 million women and girls are victims of sex trafficking, according to non-government organizations working in India.

The study, titled Preventing Sex Trafficking in India, found 90 percent of trafficked girls came from the most marginalized communities and the decision to let a girl leave was usually taken by the father who was often uneducated.

Researchers found 78 percent of girls sold for commercial sexual exploitation were from the eastern state of West Bengal where the state capital is Kolkata.

Official data in 2014 showed that West Bengal accounted for about a fifth of India's 5,466 cases of human trafficking with the state both a source and a transit location for women and children trafficked into the sex trade. Reports of human trafficking in India rose 25 percent in 2015 compared to the previous year, with more than 40 percent of cases involving children being bought, sold and exploited as slaves, according to the National Crime Records Bureau.

Isaac said the study would be used to build advocacy programs to highlight the risk of trafficking to fathers in rural India who often had no idea of the dangers. Researchers found during work in the field that parents were also reluctant to report a missing girl to the police fearing stigma or enmity with a neighbour who brokered the deal. "They hope for the best. They believe their daughter will find a good job in Mumbai," said Isaac. — Reuters

CLARIFICATIONS TO IRAN DEAL GRANT SOME BREATHING ROOM ON URANIUM STOCK

VIENNA: Iran and the major powers with which it reached a landmark nuclear accord in 2015 have agreed on clarifications that diplomats say will reduce the amount of enriched uranium that counts towards a limit set by the deal. The UN nuclear watchdog circulated the clarifications, laid out in eight documents, to its member states yesterday after receiving them from the office of European Union foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini, who coordinates the main forum for discussions created by the deal, the Joint Commission.

"These documents are merely providing clarifications, developed by the Joint Commission, for the implementation of Iran's nuclear-related measures as set out in the JCPOA," Mogherini's office said in an attached letter, using the deal's full name, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is policing the deal's restrictions on Iranian atomic activities to help ensure they are not put to developing a nuclear weapon. The accord also lifted sanctions against the Islamic Republic.

The IAEA has already expressed concern to Iran about its repeated testing of one of the deal's less strictly defined limits - its stock of heavy water, a substance used as a moderator in reactors like Iran's unfinished one at Arak, which has had its core removed to make it unusable. Diplomats have said Iran has come close to exceeding other limits under the deal, particularly the 300 kg (661 pound) cap on its stock of enriched uranium, a breach of which would most likely be far more damaging than excess heavy water.

There was concern during a visit to Iran this week by IAEA chief Yukiya Amano that Iran was about to go over that threshold, diplomats said. There is also great uncertainty about how US President-elect Donald Trump, a vocal critic of the deal, will handle any future difficulties that arise with Iran. —Reuters

TRUMP TWEETS ON NUKE: 'LET IT BE AN ARMS RACE'

TWEETS ON NUCLEAR WEAPONS RAISE QUESTIONS AND FEARS

WASHINGTON: US President-elect Donald Trump, asked to clarify his comments about expanding US nuclear weapons capability, said, "Let it be an arms race," and that the United States would win it, MSNBC reported yesterday.

Trump had alarmed non-proliferation experts on Thursday with a Twitter post that said the United States "must greatly strengthen and expand its nuclear capability until such time as the world comes to its senses regarding nukes." MSNBC's Mika Brzezinski spoke with Trump on the phone and asked him to expand on his tweet. She said he responded: "Let it be an arms race. We will outmatch them at every pass and outlast them all."

Shares of uranium producers and a nuclear fuel technology company have jumped on Trump's comments with Uranium Resources Inc, Uranium Energy Corp, Cameco Corp and Lightbridge Corp all trading higher yesterday.

It was not clear what prompted Thursday's tweet by Trump, a Republican who takes office on Jan. 20, but it came the same day Russian President Vladimir Putin said his country needed to boost its nuclear forces. In his year-end news conference in Moscow on Friday, Putin said Trump's comment on Wednesday was not out of line and that he did not consider the United States to be a potential aggressor.



WEST PALM BEACH: A motorcade carrying President-elect Donald Trump arrives at Trump International Golf Club, in West Palm Beach, Florida yesterday. —AP

Trump spokesman Sean Spicer said in several television interviews on Friday that there would not be an arms race because the president-elect would ensure that other countries trying to step up their nuclear capabilities, such as Russia and China, would decide not to do so.

"He's going to ensure that other countries get the message that he's not going to sit back and allow that," Spicer, who was named this week as White

House spokesman for the president-elect, told NBC. "And what's going to happen is they will come to their senses, and we will all be just fine."

Fears, questions

Trump called for an expansion of the United States' nuclear capabilities on Thursday, in a tweet that alarmed non-proliferation experts who said that a boost to the US. arsenal could fuel global tensions. — Reuters

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RAILROAD IN FIERY DERAILMENT AGREES TO CHANGES



This June 4, 2016, file aerial photo, provided by the Washington State Department of Ecology, shows scattered and burned oil tank cars after a train derailed and burned near Mosier, Ore. —AP

PASSENGER REMOVED FROM FLIGHT AFTER CONFLICT WITH IVANKA TRUMP

PASSENGER WAS 'CLEARLY AGITATED' BUT DID NOT 'SCREAM OR YELL'

NEW YORK: A JetBlue airline passenger, who media outlets and a witness described as making angry remarks at the sight of Ivanka Trump on his flight, was removed from the plane on Thursday by the airline. JetBlue Airways Corp confirmed in a statement that a passenger had been removed from a flight set to depart from New York's John F Kennedy International Airport, bound for San Francisco, but provided no other information about the incident.

Another passenger on the flight, Marc Scheff, said that, when the man saw US President-elect Donald Trump's daughter Ivanka, he "did a double take and said 'Oh my God. This is a nightmare!'"

JetBlue said in a statement: "The decision to remove a customer from a flight is not taken lightly. In this

instance, our team worked to re-accommodate the party on the next available flight." Reuters was not able to identify the passenger who was removed. Matthew Lasner, a Twitter user cited by TMZ, said his husband was going to confront Ivanka Trump and her husband, Jared Kushner, at the airport.

"Ivanka and Jared at JFK T5, flying commercial," Matthew Lasner (@matt-lasner) wrote in a tweet, which has since been deleted. "My husband chasing them down to harass them. #banality-of-evil."

Lasner, a professor at New York's Hunter College, did not respond to requests for comment directed to his Twitter account, which has since been taken offline, or to messages left at his office or sent to his Facebook account. "To do that to a woman who was on there

with her children, I don't care what your political background is or what your thoughts are, that's not the way we as Americans need to act," Trump spokesman Sean Spicer said on Fox News.

Scheff, 40, who told Reuters he was sitting in the row in front of Ivanka Trump on the flight, said the passenger who was later removed from the flight "started shaking." He said that after JetBlue staff approached the man to "make sure he was calm," the passenger said: "They ruin our country, now try (to) ruin our flight!" Scheff said the passenger was "clearly agitated" but did not "scream or yell." Ivanka Trump was en route to Hawaii for a vacation with her family, according to ABC News. Donald Trump and his family are spending the Christmas holidays at his resort in Palm Beach, Florida. —Reuters

DEPUTIES SHOOT FLORIDA MAN AIMING CROSSBOW AT THEM

PALM HARBOR, Fla: Sheriff's deputies in Florida fatally shot a Tampa Bay-area man who allegedly pointed a crossbow at them. According to a Pinellas County Sheriff's Office statement, deputies were called to 55-year-old Stanley Eversole's Palm Harbor home Thursday evening. A friend was concerned about the safety of Eversole's 53-year-old girlfriend because the couple had been arguing throughout the week, authorities said.

Sheriff Bob Gualtieri told reporters that Eversole had threatened his girlfriend with the crossbow several times

because he was angry that she was planning a European vacation with a friend instead of with him. "He told her that if she called the police, he was going to kill the cops who showed up. So she didn't call the police. He continued with this angry and erratic behavior over the last couple days," Gualtieri said.

As deputies spoke outside with his girlfriend, Eversole abruptly exited the home with a crossbow loaded with an arrow and pointed it at two deputies standing nearby, Gualtieri said. —AP

BILLINGS, Mont: The nation's largest freight railroad has agreed to more thorough inspections and maintenance improvements after a fiery oil train derailment in Oregon and the discovery of more than 800 potential safety violations across its sprawling network.

Details on the agreement between the Federal Railroad Administration and Union Pacific were obtained by The Associated Press. Sixteen tank cars from a Union Pacific train hauling crude through the Columbia River Gorge derailed in early June along a curve in the tracks near Mosier, Oregon. The accident sparked a massive fire that burned for 14 hours and prompted the evacuation of nearby areas. No one was injured. But federal officials said the railroad wasn't following its own maintenance rules to ensure the track was safe. Better inspections would have caught a series of broken bolts that allowed the rails to move too far apart where the accident occurred, officials said.

The investigation into the accident is continuing. Representatives of Union Pacific Railroad did not have an immediate comment on the agreement. The more than 800 potential violations against Union Pacific were found as part of a two-year examination of tracks across the US used to haul crude, federal officials said. Enforcement actions against the company have not been finalized and further details on the violations were not immediately available. Federal Railroad Administrator Sarah Feinberg said the agreement raises the bar on safety. "This compliance agreement requires Union Pacific to go above and beyond existing regulations," she said. The oil industry has become heavily reliant on trains in recent years because of limited pipeline capacity in the booming oil patch of the Northern Plains and the oil sands region of western Canada. Omaha, Nebraska-based Union Pacific operates more than 32,000 miles of track across 23 states.

The safety measures included in the agreement with the FRA will apply to all track used to haul oil and other hazardous liquids, passengers, explosives, radioactive materials and poisonous gases. They include an inventory of all curves in the track that are three degrees or greater across that network and walking inspections every 120 days on tracks that have the type of bolts involved in the Mosier accident. Those inspections have to occur every 30 days in that part of the network that includes the Mosier area.

Previously, Union Pacific said it would voluntarily take some of the same steps within the Columbia River Gorge. At least 27 oil trains have been involved in major derailments, fires or oil spills in the United States and Canada in the past decade, according to an AP analysis of accident records. The trains travel through more than 400 counties across the US to reach refineries on the West, East and Gulf coasts, according to the AP analysis. A 2013 derailment killed 47 people when a runaway oil train from North Dakota jumped the tracks and exploded in Lac-Megantic, Quebec. Damage from that accident has been estimated at \$1.2 billion or higher. —AP

CANADIANS SENT HOME FOR TRYING TO SNEAK CAT INTO NEW ZEALAND

WELLINGTON: A Canadian woman who authorities say managed to hide her 4-year-old pet cat Bella in her handbag during a trans-Pacific flight had her vacation cut short when border agents discovered the ruse at a New Zealand airport. The woman was refused entry into the country and she, her husband and the cat were forced to catch the next flight home, Ministry for Primary Industries spokesman Craig Hughes said Thursday. He called the woman's actions "reckless and dangerous."

New Zealand has strict regulations for importing pets. Cats and dogs from most approved countries must have an implanted microchip and be quarantined for a minimum of 10 days after arrival. Hughes said the couple, both in their mid- to late-20s, managed to conceal the cat from the flight crew and other passengers during the 7,000-mile (11,300-kilometer) flight from Vancouver to Auckland.

"Apparently it was a very quiet cat. Very docile," Hughes said, adding that it may have been drugged to make it drowsy. He said the traveling couple said they had nothing to declare upon arrival but border agents then determined their muddy boots needed inspecting. Agents then moved the couple's bags to an X-ray machine. —AP

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Italy approves bailout
for struggling banks

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agree settlements in US

18 Balkan youth emigrate
for better prospects

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Irish shopkeepers
fight Brexit fallout

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LAGOS, Nigeria: Pedestrians shop at the Balogun market ahead of Christmas celebrations yesterday. — AP

SAUDI PRIVATE SECTOR TO GET \$53BN BOOST

KINGDOM PLANS TO BORROW \$10-15BN INTERNATIONALLY IN 2017

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia's government plans to provide 200 billion riyals (\$53 billion) of incentives to the private sector over the next four years in its drive to diversify the economy beyond oil, according to an official planning document. A reform program launched this year, after a plunge in oil prices slashed state revenues in the world's top oil exporting country, envisions the private sector investing tens of billions of dollars over the next several years on projects from industrial zones and power stations to housing, schools and communications.

But the willingness and ability of private sector companies to invest in projects in an economy which has traditionally relied on infusions of petrodollars by the government has been a major uncertainty in the program.

"An incentives package is proposed and set at 200 billion riyals between 2017 and 2020 to help boost economic growth," said a document released by the government late on Thursday along with its 2017 budget plan.

An investment fund will be established to provide capital that will facilitate investments, the document said without giving details of the fund's operations or the nature of the incentives. It said the incentives would be directed towards sectors that supported economic growth and created jobs for Saudi citizens.

The document did not say how the government would raise money to fund the incentives, but it outlined a plan to increase the state's non-oil revenues by raising fees on foreign workers and their dependents. About

10 million foreigners live in the kingdom, in addition to roughly 20 million local citizens.

Companies now pay 200 riyals a month to employ each foreign worker above the number of Saudi workers they employ; from 2018, the fee will rise to 400 riyals per month, and it will increase further to 600 riyals in 2019 and 800 riyals in 2020.

Companies will pay smaller fees for foreign workers who number less than their Saudi workforce. Expats will pay fees on each of their dependents living in the kingdom, and the fees will increase gradually through 2020. While the higher fees will boost the government's revenues, they will also increase costs for companies, which could hurt their ability to invest.

Separately, Saudi Arabia plans to borrow

between \$10 to \$15 billion from international markets in 2017 and around 70 billion riyals from the domestic market, a senior Saudi official told Al Arabiya television channel. Mohammad Al-Tuwaijri, secretary-general of the Finance Committee at the Royal Court, was speaking to Al Arabiya in an interview aired yesterday.

The Saudi government borrowed \$17.5 billion this year in its first international bond issue, and also raised a \$10 billion international loan. It offered about 20 billion riyals of domestic bonds to banks every month through September, before suspending those issues; finance minister Mohammed Al-Jadaan told Reuters on Thursday that he expected to resume domestic bond issues in the first quarter of 2017. — Reuters

BANKS IN FOCUS AS WORLD STOCKS DRIFT INTO BREAK

LONDON: Europe's stock markets and Wall Street were broadly stable yesterday on a quiet last trading day before Christmas, with banks topping the agenda after huge US fines and a bailout in Italy. London closed marginally higher in a half-day session, as upwardly-revised data showed the British economy grew 0.6 percent in the third quarter despite Brexit jitters. In the eurozone, Frankfurt and Paris hovered around either side of unchanged, but Milan jumped nearly one percent on relief over a state rescue of the Monte dei Paschi di Siena (BMPS) bank.

"It has been a mixed end to the year for European banks with Monte dei Paschi being forced to rely on state aid and Deutsche Bank and Credit Suisse coming to an agreement with US authorities on rather sizeable fines," Oanda analyst Craig Erlam told AFP. "Still, banks are trading higher on the whole today boosted by the removal of considerable uncertainty in both cases, even if the outcome itself is a concern."

Deutsche Bank and Credit Suisse have agreed to pay a total of almost \$12.5 billion to settle disputes over the

sale of mortgage-backed securities during the global financial crisis. Germany's biggest lender has reached a \$7.2-billion deal to settle a case with the DoJ over its role in the subprime mortgage crisis. Credit Suisse meanwhile agreed to pay nearly \$5.3 billion. The DoJ said Thursday that it was suing Barclays, accusing the British bank of massive fraud in the sale of mortgage-backed securities which contributed to the 2008 crisis. Barclays rejects the claims and says it will "vigorously defend" itself.

BMPS shares suspended

"It's a mixed day for banks, after... fines from the US Department of Justice came in lower than feared, and Italy's Monte dei Paschi di Siena's shares suspended after the inevitable admission that it does indeed require state aid," said Russ Mould, investment director at stockbroker AJ Bell. "The US DoJ had initially pressed for a \$14 billion fine on Deutsche Bank for alleged mis-selling of mortgage backed-securities at the height of the housing bubble in the middle of the last decade, so the market is seeing the eventual \$7.2 billion penalty

as a bit of a result for the German lender," he said. "Shareholders in Credit Suisse are clearly similarly relieved, while it is possible that investors in Barclays are talking the view that any settlement may not be as punitive as feared."

In Frankfurt, Deutsche Bank shares gained 0.7 percent, while Credit Suisse stood 1.1 percent lower, after slipping from an initial upward bounce of two percent. Back in London, Barclays' share price sank 0.90 percent. Barclays was one of several major banks implicated in the crisis that so far have not reached settlements with US authorities over their roles in the financial meltdown.

Meanwhile in Italy, the government approved a bailout plan in the early hours of yesterday to rescue the country's struggling banks, with BMPS likely the first in line. The announcement by Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni comes after BMPS - the world's oldest bank - said it had failed to raise five billion euros (\$5.2 billion) from the markets to shore up its capital. The plan approved at a late-night cabinet meeting taps into the package of up to €20 billion approved by parliament on Wednesday.— AFP



SURABAYA, Indonesia: This picture taken on Thursday shows an Indonesian woman carrying bags of garlic at a market. — AFP

TRUMP COULD MAKE STOCKS SUFFER

Wall St Week Ahead

NEW YORK: The year-end stocks rally on the heels of the election of Donald Trump as US president was built on expectations of reduced regulations, big tax cuts and a large fiscal stimulus. Now signs are emerging from the Trump camp that harsher trade policies that could jeopardize the honeymoon are likely in the offing, and investors would be well advised to give those prospects more weight when gauging how much further an already pricey market has to run.

By naming China hawk Peter Navarro as head of a newly formed White House National Trade Council, the incoming administration is signaling Trump's campaign promises to revisit trade deals and even impose a tax on all imports are very much alive. Among the policies favored by Navarro and Trump's pick for commerce secretary, Wilbur Ross, who has the president-elect's ear on a range of economic issues, is a so-called border adjustment tax that is also included in House

Speaker Paul Ryan's "Better Way" tax-reform blueprint. If implemented, economists at Deutsche Bank estimate the tax could send inflation far above the Federal Reserve's 2 percent target and drive a 15 percent surge in the dollar. Analysts calculate that, all else being equal, a 5 percent increase in the dollar translates into about a 3 percent negative earnings revision for the S&P 500 and a half-point drag on gross domestic product growth. The dollar index has already gained more than 5 percent since the US election.

Harsher trade policies may not cause a full economic slowdown, "but I'd expect a localized recession in manufacturing and smaller gains in factory employment as well," said Brian Jacobsen, chief portfolio strategist at Wells Fargo Funds Management in Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin. He said the border tax could trigger retaliation, pouring uncertainty into the market. — Reuters

OIL SLIPS BELOW \$55

LONDON: Oil slipped below \$55 a barrel yesterday as a stronger US dollar weighed on commodities and as higher Libyan output threatened to counter some of the supply cuts planned by OPEC and other producers. Crude is still trading around its highest since mid-2015, supported by a deal by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and non-members to lower output by almost 1.8 million barrels per day from Jan 1.

Brent crude was down 54 cents at \$54.51 a barrel at 1300 GMT, after rising 1.1 percent on Thursday. It reached \$57.89, the highest since July 2015, on Dec 12. US crude fell 51 cents to \$52.44. "There's some profit-taking after the last session's gains. Oil prices are also weaker due to the stronger dollar," said Jonathan Barratt, chief investment officer at Ayers Alliance in Sydney.

Also weighing on oil was a surprise increase in US crude stocks reported on Wednesday in the government's weekly supply report - and the prospect of sales beginning in January of crude from the US Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR). "Crude failed to maintain gains this week following the unexpected build in US crude stockpiles, which revived the oversupply concerns," said Lukman Otunuga, a research analyst with FXTM. "With some anxieties still lingering over the compliance side of the unexpected cut agreement, oil could end up extremely volatile with losses expected if production fails to decline." — Reuters

DOLLAR HOLDS STEADY

NEW YORK: The dollar held steady yesterday, lingering about half a percent below a 14-year peak set earlier this week, as traders moved to the sidelines ahead of the Christmas holiday weekend. The greenback will likely test fresh multi-year heights when investors return from their year-end holiday break. The dollar has rallied more than 5 percent against a basket of currencies since Donald Trump's surprise US presidential election win on Nov 8.

"No one wants to take additional risk between now and the end of the year. They don't want to jeopardize those gains," said Stan Shipley, strategist at Evercore ISI in New York. Traders brushed off upbeat US new home sales and consumer sentiment data, which reinforced the view the world's biggest economy is expanding faster than its European and Japanese counterparts. Bets that Trump's economic policies would promote faster US growth and inflation have fed appetite for the dollar, stocks and corporate bonds and stoked selling in the yen, gold and US Treasuries.

Federal Reserve's hint that it might raise US interest rates at a faster pace in 2017, together with European Central Bank and Bank of Japan maintaining their ultra-loose policy stance, have further bolstered the dollar in recent days. The dollar index was marginally firmer at 103.14, recovering from an earlier low of 102.89. It was not far from the 14-year peak of 103.65 reached on Tuesday. — Reuters

GOLD EDGES HIGHER

LONDON: Gold edged higher yesterday in thin pre-Christmas trade as the dollar retreated from this week's 14-year high, tempting some buyers to take advantage of a near 10-month low in prices after six straight weeks of decline. Gold has fallen more than \$200 an ounce from its peak hit in the immediate aftermath of Donald Trump's US presidential election victory on Nov. 8, as his win sparked a dollar rally and drove US Treasury yields higher.

It is down 14 percent this quarter, paring its gain for the year to 6.7 percent. Gold posted its biggest quarterly increase in 30 years between January and March. Spot gold was up 0.2 percent at \$1,131.15 an ounce at 1255 GMT, off last week's low of \$1,122.35, while US gold futures for February delivery were up \$2.40 an ounce at \$1,133.10.

"(Many) traders have closed their books. For them, the year has finished," LBBW analyst Thorsten Proettel said. "With no real political or economic events to shock markets, and with Asian markets seeing dull demand, I would say not much will happen until January. We see gold holding around \$1,130." Gold remains largely driven by currency effects, he added. "The most important drivers for gold right now are the exchange rate from the dollar to the euro, and real US interest rates."

The dollar is just over half a percent off highs hit after this month's Federal Reserve policy meeting, at which the bank surprised markets by indicating interest rates could rise more quickly than expected next year. — Reuters

HOW JPMORGAN COULD NOT SAVE BMPS

MILAN/LONDON: On the morning of July 29, former Italian Industry Minister Corrado Passera was travelling in a high-speed train towards the medieval city of Siena, racing to meet the directors of the world's oldest bank to present them with a rescue plan. Monte dei Paschi di Siena (BMPS), Italy's third-largest lender, was destined to be wound down within months unless it could raise billions of euros and pull itself out of a swamp of bad loans that threatened to swallow up its five centuries of banking.

Passera's recapitalization plan was supported by Swiss investment bank UBS - Monte dei Paschi's long-time adviser - but the former minister was running out of time. The Tuscan lender had already changed advisory horses - turning away from UBS and Citi, and instead engaging JPMorgan to engineer a survival strategy, according to bankers close to the matter. Its board was meeting that day at its HQ in a 13th-century fortress to decide whether to formally commit to the Wall Street player's plan, they said. Veteran banker Passera felt he would at least have a chance to make his case. He didn't. As the train reached Florence, about 70 km from Siena, his phone rang. Monte dei Paschi's chairman told him the

board would not hear him, according to a source familiar with the events. The bank had instead pinned its fate on JPMorgan's plan to clear out €28 billion (\$29 billion) in bad debts and raise 5 billion euros in equity - one that ended in failure in the early hours of Friday when the Tuscan lender said it could not find enough investors and asked the government to bail it out.

For the plan's skeptics, the failure to rescue the bank privately was testament to a misplaced belief in government circles that Italy could find a solution to its banking problem child without the need for a politically unpopular state bailout. Passera's proposal - never made public - had involved a €2.5-billion capital increase reserved for private equity funds and a €1-billion share sale to existing Monte dei Paschi investors, according to the source familiar with events.

Bankers say that was unlikely to have met with any more success than JPMorgan's, given the lack of investor appetite for Monte dei Paschi and the wider banking sector. Italian banks are creaking under the weight of €360 billion of bad loans - a third of the euro zone's total - following the financial crisis. But the fact the bank laid its entire trust in JPMorgan, and a plan that

European regulators in Brussels and Frankfurt said from the outset was destined for failure, nevertheless underscores the government's mismanagement of a problem that continues to cast a shadow over the country and its economy.

Unlike Spain, Rome refused an EU-funded bailout for its banks when European rules for doing so were more lenient, and for too long failed to take decisive action to deal with its lenders' bad loans. Monte dei Paschi, which had already received state aid twice before, has become a symbol of the government's inefficiency in tackling the problems of its banking industry.

Renzi Lunch

Three weeks before Passera's wasted train journey, the idea of a privately funded bailout of Monte dei Paschi was born over lunch in Rome between JPMorgan's global chief, Jamie Dimon, and then Prime Minister Matteo Renzi, according to banking and political sources. Renzi thought he had finally found the man who would fix one of his biggest political headaches, despite the fact that JPMorgan's plan would involve raising 10 times the market value of Monte dei Paschi, a feat virtually unheard of in Europe.

Renzi, who hails from the bank's

home region of Tuscany, wanted to avoid a state rescue at all costs, because new European rules would require investors to bear losses in the event of a tax-payer funded bailout. The bank's bondholders include tens of thousands of Italians, many of them part of his political power base. A spokesman for Renzi did not respond to requests for comment.

JPMorgan in turn hoped to break into big Italian deal-making, a sphere where this year it lagged behind US rival Goldman Sachs with its investment banking fees more than halving since 2014, according to Thomson Reuters data. If the plan succeeded, JPMorgan and its co-adviser Mediobanca, alongside 10 other investment banks and state-sponsored banking fund Atlante, stood to share in fees worth 558 million euros, roughly equal to Monte dei Paschi's market capitalization, publicly available documents show.

By winning over the board of the Tuscan bank, JPMorgan and Mediobanca elbowed out rivals UBS and Citi, all battling to earn a jackpot of fees in a sector that could need 40 billion euros in capital over the next few years. Monte dei Paschi said on Thursday the banks involved in the failed rescue

plan would receive no fees.

Alarm Bells

Alarm bells began ringing loudly over the feasibility of the plan in early September, when Monte dei Paschi abruptly announced its chief executive, Fabrizio Viola, was quitting. Viola had received a phone call from Economy Minister Pier Carlo Padoan who told him he needed to go, according to a source close to the matter. Speaking about the episode on TV in October, Padoan said that given the Treasury was the bank's top shareholder following a previous bailout in 2013, it had to have a relationship with its top management. "With Viola, we assessed together what was best for the bank," he said.

After sounding out hundreds of investors during the summer, JPMorgan and other banks involved in the deal believed that a change of management was necessary to pull off the plan, because under Viola the bank had burnt through 8 billion euros of new capital, according to sources close to the consortium of banks. Monte dei Paschi replaced him with Marco Morelli, head of Bank of America Merrill Lynch in Italy, who rushed through a new business plan. —Reuters

EM STOCKS EXTEND POST-TRUMP SLIDE

LONDON: Emerging market stocks fell for the ninth time in 11 days yesterday, taking their drop since Donald Trump's US election win to 7.5 percent and leaving investors facing an uncertain start to 2017. Festive cheer was in short supply with some of the same worries that brought a torrid start to 2016 for EM assets starting to resurface. Chinese stocks, which are heading for a 17 percent walloping for the year, most of which came in January, fell to a two-month low, while the yuan limped back towards an 8-1/2 year low.

As was the case at the beginning of the year, EM currencies are being forced to bow to the dollar as the prospect of further US rate hikes and a fiscal spending drive under Donald Trump loom. South Africa's rand, Turkey's lira and Mexico's peso took advantage of the quiet pre-Christmas market to nudge higher. So did Poland's zloty and Hungary's forint after they had both hit more than 14-year lows versus the greenback on Thursday.

But Asia continued to struggle. The South Korean won hit a fresh 9-month low at 1,204.5 per dollar, the Taiwan dollar touched its lowest in nearly five months and Singapore's central bank was suspected to have intervened to prop up its dollar after it fell to a more than six-year low. "We have almost come full circle on the dollar attitude," said UBP's EM macro and FX strategist Koon Chow. "Similar to a year ago, we are expecting more US rate increases and also similar to a year ago we are seeing renminbi (yuan) depreciation pressure due to outflows and arguably that could intensify next year."

One of the reasons could be lower demand for yuan to buy property as Beijing bids to cool the overheating parts of the country's housing market. Another is uncertainty about how China's relations with the United States will fare under Donald Trump. Chinese state media yesterday expressed alarm and warned of a "showdown" after the president-elect named Peter Navarro, an economist who has urged a hard line against Beijing, to head a new White House National Trade Council. "The new administration should bear in mind that with economic and trade ties between the world's two largest economies now the closest they have ever been, any move to damage the win-win relationship will only result in a loss for both sides," the official English-language China Daily said in an editorial. — Reuters

ITALY APPROVES BAILOUT FOR STRUGGLING BANKS

BMPS LIKELY FIRST IN LINE TO RECEIVE STATE AID

MILAN: The Italian government approved a bailout plan to rescue the country's struggling banks yesterday, with Monte dei Paschi di Siena (BMPS) likely the first in line to receive state aid. The announcement by Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni comes after Monte dei Paschi, the world's oldest bank, said it had failed to raise five billion euros (\$5.2 billion) from the markets to shore up its capital base. BMPS is at the center of a crisis in Italy's financial sector, which includes some 700 banks and is buckling under the weight of bad loans estimated to total 360 billion euros.

