



MP demands scrapping maid company due to high prices

Bedoons under rights panel • Speaker slams footage 'leakers'

MoI mulls fee hikes to plug budget deficit

KUWAIT: Director General of Residency Affairs Maj Gen Talal Maarafi said the most important reasons that made the interior ministry submit a proposal to increase fees is the deficit in the state's general budget, besides the real cost of services presented by the department, which are not in harmony with the current fees. He said the current fees have been in effect for 40 years without a change and most of them are selective, such as for visit and temporary residency permits.

"We are not against expats as they are our brothers. They live in Kuwait and earn their living here, and have a major role in building old and modern Kuwait as far as education, health and



Talal Maarafi

infrastructure are concerned, but the fee increase includes both expats and citizens," he told Al-Qabas daily.

Maarafi spoke about a new system to renew expats' residency permits online, adding several offers from companies are being studied to select the best.

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By B Izzak

KUWAIT: MP Safa Al-Hashem yesterday demanded in a draft law the scrapping of the newly-established company for the recruitment of maids from abroad because of its high prices. Hashem said in her proposal that the company was established in accordance with a law passed in 2015 by the National Assembly with the main objective of bringing down the highly inflated prices charged by private recruitment offices.

But the company, which began operations recently, is charging almost similar fees, which means it has failed to achieve the goals of its establishment and should be scrapped, she said. Under the said law, only one company has been established, Al-Durrah Company, which recently advertised recruitment of domestic helpers from Sri Lanka, demanding a price of around KD 1,000, which is almost the same as charged by private offices.

Meanwhile, reports said the Kuwaiti Embassy in Manila recently sent a report to the foreign ministry in which it explained that the cost for the recruitment of a domestic helper from the Philippines is only KD 370, including the airfare. Recruitment offices have been charging well over KD 1,000, which prompted MPs to pass the law to set up pub-



Safa Al-Hashem

lic shareholding companies for the recruitment of helpers with the aim to reduce prices.

Meanwhile, the Assembly's human rights defense committee yesterday decided to include the issue of stateless people or bedoons under its mandate in a bid to help resolve their decades-old problem. Head of the committee MP Adel Al-Damkhi said the committee decided to invite State Minister for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh for a meet-

ing to debate the establishment of the national human rights commission. He said the committee will pay an inspection visit to the central jail on Thursday and also decided to visit any facility where human rights abuses take place.

MP Mohammad Al-Dallal said yesterday that he will grill the new finance minister if he does not send the financial and economic reforms document to the Assembly before Feb 20 for a debate. Dallal asked the minister about the motives and the reasons behind the finance ministry's plans to impose taxes on individuals and companies, especially since taxation has a unique system under capitalism and does not apply to the Kuwaiti constitutional system. The Assembly will hold its regular session tomorrow amid demands to debate the hike in petrol prices, amendments to the health insurance on expatriates and others.

Separately, Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem vowed yesterday that those who leaked footage deemed offensive to the political leadership will be exposed and penalized. Ghanem linked between these people and those who helped impose a ban on Kuwaiti sports, which was lifted by FIFA a few days ago and which allowed the country to host the Gulf football championship.

News in brief

Saudis deny Israelis visas

ATHENS: Israeli players have been denied visas to participate in a speed chess championship hosted by Saudi Arabia this week, a vice president of the World Chess Federation (FIDE) said yesterday. Seven Israeli players had requested visas for the tournament on Dec 26-30. It would have marked the first time Saudi Arabia had publicly hosted Israelis as the Gulf state does not recognize Israel and there are no formal ties between them. Israel Gelfer, vice president of FIDE, whose Secretariat is based in Athens, told Reuters in an email that visas for the Israeli players "have not been issued and will not be issued". He said the tournament would go ahead as planned. It was not immediately clear if other delegations had been excluded but players from Qatar had suggested they may have been rejected.

Tunisia outraged over UAE curbs

ABU DHABI: The United Arab Emirates said yesterday that "security information" had caused the delays on Tunisian women on boarding flights to the Gulf state that caused an outcry in their home country. "We contacted our Tunisian brothers about security information that necessitated taking specific procedures," UAE Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Anwar Gargash said on his Twitter account. A number of Tunisian women said in recent days that their travel to the Gulf state on UAE airlines had been delayed and some had to undergo additional examination of their visas. That triggered angry reactions on social media and local Tunisian media. The Tunisian government said Friday it had asked the UAE ambassador for clarification, adding that the envoy said the decision was for only a short period and the restrictions had been lifted.

Fog disrupts UAE flights

DUBAI: Thick fog yesterday disrupted flights at major airports in the United Arab Emirates as thousands of foreign residents rushed to travel home for Christmas and the New Year. Dozens of flights were cancelled, diverted or delayed at the three main airports in the emirates of Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Sharjah. At Dubai airport, one of the busiest in the world, at least 17 flights were cancelled, as visibility dropped to just 100 m in some areas of the emirate. At least another 100 incoming flights were either diverted to nearby airports or delayed, according to the flight schedule at the airport. Emirates Airlines, which has a fleet of over 250 large planes, said it has cancelled 10 flight departures. Police warned motorists to be extremely cautious when driving in the fog.

Dozens dead in Philippine mall inferno

DAVAO, Philippines: At least 37 people, including call center staff from an American firm, are believed to have perished in a fire that tore through a shopping mall in the southern Philippine city of Davao, local authorities said yesterday. President Rodrigo Duterte, himself a Davao native, visited distraught relatives outside the burning building overnight but told them there was "zero" chance their loved ones had survived, witnesses told AFP.

Firemen found one body as the blaze was finally extinguished yesterday, Davao Mayor Sara Duterte - the president's daughter - told reporters. Firemen have concluded that all those trapped in the building are dead, she said, adding: "They assessed that no one would survive in that heat and with that thick, black smoke." The deadly fire adds fresh misery for the mainly Catholic Philippines at Christmas as the death toll from a tropical storm that hit the

south of the country Friday crossed 200 and with tens of thousands displaced by severe flooding and landslides.

The blaze started at the four-storey NCCC Mall Saturday morning, sending thick plumes of black smoke billowing into the sky over Davao. With low wages but strong English language skills, the Philippines is a popular destination for international companies to set up customer call centers. The building's top floor housed a 24-hour call centre for the US-based market research company SSI.

Jimmy Quimsing, a retired seaman, was one of the relatives desperately waiting for news. His 25-year-old son Jim Benedict worked at the call centre and had not been in contact since the fire broke out. Quimsing said he spoke to President Duterte and had been told to prepare for the worst. "He told us ... no one would survive under these circumstances," he told AFP. Duterte's special assistant Christopher Go confirmed the bulk of the president's comments to AFP. Paolo Duterte, the president's son and the vice mayor of Davao, also wrote on Facebook that fire officials had told him there was "zero" chance of anyone trapped surviving the blaze.

In a statement on its local Facebook

Ad firms using tools to help them read your mind

NEW YORK: Why did you splurge on that new pair of shoes? Or that pricey smartphone? More and more advertisers are trying to tap into the unconscious to drive the invisible forces that drive those spending decisions. Using gadgets to track eye movements, computer maps of faces to capture a momentary grin (approval) or squinting (anger), and sensors to measure perspiration or monitor brain activity, companies are mining consumers' raw emotions for information. Traditionally, ad firms have measured the success of their campaigns through consumer surveys, but that technique has its limits.

"It's not that people won't tell you, they actually can't tell you why they're making the decision they're making," said Jessica Azoulay, vice president of the market intelligence practice at Isobar, a digital marketing agency. The new techniques recognize that our purchase decisions are driven by both rational and emotional factors, and

reflect research showing the brain takes in information on different levels.

They "enable us to capture many different types of emotions and to be able to profile the emotions that are happening very granularly on a second by second basis," said Elissa Moses, chief executive of the neuro and behavioral science business at Ipsos, a consultancy and market research firm. "People won't be able to tell you that something irritated them in scene three or thrilled them in scene seven, but we'll know from looking at the facial coding," Moses said.

The technologies can help track if brands are maintaining their edge over competitors, and make ads more effective by determining what to highlight, for example whether to emphasize the distress of allergy symptoms or the relief of treatment when pitching medications. And the techniques are being applied to other industries, such as retail, which is experimenting on ways to attract customers in the Amazon era. "Ultimately there is a dance between the conscious and unconscious," Moses said, noting that "in order to actually buy a product, you have to make a conscious decision."

Some of the techniques were first employed in the 1970s, but now are being more widely adopted as equip-



DAVAO: Firefighters extinguish a fire at a shopping mall on Saturday. — AFP

ment has improved. An eye tracking test uses technology-enhanced glasses with a camera to record what a person is seeing on a television or in a store and read how long the eye settles on a particular cue. That can be combined with other methods, such as galvanic skin responses with sensors applied to a person's hand to read perspiration, and electroencephalography (EEG) which reads brain activity through sensors on a per-

son's head. The data is used to produce a "heat map" with yellow, orange or red "hotspots" that show where the person's eye fixated.

Techniques measuring arousal can signal whether an ad stands out amid today's media avalanche. Other tests that are becoming more popular seek to shed light on unconscious associations with products or shopping needs.

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NORWALK, Connecticut: Emily Safian-Demers of the French advertising company Ipsos uses eye-tracking for neuromarketing techniques on Dec 5, 2017. — AFP

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Amir receives Saudi Royal Court advisor

Defense Minister receives official invitation to visit Saudi Arabia



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Advisor at the Saudi Royal Court Prince Turki Bin Mohammad Bin Fahad Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud. —KUNA



Kuwaiti Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah meets with Advisor at the Saudi Royal Court Prince Turki Bin Mohammad Bin Fahad Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud.



His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah meets with Advisor at the Saudi Royal Court Prince Turki Bin Mohammad Bin Fahad Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud.



His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah and Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh.



His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah meets with Minister of Social Affairs and Labor and Minister of State for Economic Affairs Hind Al-Sabeeh.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received yesterday at Sief Palace Advisor at the Saudi Royal Court Prince Turki Bin Mohammad Bin Fahad Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, in presence of His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. The reception was attended by Acting Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Al-Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah. The Saudi guest later met with His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah as well.

Meanwhile, Prince Turki met with Kuwaiti First

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, and delivered to him an official invitation to visit Saudi Arabia from Saudi Crown Prince, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Prince Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud.

The meeting between Sheikh Nasser and Prince Turki focused on issues of mutual interest as well as topics connected with bilateral relations and means to develop them, the Defense Ministry's Public Relations Department said.

Earlier yesterday, His Highness the Amir received

His Highness the Crown Prince, National Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem, His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak and Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Hamad. Meanwhile, His Highness the Crown Prince received Ghanem, His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak, and Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. His Highness Sheikh Nawaf also met with Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Khaled Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh, Minister of State for National Assembly Affairs Adel

Musaed Al-Kharafi and Minister of Social Affairs and Labor and Minister of State for Economic Affairs Hind Al-Sabeeh.

In other news, His Highness the Amir sent a cable of condolences to the Philippines' President Rodrigo Duterte, expressing deepest sorrow and sympathy to those who fell victim to floods and landslides caused by Tropical Storm Tembin. His Highness the Amir wished for the swift recovery of those affected by the storm, which hit southern Philippines. His Highness the Crown Prince and His Highness the Prime Minister sent similar cables. —KUNA

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Local

10 schools to be offered to investors as part of plan to privatize education

CSC suspends hiring expatriate advisors in public sector

By A Saleh

KUWAIT: The supreme privatization council's advisory committee is currently considering setting a system to allow international companies to invest in Kuwait's educational sector. It aims to bring American, Chinese and Korean experiences to Kuwait using public-private-partnership (PPP) or build-operate-transfer (BOT) systems and attracting these companies by offering more incentives and facilities that would achieve long and short-term profits, said informed sources.

The sources added that the purpose of offering 10 public schools for privatization is driven by a need to gradually develop education through PPP, making use of the sums allocated for education in the budget as well as cutting the cost of education, bearing in mind that education consumes around 15 percent of the state budget. The sources said that Ministry of Education's technical office statistics show that educating a public school student costs the state KD 15,000 until finishing high school, a medicine student annually costs KD 100,000 while other university students annually cost KD 7,350 per student, which are large sums compared to the cost of studying in European and American universities.

The sources also noted that the privatization project will help the private sector invest in education, especially since teachers' salaries already consume 93 percent of Kuwait's education budget. Moreover, the sources said Korean companies will be invited to invest in Kuwait in an experimental phase during

which the private sector will be given 10 schools to rebuild and run for 20 years.

Advisors' hiring

The Civil Service Commission (CSC) suspended appointing expatriate advisors in the public sector and restricted such positions to citizens alone as recommended by the Fatwa and Legislation Department, as part of a policy of replacing expatriates working in state departments with Kuwaitis. In a different concern, well-informed sources at CSC announced that the registration of children of Kuwaiti women in the job application system has not officially opened and that CSC is still technically studying the topic to set up the needed database, and start with jobs that cannot be filled by citizens.

Separately, the Credit Bank's deputy chairman and managing director Salah Al-Mudhaf said the bank had 'Kuwaitized' its staff members in record time. Speaking during the graduation of the first batch of newly-appointed employees at the bank's training center,



during which new recruits were briefed about the bank's regulations and loan conditions as well as other skills needed in their career.

Court cases

The criminal court yesterday ordered closing down the 'Wathakker' Islamic preaching center and sentenced its owner to five years in prison for slandering a Muslim doctrine. The criminal court also annulled the public prosecution's decision on shelving the 'Dow Chemical' report and ordered reopening the penal case filed against some officials. Meanwhile, the misdemeanor court sentenced a lawyer to three months

in prison over a hoax report and disturbing the authorities by calling the police operator and claiming the presence of a vehicle full of explosives outside his house. In another case, the court adjourned hearing a state security case filed against Abdullah Al-Saleh for slandering UAE and its rulers till Jan 21.

Cold wave expected

Meteorologist Abdul Aziz Al-Qarawi expected warm weather and southeasterly winds will continue until this evening, when a cold northwesterly moderate wind of speeds between 15-45 kilometers per hour will affect Kuwait. Qarawi added that this shift will make temperature drop by 6-8 degrees centigrade and that cold weather is predicted until the beginning of next week.



'Wathakker' center's owner jailed

Mudhaf stressed that youth are the nation's assets. He explained that the training course lasted for three months,

Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) officials. Meanwhile, the misdemeanor court sentenced a lawyer to three months

News in brief

Kuwait donation to reimburse 272 factories in Gaza

GAZA: A sum of \$2.1 million of the Kuwaiti donation for the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip will be disbursed to finance a number of industrial facilities damaged during the Israeli war, the Palestinian government said yesterday. Palestinian Minister of Public Works and Housing Mufeed Hasayneh said in a press statement that 272 destroyed industrial enterprises during the Israeli aggression would benefit from the sum. In the name of the Palestinian leadership and people, Hasayneh thanked His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) and the Kuwaiti people for their non-stop support to the Palestinian people. In October 2014, Kuwait pledged \$200 million as part of the \$5.4 billion donation made at Cairo's donors conference for the Gaza Strip. — KUNA

KPC signs LNG deal with Shell Global

KUWAIT: Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC) signed a long-term deal with Shell Global to receive supplies of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG), said a statement yesterday. A press release by KPC said that the deal would help attend to the increasing demand for energy in Kuwait. The LNG deal will provide fuel to power stations in Kuwait, the KPC indicated. It added that LNG is a clean source of energy that will protect the environment from pollutants. — KUNA

ALECSO key to keep hurdles at bay: League chief

CAIRO: The Arab League's Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO) is instrumental in staving off numerous challenges thrust upon the Arab region, the bloc's secretary general Ahmad Abul-Gheit said yesterday. In a meeting with ALECSO's newly-appointed director general of Kuwait Dr Saud Al-Harbi, the Arab League's head underlined the need for Arab nations to work closely together to ameliorate the region's educational and cultural sectors. Abul-Gheit acknowledged ALECSO's contributions towards overall growth and development, according to a statement by the Arab League. On the spread of radical ideologies, the statement cited the Arab League chief as saying that a solid education system can help promote the virtue of moderation across social spectrums. — KUNA

US Dollar stable against Kuwait Dinar

KUWAIT: The exchange rate of the US dollar was stable at KD 0.301, same as the Euro with KD 0.358, said the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) yesterday. On its daily bulletin, CBK added that the rate of the Sterling Pound was also stable at KD 0.403, while the Swiss Franc was down to KD 0.305 rate. The Japanese Yen remained stable at KD 0.002. — KUNA

Domestic helpers' trade network busted

KUWAIT: Detectives raided a luxury apartment and arrested several expat women who worked for a network that traded in domestic helpers. The owner swindled citizens and expats by sending helpers to work for a few days, who then escaped and returned to the apartment. A citizen complained to the domestic help department at the interior ministry's residency directorate against the office, saying that a helper worked for him for 48 hours, then escaped. A source said that an undercover agent called the office and hired three helpers, who were later arrested and led police to the apartment, where several other women were found.

Theft

An Egyptian man told Riqqa police that two employees, an Egyptian and a Filipino, stole from the till of a coffee shop they work in, and it was discovered they were making deposits into their personal accounts.

No injuries

Firemen put out a blaze in a pharmacy in Mubarakiya. Capital and Hilali centers responded and dealt with the fire. No injuries were reported. The blaze was caused by faulty wiring, according to investigations.

Search for ingrate son

A bedoon woman told Sabahiya police that her son, a citizen, beat her and her daughters, then escaped. The woman gave police medical reports as she lodged a complaint. The suspect is being sought by authorities. — Translated from the Arabic press



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Local

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A panoramic view of Kuwait City's skyline. —Photo by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Christians celebrate Xmas in churches around Kuwait

We are not blessed if we are greedy, angry: Catholic priest



Father Monching Atanacio



By Ben Garcia

KUWAIT: Except for the Eastern Orthodox Church which celebrates Christmas on Jan 7, Christians all over the world mark Christmas today. In Kuwait, some Christians observe Christmas through prayer services at various churches at midnight (the eve of Christmas), leading to the traditional sharing of gifts. Filipinos in Kuwait have a unique tradition in anticipation of Christmas Day. For nine consecutive days, they visit churches and attend devotional Mass (Simbang

Gabi) in the belief of a more prosperous life in the years ahead. There are about 250,000 Filipinos in Kuwait.

The Catholic Church in Kuwait has three churches - the Holy Family Cathedral in Kuwait City, Our Lady of Arabia Church in Ahmadi and the Saint Therese Church in Salmiya. These churches had schedules of nine days of Christmas Mass, which began in the early hours (4:30 am - 6:00 am) from Dec 16 to Dec 24. The Salmiya compound had additional church services, or what it calls anticipated Christmas Mass, from 9:00 pm, also for nine consecutive

days. All three churches were packed with Filipinos during these nine days.

In his message during the last day of 'Simbang Gabi' yesterday, Father Monching Atanacio urged attendees to focus more on the love of God and not on gifts or material blessings. "Mary was full of grace because she followed God," he said. He urged Christians to follow the model of Mary (the mother of Jesus) and why she is considered blessed. "People are not blessed if they are greedy, full of grudges and have anger in their hearts. They do not know

how to forgive - they prioritize money, power and fame instead," he said.

Christmas is not an official holiday in Kuwait, although some companies give the day off to Christian employees to celebrate with their loved ones, families, friends and community, with joyful carols, food and various fun activities, as long as it does not disturb the peace and harmony with others. Kuwait's constitution guarantees non-Muslims' absolute freedom of belief and the right to practice religion in accordance with its established customs.

Gold prices bounce back: Report

KUWAIT: Gold prices have rebounded in December following a two-month drop triggered by a looming decision by the US Federal Reserve to raise interest rate. Gold prices recorded the highest rate this year, hitting \$1,346 per ounce in September, as against roughly \$1,273 and \$1,161 per ounce in November and early this year respectively.

As the Federal Reserve raised interest rates to a range of 1.25 to 1.50 percent on December 13, gold prices amounted to around \$1,260 per ounce, compared with \$1,238 in the previous day. However, it left its rate outlook for the coming years unchanged even as policymakers projected a short-term jump in US economic growth from the Trump administration's proposed tax cuts.

The US central bank raised rates by a quarter of a percentage point to a range of 1.25 percent to 1.50 percent. It was the third rate hike this year. The recent US rate depreciation has pushed many investors to resort to gold instead of dollars since it is considered a safe haven in the event of economic crises. In this context, experts said that the dive in gold prices over the last couple of months was expected due to forecasts of the Federal Reserve's decision, expecting gold recovery at the advent of next year.

Sabaek Al-Kuwait Company's General Manager Rajab Hamed said there was a recent high demand for gold, occasionally hitting 50 percent especially regarding alloys, which are a "new and safe" investment source. Hamed anticipated gold prices to improve by over 10 percent in the first quarter of this year, believing that gold has proved firm in spite of repeatedly increased US interest rates this year.