The plan approved at a late-night cabinet meeting taps into a package of up to 20 billion euros approved by parliament on Wednesday. Finance Minister Pier Carlo Padoan said the funds would be "sufficient to fulfill the needs as defined by stress tests" designed to determine whether a bank has sufficient capital. BMPS said after the announcement it would seek to take advantage of the bailout. Italy's third-biggest bank launched a bid to sell fresh shares this week under plans to raise five billion euros to stay afloat. BMPS announced on Thursday that the fundraising attempt had failed. "It was not possible to attain the sum of five billion euros," the bank said in a statement, adding the operation had been hampered by a lack of so-called anchor investors.

The bank had already acknowledged late Wednesday that it had failed to



MILAN: A man walks next to a Monte Dei Paschi di Siena bank branch on Thursday. — AP

attract a cornerstone investor - a key sign of market confidence - after pinning its hopes on a big Qatari take-up.

A separate debt-for-equity swap offer to replenish the bank's coffers reaped just over two billion euros. The plan additionally entailed selling off 27.6 billion euros in bad loans. Seeking to stop any runaway crisis in the banking industry, the Italian government had made clear it was ready to step in if necessary.

'Backstop looks adequate'

Barclays Research said before yesterday's announcement that the expected

package looked to be sufficient to plug any shortfall.

"The size of the financial backstop looks adequate to deal with the situation, in our view," it said in an analysis. Provided the loans sell-off scheme stays in place, "the likely state involvement should help stabilize the system in the near term", it said.

The European Central Bank had given Monte dei Paschi until Dec 31 to fund its recovery or risk being wound down. The bank's stock lost another 7.5 percent in Milan on Thursday, closing at 15.08 euros. — AFP

HOW DEUTSCHE'S WALL ST BET TURNED TOXIC

FRANKFURT: Deutsche Bank's pursuit of success on Wall Street has come at a high price, a \$7 billion plus penalty illustrating the extent of its decline since 2008 when its then chief executive claimed it was one of the "strongest banks in the world". Expanding from its roots in Germany dating back to 1870, Deutsche transformed itself into a major player on Wall Street over the past two decades, often taking extravagant bets to do so.

But it is now set to cut back its activities in the world's biggest economy after a penalty for the sale of toxic mortgage securities that contributed to the biggest economic crash in a generation. "The strategic options open to Deutsche Bank in the USA are clearly restricted because the profitability of the business will be weakened," said Ingo Speich, a fund manager at Union Investment, a shareholder in Deutsche.

German regulators also want Deutsche, the country's largest bank which employs around 100,000 people around the world, to rein itself in. "Size in itself is no sign of success," said one senior

official in Germany, where the mood among regulators has hardened towards the bank. "They now want to curtail their ambitions." Last year, the bank's US arm, where roughly one in ten of its staff are based, racked up a loss of €2.8 billion (\$2.9 billion) - almost half the total loss made by the group. That was a swing from a profit of more than 1 billion euros in the previous year. Much of the damage was done by a writedown on the value of Bankers Trust, while tighter regulation has made it more expensive to trade.

Expansion Phase

The \$7.2 billion penalty for the sale of toxic mortgage securities closes a sobering chapter in the bank's international drive, launched in 1989 by the then chief executive, Hilmar Kopper, when he bought lender Morgan Grenfell in London. Kopper is remembered for his public description of a multi-million Deutsche mark sum as "peanuts" - opening a divide between an increasingly Anglo-Saxon bank and the prevailing fru-

gal culture among ordinary Germans.

A decade later, Deutsche bought Bankers Trust, paying \$10 billion for the American bank and an estimated severance of \$100 million to its chief executive. Management even discussed a takeover of Lehman Brothers, which later collapsed at the lowest point in the global financial crisis in 2008. This strategy of buying to expand in shares and bonds was expanded to add outsized bets on toxic derivatives - and the lender's total assets swelled to more than 2 trillion euros in 2007.

One former senior Deutsche executive, who asked not to be named and who was instrumental in building the bank's US business, said he had preferred using leverage to sell more structured debt and derivatives to buying a Wall Street rival. "Buying a US firm is like climbing Everest without oxygen. It is risky, and the achievement is substantial, but is it really worth it?" the former executive said, asking not to be named. "You may find that the view from the summit is quite cloudy." Yet this alternative route proved perilous.

World's Strongest

As the bank placed large trades at the end of 2011, its leverage ratio, which divides the value of assets by equity, reached around 21 - measured by US accounting standards. As a rule of thumb, the higher this leverage, the steeper the risks. JPMorgan, a much larger bank, had a lower ratio of around 17. There was another important difference between Deutsche and its US rivals. They had been able to improve their capital with a compulsory \$700 billion "Troubled Assets Relief Program" (Tarp). Rivals JP Morgan Chase, Morgan Stanley, Goldman Sachs and Bank of America all took the money.

At that time, in Oct 2008, Deutsche Bank's then Chief Executive Josef Ackermann described the bank as one of the "strongest and best capitalized banks in the world," privately saying he would have been "ashamed" if it needed state help. However, analysts and regulators have since bemoaned Deutsche's thin capital cushion.



FRANKFURT: This file photo shows the headquarters of Germany's biggest lender Deutsche Bank. — AFP

DEUTSCHE, CREDIT SUISSE AGREE SETTLEMENTS IN US

BANKS TO PAY COMBINED PENALTY OF MORE THAN \$12BN

ZURICH/FRANKFURT: Credit Suisse and Deutsche Bank have been hit with a combined penalty of more than \$12 billion over the sale of US toxic debt, further hampering two of Europe's leading investment banks as they struggle with weak earnings. The penalties stem from an initiative launched by US President Barack Obama to pursue banks for selling sub-prime debt without warning of the risks, a practice that led to the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression.

Credit Suisse agreed to pay more than \$5.2 billion in a deal with US authorities and the penalty is likely to push it to a second consecutive annual loss. The payment, to settle claims it misled investors when selling mortgage-backed securities in the run-up to the 2008 financial crisis, is split into two parts. It will first pay \$2.48 billion and later provide \$2.8 billion over five years to offset the impact on consumers, the bank said.

That news came after Deutsche Bank agreed to a total \$7.2 billion settlement for its pooling and sale of toxic mortgage securities, the settlement also divided in a similar manner. The German bank had previously said that the Department of Justice was seeking twice that figure. "I think the fines are reasonable and represent a positive for the system," said Alberto Gallo, head of global macro strategies at hedge fund Algebris Investments.

The penalties put the two European banks at a further disadvantage to larger US rivals, many of whom have already absorbed their own fines for such wrongdoing and have strong capital cushions. US banks earlier paid \$46 billion in such penalties.

Deutsche Shares Rise

Investors, who had feared an even bigger penalty for Deutsche, were relieved and its shares gained more than 2 percent. They have risen more than 80

percent since hitting a record low at the end of September on fears the bank would need to raise cash from investors. "It's no great coup but the settlement reduces the uncertainty," said Ingo Speich, of Union Investment, a Deutsche bank shareholder, adding that he now did not expect the bank to sell more shares to bolster its capital.

Credit Suisse, who people familiar with the matter earlier told Reuters had fought to soften its settlement, saw its shares slip by more than 1 percent. The final deal is in line with the \$5 billion-\$7 billion the US Department of Justice (DOJ) had asked Credit Suisse to pay earlier in negotiations, as reported by Reuters on Monday. Credit Suisse said it would take a pre-tax charge of approximately \$2 billion in addition to its existing reserves against these matters in the final three months of 2016. Analysts at regional bank ZKB said that the charge would depress the bank's leverage ratio from 3.4 percent to 3.1 percent. — Reuters

US SUES BARCLAYS OVER SECURITIES

WASHINGTON: The US Justice Department sued the British financial giant Barclays on Thursday, accusing the bank of massive fraud in the sale of mortgage-backed securities which contributed to the global financial crisis of 2008. Barclays was one of several major banks implicated in the crisis, along with Deutsche Bank, Royal Bank of Scotland and Credit Suisse, that so far have not reached settlements with US authorities over their roles in the financial meltdown, causing jitters among investors.

Thursday's move to sue in open court stood out, with the Justice Department choosing not to seek a mutually acceptable resolution, as it has in most cases when taking enforcement action against major financial institutions. In a statement, the bank said it would "vigorously defend" itself against the allegations. "Barclays rejects the claims made in the complaint," the statement said. "Barclays considers that the claims made in the complaint are disconnected from the facts."

The government's complaint filed in federal court also named two former Barclays executives - Paul Menefee, former head banker in charge of due diligence for Barclays so-called subprime, or higher risk, residential mortgage-backed securitizations, and John Carroll, who served as Barclays' head trader for subprime loan acquisitions. The Justice Department has faced stiff criticism for its perceived failure to hold senior executives to account following the financial crisis. No major figures have suffered criminal conviction.

Federal prosecutors say that as part of the alleged scheme Barclays sold \$31 billion in securities which packaged poor-quality subprime and Alt-A mortgages to investors around the world, more than half of which defaulted after Barclays deliberately and systematically lied to investors about the loans. — AFP



LONDON: This file photo shows Barclays bank headquarters in Canary Wharf. — AFP

TYCOON BLASTS KIEV OVER BANK NATIONALIZATION

KIEV: The owner of Ukraine's largest bank nationalized last weekend accused the authorities yesterday of spreading false rumors about his lender that forced him to appeal for help. Billionaire Igor Kolomoyskiy said in his first published comments since Sunday's takeover of PrivatBank that Kiev officials falsely blamed him for issuing bad loans to cronies and having insufficient capital to stay afloat. The finance ministry's decision to put its own administrators at a bank holding more than one-third of Ukraine's deposits was welcomed by the International Monetary Fund and the European Union as a stabilizing step.

The lender required years of state assistance and was viewed as too big to fail because its fall could have created a domino effect that would have frozen the pro-Western former Soviet republic's financial system. "PrivatBank became the victim of the arbitrary rule of the central bank," Kolomoyskiy told Friday's edition of Ukraine's 112.ua news site. "PrivatBank had a balanced, secured loan portfolio that was con-



KIEV: A client walks out as others arrive at a branch of PrivatBank in the center of the Ukrainian capital on Dec 19, 2016. —AFP

firmed by international auditors. However, the central bank, by constantly changing its own regulations, kept making up new ways of artificially lowering (PrivatBank's) capitalization."

Ukraine's central bank chief Valeria Gontareva had said that 97 percent of the PrivatBank's loans were issued by Kolomoyskiy to his business partners who might either have not paid them

back or had done so on preferential conditions. She added that the bank's debts grew to \$5.6 billion by Dec 1. Kolomoyskiy called both charges a "myth". "Normal central banks help lenders in tough times such as during economic crises or war," the 53-year-old owner of not only banks but also numerous media outlets and even airlines and smelters said.

Perhaps one of the most important things missing from Kolomoyskiy's statement was a declaration that he was joining the opposition to Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko. The tycoon was one of the president's first and biggest targets in Ukraine's uphill struggle to tackle corruption. Kolomoyskiy withstood the attack and kept all his businesses. But he said yesterday that the prime minister and his team had "shown true bravery" in making the decision to place his bank under state administration when it was experiencing financial turmoil. He also admitted that he was the one who appealed to the government for salvation of his most prized asset. —AFP



MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin gestures during his annual news conference yesterday. — AP

PUTIN SAYS RUSSIAN ECONOMY IMPROVING

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin said yesterday that the economy was set to shrink slightly this year, but by far less than in 2015, as the country struggles out of a two-year recession. "We will have a slight decrease this year, but not 3.7 percent" like last year, Putin told journalists at his annual press-conference. "In November we are observing slight growth of the country's GDP. And most likely we will have (a decrease of) 0.5-0.6 percent this year," Putin said.

Russia's economy has appeared to stabilize over the last months after two years of recession weighing on people's purchasing power and pushing large segments of the population into poverty. Experts have linked the slight rebound to improving oil prices, which is fundamental to the Russian budget. Inflation in Russia will be around 5.5 percent, Putin said, which is lower than expected.

"Most likely it will be around 5.5 percent, which is record low inflation," he said. "That gives us reason to expect to reach our target of five percent and later four percent," he said. Putin also praised Russia's agriculture for a record harvest of 119 million tonnes of grain. "We have not seen anything like it in Russia's modern history," he said. "It's a wonderful result." — AFP

BALKAN YOUTH EMIGRATE FOR BETTER PROSPECTS

COUNTRIES FACE MASSIVE BRAIN DRAIN

BELGRADE: Aleksa Konstantinov was one the brightest maths students in Serbia this year but like many Balkan youngsters he immediately left for a US university after finishing school. Bosnian neurologist Sanina Babic Ribic was either laughed at or told she needed "political or some other support" to get a job after she graduated. She moved to Germany to work three years ago and now earns "four Bosnian salaries". These are just two among the tens of thousands of young people who have abandoned the Western Balkans in the face of unemployment, corruption and low wages, looking for better prospects in western Europe or America.

The World Economic Forum's 2016/17 Global Competitiveness Report ranked Serbia 137th out of 138 countries for "capacity to retain talent". Bosnia was ranked 134 and Croatia 132, while Albania and Macedonia were just slightly ahead. According to a recent study by Montenegro's Centre for Civic Education, half of its young people want to leave the small country of about 620,000 people. Studies show that most of those leaving in the massive regional "brain drain" are well-educated youngsters.

"Universities in the US and Britain... offer many more opportunities," 19-year-old Konstantinov told AFP by email from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), where he is now studying. Last year a record 58,000 people left Serbia - more than double the yearly average of 26,000 between 2004 and 2013, according to Vladimir Grecic, an immigration expert and a Belgrade University professor. Croatia has a 43 percent unemployment rate among 15 to 24-year-olds, and its entry to the European Union in 2013 has enabled youngsters to flock to Germany, their preferred destination followed by



TUZLA: Bosnian youths wait to take German language exams, conducted by employment brokers from Bosnia and Germany, on Nov 23, 2016. —AFP

Britain. In Macedonia, "about 85 percent of final-year university students have said that they see their future out of the country," according to a government report.

Dreams of leaving

Kosovo is among the hardest-hit countries in the Balkans: Half the population is aged under 28, but youth unemployment stands at almost 60 percent. "Not only me but every young Kosovan dreams of leaving and continuing his professional career abroad," said Blerim Cakolli, a waiter and law graduate in the capital Pristina. Cakolli, 31, said he had been looking for a job in the legal profession for more than four years. "The lack of opportunity for youngsters makes them ready to leave and degrades our society," he said.

Across the region, those most likely to leave are healthcare providers. Babic Ribic, the 37-year-old neurologist now working in the northeastern German town of Paderborn, said one of her

Bosnian colleagues paid a 5,000-euro (\$5,200) bribe to get a job in Sarajevo University hospital. "I couldn't afford that, neither financially nor morally," she told AFP. In the poverty-stricken northern Bosnian region of Tuzla, the Alphabet InfoCentar organises fortnightly meetings between foreign employers and locals seeking work.

Mersudin Mahmutbegovic, the center's head, said Germany had signed an accord with several Balkan countries, including Bosnia, authorizing the employment of up to 250,000 people from the region in its health sector by 2020. Short of doctors and nurses, Germany finds Balkan employees to be "flexible and reliable," Mahmutbegovic said. And they are spurred to leave by "a lack of employment, low salaries and few possibilities for career progression" at home, said Albanian university professor Gazmend Goduzi, who co-authored a study on healthcare workers' migration from the Western Balkans. — AFP

RENAULT AL BAPTAIN LAUNCHES MEGA OFFER

KUWAIT: With the end of 2016, Abdulmohsen Abdulaziz Al Babtain Co (AABC), the authorized agents of Renault vehicles in Kuwait is ending the year with the best end-of-year offer on selected Renault vehicles, the most popular French automotive brand. This first of its kind, 10-day offer, commenced on Dec 21 and ends on Dec 31, and is offering exciting discounts on all 2016 Renault models.

Renault Al Babtain continues to offer attractive offers to bring world-class quality cars in more attractive prices. Interested customers can enjoy these fantastic offers on all 2016 vehicles, which includes Renault Captur, Renault Duster, Renault Symbol, Renault Safrane and Renault Fluence.

Renault Al Babtain aims to end

2016 with a positive note by delighting all esteemed customers with a golden opportunity to strike unbeatable deals on their favorite Renault models, urging all customers currently looking to buy a new vehicle to take advantage of our ten-day campaign.

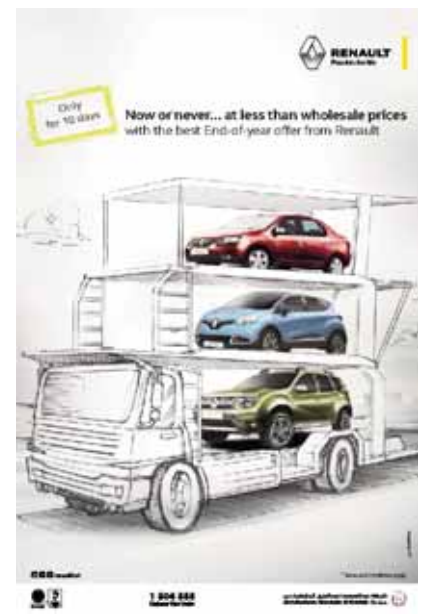
Renault, the world-renowned, French car manufacturer combines comfort with convenient mobility. As for the campaigns' irresistible bargains, taking the spot top within the SUV range is everyone's favorite, Renault Captur, a compact urban crossover and unaggressive and particularly user-friendly SUV with its robust design.

Crafted for explorers, Renault's stylish and spacious SUV, Renault Duster, is designed just for your adventures. A sub-compact from

the French manufacturer, Renault Symbol with its dynamic appearance, innovative technologies and advanced safety systems is a favorite of family cars till today.

The campaign also extends to Renault Fluence, the real hallmark of Renault's expertise with its seductive look along with Renault Safrane, an executive car built to echo luxury and commands road presence.

Renault Al Babtain urges all customers to avail this wonderful opportunity as the campaign runs during a short ten days and treat themselves to an unforgettable New Year's gift from Renault Al Babtain. To learn more about the campaign please visit Renault Al Babtain showrooms located in Al Rai and Al Ahmadi.



IRISH SHOPKEEPERS FIGHT BREXIT FALLOUT

RESIDENTS SHOPPING ACROSS THE BORDER

DUNDALK, Ireland: In the wake of the Brexit referendum earthquake, few people felt the aftershocks as keenly as the shopkeepers of Dundalk, a sleepy town of 37,000 people on the Irish border with Northern Ireland. Following the plunge in the value of the pound, residents have been heading across to Northern Ireland to do their shopping and the movement has

Gaynor told AFP. The pound is currently about 10 percent lower against the euro compared to before the June 23 referendum. The vouchers are available online or from the Dundalk Chamber of Commerce's office and can be obtained either by individuals as regular gift vouchers for Christmas presents or by employers for bonuses.

'Worth taking the trip'

The border promises to be a central part of Brexit negotiations as many on both sides fear a return of customs and police checks - the "hard" border present during decades of conflict on the island. The border is currently open and checks would be "hugely problematic", including for many people from Northern Ireland who work in Dundalk, Gaynor said.

In recent months, shoppers from the Irish Republic have been crossing the border in waves to take advantage of the favorable exchange rate, particularly on alcohol, toys and groceries. A recent Red C poll indicated that as many as 56 percent of shoppers in border counties intended to travel to Northern Ireland for Christmas shopping and a report by Goodbody Stockbrokers showed traffic flows from south to north on Saturday mornings had surged 29 percent in the wake of the referendum.

Although there are strong appeals to support the local economy, even people walking the streets of Dundalk are voting with their pockets. "Everything up north for toys is a lot cheaper and there is more variety - it's definitely worth taking the trip up to get something a little different and save a few euros," said Chris Cumiskey, a housewife who said she can save around 25 percent on food shopping in the nearby Northern Ireland town of Newry.

Eugene Kelly, an unemployed man, said: "At the end of the day, you're going to go for the bargains." "They can say the economy here is going to be affected but at the end of the day you've got to go for your own pocket," he said. Lorraine Prenty, a human resources executive, said she chose to shop local but noted the increase in cars heading across the border in recent months. "Around Dundalk there just isn't the same volume of traffic or the number of people this year," she said. —AFP



DUNDALK: Catherine Quigley (left) hands over vouchers, a form of alternative currency aimed at boosting local shopping at a cafe in this border town on Dec 1, 2016. —AFP

only intensified in the run-up to Christmas. But while the politicians are still trying to figure out what Brexit will look like, retailers in Dundalk are fighting back with gift vouchers - a form of alternative currency aimed at boosting local shopping.

"The vouchers allow businesses to give their employees up to 500 euros (\$520) as a Christmas bonus tax free, making it a win for employers, a win for employees and a win for local businesses," Dundalk Chamber of Commerce chairman Michael

The colorful "Shop Local Vouchers" are printed in denominations of 5, 10, 20 and 50 euros and are accepted in more than 200 Dundalk stores, from jewelers to electrical outlets to cafes. So far this year vouchers to the value of more than 300,000 euros have been purchased and the Chamber expects this to top out at over 500,000 euros by the end of the festive period in early January - a welcome boost to a local economy under severe pressure.

UK ECONOMY GROWS QUICKER THAN EXPECTED

LONDON: Britain's economy grew faster than expected in the third quarter, revised official data showed yesterday, indicating no impact yet from the nation's looming exit from the European Union. Gross domestic product expanded by 0.6 percent in the three months to the end of September, up from the previous estimate of 0.5 percent, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said in a statement. Activity was greater than expected due to upward revisions on the output of the business services and finance industries, it added.

"Robust consumer demand continued to help the UK economy grow steadily in the third quarter of 2016," noted Darren Morgan, head of GDP at the ONS. "Growth was slightly stronger than first thought, though, due to greater output in the financial sector. New figures on services also suggest that growth in that predominant sector of the economy continued into October, helped in large part by another strong showing from the retailers."

The ONS meanwhile revised down its growth estimates for the first and second quarters by 0.1 percentage points, to 0.3 percent and 0.6 percent respectively. "The fundamentals of the UK economy are strong, but there remain challenges ahead," a Treasury spokesman said. Economists point to an economy intact since the June 23 referendum in favor of Britain leaving the EU - but some also warn of looming trouble. "The latest set of UK national accounts leave the economy looking even stronger after the referendum than previously estimated," said economist Ruth Gregory at research consultancy Capital Economics. —AFP

US NEW HOME SALES REVIVE IN NOVEMBER

WASHINGTON: Sales of new homes in the United States in November rose to their highest level since July, Commerce Department figures released yesterday showed. New single-family houses sold at a seasonally adjusted rate of 592,000, 5.2 percent above October's level, handily surpassing an analyst forecast which predicted a rate of only 573,000 for the month. Year-on-year, sales were 16.5 percent above the same month in 2015.

The Commerce Department data coincided with industry figures released this week which showed sales of existing homes in November hitting their fastest pace since 2007, with 5.61 million condos, co-ops and single-family homes changing hands. According to yesterday's report, the median sale price was \$305,400. The estimated supply of new houses for sale stood at 250,000 by the end of November. —AFP

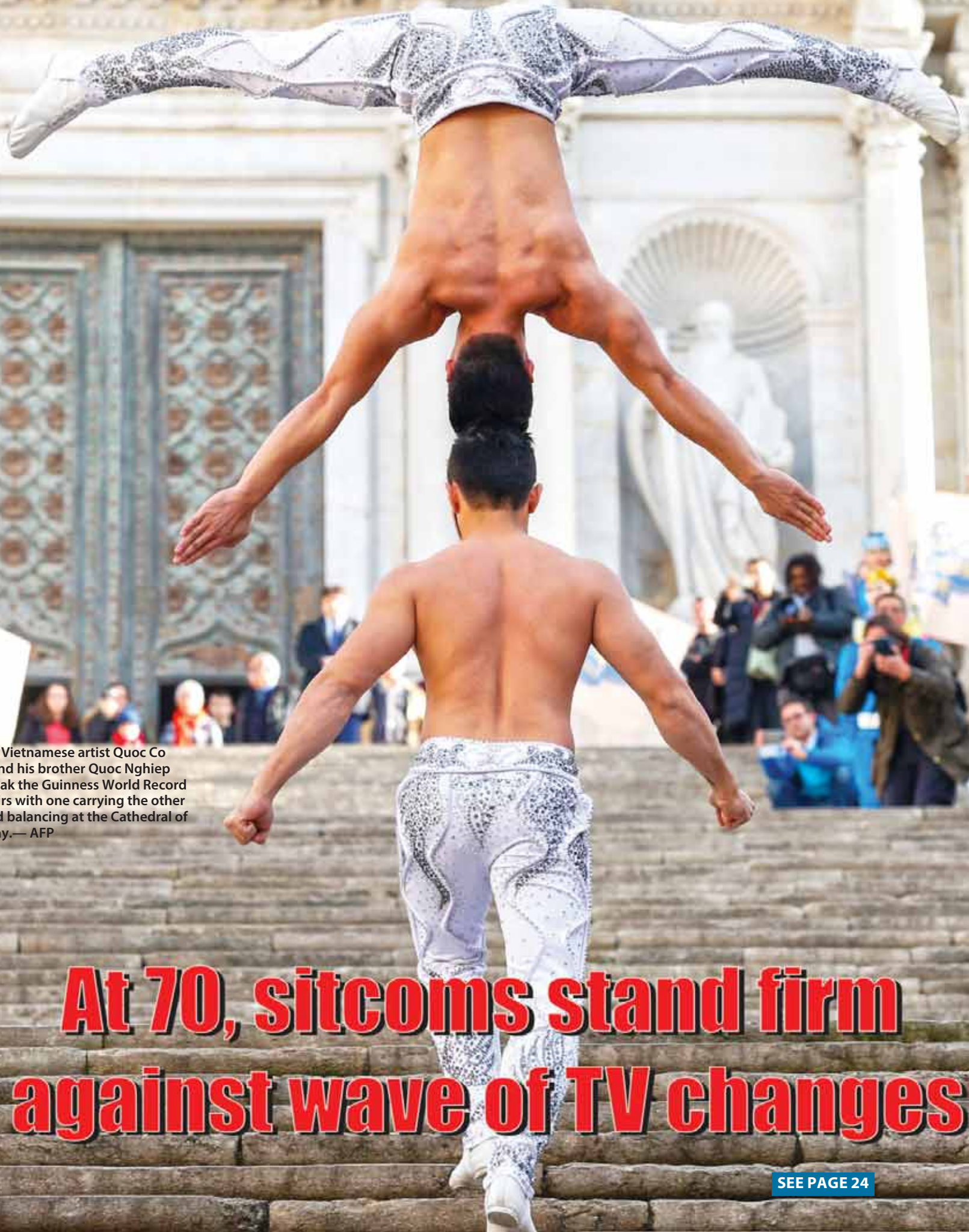
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SATURDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2016



GIRONA, Spain: Vietnamese artist Quoc Co Giang (down) and his brother Quoc Nghiep Giang try to break the Guinness World Record by climbing stairs with one carrying the other on head to head balancing at the Cathedral of Girona yesterday.— AFP

**At 70, sitcoms stand firm
against wave of TV changes**

SEE PAGE 24

AMANDA ABBINGTON SAYS SHE WILL 'REMAIN BEST FRIENDS' WITH MARTIN FREEMAN, DESPITE THEIR SPLIT

The 42-year-old actress and 'The Hobbit' star - who share 10-year-old son Joe and eight-year-old daughter Grace - announced their split earlier this week after 16 years together, and says the decision to call time on their romance was not born out of "hostility", and they reached the decision to end their relationship mutually. She said: "Martin and I remain best friends and love each other, and it was entirely amicable. "There was no hostility, really, we just said that we couldn't live together anymore, so we put everything in place, he moved out to a flat in north London, I stayed at home and we've started a new chapter. "It is sad and it is upsetting, because you think you're going to be with someone forever, but you either do that or you break up, and we both came to the decision that splitting was best for us. We've been really lucky to make it such a clean break, especially for the kids." Amanda cites the 45-year-old actor's hectic schedule as one of the reasons for their split, as his heightening demand as a Hollywood star meant the 'Mr Selfridge' actress got used to

being "separate" from him. She added to an upcoming edition of The Sunday Telegraph newspaper: "You can't be away from people for too long, because you start to function on your own, and you get used to being separate [from] the person you're supposed to be with. You lose that connection and lose sight of it, in the end." Despite their split the family will still enjoy Christmas together, and Amanda has put no restrictions on how often Martin can see their brood. She said: "He sees the children as much as he wants to, and [will spend] Christmas here. We play it by ear on childcare, and it's working so far. "They'll get the best of us now, which is far better than living in a house that's not harmonious." Meanwhile, the pair are set to star together in upcoming fourth series of 'Sherlock' - which stars Benedict Cumberbatch as the titular detective - as John Watson and his wife Mary. Amanda Abbington's full interview is available in the Sunday Telegraph, which hits newsstands on January 1 2017.



Vin Diesel made a reporter uncomfortable by hitting on her during an interview

The 'Fate of the Furious' actor - who has three children with Mexican model Paloma Jimenez - left YouTube movie reporter Carol Moreira embarrassed and annoyed when he showered her with foul-mouthed compliments during an interview at the Comic Con Experience 2016 in Brazil. She said: "He began to hit on me in the middle of the interview, say that I was pretty, and he interrupted the interview three times to talk about it. "I was laughing, completely uncomfortable. I was not sure what to do. I just laughed because it was a very delicate situation. "I did not like it. At the time I did not know how to react, but you will see that I was uncomfortable, it was not nice that he interrupted my work." Vin repeatedly interrupted the interview to tell Carol how "sexy" she is. He said: "I love you. I love her. She's so sexy. I can't do this interview - look at her. "Does anyone say this? Guys, what's wrong, am I the only one that's saying... look at her! "She's so beautiful you can't even do an interview with her 'cause you're just like... "Am I right or am I wrong? Someone save me. When did this turn into beautiful world? When did this turn into the most gorgeous girl in Brazil? When did this turn into I love you? "God, you're so beautiful. God she's so beautiful. Am I right or wrong? I mean look at her. "How am I supposed to do this interview? Look at this woman. She's so beautiful. Talk to me baby."



MATTHEW MCCONAUGHEY FAKED AN AUSTRALIAN ACCENT FOR A YEAR TO PICK UP WOMEN

The 47-year-old actor lived down under in New South Wales for a year when he was 19 years old, and has admitted that upon his return to the US, he spent some time pretending he had picked up the distinct Aussie accent whilst he was there. Speaking on 'Late Night with Seth Meyers' on Thursday evening (22.12.16), the star said: "The ladies kinda were [into it], which is why I was doing it. And also I was playing a trick. "There's a lot of my fraternity brothers out there now going, 'You did fake that for a year.' Yeah, I did." But despite having fooled his college friends for 12 months, the 'Dallas Buyers Club' star - who shares children Levi, eight, Vida, six, and Livingston, three, with wife Camila Alves - said he had no problem admitting to his joke when the time came to drop the act. Asked how he explained his accent change, Matthew said: "I actually let everybody know, all my buddies, on like one night. "It was like a year after I'd been acting it out with them and we were in the frat house and they were like 'What happened to the Australian accent?' and I was like 'Gotcha'. I did the year long con." Meanwhile Matthew, who is currently starring as an animated Koala in the musical comedy movie 'Sing', decided he wouldn't pick up the accent for the character. He said: "It would have been a little too literal, so I decided not to."

Bella Thorne says she's been 'single for two weeks'

The 19-year-old actress was rumored to be dating the 'Marvin Gaye' hitmaker after the duo were recently spotted getting cosy with each other, which prompted claims she had started romancing Charlie while she was still in a relationship with Tyler. But Bella has hit back at the accusations, writing on Twitter: "Ty and I have been broken up for like over two weeks and Charlie and I AREN'T DATING we are friends. (sic)" Bella's staunch denial came after Charlie hit out at her over the social media website, saying he was told that she was single when their rumored romance is said to have taken place. He wrote: "I can't believe what I'm reading. No one should have their heart messed with like this, and I'm not going to be in the middle of it. I don't know Tyler personally, but I know he shouldn't be treated this way. She told me she was not with him anymore. This is all news to me. I want nothing but peace for all, I'm just removing myself from this. (sic)" Charlie took to Twitter less than 12 hours after Bella shared two pictures of herself embracing former boyfriend Tyler, saying she was "taking a trip down memory lane". Bella's own posting about Tyler had come after Charlie made a mystery apology on the microblogging site. He had written: "I'm sorry....You know who you are. "I messed a lot of things up, I get it if we can't be friends....you know who you are. "But if you could just come to your senses...you know who you are. (sic)" Bella and Charlie were recently spotted together at the iHeartRadio Jingle Ball Jingle Ball and were also seen getting close on a beach in Miami, Florida, over the weekend.



DAME SHIRLEY BASSEY 'COULDN'T SING' FOR SIX MONTHS AFTER HER DAUGHTER'S TRAGIC DEATH



Samantha Novak was found face down in the River Avon in Bristol, England, in 1985 at the age of just 21, and her music legend mother has revealed she found the ordeal so "devastating" that she lost the ability to sing until vocal coach Helena Shenel re-trained her. In an upcoming TV interview with David Walliams - which will air on Christmas Eve (24.12.16) to mark her 80th birthday on January 8 - the 'Big Spender' hitmaker said: "It was just devastating. I went home and after a week of being alone I woke up one day and said, 'I have to go back on stage, this is killing me'. I don't know what I would have done with myself. "And then came the show, and I walked on the stage and I opened my mouth to sing 'Goldfinger' - nothing came out. "What had happened was, instead of staying home and grieving and getting it out my system, that I was singing it (grief) through the songs and I probably wasn't breathing in the right places and panicking. "For six months I couldn't sing at all. Then a vocal coach - Helena Shenel, who I thank so much - I just worked with Helena doing these vocal exercises strengthening my vocal cords, and after the year she said, 'Do you know, I've discovered you've got another octave that you never use. I've never heard you sing that high!' "And she did my spirit the world of good and my soul, and I went back on stage." The death of Samantha - who was the second daughter born to Shirley and her then husband Sergio Novak, who also share children Sharon and Mark together - was ruled as a suicide by the coroner, saying she died from shock due to unexpected submersion into cold water, with no evidence of foul play. However, the 'Never Never Never' singer has maintained the belief that her death was due to something more sinister. In 2009, Shirley said: "I never believed that [it was suicide] ... if she'd jumped off the bridge, all her bones would have been broken. "But there was not a bone broken. She did not have a mark on her. She didn't have any water in her lungs. If someone's drowning, they gasp, don't they? "It's bothered me all this time. Because if she didn't have any bruises or broken bones, where did she fall? And if she didn't fall from the bridge... My imagination goes wild." 'David Walliams Celebrates Dame Shirley Bassey' airs on December 24 on BBC One at 9pm.

Milla Jovovich and her husband Paul W. S. Anderson share a bed with their daughter

The 41-year-old actress and the 51-year-old filmmaker have two daughters, Ever, nine, and 20-month-old Dashiell, and their oldest child likes to sleep with her parents. Milla insists her daughter's nighttime habit has been a positive thing for her and Paul - whom she met through starring in the 'Resident Evil' film franchise - when it comes to sex because they have to get erotic outside of the bedroom. Speaking to Vanity Fair Italia magazine, she shared: "Our duties as parents make us a better couple too. We have been sleeping all together in our bed; us and our older daughter. We are not interested in material things, but when it comes to love we don't have limits. And if our daughters want to sleep with us, they are welcome." When asked how she and her man have sex, Milla added: "It is interesting, we have to find alternative solutions. We go to hotels, or just use other areas of the house. You have no idea how good creativity has been for our relationship!" Milla - who will be seen as heroine Alice for the last time in 'Resident Evil: The Final Chapter' - hasn't ruled out having a third child but accepts if she and Paul are going to have another baby she needs to get pregnant soon. Quizzed on whether she wants another kid, the screen beauty said: "My husband and I have been talking about this. I'm 41, if we are going to have another one we can't wait much longer." Now she is in her 40s, Milla has made some changes to her life and admits she now feels too old to go to nightclubs and has stopped wearing certain clothes. She said: "I'm happy with the way a look, but there are certain things I'm not doing anymore now that I'm in my 40s. I'm not going to some kinds of clubs where there are many young people, I wouldn't feel comfort-

able with that. And I'm not wearing certain dresses because they are not OK with my age. Ageing is more about the way you think than the way you look, in the end."



Gigi Hadid wants to receive a handwritten love letter instead of gifts this Christmas

The 21-year-old supermodel likes to get sentimental messages from people instead of expensive presents over the festive period because she thinks it's "cute" and she is hoping for a nice note from her boyfriend, 'Pillowtalk' singer Zayn Malik. Speaking about her preferred gifts, the blonde beauty is quoted by website Bustle as saying: "Don't get me a present, write me a love letter and I think that's cute." Gigi has revealed she will be practising what she preaches and will write a heartfelt letter to over 100 people in the fashion industry this year, which she has hinted is becoming her annual ritual. She added: "I really like writing notes. I don't always give a gift with it, but more than 100 people in the fashion industry will get a note from me every Christmas. It's something that's special to me and that's why I do it for other people because I hope they feel the same way about that." Although Gigi has admitted she likes romantic gestures, she didn't seem to be a fan of her beau's decision to take their relationship to the next step as she has reportedly turned down his wedding proposal. The fashion muse - who has been dating the One Direction band member for just under one year - is believed to have rejected Zayn's proposal because she felt it was "too fast", and she also doesn't want to rush into tying the knot after seeing her mother Yolanda Hadid go through divorce twice. Speaking previously about her decision, a source said: "She's only 21 and doesn't feel ready to tie the knot, so she turned him down. "She's seen her mom go through two messy divorces, so Gigi wants to make 100 per cent sure Zayn's the one before she makes a lifetime commitment."



The cast of Modern family photographed with their Screen actors guild award for outstanding performance by an ensemble in a comedy series in Los Angeles.



The cast of Fuller House pose for a promotional photograph. — AFP photos

At 70, **sitcoms** stand firm against wave of TV changes

The television industry is in the midst of a sea change but one format hasn't varied in 70 years-and yet remains a favorite among American viewers.

The sitcom still brings the same bag of tricks: recurring characters and sets, with humorous storylines often punctuated by laughter. Television dramas have become ever more sophisticated in recent years, from the zombie apocalypse of "The Walking Dead" to medieval power struggles in "Game of Thrones." Yet the most-watched television show in the United States last season (not including sports programming) was "The Big Bang Theory"-a sitcom in its 10th season on the airwaves.

Other sitcoms like "Modern Family," "The Goldbergs" and "Black-ish" are renewed season after season by US broadcasters, while newcomers this year included "Kevin Can Wait" and "Man With a Plan." "The genre is still alive and well and I expect it to be for quite some time," said Martie Cook, a screenwriter and professor at Emerson College. She attributes the sitcom's longevity to two factors: the comedy and stories "that are very much in line with our everyday lives."

Sitcoms are built around families-whether they are a nuclear family, an extended clan or a close but unrelated group of people, said Doug Smart, a director and producer who shoots a sitcom every year with students at tiny Asbury University in Wilmore,

Kentucky. The secret is "to create family members that members of the viewing audience can relate to"-like an elderly uncle or an annoying coworker, he said.

With the growth of free video content, niche programs and personalized viewing on smartphones, sitcoms play an important role in bringing families together. "It's that 30 minutes or one hour of the day where you can sit with your kids," said Candace Cameron Bure, star of the Netflix series "Fuller House," a reboot of 1980s classic "Full House." Even millennials can be drawn to sitcoms with their short episodes and relatable plots. "They may love fantasy, and the genres like 'Game of Thrones' and drama, but they like their comedies to be more true to life, more everyday situations that they can relate to," Smart said. "Love, betrayal, awkwardness, uncomfatableness, embarrassment... things that ring true to them."

Another key to the success of sitcoms: they are relaxing to watch. "We sit down and we get a break from the stress of our lives. And we laugh, because it's funny," Cook said. "Human beings love to laugh." "Sometimes, I want to just sit and laugh at something. I don't want to think too hard. And that's what 'Fuller House' is all about," Cameron Bure told journalists in New York.

Netflix created "Fuller House," which is filmed in front of a live audience. Actors and writers stress that a lot of hard work goes into creating a product that seems so light. "It can be a blow to the ego" when jokes fall flat, said Justina Machado, star of "One Day at a Time," another Netflix remake of a decades-old sitcom, which is also filmed in front of a live audience.

Cook points out that sitcoms can play an important role in society. Under the guise of light entertainment, the shows can pose serious questions and prompt viewers to ponder weighty issues. Six years before gay marriage was legalized throughout the United States, "Modern Family" was featuring Mitchell and Cameron, a gay couple with an adopted child.

And last February, an episode of "Black-ish" addressed the issue of police brutality against black Americans. When social justice demands are raised "in a funny way, people are more open to listen to them," Cook said. Added Smart: "As long as it's entertaining and it's done with good humor and good taste, the audience will say yes, of course, let's talk about this, let's examine this, this doesn't seem right." — AFP

Social change via sitcom?

Highlighting the sitcom's durable appeal, video streaming serv-



The cast of Friends take part in a promotional shot. — AFP



An employee makes Christmas ornaments at a factory in Tlalpujahua, Mexico, on December 16, 2016. — AFP photos



An employee makes Christmas ornaments at a factory in Tlalpujahua, Mexico on December 16, 2016.

Christmas all year in Mexico ornament village

Sweat runs down Adan Marin's wrinkled face as he blows into a blob of molten glass, creating a perfect, delicate sphere within the blue and orange flames of his torch.

Marin is one of the godfathers of the glassblowing trade in the Mexican village of Tlalpujahua, which makes tens of millions of ornaments each year to decorate Christmas trees in American and Canadian homes.

Even mid-winter, the sun shines strong in this village in the western state of Michoacan. But it might as well be the North Pole. Stores with names like "Santa's Workshop" and "The Christmas House" line the colonial village's cobblestone streets. And Christmas lasts all year for its 28,000 residents.

For more than 50 years, Tlalpujahua has been known as the Christmas ornament capital of Mexico, making blown-glass decorations that range from the traditional globes to sports team logos and Pokemon.

The booming cottage industry generated 1,000 jobs and \$3.4 million in income last year for the village, which sold some 20 million ornaments, according to the local government. This year, more than half a million tourists descended on the village for its annual ornament fair. The government expects 2016 sales revenues to top \$4.5 million.

But there are also fears it could be the last boom year. US President-elect Donald Trump's vows to build a wall on the Mexican border and renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement are worrying Tlalpujahua's glassblowers.

Trump, who takes office on January 20, has pledged to slap customs duty of up to 35 percent on goods from Mexico, a country that sends 80 percent of its exports to the US market. "There's a lot of concern," said Rafael Berrios, the Tlalpujahua government spokesman. If Trump follows through, the effect will be devastating for local artisans, he said.

Sick of Christmas

The village feels far removed from the

rest of Michoacan, a state racked by violence and drug trafficking. "It's out of the ordinary for Michoacan," said Luis Antonio Zimbron, a 43-year-old teacher from out of state who was in town ornament shopping. "I had the opportunity to visit a similar place in Germany once, and it had nothing on Tlalpujahua," he said, basking in "the decoration, the music, the magic."

The magic has worn off for some residents, though, as you'll learn if you ask them their favorite ornaments. "We don't have favorites, because we're in Christmas mode all year here," said Veronica Pompa, a manager at the village's only mass-production ornament factory, Fimave. "We almost don't like Christmas anymore," said Pompa, who has worked more than 40 of her 56 years in the industry.

Employees work nine-hour days in a smelly haze of lacquer, paint and polishing acid. "We look at these models all year... We even dream about ornaments," said Pompa's colleague of 25 years, Gaspar Velarde, as he washed a set of glass globes.

'Keep blowing'

Still, blowing glass is a way of life for many in Tlalpujahua. The tradition started in the 1960s when a large ornament factory set up shop in the village. It promptly went out of business. But many villagers learned the glassblowing trade, and soon opened their own workshops.

Today there are more than 200 of them. Marin started working at the original factory as a 15-year-old boy. Now 70, he still blows glass at the workshop he founded, which is run today by his children and grandchildren. "I don't know how to do anything else," he said as he worked a ball of melted glass into a flower. "It's a job that takes a lot of patience," added the master craftsman, who makes works of fragile beauty and reckons he has trained more than 300 people. What are his plans for the future? "To just keep blowing," he said. — AFP



An employee makes Christmas ornaments at a factory.



Christmas ornaments are seen at a factory.

At 96, Cuban ballet legend **Alicia Alonso** still dancing inside

She needs help sitting down, but no sooner has she done it than Alicia Alonso is tapping her foot three times and giving orders in a good-natured but authoritative tone. At age 96, the Cuban ballerina, one of the most revered dancers of all time, is blind and frail. But she hasn't lost a step, or her outsize role in Cuban ballet.

"Ready to start? Let's start!" she says in a firm voice, opening a rehearsal on the second floor of the National Ballet of Cuba—which she launched together with her first husband, Fernando Alonso, and which she still directs.

Before her, the multi-racial company is practicing "The Nutcracker," which it will perform on January 1 to commemorate the 58th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution. Alonso cannot see the dancers, but she imagines every movement. "I dance here, in my mind," she often says.

Ever flamboyant, the woman nicknamed the "prima ballerina assoluta" is wearing enormous sunglasses, bright red pants and a headscarf to match, with fuchsia lipstick and long, pink nails.

At her side, two dancers whisper every move in the choreography. Alonso, who danced much of her career sightless after suffering a detached retina as a young woman, traces out giant movements in the air with her hands. "You're doing something that has to be eternal, eternal, and reach the entire world," she tells her young dancers. "You have it in your hands, your bodies, your faces. And you have the happiness to do it," she says, adding: "How I envy you!"

Alonso, who turned down myriad offers to leave Cuba throughout her career, has created a unique school of ballet on the island, instantly recognizable with its blend of classical style and Latin sensuality.

At nearly 100 years old, she is a legend.

'Cuban school'

It was a lifetime ago that Alonso-born Alicia Ernestina de la Caridad del Cobre Martinez del Hoyo—began seducing audiences with her exuberant steps. A disciplined but feisty dancer, she conquered Havana, New York, and a host of European capitals, then went on to become a renowned choreographer, known for making her dancers rehearse to the point of perfection.

She has faced criticism in some quarters for her close relationship with the communist regime of late revolutionary leader Fidel Castro, whose backing was instrumental in the launch of the National Ballet. But her status as an icon is beyond question.

Among her long list of roles, she is best remembered for dancing "Giselle," the French romantic ballet that made her an international star. But admirers also wax poetic on her "Cuban version" of



"Prima ballerina assoluta" and director of Cuba's National Ballet, Alicia Alonso (R), talks to dancers during her ballet's company class in Havana, on December 20, 2016. AFP

classics like "Carmen," "The Sleeping Beauty," "Coppelia," "Swan Lake" and "The Nutcracker."

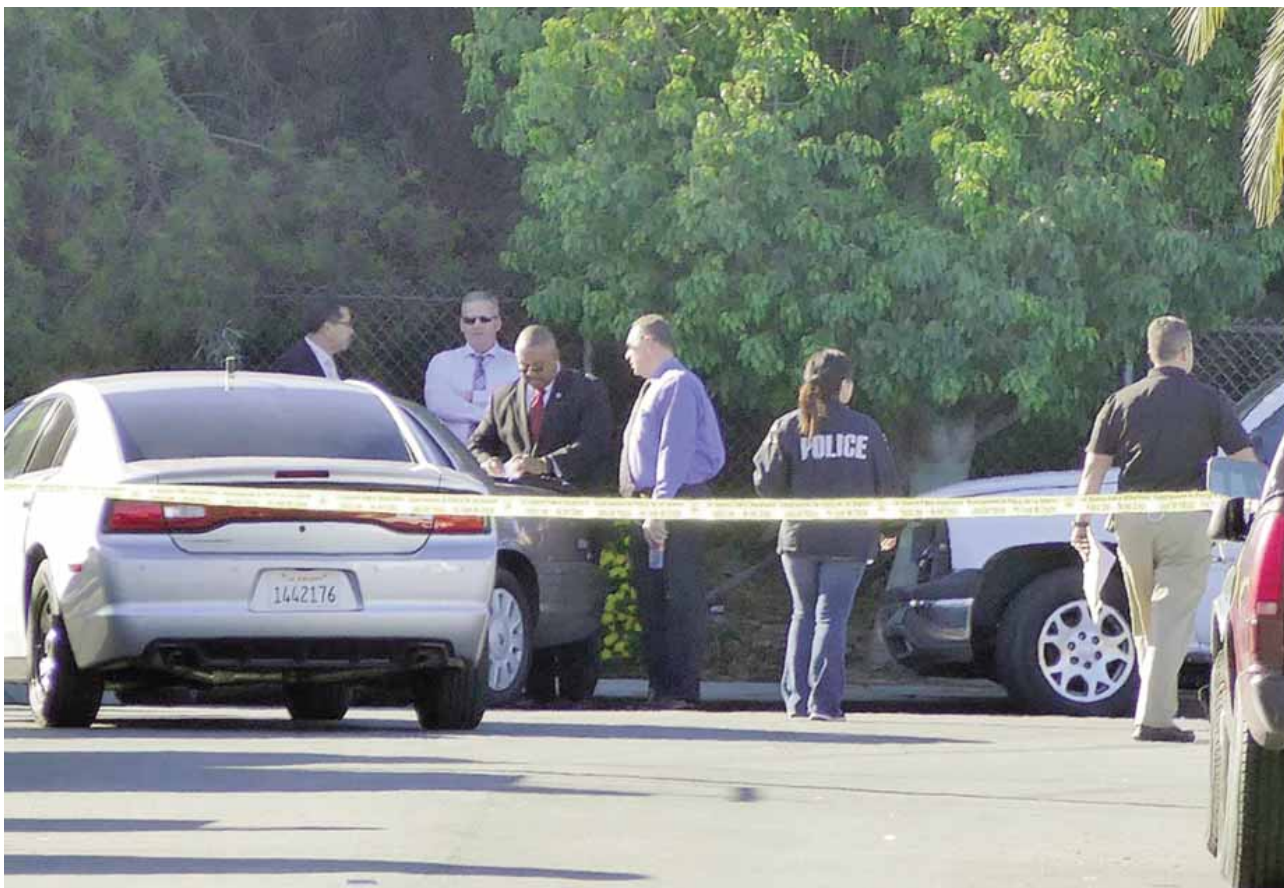
Viengsay Valdes, Alonso's current prima ballerina, recounts how she was once invited to Russia to dance "their version" of "Carmen." She insisted on dancing Alonso's instead. "I defend all her work, everything she's created," Valdes told AFP. Another one-time protégé, Aurora Bosch, who is now 74, recalls how Alonso lured male dancers to join the company in this country where the culture of machismo runs deep.

"She would tell them we were doing fencing classes," she says. "When they would start rehearsing ballet steps, they would say, 'Wait, where's the sword?'" But drawn in by Alonso's magnetism, they would eventually relent and stay. "And today, our school, our

way of dancing, stands out in large part because of our male dancers," says Bosch.

Alonso hung up her ballet slippers in 1995, at the age of 75 — nearly 60 years after making her debut on Broadway in 1938. The newest generation of Cuban talent has never seen her dance. But the reverence remains. Patricio Reve, a rising star at 18 years old, says he has retained one great lesson from the company's founder.

"Alicia always insists on the need to dance and defend the Cuban school." — AFP



MAN CHARGED WITH KILLING EX-REALITY TV CONTESTANT

A Southern California man has been charged with beating to death a former reality TV show contestant with a hammer and burying her in his backyard. Jackie Rogers was charged Thursday with murder. It's unclear whether he has an attorney because his scheduled Thursday arraignment was postponed. Rogers could face 26 years to life in prison if convicted.

The 34-year-old Lennox man is charged with bludgeoning to death Lisa Marie Naegle of San Pedro last Sunday. Naegle was a registered nurse who taught nursing at a local community college. She was a losing contestant in the 2010 reality series "Bridalplasty." Rogers was a student of the 36-year-old married woman. He was arrested after video showed him leaving a Torrance beerhall with Naegle. Police haven't disclosed the nature of their relationship. — AP

In this Tuesday, Dec. 20, 2016, file photo, police and coroner's officials investigate a home in the Lennox area of Los Angeles as they search for Lisa Marie Naegle, who has been missing since the previous weekend. — AP

Argentine court to try **Bieber** for photographer assault

BUENOS AIRES: An Argentine court has ruled that pop star Justin Bieber must face trial for allegedly assaulting a photographer outside a nightclub in 2013, according to a decision published Thursday.

Judge Alberto Banos ordered Bieber to go on trial on charges of robbery, attempted robbery and assault with minor injuries, according to the decision. The case dates to a stop in Buenos Aires on the Canadian heartthrob's Believe tour.

According to the complaint, a bodyguard, following Bieber's orders, forcefully seized pho-

tographer Diego Pesoa's camera and cellphone outside a nightclub in the upscale Palermo neighborhood in November 2013.

Bieber has ignored court orders to appear before the judge, prompting Argentina to request an Interpol Red Notice for his arrest. The plaintiff's lawyer, Matias Morla, welcomed the ruling. "The judge's decision is excellent and represents a new slap in the face to Justin's arrogance," he said.

"Justin has hidden behind his fame and money to escape justice. Now he will have to

observe the court ruling of a sovereign country like Argentina and show up to testify like any other citizen," he told Argentine newspaper Diario Popular.

Bieber, 22, once enjoyed a squeaky clean image, but has recently had frequent run-ins with the law, including in the United States and Canada. — AFP



Singer Justin Bieber



Indonesian youths display "om telolet om" posters asking for passing bus drivers to toot their horns on the side of a road in Solo, Central Java, yesterday. — AP

Honk if you want to know what the 'om telolet om' meme means

Honk if you want to know what the internet's latest meme "om telolet om" means. The expression was started by Indonesian children standing on the side of the road yelling for bus and truck drivers to toot their horns, which play a series of jingle-like beeps.

Internet videos showed Indonesian kids holding signs and jumping up and down with each passing bus while calling out: "Om telolet om! Om telolet om!" When the driver lays on the horn, the children jump and shriek with delight.

Once the videos went viral so did the expression. International DJs have released mixes with om telolet om honks in them, and social media feeds have been spammed with om telolet messages fol-

lowed by bus icons. Some people have posted videos online in New York and other cities yelling out "om telolet om!" to passing trucks.

Many, though, still ask what it means. The expression loosely translates to "uncle, honk, uncle" ("telolet" is onomatopoeia for the festive beeps). A video posted on Instagram from Indonesia showed police officers dancing in the street when passing buses and trucks blasted their horns.

Despite all the fun, The Jakarta Post reported this week that police in Jepara, Indonesia, where children first started yelling the phrase at buses, have banned the practice for safety reasons. — AP

Pitt accuses Jolie of risking children's privacy

Brad Pitt has accused Angelina Jolie of compromising their children's privacy and is asking a judge to seal details about the youngsters emerging from the couple's divorce, court papers showed Thursday.

The 52-year-old star's lawyers claim his estranged wife is showing little regard for the welfare of the three boys and three girls, as her attorneys try to make him look bad, according to a motion filed in a Los Angeles court. Pitt's legal team argues that Jolie has already violated an agreement to protect the privacy of the children—who range from age eight to 15 -- by making public the names of family therapists.

The lawyers accuse Jolie, 41, of "attempting to clear the way to put in the public eye any allegations she can" without regard to the impact on the children. Jolie filed for divorce in September, citing irreconcilable

differences, and is seeking sole custody of the children.

Pitt was cleared by the FBI and social workers over allegations that he struck one of his children during a flight that month from France to Los Angeles. Pitt, who won a best film Oscar for producing "12 Years a Slave" (2013), is seeking joint legal and physical custody.

He has been granted visits supervised by a therapist as part of a temporary custody agreement. Under the deal Jolie has physical custody of the children—three of whom are adopted—at a rented LA house.

The A-listers-given the celebrity moniker "Brangelina"—wed in France in August two years ago, but had been a couple since 2004. A hearing on Pitt's motion is scheduled for January 17. — AFP



This file photo taken on November 04, 2015 shows actress Angelina Jolie Pitt and husband actor Brad Pitt at the AFI FEST 2015 presented by Audi opening night gala premiere of Universal Pictures' "By The Sea" at the Chinese Theatre in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

Fox News has kept most of its audience after the election

A sharp drop in cable news ratings following a presidential election is as inevitable as snow in Buffalo. Yet in the Age of Trump, so far Fox News Channel is defying that trend.

Comparing the five weeks after the election to the white-hot campaign days of October, Fox's prime-time audience is down 8 percent, the Nielsen company said. That's a much smaller drop than rivals CNN and MSNBC, and smaller than all of the networks historically following elections.

"They've really, obviously, established themselves as the go-to place for all things Trump, Trump supporters certainly," said Paul Sweeney, an analyst for Bloomberg Intelligence. "This is their time to shine and they're making the most of it."

Post-election has been a victory lap for Sean Hannity, who made no secret of his support for Trump and was rewarded with regular interviews. Fox also enticed viewers with TMZ's Harvey Levin getting a guided tour of the president-elect's New York apartment. Following Barack Obama's victories, Fox's post-election viewership dropped by 50 percent in 2012 and 36 percent in 2008, Nielsen said. The drop was 25 percent after Republican George W. Bush's 2004 win.

Reflections

Fox's audience likely reflects the surprise nature of Trump's win: Viewers depressed about his chances of winning were less inclined to watch during October and much more excited in November. Fox's viewership shot up in late October when new questions were raised about Hillary Clinton's emails.

The timing couldn't be better for Fox, thrown into uncertainty this summer with the ouster of the man who essentially invented the network, Roger Ailes. People wondered whether James and Lachlan Murdoch, who run Fox's parent 21st Century Fox, would want to change the focus of a network that strongly appeals to conservatives.

"The rising tide of Trump and what he represents coincides well with what Fox traditionally has been," Sweeney said.

Given its success, Lachlan Murdoch has been quoted as saying it would be foolish of Fox to change direction. His brother James, during an appearance at a Business Insider conference earlier this month, said there's more to the network's success than politics, and that the programming is very engaging for viewers.

Fox last month plugged Tucker Carlson into the 7 p.m. time slot vacated by Greta Van Susteren. The next big decision comes from prime-time host Megyn Kelly, who's mulling whether to stay

at Fox following the expiration of her contract next year. It's an interesting case: Her talent is undeniable, but many of Trump's fans are cool to her because their candidate was angered by her debate questioning. Should Kelly leave, Fox has a good track record of developing stars, Sweeney said.

The campaign was a boon to cable news in general. Fox, CNN and MSNBC will all finish with more viewers in 2016 than any other year in their histories, Nielsen said. Fox had the best ratings of any basic cable network for the first time in its 20 years.

Angering supporters

CNN angered supporters of both candidates. Clinton fans say CNN gave far too much uncritical airtime to Trump in the formative months of his campaign; Trump, for his part, frequently tweeted criticism of the network.

Amid anecdotes that many voters went on a "news strike" following the election, CNN's prime-time viewership in the five weeks after it sunk 51 percent from October, Nielsen said. CNN had an identical 51 percent decline during the same period in 2012. In 2008, CNN's drop was 47 percent.

More than its rivals, CNN has traditionally risen and fallen depending on the news. That's why chief executive Jeff Zucker has invested in more timeless nonfiction programming, such as Anthony Bourdain's cooking travelogue. Expect more town hall events in the network's future, similar to Van Jones' attempt to get political rivals talking to one another. MSNBC's post-election decline was 41 percent, slightly higher than in past election years (36 percent four years ago, 35 percent in 2008).