Gold prices have rebounded this year following a hike in US interest rates, he said, adding that gold prices always nosedive with an approaching US decision to raise interest

rates. Commerce and Industry Ministry's Precious Metals' Department Acting Manager Saad Al-Saidi said local demand for gold during the last four months went down, as against the same period last year.

External gold quantities hit around 3,720 tons of different gold karats during the reported period, compared with 4,184 tons during the same period last year, he added. On consumers' indexes, he pointed out an increasing demand for alloys of different sizes during the last period, reflecting investors and citizens' desire to buy gold as a feasible investment opportunity.

Meanwhile, Ali and Nasser Al-Sayegh Jewellery Company's General Manager Nasser Al-Sayegh said gold prices in Kuwait are linked to the world bourse, and high or low gold prices depend on occasions, rather than world prices. Local jewelry sales often largely increase during Eid Al-Fitr and Eid Al-Adha as well as wedding parties, he pointed out. Kuwait's current growing demand for gold reflects investors' search for fresh opportunities, he said, estimating gold investment returns at a range of 10 to 15 percent. —KUNA



Local

Kuwait Finance House cooperates with UNHCR to aid Rohingya refugees

First bank to sign agreements with UN organizations in GCC

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) Group CEO Mazen Saad Al-Nahedh said that KFH is expanding its social role to include GCC, Arab and Global zones, adopting various projects and activities to serve all nations and uphold humanity, thus highlighting the cultural aspect of Kuwait and the human role which His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah has played to strengthen and enhance all means of cooperation and understanding among all nations and civilizations. KFH applies sharia principles to address society issues and achieve prosperity and growth for humanity. He indicated that KFH has donated \$540,000 to aid the distressed Rohingya Muslims through the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR).

Nahedh made his statements in a press release during the signing ceremony of a memorandum of understanding with UNHCR. This memorandum is the first of its kind at all Kuwait banks' level to be signed at the UN house. KFH has commenced a documented cooperation with the commission through its office in Kuwait to aid Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh and relieve their sufferings and the fierce circumstances they are living.

Honorable goals

Nahedh reiterated that KFH honorable goals is to work in the best interest of humanity regardless of religion, race, ethnicity or gender, whether on the economic level by presenting sharia compliant financial solutions or through social role through official channels at local and regional levels. He emphasized that KFH has managed to participate in global efforts of humanitarian foundations to encounter several crises and disasters in various countries whether through KFH Kuwait or KFH group branches in Turkey, Malaysia, Bahrain and Germany.

Nahedh reiterated that KFH is currently undergoing a full transformation process, while maintaining the bank's legacy and reputation as the most trusted Islamic bank. To achieve this vision, the bank focuses on distinction, innovation and social responsibility. He expressed his confidence that KFH contributions in social and human issues are considered as a bright and honorable aspect in its 40 years history.

First partnership

The head of the UNHCR in Kuwait Dr Hanan Hamdan said that this agreement is the first partnership between UNHCR Kuwait and the largest Islamic



KUWAIT: KFH and UNHCR officials pose for a group photo during the signing ceremony.

bank in Kuwait. This agreement is considered as an extension of KFH role and efforts as a reputable entity for aiding the needy. KFH has taken the initiative to aid refugees and the needy worldwide. This generous contribution to aid refugees worldwide namely the immediate donation and contribution to aid the Rohingya refugees is highly appreciated and recognized. This initiative reflects the extent of cooperation between the UNHCR and the private sector leaders in Kuwait namely KFH.

She indicated that this cooperation is a continuation of Kuwait's humanitarian efforts led by His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and matches the UNHCR goals. Kuwait has always been the leading country in humanitarian issues for all poor countries. Kuwait was granted in 2014 a global title for its humanitarian contributions and efforts as HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah was named and titled as the Leader of Humanity by UN. Also, Kuwait was listed among the top 10 donating countries for the UNHCR operations and projects during the period 2013 - 2015.

She added that the UNHCR in Kuwait is expecting that KFH generous initiative towards the Rohingya refugees would pave the way for better cooperation and a long term partnership to provide sustainable aid, mitigate the suffering of all refugees and shed more light on the refugees crises. KFH contribution would help 3,794 families of the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.

Dr Hamdan expressed her hope that this agreement would be the cornerstone for a sustainable and long term partnership with KFH to ensure a better future for all refugees worldwide namely the Rohingya refugees' families who depend on the

UNHCR and its partners from the private sector to provide them with an honorable life. "We hope that all other entities would follow KFH track and participate in the honorable humanitarian work," she said.

The agreement comprises cooperation and coordination between the two parties in regard to KFH's wish to provide all possible means of care to refugees under UN supervision. KFH has donated \$540,000 to the UNHCR to respond urgently to the needs of the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.

The UNHCR has sought, since its inception in 1950, to condense its international efforts to protect all refugees around the world, solve their problems and ensure their safety. Accordingly, the UNHCR is stationed in more than 130 countries worldwide with 11,000 employees while 90 percent of them working in the disastrous and conflict areas. Accordingly, the UNHCR has gained the trust of international community and this has enabled it to aid and help more than 50 million refugees to rebuild their lives. Also it is the only UN organization which was awarded the Noble prize twice.

Pledging conference

The state of Kuwait has presided, in cooperation and coordination with the UNHCR, European Union and other UN organizations, the International Humanitarian Pledging Conference in Geneva on 23rd October which was specially organized to address the immediate humanitarian response plan to the needs of the Rohingya Refugees Minority in Bangladesh. Kuwait announced the donation of \$15 million in which several official and private entities have participated as part of Kuwait's humanitarian efforts to mitigate the impact of the catastrophe and respond to



KFH Group CEO Mazen Saad Al-Nahedh (right) and head of the UNHCR in Kuwait Dr Hanan Hamdan sign the memorandum of understanding.

the international efforts aiming to relieve the suffering of the Rohingya Refugees.

As conflicts and disasters have increased, the latest records indicate that the numbers of refugees have increased. The number of refugees reached 65.6 million. The Syrian crises is considered currently one of the major crises where the number of refugees reached 5.3 million in addition to 6.3 million internal refugees. The situation does not differ much in Yemen where nearly one million refugees have migrated internally. The latest Rohingya crises was the last. It was described as the fastest growing humanitarian crises worldwide. The number of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh approximated 900,000 refugees including 626,000 refugees which have fled to Bangladesh before the outbreak of the violence this year.

Public Works Minister seals mega deal



KUWAIT: Minister of Public Works Hussam Al-Roumi (second left) attends a ceremony to announce signing a deal for the 'Barayeh Salem' project. —KUNA

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Minister of Public Works Hussam Al-Roumi and the National Fund for Small and Medium Enterprise Development (SMEs) have co-signed a deal for a key cultural project in Salmiya area known as 'Barayeh Salem.' In a speech after the deal was finalized, Roumi, who is also Minister of State for Municipal Affairs, said that it was imperative to allow the nation's youth the chance to translate their ambitious thoughts into success stories. He pointed out that a growing number of youngsters have forayed into the business world, where a number of develop-

ment projects are currently in the works. On the idea behind the project, SMEs' chairman Abdullah Al-Jouaaan said that the sprawling promenade would conjure memories of yesteryear while allowing fledgling entrepreneurs to explore new ventures. He added that such projects fit into His Highness the Amir's vision of transforming Kuwait into a financial and commercial hub. Set in one of Salmiya's most historic precincts amid lush greenery, kiosks and a parking lot, 'Barayeh Salem' is set to provide visitors with the ultimate shopping experience. —KUNA

Arab housing ministers' meeting makes proper resolutions: Official

RABAT: The 34th session of the Arab housing ministers' council on Saturday made proper resolutions regarding recommendations submitted by the executive bureau, said a Kuwait official. Speaking on the sidelines of the session of the council, Director General of the Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW) Bader Al-Wugayyan said the meeting discussed recommendations submitted by the executive council and made proper resolutions. He added that the conferees approved to hold a housing conference in Bahrain. The council also endorsed the executive bureau's membership of the council for the 2018-19, he added.

He noted that the meeting set a place and a time for holding the 35th session. Today's meeting was preceded by the second Arab ministerial forum on housing and urban development, in Rabat on December 21-22, themed: "Implementation of the new urban plan in the Arab region," he explained. During the forum, the conferees reviewed the reality of sustainable urbanization



RABAT: Director General of the Public Authority for Housing Welfare Bader Al-Wugayyan attends the 34th session of the Arab housing ministers' council. —KUNA

in the Arab region, and how to ensure an adequate and safe housing to achieve comprehensive social justice, he noted.

The forum saw sharing expertise among Arab countries involved in the field of planning and sustainable human settlements and discussed means to implement the principles of good urban management, build capacities and plan, manage human settlements, improve urban environmental sustainability, address climate change, protect natural resources and achieve sustainable development, he concluded. —KUNA

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New UN sanctions an 'act of war': N Korea

In 'China's Jerusalem', faith trumps Sunday School ban

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LANAO DEL NORTE: People look at the bodies of victims who died during Tropical Storm Tembin in Lanao del Norte on the southern Philippine island of Mindanao. Tens of thousands have been forced from their homes by a tropical storm that battered the southern Philippines leaving at least 200 dead. —AFP

Philippines storm death toll tops 200

Scores missing; tens of thousands displaced

MANILA: More than 200 people have been killed and scores were missing in the southern Philippines yesterday after a tropical storm triggered severe flooding and landslides that also wrecked Christmas for tens of thousands of survivors. Tropical Storm Tembin lashed Mindanao Island, home to 20 million people, on Friday with strong gusts and torrential rain, wiping out at least one mountain village and prompting a massive rescue operation. Police said 208 people were confirmed dead and 164 remained missing, while more than 40,000 had fled their homes for evacuation camps as Tembin roared out into the South China Sea yesterday.

A total of 70,000 have been displaced or otherwise affected by the storm, according to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), which warned that continued heavy rain could hamper the search for survivors. "People left everything behind when they fled for their lives," the IFRC's Philippines operations and programs manager Patrick Elliott said in a statement. The archipelago nation is pummeled by major storms every year, many of them deadly.

Mindanao tends to be less affected and officials said

this may have caused many to ignore warnings to move to safer ground. Footage showed vast tracts of land on the island submerged by brown water, often waist-deep, with streets turning into rivers. Local police said 135 people were killed and 72 missing in the northern section of Mindanao, while 47 were dead and 72 missing in the impoverished Zamboanga peninsula on its western side. Another 26 people perished with 20 missing in the province of Lanao del Sur in the centre of the island, based on an updated official tally there.

Village erased

One of the places hit hardest was the mountain village of Dalama, which was virtually wiped off the map as roaring

floodwater carried away 103 houses. Footage on ABS-CBN showed houses there destroyed or engulfed by floodwater and rescuers retrieving the body of a girl buried in a landslide.



Tropical storm triggered severe flood, landslides

Police, soldiers and volunteers used shovels and their bare hands to dig through mud and debris in their search for survivors.

"The flood was already close and the people were not able to get out from their homes," Armando Sangcopan, an elderly male survivor, told the station.

"We called for forced evacuation, pre-emptive evacuation in certain areas. We are saddened by the (large) numbers of casualties," Romina Marasigan, spokeswoman for the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council, told reporters in Manila.

In the town of Kabasalan in Zamboanga, dozens of families huddled in the homes of neighbors on Christmas Eve, two

days after floods carried off 40 houses, killing three people with one missing, said local civil defense chief Junalyn Maravillo. "This is a disaster. They don't think about Christmas. All they think about is what they will eat for today," she said. Pope Francis said in Rome he was praying for storm victims in the Philippines, where some 80 percent of the population is Catholic.

"May the merciful God welcome the souls of the dead and comfort those who suffer from this calamity," he said. The storm swept into the South China Sea before dawn yesterday after hitting the western tourist island of Palawan overnight Saturday, the state weather service said. "So far zero casualties, but we have accounts of some people missing," Palawan civil defense chief Zaldy Ablana told DZMM radio yesterday.

But in a Palawan fishing village, a 53-year-old man was killed by a crocodile while securing his boat in a river. Tembin struck less than a week after Tropical Storm Kai-Tak left scores dead and more than 20 missing in the central Philippines, straining the disaster-prone nation's already stretched resources. The deadliest typhoon to hit the country is still Haiyan, which killed thousands and destroyed entire towns in heavily populated areas of the central Philippines in November 2013.—AFP

'10,000 refugees' to be relocated from Libya to EU

ROME: Up to 10,000 people stranded in refugee camps and detention centers in Libya could be relocated to Europe in 2018, the Italian government said yesterday. The initiative would be part of an attempt by EU countries to address the deteriorating conditions in Libya, where thousands of people are held captive in inhumane conditions. "In 2018, up to 10,000 refugees will be able to come to Europe without risk, through humanitarian corridors," Italian Interior Minister Marco Minniti said in an interview with the newspaper La Repubblica.

The announcement comes after a group of 162 "vulnerable" people, from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia and Yemen, were evacuated from Libya and arrived by military plane in Rome on Friday. The group included single mothers, unaccompanied children and handicapped people, and was the first time refugees and migrants had been relocated directly to Europe by the UN's refugee agency (UNHCR).

About 400,000 migrants are in Libya, including roughly 36,000 children, the UN children's agency UNICEF and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said earlier this month. In 2018, the IOM aims to repatriate 30,000 migrants to their home countries as part of a voluntary return program. Around 15,000 have been sent back this year. "In accordance with the objectives of the International Organization for Migration, 30,000 migrants without right to asylum will be able to be repatriated to their countries on a voluntary basis," in 2018, Minniti said.

"With the help of the Libyan authorities, we have constructed a new management model on the other side of the Mediterranean." Libya has long been a transit hub for migrants seeking a better life in Europe, but



TRIPOLI: Libya's unity government Prime Minister Fayez Al-Sarraj (right) meets with Italy's Foreign Minister Angelino Alfano (left) in the capital Tripoli on December 23, 2017. —AFP

people smugglers have stepped up their lucrative business since the chaos following the 2011 revolution. Last month, US television network CNN broadcast video footage appearing to show migrants being sold as slaves near the Libyan capital Tripoli, sparking international outrage.

International organizations are now able to "visit reception centers and improve their living conditions," Minniti said, adding that the conditions were currently

"unacceptable". Italy also needs to take "credible" measures to work with the Libyan coastguard to better control the "illegal" influx of migrants arriving by sea, he said. Sea arrivals to Italy are down a third this year, from almost 180,000 people in 2016 to just under 119,000 in 2017, which includes nearly 15,000 unaccompanied children, according to UNICEF and IOM. Hundreds of people also drowned trying to make the treacherous journey across the Mediterranean.—AFP

Turkey fires more than 2,700 in latest post-coup purges

ANKARA: The Turkish government yesterday ordered the sacking of more than 2,700 people working in public institutions over alleged links to "terror" groups, in the latest round of purges since last year's failed coup. In a separate emergency decree, the country's defense procurement agency was ordered to answer to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan instead of the defense ministry, in a move widely viewed as a further expansion of his powers.

Turkey's intelligence service (MIT) also came under Erdogan's control in August. A total of 2,756 people including academics, soldiers and military personnel were removed from different bodies including the interior, foreign and defense ministries, according to the Official Gazette. All those dismissed were either members of "terror" organizations or had links to structures which were acting against national security, it said. 17 Turkish institutions were also ordered to close, including two newspapers and seven associations.

More than 140,000 people including judges, lawyers and academics have been sacked or suspended since a failed coup in July last year, while some 55,000 people have been arrested over suspected links to US-based Islamic cleric Fethullah Gulen and the coup attempt. Turkey claims Gulen and his Hizmet (service) movement, which it calls the "Fethullah Terrorist Organization", ordered and conducted the attempted coup. Gulen, who's lived in self-imposed exile in Pennsylvania since 1999, denies any links to terrorism and the failed putsch.—AFP

International

New UN sanctions an 'act of war,' North Korea declares

Pyongyang vows to punish those who supported new resolution

BEIJING: The latest UN sanctions against North Korea are an act of war and tantamount to a complete economic blockade against it, North Korea's foreign ministry said yesterday, threatening to punish those who supported the measure. The UN Security Council unanimously imposed new sanctions on North Korea on Friday for its recent intercontinental ballistic missile test, seeking to limit its access to refined petroleum products and crude oil and its earnings from workers abroad.

The UN resolution seeks to ban nearly 90 percent of refined petroleum exports to North Korea by capping them at 500,000 barrels a year and, in a last-minute change, demands the repatriation of North Koreans working abroad within 24 months, instead of 12 months as first proposed. The US-drafted resolution also caps crude oil supplies to North Korea at 4 million barrels a year and commits the Council to further reductions if it were to conduct another nuclear test or launch another ICBM.

In a statement carried by the official KCNA news agency, North Korea's foreign ministry said the United States was terrified by its nuclear force and was getting "more and more frenzied in the moves to impose the harshest-ever sanctions and pressure on our country". The new resolution was tantamount to a complete economic blockade of North Korea, the ministry said. "We define this 'sanctions resolution' rigged up by the US and its followers as a grave infringement upon the sovereignty of our Republic,

as an act of war violating peace and stability in the Korean peninsula and the region and categorically reject the 'resolution'," it said.

"There is no more fatal blunder than the miscalculation that the US and its followers could check by already worn-out 'sanctions' the victorious advance of our people who have brilliantly accomplished the great historic cause of completing the state nuclear force", the ministry said. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un on Nov. 29 declared the nuclear force complete after the test of North Korea's largest-ever ICBM test, which the country said puts all of the United States within range.

Kim told a meeting of members of the ruling Workers' Party on Friday that the country "successfully realized the historic cause of completing the state nuclear force" despite "short supply in everything and manifold difficulties and ordeals owing to the despicable anti-DPRK moves of the enemies". North Korea's official name is the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). South Korea's foreign ministry told Reuters it is aware of the North Korean statement on the new sanctions, again highlighting its position that they are a "grave warning by the inter-

national community that the region has no option but to immediately cease reckless provocations, and take the path of dialogue for denuclearization and peace".

'Balance of force'

The North Korean foreign ministry said its nuclear weapons were a self-defensive deterrence not in contradiction of international law.

“New sanctions tantamount to economic blockade”

"We will further consolidate our self-defensive nuclear deterrence aimed at fundamentally eradicating the US nuclear threats, blackmail and hostile moves by establishing the practical balance of force with the US," it said. "The US should not forget even a second the entity of the DPRK which rapidly emerged as a strategic state capable of posing a substantial nuclear threat to the US mainland," it added.

North Korea said those who voted for the sanctions would face its wrath. "Those countries that raised their hands in favor of this 'sanctions resolution' shall be held completely responsible for all the consequences to be caused by the 'resolution' and we will make sure for ever and ever that they pay heavy price for what they have done." The North's old allies China and

Russia both supported the latest UN sanctions. Tension has been rising over North Korea's nuclear and missile programs, which it pursues in defiance of years of UN Security Council resolutions, with belligerent rhetoric coming from both Pyongyang and the White House.

In November, North Korea demanded a halt to what it called "brutal sanctions", saying a round imposed after its sixth and most powerful nuclear test on Sept 3 constituted genocide. US diplomats have made clear they are seeking a diplomatic solution but proposed the new, tougher sanctions resolution to ratchet up pressure on North Korea's leader. China, with which North Korea does some 90 percent of its trade, has repeatedly called for calm and restraint from all sides. China said on Saturday the new resolution also reiterated the need for a peaceful resolution via talks and that all sides needed to take steps to reduce tensions.

Chinese state-run tabloid the Global Times said on Saturday the tougher resolution was aimed at preventing war. It suggested the United States had wanted an even harsher resolution, and noted there was no indication in the resolution that the United Nations could grant the United States permission for military action. "The difference between the new resolution and the original US proposal reflects the will of China and Russia to prevent war and chaos on the Korean Peninsula. If the US proposals were accepted, only war is foreseeable," it said in an editorial. — Reuters

UN vote a setback but US still 'a key' to Mideast peace

WASHINGTON: Washington's latest overwhelming defeat at the United Nations may have been an embarrassment, but any claim it has lost its role as Middle East peace mediator will likely prove premature. A huge majority of UN member states, including close US allies and major aid recipients, voted Thursday to reject President Donald Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

Underscoring the significance of the defeat, US ambassador Nikki Haley had warned that Trump would be watching and that she would be "taking names" of countries who let him down. But-again-Trump's "America First" policy delivered an "America Alone" result, leaving some Palestinians crowing that the United States can no longer serve as peace mediator. Vice President Mike Pence had already postponed a trip he was due to make to the region this week, after Palestinian and Arab Christian leaders had proved reluctant to meet him.