The network faces personnel transition. MSNBC is looking for a new show to air at 6 p.m. and, with Trump taking office next month, it will most likely be Washington-based. Brian Williams' 11 p.m. show that was supposed to run through the election and now will continue until Trump's inauguration, and perhaps beyond. One positive sign for all of the networks is that their viewership is still well above the historic lows of early 2015, before the campaign started. Fox's prime-time viewership was just over 2 million for the first six months of 2015 and has been 3.1 million during the past five weeks. CNN's pre-campaign average of 565,000 viewers is now 966,000. MSNBC has gone from 604,000 to 1.2 million. — AP



In this photo taken on Wednesday, Feb. 24, 2016, Carla Sozzani arrives to attend a lunch with Italian premier Matteo Renzi at Palazzo Reale, in Milan, Italy. — AP

Vogue Italia
editor **Franca**

Sozzani dies at 66

Vogue Italia editor Franca Sozzani, who championed Italian fashion in the magazine she ran for 28 years, has died at the age of 66.

Conde Naste International chairman Jonathan Newhouse said she died Thursday after a yearlong illness with her son Francesco by her side. The online version of Vogue Italia remembered Sozzani with a simple red heart next to her name.

"Franca was one of the greatest editors who ever made a magazine," Newhouse said in a note to the Conde Naste team. "She made Italian Vogue a powerful and influential voice in the worlds of fashion and photography by publishing groundbreaking photography and journalism."

After turns at Vogue Bambini, the Italian version of Glamour and a corresponding men's magazine, Sozzani became editor-in-chief of Vogue Italia in 1988. She also was active in humanitarian causes, and in recent years served as the ambassador to fashion for the United Nations, traveling to support people working in the fashion world in Africa and Asia while helping to raise money and awareness to fight hunger.

Back home in Milan, she was easy to spot in the fashion crowd with her wavy blonde locks and bright smile. She also had a big social media presence, running a blog on Vogue Italy's website as well as an active Twitter feed that went silent in June.

Once asked to define style, she replied, "Today there is not just one. I think people should buy more mirrors than clothes, to see themselves before going out ... but I think that clothes need to correspond to one's own personality. That is style." — AP



In this Saturday, Dec 10, 2016 file photo, President-elect Donald Trump, right, is interviewed by Chris Wallace of "Fox News Sunday" at Trump Tower in New York. — AP

What's the story with Ben Affleck? 'Live by Night,' he hopes

When Ben Affleck's "Argo" won best picture four years ago, it was an unquestionable high point in a career that has seesawed with ups and downs. As he, clutching the Oscar, spoke emotionally of "getting back up" after being knocked down, Affleck seemed to be leaving the turbulence behind.

But the roller coaster soon enough started rolling again. Though many expected him to continue on the path of prestige filmmaker, he, with just a touch of fanfare, took on the high-pressure role of Batman, a bid to secure his place on the A-list and wow his four-year-old son. And after splitting with his wife, Jennifer Garner, Affleck again found himself a tabloid regular.

"This business tends to exaggerate highs and lows," Affleck said in an interview over coffee at a Manhattan restaurant overlooking Central Park. "I've had legitimate lows, movies I didn't like, and I'm very proud of the movies I directed and so on. But you become a cast member in a soap opera that you're not writing. You get the script every day and you find out what your role is that day."



In this Sept 30, 2016 photo, Ben Affleck poses at The Four Seasons Hotel in Los Angeles. — AP

Now, Affleck is hoping to flip the script again. He's releasing his directorial follow-up to "Argo," an adaption of Dennis Lehane's crime novel "Live by Night." It's the story of a Prohibition era gangster (Affleck) who decamps from Boston to Tampa's Ybor City to create a rum-running empire. It's his fourth film as a director and second adaptation of Lehane, whose "Gone Baby Gone" was his directorial debut in 2007.

Past success

"When I had the success of 'Argo,' I kind of got to leverage that," said Affleck, who was sent the book by Leonardo DiCaprio. "It was sort of pick what you want to do and this is what I wanted to do. I wanted to make a classic Warners picture."

It's easily Affleck's most ambitious film yet, one he grants he couldn't have tackled earlier. It has lavish period sets and costumes, a lengthy car chase and an epic sweep compelled by a clash of American ideals that resonates particularly post-election. He just hopes his side job in Warner Bros.' DC Comics universe doesn't overshadow it.

"They're saying you have to have x, y and z to make money in the movie business," Affleck said. "You've got to have somebody wearing a cape,

for example. While I have nothing against movies with people with capes on—I'm a big fan of capes—I don't think we should be limited to that genre."

Affleck and his family were preparing to soon head to Montana to celebrate Christmas with his brother, Casey, and his family. It's been an especially busy year for both. Casey is enjoying the most acclaim of his career for "Manchester by the Sea," while Ben has run up more than \$1.7 billion in box office, starring in "Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice," making a cameo in "Suicide Squad" and top-lining the bean-counter thriller "The Accountant."

But concern that Affleck's caped duties might overshadow "Live By Night" was especially acute on a recent December afternoon. He had just conducted a wide-ranging Times Talk about his career, but the headline-grabbing takeaway was that he said wouldn't direct the planned stand-alone "Batman" film until the script was good enough.

"That generated 30 stories about 'Ben Affleck's taking his time with Batman.' Of course I am!" Affleck said incredulously. "You take your time with any movie. It's no different than anything else but because it's 'Batman' and it has that level of attention on the Internet. What could be less newsworthy than a person saying they want to have a good script for their movie? We're making the movie. We're going ahead with it. We're just working on the script to make it good. It's like the most famous unmade movie in history." "We also want good actors. We want good stages," he said. "It boggles the mind."

After the critical lashing of "Batman v Superman" and "Suicide Squad," Affleck would have good reason to emphasize the script stage of his "Batman" film, which he calls an "exhilarating" challenge, "like jumping out of an airplane." He has written or co-written all his films except "Argo," and, of course, first won an Oscar for penning "Good Will Hunting" with Matt Damon.

Lehane, the celebrated crime noir novelist, said Affleck is orderly, "no-muss, no-fuss" in talking over the screenplays of "Gone Girl" and "Live by Night" - even if there were understandable delays.

"I think he thought, 'I'm just going to go direct this' (after 'Argo') and then he got the offer to do 'Gone Girl,'" Lehane said. "And then he was like, 'OK, now I'm ready to direct this.' And then he got the offer to do Batman. As he said to me at the time, in the grandest understatement, 'A guy's got to eat.'"

The reviews for "Live By Night" haven't been great, and it won't reach the Oscar heights of "Argo." But after the film's first, more traditional crime-thriller chapter, it becomes a timely collision between diverging visions of America: multiculturalism squares off with the KKK and religious zealotry.

"Some of those conflicts, it turns out, are still really relevant today," Affleck said. "In fact, I had no idea a story about immigrants and the Klu Klux Klan and morality would feel so current today."

Whether or not "Live by Night" succeeds, Affleck is at peace with the undulations of his Hollywood career. "I do look at the careers of other directors, guys like John Huston, and see how they had big hits and big misses and lived big lives. That's OK with me as a model," Affleck said. "I don't mind the high stakes gambling nature of this profession. If it's a hit, you're a hit, and if it's a bomb, you're a bomb. That's just the way things go. There's something uniquely American about that." — AP



This Dec 19, 2016 photo shows an interior exit stairway at an underground music club known as Purple 33 in a Playa Vista neighborhood of Los Angeles. — AP

Artists, officials clash over safety of underground venues

The party is over at Purple 33. About a week after 36 people died in a fire at an underground music party in Oakland, inspectors acting on a complaint discovered a makeshift nightclub and unpermitted living quarters concealed in a warehouse near Los Angeles International Airport.

Authorities searching the drab, two-story building found an illegally constructed dance floor, paired with a bar and DJ booth. Haphazard wiring snaked through walls, and an outdoor staircase capped by a bamboo canopy was flagged as a fire threat. The unlicensed club was shut down, and operator Donald Cassel, who also lives there, was ordered to clear out.

The closing of the space dubbed Purple 33 highlights growing friction between underground music venues that can be the only option for experimental or emerging performers and their fans, and authorities who see disasters-in-waiting.

Another matter

Finding them is another matter, when clandestine events can be announced with a fleeting Facebook post or text message and, in many cases, vanish after the music stops. "You have a situation where folks are coming together and they are not applying for special permits. They're just posting fliers 24 hours in advance, and they're bringing hundreds of people in for different functions," Oakland Fire Chief Teresa DeLoach Reed said at a news conference days after the Dec. 2 fire during an electronic music party at an illegally converted warehouse nicknamed "Ghost Ship." "We do not have the resources to track those types of functions," she conceded.

After the blaze, officials in LA, Baltimore and other cities announced plans to aggressively pursue illegally converted warehouses and other jerry-rigged living spaces. The threat of a crackdown is unnerving musicians and artists who live in them and routinely accept risks that can come with performing on unlicensed stages.

The Los Angeles case has similarities to Oakland, where a leased warehouse was converted into living space and an entertainment stage without proper permits or inspections. "Lesser-known artists are happy to play nearly anywhere that will host them, because there are very few options," said Amanda Brown, co-owner of the Los Angeles record label 100% Silk, which lost two of its artists in the Oakland fire.

"These events are way more about community and shared experience than they are making money," she said in an email. "Most artists are very flexi-

ble and willing to deal with strange venues as long as there is a sound system and some enthusiasm for the music."

It's difficult to generalize about underground music and the places it's played, which sometimes hide in plain sight. Purple 33 has a webpage.

It's like a jukebox, encompassing everything from punk to metal to electronic, a branch that itself is divided into dozens of splinters. Similarly, the events can range widely: a couple of dozen people in a garment factory, an after-hours gathering in a coffee shop, 150 electronic music fans in a clearing in a forest. The scene is alternately inclusive, welcoming artists and fans of all demographics, and exclusive, since by definition it's hard to find if you don't know where to look. The list of Oakland victims speaks to the diversity it attracts: a teacher, a computer engineer, a filmmaker, musicians and artists, a lawyer.

Regulations

Regulations vary, but generally a gathering of 100 people with live music on a stage would require one or more permits. Depending on its size, a fire marshal could make a spot check to ensure fire extinguishers are available and lighting is adequate, or officials might oversee the event.

In general, building inspectors in Los Angeles would reject applications for musical events in warehouses, since they are designed to hold goods, not parties.

A gritty location can be part of the allure, and Cassel and others see it as an escape from mainstream clubs that they see as unwelcoming, even hostile, to free spirits and nonconformists.

But a big part of it is economics. A maze of rules and the high costs that come with meeting them leave few alternatives for running events on a skimpy budget, they say. "When you are charging five, six bucks and 50 people show up, it doesn't work to have a permit," said George Chen, who organized underground shows in the San Francisco Bay Area for over a decade.

Cassel acknowledges he ran Purple 33 without proper authorization but says it's not because he didn't try. The businessman-contractor-inventor who once sold skateboard parts claims he spent \$70,000 on licensing and other fees to try to get the city to green-light an earlier club he ran nearby. But neighbors who feared wild parties blocked it. At Purple 33, he remained underground, convinced the outcome would be the same if he tried to go legal. —AP



YANGON: This photo taken on November 3, 2016 shows a sample of mechanical parts made using 3D printing technology as an employee works on a design using a computer (background) at a printing factory in Yangon. —AFP

MYANMAR FARMERS REAP REWARDS FROM 3D PRINTING

TECHNOLOGY CHANGING THE LIVES OF IMPOVERISHED FARMERS

YANGON: Whizzing across a blue-lit platform with a whirr and a squeak, liquid plastic emanating from its chrome tip, the 3D printer seems a far cry from the muddy, crop-filled fields that fringe Yangon.

But in an industrial park south of Myanmar's commercial hub, the advanced technology is now being used to design bespoke parts that are changing the lives of impoverished farmers. Myanmar's manufacturing sector was gutted under five decades of isolationist military rule, forcing farmers to cobble together their own tools or use ill-adapted imports. Poor equipment has only added to the hardships of growing crops in the disaster-prone country, where farmers account for nearly half of the economy's output despite being among the poorest producers in Asia.

But in one corner of Yangon, change is afoot. Over at social enterprise Proximity Designs, cutting-edge 3D

printer technology is being used to design specially adapted tools, in consultation with the farmers who use them.

"We want to create something that farmers find delight in," product designer Taiei Harimoto told AFP at their workshop, where robotic arms line the walls near benches littered with tools and mechanical parts. The printer, a small, black, hollow cube with a needle inside attached to a computer, has already been put to use helping design parts for a sprinkler system and the internal mechanics for a solar pump.

Creating prototypes in plastic means the team can perfect designs for complex pieces in the lab, cutting out a lengthy back-and-forth that can cost thousands of dollars.

Once the design has been perfected, it is then sent off to factories in other countries where the final part is mass produced. "Before it might have taken weeks and sometimes months" to make

the prototypes for each product, said co-founder Debbie Aung Din.

Out in the fields, farmers say they are already seeing their profits grow.

On his tiny half-acre plot some 70 miles (100 kilometres) from Yangon, betel leaf farmer Kyaw Win said his life has been changed by the 3D printer-designed sprinkling system he installed over two months ago.

"Using products like this can cut in half the amount of time we have to spend working each day," the 60-year-old told AFP as he stroked the plants' wide leaves, which many people in Myanmar chew as a stimulant. Instead of paying laborers to water the plants using buckets-back-breaking work that often meant the leaves became damp and diseased—now he has a targeted system that he can operate himself. "We also reduced our costs by more than half compared to what we had to spend before," he explained. —AFP

DON'T GET CYBER SCROOGED! TIPS FOR ONLINE SHOPPING

NEW YORK: 'Tis the season to be jolly - but it's also the season for identity theft, phishing and credit card fraud. With Christmas just days away, people are using their smartphones and other devices to get a handle on their last-minute shopping. Hackers are on the hunt as well, looking to steal personal information from easy targets.

"People just need to have their radar up, so that when they're trying to get their perfect gift to grandma's house in time for Christmas day, they're not clicking on things they shouldn't," says Michael Kaiser, executive director of the National Cyber Security Alliance.

We've written earlier on how to avoid holiday scams in general, both of the technology kind and otherwise: <http://apne.ws/2hRZ55V>. Here are some other tips for staying safe this holiday season.

YOU'D BETTER WATCH OUT

Make sure your phone's operating system and all the apps you use to shop are up to date.

That way you'll have the fixes for any recently discovered security problems. You should also enable multi-factor authentication in the settings on your important accounts. This is a security measure that requires you to enter a temporary code in addition to your password when signing in; services often text this code to your phone. It complicates life for hackers should they somehow manage to get your password.

Improvements in credit card fraud detection have pushed hackers to focus on stealing legitimate login credentials, so adding an extra layer of protection to these accounts is a must, says John Dickson with the cybersecurity firm Denim Group. And while some cybersecurity experts question the value of changing your password frequently, Dickson says it's not a bad idea this time of year. "If you had a New Year's resolution to change your passwords, move that up by about four weeks, because this is fraudster season," Dickson says.

SANTA (AND HACKERS) ARE WATCHING

Nobody likes to dip into their mobile-data plan, but you might want to set aside a few gigabytes for your holiday shopping. Signing on to free Wi-Fi at a store or coffee shop can be risky. Hackers could be lurking on the networks, ready to use that connection to steal credit-card numbers or other personal information. If you're using free Wi-Fi, at least wait till you get home to check your bank account balances, Kaiser says.

FEAST OF THE PHISHES

Phishing spikes during the holiday season. Emails that offer great deals on holiday gifts or donation pitches from charities could actually be attempts to steal your credit card or login information. Another popular trick: Fake emails supposedly sent by online retailers or shipping companies. Don't click on links in these emails, as they may lead you to a fake website that looks legitimate. Instead, type in the company's website directly.

CHECKING IT TWICE (OR MORE)

Shoppers need to keep a close eye on their accounts. The easiest way to do this is to use the same credit card for all of your holiday shopping. Avoid debit cards - running up a credit card balance is one thing and can be challenged; draining your life's savings is another.

Use different passwords for your various shopping accounts. That way if one is compromised, it's less likely that the others will fall to hackers as well.

NAUGHTY OR NICE?

Websites that advertise hot deals on popular or hard-to-find gifts are probably scams. So are those touting free or deeply discounted gift cards. Stick with e-commerce sites you know are real. Don't click on web ads.

And if something advertised on a website or social media looks too good to be true, it probably is, says Brian Reed, chief marketing officer for ZeroFox, a cybersecurity firm that focuses on social media.

Instead of getting a great deal on a North Face jacket or a free iPhone, shoppers are getting their money and personal information stolen. Also avoid apps that promise to generate gift card codes for various retailers, Reed says. —AP

SIDE EFFECTS LOOM IF IOWA ADOPTS TRAFFIC CAMERA BAN

CEDAR RAPIDS: A ban on traffic enforcement cameras could have side effects for Iowa cities that rely on the technology, including Cedar Rapids, which has the most robust camera program in the state. The specter of a ban has prompted Cedar Rapids City Manager Jeff Pomeranz to not count on the \$3 million to \$3.5 million in annual revenue from speed and red light cameras in the city's fiscal 2018 general fund budget, which will be adopted by City Council in March and starts July 1, 2017.

"In order to be cautious we are going to exclude that revenue," Pomeranz said. "The last thing we want to do is have the City Council approve a budget that is several million dollars short." The general fund pays for various city

services and staff, such as police, fire, library, streets and garbage collection, while generating money from property taxes, which Pomeranz said won't be increased. Total property tax revenue won't be known for another month, so how to offset lost traffic camera revenue remains up in the air, Pomeranz said.

Budgeting is just one of the possible ripple effects should state lawmakers ban traffic cameras. Traffic safety, pending lawsuits and ticket refunds could also crop up as issues. State Sen. Brad Zaun, R-Urbandale, chairman of the Judiciary Committee, told the Quad-City Times he expects legislation to ban traffic cameras to clear the House and Senate next month and then land on Gov. Terry Branstad's desk. —AP

TECH ON WHEELS: ACURA NSX RETURNS AS GAS-ELECTRIC HYBRID

After a 12-year absence, the Acura NSX returns for 2017 as the first gasoline-electric hybrid supercar, mixing exotic looks and sports-car handling with the latest engine and electric power technology. A twin-turbo V-6 behind the seats works in tandem with electric motors between the front wheels and at the back of the car to generate 573 horsepower and 476 foot-pounds of torque, all while wearing the fuel-efficiency crown for a high-performance, gasoline-powered sports car.

The federal government rates the 2017 NSX at 21 miles per gallon in city driving and 22 mpg on highways, which is a 17 percent improvement over the last NSX. These mileage ratings help the 2017 NSX avoid the federal government's gas guzzler tax and surpass pricey, two-seat supercar competitors - such as McLaren, Ferrari, Lamborghini and Mercedes-Benz.

But the new NSX is more than a fuel-efficient sports car. The electric motors that independently drive the left and right front wheels also provide torque vectoring for all-wheel drive taken to a new level of cornering precision. The electric power adds fast off-the-line starts, then smoothly transitions to robust engine power. And every tap of the accelerator brings instantaneous torque from the electric motors, too, so the NSX feels quick and responsive across a wide driving range. With a starting manufacturer's suggested retail price, including destination charge, of \$157,800, the 2017 NSX undercuts many competitors, but the price can exceed \$200,000 upon adding options such as carbon fiber pieces and carbon-ceramic brake rotors.

On sight, the NSX has a low-slung, sleek body. Ground clearance is just 3.7 inches, and driver and passenger drop low into the sculpted seats, where they are perfectly positioned to look at the tailpipes of trucks and SUVs ahead of them. Drivers must watch that they don't bump the low NSX nose as they enter driveways.

At 87.3 inches wide, the NSX's cabin feels wider and roomier than expected. Legroom maxes out at a decent 42.8 inches, and headroom is a good 38.3 inches. Strong engine sounds emanate from behind the seats where the mid-mounted engine resides. But there's a "quiet" drive mode that tries to keep the car on silent electric-only power if the driver can creep along at less than 20 mph.

Good luck with driving this car that slow: The 3.5-liter, double overhead cam, twin-turbocharged V-6 is longitudinally placed and is visible, under its engine cover, under the glass of the rear window. The engine, which is new for Acura and its parent company, Honda, has both direct injection for regular fuel delivery and port injection for additional power in high-performance driving.

It's mated to a nine-speed, dual-clutch transmission that can be driven like a typical automatic or shifted manually by the driver without the need for a clutch pedal. The NSX rides firmly, feels solidly planted to the road and conveys even subtle road imperfections inside to the driver and passengers. Many bumps come through as vibrations, but some can be jarring. The car stays amazingly flat in turns and curves, and while it can dart aggressively through a slalom, it doesn't feel lightweight. The new NSX weighs 3,800 pounds, some 600 more than its predecessor, because of its electric motors and lithium ion battery pack. The NSX controls on the dashboard look like they were pulled out of another Acura. As an example, the NSX doesn't have an enlarged, vertically positioned display screen, like a computer tablet, the way such screens are in McLarens, the latest Volvos and the Tesla Model S.

The NSX also doesn't decouple the suspension and engine controls to allow drivers to mix and match their drive experience the way that a McLaren does. —AP



SAN FRANCISCO: In this Tuesday, Dec. 13, 2016, file photo, an Uber driverless car is displayed in a garage in San Francisco. Uber has pulled its self-driving cars from California roads. The ride-sharing company said, California transportation regulators revoke registrations for the vehicles. —AP

UBER MOVES SELF-DRIVING CARS FROM CALIFORNIA TO ARIZONA GOVERNOR TWEETS ARIZONA AN ALTERNATIVE

PHOENIX: A fleet of self-driving Uber cars left for Arizona on Thursday after they were banned from California roads over safety concerns. The announcement came after Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey took to social media on Wednesday and Thursday touting Arizona as an alternative to California for the ride-hailing company to test out its self-driving cars.

Ducey, a Republican, sent tweets advertising Arizona's friendly business environment, saying Uber should ditch California for the Grand Canyon state. Uber said in a statement that it had shipped its cars to Arizona and will be expanding its self-driving pilot program in the next few weeks. The company hasn't announced a date when the cars will be tested, nor did it provide details about how many cars were included. Uber previously had 16 self-driving cars registered in California.

"Arizona welcomes Uber self-driving cars with open arms and wide open roads. While California puts the brakes on innovation and change with more bureaucracy and more regulation, Arizona is paving the way for new technology and new businesses," Ducey said in a written statement.

Ducey spokesman Daniel Scarpinato said the governor has been a strong supporter of driverless car technology and new business models, signing in August 2015 an executive order supporting the testing of such cars in Arizona. Uber faced immediate backlash after it launched its California testing in San Francisco last week.

The California Department of Motor Vehicles had threat-

ened legal action if Uber kept the cars on the road, saying they needed the same special permit as the 20 other companies testing self-driving technology in California.

Uber said it doesn't need that permit because the cars are not sophisticated enough to continuously drive themselves. Still, the company promotes the cars as "self-driving."

The ride-hailing company and state regulators negotiated for a week, but Uber pulled its cars off California roads Wednesday after state officials announced they would revoke the vehicle registrations of all 16 self-driving cars. The DMV said the registrations for the vehicles were wrongly issued because they were not properly marked as test vehicles. It invited Uber to seek a permit so their vehicles could operate legally in California - an offer the company said it did not plan to accept. Uber said on Wednesday it was looking for other places to test out the cars but remained 100 percent committed to California and would redouble its efforts "to develop workable statewide rules."

Ducey called California's rules "over-regulation." It's unclear which if any regulations exist in Arizona that would apply to the testing of self-driving cars. The executive order Ducey signed last year calls for the state's public safety and transportation departments to take steps toward allowing for the testing of self-driving cars. "This is about economic development, but it's also about changing the way we live and work. Arizona is proud to be open for business. California may not want you, but we do," he said in a statement. —AP



MIAMI: In this Monday, Dec 12, 2016, photo, a person searches the internet for sales in Miami. With the holidays fast approaching, more people are using their smartphones and other devices to get a handle on their last-minute shopping. —AP

CAN TECHNOLOGY STOP ANOTHER TRUCK ATTACK?

LONDON: The attack on a Berlin Christmas market showed the devastation that can be wrought by the simple act of driving a truck into crowds, and the problems in preventing another massacre.

The attack in Germany on Monday, in which 11 people were killed by the truck in addition to the murder of the Polish driver, mirrored a militant raid in the French city of Nice in July that killed 86.

Hauliers increasingly track their vehicles in real time but security experts say the technology cannot be used to stop an attack if a lorry has been hijacked to be used

as a weapon. "(Militant) groups have been shouting about this sort of attack for some time, it's just that the Nice attack was the first really successful one we've seen," said Raffaello Pantucci at the Royal United Services Institute defence and security think-tank.

"Whenever you see a successful attack you will see people trying to copy it." From a militant's perspective, the advantage of a lorry attack is its simplicity: a truck is not difficult to obtain and move around, as guns and explosives are, and it does not operate in an environment that

can be secured, like the air industry.

"If you have security forces who are very aggressively keeping an eye on guns and on bomb-making stuff and you need to acquire a certain level of training to do these things, then it raises the threshold of launching a successful attack," said Pantucci.

"If you are dealing with a heightened security environment you basically use what tools you have to hand." The threat from a lorry attack can be reduced by physical deterrents such as concrete blocks and bollards, but this is harder for temporary events like Christmas markets. —Reuters

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2016

OSN MOVIES HD
ACTION

- 00:00 No Tell Motel
- 01:45 The Liability
- 03:30 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
- 05:15 Hidalgo
- 07:45 Last Action Hero
- 10:00 Taken 3
- 12:00 Jesse Stone: Lost In Paradise
- 13:45 The Last Survivors
- 15:30 Hidalgo
- 18:00 Taken 3
- 20:00 Cradle 2 The Grave
- 22:00 Colors

ANIMAL PLANET HD

- 00:50 Monster Hammerhead
- 01:45 Bondi Vet
- 02:10 Bondi Vet
- 02:40 Life On Earth: A New Prehistory
- 03:35 Tanked
- 04:25 Ten Deadliest Snakes
- 05:15 Gator Boys
- 06:02 Monster Hammerhead
- 06:49 Life On Earth: A New Prehistory
- 07:36 Swamp Brothers
- 08:00 Swamp Brothers
- 08:25 Life On Earth: A New Prehistory
- 09:15 Lone Star Law
- 10:10 Dr. Jeff: Rocky Mountain Vet
- 11:05 Wildest Islands Of Indonesia
- 12:00 Tanked
- 12:55 Bondi Vet
- 13:20 Bondi Vet
- 13:50 Ten Deadliest Snakes With Nigel Marven
- 14:45 The Beauty Of Snakes
- 15:40 Ten Deadliest Snakes
- 16:35 Ten Deadliest Snakes
- 17:30 Ten Deadliest Snakes
- 18:25 Ten Deadliest Snakes With Nigel Marven
- 19:20 Lone Star Law
- 20:15 Life On Earth: A New Prehistory
- 21:10 Dr. Jeff: Rocky Mountain Vet
- 22:05 Tanked
- 23:00 Lone Star Law
- 23:55 Gator Boys

crime & investigation network

- 00:00 They Took Our Child, We Got Her Back
- 01:00 The Haunting Of...
- 02:00 My Haunted House
- 03:00 50 Ways To Kill Your Lover
- 04:00 They Took Our Child, We Got Her Back
- 05:00 The Haunting Of...
- 06:00 My Haunted House
- 07:00 The First 48
- 08:00 Fred Dinenage: Murder Casebook
- 09:00 Beyond Scared Straight
- 10:00 My Crazy Ex
- 11:00 My Crazy Ex
- 12:00 My Crazy Ex
- 13:00 My Crazy Ex
- 14:00 My Crazy Ex
- 15:00 My Crazy Ex
- 16:00 My Crazy Ex
- 17:00 My Crazy Ex
- 18:00 My Crazy Ex
- 19:00 Evil Up Close
- 20:00 Evil Up Close
- 21:00 Evil Up Close
- 22:00 Evil Up Close
- 23:00 The Body Detective

COMEDY CENTRAL

- 00:00 Tosh.0
- 00:25 Kyle Kinane: I Liked His Old Stuff Better
- 01:15 Tosh.0
- 01:40 The Daily Show With Trevor Noah
- 02:05 Ugly Americans
- 02:30 Broad City
- 03:00 Workaholics
- 03:25 Disorderly Conduct: Video On Patrol
- 04:15 Key And Peele
- 04:40 Key And Peele
- 05:05 Ridiculousness
- 05:30 Ridiculousness
- 05:55 Tosh.0
- 06:20 Tosh.0
- 06:50 Workaholics
- 07:15 Workaholics

- 07:40 Key And Peele
- 08:05 Key And Peele
- 08:30 Workaholics
- 08:55 Workaholics
- 09:20 Tosh.0
- 09:45 Tosh.0
- 10:10 Ridiculousness
- 10:35 Ridiculousness
- 11:00 Urban Tarzan
- 11:25 Urban Tarzan
- 11:50 Tosh.0
- 12:15 Tosh.0
- 12:40 Tosh.0
- 13:05 Framework
- 13:55 Ridiculousness
- 14:20 Ridiculousness
- 14:45 Ridiculousness
- 15:10 Hungry Investors
- 16:00 Workaholics
- 16:30 Workaholics
- 16:55 Key And Peele
- 17:25 Key And Peele
- 17:50 The It Crowd
- 18:15 I Live With Models
- 18:39 Brotherhood
- 19:03 The Jim Gaffigan Show
- 19:27 The Jim Gaffigan Show
- 19:50 Idiotsitter
- 20:13 Lip Sync Battle Holiday Special
- 21:00 The Daily Show - Global Edition
- 21:30 Chappelle's Show
- 21:54 Broad City
- 22:18 Another Period
- 22:42 Inside Amy Schumer
- 23:05 The Half Hour
- 23:30 The Daily Show - Global Edition

Discovery Family

- 00:30 World's Toughest Jobs
- 01:20 Battle Bots
- 02:10 Now That's Funny
- 03:00 Destroyed In Seconds
- 03:25 Destroyed In Seconds
- 03:50 Ultimate Survival
- 04:40 How It's Made
- 05:05 How It's Made
- 05:30 World's Toughest Jobs
- 06:20 Mythbusters
- 07:00 Kenny The Shark
- 07:25 Kenny The Shark

- 07:50 Awesome Adventures
- 08:15 Awesome Adventures
- 08:40 Bad Dog
- 09:30 Bad Dog
- 10:20 Bad Dog
- 11:10 Mythbusters
- 12:00 Mythbusters
- 12:50 Mythbusters
- 13:40 Mythbusters
- 14:30 Mythbusters
- 15:20 Mythbusters
- 16:10 Mythbusters
- 17:00 What Could Possibly Go Wrong?
- 17:50 What Could Possibly Go Wrong?
- 18:40 Battle Bots
- 19:30 Now That's Funny
- 20:20 Playhouse Masters
- 21:10 Troy
- 22:00 Destroyed In Seconds
- 22:25 Destroyed In Seconds
- 22:50 Destroyed In Seconds
- 23:15 Destroyed In Seconds
- 23:40 Now That's Funny



- 00:40 Las Vegas Law
- 01:30 A Crime To Remember
- 02:20 Blood Relatives
- 03:10 True Nightmares
- 04:00 Las Vegas Law
- 04:48 I Almost Got Away With It
- 05:36 Tabloid With Jerry Springer
- 06:24 Beauty Queen Murders
- 07:12 Blood Relatives
- 08:00 Who On Earth Did I Marry?
- 08:25 Who On Earth Did I Marry?
- 08:50 Who On Earth Did I Marry?
- 09:15 Who On Earth Did I Marry?
- 09:40 Who On Earth Did I Marry?
- 10:05 Who On Earth Did I Marry?
- 10:30 Who On Earth Did I Marry?
- 10:55 Who On Earth Did I Marry?
- 11:20 Who On Earth Did I Marry?
- 11:45 Who On Earth Did I Marry?
- 12:10 I Am Homicide
- 13:00 I Almost Got Away With It
- 13:50 I Almost Got Away With It
- 14:40 I Almost Got Away With It
- 15:30 I Almost Got Away With It
- 16:20 I Almost Got Away With It

- 17:10 Momsters: When Moms Go Bad
- 17:35 Momsters: When Moms Go Bad
- 18:00 Obsession: Dark Desires
- 18:50 Obsession: Dark Desires
- 19:40 Obsession: Dark Desires
- 20:30 Obsession: Dark Desires
- 21:20 Obsession: Dark Desires
- 22:10 Who On Earth Did I Marry?
- 22:35 Who On Earth Did I Marry?
- 23:00 Women In Prison
- 23:50 Paranormal Lockdown



- 00:10 Hank Zipzer
- 00:35 Binny And The Ghost
- 01:00 Violetta
- 01:45 The Hive
- 01:50 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
- 02:15 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
- 02:40 Hank Zipzer
- 03:05 Binny And The Ghost
- 03:30 Violetta
- 04:15 The Hive
- 04:20 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
- 04:45 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
- 05:10 Hank Zipzer
- 05:35 Binny And The Ghost
- 06:00 Violetta
- 06:45 The Hive
- 06:50 Mouk
- 07:00 Dog With A Blog
- 07:25 Dog With A Blog
- 07:50 Tsum Tsum Shorts
- 07:55 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug And Cat Noir
- 08:20 Elena Of Avalor
- 08:45 Star Darlings
- 08:50 Duck The Halls: A Very Mickey Christmas
- 09:15 Jessie
- 09:40 Jessie
- 10:05 Jessie
- 10:30 Bob's Broken Sleigh
- 11:20 The Naughty List
- 12:10 Bunk'd
- 12:35 Bunk'd
- 13:00 Bunk'd
- 13:25 Bunk'd
- 13:50 Bunk'd
- 14:15 Backstage
- 14:40 Backstage
- 15:05 Bizaardvark
- 15:30 Dog With A Blog
- 15:55 Dog With A Blog
- 16:20 Stuck In The Middle
- 16:45 Duck The Halls: A Very Mickey Christmas
- 17:10 Elena Of Avalor
- 17:35 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug And Cat Noir
- 18:00 The Next Step
- 18:25 Twas The Night
- 20:05 Disney Cookabout
- 20:30 Elena Of Avalor
- 20:55 Best Friends Whenever
- 21:20 Jessie
- 21:45 Jessie
- 22:10 Jessie
- 22:35 H2O: Just Add Water
- 23:00 Binny And The Ghost
- 23:25 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
- 23:50 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch



- 00:00 Doc McStuffins
- 00:30 Minnie's Bow-Toons
- 00:35 Zou
- 00:50 Loopdidoo
- 01:05 Art Attack
- 01:30 Henry Hugglemonster
- 01:45 Calimero
- 02:00 Zou
- 02:15 Loopdidoo
- 02:30 Art Attack
- 03:00 Calimero
- 03:15 Zou
- 03:30 Loopdidoo
- 03:45 Art Attack
- 04:10 Henry Hugglemonster
- 04:25 Calimero
- 04:45 Loopdidoo
- 05:00 Art Attack
- 05:25 Henry Hugglemonster
- 05:35 Calimero
- 05:50 Zou
- 06:00 Loopdidoo
- 06:15 Art Attack
- 06:35 Henry Hugglemonster

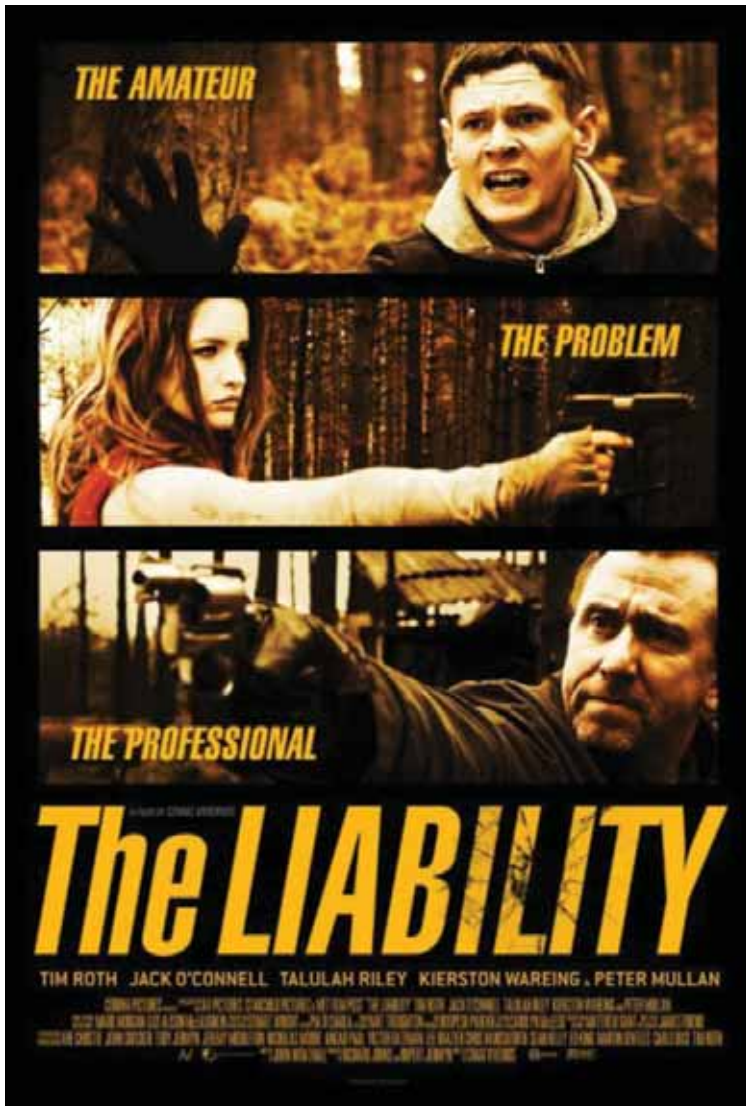
- 06:50 Calimero
- 07:00 Zou
- 07:20 Loopdidoo
- 07:35 Art Attack
- 08:00 Mickey Mouse Clubhouse
- 08:25 Sheriff Callie's Wild West
- 08:50 Sheriff Callie's Wild West
- 09:20 Sheriff Callie's Wild West
- 09:50 Jake And The Never Land Pirates
- 10:45 Sofia The First
- 11:15 Sofia The First
- 11:40 Sofia The First
- 12:10 Minnie's Winter Bow Show
- 13:00 Sofia The First
- 13:30 Mickey Mouse Clubhouse
- 13:55 Jake And The Never Land Pirates
- 14:25 Doc McStuffins
- 14:50 The Lion Guard
- 15:20 Sofia The First
- 15:45 Doc McStuffins Toy Hospital
- 16:15 Doc McStuffins Toy Hospital
- 16:40 Doc McStuffins Toy Hospital
- 17:10 A Goofy Fairy Tale
- 18:00 The Adventures Of The Disney Fairies
- 18:30 Goldie & Bear
- 18:55 Jake And The Never Land Pirates
- 19:25 Unbungalievable
- 19:30 Little Mermaid
- 20:00 PJ Masks
- 20:30 Sofia The First
- 21:00 Bob's Broken Sleigh
- 22:00 PJ Masks
- 22:30 PJ Masks
- 23:00 PJ Masks
- 23:30 Mickey Mouse Clubhouse



- 00:20 Gold Rush
- 01:10 Fast N' Loud (Season 4 Specials)
- 02:00 Sacred Steel Bikes
- 02:50 Street Outlaws
- 03:40 How Do They Do It?
- 04:05 How Do They Do It?
- 04:30 How Do They Do It?
- 05:00 How Do They Do It?
- 05:30 How Do They Do It?
- 06:00 Storage Hunters UK
- 06:25 Storage Hunters UK
- 06:50 Storage Hunters UK
- 07:15 Storage Hunters UK
- 07:40 Storage Hunters UK
- 08:05 How Do They Do It?
- 08:30 How Do They Do It?
- 08:55 How Do They Do It?
- 09:20 How Do They Do It?
- 09:45 How It's Made: Dream Cars
- 10:10 Gold Rush
- 11:00 Deadliest Catch
- 11:50 Catching Monsters
- 12:40 Misfit Garage
- 13:30 Cuban Chrome
- 14:20 Cuban Chrome
- 15:10 Cuban Chrome
- 16:00 Cuban Chrome
- 16:50 Sacred Steel Bikes
- 17:40 Kings Of The Wild
- 18:30 Sydney Harbour
- 19:20 Marooned With Ed Stafford
- 20:10 The Return Of The Monster Mako
- 21:00 Alcatraz: Escaping The Rock
- 21:50 Edge Of Alaska
- 22:40 Alaska: The Last Frontier
- 23:30 Gold Rush



- 06:00 Supa Strikas
- 06:25 Supa Strikas
- 06:50 Counterfeit Cat
- 07:00 Star vs The Forces Of Evil
- 07:15 K.C. Undercover
- 07:40 Atomic Puppet
- 08:10 Lab Rats
- 08:35 Danger Mouse
- 09:00 Duck The Halls: A Very Mickey Christmas
- 09:25 Lab Rats
- 09:50 K.C. Undercover
- 10:20 Lab Rats
- 10:45 K.C. Undercover
- 11:10 Lab Rats
- 11:35 K.C. Undercover
- 12:00 The Sword In The Stone
- 13:30 Danger Mouse
- 13:45 Lab Rats
- 14:10 Disney Mickey Mouse
- 14:15 K.C. Undercover
- 14:40 Counterfeit Cat
- 14:50 Star vs The Forces Of Evil
- 15:05 K.C. Undercover
- 15:30 Atomic Puppet
- 15:55 Lab Rats



THE LIABILITY ON OSN MOVIES HD ACTION

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2016

- 16:25 Danger Mouse
- 16:50 Star Wars Rebels
- 17:15 Future-Worm!
- 17:40 Star Wars Freemaker Adventures
- 18:10 K.C. Undercover
- 18:35 The Sword In The Stone
- 20:05 Counterfeit Cat
- 20:20 Star Wars Rebels
- 20:45 Mighty Med
- 21:10 Pickle And Peanut
- 21:40 Disney Mickey Mouse
- 21:45 Guardians Of The Galaxy
- 22:10 Ultimate Spider-Man
- 22:35 Boyster
- 23:00 Programmes Start At 6:00am KSA



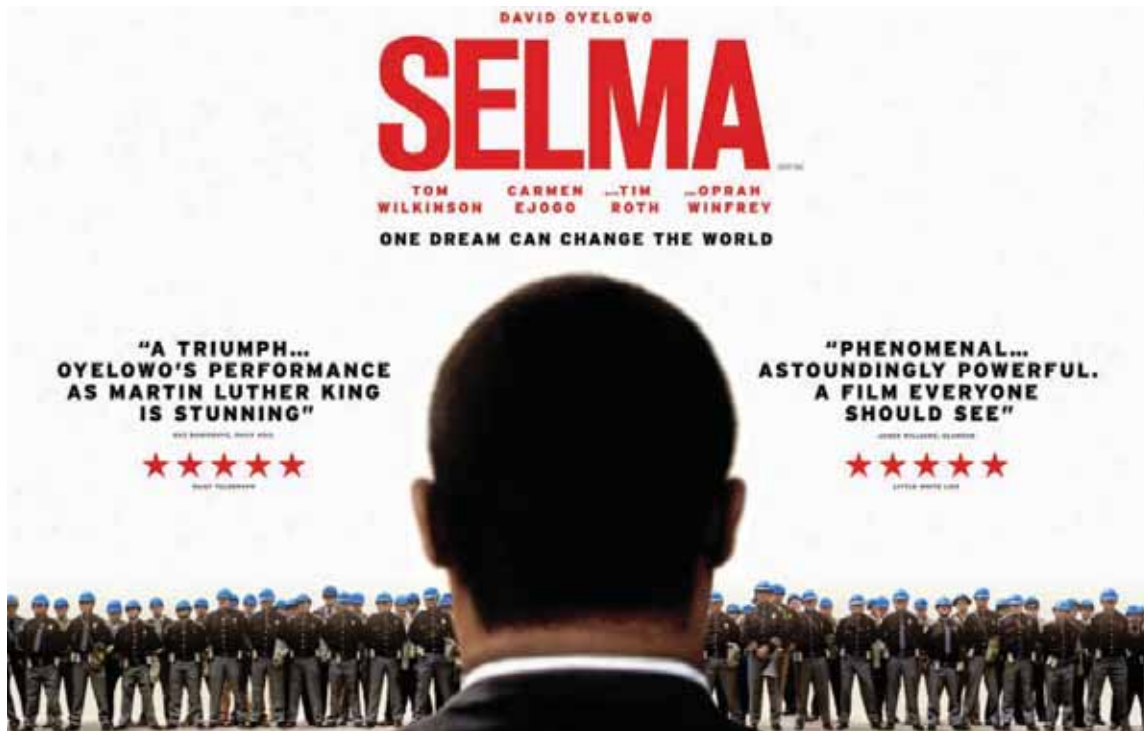
- 00:00 All Star Academy
- 01:00 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
- 01:30 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
- 02:00 Man Fire Food
- 02:30 Man Fire Food
- 03:00 Chopped
- 04:00 Guy's Grocery Games
- 05:00 Roadtrip With G. Garvin
- 05:30 Roadtrip With G. Garvin
- 06:00 Chopped
- 07:00 Guy's Grocery Games
- 08:00 The Kitchen
- 09:00 12 Chefs Of Christmas
- 09:30 12 Chefs Of Christmas
- 10:00 12 Chefs Of Christmas
- 10:30 12 Chefs Of Christmas
- 11:00 12 Chefs Of Christmas
- 11:30 12 Chefs Of Christmas
- 12:00 Holiday Baking Championship
- 13:00 Holiday Baking Championship
- 14:00 Holiday Baking Championship
- 15:00 Holiday Baking Championship
- 16:00 Cooking Christmas With Matt And Lisa
- 16:30 Cooking Christmas With Matt And Lisa
- 17:00 Cooking Christmas With Matt And Lisa
- 17:30 Cooking Christmas With Matt And Lisa
- 18:00 Cooking Christmas With Matt And Lisa
- 18:30 Siba's Festive Table
- 19:00 Spicy Christmas With Thomasina Miers
- 19:30 Jodie Prenger's Christmas Cracker
- 20:00 Chopped
- 21:00 Denise Van Outen's Christmas
- 21:30 Denise Van Outen's Christmas
- 22:00 Denise Van Outen's Christmas
- 22:30 12 Chefs Of Christmas
- 23:00 12 Chefs Of Christmas
- 23:30 12 Chefs Of Christmas



- 00:10 Masterpiece With Alan Titchmarsh
- 01:00 Tracey Ullman's Show
- 01:30 Emmerdale
- 01:55 Emmerdale
- 02:20 Emmerdale
- 02:45 Emmerdale
- 03:10 Emmerdale
- 03:35 Emmerdale
- 03:55 Coronation Street
- 04:20 Coronation Street
- 04:45 Coronation Street
- 05:10 Coronation Street
- 05:35 Coronation Street
- 06:00 Tracey Ullman's Show
- 06:30 Gino's Hidden Italy
- 06:55 Broadchurch
- 07:45 Broadchurch
- 08:40 The Jonathan Ross Show
- 09:30 Surprise Surprise Christmas Special
- 10:25 The Doctor Blake Mysteries
- 11:25 The Doctor Blake Mysteries
- 12:25 Jericho
- 13:15 Big Star's Little Star
- 14:05 The Jonathan Ross Show
- 15:00 Paul O'Grady: For The Love Of Dogs At Christmas 15
- 15:55 A Merry Murdoch Christmas
- 17:25 The Jonathan Ross Show
- 18:15 Doc Martin
- 19:05 Big Star's Little Star
- 20:00 Paul O'Grady: For The Love Of Dogs At Christmas 15
- 20:55 A Merry Murdoch Christmas
- 22:25 The Jonathan Ross Show
- 23:15 Coronation Street
- 23:45 Coronation Street



- 00:00 In Search Of Aliens
- 01:00 Ancient Aliens
- 02:00 America's Book Of Secrets



SELMA ON OSN MOVIES HD

- 03:00 Ancient Discoveries
- 03:50 Warriors
- 04:40 Serial Killer Earth
- 05:30 In Search Of Aliens
- 06:20 America's Book Of Secrets
- 07:10 The Universe
- 08:00 Ancient Aliens
- 09:00 America's Book Of Secrets
- 10:00 Ancient Discoveries
- 11:00 How The States Got Their Shape
- 12:00 Serial Killer Earth
- 13:00 In Search Of Aliens
- 14:00 Ancient Aliens
- 15:00 America's Book Of Secrets
- 16:00 Ancient Discoveries
- 17:00 How The States Got Their Shape
- 18:00 Serial Killer Earth
- 19:00 The Universe
- 20:00 The Universe



- 00:20 Pawn Stars
- 00:45 Pawn Stars South Africa
- 01:10 America's Greatest Prison Breaks
- 02:50 Pawn Stars Australia
- 03:15 Pawn Stars Australia
- 03:40 Pirate Treasure Of The Knights Templar
- 04:30 American Restoration
- 05:00 Billion Dollar Wreck
- 06:00 Counting Cars: Best Of
- 06:25 Counting Cars: Best Of
- 06:50 Counting Cars: Best Of
- 07:15 Counting Cars: Best Of
- 07:40 Pawn Stars Australia
- 08:05 Pawn Stars Australia
- 08:30 Counting Cars
- 08:55 Mountain Men
- 09:45 Aussie Pickers
- 10:35 Counting Cars: Best Of
- 11:00 Counting Cars: Best Of
- 11:25 Storage Wars Christmas Special
- 12:15 Billion Dollar Wreck
- 13:05 Swamp People: Swamp Christmas
- 13:55 Hunting Hitler
- 14:45 Hunting Hitler
- 15:35 Hunting Hitler
- 16:25 Hunting Hitler
- 17:15 Pawn Stars Australia
- 17:40 Shipping Wars
- 18:05 Shipping Wars
- 18:30 Pawn Stars
- 18:55 Pawn Stars South Africa
- 19:20 Storage Wars Texas
- 19:45 Storage Wars Texas
- 20:10 Storage Wars Texas
- 20:35 Storage Wars Texas
- 21:00 American Pickers
- 21:50 American Pickers
- 22:40 Time Team
- 23:30 DB Cooper: Case Closed?



- 01:15 Don't Wake Mommy
- 03:00 Serena
- 05:00 Abandoned

- 06:45 Selma
- 09:00 Healing
- 11:00 Don't Wake Mommy
- 13:00 No God No Master
- 15:00 Cas & Dylan
- 17:00 Healing
- 19:00 The Reluctant Fundamentalist
- 21:15 Good People
- 23:00 Parts Per Billion



- 00:30 Cougar Town
- 01:00 Cougar Town
- 01:30 Man Seeking Woman
- 02:00 Man Seeking Woman
- 02:30 It's Always Sunny In Philadelphia
- 03:00 Black-Ish
- 03:30 Kevin Can Wait
- 04:00 Better With You
- 04:30 The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon
- 05:30 10 Items Or Less
- 06:00 My Big Fat Greek Life
- 06:30 Living With Fran
- 07:00 Late Night With Seth Meyers
- 08:00 Better With You
- 08:30 10 Items Or Less
- 09:00 Black-Ish
- 09:30 Kevin Can Wait
- 10:00 Dr. Ken
- 10:30 Living With Fran
- 11:00 The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon
- 12:00 My Big Fat Greek Life
- 12:30 Better With You
- 13:00 10 Items Or Less
- 13:30 Living With Fran
- 14:00 Kevin Can Wait
- 14:30 Kevin Can Wait
- 15:00 Dr. Ken
- 15:30 Cougar Town
- 16:00 Cougar Town
- 16:30 My Big Fat Greek Life
- 17:00 Late Night With Seth Meyers
- 18:00 2 Broke Girls
- 18:30 Baby Daddy
- 19:00 Truth Be Told
- 19:30 Dr. Ken
- 20:00 The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon
- 21:00 Happy Endings
- 21:30 Happy Endings
- 22:00 Saturday Night Live
- 23:30 Late Night With Seth Meyers



- 01:00 Gulliver's Travels
- 03:00 Monsterville: The Cabinet Of Souls
- 05:00 Muppets Most Wanted
- 07:00 Open Season: Scared Silly
- 09:00 Cinderella
- 11:00 Muppets Most Wanted
- 13:00 Snow Day
- 15:00 One Christmas Eve
- 17:00 Charlotte's Web
- 19:00 Hotel For Dogs
- 21:00 Earth To Echo
- 23:00 One Christmas Eve

- OSN Movies HD
- 00:30 The Gift
- 02:30 Tracers
- 04:30 Maze Runner: The Scorch Trials
- 06:45 Insurgent
- 09:00 Tomorrowland
- 11:15 Before We Go
- 13:00 Pan
- 15:00 The Last 5 Years
- 17:00 Everest
- 19:00 Christmas Eve
- 21:00 Love The Coopers
- 23:00 The Night Before



- 00:00 My Man Is A Loser
- 02:00 Pixels
- 04:00 The Proposal
- 06:00 The Beautician And The Beast
- 08:00 Under The Tuscan Sun
- 10:00 The Proposal
- 12:00 Pixels
- 14:00 The Butcher's Wife
- 16:00 Under The Tuscan Sun
- 18:00 Confessions Of A Shopaholic
- 20:00 Two Night Stand
- 22:00 Death At A Funeral



- 01:00 Wuthering Heights
- 03:00 Identity
- 04:45 Instinct
- 07:00 Bottle Rocket
- 09:00 The Railway Man
- 11:00 Wuthering Heights
- 13:00 Neil Young: Heart Of Gold
- 14:45 Mood Indigo
- 17:00 The Railway Man
- 19:00 The Fugitive
- 21:15 Lost River
- 23:00 Five Easy Pieces



- 01:00 Jungle Book: Mowgli's Adventure
- 02:45 Gladiators Of Rome
- 04:30 True Story Of Puss'n Boots
- 06:00 Rugrats In Paris: The Movie
- 07:45 Mamma Moo And Crow
- 09:15 Savva
- 11:00 Rugrats Go Wild
- 12:45 Gladiators Of Rome
- 14:30 The Adventures Of Don Quixote
- 16:00 Yellowbird
- 18:00 Savva
- 20:00 Worms
- 22:00 The Adventures Of Don Quixote
- 23:30 Yellowbird



- 00:40 The Big Brain Theory
- 01:30 Mythbusters
- 02:20 Mythbusters
- 03:10 How Do They Do It?
- 03:35 Food Factory
- 04:00 Outrageous Acts Of Psych
- 04:24 Outrageous Acts Of Psych
- 04:48 The Big Brain Theory
- 05:36 Mythbusters
- 06:24 Mythbusters
- 07:12 How Do They Do It?
- 07:36 Food Factory
- 08:00 How Do They Do It?
- 08:26 Food Factory
- 08:50 Food Factory
- 09:14 Food Factory
- 09:38 Food Factory
- 10:02 Food Factory
- 10:26 How Do They Do It?
- 10:50 How Do They Do It?
- 11:14 How Do They Do It?
- 11:38 How Do They Do It?
- 12:02 How Do They Do It?
- 12:26 Magic Of Science
- 12:50 Magic Of Science
- 13:14 You Have Been Warned
- 14:02 Penn & Teller Tell A Lie
- 14:50 Race To Escape
- 15:38 Outrageous Acts Of Psych
- 16:02 Outrageous Acts Of Psych
- 16:26 Weird Or What?
- 17:14 Weird Or What?
- 18:02 Weird Or What?
- 18:50 Weird Or What?
- 19:40 Mythbusters
- 20:30 How To Build... Everything
- 20:55 How To Build... Everything
- 21:20 Sci-Trek
- 22:10 Jupiter: Close Encounter
- 23:00 Landing On A Comet: Rosetta
- 23:50 Death On A Comet: The Rosetta Mission



- 00:20 My Giant Life
- 01:10 Love In The City
- 02:00 Return To Amish
- 02:50 Monsters Inside Me
- 03:35 Outdaughtered: Busby Quints
- 04:20 Toddlers & Tiaras
- 05:10 Toddlers & Tiaras
- 06:00 Jon & Kate Plus 8
- 06:25 Jon & Kate Plus 8
- 06:50 Jon & Kate Plus 8
- 07:40 Jon & Kate Plus 8
- 08:05 Jon & Kate Plus 8
- 08:30 Two In A Million: Boys On Fire
- 09:20 Coach Charming
- 09:45 Coach Charming
- 10:10 Obsessive Compulsive Cleaners
- 11:00 Obsessive Compulsive Cleaners
- 11:50 Say Yes To The Dress
- 12:15 Say Yes To The Dress
- 12:40 Say Yes To The Dress
- 13:05 Say Yes To The Dress
- 13:30 Say Yes To The Dress
- 13:55 Sweet 15: Quinceanera
- 14:45 Promzillas
- 15:35 My Big Fat Fabulous Life
- 16:00 My Big Fat Fabulous Life
- 16:25 My Big Fat Fabulous Life
- 16:50 My Big Fat Fabulous Life
- 17:40 Oprah: Where Are They Now?
- 18:30 Oprah: Where Are They Now?
- 19:20 Two In A Million: Boys On Fire
- 20:10 Buddy's Family Vacation
- 20:35 Buddy's Family Vacation
- 21:00 Oprah's Master Class
- 21:50 Belief
- 22:40 My Baby Has Two Heads: Body Bizarre
- 23:30 Botched Up Bodies
- 00:15 Duplicity
- 02:30 Mine Games
- 04:15 Jesse Stone: Lost In Paradise
- 06:00 The Machine
- 08:00 The Last Survivors
- 10:00 Last Knights
- 12:00 Swelter
- 14:00 Seventh Son
- 16:00 The Machine
- 18:00 Last Knights
- 20:00 Nick Of Time



KNES SECONDARY STUDENTS VISIT KOC



During the month of December, a group of secondary students from Kuwait National English School (KNES) visited the Kuwait Oil Company (KOC) in Al-Ahmadi. It was an amazing experience. There were incredible miniatures of oil wells, fractional distillation of petroleum in the refineries, the amount of oil tanks a ship can carry and the routes taken by ships to send oil to other countries. It was an exceptionally informative and interesting educational trip for our key stage 4 students.

The oil was found many decades ago in Kuwait. Oil and Natural gas together make up petroleum. Petroleum is a dark, oily substance that is typically liquid, but it can also be solid or gaseous. Petroleum is made naturally from the decomposition of living things. Locating a suitable site for drilling is just the first step in extracting oil. When it comes straight out of the ground, it is called crude oil. Different chemical groups can be separated out at refineries and petrochemical plants. It was a very fascinating and valuable educational science trip for our students. They learned the story of petroleum and the many ways it shapes the world we live in.



IISM HONORS CHAIRMAN DR IBRAHIM

India International School extended a red carpet welcome to the Chairman, Dr P A Ibrahim and his son P A Salman Ibrahim, the director of PACE group of institutions. A special program was arranged by the staff and students on the occasion of his accomplishment of 50 golden years across the GCC countries. A documentary portraying the life journey of Dr P A Ibrahim as a business legend and a visionary educationalist was played. Welcome address was delivered by the school Director Malayil Moosa Koya and vote of thanks was proposed by the school Principal F M Basheer Ahmed. The event was graced by the presence of dignitaries from various fields.