Peace broker

So, perhaps Washington will have to keep its powder dry for a few weeks as dust settles, some experts acknowledge. But if there is ever to be a long-elusive peace deal between Israel and the Palestinians, only one broker can deliver it. "There's been peaks and valleys before on this issue," said David Makovsky, a peace process veteran and senior fellow of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. "If I had a dollar every time people said 'Oh, it's over now, the US is not the broker...'" he said ironically. Dan Shapiro, who served as former president Barack Obama's ambassador to Israel, dismissed the vote as a "pathetic UN circus" and urged Washington to refocus on its goal. "What is US strategy to end the conflict, achieve two states, avoid permanent binational reality? Or at least keep those goals alive?" he demanded, on Twitter.

That strategy should reveal itself in the coming weeks or months, when Trump's son-in-law and peace envoy Jared Kushner reveals his hotly anticipated blueprint. Almost since Trump has been in office Kushner and his fellow real estate lawyer Jason Greenblatt have been shuttling between the White House and the region drawing up plans. Few details have leaked, but Washington gossip assumes it will be a less prescriptive version of the plan to see Israel and Palestine negotiate the borders of two states.

Kushner and Greenblatt initially made a good impression on leaders in the region, despite Palestinian fears that Trump is sympathetic to Israeli settlement building on occupied land. But America's unilateral decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital without the parties first agreeing a division of sovereignty in the holy city outraged Palestinians. Planned meetings with Pence were cancelled and, at the United Nations on Thursday Palestinian envoys tasted bitter victory when the world largely united to condemn Trump's position.

Peace parameters

"One hundred twenty-eight versus nine—that's a massive setback for the United States of America," Ambassador Riyad Mansour said, after the vote. But if the Palestinians are now hoping for a more convenable mediator, they stand to be disappointed. France—along with other key US allies like Britain, Turkey and Saudi Arabia—voted to censure Trump, but French envoy Ambassador Francois Delattre played down its importance.

"Today's resolution simply reaffirms the international law that applies to Jerusalem," he told reporters. "It is more important than ever to unite the international community behind agreed peace process parameters, including of course the United States," he said. Of Washington's mediation, the ambassador added: "Everyone knows the special role and weight they have in this dossier." So, however the Palestinians fell today after a rare procedural victory, next year they may find themselves obliged to engage with whatever new plan Kushner comes up with.

Makovsky argued that Trump had never ruled out a Palestinian capital in east Jerusalem, and said US officials should have gone on Arab television to explain this. "Look at what the guy said: that he wanted to leave this open to the parties to negotiate whatever sovereignty arrangements they want, including the religious sites," he argued. "So I wouldn't say this is dead and buried," he said. "My feeling is that if Kushner and Greenblatt actually put forward a peace plan in the first quarter of 2018, I think [the Palestinians] would have to take it seriously." —AFP

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International

Britain homelessness becomes a 'national crisis'; Christmas helps

Thousands of people forced to sleep in cars, trains, buses

LONDON: Volunteers at a drop-in centre in north London hand out food, healthcare and advice to homeless people as they do every Christmas-except that this year, the numbers needing help have reached crisis point. At a school emptied of children for the holidays, visitors are offered a hot meal and a chat, dental and medical check-ups, and even a sewing repair service for damaged sleeping bags.

The pop-up centre is among 13 set up across Britain by homelessness charity Crisis to provide some festive cheer to an estimated 4,500 people who might otherwise be on the streets. Among those stopping by for a cup of tea before Christmas was Paula, a 48-year-old former care worker who spent three months living in her car after being evicted following problems with her landlord. "My car was my safest bet because I could lock the doors, but it wasn't warm-luckily it was summer," she said.

It was also deeply uncomfortable and exacerbated an existing back problem, to the point that she collapsed and had to be taken to hospital. She has since found a new place to live, but Crisis warned that cases like hers are increasingly common, estimating that thousands of people across Britain are forced to sleep in cars, trains, buses and tents. These "hidden" homeless are in addition to the more than 9,000 people living on the streets in England at any one time, up 134 percent since 2011, according to a scathing report by lawmakers published this week. The MPs said the growth was "appalling".

adding: "The extent of homelessness across England is a national crisis."

Housing shortages

Opposition Labor lawmaker Jeremy Corbyn highlighted the plight of rough sleepers in his Christmas message yesterday, as well as that of an estimated 78,000 households who are living in temporary, often sub-standard accommodation. He has previously described it as a "national disgrace". Crisis chief executive Jon Sparkes said there were numerous reasons why people lost their homes, including the breakdown of relationships, but the biggest recent factor has been the ending of a private sector tenancy. "What's becoming really clear to us is that the impact of not building social houses, the impact of spiraling cost of housing, the impact of welfare reform and cuts to benefits is creating and driving a really worrying growth in rough sleeping and broader homelessness," he said.

The MPs said the government's attitude in the face of a growing problem had been "unacceptable complacent". They too warned about the impact of a lack of affordable, decent homes, calling for a "renewed focus" on housing policy. Challenged on the subject earlier this month, Prime Minister Theresa May said the government was investing £500 million (563 million euros, \$668 million) in tackling homelessness. Speaking in the House of Commons, she also noted measures announced in last month's annual



'National disgrace' thousands living on the streets



LONDON: Photo shows a homeless person sleeping rough by the entrance to a money exchange shop in central London. —AFP

budget to increase the supply of affordable housing. "We are going to be a government who put a clear focus on housing, on building the homes that people need, on ensuring that people are given help to get into those homes, and on acting to prevent homelessness before it happens," she said. At the drop-in centre, volunteer

Mhari Colvin, who has worked with Crisis for 13 years, reflected on "just how easy it is for people to become homeless". "They are just you and me, they're the same people, they've just had one or two runs of bad luck and it can be just one thing and their whole world falls apart," she said.—AFP

News in brief

Gunmen kill 3 at cafe

CAIRO: Masked gunmen opened fire on a cafe south of the Egyptian capital, killing three people, security officials said yesterday. The attack, which took place overnight in the village of Al-Ayat about 50 kilometers from Cairo, left at least five others wounded, they said. While the motivation was unclear officials suspect it was a criminal incident rather than terrorism. State-run newspaper Akhbar Al-Youm, citing witnesses, said two attackers arrived on a motorcycle and opened fire on people in the cafe before fleeing. Security officials arrived at the scene and also interviewed injured people in hospital to try to identify and arrest the attackers, the newspaper reported.

American IS fighter

WASHINGTON: A federal judge has ruled that the Pentagon must allow an American Islamic State fighter captured in Iraq access to a lawyer, following a lawsuit filed by the American Civil Liberties Union. Judge Tanya S Chutkan of the Federal District Court in Washington ruled Saturday the ACLU must be provided "temporary, immediate and unmonitored access" to establish whether the detainee wants it to act on his behalf. The Trump administration had argued the ACLU had no standing to file suit as it had not conferred with the man and could not "prove that it is pursuing his best interests," according to the 12-page ruling. But in a cutting criticism, Judge Chutkan slammed the government's position as "disingenuous at best"—given that the Defense Department was the only reason the ACLU had not met with the detainee, designated an "enemy combatant." The ruling also noted that the man requested counsel during questioning by FBI agents—describing the Defense Department's disregard of the request "until it decides what to do with the detainee and when to allow him access to counsel" as "remarkable and troubling."

Vanished submarine

BUENOS AIRES: A sonar search for the Argentine submarine that disappeared on November 15 with 44 crew members on board has made a new contact in the South Atlantic, according to the navy. It will be investigated by the remotely-operated Russian Panther Plus submarine, while the US oceanographic research vessel Atlantis continues exploring the search area, the navy announced Saturday. Argentina has received help from 13 countries in its search for the San Juan submarine. It has abandoned hope of finding survivors and is concentrating only on finding the vessel, which in its last message reported that seawater had entered the ventilation system, causing a battery on the diesel-electric vessel to short-circuit and start a fire. An unusual noise heard in the ocean near the last known position of the San Juan, three hours after its final contact, was "consistent with an explosion," the navy said in late November. Other reported contacts detected weeks ago amounted to nothing—with some arising from a fishing boat which sank years previously.

12th Palestinian dies

GAZA: A Palestinian teenager died yesterday, nine days after being wounded by Israeli fire during a Gaza protest against US recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, the health ministry said. Mohammad Sami Al-Dahidh, 19, from Gaza City was shot on December 15 during a demonstration on the Israeli border, ministry spokesman Ashraf Al-Qudra said. His death brings to 12 the number of Palestinians killed since US President Donald Trump announced on December 6 that he would recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital and move the US embassy there from Tel Aviv. Ten protesters have died after clashes with Israeli troops, two of them on Friday. Two others were killed in an Israeli air strike on Gaza earlier in the month. Among the Gazans killed in the December 15 clashes was Ibrahim Abu Thurayeh, who had lost his legs in an Israeli attack a decade ago.

Russians endorse Navalny candidacy; a challenge to Putin

MOSCOW: Thousands of Russians yesterday endorsed the candidacy of Alexei Navalny, seen as the only Russian opposition leader who stands a fighting chance of challenging strongman Vladimir Putin in a March vote. Thousands of people who back the charismatic 41-year-old lawyer were meeting in 20 Russian cities to nominate him as a candidate in the presence of electoral officials to boost his chances of making the presidential vote.

In Moscow alone, more than 700 people supported Navalny's candidacy as they gathered in a huge tent set up in a picturesque park on the snow-covered banks of the Moscow River. "I am hugely happy, I am proud to tell you that I stand here as a candidate of the entire Russia," the plucky Western-educated lawyer told supporters at the Moscow event which at times felt like a US campaign conference. "We are ready to win and we will win these elections." Navalny said before finishing his speech in a cloud of confetti. Two members of the Central Election Commission attended the Moscow event, Navalny's campaign said.

Earlier yesterday supporters in other Russian cities also endorsed his candidacy, including more than 800 people in the southern city of Rostov-on-Don, more than 900 in the Urals city of Yekaterinburg and over 700 in Novosibirsk in Siberia, his campaign said. Electoral officials have deemed Navalny ineligible to run due to a criminal conviction, saying "only a miracle" would help him get registered. Navalny, who has tapped into the anger of a younger generation who grew up under Putin and yearn for change, hopes that popular support for his Kremlin bid would pressure authorities into putting his name on the ballot.

'Thwart dishonest elections'

An independent candidate needs at least 500 votes to get registered with election authorities, according to legislation. Navalny has said he would get at least 500 Russians in each of the 20 cities to support his candidacy to make it harder for the authorities to reject his bid. Putin, 65, announced this month that he will seek a fourth presidential term, which would extend his rule until 2024 and make him the longest-serving Russian leader since dictator Joseph Stalin.

Opposed by token opposition candidates, he is widely expected to sail to victory. Yesterday, Navalny reiterated his

Florida orange industry hit by hurricane, disease

NEW YORK: Hit by Hurricane Irma and a citrus ailment known as "Yellow Dragon Disease," Florida orange growers are bracing for potentially the worst harvest in more than a half century. Forecasters are projecting a yield of 46 million boxes of oranges for the 2017-2018 Florida orange season, a drop of 33 percent from last year and the lowest output since at least 1944-1945, according to the US Agriculture Department.

Some areas have lost as much as 90 percent of their fruit due to winds from Irma, or root damage due to flooding. "It may take months for growers to gauge the true scale of the impact of Hurricane Irma and years to fully recover," said Shelley Rossetter, a spokeswoman for the Florida Citrus Department. Florida oranges aren't the only casualty of 2017, an unusually busy year for natural disasters in North America.

The massive "Thomas" wildfire, considered the second biggest fire ever in California, has damaged lemon and avocado crops in the region north of Los Angeles. Hundreds of acres of producing land have burned, said Ken Melban, vice president of industry affairs at the California Avocado Commission. "It's a very unusual fire, some areas have been burned several times," Melban said. "It has a tremendous impact on growers impacted by the fire." But Melban said it was difficult to determine the full



MOSCOW: Supporters of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny hold ballots as a symbol to nominate him as opposition candidate for the upcoming presidential election yesterday. —AFP

threat to call for a boycott of the polls if he did not get registered. "Thwart the elections if they are dishonest," he said. With the result of the March vote a foregone conclusion, turnout could be low, harming Putin's hopes for a clear mandate, observers say. "If Navalny is not allowed to run I am not going to vote," pensioner Marina Kurbatskaya said in Moscow. "I don't see anyone else who I want to become president."

Navalny has built a robust protest movement in the face of persistent harassment and jumped through multiple hoops as he campaigned across the country in an effort to shift attitudes amid widespread political ennui. He says he is the only Russian politician who has run a genuine Western-style political campaign, stumping for votes in far-flung regions. Many critics scoff at Navalny's Kremlin bid but the anti-corruption blogger says he would beat Putin in a free election if he had access to state-controlled television, the main source of news for a majority of Russians.

impact on avocado prices because of higher imports and the supply from California growers not touched by the fire.

Sour times

But in Florida, where the orange industry employs 45,000 and an economic impact in the state of \$8.6 billion, the outlook is grim, especially since the industry already faced myriad challenges even before Irma hit in September. Citrus greening disease—otherwise known as Yellow Dragon Disease—is a bacterial malady spread by insects that has begun to ravage crops, killing some orange trees and rendering other fruit small and sour.

Orange production in Florida, which peaked at 244 million cartons in 1998, fell last year to 67 million. There is no cure, so growers are focusing on ways to limit the spread of the disease, and on technologies and growing practices that could build resistant to the disease. "Things were starting to turn around," Rossetter said. "Before Hurricane Irma, Florida Citrus growers were expecting 75 million boxes, the first crop size increase in years."

But she warned that in the wake of the storm, "Without support from state and federal government, some growers may go out of business." The state orange industry also has come under pressure due to declining demand for orange juice as Americans turn to less sweet drinks and other alternatives. About 90 percent of Florida's oranges are used for juice. US consumption of fresh orange juice has fallen 18 percent in just four years, according to Nielsen data. At the same time, rising imports offer unwelcome competition. Brazil, a big producer of oranges for orange juice, could see an increase in output of 55 percent this year amid favorable weather conditions, according to USDA.—AFP

'Need new president'

Navalny shot to prominence as an organizer of huge anti-Putin rallies that shook Russia in 2011 and 2012 following claims of vote-rigging in parliamentary polls. The rallies gradually died down but he has been able to breathe new life into the protest movement this year, bringing out tens of thousands of mostly young protesters onto the streets. "Navalny is the only real opposition candidate," Sergei Dmitriyev, 60 said in the second city of Saint Petersburg where more than a thousand supporters gathered to support Navalny's bid. "We need a new president," added Alexander Semyonov, 18. Despite a litany of problems such as corruption, poor health-care and increasing poverty, opinion polls suggest Putin enjoys approval ratings of 80 percent. Asked why Navalny had been barred from running, Putin—who has refused to mention him by name in public—said the opposition was hoping for a "coup" but would not succeed.—AFP

Myanmar, accused of crackdown, invited to US-Thai exercise

WASHINGTON: The Myanmar military, which has been accused of ethnic cleansing against the country's Muslim Rohingya minority, has been invited back as an observer in a major multinational military exercise next year led by the United States and Thailand. Lieutenant Colonel Christopher Logan, a Pentagon spokesman, told Reuters that Thailand had invited Myanmar to take part in the annual Cobra Gold exercise, which involves thousands of US and Thai military personnel and participants from other Asian countries.

Myanmar had been invited to observe the humanitarian assistance and disaster relief portion of the exercise, Logan said. A senior officer at the Directorate of Joint Intelligence of the Royal Thai Armed Forces told Reuters it was unclear whether Myanmar had accepted the invitation but Thailand was eager for them to join. Asked why Thailand decided to invite Myanmar despite concerns over the crackdown against the Rohingya and whether this issue was part of their deliberations, the official said:

"That never came up in the discussions. We separated that issue (the Rohingya). We focus on training, on education, on military cooperation. That is our wish, to have Myanmar involved." "That is politics. We are soldiers. This is a military exercise," added the official, who declined to be named because he was not authorized to speak to the media.—Reuters

International

In 'China's Jerusalem', faith trumps Sunday School ban

As religion grows, Beijing warns against 'Western' ideas

WENZHOU: When authorities in China's southeastern city of Wenzhou outlawed Sunday School earlier this year, Christian parents determined their children must still learn about Jesus and the Bible. Churches in Wenzhou started teaching children in private homes or at other venues. Some billed Sunday School classes as daycare, not education, or moved them to Saturdays, more than a dozen local Christians told Reuters.

Wenzhou, sometimes known as "China's Jerusalem" due to its sizable Christian community, is at the forefront of a growing standoff between China's leadership and the country's devout over religious education for children. The ruling and officially atheist Communist Party has increased efforts to curb the influence of Christianity, tightening restrictions on faith classes and warning against the religion's "Western" ideas.

But Christians say the resolve of the community in Wenzhou suggests the party will struggle to exert control over the next generation of the country's 60 million Christians. In her house, "faith comes first, grades come second," said one parent surnamed Chen, asking not to use her full name due to the sensitivity of the matter. Immaculately turned out in a cream fur coat and wearing a giant turquoise ring, Chen is one of Wenzhou's numerous wealthy Christians who say their children must attend Bible classes because state education fails to provide sufficient moral and spiritual guidance.

"Drugs, porn, gambling and violence are serious problems among today's youth and video games are extremely seductive," she told Reuters. "We cannot be by his side all the time so only through faith can we make him understand (the right thing to do)." In some districts of Wenzhou, in Zhejiang province, an official edict has prohibited Sunday Schools since August, according to three sources with direct knowledge of the matter. The provinces of Zhejiang, Fujian, Jiangsu, Henan and the autonomous region of Inner Mongolia have barred children from faith activities including summer camp, Christian news site World Watch Monitor reported in September.

Sources spoken to by Reuters were unaware if the policy was a local government initiative or centrally mandated. They also did not know of any similar bans in other regions of China. Also in September, new rules were released expanding state oversight of religious education

nationwide in what officials say is an attempt to create a new generation of religious leaders loyal to the party. China's State Administration for Religious Affairs and the foreign affairs office of the Wenzhou city government did not reply to faxed requests for comment.

Explosion of belief

In the last four decades of economic prosperity, China's faithful have multiplied rapidly. Official numbers say there are now around 30 million Christians, while independent estimates suggest the number is about 60 million, most of whom are Protestants. In Wenzhou, a small Christian community started by 19th century missionaries has bloomed to over one million Christians. Until recent years, they had enjoyed a relatively relaxed relationship with local officials, residents said.

Then, in 2014, a government campaign to demolish "illegal" churches and tear down the crosses that adorned them sparked an outcry from the Christian community and sowed mistrust of authorities among believers. The campaign came shortly after President Xi Jinping, who had been communist party chief of Zhejiang from 2002 to 2007, was appointed General Secretary of the party. But attempts to stem the rapid growth of believers has struggled in Wenzhou where churches, often funded by devout local business owners, are ubiquitous.

"Wenzhou government does not let churches register, because there are way too many, so there are lots of house churches and it is tough for the government to manage them," Zhao Gang, the minister at Wenzhou's Church of the Rose-tinted Clouds said. Sunday School textbooks have been especially sensitive in the clampdown in Wenzhou, teachers said. The government restricts religious publications, and churches often use translated texts from overseas. One teacher said classes resumed when they stopped using unsanctioned textbooks and avoided the words "Sunday School".

Freedom for all

Chinese law officially grants religious freedom for all, including children, but regulations on education and protection of minors also say religion cannot be used to hinder state education or to "coerce" children to believe.



Christians pursue religious education in spite of ban



SHANGHAI: A Chinese visitor looks on as he wraps himself with Disney blanket at Shanghai Disneyland in Shanghai. —AFP

Local governments in troubled areas of China, such as the far western region of Xinjiang, ban children attending religious events, but Christian communities elsewhere rarely face blanket restrictions. This year, the party has been unusually strict in warning university students, state-owned enterprise employees and officials themselves against celebrating Christmas, with admonitions such as to "resist the corrosion of Western religious culture", according to state media reports.

While parents in Wenzhou want to control their children's education, the government is working to create a new crop of religious leaders loyal to the party. New rules governing religious schools from China's cabinet, due to take effect in February, are necessary to meet China's "pressing need" for patriotic religious leaders. Wang Zuoan, the head of China's official State Administration of Religious Affairs, told Reuters in written comments in

October. "We hope that the talent graduating from religious schools will be up to standard in both their political and religious character and will do a good job of combining love for the country with love for religion," he said.

But for many Christians allowing the party to control religious education is unacceptable, as it requires putting the party before God, according to Sarah Cook, a New York-based analyst at Freedom House, an advocacy group. As such, the party can only do so much to control faith education. "There are always going to be kids at home whose bedtime stories are from the Bible," Cook said. For Chen in Wenzhou, faith should be at the forefront of education until believers outnumber atheists in China's young. "There will definitely be more Christian believers in the next generation," she said. "The ability for the Christian faith to be inherited and passed on is ever growing." —Reuters

Venezuela frees 80 opponents in rare goodwill gesture

CARACAS: Venezuelan authorities late Saturday began releasing some of those detained during demonstrations against President Nicolas Maduro's socialist government, a rare goodwill gesture to the opposition at the end of a politically torrid year. Deley Rodriguez, the president of the assembly and head of its Truth Commission investigating the protests, said that Christmas was "a moment of reconciliation" as she announced the decision to release around 80 people. Among the first freed was Alfredo Ramos, mayor of the northwestern municipality of Iribarren, who was arrested late July and handed a 15 month sentence, and a dozen police officers from Chacao municipality, an opposition stronghold of Caracas.