On the second day the chairman was welcomed with Guard of Honor by the school

Council. After the welcome note offered by the Principal, the floor was taken over by the young artists of the school who stole the hearts of the audience by their passionate and enthralling music and amazing classical dance performance. The eminent guests were honored by the Director by presenting mementos. In his address, the Chairman urged the audience that we should attain credibility and hold on to truth under any circumstances. It was followed by the prize distribution to the winners of various inter school competitions. The program was well organized under guidance of Senior Vice Principal Narender Kaur and Vice Principals Sophy John, Indulekha Suresh and Saleem. Vote of thanks was proposed by the Head Boy Master Moosa Kazi and Head Girl Miss Sadaf Mariyam.



ESF ANNUAL PANTOMIME BRINGS HOLIDAYS CHEER

This year the Sixth Form once again entertained and were cheered on for the superbly entertaining Pantomime 'Hansel and Gretel' at the Lloyd Webber Theatre. The colorful show opened with lively narrators Maria and Hannan. Hansel was played Mohammad Wajid and Gretel by Fibi

Philips. The rest of the amazing cast were Rahaf, Nadia, Rawan, Faisal, Abelaziz and Athira. The play was directed by Upper school Drama Teacher Mullay. Above all a big thank you goes out to Ms. Ashton (Head of Sixth Form) for her amazing efforts in making this production possible.



MAGICAL FESTIVE CELEBRATION AT MARRIOTT HOTELS IN KUWAIT

The tree, the glittering decor, the fun and festive ambience all combine to make Marriott Hotels in Kuwait the perfect venues to celebrate the Christmas and New Year in style. Festivities begin with a grand Christmas celebration, diners visiting Kuwait's best steakhouse "Terrace Grill" at the JW Marriott Kuwait City can enjoy an unforgettable holiday dining experience accompanied by the finest certified US Angus beef, wagyu beef cuts and mouth-watering seafood dishes for lunch and dinner. Meanwhile, guests visiting the newly opened Crossroads Restaurant will be treated to an elegant international buffet featuring traditional Christmas dishes such as turkey roulade with dry apricots, stuffed turkey, Yule logs de mangue, Christmas cake, roasted salmon, almond crusted hammour and a lot more.

Furthermore, guests visiting the Courtyard by Marriott Hotel's renowned

"Soul and Spice" Restaurant on Christmas can enjoy an exceptional lunch and dinner filled with Christmas cheer. At the Atrium Restaurant, located in the heart of the hotel's stunning lobby, diners can feast on a huge selection of international Christmas dishes including roasted turkey with cranberry sauce, slow oven roasted Cajun rib-eye steak with pan gravy, Yorkshire pudding and a lot more.

To top off the captivating Christmas mood, guests are invited to ring in the New Year with live entertainment and a wide range of gastronomic delights at Marriott properties. Bid Adieu to 2016 in style.

The JW Marriott Kuwait City is set to be transformed into the trendiest place in town, with the lively ambience at Crossroads Restaurant complete with music and sensational décor, including party poppers, hats and horns. The Terrace

Grill Steakhouse will offer mesmerizing live music and a delicious five-course menu.

In addition, guests at the Courtyard by Marriott Kuwait City will celebrate the countdown to 2017 with elegance and style at Soul and Spice Restaurant with a four-course set menu including beverages, while a special dinner buffet will be served at the panoramic Atrium Restaurant featuring the finest cuisines from all over the world for an unforgettable evening.

Blendz Restaurant at the Residence by Marriott Kuwait City will also be offering special a la carte menus throughout the Festive Season. "We would like to take this opportunity to wish our guests and their families a merry Christmas and a Happy New Year." Said George Aoun, the hotels' Cluster General Manager. "This year we have upgraded our food and beverage menus to provide a high level of guest satisfaction" Aoun added.



HAPPY BIRTHDAY COLO: US GORILLA TURNS 60

THE NATION'S OLDEST LIVING GORILLA

COLUMBUS: She is a mother of three, grandmother of 16, great-grandmother of 12 and great-great-grandmother of three. She recently had surgery to remove a malignant tumor, but doctors say she's doing well. She's Colo, the nation's oldest living gorilla, and she turned 60 on Thursday at the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium. Colo was the first gorilla in the world born in a zoo and has surpassed the usual life expectancy of captive gorillas by two decades. Her longevity is putting a spotlight on the medical care, nutrition and up-to-date therapeutic techniques that are helping lengthen zoo animals' lives.

"Colo just epitomizes the advances that zoos have made, going all the way back to her birth at Columbus," said Dr Tom Meehan, vice president for veterinary services at Chicago's Brookfield Zoo and veterinary adviser to a national gorilla species survival plan. The changes also mean more animals living with the normal aches and pains of growing older. Today, zoo veterinarians regularly treat animals for heart and kidney disease, arthritis, dental problems and cancer.

'Tribute to the zoo'

Hundreds of people gathered at the zoo Thursday to see Colo, singing "Happy Birthday" moments before the gorilla ambled into an enclosure decorated with multicolored construction paper chains and filled with cakes such as squash and beet and cornbread with mashed potato parsley frosting. Among the first in line was Pam Schlereth of Columbus, who at 63 was just a little girl when her father brought her to see the newborn Colo in a gorilla incubator in 1956. "It's a tribute to the zoo that she's alive at 60 years old," Schlereth said.

Colo represents so much to the zoo, Tom Stalf, president of the zoo, told the

crowd. "It's all about connecting people and wildlife," he said. Colo is one of several elderly gorillas around the country. The oldest known living male gorilla, Ozzie, is 55 years old and lives at the Atlanta Zoo, which has a geriatric gorilla specialty. At Seattle's Woodland Park Zoo, staff members use acupuncture, massage, laser therapy, and heat and joint supplements to help Emma, a 13-year-old rabbit. At the National Zoo in Washington, Shanthi, a 42-year-old Asian elephant with arthritis, receives osteoarthritis therapy and was recently fitted with specially crafted front foot boots to help her feet heal as medications are applied.

In Oakland, California, Tiki, a 27-year-old giraffe and one of the oldest in the nation, gets foot care, massage therapy, acupuncture and chiropractic care, along with traditional veterinary medicine. Gao Gao, a 26-year-old male panda at the San Diego Zoo with a heart condition, periodically undergoes cardiac ultrasounds.

"Geriatrics is probably one of our most common medical challenges that we face in a zoo situation," said Dr. Keith Hinshaw, director of animal health at the Philadelphia Zoo. "So pretty much anything that you could imagine would happen with an older person is going to happen eventually with any animal." That's up to and including medication: JJ, a 45-year-old orangutan at the Toledo Zoo, is on the human heart medicines carvedilol and Lisinopril, along with pain and orthopedic medications. He also takes Metamucil.

Age defying animals

Colo, a western lowland gorilla, holds several other records. On her 56th birthday in 2012, she exceeded the record for longest-lived gorilla. On Thursday, she surpasses the median life expectancy for female gorillas in human care (37.5

years) by more than two decades. Other age-defying zoo animals:

POLAR BEAR

Coldilocks, a 36-year-old polar bear at the Philadelphia Zoo and considered the oldest polar bear in the US. The bears' typical lifespan in captivity is 23 years. The zoo says treating her early for kidney disease appears to have helped prolong her life.

RHINO

Elly, an eastern black rhino at the San Francisco Zoo estimated to be 46 years old, is the oldest of her species in North America. She has had 14 calves, and her offspring have produced 15 grandchildren, 6 great-grandchildren and 1 great-great-grandchild.

ELEPHANT

Packy, an Asian elephant at the Oregon Zoo, and at 54, the oldest male of his species in North America. The zoo says Packy, born in 1962, became the first elephant to be born in the Western Hemisphere in 44 years.

MONKEY

Nikko, a 33-year-old snow monkey at the Minnesota Zoo, the oldest male snow monkey in North America.

CHIMPANZEE

Little Mama, a chimpanzee living at Lion Country Safari in Loxahatchee, Florida, with an estimated age in her late 70s. She takes allergy medicine, iron supplements and omega 3 multivitamins, and has been trained to accept a nebulizer treatment for coughing.

TORTOISE

Emerson, a Galapagos tortoise at the Toledo Zoo in Ohio, whose age is estimated at about 100. — AP



KUCHKI: A picture taken on November 25, 2016 shows a policeman as he stands inside of an illicit vodka distillery. — AFP

RUSSIA WORKS TO ABOLISH BOOTLEG VODKA HANGOVER

KUCHKI: In a snowy field outside Moscow, an abandoned barn conceals an illicit vodka distillery that produces thousands of bottles of Russia's national drink for the black market. In a recent raid, police seized more than 100,000 half-liter vodka bottles with counterfeit labels and tax stamps from the barn in the village of Kuchki.

Surrogate alcohol, a cheaper alternative to store-bought spirits, accounts for many deaths in Russia every year and is coming under growing scrutiny in a country with one of the highest liquor consumption rates in the world. This week at least 71 people died in the Siberian city of Irkutsk after drinking bath essence containing toxic methanol in a bid to get merry on the cheap. The bottles discovered in Kuchki cost under \$2 (two euros) each—three times less than vodka sold in shops. "We don't know what they make this vodka with," said Alexander Kulikov, spokesman for Russia's alcohol regulator. The equipment at the barn looked clean, but Kulikov recalls a case in which vodka-makers at another illegal facility were working "with mud up to their knees". After banning the sale of spirits at night and hiking alcohol taxes, authorities have started cracking down on bootleggers in a bid to curb the damage wreaked by illegally-produced booze. Officials say they have dismantled more than 170 workshops, seizing over 37 million liters since October 2015.

Shrinking black market

Authorities are also hoping the crackdown will help address the problem of unpaid taxes by illegal alcohol producers, as low oil prices have hit Russia's coffers. A new law came into force in July requiring business owners who sell alcohol to join an electronic registry that tracks each bottle from production to sale, an initiative meant to prevent surrogate booze from making its way onto the shelves.

This has seen legal vodka sales bounce back after years of stagnation, hinting that the black market is shrinking. Vadim Drobiz, a researcher who studies alcohol markets, says the black market share in hard liquor sales dropped to 50 percent this year after standing at 65 percent in 2015. But as Russia struggles to pull itself out of a recession that has battered the currency and significantly diminished people's purchasing power, it seems unlikely the black market will disappear altogether. According to Drobiz, up to 25 million Russians do not earn enough to purchase liquor at official selling points. Hoping to save a few rubles, the poorest often turn to cosmetics and household products containing alcohol, a factor blamed for a large number of drink-related deaths.

In late 2014, when the ruble lost half its value off the back of Western sanctions and low oil prices, authorities dropped the price of vodka after President Vladimir Putin expressed concern that soaring prices could boost consumption of illegal booze. Throughout history, Russian leaders have had to act with caution when it comes to regulating alcohol. On the eve of World War I, tsar Nicholas II ordered a crackdown that fuelled moonshine production and demoralized his troops. And in the 1980s, a sobriety campaign spearheaded by Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev drove his popularity down.

Hawthorn liqueur

The number of alcohol-related deaths has fallen in recent years, according to the state statistics agency, with experts attributing this to measures implemented to curb the sale of illegal spirits. "Alcohol abuse is down," said Yevgeny Bryun, who heads Moscow's toxicology centre, stressing that the number of poisoning cases had dropped 30 percent in the past three years. "But we need to go further," he said, citing the need to stop Russians from drinking pharmaceutical products. — AFP



COLUMBUS: Colo, the nation's oldest living gorilla, sits inside of her enclosure during her 60th birthday party at the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium. — AP

EBOLA VACCINE MAY BE '100% EFFECTIVE': WHO

VACCINE COULD BECOME AVAILABLE IN 2018

PARIS: A prototype vaccine for Ebola may be "up to 100 percent effective" in protecting against the deadly virus, the World Health Organization (WHO) said yesterday. If all goes well, the vaccine could become available in 2018 under a fast-track approval process, it said. In a major clinical trial, nearly 6,000 people in Guinea were given the test vaccine last year, at the tail end of a lethal epidemic of Ebola.

Not one of the 6,000 contracted the disease. But in a control group of volunteers that did not receive the vaccine, 23 Ebola cases occurred, researchers reported in *The Lancet* medical journal. "If we compare zero to 23, this strongly suggests that the vaccine is very effective, that it could be up to 100 percent effective," Marie-Paule Kieny, WHO's assistant director-general and lead author of the study, told AFP.

Her team of three dozen researchers calculated a 90-percent likelihood during a full-fledged epidemic that the vaccine, dubbed rVSV-ZEBOV, would work in more than 80 percent of cases. "After 40 years, we appear to now have an effective vaccine for Ebola virus disease to build upon," Thomas Geisbert, a scientist at Galveston National Laboratory in Texas who did not take part in the study, wrote in a commentary, also in *The Lancet*.

'Compassionate use'

First identified in 1976 in what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Ebola virus erupted periodically in outbreaks of up to a couple hundred cases, mainly across west and east Africa. In early 2014, however, a handful of infections in southern Guinea mushroomed rapidly into



CONAKRY: This file photo taken on March 10, 2015 shows a woman getting vaccinated at a health center in Conakry during the first clinical trials of the VSV-EBOV vaccine against the Ebola virus. —AFP

an epidemic. Over the next two years, more than 28,000 people fell ill, mainly in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Some 11,300 died.

With a mortality rate above 40 percent, the disease—one of a category of so-called hemorrhagic fevers—has an incubation period of up to three weeks. It causes violent and painful symptoms, including vomiting, diarrhea, organ failure and internal bleeding. The new vaccine was initially developed in Canada by public health authorities before being taken over by pharmaceutical giant Merck.

It is slated to be submitted by Merck to health authorities in the United States and Europe sometime next year under a fast-track approval process. "We may have a vaccine which is registered in 2018," Kieny told journalists at a press conference Thursday, noting that the standard approval process for a new drug takes a decade, if not more. In the meantime, Merck has committed to ensuring that 300,000 doses of the vaccine are available for emergencies under a protocol called "compassionate use". "They will

be able to produce a million in very short period of time," Kieny noted.

Unanswered questions

There are still questions to be resolved concerning the vaccine, including side effects. Initial tests last year did not include children, while the most recent trials covered those over six years old. Of the more than 6,000 people injected with the Ebola vaccine only two showed serious adverse effects, the study reported. Both recovered fully. But it is still unknown if the vaccine is safe for children six and under, pregnant women, or people with the AIDS virus—all groups that were excluded from the most recent trials.

Another unknown is how long inoculation lasts. "With the Canadian Merck vaccine, you have a protection very early after vaccination, but we don't know if it will last after six months," Kieny said. Other Ebola vaccines under development—some of which have been tested in humans—could prove more effective over a longer period.

British firm Glaxosmithkline and Johnson & Johnson, based in the United States, each have experimental products in the pipeline. China and Russia have also developed vaccines, with the Russian one having just finished the second phase of three-step clinical trials. Some of these vaccines require two doses three weeks apart, and may confer a longer immunity. "That might be better suited to immunize health workers in advance of an outbreak," Kieny said. Health officials also point to the fact that other strains of the virus—including one in Sudan—will require the development of separate vaccines. — AFP

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THE LEADING INDEPENDENT DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF

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EMERGENCY 112



PRAYER TIMINGS

Fajr:	05:14
Shorook	06:39
Duhr:	11:47
Asr:	14:37
Maghrib:	16:55
Isha:	18:18

ACCOMMODATION

For Filipino Bachelor ONLY near Big Jamiya Farwaniya. Available on December 25, Contact 66826412 or 97512782
22-12-2016

Sharing room with Balcony available from January 2017, with Pakistani family for couple family or ladies health workers. Farwaniya backside, Crown Plaza, Area 6, Street 3. Contact: 99552706. (C 5246)
12-12-2016

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Purchase Manager experience 20 years in constructions field, seeking for job in one of the leading Co. Tel: 99061637. (C 5248)
18-12-2016

CHANGE OF NAME

I HATIM S/o MANSUR, holder of Indian Passport No. K8514434 and Civil ID No. 291072601473 has changed my name to HATIM MANSUR NAJMI, hereinafter in all my dealing and documents I will be known by name of HATIM MANSUR NAJMI. (C 5249)
17-12-2016

I, Chejalla Nageshwar Raju (old name) S/o. Chejarla Pedda Chengal Raju, R/o. H.No. 2/150, Bommavaram (V) & (P), Obulavaripalli (M), Y.S.R. Kadapa, Dist., A.P. hereby state that I have changed my name as CHEJARLA NAGESWAR RAJU (new name). (C 5247)
13-12-2016

APARTMENT FOR RENT

1. AL MAHBUOLLA AREA

◆ Sea View ◆ Featured Site

2. AL JABRIYA AREA

◆ Featured Site
◆ Near Royale Hayat Hospital

3. AL SALMIYA (Hamad Al Mubarak Street)

◆ Features Site, Near from Al Mowasat Hospital, near from seaside.

4. AL SALMIYA (Amman Street)

◆ Featured Site, near from Fifth Ring Road

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KNCC PROGRAMME FROM THURSDAY TO WEDNESDAY (22/12/2016 TO 28/12/2016)

SHARQIA-1 SING 12:15 PM SING 2:30 PM SING 4:45 PM SING 7:00 PM PASSENGERS 9:15 PM PASSENGERS 11:45 PM	SING -3D SING 2:00 PM SING 4:15 PM SING 6:30 PM ROGUE ONE:A STAR WARS STORY 8:45 PM ROGUE ONE:A STAR WARS STORY 11:30 PM	PASSENGERS -3D- 4DX PASSENGERS -3D- 4DX 7:45 PM PASSENGERS -3D- 4DX 10:15 PM PASSENGERS -3D- 4DX 12:45 AM
SHARQIA-2 PASSENGERS 12:30 PM PASSENGERS 3:00 PM MOANA 5:30 PM PASSENGERS 8:00 PM PASSENGERS 10:30 PM PASSENGERS 1:00 AM	FANAR-3 ROGUE ONE:A STAR WARS STORY 12:45 PM 13 DAYS 3:30 PM ROGUE ONE:A STAR WARS STORY 5:30 PM 13 DAYS 8:15 PM COLLATERAL BEAUTY 10:30 PM 13 DAYS 12:45 AM	AVENUES-3 SING 11:30 AM DANGAL -Hindi 1:45 PM DANGAL -Hindi 5:00 PM DANGAL -Hindi 8:15 PM DANGAL -Hindi 11:30 PM
SHARQIA-3 DANGAL -Hindi 12:45 PM MOANA 4:00 PM DANGAL -Hindi 6:15 PM ROGUE ONE:A STAR WARS STORY 9:30 PM PASSENGERS 12:15 AM	FANAR-4 PASSENGERS 12:00 PM PASSENGERS 2:30 PM PASSENGERS 5:00 PM PASSENGERS 7:30 PM PASSENGERS 10:00 PM PASSENGERS 12:30 AM	AVENUES-4 DANGAL -Hindi 11:30 AM ROGUE ONE:A STAR WARS STORY 2:45 PM DANGAL -Hindi 5:30 PM NO THU Special Show "THE GIRL WITH ALL THE GIFTS" 5:30 PM THU DANGAL -Hindi 8:45 PM ROGUE ONE:A STAR WARS STORY 12:05 AM
MUHALAB-1 MOANA 1:00 PM THU+SAT PASSENGERS 1:00 PM NO THU+FRI+SAT MOANA 3:30 PM DANGAL -Hindi 6:00 PM DANGAL -Hindi 9:15 PM PASSENGERS 12:45 AM	FANAR-5 MOANA 11:30 AM DANGAL -Hindi 2:00 PM DANGAL -Hindi 5:15 PM DANGAL -Hindi 8:30 PM DANGAL -Hindi 11:45 PM	360° 1 SING 1:00 PM SING -3D 3:15 PM SING 5:30 PM SING -3D 7:45 PM DANGAL -Hindi 10:00 PM 13 DAYS 1:15 AM
MUHALAB-2 SING 11:30 AM SING 1:45 PM SING 4:00 PM SING 6:15 PM ROGUE ONE:A STAR WARS STORY 8:30 PM DANGAL -Hindi 11:15 PM	MARINA-1 ROGUE ONE:A STAR WARS STORY 12:30 PM MOANA 3:30 PM MOANA 6:00 PM AL MAA WA AL KHOUDRAH WA AL WAJEH AL HASSAN 8:15 PM PASSENGERS 10:30 PM PASSENGERS 1:00 AM	360° 2 ROGUE ONE:A STAR WARS STORY 12:45 PM ROGUE ONE:A STAR WARS STORY 3:30 PM ROGUE ONE:A STAR WARS STORY 6:15 PM ROGUE ONE:A STAR WARS STORY 9:00 PM ROGUE ONE:A STAR WARS STORY 11:45 PM
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SATURDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2016



Flight Schedule

DIAL 161 FOR AIRPORT INFORMATION

Arrival Flights on Saturday 17/12/2016

Airlines	Flt	Route	Time
KLM	413	Amsterdam/Dammam	00:25
JZR	267	Beirut	00:30
CLX	852	Luxembourg	00:35
JZR	539	Cairo	00:40
THY	772	Istanbul	00:55
RJA	642	Amman	01:05
QTR	1086	Doha	01:15
SAI	441	Lahore	01:30
THY	764	Istanbul	01:50
DLH	635	Doha	01:55
MSC	511	Alexandria	02:00
PGT	858	Istanbul	02:00
ETH	620	Addis Ababa	02:05
GFA	211	Bahrain	02:30
UAE	853	Dubai	02:30
KAC	412	Bangkok	02:50
OMA	643	Muscat	02:55
KKK	6506	Istanbul	02:55
FDB	069	Dubai	03:05
ETD	305	Abu Dhabi	03:10
MSR	612	Cairo	03:10
KAC	358	Kochi	03:30
QTR	1076	Doha	03:30
KAC	546	Cairo	03:55
KAC	784	Jeddah	03:55
FEG	931	Alexandria	04:00
KAC	418	Manila	04:25
JZR	503	Luxor	05:10
JZR	529	Asyut	05:15
DHX	170	Bahrain	05:20
KAC	344	Chennai	05:35
KAC	332	Trivandrum	05:45
THY	770	Istanbul	05:55
KAC	384	Delhi	06:05
KAC	364	Colombo	06:05
KAC	206	Islamabad	06:20
KAC	346	Ahmedabad	06:25
BAW	157	London	06:40
PAL	668	Manila/Dubai	07:00
FDB	5061	Dubai	07:15
KAC	204	Lahore	07:15
FDB	053	Dubai	07:50
KAC	302	Mumbai	08:20
UAE	855	Dubai	08:40
KAC	382	Delhi	08:45
ABY	125	Sharjah	09:05
ETD	301	Abu Dhabi	09:05
KAC	352	Kochi	09:10
QTR	1070	Doha	09:30
FDB	055	Dubai	09:40
AVV	653	Sohag	10:10
GFA	213	Bahrain	10:40
KAC	774	Riyadh	11:05
RBG	553	Alexandria	11:15
IRM	1188	Mashhad	11:15
JZR	165	Dubai	11:30
IRC	526	Mashhad	11:40
KAC	618	Doha	11:50
IAW	157	Al Najaf	12:00
SYR	341	Latakia	12:05
MSC	401	Alexandria	12:30
JZR	239	Amman	12:45
FDB	075	Dubai	12:50
UAE	871	Dubai	12:50
MSR	610	Cairo	13:00
BON	101	Sarajevo	13:30
JZR	779	Jeddah	13:35
KAC	564	Amman	13:40
KAC	788	Jeddah	13:45
KNE	231	Riyadh	13:55
KAC	672	Dubai	14:00
QTR	1078	Doha	14:10
FDB	059	Dubai	14:20
KAC	692	Muscat	14:30
GFA	221	Bahrain	14:40
KAC	542	Cairo	14:45
IRM	1180	Mashhad	14:55
KNE	529	Jeddah	14:55
KNE	683	Madinah	15:05
ETD	303	Abu Dhabi	15:15
KAC	286	Dhaka	15:20
OMA	645	Muscat	15:35
UAE	857	Dubai	15:45
ABY	127	Sharjah	15:50
MSR	575	Sharm el-Sheikh	15:50
KAC	154	Istanbul	15:55
SAW	705	Damascus	16:00
SVA	504	Madinah	16:00
KNE	531	Jeddah	16:05
QTR	1072	Doha	16:10
JZR	535	Cairo	16:10
FDB	051	Dubai	16:25
JZR	787	Riyadh	16:25
JZR	357	Mashhad	16:25
KAC	662	Abu Dhabi	16:35
RJA	640	Amman	16:55
KAC	118	New York	17:00
SVA	510	Riyadh	17:15
FDK	801	Damascus	17:25
GFA	215	Bahrain	17:30

JZR	777	Jeddah	17:45
JZR	325	Al Najaf	17:50
NIA	251	Alexandria	17:55
SVA	500	Jeddah	18:00
UAE	875	Dubai	18:00
FDB	063	Dubai	18:10
JZR	177	Dubai	18:20
MSR	620	Cairo	18:30
QTR	1080	Doha	18:50
IRA	669	Mashhad	18:55
KAC	512	Mashhad	19:20
ABY	123	Sharjah	19:25
KAC	502	Beirut	19:30
GFA	217	Bahrain	19:30
KAC	674	Dubai	19:45
FDB	057	Dubai	19:50
KAC	104	London	19:50
KNE	381	Taif	19:55
KAC	166	Rome	19:55
MSR	618	Alexandria	20:05
OMA	647	Muscat	20:10
JZR	189	Dubai	20:15
DHX	172	Bahrain	20:20
QTR	1088	Doha	20:35
KAC	562	Amman	20:40
KAC	174	Munich	20:45
FDB	5053	Dubai	20:50
KAC	616	Bahrain	20:50
JAI	572	Mumbai	20:55
KAC	786	Jeddah	21:15
ETD	307	Abu Dhabi	21:20
MEA	402	Beirut	21:20
ALK	229	Colombo	21:25
UAE	859	Dubai	21:40
GFA	219	Bahrain	21:45
KAC	676	Dubai	21:45
QTR	1082	Doha	22:00
KLM	415	Amsterdam/Dammam	22:05
JZR	125	Bahrain	22:05
NIA	151	Cairo	22:10
ETD	309	Abu Dhabi	22:15
AIC	987	Chennai/Hyderabad	22:25
KNE	533	Jeddah	22:45
JZR	241	Amman	22:45
KAC	1544	Cairo	22:55
KAC	164	Paris	22:55
JZR	185	Dubai	23:15
FDB	071	Dubai	23:45
JAI	574	Mumbai	23:50

Departure Flights on Saturday 24/12/2016

Airlines	Flt	Route	Time
AIC	976	Goa/Chennai	00:05
ETD	9860	Bahrain	00:35
PIA	240	Sialkot	00:40
FDB	072	Dubai	00:40
JAI	573	Mumbai	00:50
BBC	044	Dhaka	01:30
KLM	413	Amsterdam	01:50
KAC	417	Manila	02:00
CLX	853	Luxembourg	02:05
KAC	285	Dhaka	02:25
THY	773	Istanbul	02:25
SAI	442	Lahore	02:30
DLH	635	Frankfurt	02:55
MSC	512	Alexandria	03:05
ETH	621	Addis Ababa	03:05
PGT	859	Istanbul	03:35
KAC	103	London	03:40
UAE	854	Dubai	03:45
KKK	6505	Istanbul	03:55
OMA	644	Muscat	03:55
THY	765	Istanbul	04:00
MSR	613	Cairo	04:10
ETD	306	Abu Dhabi	04:10
QTR	1077	Doha	04:40
FEG	938	Sohag	05:00
QTR	1087	Doha	05:50
DHX	173	Bahrain	06:20
FDB	070	Dubai	06:30
KAC	153	Istanbul	06:50
THY	771	Istanbul	06:50
JZR	164	Dubai	06:55
KAC	165	Rome	06:55
RJA	643	Amman	07:05
JZR	238	Amman	07:10
KAC	541	Cairo	07:15
GFA	212	Bahrain	07:15
KAC	163	Paris	07:25
KAC	773	Riyadh	07:30
KAC	173	Munich	07:35
KAC	787	Jeddah	07:45
JZR	778	Jeddah	07:55
FDB	5062	Dubai	07:55
KAC	617	Doha	08:00
KAC	563	Amman	08:00
BAW	156	London	08:40
FDB	054	Dubai	08:55
KAC	691	Muscat	09:00
KAC	117	New York	09:00
KAC	671	Dubai	09:15

JZR	534	Cairo	09:15
KAC	101	London	09:35
ABY	126	Sharjah	09:45
UAE	856	Dubai	09:55
ETD	302	Abu Dhabi	10:10
JZR	356	Mashhad	10:25
KAC	411	Bangkok	10:30
FDB	056	Dubai	10:35
QTR	1071	Doha	10:40
AVV	654	Asyut	11:10
KAC	501	Beirut	11:15
GFA	214	Bahrain	11:25
RBG	554	Alexandria	11:55
KAC	661	Abu Dhabi	12:05
JZR	776	Jeddah	12:05
IRM	1189	Mashhad	12:30
IRC	527	Mashhad	12:40
IAW	158	Al Najaf	13:00
SYR	342	Latakia	13:05
JZR	786	Riyadh	13:10
KAC	511	Mashhad	13:15
MSC	402	Alexandria	13:30
JZR	176	Dubai	13:45
MSR	611	Cairo	14:00
FDB	076	Dubai	14:05
UAE	872	Dubai	14:15
JZR	324	Al Najaf	14:25
KNE	382	Taif	14:50
BON	102	Sarajevo	14:55
KAC	561	Amman	15:00
KAC	673	Dubai	15:00
FDB	060	Dubai	15:10
KAC	785	Jeddah	15:15
PAL	669	Dubai/Manila	15:20
GFA	222	Bahrain	15:25
JZR	188	Dubai	15:40
QTR	1079	Doha	15:40
KAC	1543	Cairo	15:55
KNE	530	Jeddah	15:55
KNE	684	Madinah	16:00
IRM	1181	Mashhad	16:05
KAC	357	Kochi	16:20
ETD	304	Abu Dhabi	16:20
ABY	128	Sharjah	16:30
OMA	646	Muscat	16:35
MSR	576	Sharm el-Sheikh	16:50
SAW	706	KAC/Damascus	16:55
KNE	532	Jeddah	16:55
KAC	675	Dubai	17:00
SVA	505	Madinah	17:00
JZR	266	Beirut	17:05
JZR	240	Amman	17:15
FDB	052	Dubai	17:25
KAC	615	Bahrain	17:35
QTR	1073	Doha	17:40
JZR	538	Cairo	17:45
UAE	858	Dubai	17:45
RJA	641	Amman	17:55
KAC	353	BLR	18:15
SVA	511	Riyadh	18:15
GFA	216	Bahrain	18:20
FDK	802	Damascus	18:25
JZR	184	Dubai	18:40
JZR	554	Alexandria	18:55
NIA	252	Alexandria	18:55
FDB	064	Dubai	19:05
JZR	124	Bahrain	19:15
UAE	876	Dubai	19:30
SVA	501	Jeddah	19:30
MSR	621	Cairo	19:30
QTR	1081	Doha	19:50
IRA	666	Esfahan	19:55
ABY	124	Sharjah	20:05
GFA	218	Bahrain	20:15
KAC	383	Delhi	20:30
KAC	361	Colombo	20:35
FDB	058	Dubai	20:35
KAC	775	Riyadh	20:45
KNE	232	Riyadh	20:55
MSR	607	Luxor	21:05
OMA	648	Muscat	21:10
KAC	205	Islamabad	21:25
KAC	345	Ahmedabad	21:30
QTR	1089	Doha	21:35
KAC	741	Dammam	21:45
FDB	5054	Dubai	21:50
DHX	171	Bahrain	21:50
JAI	571	Mumbai	21:55
KAC	351	Kochi	22:00
ETD	308	Abu Dhabi	22:15
MEA	403	Beirut	22:20
ALK	230	Colombo	22:25
GFA	220	Bahrain	22:30
KAC	301	Mumbai	22:45
KAC	381	Delhi	22:45
UAE	860	Dubai	22:55
KLM	415	Dammam/Amsterdam	23:05
ETD	310	Abu Dhabi	23:05
NIA	152	Cairo	23:10
QTR	1083	Doha	23:20
KNE	534	Jeddah	23:35

WORDSEARCH PUZZLE

Back to School

Find and circle all of the School related words that are hidden in the grid. The remaining letters spell a Mark Twain quotation.