State television showed image of Rodriguez meeting with the group. "You go back to jail for the medical check and then you go home to spend Christmas with your families," she said. "I feel happy for my freedom," Ramos told journalists upon his release. "It was a hard test, quite difficult." But he also lashed out at his sentence. "It was an arbitrary, unjust detention-I committed no crime," he added. Venezuela, whose oil reserves once made it the region's richest country, has been paralyzed in recent years by economic collapse and political conflict.

Opposition forces accuse Maduro of dismantling democratic institutions and setting up the Constituent Assembly to rubber-stamp his policies, with widespread protests breaking out this year. Supplies of food and medicine have become scarce, taking an ever-greater toll on



CARACAS: A man dressed as Santa Claus is seen during the event 'Santa en las calles' in the Pastora shantytown in Caracas. —AFP

people's health, and hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans have chosen to emigrate. The fate of those imprisoned has been a subject of negotiations between the government and the opposition Democratic Unity Roundtable (MUD) in the Dominican Republic, as both sides seek a solution to the country's grave political and economic crisis.

A third round of talks is set for January 11 and 12. Earlier this week, Venezuelan opposition leaders asked Maduro to free "political prisoners"-whose numbers one non-governmental group has put at 268 - before Christmas as a gesture of good will. On Thursday, the regional trade bloc Mercosur also called for their release. The government has insisted that all are being held for acts of violence, conspiracy or treason, not as "political prisoners". Rodriguez said those affected were being held in both civilian and military prisons, and she suggested community service as an alternative to imprisonment. Some were detained in 2014 protests, and others this year. —AFP

joint investigation team has excavated the soil, and sifted it. It can't be possible on that place that there are a lot of human remains."

'Disrespectful to victims'

"It is curious," he said, adding "it seems like someone withheld human remains to release them now and then, and get publicity about it". Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur was shot down in July 2014 over war-torn Ukraine, killing all 298 people on board most of them Dutch. An international investigation concluded the plane was hit by a Russian-made BUK missile transported across the border into Ukraine from Russia and fired from territory held by separatists pro-Russia rebels.

Ploeg's 58-year-old brother, Alex, is one of only two victims who has not yet been identified, and fresh videoed reports of new finds are painful. "It's good when human remains return to the next-of-kin let's be clear about that. But playing games with them, is not good. That's bad behavior from the journalists," Ploeg said.

"It's disrespectful to the victims and very difficult to see for the next-of-kin," he added, calling for anyone with remains to "please handle them with respect and hand them to the authorities and don't use any publicity." Lancaster did not immediately reply to an AFP request for comment. Alex Ploeg died alongside his wife, Edith, and 18-year-old son Robert. His two daughters had not joined them on the holiday trip, and survived. "We had a funeral with two coffins and one photo ... we didn't have a funeral for my brother as we can't say goodbye to his remains. That's very strange. It's very painful," Ploeg said. —AFP

MH17 families voice concerns over new discovery of remains

THE HAGUE: Relatives of those killed in the MH17 air disaster have called for greater respect for victims' remains fearing some may be "playing a game" after a new discovery of bones. Freelance journalist Patrick Lancaster revealed in a YouTube video on December 11 that he had found 52 bones and remains on the site of the 2014 crash in eastern Ukraine. His video shows him apparently excavating the remains from the snow-covered crash site in rebel-held territory. It comes after Lancaster maintained he had discovered remains in August and handed them over to local mayor, saying he was trying to do it "in the most professional way possible."

And in January, Dutch police seized possible human remains from a Dutch journalist which he said he found on the site. But Lancaster's latest find has puzzled relatives and the MH17 Foundation, who are calling for any outstanding remains to be handed over immediately to be identified and returned to the next-of-kin. "The circumstances of the findings are a little suspicious," Piet Ploeg, the chairman of the foundation said yesterday. The remains were found "exactly on the place where the

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Washington Watch

A Christmas message to Mike Pence

By Dr James J Zogby

Mr Vice President:

As you celebrate Christmas with your family and listen to the gospel story of the birth of Jesus, I hope you will read and reflect on the following piece I wrote a few years back. I want you to open your eyes to the situation facing Palestinian Christians and Muslims living in the Holy Land. And I want you to understand why the Arab Christian leadership in Palestine was so troubled by your blindness to their plight that they refused to meet with you.

Christmas: Then and Now

Two thousand years ago, Palestine was subject to a harsh occupation, much as it is today. In some ways, though, the conditions back then allowed the residents of occupied Palestine greater mobility than the current inhabitants of that land. As we are told in the bible story, Joseph had to take his expectant wife from Nazareth, where they were living, to Bethlehem, their ancestral village, in order to fulfill a requirement imposed by the authorities to register as part of a nationwide census. Today, of course, all of that would be impossible.

In the first place no Palestinian originally from Bethlehem could ever have moved to Nazareth. The occupation and closure of the West Bank makes that sort of movement impossible. Furthermore, Israeli law prohibits an Arab from Nazareth from marrying a Bethlehemite and bringing their spouse across the Green Line to live with them in Israel.

Additionally, while thousands of Palestinians in Bethlehem, both Muslim and Christian, can see Jerusalem from their homes, they cannot go to the Holy City to pray. And Arab Christians from Jerusalem, likewise, can not easily go the Christmas services in Bethlehem to pray alongside their co-religionists at the seasonal event.

Bethlehem of old was overcrowded and under siege. Today, as well, the city itself is being strangled, hemmed in by settlements that have confiscated the town's ancestral lands to make way for a 30 foot barrier wall and massive Jewish-only housing colonies that cut the Arab residents off from nearby Jerusalem. The construction of growth and the lack of economic opportunity have forced Bethlehemites to flee in search of jobs and freedom, with tens of thousands of them and their descendants now living in the US and the Americas. They can return to visit Bethlehem with difficulty, but are not permitted by the occupation authorities to take up permanent residency in the town of their origins.

While the kings of old, we are told, were able to travel from afar bearing gifts to honor the newborn child, one can only imagine the difficulties they would encounter today dealing with Israeli soldiers at the Allenby Bridge. Having personally endured their interrogations, I can hear the kings answering hours of questions, such as "Where are you from?" "Who are your parents, grandparents?" "Why are you here?" "Who are you visiting?" "What are these gifts for?" The questioning is reminiscent of Herod's interrogation of the biblical visitors. In today's Israel/Palestine, it is doubtful whether those hapless "kings from the East" would have gained entry.

That Joseph, Mary, and Jesus were able to flee to Egypt to escape Herod's vengeful wrath was possible back then. Today, that option is unlikely. The barrier/wall that encapsulates the West Bank, the hundreds of checkpoints, and the closure of Gaza would make such a life-saving flight impossible.

Finally, as I reflect on the birth of Jesus, I cannot help but think of the almost 400 babies who will be born, this very day, to Palestinian parents in the West Bank and Gaza. I think as well of the number of those who will perish at birth because of inadequate medical services (some babies have been put at fatal risk at checkpoints, because Israeli soldiers would not permit their delivering mothers to pass). And I think of Mary, 2,000 years ago, and am grateful that, despite all she endured, there were no checkpoints blocking her way to Bethlehem.

Our traditions tell us that Mary's joy at the birth of her son was tempered by foresight. She knew her child would grow and endure great suffering. Likewise, the joy that Palestinian parents experience when greeting new life these days must, no doubt, be accompanied by similar concerns. Not only must they question how they will provide for their new child, but they must face down their fears of bringing up a son or daughter under occupation, with its dangers and hardships. From the violence, pressures, and humiliation encountered daily by Palestinians in the West Bank at the hands of the Israeli military and settlers, to the grinding poverty and despair facing those trapped in Gaza, life under hostile foreign rule can drain joy out of even the most blessed events.

There is a traditional Christmas carol that asks the question "What child is this?" - the answer, of course, being "Jesus, the son of Mary". But given the universal message conveyed by the Christmas story we also understand that the child is for us, a reminder of our responsibility to care for the helpless and the unrecognized.

NOTE: Dr James J Zogby is the President of the Arab American Institute



Bangkok struggles to keep canal slums dry

Rung, 63, fought a running battle against the rubbish and raw sewage besieging her old home in a wooden slum perched on stilts on the banks of Bangkok's Lat Phrao canal. "You could see and smell the daily flow of trash," recalled the tailor who goes by one name. "It would stop at the back of my house. I wanted a better life for my son and daughter." On Christmas Day last year, Rung moved into a brand-new, blue-painted house just yards from her old one in the Chao Phor Somboon community - part of the Thai capital's attempts to clear a waterway of illegal settlements that contributed to catastrophic floods in 2011.

Rung, who now pays just \$2 per month towards the \$6,000 construction cost of her new two-room home, is one of the successes of a project along the Lat Phrao canal launched almost two years ago, which is so far only about a third complete. The authorities have struggled to convince most slum dwellers to relocate, and are unlikely to meet the project deadline of June 2019, according to a senior official.

Delays to the canal rehabilitation, and the slow progress or abandonment of a flurry of other flood-prevention schemes announced after 2011 could result in a bigger flood disaster in the decades ahead unless urgent action is taken, experts warn. Besides causing damage worth \$46 billion, the floods six years ago affected more than 3 million of Bangkok's residents, mostly the poor, across 36 of the 50 districts that make up the sprawling megacity.

Key causes of the flooding included subsidence, poor infrastructure, weak government coordination, and the blockage of vital waterways by littering and unregulated construction. The extensive canal and drainage network that once helped manage the flow of water in the Chao Phraya River has been largely filled in to accommodate the traffic that now clogs the capital's streets. And while efforts to better equip the city to handle flood waters have struggled to keep pace with a booming population, the threat from climate change has worsened, experts say.

"The wet places will become wetter, and the dry places will become drier," said Abhas Jha, a manager for urban development and disaster risk at the World Bank. "What we used to call a one-in-a-hundred-year event is happening more frequently."

Going Underground

Bangkok is a city that is slowly sinking. Built on a swampy plain, the so-called City of Angels has a land subsidence problem made worse by over-pumping of groundwater. Tapping underground wells was traditionally a way

for people to access free water, and at one stage the city was sinking at a rate of 10 cm per year. In the late 1970s, the central government introduced and enforced a new law to help ban groundwater extraction.

The city is now sinking at a smaller rate of 2-3 cm per year - a success story that could be replicated in other cities, researchers said. But it still faces the threat of floods. Today, Bangkok receives just 3 billion-5 billion baht (\$92 million-\$153 million) per year from the central government to invest in new water management projects, officials said. As the monsoon season has become increasingly unpredictable, the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration Flood Control Centre has set up a flood

latest data. "We have flooding every year. This year we have had a few floods during the rainy season, lasting three to four hours ... it caused a lot inconvenience," he said. "Our infrastructure is not sufficient to drain the water." Supachai, previously an adviser to the governor of Bangkok, said Dutch experts had already started scoping out a plan, which would cost around A2 million (\$2.4 million). As in other Asian cities, a lack of coordination between local and central government authorities often makes river management difficult, said the World Bank's Jha.

A focus on hard infrastructure projects means people think cities can build their way to safety, he added. "Globally, we find that policymakers love concrete," he said, noting other measures can be simpler and more cost-effective. Green infrastructure projects that could help Bangkok include the protection of wetlands and the development of green roofing, permeable pavements and rain-water harvesting. Dual-purpose facilities - like car parks that double up as storage spaces for floodwater - are also a relatively cheap method of reducing risk.

'Infrastructure Deficit'

Bangkok, which became Thailand's capital in 1782, is now home to more than 10 million people. Rapid industrial growth over the past decade has attracted large flows of people from other parts of Thailand. This migration is set to continue, with the population expected to top 15 million by 2020. Previously, the city's water defense strategy focused on strengthening the giant flood wall encircling its center, and pumping out any excess water.

But as the capital keeps on growing, new approaches will be needed to protect all Bangkok's residents, officials said. Managing the water surrounding the city and longer-term investments are crucial for the city's future, according to urban experts. Rajiv Shah, president of The Rockefeller Foundation, a New York-based philanthropic organization that funds 100 Resilient Cities, said 70 percent of the network's projects in Asia relate to water - from providing clean drinking water to managing storm run-off.

"The huge deficit in infrastructure and infrastructure finance is going to hold back growth and well-being," he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. "We see a whole new set of technologies and partners that can come together and do things." Back at the Lat Phrao canal, work grinds on to build new homes, reinforce the sides, and dredge the channel. Rung urged those still in slums by the water not to let stubbornness or pride stop them from moving into new homes. "I have no regrets about leaving. It is better and cleaner here," she said.— Reuters

“ You could see and smell the daily flow of trash ”

monitoring system across the city and an alert system that incorporates social media.

But the city needs to expand early warnings to ensure they do not ignore the poor and rural areas, urban experts said. "The problems are more complicated today," said Nambi Appadurai, head of strategy for the climate resilience practice at the World Resources Institute, referring to new construction and Bangkok's population growth. "I wouldn't be surprised to see flooding (like in 2011) happening again. Very little has been learned."

Master Plan

In an effort to avoid a repeat of the 2011 floods and improve residents' lives, in 2013 Bangkok joined 100 Resilient Cities, a network backed by The Rockefeller Foundation to help cities tackle modern-day shocks and stresses. Supachai Tantikom, Bangkok's chief resilience officer, published a strategy for the city earlier this year, with flooding a key focus. Supachai believes the Thai authorities should create a new 20-year master plan for flood defense in Bangkok's 50 districts and surrounding provinces, mapping out each area and making use of the

Investor's best friend: China pet market sparks deals

Li Mingjie is a pet industry investor's dream. The 23-year-old e-commerce worker spares little expense to make his pooch happy. "I'll happily splash out on my dog," Li told Reuters as he walked his brown poodle Coco in Pingyang, a town on China's east coast. "She is like a child to me." He is far from alone in China these days. The growth in the middle class, a massive move to urbanization and other demographic changes - such as growing numbers of elderly, and people getting married and having children later than before - have been turning this into not just a pet-owning society but also one that is prepared to lavish money on them.

Chinese shoppers are set to spend 46.3 billion yuan (\$7 billion) on their pets by 2022, up from 17.5 billion yuan this year as the market grows at around an annual 20 percent, according to estimates from Euromonitor. The U.S. market may be much bigger with an estimated \$44.4 billion in sales this year but it is only growing around 2 percent a year. The surge in Chinese demand is not only great news for

global pet food behemoths such as Mars Inc and Nestle SA, but also rapidly growing Chinese pet food and product companies, as well as entrepreneurs setting up everything from dog salons for grooming to fancy pet hotels.

It is an amazing shift in a country where owning pets was once banned for being too much of a bourgeois pursuit under revolutionary leader Mao Zedong, and where - despite protests - there is still an annual dog-meat festival in the southern Chinese town of Yulin. "There is huge growth potential in the Chinese market," said Liu Yonghao, the chairman of Chinese company New Hope Group at a recent event in Beijing, noting that younger people especially were developing closer bonds with their pets. "They are willing to spend lots of money on the pets because they have become like part of the family," he said.

New Hope joined a consortium, including Singapore's state-owned fund Temasek and private equity firm Hosen Capital that just closed a \$1 billion deal to acquire Australian pet food maker Real Pet Food Co, with the aim of bringing the firm's brands to China. The growing popularity of pets is turning China into a magnet for local and global firms. Thomas Kwan, chief investment officer of Hong Kong-based fund manager Harvest Global, said China's pet market would be one of his personal picks for 2018 as consumers looked to shift up to premium products. The questions pet owners are asking now: "Can you buy them healthy foods? Can you give them a good lifestyle?" he said.—Reuters

Big strategies drive small plane deals

Airbus and Boeing are pairing with smaller regional rivals to add sales at the lower end of their \$100 billion-a-year commercial plane duopoly, but the two market leaders are also laying the foundation for a longer-term strategic contest against more powerful threats such as China. US planemaker Boeing Co and Brazil's Embraer SA said on Thursday they were discussing a "potential combination" widely assumed to focus on jetliners, confirming a report in the Wall Street Journal.

News of the talks comes just two months after Boeing's European archrival Airbus agreed to buy a majority stake in Bombardier Inc's 110 to 130-seat C-Series jet, the Canadian rival of Embraer's biggest E-Jets. "This seems initially to be about blunting the offering of the C-Series," said consultant Jerrold Lundquist, managing director of The Lundquist Group, one of the first industry-watchers to predict the move. "One of the things the C-Series brings to Airbus is the ability to offer a broader product line."

Both Embraer's E-Jets, which generally range between 70 and 130 seats, and to a greater extent Bombardier's C-Series, overlap at the margins of the big-airplane portfolios of Airbus and Boeing, but the products are mainly seen as complementary. Boeing and Airbus smaller planes start at around 125

seats. Such commercial tie-ups allow plane-makers to offer package deals and expand opportunities for generating revenue and profit, a person familiar with the C-Series deal said.

Boeing now appears to be a convert to this approach after initially - at least in public - dismissing the deal between Airbus and Bombardier, several analysts said on Thursday. But the proposed alliances, neither of which is finalized, are not simply about tacking on revenue and cash flow, analysts and industry sources said. First, they could quickly lead to technical overlap. "If Boeing begins to collaborate with Embraer, you could imagine them creating commonality in the Boeing cockpit," Lundquist said. Others see similar benefits at Airbus.

More importantly, they broaden the battlefield for the next round of developments in 2030 and beyond: one in which Western jet-makers will be up against growing competition from China and Russia and could rely on their new partners to spread the risk.

Boeing and Embraer had already prepared just such a tryst in confidential talks over a decade ago. In October, Reuters reported that the template for a possible Boeing-Embraer response to the Airbus-Bombardier deal already existed in dormant plans for a new generation of single-aisle planes, for which there had been a previously unreported collaboration between Boeing and Brazil. Plans for an all-new plane were put on hold while Boeing and Airbus focused on engine makeovers for existing models, cashing in on fuel savings that were considered strong enough to hold off Chinese and Russian competitors for another 10 or 15 years.—Reuters

World's largest amphibious plane takes off in China

BEIJING: China's home-grown AG600, the world's largest amphibious aircraft in production, took to the skies yesterday for its maiden flight. The plane, codenamed "Kunlong" according to state news agency Xinhua, took off from the southern city of Zhuhai and landed after roughly an hour-long flight. With a wingspan of 38.8 m and powered by four turboprop engines, the aircraft is capable of carrying 50 people and can stay airborne for 12 hours. "Its successful maiden flight makes China among the world's few countries capable of developing a large amphibious aircraft," chief designer Huang Lingcai told Xinhua.

The amphibious aircraft has military applications but will be used for firefighting and marine rescue, with at least 17 orders placed so far with state-owned manufacturer Aviation Industry Corp of China, state media reported. While it is around the size of a Boeing 737, the AG600 is considerably smaller than billionaire Howard Hughes' flying boat, better known as the Spruce Goose, which had a wingspan of 97 m and a length of 67 m but only made one brief flight, in 1947.

The AG600's flight capabilities put all of China's island-building projects in the South China Sea well within range. "Its 4,500-km operational range and ability to land and take off from water makes it well-suited for deployment over China's artificial

islands," said James Char, a military analyst at Singapore's Nanyang Technological University. The aircraft can fly to the southernmost edge of China's territorial claims - the James Shoal - in just four hours from the southern city of Sanya, state-owned GlobalTimes reported.

The shoal is also claimed by Taiwan and Malaysia, and is currently administered by Malaysia. The collection of submerged rocks lies roughly 80 km from Malaysia's coastline and about 1,800 km from the Chinese mainland. "The plane's capacity and maneuverability makes it ideal for transporting materiel to those maritime features that are too structurally fragile to support runways," Char said. Beijing's buildup in the South China Sea, through which some \$5 trillion in annual trade passes, is hotly contested by other nations.

The Philippines for many years was one of the region's strongest opponents of Chinese expansionism, and brought a complaint to a United Nations-backed tribunal. The panel ruled last year that China's territorial claims in the sea were without legal basis, but the Philippines has backed away from the dispute under its new president Rodrigo Duterte. The launch of the new amphibious aircraft further strengthens China's rapidly modernizing military.

Earlier this year, it launched its first domestically built aircraft carrier, the Type 001A. This complemented the



ZHUHAI, China: China's homegrown AG600, the world's largest amphibious aircraft in production, is seen at Jinwan Airport in this city in southern Guangdong province yesterday. —AFP

Liaoning, a second-hand Soviet carrier commissioned in 2012 after extensive refits. China's military expenditure in 2016 was an estimated \$215 billion, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, putting it in first place in Asia, well ahead of India (\$56 billion), Japan (\$46 billion) and South Korea (\$37 billion). — AFP

MoI mulls fee hikes to plug...