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

- | | | | |
|-------------|---------------|-------------|----------------|
| ASSIGNMENTS | ERASER | LUNCHROOM | ROLL CALL |
| BACKPACK | EXAMS | MATH | RULES |
| BATHROOM | FIRST DAY | NEW FRIENDS | SCHOOL BUS |
| BELL | GYMNASIUM | NOTEBOOK | SCHOOL OFFICE |
| BINDER | HALLWAY | NURSE | SCHOOLYARD |
| CAFETERIA | HOMEWORK | OLD FRIENDS | SCIENCE |
| CHALKBOARD | INTERCOM | PADLOCK | SECRETARY |
| CLASSROOM | JANITOR | PAPER | SEPTEMBER |
| CLOCK | LANGUAGE ARTS | PENCILS | SOCIAL STUDIES |
| COURSES | LEARNING | PENS | STUDENT |
| DESK | LIBRARY | PRINCIPAL | STUDY |
| DOORS | LOCKER | QUIZZES | TEACHER |
| ENROLL | | | |

Yesterday's Solution

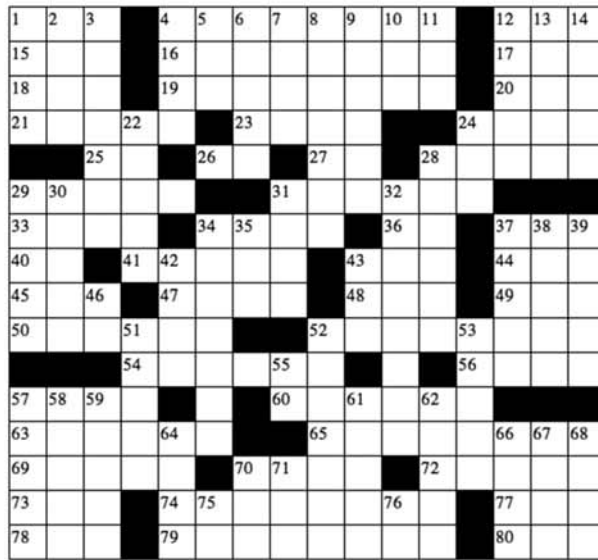
Baby Shower

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

- | | | | |
|-------------|--------------|----------------|----------------|
| ACTIVITIES | CONFETTI | GIFTS | PARTY FAVORS |
| APPETIZERS | DECORATIONS | GLASSES | PLATES |
| BABY | EVENT | GREETING CARDS | PRIZES |
| BAKING | FAMILY | GUESTBOOK | PUNCH |
| BALLOONS | FESTIVE | GUESTS | SANDWICHES |
| BANNER | FINGER FOOD | HOSTESS | SPOONS |
| BIRTH | FLOWERS | INVITATIONS | STREAMERS |
| CAKE | FORKS | KNIVES | TABLES |
| CAMERA | FRIENDS | MOTHER | THEME |
| CELEBRATION | GAMES | MUSIC | TRADITION |
| CHAIRS | GIFT OPENING | NAPKINS | WRAPPING PAPER |
| COFFEE | | | |

The hidden message is: LOVE AND JOY ARE WHAT BABIES ARE MADE OF

CROSSWORD 1470



ACROSS

- Committee formed by a special-interest group to raise money for their favorite political candidates.
- Parachute that will lift a person up into the air when it is towed by a motorboat or a car.
- A person active in party politics.
- A constellation in the southern hemisphere near Telescopium and Norma.
- Capable of being treated by surgical operation.
- South American wood sorrel cultivated for its edible tubers.
- A compartment in front of a motor vehicle where driver sits.
- Small plains antelope of southeastern Africa.
- The smallest multiple that is exactly divisible by every member of a set of numbers.
- The address where a person lives.
- An informal term for a father.
- A state in New England.
- A state in east central United States.
- Date used in reckoning dates before the supposed year Christ was born.
- Cubes of meat marinated and cooked on a skewer usually with vegetables.
- A form of energy that is transferred by a difference in temperature.
- 16 ounces.
- A colorless and odorless inert gas.
- By accident.
- Relating to or characteristic of or occurring on the sea or ships.
- Used in combination to denote the middle.
- Stable gear consisting of either of two curved supports that are attached to the collar of a draft horse and that hold the traces.
- A doctor's degree in dental medicine.
- A close friend who accompanies his buddies in their activities.
- Of or relating to or characteristic of the prehistoric Aegean civilization.
- A port city in southwestern Iran.
- The United Nations agency concerned with civil aviation.
- A male monarch or emperor (especially of Russia prior to 1917).
- Title used for a married Frenchwoman.
- To or from every one of two or more (considered individually).
- The profession of a teacher.
- A genus of Ploceidae.
- A design fixed to some surface or a paper bearing the design to be transferred to the surface.
- Water frozen in the solid state.
- A woman's headscarf folded into a triangle and tied under the chin.
- Step on it.
- Having any of numerous bright or strong colors reminiscent of the color of blood or cherries or tomatoes or rubies.
- Excessive size.
- A guided missile fired from shipboard against an airborne target.

DOWN

- Large burrowing rodent of South and Central America.
- An Arabic speaking person who lives in Arabia or North Africa.
- Alternatively, a member of the family Nymphaeaceae.

- Affected manners intended to impress others.
- (usually followed by 'to') Naturally disposed toward.
- Having a tone of a reed instrument.
- A particular geographical region of indefinite boundary (usually serving some special purpose or distinguished by its people or culture or geography).
- A bar of sand.
- The jurisdiction or office of an abbot.
- The United Nations agency concerned with the interests of labor.
- The basic unit of money in Albania.
- Music performed for dancing the polka.
- English scholastic philosopher and assumed author of Occam's Razor (1285-1349).
- A genus of Lamnidae.
- The event of dying or departure from life.
- Title for a civil or military leader (especially in Turkey).
- The ratio of reflected to incident light.
- Suggestive of the supernatural.
- The British system of withholding tax.
- One of the 4-year intervals between Olympic Games.
- Any customary and rightful perquisite appropriate to your station in life.
- An advanced law degree.
- Savory jelly based on fish or meat stock used as a mold for meats or vegetables.
- A long noosed rope used to catch animals.
- Celebes megapode that lays eggs in holes in sandy beaches.
- According to the Old Testament he was a pagan king of Israel and husband of Jezebel (9th century BC).
- Automatic data processing by electronic means without the use of tabulating cards or punched tapes.
- 1/10 gram.
- Worn or shabby from overuse or (of pages) from having corners turned down.
- A metrical unit with unstressed-unstressed-stressed syllables.
- The action of an armed force that surrounds a fortified place and isolates it while continuing to attack.
- Before noon.
- The unlimited 3-dimensional expanse in which everything is located.
- Having help.
- A city in north-central India.
- A woman of refinement.
- Open-heart surgery in which the rib cage is opened and a section of a blood vessel is grafted from the aorta to the coronary artery to bypass the blocked section of the coronary artery and improve the blood supply to the heart.
- United States newspaper publisher (1858-1935).
- (Greek mythology) Goddess of the earth and mother of Cronus and the Titans in ancient mythology.
- (cosmology) The original matter that (according to the big bang theory) existed before the formation of the chemical elements.
- A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.
- Small rounded bread either plain or sweet.
- The branch of computer science that deal with writing computer programs that can solve problems creatively.
- A state in midwestern United States.

Yesterday's Solution

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

Daily SuDoku

		1	5					
4			3				2	
	3		9	1				
3	7					2		9
	1	4				7	3	
8		9					4	6
			7	8			9	
	6			5				2
					6	1		

Yesterday's Solution

8	3	2	9	4	6	5	7	1
5	1	9	7	3	8	6	4	2
6	7	4	2	1	5	3	8	9
3	9	1	8	5	2	7	6	4
7	2	8	4	6	3	9	1	5
4	6	5	1	9	7	2	3	8
2	5	3	6	8	4	1	9	7
1	8	7	3	2	9	4	5	6
9	4	6	5	7	1	8	2	3

BRUINS HUNT DOWN PANTHERS

SUNRISE, Florida: Jaromir Jagr moved into sole possession of the No 2 spot on the NHL career scoring list Thursday night, getting an assist in the Florida Panthers' 3-1 loss to the Boston Bruins. Jagr got point No 1,888 to break a tie with Mark Messier. The historic point came with 6:40 left. In a brief ceremony, Jagr was given a golden stick. Only Wayne Gretzky, with 2,857 points, has more than Jagr. Aleksander Barkov was credited with the goal that deflected off the 44-year-old Czech star.

In a video, Gretzky offered congratulations. The game was stopped for a celebration, and Jagr came onto the ice to accept the commemorative golden stick from the Panthers. He waved to the crowd, got congratulatory stick-taps from both teams, and the game - his 1,663rd in the NHL - resumed. Frank Vatrano, Patrice Bergeron and David Backes scored for Boston, and Tuukka Rask made 29 saves. Rask improved to 18-3-1 against Florida, and Boston is 16-2-1 in its last 19 games against the Panthers.

BLUE JACKETS 7, PENGUINS 1

Scott Hartnell had his ninth career hat trick and Columbus scored four times in a head-spinning, third-period flurry to blow out Pittsburgh. Cam Atkinson, William Karlsson, Brandon Saad and Boone Jenner also scored to help the Blue Jackets win their 11th straight game and take over first place in the Metropolitan Division. Sergei Bobrovsky stopped 25 shots for Columbus (22-5-4) amid a rollicking playoff atmosphere and a sellout crowd at Nationwide Arena. Sidney Crosby scored his NHL-leading 23rd goal for the Penguins in a fast, testy game. Matthew Murray had 21 saves for Pittsburgh (21-8-5), which failed to earn a point for the first time in 11 games. The loss matched the Penguins' worst of the season.

KINGS 4, PREDATORS 0

Peter Budaj made 28 saves to lead Los Angeles over Nashville. Nick Shore, Nic Dowd, Jeff Carter and Devin Setoguchi scored for the Kings, who improved to 3-2-1 on a nine-game road swing - their longest of the season. Budaj earned his fourth shutout this season and the 15th of his career. Pekka Rinne made 21 saves for Nashville.

LIGHTNING 5, BLUES 2

Alex Killorn scored the go-ahead goal early in the third period, Jonathan Drouin added two late goals and Tampa Bay rallied from a 2-0 deficit to beat St. Louis. Tampa Bay also got goals from Brian Boyle and Michael Bournival. Andrei Vasilevskiy made 21 saves and Victor Hedman had two assists. David Perron and Wade Megan scored 32 seconds apart in the first period for the Blues, and Jake Allen stopped 27 shots before getting hurt. St. Louis had won six straight against Tampa Bay.

WILD 4, CANADIENS 2

Eric Staal's short-handed goal in the third period broke a tie and sent Minnesota past Montreal for a ninth straight win that tied the team record. Jordan Schroeder and Jared Spurgeon also scored for the Wild (20-8-4), who last won nine in a row March 8-24, 2007. They have a chance to break the record Friday night against the Rangers in New York. Jason Zucker added an empty-net goal with 23 seconds left. Max Pacioretty and Artturi Lehkonen scored for Montreal (21-8-4). The game featured a duel between two of the NHL's top goalies, with Devan Dubnyk having the edge over Carey Price as the Canadiens outshot the Wild 34-27.

SENATORS 2, DUCKS 1, OT

Mike Hoffman scored a power-play goal at 4:03 of overtime to give Ottawa a victory over Anaheim. Hoffman's one-timer off a pass from Dion Phaneuf beat John Gibson in the Anaheim net. Andrew Cogliano took a high-sticking minor at 3:23 of the extra period, giving the Senators a 4-on-3 advantage. Ryan Dzingel scored in regulation for the Senators (20-11-3), who got 24 saves from Mike Condon. Jakob Silfverberg had the goal for Anaheim (17-12-6). Gibson made 16 saves, but didn't face a single shot in the second half of the third period. — AP



SUNRISE: Goaltender Tuukka Rask #40 of the Boston Bruins makes a diving save on a shot by Reilly Smith #18 of the Florida Panthers during first period action at the BB&T Center. — AFP

TEAMS SEEK PLAYOFF BERTH, LET GIANTS' LOSS BE A LESSON

NEW YORK: The New York Giants have given teams chasing playoff berths a fresh reminder to take nobody for granted, especially division rivals. As a result, the Dallas Cowboys' only challenge now as the NFC East champs and the NFC's top seed is handling the final two regular-season games before a first-round bye.

The Giants only had to beat Philadelphia on Thursday night to clinch at least a wild-card berth, yet Eli Manning was intercepted three times in a 24-19 loss. That started a big celebration by the Cowboys' faithful with Dallas now assured of staying in Texas throughout the postseason. Five division titles remain up for grabs with two weeks left in the season.

Dallas can help out the Giants, the only team to beat the Cowboys all season, by defeating Detroit on Monday night, which would clinch a wild-card berth for New York. The Giants also clinch a spot if Green Bay, Tampa Bay or Atlanta loses. New England, AFC East title in hand, needs a little help to claim home-field advantage throughout the AFC playoffs this week. The Patriots first must beat the Jets, then wait to see if the Colts can win in Oakland. The Raiders can win the AFC West title and grab their own first-round bye by beating the Colts with Denver beating Kansas City on Sunday night.

Seattle is trying to earn the NFC's other first-round bye. The NFC West champs must beat Arizona and also need Atlanta to lose or tie and then wait to see if Detroit can win in Dallas on Monday

night. Three division titles have been clinched, with eight playoff berths still up for grabs, and the Pittsburgh Steelers can wrap up the AFC North title by beating Baltimore on Christmas.

Clinch the crown

The Houston Texans will know before kicking off tonight if a victory over Cincinnati will give them their second straight AFC South championship. They need Tennessee to lose earlier today to Jacksonville to avoid playing the Titans on Jan. 1 for the division title. Atlanta heads to Carolina trying to clinch both a playoff berth and the NFC South title, needing both a win and a New Orleans victory over

Tampa Bay to win the division. If they don't get that, the Falcons could still clinch at least a wild card this weekend.

Green Bay needs a win over Minnesota and help to clinch a playoff berth today. But the Packers only need to win their final two games to take the NFC North title. The Lions are trying to hang on in that division, and they can clinch the crown Monday night if Green Bay loses to Minnesota. The Lions could have a playoff berth in hand if Washington and Tampa Bay already have lost and Atlanta wins at Carolina. If not, the Saints beating Tampa Bay can allow Detroit to clinch at least a wild-card spot with a win or a tie in Dallas. — AP



PHILADELPHIA: Philadelphia Eagles' Carson Wentz (11) scrambles away from New York Giants' Romeo Okwara (78) during the second half of an NFL football game. — AP



BRISBANE: Pakistan's Azhar Ali scrapes home as Australia's Nathan Lyon, on ground, attempts to run him out on day four of the first cricket test. — AP

MOMENTUM WITH PAKISTAN VS WEARY AUSSIE BOWLING ATTACK

MELBOURNE: Pakistan say they have the momentum heading into the Boxing Day Melbourne Test after giving Australia a mighty fright during an epic run-chase in the opening clash of the series. The tourists fell just 39 short of a mammoth 490-run target on the fifth and final day of the Gabba Test, led by a magnificent 137 from Asad Shafiq.

Steve Smith was a relieved captain as his Australia team fell over the line after the last five Pakistan wickets piled on 230 runs to get within sight of a world-record Test run chase. The grueling 145-over fourth innings has taken its toll on the Australian bowlers with selectors adding bowling all-rounder Hilton Cartwright to the squad as a precaution while their recovery is assessed. The tourists' batting coach, Gary Flower, said the Australians can expect another hard slog on an abrasive drop-in Melbourne Cricket Ground wicket in expected sweltering conditions as Pakistan fight to level the three-match series.

"The confidence they have gained since that last innings and that momentum will definitely help carry them on into this Test," former Zimbabwean Test batsman Flower said. "It's going to be hard work for the bowlers, but if we can get into them early and if the ball starts reversing then I'm sure we've got a good chance of making some things happen."

Australia dominated the first day-night Brisbane Test up until late on the fourth day, when signs of anxiety crept in as Pakistan edged closer to a miraculous victory before Shafiq was dismissed. "I saw a lot of very nervous campers all of a sudden for the first time," Pakistan assistant coach Steve Rixon said. "I would have thought they would have turned up thinking, 'We're just going to win this, it's only going to take two good balls and that's it'. Well guess what? It wasn't."

'Sore, for sure'

Pakistan have lost their last 10 Tests in Australia and last

won at the MCG in 1981 in the era of Imran Khan, Javed Miandad and Zaheer Abbas. The Australians are confident crack pace pair Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood will back up to bowl at the showpiece event despite each sending down 56 overs in the Brisbane heat with just a week's recuperation.

"They'll be sore, for sure, but it depends on how significant those little things are and the risks associated with it," team sports medicine manager Alex Kountouris said. "In general terms we think they'll get through but we won't know until we assess." Zimbabwe-born Cartwright, who was recently included in the Chappell-Hadlee ODI squad to face New Zealand but did not play, has averaged 44.50 across 16 first-class matches.

But his 15 first-class wickets have come at an undistinguished 41.93, and he has only four wickets at 74.75 in the current Sheffield Shield campaign.

The selectors' desire for a batting all-rounder to take a place in the top six means the incumbent number six, Nic Maddinson, could face the axe after his three Test innings of 0, 1 and 4. Team vice-captain David Warner is also overdue and has not posted a Test century since his 122 against the West Indies in Sydney in January for an average of 35 this year, well below his career average of 47.58.

Teams

Australia (from) - Matt Renshaw, David Warner, Usman Khawaja, Steve Smith (capt), Peter Handscomb, Nic Maddinson, Hilton Cartwright, Matthew Wade, Mitchell Starc, Josh Hazlewood, Nathan Lyon, Jackson Bird, Chadd Sayers.

Pakistan (from) - Azhar Ali, Sami Aslam, Babar Azam, Younis Khan, Misbah-ul-Haq (capt), Asad Shafiq, Sarfraz Ahmed, Wahab Riaz, Yasir Shah, Mohammad Amir, Rahat Ali, Sohail Khan, Imran Khan. — AFP

FEDERER EXPECTS INJURY TO PROLONG PLAY TIME

MUMBAI: Roger Federer believes his six-month absence due to a knee injury could help prolong his playing career, with the 17-times grand slam winner saying he has enjoyed the break. The 35-year-old Swiss had surgery on his left knee in February and, after missing the French Open with a back injury, announced in July that he needed extensive rehabilitation and would be sidelined for the rest of the season.

Federer returns to action at the Hopman Cup, starting on Jan 1, which he will play in for the first time since he teamed up with his now wife Mirka in 2002. He will partner compatriot Belinda Bencic, 19, at the international team tournament in Perth. Federer said it was a tough call to take a six-month break and he looked at the bigger picture before deciding. "I do believe that it could be very beneficial for the future of my tennis career," he told reporters on a conference call.

"To have had this six-month layoff, rejuvenated, refreshed... maybe mentally I needed this rest more than I thought I would. Maybe my body needed a rest more than I thought it would. I tried to look at the big picture, I hope it's going to pay off. "At least one thing I know now is I have no regrets. I did everything this year to get my body back in shape. It didn't feel too grueling, too long, too hard to go through this process. I have actually enjoyed it."

Unique year

For much of his career, the former world number one had been blessed with a body that seemed bullet-proof against the aches, pains and injuries suffered by most top athletes. Until May this year, Federer had appeared in 65 successive grand slam tournaments and the last time he was absent from one of the four majors was at the 1999 US Open. But his semi-final defeat by Canadian Milos Raonic at Wimbledon, which saw him drop to 16 in the world rankings, was his last professional match this year. Federer said his goal was to get fully fit and he was looking forward to a few matches in Perth before the year's first grand slam starts later in the month in Melbourne. "This year is unique because maybe this is the year more than any time before where I do need matches at the beginning of the season," Federer said, adding that he was doing everything possible to add more majors to his trophy cabinet.

"Matches have a different intensity about it and your body reacts according to it," Federer said he had expected Andy Murray to be world number one at some point but was surprised the Briton finished the year at the top of the rankings ahead of Serb Novak Djokovic. "That just gives even more credit to Andy for not becoming world number one but finishing world number one," he said. "Those are two separate things. "Becoming world number one for a week or finishing a year as world number one, it's a different animal." — Reuters

SECURITY HIGH FOR MCG TEST

MELBOURNE: Security has been increased at the Melbourne Cricket Ground for Monday's second test between Australia and Pakistan following the arrest of seven people over a terror-related plot in the city. Those charged were allegedly planning to attack Melbourne's Flinders Street train station, nearby Federation Square and St Paul's Cathedral on Christmas Day. Chief police commissioner Graham Ashton said while they are confident the terror plot had been contained, extra police will be deployed at major events. "We know there's lot of events on over the next several days right across our state, including the Boxing Day test, Christmas carols, other events that are on," he said. "There is no intelligence to suggest there is any threat whatsoever in relation to any of those events. However we're just making sure we're taking those extra precautions."

Victoria Police and Cricket Australia were liaising over the appropriate security level. "Our security team is in contact with the relevant authorities to ensure we have the appropriate level of security at the Boxing Day test and other cricket matches being held around the country," Cricket Australia chief executive James Sutherland said in a statement. In a security-related move late in 2015, the MCG erected a new perimeter fence about 20 to 25 meters away from the stadium where spectators queue to pass through security before entering the ground. Australia won the first test against Pakistan by 39 runs at the Gabba in Brisbane. A third test in the series begins Jan 3 in Sydney. — AP



KABUL: In this Feb 2, 2016, file photo, Murtaza Ahmadi, a five-year-old Afghan Lionel Messi fan plays soccer, at the Afghan Football Federation Stadium. —AP photos



RIO DE JANEIRO: In this Aug 16, 2016, file photo, New Zealand's Nikki Hamblin, left, and United States' Abbey D'Agostino after competing in a women's 5000-meter heat during the athletics competitions of the 2016 Summer Olympics at the Olympic stadium.

2016'S MOST INSPIRING SPORTS MOMENTS

We watch sports to see who wins and loses, but also to be inspired - and 2016 offered plenty of examples of the latter, from a touching moment between two strangers on the Olympic track, to a little boy from a war-torn land who met his favorite soccer player, to a warm ovation fueled by empathy for a visiting NHL goalie. Moments and feelings that will be recalled more vividly than any numbers on a result sheet or etched in bright lights on a scoreboard. There were athletes and coaches whose stories touched us, as well as folks connected to the sports world who contributed their own uplifting vignettes.

One example: When sideline reporter Craig Sager died from leukemia this month, there were heartfelt tributes tinged with sadness, of course, but also remembrances that spread the positive message he offered as he continued to cover the NBA and college basketball despite his illness. "Man, life is too beautiful, too wonderful. There's just too many things," Sager said in August. "It's not just you. It's your family and kids and all. Fight. Fight until the end. Fight as hard as you can." Some inspiring sports moments during the past year:

Lending a hand

During a qualifying heat for the 5,000 meters at the Rio Games, Abbey D'Agostino of the US and Nikki Hamblin of New Zealand got their feet tangled, sending both sprawling. D'Agostino got up and, instead of trying to get herself back into the race, crouched down, helped Hamblin rise and whispered, "Get up. We have to finish this." Turned out both were injured - D'Agostino could barely move by race's end and needed a wheelchair - but they crossed the line. Then they hugged. Long-time friends? Hardly. "That girl is the Olympic spirit, right there," Hamblin said. "I've never met her before. Like, I never met this girl before. And isn't that just so amazing? Such an amazing woman." Even Olympic officials were moved by the episode, awarding both runners berths in the final.

Meeting Messi

First, Murtaza Ahmadi, a 5-year-old from Afghanistan, was photographed wearing a plastic bag fashioned into a makeshift Lionel Messi uniform - blue and white stripes, like Argentina's national team; Messi's name and number written in black marker. The image

became an internet sensation. Later, Murtaza got to walk with Messi onto the field before an exhibition game. When it was time for the kickoff, Murtaza did not want to leave his new pal's side.

Saluting an opponent

Takes something special for supporters of one team to salute a player for an opponent that won a game, and that's what happened early in the NHL season in Edmonton. The Oilers' fans gave Senators goalie Craig Anderson a standing ovation he made 37 saves for a shutout in Ottawa's 2-0 victory over Edmonton - his first start since learning his wife had been diagnosed with cancer.

Si Se Puede!

Vibrant chants of "Si se puede!" resonated around Rio's main tennis stadium as Puerto Rico's unseeded Monica Puig beat Germany's Angelique Kerber - who would win two Grand Slam titles in 2016 and take over the No. 1 ranking - to become her island nation's first gold medalist in any Olympic sport. As the Puerto Rican anthem echoed around an Olympic arena and spectators belted out the lyrics, Puig was unable to join

in for one simple reason: too many tears. "If I would've stopped crying," Puig said, "I probably would have started singing."

Go, Cubs, go

The Chicago Cubs' first World Series championship in more than a century was a big deal to many long-suffering fans - and provided a way for some to reconnect spiritually with lost loved ones who never got to see Wrigleyville turn into Titledown. Wayne Williams kept a pledge he and his father made to each other and shared a moment they'd both been waiting for all their lives. Williams drove from North Carolina to his father's gravesite in Indiana to listen on the radio "together" as the Cubs beat the Cleveland Indians in Game 7.

Breaking records after cancer

University of Pittsburgh running back was diagnosed with Hodgkin lymphoma in 2015, went through more than five months of draining treatment, then returned to college football this year and wound up breaking Atlantic Coast Conference records for career touchdowns and running TDs. Now he's headed to the NFL. —AP



RIO DE JANEIRO: In this Aug 13, 2016, file photo, Monica Puig, of Puerto Rico, cries after winning the gold medal match in the women's tennis competition at the 2016 Summer Olympics.



PITTSBURGH: In this Oct 27, 2016, file photo, Pittsburgh's James Conner (24) celebrates after scoring a touchdown against Virginia Tech during an NCAA college football game.



MIAMI: Retired Hall of Fame basketball player Shaquille O'Neal's jersey is raised during halftime at an NBA basketball game between the Los Angeles Lakers and the Miami Heat. (INSET) Retired Hall of Fame basketball player Shaquille O'Neal shouts and waves to the fans after his jersey was raised during halftime. — AP photos

TO THE RAFTERS: HEAT RETIRE SHAQ'S JERSEY

MIAMI: Shaquille O'Neal once brought in someone to set up a makeshift jewelry store in the Miami Heat players' lounge, and often could be found surprising team executives and employees while naked. Sometimes, he also played basketball. For all those reasons, and many others, Thursday was a night to celebrate O'Neal at the arena he called home for parts of four seasons. The Heat raised O'Neal's No. 32 to the rafters, a distinction the team has only previously awarded to Alonzo Mourning and Tim Hardaway.

"This is an inside joke for all the Miami people," O'Neal said. "It's definitely unexpected." Not from the Heat perspective, it wasn't. Although it wasn't a well-kept secret that O'Neal's departure from the Heat did not come with either side particularly happy with and fond of the other - O'Neal thought he was being pranked when a team official called months ago to say this event was planned - it was always Miami's intention to pay homage to his tenure with the franchise.

"He's a once-in-a-lifetime player," Heat President Pat Riley said. "There are a lot of them in the history of the NBA, but he's a once-in-a-lifetime acquisition for us and meant so much to us." Alex Rodriguez was there sitting courtside for the big night, and so was rapper DJ Khaled. Heat coach Erik Spoelstra emerged from the locker room for the halftime ceremony, as did former

O'Neal teammate Udonis Haslem. There were a slew of gifts, including a framed version of the jersey banner that was raised, and a miniature 18-wheeler - like the one he arrived on in 2004 - driven out onto the court by O'Neal's mother, Lucille. O'Neal thanked Haslem and Mourning, and made sure to pay tribute to the fans. "I couldn't do it without you," O'Neal said.