Continued from Page 1

He said this project will improve performance and make it easy for companies, while boosting economic activity and reducing the number of people in offices. He revealed there will be a new security card instead of the sticker on the passport.

He said new fees will not be implemented on visit and residency permits without the approval of Deputy Premier and Interior Minister Sheikh Khalid Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah and the National Assembly. Maarafi said there are 2.753 million residents with valid residencies in the country, representing nearly 205 nationalities from around the world. He said Indians are on top with 925,000 residents, followed by 605,000 Egyptians, 257,000 Filipinos, 241,000 Bangladeshis, 144,000 Syrians, 107,000 Pakistanis and 93,000 Sri Lankans.

Maarafi said a new penalty for harboring iqama violators of KD 1,000 will have to be paid instantly if a joint committee of the interior, social affairs, municipality and commerce ministries catch an employer with a residency law violator working for him. He said that a meeting was held with the health and social affairs committee at the Assembly with regards to imposing health insurance on visitors. He said visit visa holders are not allowed to work, especially those on business visas, adding that

many such cases have been discovered and deported. About the decision to increase the salary ceiling of those who want to bring their wives, children or other relatives on visit visas, he said strict measures are being implemented to prevent marginal laborers, beggars and those seeking treatment from arriving in the country, by studying the cases and ability of the applicants. He said parents' visits are linked to age and the maximum age limit is 60. As for ages above this, the cases are considered according to status and salary.

Maarafi said the salary ceiling for family visas will be raised from KD 250 to KD 450, while recommendations are made to the manpower authority to decide the maximum period of residency. He said no family visas will be granted to children without the presence of the father. He said the mother cannot sponsor her children except for rare specialties the country needs.

Meanwhile, Social Affairs and Labor Minister and State Minister for Economic Affairs Hind Al-Sabeeh told Al-Rai daily a plan to deal with the population imbalance has been in place for a while, and coordination is ongoing with ministries and government departments to implement it, adding "the response of government departments was positive, and soon results will be clearer".

She said the social affairs ministry is following the matter with government entities, which expressed strong belief that the imbalance exists and must be dealt with. Sabeeh said some departments have started to reduce the number of cleaning and security workers by 25 percent, adding other contracts must be waited out so to prevent any legal action.

Ad firms using tools to help them...

Continued from Page 1

Johnson & Johnson has tested thousands of consumers about Tylenol pain relief and other over-the-counter products, showing them quick-fire images or words that connote a particular emotion. Responses are tracked to the tens of milliseconds, said Eric Dolan, associate director for global strategic insights at Johnson & Johnson. The insights can help determine "whether we want to dig in and reinforce those emotional spaces," or rethink the marketing to convey a different message, he said.

Tivity Health turned to many of these techniques for its "Silver Sneakers" fitness program for seniors, hiring Isobar to help it devise a marketing strategy based on a psycho-

logical profile of potential members. Isobar had more than 1,000 seniors review a series of rapidly presented images and words about exercise. Based on their clicks, the report showed the population most valued exercise because it made them feel empowered or "ready to go".

The finding was important as Tivity weighed potential marketing campaigns, including "Living Life Well," which featured images of age-defying seniors, such as a grandfatherly figure balancing a toddler on his back while doing push-ups. These ads performed better than an alternative campaign showing groups of smiling seniors together in swim class and in a gym which emphasized the social aspect of Silver Sneakers.

That campaign appeared to fall flat with seniors who view exercise as a means of staying independent, or who may be intimidated at the thought of immediately exercising in a group. The results countered Tivity's assumption that the social aspect of the program was the "key motivating driver for members," said Elizabeth Rula, who directs research for Tivity Health. "We were a bit surprised." — AFP

Dozens dead in Philippine...

Continued from Page 1

When our firemen tried to enter they were pushed back by smoke and fire."

Mayor Duterte said she told the firefighters to retrieve all the dead, stressing: "you do not stop until you find 37". She also said the circumstances surrounding the fire would be investigated but added that it was too early to say who was at fault. Deadly blazes occur regularly in the Philippines, particularly in slum areas where there are virtually no fire safety standards. "It's possible that while they were working, they did not immediately notice the fire spreading," Davao police officer Ralph Canoy told AFP, referring to the call cen-

ter workers. Davao, with a population of about 1.5 million people, is the biggest city in the southern Philippines. It is about 1,000 km south of Manila, the nation's capital. President Duterte served as mayor of the city for more than two decades and continues to visit on weekends. His daughter succeeded him when he ran for president, with one of his sons winning the vice mayoralty post. Most of those killed by the recent tropical storm were also in the southern region of Mindanao.

There have also been horrific fires in bigger buildings and factories, where corruption and exploitation mean supposedly strict standards are often not enforced. In 2015, a fire tore through a footwear factory in Manila, killing 72. Survivors of that blaze blamed barred windows and other sweatshop conditions for trapping people inside the factory. In the deadliest fire in the Philippines in recent times, 162 people were killed in a huge blaze that gutted a Manila disco in 1996. — AFP

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Sports

Fluery stops 26 shots to lead Knights to 3-0 win over Capitals

Rookie forward Barzal powers Islanders past Jets

WASHINGTON: Marc-Andre Fluery stopped 26 shots to pick up his first shutout of the season and lead the Vegas Golden Knights to a 3-0 victory over the Washington Capitals on Saturday night at T-Mobile Arena. It was the eighth win in nine games (8-0-1) for the Golden Knights, who are tied with Tampa Bay for the most home wins in the NHL. (15). Alex Tuch, Oscar Lindberg and William Karlsson all scored first-period goals for Vegas. That was all Fluery needed en route to the 45th career shutout of his career. Braden Holtby had 25 saves for Washington, which fell out of first place in the Metropolitan Division.

LIGHTNING 3, WILD 0

Dan Girardi, Tyler Johnson and Nikita Kucherov scored in the final 2:42 to lift Tampa Bay. Andrei Vasilevskiy finished with 22 saves for his fourth shutout of the season and eighth of his career. The NHL-best Lightning enter the three-day break for Christmas with nine wins in the past 10 games and seven consecutive victories on home ice. Alex Stalock, starting in net on consecutive nights, stopped 28 shots for the Wild.



Matthews had a goal in his first game back from concussion

DUCKS 4, PENGUINS 0

John Gibson made 29 saves for his 13th career shutout, leading Anaheim to victory over his hometown team. Ondrej Kase, Rickard Rakell, Andrew Cogliano and Cam Fowler staked the Ducks to a 4-0 lead through two periods. Anaheim finished a six-game road trip 3-2-1. Gibson improved to 2-3-0 versus the Penguins. Pittsburgh's Matt Murray gave up three goals on 13 shots before he was pulled for rookie Tristan Jarry, who stopped nine of 10 shots. The Penguins lost for the fifth time in seven games.

ISLANDERS 5, JETS 2

Mathew Barzal collected his first NHL hat trick as New York cruised past Winnipeg. Barzal (20 years, 211 days) scored twice in the first and once in the third to become the youngest Islanders player to record a hat trick since John Tavares did so at 20 years and 117 days on Jan. 15, 2011. Anders Lee and Anthony Beauvillier also scored for New York and Jaroslav Halak recorded 38 saves. Tucker Poolman and Adam Lowry scored for the Jets, who ended a four-game road trip with three straight losses (0-2-1). Steve Mason made 24 saves.

MAPLE LEAFS 3, RANGERS 2

Auston Matthews had a goal and an assist in his first game back from a concussion as Toronto defeated New York. William Nylander also had a goal and an assist for the Maple Leafs. Ron Hainsey had a goal and Morgan Rielly had two assists for Toronto. Frederik Andersen stopped 30 shots to halt the Maple Leafs' four-game road losing streak. Jimmy Vesey and J.T. Miller had the Rangers' goals. Henrik Lundqvist made 34 saves for New York.

Breathless finish forecast for Sydney-Hobart race

SYDNEY: A close race could be in store for Australia's gruelling Sydney to Hobart bluewater classic, with unfavourable conditions near the finish set to work against the supermaxi favourites. There are 103 entries, including 28 from overseas, for the 73rd edition of the often brutal 628-nautical mile (1,163-kilometre) slog across the Tasman Sea, which leaves Sydney on December 26.

The weather forecast points to a fast race, ideal conditions for line honours favourite Comanche, one of four supermaxis in the hunt along with Wild Oats XI, BlackJack and InfoTrack. But the conditions could also see the frontrunners arrive in Hobart's notoriously breathless River Derwent at night.

"It doesn't look good for us in the river. We could spend a lot of time there," Comanche's navigator Stan Honey said. Ichi Ban's navigator Will Oxley quipped that "between 10pm and 10am is death in the Derwent".

The Bureau of Meteorology's state weather services chief Jane Golding said the race was likely to start in a moderate east or south-easterly breeze around 10 knots. "The winds will shift around to the north-east during the afternoon, to around 15 knots," she added.

The forecast, if it holds, means last year's record race time of 1 day 13hr 31min 20sec by Australian supermaxi Perpetual Loyal, now InfoTrack, was unlikely to be under threat. Wild Oats, an eight-time winner, is hoping to make it third time lucky after being forced to retire from the last two races.

It took a blow to its chances when the top of its 45-metre (147-foot) high carbon fibre mast was struck by lightning last week, destroying some of its instruments, but is expected to be ready. "The goal is to be first, to finish," said Wild Oats skipper Mark Richards.

Medium-sized boats, which expect to arrive at the Derwent in the morning, would be in "red hot" competition for the overall win, Oxley suggested. "It will come down to boat handling and minimising damage," he said. "Everyone talks about how much fun it is to go downwind, but in 25 to 30 knots on a TP52 (Ichi Ban), that's a lot of wind on the eastern side of Bass Strait.

BRUINS 3, RED WINGS 1

Patrice Bergeron scored twice as Boston won its fourth straight game. Brad Marchand scored one goal and set up Bergeron's winner 6:11 into the third, and Tuukka Rask made 30 saves for the Bruins. Bergeron scored an empty-net goal in the closing seconds for his 10th goal of the season. Frans Nielsen scored a short-handed goal and Jimmy Howard made 22 saves for the Red Wings, who haven't won at TD Garden since April 14, 2014.

OILERS 4, CANADIENS 1

Connor McDavid had a goal and an assist to lead Edmonton to its fourth straight victory. Juhar Khaira also had a goal and an assist for the Oilers. Ryan Strome and Milan Lucic also scored. Leon Draisaitl had three assists and Cam Talbot made 29 saves for Edmonton. Antti Niemi made 31 saves for the Canadiens, who had their two-game winning streak snapped. Andrew Shaw scored for Montreal.

DEVILS 4, BLACKHAWKS 1

Cory Schneider made 39 saves, and Brian Boyle sparked a three-goal first period as New Jersey won its fourth straight game. Schneider made 21 saves in the second period and withstood a flurry in the opening half of the period. He made five stops on Patrick Kane before allowing the Blackhawks wing's 300th career goal late in the second. The Devils scored three times in the first 13:22 to chase Chicago goaltender Corey Crawford for the second time this season. Kyle Palmieri scored a power-play goal and Pavel Zacha capped the three-goal outburst.

SHARKS 2, KINGS 0

Goalie Martin Jones stopped 28 shots for his 100th career victory while defeating his former team as San Jose topped Los Angeles. Jones improved to 8-3-2 in his career against the Kings, the team he broke in with and for which he played two seasons, including 2014 when the Kings won the Stanley Cup. Jones collected his third shutout of the season and 18th of his career. Marcus Sorensen scored his third goal in four games and Joe Pavelski scored for the Sharks.

STARS 4, PREDATORS 3 (SO)

Alexander Radulov and Tyler Seguin scored in the shootout, and Dallas killed off two penalties in overtime—including 31 seconds of a 5-on-3 — in defeating Nashville. Ben Bishop made 29 saves to help the Stars win back-to-back games and extend a four-game point streak. Bishop stopped Filip Forsberg and Kevin Fiala in the shootout before Seguin scored in the third round. Juuse Saaros made 25 saves for the Predators, who lost their third straight game.

BLUES 3, CANUCKS 1

Kyle Brodziak's goal with 1:30 left in the second



PITTSBURGH: Jakob Silfverberg #33 of the Anaheim Ducks skates with the puck against the Pittsburgh Penguins at PPG PAINTS Arena on Saturday in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.— AFP

period stood up as the winner as St. Louis defeated Vancouver. Brodziak gave the Blues a 2-1 lead as he squeezed a shot from a sharp angle between Jacob Markstrom and the post while the crowd groaned. St. Louis ended a three game-losing streak, while the Canucks suffered their fourth straight loss. Patrik Berglund and Alex Steen (empty-netter) also scored for the Blues. Rookie Brock Boeser tallied for Vancouver.

BLUE JACKETS 2, FLYERS 1 (SO)

Pierre-Luc Dubois scored the only goal in the shootout on his first NHL attempt as Columbus defeated Philadelphia. Seth Jones scored in the opening period for the Blue Jackets, and Ivan Provorov answered with the tying goal in the second period for the Flyers. Sergei Bobrovsky made 30 stops for Columbus and Brian Elliott finished with 35 saves for Philadelphia. The Flyers' Sean Couturier nearly won the game with 17 seconds remaining in the third period, but his shot bounced off the goal post.

PANTHERS 1, SENATORS 0

James Reimer made 38 saves to lead Florida over Ottawa. The shutout was the 18th of Reimer's career and fourth against Ottawa. The victory gave the Panthers a three-game winning streak for the first time this season. Jonathan Huberdeau scored for Florida. Mike Condon,

playing in place of No. 1 goaltender Craig Anderson (illness), made 37 saves for the Senators.

HURRICANES 4, SABRES 2

Defenseman Justin Faulk scored twice to snap a two-month scoring drought and Teuvo Teravainen matched a career high with three assists as Carolina defeated Buffalo. The Hurricanes won for the fifth time in its last six games. Cam Ward also improved to 7-0-1 in his last nine appearances in net for Carolina. Jordan Staal and Sebastian Aho also scored for the Hurricanes. The Sabres got second-period goals from Nathan Beaulieu— his first of the season—and Zemgus Girgensons.

AVALANCHE 6, COYOTES 2

Matt Nieto had a goal and an assist, and Colorado scored four goals in less than four minutes following a series of nasty mid-ice fights in its victory over Arizona. Carl Soderberg began the flurry and J.T. Compher and Nail Yakupov followed by scoring on the same power play resulting from Coyotes center Zac Rinaldo's match penalty as the Avalanche needed only 3:46 to turn a scoreless game into a 4-0 lead. Soderberg finished with two goals and Alexander Kerfoot had a pair of assists. Semyon Varlamov turned aside 32 shots despite allowing two short-handed goals to Derek Stepan.— Reuters



File photo shows the start of 2016 Sydney to Hobart yacht race.

"So we will be working pretty hard to look after the boat to get through those conditions."

NEW OWNERS

All the supermaxis this year are Australian owned, after Sydney's Jim Cooney purchased the 100-foot Comanche from American owner Jim Clark less than two weeks ago. Local media speculated he paid more than Aus\$10 million (US\$7.7 million) for the yacht.

"It's a once in a lifetime opportunity—too good to pass up," said Cooney, who is relishing the upcoming battle despite only having handled Comanche several times before the start of the race.

"This year competition is fierce, with the strongest line-up of supermaxis ever seen on one race," he said. "Depending on conditions, any of the 100 footers could

take line honours, it threatens to be one of the best races in the history of the event."

InfoTrack is also in the hands of a different owner, Sydney software developer Christian Beck, a newcomer to ocean racing. "I've seen the start one hundred times but I've no idea what happens after that," he joked.

One more serious note, he said that "if the weather is very windy like it was last year I think we have a realistic chance of taking back-to-back line honours". Last year's overall handicap winner, the Volvo 70 Giacomo, has been renamed Wizard, and is now under the ownership of American brothers David and Peter Askew.

It is tipped to again be a challenger for handicap honours—the vessel that performs best according to size. Line honours go to the fastest boat.— AFP

Chess federation says Israel excluded from Saudi-hosted match

ATHENS: Israeli players have been denied visas to participate in a speed chess championship hosted by Saudi Arabia this week, a vice president of the World Chess Federation (FIDE) said yesterday.

Seven Israeli players had requested visas for the tournament on Dec. 26-30. It would have marked the first time Saudi Arabia had publicly hosted Israelis as the Gulf state does not recognize Israel and there are no formal ties between them.

Israel Gelfer, vice president of FIDE, whose Secretariat is based in Athens, told Reuters in an email that visas for the Israeli players "have not been issued and will not be issued". He said the tournament would go ahead as planned. It was not immediately clear if other delegations had been excluded but players from Qatar had suggested they may have been rejected. Saudi Arabia's Center for International Communication said in a statement that more than 180 players would participate but did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Israel Chess Federation Spokesman Lior Aizenberg said efforts were still being made "by various parties" to ensure the Israeli players took part. "The event is not a world championship if they prevent chess players from several countries from taking part," Aizenberg told Reuters.

"Every chess player should have the right to participate in an event on the basis of professional criteria, regardless of their passports, their place of issue or the stamps they bear," Aizenberg said FIDE should ensure Israeli players could compete in international events and that the Israeli federation was considering all options, including legal action and holding an international competition in Israel for players excluded from the Saudi match. FIDE had said in November it was undertaking a "huge effort" to ensure all players were granted visas.—Reuters

Sports

Ashes gone, pride at stake for wounded England at MCG

Bairstow call teammates to rally behind under-fire skipper

MELBOURNE: England have lost paceman Craig Overton and may make a further change as they try to restore some pride in tomorrow's fourth Melbourne Test after surrendering the Ashes to Australia. It's been a tour from hell for Joe Root's beleaguered team, succumbing to three heavy defeats which rendered the last two Tests in Melbourne and Sydney "dead rubbers."

Root has been in the eye of the storm over the tourists' underwhelming efforts, with former Australia captain Ricky Ponting deriding him as a "little boy" who has been a "bit soft" during the one-sided series. Several other under-performing senior players, notably Alastair Cook, Stuart Broad and Moeen Ali, have also been under the gun as some critics call for their axing.

Overton was ruled out on Sunday with a rib injury, with either Tom Curran or Mark Wood likely to replace him, while young leg-spinner Mason Crane is pushing for a Test debut.

England and Wales Cricket Board chief Tom Harrison typified the feelings inside the team when he said earlier in the week: "I don't think this is the moment for rash decisions." Wicketkeeper Jonny Bairstow has called on his teammates to rally behind their under-fire skipper. "We don't just owe him (Root), we owe ourselves as well," Bairstow said. "We've got to go out there and try and win both of these Test matches."

Talking is one thing, doing is another for England, who have had their moments in the series but have been

blown away by big losses — 10 wickets in Brisbane, 120 runs in Adelaide and an innings and 41 runs in Perth. Cook, who became the first Englishman to play 150 Tests during the series, has scored just 83 runs in six innings, while Root has two half-centuries but only a total of 176 runs at 29.33.

In comparison, Australia skipper Steve Smith is in cracking form and is coming off a Test-best 239 in the third Test. He is averaging 142 for the series. Smith's phenomenal form has him in rarefied company, occupying joint second position in the ICC's all-time rankings list along with England's Len Hutton and behind only the legendary Don Bradman.

Smith has a career average of 62.32 from 59 Tests, second only to Bradman's pinnacle 99.94. The Australian skipper is gunning for his fourth consecutive Melbourne Test century after hundreds against Pakistan, the West Indies and India in the last three Boxing Day showpieces.

Australia have won half of the 56 Tests played at MCG

There will be some respite for England, with Australian pace spearhead Mitchell Starc ruled out on Sunday with a bruised heel and replaced by Jackson Bird. But Smith has vowed no let-up in short-pitched bowling against England's tailenders, despite claims the umpires should give the lower order more protection.

"We obviously had a plan from the start of the series that we were going to bowl a lot of short stuff to those



PERTH: File photo shows Australian players celebrate taking the Ashes series after winning the third Ashes cricket Test match between England and Australia in Perth on December 18, 2017.—AFP

guys, much like we did back in 2013," Smith said in the past week. Australia have won half of the 56 Tests played at the vast MCG, although England won there in 1998 and 2010.

Cricket Australia chief executive James Sunderland said the Boxing Day crowd was likely to surpass the 91,112 that made Ashes history in 2013-14 even though England had already lost the series.

Teams (probable):

Australia - David Warner, Cameron Bancroft, Usman

Khawaja, Steve Smith (capt), Shaun Marsh, Mitchell Marsh, Tim Paine, Pat Cummins, Josh Hazlewood, Nathan Lyon, Jackson Bird.

England - Alastair Cook, Mark Stoneman, James Vince, Joe Root (capt), Dawid Malan, Jonny Bairstow, Moeen Ali, Chris Woakes, Tom Curran/Mark Wood, Stuart Broad, James Anderson.

Umpires: Kumar Dharmasena (SRI) Sundaram Ravi (IND).

TV umpire: Joel Wilson (WIS). Match referee: Ranjan Madugalle (SRI).—Reuters

Selection challenge for South Africa against Zimbabwe

PORT ELIZABETH: Selection is likely to be South Africa's biggest challenge ahead of their one-off day-night Test against Zimbabwe, starting at St George's Park tomorrow. Zimbabwe are unlikely to stretch the home side but South Africa, ranked second in Test cricket, will want to establish their best XI in this four-day Test ahead of a three-match series against India, starting in Cape Town on January 5.

With the return of AB de Villiers and Dale Steyn after long absences from Test cricket, and with all South Africa's front-line fast bowlers fit for the first time in more than a year, coach Ottis Gibson described the selection issue as "a good nightmare".

"India are the number one team in the world at the moment and we know we need to be at our best if we are going to compete with them and beat them, which is our ultimate goal," said Gibson.

Six or seven batsmen? Three or four fast bowlers? A spin bowler? An all-rounder? These are all questions that will be troubling Gibson and his fellow selectors.

The situation is complicated by South Africa's unique racial balancing act, with Cricket South Africa committed to having an average of six players of colour, including two black Africans, in their starting teams. Three black Africans - batsman Temba Bavuma, all-rounder Andile Phehlukwayo and fast bowler Kagiso Rabada - played in South Africa's most recent Test matches, two one-sided encounters against Bangladesh. But with batsman De Villiers and fast bowlers Steyn, Vernon Philander and Morne Morkel back in the mix, only Rabada of the three seems guaranteed to start in what should be another lop-sided contest. Assuming captain Faf du Plessis is passed fit after recovering from shoulder surgery, it will be difficult to fit Bavuma into the batting line-up, while Phehlukwayo's medium-pace is unlikely to be required when there are four world-class fast bowlers in the squad.

Zimbabwe had a disappointing warm-up when they were beaten by a largely unheralded Invitation team in Paarl, but they were able to gain some experience with a pink ball under floodlights.

It is the first day-night Test to be played in South Africa. When the hosts held their first practice under lights on Friday they found the ball helped the seam bowlers more at night than during the day, which has been a pattern in floodlit Tests elsewhere.

The floodlights at St George's Park were upgraded during the off-season. Only two Twenty20 matches have been played at the ground since then, with the team batting second winning on both occasions.

Squads:

South Africa: Faf du Plessis (capt), Dean Elgar, Aiden Markram, Hashim Amla, AB de Villiers, Temba Bavuma, Quinton de Kock (wkt), Theunis de Bruyn, Andile Phehlukwayo, Vernon Philander, Keshav Maharaj, Kagiso Rabada, Dale Steyn, Morne Morkel, Duanne Olivier.

Zimbabwe: Graeme Cremer (capt), Hamilton Masakadza, Solomon Mire, Craig Ervine, Brendan Taylor, Sikandar Raza, Chamu Chibhabha, Ryan Burl, Peter Moor, Regis Chakabva (wkt), Kyle Jarvis, Chris Mpofu, Tendai Chatara, Blessing Muzarabani, Tendai Chisoro.

Umpires: Richard Kettleborough (ENG), Paul Reiffel (AUS).

TV umpire: Michael Gough (ENG).

Match referee: Chris Broad (ENG).—AFP

South Africa's de Villiers eyes successful test return

PORT ELIZABETH: South Africa talisman AB de Villiers has declared himself fit for the challenge of day-night test ahead of the one-off match against Zimbabwe at St George's Park tomorrow.

It will be the first test appearance in almost two years for the 33-year-old, who had taken time off from the longer version of game while continuing to dominate bowlers in limited overs. "I pride myself in the fact that I can adapt to certain conditions and formats," he told reporters as the Proteas prepare for the first ever-four day match, also the first test to be played under lights in South Africa.

"I have worked hard on my game over the last six months. I started in July facing red balls at the University of Pretoria, getting some technical stuff sorted out, I feel more ready than ever to take it on. "I faced a few pink balls here

last night on a spicy wicket, it was really tough. Then again it's a great challenge, it's the ultimate form of the game, it's the greatest challenge to come out on top when the ball is moving around a bit."

De Villiers did not see much difference between the formats. "It's a mindset, a little tweak here and there. You have to have more patience with the red ball but you still have to play cricket strokes, it's not like you are playing rugby, it is still cricket.

"As long as you respect the conditions, sum up what is going on in a match situation, you can make it work." He allayed fears about the stiff lower back that kept him out of the three-day warm-up match against Zimbabwe in Paarl and was looking forward to a fruitful outing.

"I want to contribute. I want to play knocks, have my say in the field with my experience and take some catches that can win games of cricket," he said. South Africa will host India to three tests in January before their four-test series against Australia in March and April.

"We would like to be number one in the world, we are not far away. We know if we win a few series in the next three months against tough opposition we can achieve that," de Villiers said.

"We will take it one step at a time, that will be nice to achieve, to be the number one team in the world and to maintain it for a few years." — Reuters

Giles slams immature England

LONDON: Ashley Giles admits he would have considered sending home some of England's players for bad behaviour during their Ashes tour of Australia. England's poor performances on the pitch, which have seen them lose the series ahead of the start of the fourth Test on Boxing Day, have been compounded by incidents off it.

Ben Duckett, who is not part of the full Ashes squad but was in Australia to play for England Lions, was given a suspension and a fine by the England and Wales Cricket Board for throwing a drink over vice-captain James Anderson. England star Jonny Bairstow was involved in a bizarre headbutt incident with Australia's Cameron Bancroft during a night out in Perth. Ben

Stokes, an England all-rounder, is out of the international frame while waiting to discover whether he will be charged for an alleged late-night brawl before the Ashes tour in Bristol in September. Former spinner Giles, who played 54 Test matches for England and later worked as a national team selector, believes some of the current crop of players have lacked maturity.

"I think I would have been very tempted (to send some home)," Giles told BBC Radio 5 Live yesterday. "There comes a time when there's enough water gone under the bridge, a lot of it not very nice water, you have to make a stand and we're probably past that point."

"The whole thing sheds a bad light on England cricket but I think what we have to remember is these guys are extremely talented cricketers and they've got a great gift in what they do. "It doesn't make them extremely mature individuals. And there's work to do there. "If the maturity isn't there in the dressing room then they need quite strict guidelines and rules. "Over time, if you can't trust people to make correct decisions off the field, how can you trust them to make them on the field?" — AFP



AB de Villiers

England's injured paceman Overton out of fourth Melbourne Test

MELBOURNE: England paceman Craig Overton is out of the fourth Ashes Test against Australia with a fractured rib, officials said yesterday.

The England and Wales Cricket Board confirmed he would not play in the Melbourne Test, starting on Boxing Day. Uncapped fast bowler Tom Curran will reportedly make his debut to replace him, although fellow speedster Mark Wood has trained with the team this week.

Overton, who made his Test debut in Adelaide this month, was diagnosed with a cracked rib during the third Test in Perth. He was struck when batting in Adelaide and exacerbated the injury when he tumbled while attempting to take a catch off his own bowling in Perth.

It is a blow for England, with Overton one of their best players on a troubled tour in which the Ashes urn was surrendered before Christmas. "It's obviously quite sore...and not the most ideal thing to get," Overton told reporters last week.

"It just seemed like battling through the pain was in my nature. I've always been taught to fight through things and that's what I've had to do." Curran, a right-arm from Surrey, was only added to England's Ashes squad when Steve Finn was ruled out at the start of the tour with a torn knee cartilage.

Born in South Africa, the 22-year-old played a one-day international and three T20s for England earlier this year. — AFP



Ashley Giles

Sports

Golden State Warriors' win streak snapped by Nuggets

Bucks missing Antetokounmpo, who sat out with soreness in his right knee

LOS ANGELES: The Denver Nuggets limited the Golden State Warriors to 3-for-27 on 3-point shooting Saturday, stunning the defending NBA champions 96-81 on the second night of back-to-backs for both teams. The loss ended the Warriors' 11-game winning streak on the eve of their showdown with the Cleveland Cavaliers on Christmas Day in a rematch of last season's NBA Finals. Coming off a tremendous defensive effort in a 102-85 win at Portland on Friday night, the Nuggets were even better less than 24 hours later, harassing Warriors stars Kevin Durant and Klay Thompson into a combined 12-for-38 shooting, including 1-for-15 on 3-pointers. Gary Harris led five players in double figures with 19 points for the Nuggets, who were thumped 127-108 at home by the Warriors earlier this season when Golden State matched its season-high with 18 3-pointers.



RAPTORS 102, 76ERS 86

DeMar DeRozan, who scored a career-best 45 points Thursday against the Philadelphia, came back with 29 points in the rematch. The Raptors have won six in a row and 12 of their past 13 games while the 76ers have lost five in a row and nine of their past 10. The Raptors are 18-1 against the 76ers since 2013-2014. Dario Saric scored 17 points for Philadelphia.

HORNETS 111, BUCKS 106

Dwight Howard had 21 points and 16 rebounds, and Charlotte salvaged a weekend split against Milwaukee. The Hornets rallied from an 18-point deficit in the third quarter after the Bucks opened the second half with a 19-2 run to make it 73-55. The Hornets won thanks to free throws, as they attempted 40 free throws to Milwaukee's 17. Michael Carter-Williams' two free throws with 8.4 seconds left pushed a two-point lead to 107-103 and then Kemba Walker tacked on four more free throws in the final six seconds. The Bucks were missing Giannis Antetokounmpo, who sat out with soreness in his right knee. Antetokounmpo came into the game as the NBA's second-leading scorer at 29.6.

PACERS 123, NETS 119 (OT)

Victor Oladipo scored 38 points to go with six assists as Indiana snapped a three-game home losing streak. Myles Turner added 23 points, nine rebounds and six blocks, which ties a career high. Spencer Dinwiddie led the Nets with 26 points and eight assists, and DeMarre Carroll added 20 points and a game-high 13 rebounds, helping Brooklyn rebound the Pacers 51-41. Rondae Hollis-Jefferson finished with 18 points and eight rebounds despite shooting 7 of 18 from the field.

WIZARDS 130, MAGIC 103

Mike Scott paced a balanced scoring attack with 18 points and the unpredictable Wizards returned to their winning ways with a rout over Orlando. Returning

home after Friday's stunning 119-84 road debacle against the Brooklyn Nets, the Wizards (18-15) led 72-48 at halftime and pushed the margin to 29 in the second half en route to scoring their most points in any game this season. Bradley Beal and Otto Porter each scored 17 points while Markieff Morris had 16. John Wall finished with 10 points and 13 assists. Washington has won four of six games. Elfrid Payton scored a career-high 30 points and added 10 assists for the short-handed Magic, who have lost eight in a row.

HAWKS 112, MAVERICKS 107

Guard Dennis Schroder scored 26 of his 33 points in the second half, including 10 in the final five minutes, to help Atlanta win. Schroder, who didn't play on Friday night because of an ankle injury, matched his season high with 13 field goals and was 4-for-8 on 3-pointers. He added seven assists and three rebounds to help Atlanta break a two-game losing streak and sweep the season series against the Mavericks. Schroder's 3-pointer with 1:21 left in the game gave Atlanta a 110-107 lead. The Mavericks had a chance to tie when Dirk Nowitzki missed a 3-pointer with 26 seconds remaining.

Oklahoma City beat Utah for third time

CELTICS 117, BULLS 92

The Celtics hit Chicago with a 38-point third quarter en route to a blowout of the Bulls that ended Boston's two-game losing streak. The Celtics led by a point when Jaylen Brown hit a pair of 3-pointers to start and finish a 12-0 run over 2:49 early in the quarter, breaking the game open and sending the Bulls to their second straight loss after seven wins in a row. The 38 points was a third-quarter high for the Celtics, who avenged a loss suffered in Chicago two weeks earlier. Kyrie Irving, who didn't play in that first meeting, scored 25 points and dished out seven assists and Brown, who missed the loss in New York with Achilles soreness, scored 20.

PELICANS 109, HEAT 94

Ian Clark scored 19 points to the lead New Orleans over Miami. Clark shot 7-of-11 from the field and made 5-of-7 3-pointers. DeMarcus Cousins finished with 16 points, seven rebounds and eight assists and Anthony Davis scored 17 points as the Pelicans swept their back-to-back set in Florida games after their win Friday at Orlando. The Pelicans scored 13 unanswered points and built a 17-point lead midway through the third quarter. Clark's two 3-pointers and Davis' triple keyed the run. Davis' layup with 3:35 remaining capped the surge and gave the Pelicans an 81-64 lead.

GRIZZLIES 115, CLIPPERS 112

Guard Tyreke Evans scored 30 points with 11 assists as Memphis hung on to defeat the Los Angeles Clippers. Trailing by as many as 16 points in the fourth quarter, the Clippers made it a one-possession game

with Christian Fuchs' hands and crosses. "We couldn't defend the last cross so I think we were punished by our mistakes in both penalty areas.

"There was a lack of maturity. I cannot stop the game and give a team talk," said Mourinho. "For the last two minutes the players had to immediately adapt, to read the game, which they didn't so we had childish decisions in front of goal and bad decisions as it was not just about the goals we missed, or dribbling or hitting the post.

"It was not just about missing chances with an open goal, it was also about decisions. Easy decisions to make in easy transitions to counter-attack."

'CHILDISH DECISIONS'

Mourinho admitted he does not know whether all of his players will develop the maturity he needs. "Some players they have childish decisions and time helps them to have maturity and to decide better but some other players stay with childish decisions until the end of their career," he said.

"You know it depends on what is inside and the way they learn or they don't learn." Leicester fought back despite having substitute Daniel Amartey sent off for two yellow cards in the space of five minutes.

Foxes manager Claude Puel said: "He took the second yellow card with naivety. Perhaps the first yellow card was a little harsh, but the second he needed to manage better. "He's a young player, he came into the game when there was a little pressure, there was intensity, rhythm, it was a difficult to come into the game.

assists. He won a disputed penalty early in the game, shortly after receiving a yellow card for a dangerous challenge on Burnley defender Charlie Taylor, with many home fans believing it should have been a sending off. However, he did produce a sublime pass for Kane to complete his hat-trick with 12 minutes to go.

Pochettino said that both men played a significant role in Tottenham's first away league win since September 30, and is hopeful that they can continue to lift a side who had slipped to seventh place before the weekend. "Harry is so important. I have praised him over the three-and-a-half years I have been here," Pochettino said.

"He makes a contribution not only with goals but with his attitude and his professionalism. How he works on the pitch is fantastic. He's a massive example for everyone. "I'm so happy for him, because not only have we achieved the three points, but he equalled Alan



LOS ANGELES: Lonzo Ball #2 of the Los Angeles Lakers looks to pass as Al-Farouq Aminu #8 of the Portland Trail Blazers defends during the first half of a game at Staples Center on Saturday. — AFP

with 1:02 left when guard Lou Williams (36 points) hit a 3-pointer. After Memphis failed to add to their lead, the Clippers had 21.3 seconds to attempt a game-tying shot. But the Grizzlies' defense forced Williams into a bad pass and turnover and the clock expired. Memphis snapped a three-game losing streak and won for just the third time in the last 22 games. The 115 points marked a season high.

THUNDER 103, JAZZ 89

Russell Westbrook totaled 27 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists for his 11th triple-double of the season to lead Oklahoma City. Paul George added 26 points and Carmelo Anthony chipped in 16 points for the Thunder. Oklahoma City beat Utah for the third straight time to win the season series 3-1. Utah's Donovan Mitchell scored 29 points on 12-of-16 shooting after returning from a two-game absence.

TIMBERWOLVES 115, SUNS 106

Jimmy Butler scored 32 points and Minnesota blew most of a 22-point third-quarter lead before regrouping to beat Phoenix. Andrew Wiggins had 17 points and Karl-Anthony Towns had 16 points and 14 rebounds for Minnesota, which has won four of the past five games and six of the past eight. TJ Warren had 24 points and Troy Daniels 18 for Phoenix.

TRAIL BLAZERS 95, LAKERS 92

Maurice Harkless scored 13 of his season-high 22 points in the fourth quarter to lift Portland to a victory against the Los Angeles Lakers. The Trail Blazers have won 14 straight against the Lakers and eight in a row at Staples Center. Shabazz Napier started in place of injured leading scorer Damian Lillard and scored 21 points, CJ McCollum scored 17 and Zach Collins contributed 11 off the bench for Portland. Harkless, who came in averaging 4.9 points, grabbed an offensive rebound, put it back while being fouled and made the free throw with 21.4 seconds left to give Portland a 94-92 lead. Kentavious Caldwell-Pope missed two 3-point tries in the final 10 seconds for the Lakers.

SPURS 108, KINGS 99

Being down two of their starters hardly mattered San Antonio against Sacramento. The Spurs beat Sacramento for the 11th straight time, riding a 29-point, 10-rebound effort from LaMarcus Aldridge, a triple-double from Pau Gasol and terrific guard play. San Antonio produced 29 assists as a team and committed only eight turnovers. By doing so, the Spurs survived a night without All-Star forward Kawhi Leonard and starting guard Danny Green. Leonard, who has missed 30 games this season because of right quadriceps tendinopathy, sat out to rest as part of his comeback plan. Green had tightness in his left groin. — Reuters

Mourinho lashes United after Leicester frustration

LEICESTER: Jose Mourinho slammed his Manchester United stars after they conceded a late equaliser in a 2-2 draw against 10-man Leicester that left them 13 points adrift of leaders Manchester City. United were already trailing in City's wake, but Harry Maguire's 94th-minute leveller at the King Power Stadium on Saturday was another hammer blow to their title hopes just hours after their rivals had beaten Bournemouth.

Mourinho's side had missed several superb chances to move 3-1 ahead and effectively kill off Leicester and the United boss was furious with his players' finishing and the sloppy way they allowed Maguire to equalise.

"It is as bad as a defeat," said Mourinho. "Sometimes you take a point and you say 'OK' and you accept it as it was hard to get a positive result. "That is not the case. It is a game to win easily. It is a big frustration as they are easy goals to score and easy goals to kill the game but not just the goals we missed, also some easy way out to counter-attack where we lost the ball quite easily.

"On top of that, in the last couple of minutes, we allow the opposition to throw a few balls into the box,

Pochettino hails 'fantastic' Kane and Alli

BURNLEY: Mauricio Pochettino saluted "fantastic" duo Harry Kane and Dele Alli after Tottenham revived their challenge for Champions League qualification with a 3-0 win at Burnley. Kane scored a hat-trick to take his total of Premier League goals in the calendar year to 36, equalling the competition record set by Alan Shearer with Blackburn in 1995.

Alli played a rather more controversial role in proceedings, although he did end the match with two



Jose Mourinho

"It was a good game for us against a great team. We started well. It was a fantastic first goal after regaining the possession," said Puel. "In the second half we started well also, with quality. We made some fantastic opportunities to score, just after this, we conceded the free-kick. And just after it was a little harsh with the sending off of Amartey. "It was a difficult scenario. We saw fantastic spirit, character of my players. They believed until the end." —AFP

Shearer's record.

"He needs one more to set a new record, and I think that's a massive, massive achievement for an individual like him." Alli has had a relatively disappointing personal season to date, with only three league goals to his name.

The midfielder was criticised heavily a week ago for a bad challenge on Manchester City's Kevin de Bruyne, for which he received a yellow card, while his early tackle on Taylor was another example of his temperamental side. Pochettino, though, said that referee Michael Oliver was correct both in only booking Alli and in awarding the early penalty.

"I think it was a yellow. I don't think it was more than yellow. The penalty was a penalty," he said. "I'm happy with his performance and contribution. He tried always. He was always in the game, trying to help the team. His contribution was fantastic." —AFP

Conte defiant over Batshuayi snub

LIVERPOOL: Antonio Conte defended his tactical approach in Chelsea's goalless draw at Everton as he limited stand-in forward Michy Batshuayi to a 20-minute substitute appearance. Conte was without suspended striker Alvaro Morata on Saturday but opted to start with a forward line that featured Willian, Pedro and Eden Hazard rather than an orthodox number nine. The move didn't pay off as Chelsea failed to turn their dominance into goals, but Blues boss Conte said his striker-free team was his only option because Batshuayi isn't fully fit.

"Don't forget today our striker Morata was out. And I think for us this player is very important, he is our finisher," Conte said. "In the end we played with a second option, with three numbers 10's - Willian, Pedro, Hazard - and we created many chances to score. We must be more clinical.