'Can you dig it?'

As the event was starting, Riley dumped hundreds of the "15 Strong" cards that were the signature keepsake for the 2006 Heat NBA title team over his head. "We would not have

won the championship in 2006 without the efforts of Shaquille O'Neal," Riley said.

O'Neal had about a dozen relatives and friends with him for the halftime celebration of Miami's game against the Los Angeles Lakers, taking a break from his game-analyst duties on television for the festivities. The Heat gave commemorative T-shirts to all fans in attendance, and presented O'Neal with a \$50,000 check for his foundation.

And it ended with O'Neal offering his favorite line: "Can you dig it?" he bellowed twice, as the crowd screamed. O'Neal was a huge part of the team that delivered Miami's first championship in 2006, even though Dwyane Wade was emerging as a superstar and longtime stars like Mourning and Gary Payton also had voices that resonated deeply within the locker room at that time.

"Contrary to what everybody thinks about his practical joking and his telling stories, he was very serious about winning," Riley said. Serious about having fun, too. O'Neal once emerged from the shower and found managing general partner Micky Arison and athletic trainer Jay Sabol engaged in a conversation. So O'Neal decided to stand behind Arison, fully nude, until someone noticed. More naked O'Neal exploits included the 7-foot-1, 325-pound man's penchant for grabbing people around the locker room and wrestling them to the ground.

"It never happened to me," Spoelstra said. "Thank God." Then there was the day that Riley got a call after practice from someone inside the arena, asking about the person selling jewelry inside the players' lounge. Riley went down and asked the portable jeweler what he was doing there, and he said O'Neal gave his approval to set up shop. "My bad," O'Neal said. Eventually, O'Neal delivered the jewelry Miami wanted most - the 2006 championship ring, the one that Riley was wearing on Thursday night. And all jokes aside, O'Neal was moved by the Heat gesture. "It is a big honor," O'Neal said. — AP

CURRY AND DURANT THRIVING TOGETHER

OAKLAND: As shootaround wrapped up one morning last weekend, once Stephen Curry had concluded his methodical session flicking jumpers from every spot on the same practice court he always uses, Kevin Durant took a pass from the MVP's main rebounding man, Bruce Fraser, and let fly an extra-long 3-pointer from the right wing. Swish, Steph-style. When Curry recently hosted 14 children and their families through the Make-A-Wish Foundation and handed out shoes and bags, Durant did his part: He walked up and introduced himself to all the visitors, too, with plenty of high-fives.

For everyone who questioned whether Curry and Durant could coexist and put their egos aside for the greater good - a championship chase, of course - the Golden State Warriors are a couple of months into the season and the two superstars are thriving together, feeding off one another and cherishing the chance to create spectacular plays night after night with arguably the best team in the NBA.

As far as their on-court chemistry, it's obvious to anyone who watches they're having a blast. And, "they learn a lot from each other. ... They've had plenty of discussions talking to each other trying to help each other out on the floor," teammate Ian Clark said. Each guy mentions experiencing "wow" moments playing alongside the other for a team regularly reaching 30 assists. Golden State has even posted a handful of 40-assist performances.

The wow factor

"Most definitely," Durant said. "The way he shoots the basketball coming off of curls, off the dribble, off the catch, guys flying at him, it's amazing to see. When he shoots the ball I think every shot's going in. I won't say that about a lot of people. But it's still the wow factor when I'm playing with him and Klay (Thompson). It definitely makes my job easier going out there trying to get them open, trying to make plays for them. It's definitely fun. He can get it going."

Not to forget Thompson, who scored 60 points in less than three quarters against the Pacers on Dec 5. Everyone is getting their touches, while Curry and Durant seem to take turns on the highlight reel - though they've had a bunch of games when both had big nights.

"It's fun. Obviously they're both so skilled," Warriors coach Steve Kerr said. "They might be the two most skilled players in the league when you're talking about the combination of shooting and passing and creating for others. It's an incredible luxury as a coach to be able to count on guys like that. The fact that they're so unselfish just completes it all. They really want to see each other succeed, they want to see their teammates succeed."

Against Portland on Saturday, the third quarter was winding down when Durant realized two defenders were swarming him and he made a perfect bounce pass between them to find Curry on the left wing. The MVP knocked down a 3 as the buzzer sounded, Curry pointed at KD and they celebrated with a tame high-five in the blowout.

Fun to watch

"There have been moments throughout the season where I wouldn't say you're surprised, but it's kind of just wow moments where you appreciate the talent on this squad all the way through," Curry said. Other times, Curry screens for Durant on the perimeter and then the big man returns the favor. There was a no-look, over-the-shoulder alley-oop Curry threw to Durant off a long heave by Draymond Green against Indiana earlier this month.

"It's fun to watch," said former Warriors player and coach Al Attles. "That's not easy because there are so many outside influences, but they seem to be on the same page." Curry, still the last Warriors player announced during pregame introductions, and Durant are constantly looking for each other with the right pass, even if it means passing up a shot. Also against the Trail Blazers, Curry handed off to Durant, who shimmied past CJ McCollum and dribbled left into the paint before an emphatic slam with his right hand over Noah Vonleh. "Kevin, I don't think there's ever been anybody quite like him in the NBA because of his size and his skill, what he does at that size," Kerr said. "Not many have ever done it." Months ago, as they all met in the Hamptons trying to persuade Durant to pick Golden State, Curry and the room of All-Stars envisioned this very kind of depth, dominance and unselfish play that has defined the Warriors during another sensational start. — AP

SOLO TALKS ON FUTURE, FIGHT FOR EQUAL PAY

LOS ANGELES: Hope Solo says she hopes that someday she can return to the US women's national team, but in the meantime she vows to keep fighting for equal pay for the players. Solo was handed a six-month suspension and her contract with US Soccer was terminated following the Rio Olympics, after she called Sweden's team "cowards" for their defensive style of play against the Americans in the quarterfinals.

"Let's be honest, it's not my decision if I return to the national team," she said. "I find it an honor and a privilege to represent our country at the highest level in a sport that I love, in a position that I love. And I would do almost anything to play at that level once again. I say almost, because at this point in time I believe our fight for equality is much bigger than being on the national team again."

Solo is not eligible for reinstatement to the team until February. She said it's up to the US Soccer Federation and coach Jill Ellis to allow her to return. Her comments come as the team's players are negotiating a new collective bargaining agreement with US Soccer. The current contract expires on Dec 31. Solo, a 17-year veteran of the team, is closely watching the negotiations, which have been ongoing this month. In a wide-ranging interview with The Associated Press on Thursday, she said she "hopes and prays" players don't back down.

All the way

"I think many of the players are prepared to go all the way in," she said. "When we're supposed to have a new CBA by Jan 1, now is the time you can be scared - you can be scared of going on strike, you can be scared of losing employment and a paycheck. And I think that I have been used as an example, and my firing instilled a lot of fear in the players. And I also know fear is what has held many movements back."

That's why she's speaking out now - because she can. "There's no turning back for me," she said. "I think with some of the player there are different intentions - because they want to play the game that they love. It's easier for me to fight and put everything into it than it is for them." Solo's year has been nothing if not eventful.

At the start, Solo and the national team were still basking in their victory at the 2015 Women's World Cup. Solo allowed only three goals in seven games with five shutouts during the tournament - earning her a second straight Golden Glove Award. But with the CBA due to expire, Solo and four of her teammates filed a complaint in late March with the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission alleging wage discrimination. The players maintain they make far less than their male counterparts for the national team, despite outperforming them on the international stage. A decision by the EEOC is pending.

On the field, Solo became the first goalkeeper with 100 international shutouts before the Olympics when the United States defeated South Africa 1-0 in Chicago. It also was her 150th career win. During the Rio Games she made her 200th appearance in goal for the United States, an international record. But in the quarterfinals the defending champion US women were handed their earliest-ever exit from the Olympics when Sweden advanced 4-3 on penalty kicks following a 1-1 draw.

Off-the-field controversies

Solo's infamous "cowards" quote came immediately following the loss. Sweden went on to play in the gold-medal match against Germany. Solo said she spoke to Ellis and US Soccer President Sunil Gulati the night of the loss, and felt that the issue was put to rest. After she returned to the United States, she said she was blindsided by the announcement about her suspension.

She said she believes US Soccer wanted her off the CBA negotiations. A spokesman for USSF did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Thursday evening. "Let's call it what it is, which is a firing is," she said. "It was a termination of my contract effective immediately with severance. That is a firing. It wasn't a suspension, that's what they told the media because it looked better. But I got fired. I got fired for what they say was using the word 'cowards' but in reality they got rid of an adversary in the fight for equal pay."

US Soccer said at the time the action was taken after a culmination of events. Solo has at times during her career been dogged by off-the-field controversies. Notably, a domestic violence case stemming from a 2014 altercation at a family member's home in Washington state. The case is still pending and she cannot comment on the matter. — AP



LAGOS: Local project director of the FCB Escola soccer school, Bernat Gorriz (C), takes part in a training session with students of the academy at Teslim Balogun Stadium. — AFP

THE TRIALS OF BECOMING A NIGERIA FOOTBALL STAR

LAGOS: Somewhere out there is a new Nwankwo Kanu or a Jay-Jay Okocha, but it is not easy for the thousands of pretenders to become Nigeria's newest football hero to get a foot on the ladder. There are hundreds of football academies across the country of 180 million people but few put their star-struck trainees on the road to a contract in Europe.

Each week, more than 400 aspiring heroes aged between six and 18 attend the Barcelona football academy in Lagos, which opened in November. Football is king in Nigeria, even though the country has again failed to reach the Africa Cup of Nations finals which will be held in Gabon in January. More than 1,500 youngsters took skills tests in September to get into the Barcelona academy. But the 1,000 euros (\$1,000) annual cost was an even bigger hurdle for many.

The parents of Johnson Gbenga, 12, had to borrow money from their family and neighbors in the distant Lagos suburb of Badagry to get a place. "They understood that there is nothing more important than football," said the shy youngster who spends three hours on a bus to get to each training session at FCB Escola.

"One day for sure, I will play for Barca," said 12-year-old Yacub Farouk as he kicked a ball in his tattered shorts and worn shoes. "It makes me happy because other footballers will be able to see that Nigerians have talent and that we can be the best." After Dubai, Istanbul and Sao Paulo, Barcelona is now spreading word of the team in Lagos, business capital of Africa's most populated country.

Barca 'vision' in Lagos

Ten coaches watched over the young players at the Teslim Balogun stadium in a teeming district of the city of 20 million. Blaugrana Sports International Limited director Leslie Oghomienor, who helped set up the

academy, said it was a "revolution" for Nigerian football. Most of the Nigerians who became stars in Europe-like Kanu at Ajax Amsterdam and Arsenal and Okocha-who made his name at Bolton Wanderers and Paris Saint Germain-learned their football in the streets.

Like many of the facilities in Nigeria, the Teslim Balogun stadium is not state-of-the-art. The worn turf has covered with synthetic grass. The paint on the walls is peeling. Oghomienor insisted that Nigeria will see the benefit of the school even if there is a chance in a million of getting to one of the top European teams. "We have trained coaches who will later enter the market. And we also have all the young people who will get to play here in and West Africa."

Bernat Villa Gorriz, the academy's technical director, laughed when asked whether the coaches had already spotted the new Lionel Messi. "We want to introduce our vision and our way of

training," he said. For Barcelona, the school is a way of looking for talent but also getting its name known in the globalised world of football where it faces intense competition with English Premier League giants like Manchester United, Chelsea and Arsenal.

All are setting up similar academies in Africa, Asia and North America. Barcelona is not alone in looking at Nigeria. Paris Saint-Germain has signed commercial accords with two Nigerian companies and will choose 100 children to take part in a three day coaching session this year. "While the Premier League may be more popular than the Spanish league, the trainee footballers are more than happy to welcome the Catalonian club," said Gorriz. Fans of other clubs largely agree. "I support Arsenal but everyone's got to start somewhere-you can't choose your club at my age. You have to take what you're offered," said Okiki one of the Barcelona pupils. — AFP

ASIAN CHAMPIONS' MATCH-FIXING BAN

KUALA LUMPUR: Asian title-holders Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors could be banned from next year's AFC Champions League over a match-fixing scandal after a new eligibility body was unveiled yesterday. Jeonbuk, who lifted the Asian trophy in November, two months after they were punished for match-fixing in South Korea's K-League, face a possible one-year ban by the five-member panel.

The Asian Football Confederation said the independent Entry Control Body, led by China's Liu Chi, will make decisions based on a new document setting out rules for eligibility. Any clubs involved in "arranging or influencing the outcome of a match at

national or international level" will be barred from the Asian competition for one season, the document says.

"The AFC has a zero tolerance towards match manipulation and has done more than many other bodies to tackle that threat to sport," AFC general secretary Windsor John said in a statement announcing the new body. "We are also determined to protect the sporting integrity of our competitions which are now regarded as some of the best in the world." Asia's football authorities have long struggled against match-fixing, with major scandals seen in a swathe of countries including South Korea and China. — AFP

CHINA'S FIVE RECORD SIGNINGS

SHANGHAI: After Shanghai SIPG confirmed the arrival of Chelsea's Brazilian midfielder Oscar yesterday, here are the five Asian-record signings announced by Chinese clubs this year:

Oscar, 70.5 million euros

Oscar will become Chelsea's most expensive sale and one of the biggest transfers from the Premier League when he signs his new deal with Shanghai SIPG, worth a reported £60 million (70.5 million euros), in the coming days. The 25-year-old scored 38 goals in 203 matches for Chelsea after arriving from Brazilian outfit Internacional for nearly 30 million

euros in 2012. At Shanghai he joins former Tottenham Hotspur boss Andre Villas-Boas, who arrived at the club last month.

Hulk, 55.8 million euros

The muscular Brazil striker, 30, joined SIPG from Zenit St. Petersburg in July and helped them finish third in this year's Chinese Super League, grabbing four goals. He scored 77 goals in 147 matches with Zenit, winning them the 2014-15 Russian Premier League title.

Alex Teixeira, 50 million euros

Striker Teixeira, 26, scored 89 goals

in 223 matches for Ukraine's Shakhtar Donetsk and was a target for Liverpool until he was snapped up by Jiangsu Suning in February. Teixeira has proved an important asset with 19 goals in 14 games so far for Jiangsu, who finished second in the Chinese Super League.

Jackson Martinez, 42 million euros

Two-time Asian champions Guangzhou Evergrande had high expectations of Atletico Madrid's Colombian hitman when he joined in February. But the 30-year-old has managed only four games for his new club, albeit scoring four times along

the way. It mattered little as Evergrande won their sixth straight Super League title in October.

Ramires, 28 million euros

The Brazilian had fallen out of favor with then English champions Chelsea, who probably couldn't believe their luck when Jiangsu offered to take him off their hands in January for a fee that was, for a short time, an Asian record. He has returned five goals in five games for SIPG but will form a formidable midfield partnership with Oscar in incoming manager Andre Villas-Boas's team next season. — AFP

OSCAR CLEARED FOR RECORD BREAKING SHANGHAI MOVE

SHANGHAI: Chelsea's Oscar said he was looking forward to joining his "new family" yesterday after Shanghai SIPG sealed terms on what will be China's fifth Asian-record signing in less than a year. The 25-year-old Brazil midfielder, snared for a reported £60 million (70.5 million euros), becomes just the latest top player in his prime lured to the mega-rich Chinese Super League. He is due to finalize the deal in Shanghai in the "coming days", said the Chinese club, which is coached by ex-Tottenham Hotspur manager Andre Villas-Boas.

"I'm very happy to sign to SIPG. This is an important day for me to join to my new family in China," Oscar said in a video statement released by SIPG. As well as Asia's record signing, Oscar will also become Chelsea's biggest sale, beating compatriot David Luiz's £50 million move to Paris Saint Germain in 2014.

Chinese Super League clubs have already splashed out more than \$400 million on players this year, after President Xi Jinping laid out a vision of turning the country into a football power. Chinese teams broke the Asian record three times in just 10 days in the January-February transfer window, and moved it still higher when Brazil's Hulk joined SIPG for 55.8 million euros in July. Significantly, Chinese clubs are now competing with European rivals for world-class players, who are opting for China's astronomical pay packets over the chance of a career in football's top leagues.

Twenty-somethings

Oscar's ex-Chelsea team-mate Ramires 29, and Alex Teixeira, 26, are other highly rated Brazilians in their twenties to join the Super League for record sums this year. Other world-renowned players in China include Hulk and Jackson Martinez, both 30, and Ezequiel Lavezzi and Graziano Pelle, both 31. According to reports, some of the players are now among the highest paid footballers in the world.

A Chelsea statement said Oscar will join SIPG at the start of the January transfer window, noting he has won



STOKE CITY: In this Tuesday, Oct 27, 2015 file photo Chelsea's Oscar runs with the ball during the English League Cup Fourth Round soccer match between Stoke City and Chelsea at the Britannia Stadium. — AP

the Premier League, League Cup and Europa League titles during his four-and-a-half years at the London club. "Shanghai SIPG has formally completed the transfer agreement of Brazil football player Oscar with Chelsea," the Chinese club said on its official social media account.

"Oscar will arrive in Shanghai in the coming days to officially join SIPG." He has been a target of Shanghai's new manager Villas-Boas since the Portuguese managed Tottenham Hotspur in the 2012/13 season, but opted to join Chelsea instead. Last week Chelsea boss Antonio Conte, when asked to comment on Oscar's

impending transfer, called China's financial muscle "a danger for all teams in the world".

Chinese state media has also warned of a "bubble" developing in China's football industry, saying total spending this year had topped \$1 billion. Communist Party mouthpiece the People's Daily said 8 billion yuan (\$1.15 bn) had been spent in 2016, a sum which "far exceeded the economic value brought to the league". The break-neck spending shows no sign of slowing, however, with Argentine forward Carlos Tevez also expected to move to China when the transfer window opens in January. — AFP

PLASTIC NOT PERFECT FOR CELTIC COACH RODGERS

GLASGOW: Celtic manager Brendan Rodgers admits he's not a fan of plastic pitches as the Scottish champions prepare to take on Hamilton. The runaway leaders play Hamilton on their FIFA-approved synthetic surface today as they bid to maintain their 14-point gap ahead of bitter rivals Rangers at the top of the Scottish Premiership. Rodgers, whose side defeated Kilmarnock 1-0 on their artificial pitch earlier this season, hopes to see his side extend their 21-match unbeaten run in all competitions in Scotland this season.

"It is always difficult. Any coach or manager will tell you, it is always a different game on a plastic pitch," said Rodgers. "I have yet to see a good game on a plastic pitch but I have to respect that the conditions for every club are different. "Hamilton are a football club that has produced many great young players so they have a way of working and that's what works for them, which is absolutely fine-I respect that."

The former Liverpool and Swansea boss says the surface will have a negative impact on his side's free-flowing style and said it made it hard for the players to produce an entertaining spectacle for the supporters. "In global football, most people will tell you that plastic pitches aren't ideal, and that's where you feel for supporters because are they seeing the best game of football possible? "For us we have to turn up, be professional and look to get the job done. "I think it is about going there and getting a result. "Like I say, I have never seen a good game of football on a plastic pitch. "It brings lots of different elements to the game. It brings unpredictability to the game that you wouldn't see in normal circumstances.

Tough test

"I have seen a number of games on plastic pitches and been involved in a number of games on plastic pitches. I have yet to see a good one." It is a quick rematch between the two sides as Celtic came out 1-0 winners over Hamilton at Parkhead a week ago. Rodgers, who will be without Australian international midfielder Tom Rogic due to an ankle knock, said he expected an equally tough test today.

"They were a tough team to break down the last time we played them and it is on an AstroTurf pitch, of course, which makes it even more difficult," said Rodgers. "So we will go expecting another tough game but looking to continue with our sequence of good results," added the 43-year-old Northern Irishman.

Meanwhile, his Rangers counterpart, Mark Warburton, says he's not looking to leave Rangers any time soon after he was linked with the England Under-21 job vacated by new England manager Gareth Southgate. Warburton, who just a few weeks ago was coming under pressure from Rangers fans following a poor display in a 2-0 defeat to Hearts, is said to be being considered for the role by the Football Association due to his previous experience working in youth development. But the former Brentford boss, whose side take on Inverness Caledonian Thistle on Saturday looking for their fourth consecutive win, says he hasn't had any contact with the FA and claims he has unfinished business with Rangers. — AFP

MADRID FACES SEVILLA IN COPA DEL REY

MADRID: Real Madrid will play Sevilla in the Round of 16 of the Copa del Rey in a rematch of the European Super Cup final, while defending champion Barcelona will face Athletic Bilbao in a rematch of the Copa final two seasons ago. Madrid defeated Sevilla in extra time to win the Super Cup four months ago. The teams are only four points apart atop the Spanish league, with Madrid first and Sevilla third. Both made it to the knockout round of the Champions League.

Sevilla lost last season's Copa final to Barcelona, which is seeking its third straight title in Spain's second-most important club competition. Barcelona

won its record 28th Copa title last season, when Madrid was disqualified in the opening round for fielding an ineligible player. Atletico Madrid will play Las Palmas, the team it defeated 1-0 last weekend in its final Spanish league game of the year.

Valencia, still struggling under Coach Cesare Prandelli, will meet Celta Vigo, while Villarreal plays against Real Sociedad. Villarreal is fourth in the Spanish league, one spot ahead of Real Sociedad. The two second-division clubs in the draw, Cordoba and Alcorcon, will get to play each other. Deportivo La Coruna faces Alaves and Osasuna meets Eibar. The first-leg matches will be played in the first week of January.

Copa del Rey draw

Draw for the last 16 of the Spanish Copa del Rey, made yesterday:

Las Palmas v Atletico Madrid
Alcorcon v Cordoba
Athletic Bilbao v Barcelona
Real Madrid v Sevilla
Real Sociedad v Villarreal
Deportivo La Coruna v Alaves
Valencia v Celta Vigo
Osasuna v Eibar — AFP

SIMEONE HINTING AT EXTENDING CONTRACT

MADRID: Argentine coach Diego Simeone says he could stay at Atletico Madrid beyond his current contract, despite shortening it recently by two years until June 2018, in an interview published yesterday.

"It will be difficult to find a better team than Atletico in my future as a coach. So why not remain linked to a club I love?" he told Spanish sports daily Marca. "I have possibly found my place in the world, we will see," he added. In charge of Atletico since 2011, Simeone signed a contract in March 2015 that originally tied him to the club until June 2020. But the 46-year-old, who has been linked to many of Europe's top clubs, including Paris Saint-Germain, Arsenal and Inter Milan, in September reduced the contract to 2018 after talks with Atletico.

Simeone said that decision was in the best interests of the club, which he took to the Spanish league title in 2014 and to two of the last three Champions League finals. "I believe it is the best situation which we found to continue being demanding of myself and, at the same time, think of what is best for the club," he said. "If the club continues to want to count on us, and if it carries out the efforts it has been doing for this...we can possibly remain together," he added.

Atletico lost out on a first Champions League title to Real Madrid on penalties in May and finished just three points adrift of La Liga champions Barcelona. The club's form has stuttered this season and Simeone's side find themselves in sixth in La Liga with 28 points. Atletico are not in league action again until January 7 as La Liga takes a winter break over the new year. —AFP



ROME: Roma's Egyptian midfielder Mohamed Salah (C) runs with the ball during the Italian Serie A football match between Roma and Chievo Verona on December 22, 2016 at the Olympic Stadium. — AFP

ROMA POUNCE ON NAPOLI GAFFE WITH CHIEVO WIN

MILAN: A first-half free-kick from Stephan El Shaarawy sent Roma on their way to a precious 3-1 win over Chievo that moved them to within four points of Juventus on Thursday. With Juventus in Super Cup action in Doha this Friday against AC Milan but facing a relatively easy fixture with Crotona on their return, both Roma and Napoli were keen to stay on their tails in the final fixtures of 2016.

El Shaarawy was given a rare start by coach Luciano Spalletti and the former Milan forward paved the way for a classy win with an incisive free kick on the stroke of half-time that levelled Jonathan De Guzman's 37th minute opener. "His goal was a decisive factor for us," Spalletti later told Sky Sport.

Roma were superb after the break and Edin Dzeko fired the hosts into a 52nd minute lead with his 13th goal of the campaign. The Bosnian is now just one behind Serie A leader Mauro Icardi, who hit a brace for Inter Milan in a 3-0 win over Lazio on Wednesday. Dzeko spurned sev-

eral chances to tie and perhaps surpass Icardi in the later stages, before Diego Perotti put the result beyond doubt with a penalty on the stroke of full-time.

Roma's 11th win of the campaign tightened their grip on second spot and, although Juventus will be expected to restore their seven-point advantage when they face Crotona in their catch-up fixture in early February, the Giallorossi have stolen a march on Napoli. "The lads were brilliant tonight, from the first minute to the last," gushed Spalletti. "There was a slight risk after our defeat (to Juventus) last week but the lads went out and showed how much they wanted the points."

Napoli drop precious points

A last-gasp penalty from Manolo Gabbiadini saw Napoli grab a share of the spoils in a 3-3 draw at Fiorentina that nonetheless saw them drop two precious points. Napoli remain third but are seven points behind Juventus, three behind

Roma and one ahead of Lazio. AC Milan are fourth at one point further behind, but also have a catch-up game, away to Bologna, in February. After two consecutive defeats for Fiorentina, Napoli had a decisive swagger after a beautiful strike from Lorenzo Insigne flew over the head of Ciprian Tatarusanu and into the far corner of the Fiorentina net on 25 minutes. There was a hint of offside, and Fiorentina coach Paulo Sousa later hit out at the decision: "It happens, but all of us have to improve and we also have to help the referees to get better."

"We did well to fight our way back, but we deserved to win." But then Federico Bernardeschi's 52nd minute free-kick deflected off Jose Callejon's elbow to wrong-foot Pepe Reina in the Napoli net. Napoli looked to be back in command when Dries Mertens flicked a Faouzi Ghoulam cross past Tatarusanu in the 68th minute to restore the visitors' one-goal advantage, the Belgian remarkably hitting his eighth goal in just three games. — AFP



Diego Simeone

Sports



2016's most inspiring sports moments

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MIAMI: Timofey Mozgov #20 of the Los Angeles Lakers and Hassan Whiteside #21 of the Miami Heat jump ball during a game at American Airlines Arena. — AFP

HEATS CLINCH LAKERS FROM 19-POINT DEFICIT DURANT CARRIES WARRIORS TO AN EASY FINISH

MIAMI: Justise Winslow and Hassan Whiteside each finished with 23 points and 13 rebounds, and the Miami Heat rallied from 19 points down to beat the Los Angeles Lakers 115-107 on Thursday night. Winslow set a career high for points and tied a career best in rebounds for the Heat, who raised Shaquille O'Neal's No 32 jersey to the rafters in a half-time ceremony. Goran Dragic scored 21 and James Johnson added 19 for Miami, which snapped a three-game slide and went 3-3 on its six-game homestand. Lou Williams scored 27 points for the Lakers, who fell to 5-14 on the road. Nick Young scored 20 and D'Angelo Russell had 17.

WARRIORS 117, NETS 101

Kevin Durant had 26 points, nine rebounds and seven assists, and Golden State turned an ugly start into an easy finish. Klay Thompson

added 23 points for the Warriors, who opened a three-game road trip that leads into their NBA Finals rematch in Cleveland on Christmas. They didn't look ready while falling behind by 16 at halftime, but were back to their sometimes unstoppable selves while outscoring the Nets by 32 points over the final 24 minutes. Stephen Curry and Zaza Pachulia each finished with 15 points for the Warriors, who played without Draymond Green, who returned to the Bay Area early Thursday after the birth of his son, Draymond Jamal Green Jr. Brook Lopez scored 28 points for Brooklyn, but just five in the second half as the Nets dropped their fourth straight.

CLIPPERS 106, SPURS 101

Chris Paul scored 19 points before injuring his left hamstring to lead the Clippers to a win over the Spurs. Paul added seven rebounds

and six assists before leaving the game late in the third quarter. The Clippers used their bench in the fourth quarter to seal the victory, only the Spurs second on the road this season. The Clippers reserves outscored San Antonio's 58-33. The Spurs had started the season 15-1 on the road. Kawhi Leonard led the Spurs with 27 points and nine rebounds, while Pau Gasol added 19 points and eight rebounds.

CELTICS 109, PACERS 102

Isaiah Thomas had 28 points and nine assists, helping Boston to its fourth straight win. Avery Bradley and Jae Crowder each scored 15 points for the Celtics, who led 51-40 at halftime. Marcus Smart had 12 points, and Amir Johnson and Kelly Olynyk finished with 11 apiece. The Pacers pulled within four late in the game, but were unable to catch the Celtics

down the stretch. Jeff Teague led Indiana with 31 points and eight assists. Paul George and CJ Miles scored 19 points apiece, and Thaddeus Young had 15 points and 12 rebounds.

KNICKS 106, MAGIC 95

Derrick Rose scored 19 points, Kyle O'Quinn had 14 points and a career-high 16 rebounds, and the Knicks got the win at home. Carmelo Anthony and Willy Hernangomez each had 15 points for New York, which has won two in a row since a three-game losing streak. Kristaps Porzingis scored 12 points, and reserve Brandon Jennings had 12 assists in 22 minutes. Serge Ibaka led the Magic with 23 points and 10 rebounds. Evan Fournier scored 21 points. Orlando closed to 104-95 on Jeff Green's free throws with 1:29 left, but Rose scored with 1:08 remaining to help the Knicks close it out. — AP