"Today we played without our striker but in this season we played many times this way. "Don't forget that Michy started many games at the star of the season then he had an injury. He's still coming back from injury and just played 75 minutes against Bournemouth (in midweek)." Still, although Batshuayi did indeed miss the month of November, the forward has only started two league games for Conte this season. "I think there is nothing to explain," said Conte when asked why he opted not to start Batshuayi at Goodison. —AFP

Live		Matches on TV (Local Timings)	
ARABIAN GULF CUP			
United Arab Emirates v Saudi Arabia	Kuwait TV Sport Plus KTV Sport HD Dubai Sports 1 HD	17:30	
Kuwait v Oman	Kuwait TV Sport Plus KTV Sport HD Dubai Sports 1 HD	20:00	

13 Flueary stops 26 shots to lead
Knights to 3-0 win over Capitals



14 Ashes gone, pride at stake
for wounded England at MCG



15 Golden State Warriors' win
streak snapped by Nuggets



GREEN BAY: Kylar Fackrell #51 of the Green Bay Packers tackles Jerick McKinnon #21 of the Minnesota Vikings in the second quarter at Lambeau Field on Saturday in Green Bay, Wisconsin. — AFP

Ravens hang on to beat the Colts

Minnesota Vikings' defense dominate short-handed Packers

BALTIMORE: Joe Flacco threw a pair of touchdown passes and the Baltimore Ravens held off the Indianapolis Colts for a 23-16 victory and took over the sixth playoff spot in the AFC on Saturday night. Colts linebacker Anthony Walker blocked a punt with 2:36 left in the game, giving his team the ball on the Ravens' 27-yard line. However, on fourth-and-10, Baltimore cornerback Maurice Canady knocked down a pass from Indianapolis quarterback Jacoby Brissett to seal the win. The Ravens (9-6) overtook Buffalo (8-6) in the postseason race, and Baltimore currently has a better record against common opponents, which would be a tiebreaker. The Bills play at New England on Sunday. Flacco was 29 of 38 for 237 yards.

Baltimore was able to move the ball against the Colts' 30th-ranked defense, but struggled to find the end zone. Justin Tucker's third field goal of the game increased their lead to 16-7 to open the second half.

Colts kicker Adam Vinatieri kept his team in the game with 48- and 38-yard field goals and Indianapolis trailed just 16-13 with 1:34 left in the third quarter. Two penalties—a hold and pass interference—proved to be costly for the Colts (3-12) on the Ravens' next drive. Flacco made them pay with a 4-yard touchdown pass to tight end Maxx

Williams—his first score of the season. That put Baltimore ahead 23-13.

Vinatieri's 30-yard field goal pulled the Colts to within 23-16 with 4:33 left in the game. That gave Indianapolis just enough life to put itself in position to win the game. Brissett did a solid job managing the game. He completed 16 of 33 for 215 yards with a touchdown. Brissett did not have a turnover and was sacked once.

Indianapolis receiver T.Y. Hilton created matchup problems for much of the game and finished with six receptions for 100 yards. The Ravens' opening drive stalled at the Colts' 12 after 14 plays, and they settled for a 30-yard field goal by Tucker.

Tony Jefferson blocked an attempted 38-yard field goal by Vinatieri on the ensuing drive. That led to a 6-yard touchdown pass from Flacco to Michael Campanaro and Baltimore led 10-0 with 12:16 left in the half. The Colts

responded when Frank Gore took a short pass from Brissett and ran it in for a 14-yard score. Another 39-yard kick by Tucker with two minutes left made it 13-7. Vinatieri missed a 60-yard attempt in the final seconds and the Ravens led 13-7 at the break. In Green Bay, the Minnesota

Vikings' defense dominated the short-handed Packers. The Packers, with quarterback Aaron Rodgers on injured reserve, receiver Davante Adams inactive and receiver Jordy Nelson lost for the second half, simply lacked the horses to challenge the Vikings. Minnesota won for the 10th time in 11 games by knocking off the rival Packers 16-0 in a game played in sub-10 degree temperatures.

For the fourth time in their last six games, the Vikings (12-3) allowed fewer than 10 points. It was their first shutout victory since 1993. Harrison Smith's second interception of the night preserved the achievement.

Green Bay (7-8) was blanked for the second time this

season, also losing at home to Baltimore 23-0 on Nov. 19. Brett Hundley, making his eighth start for Rodgers, was ineffective, going 17 of 40 for 130 yards and two interceptions. He wasn't helped by a handful of drops, a makeshift offensive line and the lack of two of the team's top weapons. Case Keenum threw a first-quarter touchdown pass to Stefon Diggs, and running backs Latavius Murray and Jerick McKinnon combined for 111 rushing yards for Minnesota. Green Bay trailed 10-0 midway through the third quarter when it faced a fourth-and-7 from the Vikings' 36-yard line. Without Adams, who ranks second in the NFL with 10 touchdown catches but was out with a concussion suffered last week, and Nelson, who exited late in the second quarter with a shoulder injury, Hundley threw the ball to Michael Clark.

Clark, an undrafted free agent, recently was promoted from the practice squad. A former college basketball player, he played one year of football at Marshall. The ball was sailed over Clark's head. The Vikings tacked on a 20-yard field goal by Kai Forbath on the ensuing possession to extend the lead to 13-0. The key play on the drive came when Keenum ran toward the line of scrimmage, backpedaled and threw a short pass to tight end David Morgan, who broke three tackles for a gain of 23.—Reuters



Flacco made them pay with a 4-yard touchdown pass

India beat Sri Lanka to sweep T20 series 3-0

MUMBAI: Paceman Jaydev Unadkat led a disciplined attack to set up India's five-wicket win in the third Twenty20 international against Sri Lanka as the hosts completed a 3-0 whitewash yesterday. Unadkat returned impressive figures of 2-15 to help restrict the visitors to 135-7. India then achieved their target with four balls to spare in a tense chase at the Wankhede Stadium. Manish Pandey top-scored with 32 but

it was Dinesh Karthik (18) and Mahendra Singh Dhoni (16) who put on an unbeaten 31-run stand to take the team home.

The win ensured that India end the year on a high after outplaying the islanders in the Test (1-0), one-day (2-1) and T20 series. Sri Lanka however put the hosts under pressure with regular strikes as paceman Dushmantha Chameera and medium-pace bowler Dasun Shanaka claimed two wickets each. Shanaka got skipper Rohit Sharma for 27, early in the chase. The in-form Sharma hit 4 fours and a six during his 20-ball stay but his wicket silenced the crowd.

Shreyas Iyer, who scored 30 before being run out while backing up at the non-strikers end, and Pandey then put on a gritty 42-run stand for the third wicket but their departure

spelt trouble. But veterans Karthik and Dhoni stayed calm in the final few overs when India needed 20 off 18 balls. Earlier Asela Gunaratne, who top-scored 36, and Shanaka, who hit an unbeaten 29 off 24 balls, gave some respectability to the total after the visitors lost their top three batsmen for 18 runs.

Unadkat, who removed the openers early, was ably supported by fellow fast bowler Hardik Pandya as they claimed two wickets each. Apart from the paceman, debutant off-spinner Washington Sundar, who opened the attack for India, dismissed Kusal Perera for four and ended with figures of 1-22. After a dominant home season across all three formats, India now head for their high-profile tour of South Africa starting January 5 with the first Test in Cape Town.—AFP



MUMBAI: Sri Lanka's bowler Dushmantha Chameera (R) celebrates after taking the wicket of India's batsman Manish Pandey (L) during the third T20 international cricket match between India and Sri Lanka at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai yesterday. — AFP

Business

MONDAY, DECEMBER 25, 2017

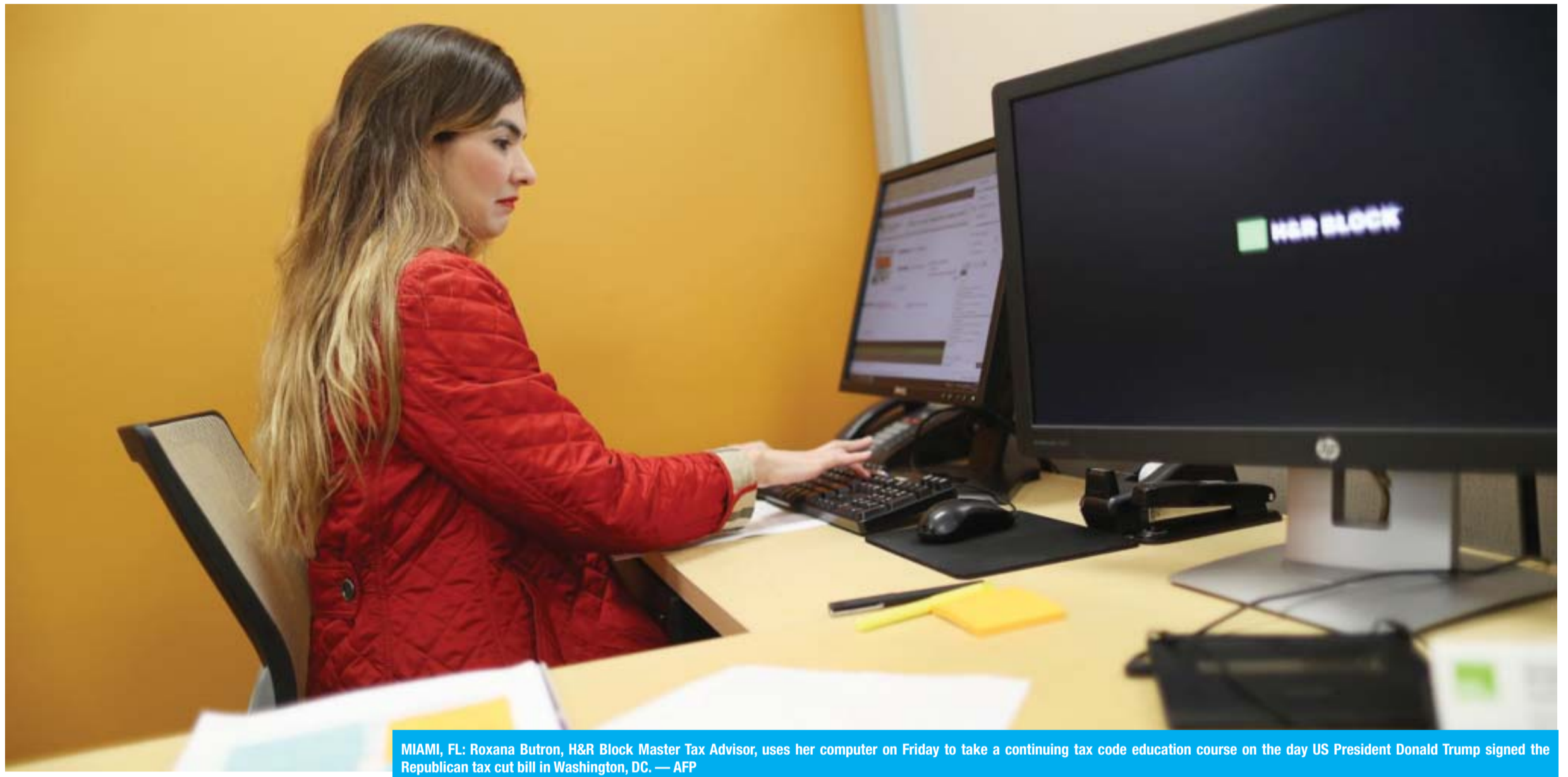
18 Mid-market enterprises turn to sustainability for growth



19 Dollar remains subdued despite passage of tax overhaul bill



21 Al-Shamri: Kuwaitis Islamic banking has reached an important stage



MIAMI, FL: Roxana Butron, H&R Block Master Tax Advisor, uses her computer on Friday to take a continuing tax code education course on the day US President Donald Trump signed the Republican tax cut bill in Washington, DC. — AFP

US bond market flashes a warning sign

Could the 'curve' be a warning of US recession?

NEW YORK: The US economy may be basking in the warm glow of solid growth, but economists are nervously eyeing a trend in the bond market that could spell stormy weather ahead.

Even though President Donald Trump is touting unemployment at its lowest level in 17 years and Wall Street soaring to new heights, economists are worried about one indicator that is often a harbinger of recession: the yield curve. "Since 1950, each recession has been preceded by a reversal of the yield curve," said Christopher Low, chief economist of FTN Financial.

This closely scrutinized graph maps the difference in yield, or return on investment, of short- and long-term US Treasury debt, usually comparing two-year notes to 10-year bonds. Normally, the shorter the investment, the lower the yield, and conversely, the longer the investment, the higher the return, to offset the greater risks of losing access to funds for an extended period.

But for the past year, the yield curve has been flattening as the return on short-term debt has been getting close to long-term yields, possible signaling eroding confidence in the economy's performance in the coming years.

The spread between the yield on two- and 10-year Treasury paper fell from 135 in December 2016 to 51 basis points on December 15, the lowest since October 2007 — just before the start of the global financial crisis. Worse still would be if the yield curve inverts, as short-term returns outpace the longer-dated debt-meaning the spread is negative-and if officials ignore the warning.

The yield curve inversion "could be heralding a contraction of the economy," says Gary Duncan, chief economist at Oxford Economics.

Fed policy

As Gregori Volokhine, of Meeschaert Financial Services, explained: "An inversion of the curve indicates

that investors do not have confidence in the future." The main factor behind the flattening of the yield curve is the US central bank's moves to raise the benchmark interest rate five times since the end of 2015, including three increases this year and three more expected in 2018.

The long-term yields fluctuate more in line with growth and inflation expectations. And while growth prospects have been revised upwards for next year-in part due to the impact of the massive corporate tax cuts just approved by Congress-the Federal Reserve's inflation target will not be reached until 2019, according to its latest forecasts. The Fed's preferred inflation measure was only 1.6 percent year-on-year in October.

Two voting members of the Fed's policy committee-

including Minneapolis Fed President Neel Kashkari-dissented from the December 13 decision to raise rates, preferring to wait for inflation to rise further.

'Worrying'

Kashkari also mentioned his concerns about the yield curve and the signal it is sending to policymakers. "While the yield curve has not yet inverted, the bond market is telling us that the odds of a recession are increasing," he said in a statement explaining his opposition to raising rates again.

Duncan of Oxford Economics cautioned that "if the Fed tightens its policy too quickly, the markets anticipate a slowdown in the economy in the longer term" as credit becomes more expensive. However, outgoing Fed Chair Janet Yellen downplayed those fears. "There are good reasons to think that the relationship between the slope of the yield curve and the business cycle may have changed," Yellen said in her press conference last week. FTN's Low said Yellen could be making the same mistake as her predecessors Alan Greenspan in 1998 and Ben Bernanke in 2006, who each saw recessions after the yield curve inverted. —AFP



Investors lose confidence in future?

Boursa Kuwait announces sustainability action plan

KUWAIT: Earlier this year, Boursa Kuwait became a signatory of the Sustainable Stock Exchanges Initiative (SSE) demonstrating its commitment to encourage sustainability in financial markets.

Building upon this commitment, Boursa Kuwait has announced its action plan to promote sustainability internally and among its listed issuers, and thereby ensure Boursa Kuwait meets the obligations of its participation in the Sustainable Stock Exchanges Initiative (SSE).

Initiating its sustainability action plan, Boursa Kuwait has held on December 19 on its premises, a sustainability engagement session for its issuers in partnership

with Sustainability Excellence, a leading regional sustainability advisory, reporting, and research firm.

This session covered the business case for ESG and sustainability, provided an overview of global investor assessment approaches to ESG, and presented Boursa Kuwait's new voluntary sustainability disclosure guide to support listed companies report on ESG information. The sustainability disclosure guide proposes an initial set of sustainability indicators that are in line with the State of Kuwait's sustainable development ambitions as set out by the Kuwait Vision 2035 and the National Development Plan "New Kuwait". This guide is also aligned with the ESG recommendations of the Sustainable Stock Exchanges Initiative (SSEI) and the World Federation of Exchanges (WFE).

In the same day, Boursa Kuwait and Sustainability Excellence have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), formalizing the deployment of series of strategic sustainability initiatives aimed at further enhancing transparency and disclosure of sustainability/ESG information among Boursa Kuwait listed companies.

Through this MOU, Boursa Kuwait aims to promote market education by deploying group and individual engagement sessions with the listed companies, encouraging dialogue between investors and listed companies on ESG issues, and developing research on the status of sustainability in Kuwait.

Khaled Abdulrazzaq AlKhaled, Chief Executive Officer of Boursa Kuwait, highlighted Boursa Kuwait's strong commitment to drive sustainability in capital markets. He said: "Boursa Kuwait is fully committed to promote sustainability both internally and among our listed issuers. We have set a comprehensive sustainability action plan to engage with our companies and support their new sustainability journey". During the event, Darin Rovere, Founder and CEO of Sustainability Excellence, presented the business case for sustainability adoption and its role in supporting companies identify new opportunities and hedge risks. He said: "Companies that integrate sustainability issues in their core business operations are more competitive and financially outperform their peers."



Darin Rovere and Khaled Abdulrazzaq AlKhaled

Houssam Lahrech, Head of ESG Invest - provided an overview of how investors and ESG rating agencies use ESG information to inform their investment decisions. He said: "responsible investing is one of the

fastest growing trends in financial markets in decades. Companies will need to address the demanding requirements of international investors and rating agencies in terms for ESG information".

WALL STREET WEEK AHEAD

2017's lumps of coal could be 2018's diamonds

SAN FRANCISCO: Investors saddled in 2017 with the market's worst performers, including Under Armour and General Electric, may do well to remember as December draws to an end that lumps of coal sometimes turn into diamonds.

own technology and other high-growth stocks may attract bargain-hunting investors heading into 2017. "A contrarian strategy of buying beaten-up names might have a good year," said Tim Ghriskey, chief investment officer of Solaris Group in Bedford Hills, New York.

2016 roared back to life in 2017, including Vertex Pharmaceuticals and medical device maker Illumina. Those two companies this year have rebounded 69 percent or more.

Kroger has the footprint to not even notice that Amazon is around," Dollarhide said. Investors following the Dogs of the Dow investment strategy each year buy components of the Dow Jones Industrial Average with the highest dividend yield, betting that those stocks have been oversold.

December also would have bought Boeing, which has nearly doubled in 2017. Caterpillar, which is up 64 percent, and Cisco Systems, which has risen 28 percent.

With the S&P 500's rally pushing price/earnings multiples to highs not seen since 2002, laggards overlooked by a rush to

Some of the worst-performing stocks of

Daily Kuwait Stock Exchange Report. Logo for Global and Kuwait Stock Exchange.

Sunday 24 December 2017

Summary table with columns: Index, Change, Closing, Last Closing. Rows include Price Index, Weighted Index, and KSX 15.

Table with columns: Security, High, Low, Volume, Value (KD), Trades, Last, Change. Rows include IPOG, NAPESCO, ENERGYH, etc.

Table with columns: Security, High, Low, Volume, Value (KD), Trades, Last, Change. Rows include KFOUC, BPCC, ALKOUT, etc.

Table with columns: Security, High, Low, Volume, Value (KD), Trades, Last, Change. Rows include KCEM, CABLE, SHIP, etc.

Table with columns: Security, High, Low, Volume, Value (KD), Trades, Last, Change. Rows include PAPCO, CATTI, DANAH, etc.

Table with columns: Security, High, Low, Volume, Value (KD), Trades, Last, Change. Rows include ATC, YIACO, Health Care, etc.

Table with columns: Security, High, Low, Volume, Value (KD), Trades, Last, Change. Rows include ZAIN, OOREDOO, AAN, etc.

Table with columns: Security, High, Low, Volume, Value (KD), Trades, Last, Change. Rows include KINS, GINS, AINS, etc.

Summary table with columns: Volume, Value (KWD), Number of Trades.

Table with columns: Security, High, Low, Volume, Value (KD), Trades, Last, Change. Rows include SOKOUK, KRE, URC, etc.

Table with columns: Security, High, Low, Volume, Value (KD), Trades, Last, Change. Rows include IRC, ALTIJARIA, SANAM, etc.

Table with columns: Security, High, Low, Volume, Value (KD), Trades, Last, Change. Rows include KINV, FACIL, IFA, etc.

Table with columns: Security, High, Low, Volume, Value (KD), Trades, Last, Change. Rows include KAMCO, NIH, UNICAP, etc.

Table with columns: Security, High, Low, Volume, Value (KD), Trades, Last, Change. Rows include ALSALAM, EKTITAB, ALMADINA, etc.

Table with columns: Security, High, Low, Volume, Value (KD), Trades, Last, Change. Rows include SANAD, AFAQ, TAHSILAT, etc.

Table with columns: Security, High, Low, Volume, Value (KD), Trades, Last, Change. Rows include PARALLEL MARKET.

National Bank of Kuwait Financial Markets Daily Report. Logo for NBK.

Global Stock Indices table with columns: Index, Previous Close, Last Price, Change, Daily Performance %, Yearly Performance %.

MENA Stock Indices table with columns: Index, Previous Close, Last Price, Change, Daily Performance %, Yearly Performance %.

Global Currencies Exchange Rate table with columns: Currency, Kuwaiti Dinar, Saudi Riyal, US Dollar, Euro, Sterling Pound, Swiss Franc, Japanese Yen, Australian Dollar.

MENA Currencies Exchange Rate table with columns: Currency, US Dollar, Kuwaiti Dollar, Saudi Riyal, Bahraini Dinar, Qatari Riyal, Omani Riyal, Emirates Dirham, Egyptian Pound.

Global Interest Rates table with columns: Currency, 1-Week, 1-Month, 3-Month, 6-Month, 1-Year.

Global Bond Yields table with columns: Country, 2-Year, 5-Year, 10-Year, 30-Year.

Commodities table with columns: Index, Previous Close, Last Price, Change, Daily Performance %, Yearly Performance %.

Source: National Bank of Kuwait

Business

Al-Shamri: Kuwait's Islamic banking has reached an important stage

KIB sponsors the 7th Shura Fiqh Conference

KUWAIT: Kuwait International Bank (KIB) offered its platinum sponsorship to the 7th Shura Fiqh Conference, which was organized by the Shura Advisory Company in cooperation with the Islamic Research and Training Institute (IRTI) within the Islamic Development Bank (IDB). The conference took place at Jumeirah Messilah Beach Hotel & Spa, under the title "Sukuk: Increasing Efficiency and Sharia compliance".

This latest conference featured a number of seminars discussing the development of Islamic banking products and services, focusing primarily on sukuk bonds and their Islamic bases. Additionally, the conference also discussed legal principles and risks pertaining to Islamic finance. Attendees included a large group of key members from various Islamic fiqh councils, as well as a selection of international senior experts, including financial experts and scholars in Islamic law and economics.

On this occasion, Dr Mohammed Al-Shamri, Manager of the Internal Sharia Audit Department at KIB, said: "This conference came at an important stage of Islamic banking in Kuwait. As

of early 2018, Islamic banks across the country will be required to implement the Sharia Supervisory Governance guidelines, issued by the Central Bank of Kuwait. As Islamic banks are expected to experience a remarkable growth, we must expand our experience and expertise and develop our labor force in order to be able to compete



with the ever-changing needs of the market. This rapid growth in Islamic banking will drive Islamic jurists and scholars to research more into the sources of law in Islam and offer more adaptable and realistic guidelines."

Al-Shamri lauded the conference saying: "We are truly in need of conferences and activities such as these that bring together Shari'ah experts and economists, enriching discussions to offer better perspectives on issues for more well-rounded solutions."

Conference seeks to boost efficiency in sharia-compliance



Manager of the Corporate Communications Unit at KIB, Nawaf Najia said: "Our sponsorship of this conference came as part of our strong role in the local community and our interest in developing research in Islamic banking. Also, the conference discussed topics of great interest to us as it explored a wide range of topics pertinent to an Islamic financial institution, such as various products offerings, sales contracts, Murabba

and its impact on business development." Najia added that the Islamic banking industry has gone through a number of noticeable changes over recent years, showing steady, continued growth. Accordingly, Islamic financial institutions should set clear performance criteria to maintain business strength, stability, and continuity in today's competitive market.

NBK Business Banking has 13 customized branches for business clients across Kuwait

KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait serves the needs of small and medium business with a dedication to service and quality. NBK Business Banking has 13 dedicated branches offering business customers specialized services throughout the country whereas business owners can be served across all 68 branches. With the largest branch network in Kuwait,

NBK makes banking easy and convenient for all its customers.

Bader Al-Mutawa, Assistant General Manager Consumer Banking Group, National Bank of Kuwait said "Businesses need specialized, dedicated services that meet their specific needs" "We have 13 Business Banking branches across the country so that business owners and employees can reach an NBK branch easily and conduct their business in a timely, convenient and safe manner."

NBK Business Banking branches provide a dedicated team of business relationship officers. These highly trained staff can serve as the main point of contact for businesses and provide customized, tailored financial solutions and advice. Exclusive products available



to Business Banking NBK clients include ATMs, credit cards, salary portal, banking facilities, POS & payment gateway.

The growing number of small and medium enterprises, as well as new and young entrepreneurs necessitates the need for efficient, easy and convenient ways of completing banking transactions. Whether online or at a local branch, whatever work you need to conduct, transaction you need processed, an NBK Business Banking relationship officer can help get it done.

"We help businesses help themselves and keeps their business running smoothly," said Al-Mutawa. "NBK Business Banking professionals are also specialized to help customers identify concerns and to provide solutions at every stage."

NBK Business Banking branches are located in the following branches: Head Office, Surra, Shuwaikh, Al-Tadamoun, Mubaker Al-Kabeer, Jabriya, Arraya Tower 2 (fifth floor), Fintas, Salwa, Ras Salmiya (3rd floor), Hawally, Sharq and Ghazali.

CBK nounces winners of Al-Najma Account draw

KUWAIT: Commercial Bank of Kuwait held the daily draw on Al-Najma Account yesterday at the bank's head office to select five winners to win a cash prize of KD 7,000 for each. The draw was held in the presence of Latifa Al-Jiaan, representative of the Ministry of Commerce & Industry. The following names were announced as winners of the prizes:

1. Lotfy Shamseldin Aly
2. Khaireyah Jaafar Mohammad Hasan
3. Harishankar Sundarlal Kanojiya
4. Damianah Jerjes AlQums Loqa Jad

5. Ali Mitham Al-Mahna
Al-Najma Account allows its customers to win a daily prize of KD 7,000 which is the highest daily prize in Kuwait. In addition, the Account offers quarterly draws that provide customers with opportunity to get their dreams turned to reality by winning great prizes starting from KD 100,000 for the first quarter escalating thereafter by KD 50 thousand for each quarter to reach KD 250,000 in the last quarter. Customers can enjoy additional benefits including obtaining ATM card and a credit card against the customer's account along with enjoying all other banking services.

The Bank congratulates all the lucky winners and draws their attention that the cash prizes will be credited into their accounts with the Bank. Further, the Bank appreciates the Ministry of Commerce & Industry's significant role and its continuous cooperation and effective supervision on the draw that was smoothly and transparently organized.

Mutawa Alkazi launches special service offers for GAC car owners

KUWAIT: Mutawa Alkazi launched their special service offers for GAC car owners at their service center, affirming close ties with customers based on constant interest.

Mutawa Alkazi Group and subsidiaries stressed upon the significance of trust between the company and its customers. Such trust is highly recognized by Mutawa Alkazi Group since its incorporation 60 years ago. During that period, the Group achieved entrepreneurship and distinct performance by publicizing the latest cars and motorcycle models, alongside the abundance of spare parts at reasonable prices throughout their service centers. Thanks to the integrated staff capable of conducting efficient, prompt service and repair works, the group has gained a good reputation.

Alkazi called for all Company customers owning GAC cars to seize the opportunity of new service offers provided by the Company at service centers under the slogan "GAC Service Offers: Safety, Quality, Efficiency and Care". Customers will benefit from 25 percent off spare parts and 15 percent off service charges, in addition to a 25-point service check-up free of charge. Furthermore, customers will receive a coupon for replacing windscreen wipers, as the winter months are approaching, therefore clear visibility on roads is essential.



There is an array of surprises and gifts that will be presented to customers. Alkazi reiterated the Company's commitment to provide the best quality services to customers at all times. GAC proved its capability and worthiness on the road and became one of the world's fastest growing and developing car manufacturers. It joins hands with the significant automotive manufacturers in the United States of America, Japan, Germany, Sweden and Korea. GAC selects the best products to compete confidently and achieve incredible results by expanding in China and around the globe, as stated by Alkazi.

Mutawa Alkazi announced the recognition by GAC MOTOR for being the best after-sale services agent in the Middle East. Perceived

for quality of after-sales services provided to customers, contacting them for quality services, in addition to processes of service and repair performed by the highly-skilled company staff. This gives customers confidence and safety on the road. As reported, such recognition will enhance the Company's keenness and interest in being constantly distinguished, hardworking and persistent. With realization that customers trust and satisfaction is a priority for all GAC's service team. Alkazi wished safety to all on the road and a joyful and safe drive for all.

Furthermore, Alkazi invited all GAC vehicle seekers to have a glimpse of various offers, models and specifications that correspond to their needs.

Burgan Bank announces winners of Yawmi account draw

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank, the second largest in terms of assets, announced yesterday the names of the daily draw winners of its Yawmi account draw, each taking home a cash-prize of KD 5,000.

The lucky winners are:

1. Mohammad Salem Kuredi Al-Dousari
2. Mohammad Salem Kuredi Al-Dousari

3. Mohammad Abdullah Alwazzan
4. Sarah Mohammad Abdullah and Aliyah Mohammad Abdullah
5. Wael Adel Hussain Abo Hassan

In addition to the daily draw, Burgan Bank also offers a quarterly draw with more chances to win higher rewards, offering the chance to one lucky customer to win KD 125,000 every three months. The Yawmi Account offers daily and quarterly draws, wherein the quarterly draw requires customers to maintain a minimum amount of KD 500 in their account for two months prior to the draw date. Additionally, every KD 10 in the account will entitle customers to one chance of winning. If the account balance is KD 500 and above, the account holder will be qualified for both the quarterly and daily draws. Burgan Bank encourages everyone to open a Yawmi account and/or increase their deposit to maximize their chances of becoming a winner. The higher the level of the deposit, the higher the likelihood to win.

ABK launches 'Instant Pay' for customers in Kuwait

KUWAIT: In a move to continue to set new benchmarks for banking in the Middle East,

Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) unveiled its 'Instant Pay' service for its customers in Kuwait this November. This service allows ABK customers to withdraw and transfer funds from all other banks using their KNET cards and through the Bank's Internet Banking Portal, 'eahli.com' online banking.

In addition, ABK was the first bank in Kuwait to ensure that its mobile banking system supports Apple's facial recognition technology built into the new iPhone X. This service will allow the use of Apple's newest technology to access their bank accounts in a simple and secure manner.

Stewart Lockie, General Manager of Retail Banking at ABK said: "At ABK, we are focused on the continual renewal and investment in customer service, technology and products. With the launch of Instant Pay, our customers will no longer need to go to other banks to transfer funds to ABK, but can directly do so through our internet banking portal, eahli.com online banking. Not only is our online banking system extremely reliable and secure, but it also provides the utmost banking convenience for our customers who want to access their accounts online from anywhere."



Technology

Ooredoo pursues plans to deploy IoT nationwide

Plans to launch 'Smart Home and Office' solutions by the beginning of 2018

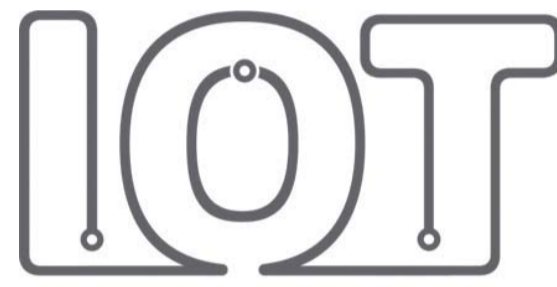


KUWAIT CITY: Reiterating its leading position as a supporter of telecommunication technology, Ooredoo underscored that it is gearing up to launch Smart City initiatives across Kuwait. The announcement came during the Kuwait Internet of Things (IoT) Conference and Expo 2017 which took place last week in Jumeriah Hotel Kuwait. The event was an initiative led by Ooredoo Business, in collaboration with the Ministerial Council's Central Agency of Information Technology and IoT Asia. Speaking at the event, Ooredoo Kuwait's Senior Director of B2B Sales, Abdulaziz Al-Babtain, noted that Ooredoo launched many products and services to enrich its current portfolio, all aimed to support the launch of digital and cloud-computing services that are utilized by IoT technologies. IoT is expected to play an integral part in a variety of sectors, such as healthcare, transportation, and services sector.



ner. They have great experience in delivering advanced solutions in the areas of IoT and ICT, and we believe that they are the most capable organization to implement this project within our network."

Mohamad Dergham, Head of Ericsson Levant and global customer Unit Ooredoo said: "At Ericsson, we are striving to leverage on our IoT experience and capabilities and collaborate on advanced solutions for Ooredoo Kuwait which in turn will help them to provide the best of solutions for their customers. With this partnership, we will successfully be able to enable cities across Kuwait to better serve the needs of smart citizens and enterprises.



THE INTERNET OF THINGS
CONFERENCE & EXPO 2017
K U W A I T



Ooredoo partners with Ericsson to deliver IoT services

Reiterating its leading position as a supporter of telecommunication technology, Ooredoo signed a memorandum of understanding with Ericsson to deliver the best IoT solutions. The agreement aims to bolster Ooredoo's network across Kuwait, readying it for delivering customers with the best services for customers. Abdulaziz Al-Babtain, Senior Director of B2B Sales at Ooredoo Kuwait said: "We were pleased to have partnered with Ericsson as our digital transformation part-

Smart Home and Office Exhibition

During the conference, Ooredoo Kuwait announced its intent to launch smart home and office solutions by the beginning of 2018. The company demonstrated several solutions at its 'Smart Home' exhibition which showcased a number of products including lights, camera monitoring, TV control, Weather control, Door locks, Amazon's Alexa, Magic Mirror - supported by Android, curtain control, and others. These were all controlled by one tablet, giving customers comfort and ease. These

solutions will include full installations, guides, recommendations, bundles and after sales support.

The conference also helped in posing solutions for the various logistic and security solutions that are expected to materialize with the leading of this technology. Over the span of three days, the event featured talks and discussions led by a consortium of professionals and entrepreneurs, to shed light on their experience and the different ways to overcome obstacles in this thriving mode of usage for information technology. Speakers also highlighted the ways different sectors collaborate to better serve individuals and users of this technology.

Ooredoo Kuwait noted in statement prior to the launch of the event: "We are very eager to lead the discussion of IoT in Kuwait today, as the Kuwaiti market is one of the fastest markets to adopt the latest trends in technology. This echoes our core values of caring, connecting, and challenging, and we strongly believe that it is important for all telecom service providers to innovate within the modes of usage of telecommunications today, namely the IoT which will play a vital part in the near future." Ooredoo Kuwait is committed to bringing users the best and most advanced services, to fulfill its mission of enriching people's lives through technology and embracing digitalization.



Qualitynet participates in IoT Conference and Expo '17 Kuwait

Qualitynet, Kuwait's #1 ICT, Data Communications & Internet Services Provider participated in the IoT Conference and Exhibition '17 held in collaboration with Vigor Events, the organization's first event in this segment in Kuwait. The conference was held between the 19th and 21st of December at the Jumeirah Messilah Hotel, with workshops being held on the sidelines of the conference, which saw attendance from Tech and ICT experts from around the region.

Essa Al-Kooheji, Chief commercial Officer at Qualitynet expressed his company's support for the IoT '17 conference and exhibition, as part of its ongoing contribution to the advancement of the Information and Communications Technology sector in Kuwait. "As the leader in innovative technology solutions for Residential & Business customers, we are quite involved in IoT - an emerging segment in the IT industry.

The Internet today allows for an interconnected environment where our devices communicate with each other over IP. These devices include sensors, AI tools and lifestyle devices among others. Its definition goes beyond the traditional concept of connecting people with computers and smart phones through a global network and via the traditional IP" said Kooheji. "What distinguishes IoT is how it allows a person to be free from the limitations of a physical location, where one can control every connected element of the IoT network

remotely. IoT is a promising concept for the technology industry with exponential growth prospects" he added. According to statistics, the volume of investments in the global Internet market for IoT has doubled to reach US \$ 1 Trillion over the last 3 years. By 2019, the figures for the global Internet market are expected at over US \$ 1.7 trillion with 50 billion connected devices by 2020.

Al-Kooheji also talked about how Qualitynet will focus on helping customers choose from the latest IoT products to keep pace with the global market. The company recently launched a range of Internet enabled Security and Smart Systems, available through multiple retail and corporate packages. "We aim to meet our customers' needs at all levels, by providing flexible and scalable IoT solutions taking into account the connectivity of Data networks and the provision of Cyber Security Solutions at Individual and Business levels, both locally and across borders if necessary" said Kooheji.



Hani Abu Al-Khair



Through a strategic partnership with Kuwait Cable Vision, Qualitynet offers an innovative Home Entertainment console named 'Seevii'. The ideal solution for home entertainment through the Internet, Seevii offers a diverse range of content from all over the world, based on IPTV technology. You can access satellite television, international programs with HD quality and on-demand entertainment, all through a single device and without the hassles of costly sub-

scriptions or extensive cabling for Satellites and Receivers. Take control of your entertainment through the Seevii App for Smartphones or their online service. Qualitynet offers a wide range of Office Automation and Intelligent Home Systems, that covers everything from Lighting, Thermostat, Access Control, Alarms, Surveillance and more, making it easy to control everything at home, from anywhere in the world, at the press of a button.

Health

Thirsty rocks may contain the missing water of Mars

Researchers put scientific modeling to the test

PARIS: What happened to all the water that once sloshed in lakes and oceans on Mars? Much of it, researchers proposed Wednesday, may be locked up in stone. Previous studies had concluded that the water was swept into space by powerful solar winds when the planet's magnetic field collapsed, while some was captured in sub-surface ice. But this did not account for all the missing water.

To try to track down the rest, an international team of researchers put scientific modeling to the test. "The results revealed that the basalt rocks on Mars can hold approximately 25 percent more water than those on Earth, and as a result drew the water from the Martian surface into its interior," said a statement from Oxford University, where scientists took part in the study.

As on Earth, chemical weathering and hydrothermal reactions can change minerals in rock from dry to water-bearing, study co-author Jon Wade of Oxford said. But Martian rock, because of a different composition, is much better at doing so. Such rocks would have reacted with the surface water on Mars, locking some of it up in their mineral structure, Wade said in an email.

"It is not liquid anymore but physically bound in the mineral," he said—which means the only way to release the water would be to melt the rock. On an infant Earth, water-bearing rocks formed in a similar way would have floated on the planet's super-hot surface until



IN SPACE: This handout picture shows Mars through time: Current Mars, red, dead and dry on the left, in contrast with the same landscape covered in water, early in the planet's history, over 3 billion years ago.—AFP

they melted, releasing water back to the surface as they did. But on Mars, not all the rock would have melted and some of the water would have remained trapped in rock that sank straight to the mantle. "In essence, Mars was doomed by its geochemistry!" Wade said.

Liquid water is a prerequisite for life as we know it. And although it is dry and dusty today, the Earth's neighbor is thought to have

been a wet planet once. In 2015, NASA said almost half of Mars's northern hemisphere had once been an ocean, reaching depths greater than 1.6 kilometers. Later that year, a study announced the discovery of "water" remaining on the fourth rock from the Sun, in the form of super-salty brine streaks running down steep slopes. The latest findings were published in the journal Nature.—AFP

Thursday. The smashup of the two ultra-dense stars observed on August 17 "confirmed several key astrophysical models, revealed a birthplace of many heavy elements, and tested the general theory of relativity as never before," said the report.

The blast, which occurred 130 million light-years away, is the kind of event that produces as much as half of the universe's gold, platinum, uranium and mercury, experts said. Shockwaves ran through the scientific community when the discovery was announced in October, after

being detected by gravitational wave sensors in the US and Europe, and some 70 telescopes and observatories around the world.

Bangalore Sathyaprakash from Cardiff University's School of Physics and Astronomy recalled the moment as "the most exciting of my scientific life." The magazine's annual rundown of the top advances of the past year also included the discovery of a new kind of orangutan, Pongo tapanuliensis, with just 800 believed to live in an isolated Indonesian forest.—AFP

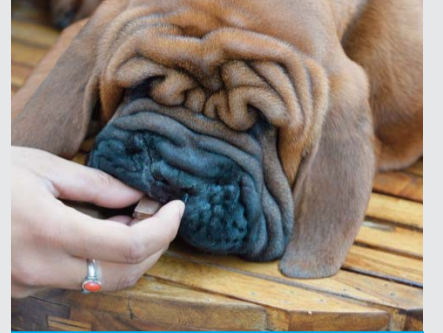
Discovery of neutron star collision is 'breakthrough' of 2017

MIAMI: The world's first-ever detection of two faraway neutron stars colliding, causing a massive blast that rippled through the fabric of space and time, was judged the scientific breakthrough of 2017, the journal Science said

Hide holiday chocolate from your dog: Experts

PARIS: While Christmas may be a time of sweet indulgence for humans, for dogs it is a period of heightened risk of chocolate poisoning, experts warned on Thursday. With edible tree decorations, sweet-laden advent calendars and gift boxes aplenty, chocolate becomes "more accessible" meaning dog owners must be extra vigilant, a University of Liverpool research team said.

When eaten by dogs, chocolate in small doses can cause vomiting or diarrhea, and in large quantities it can lead to muscle tremors, seizures, an irregular heartbeat, internal bleeding or even heart attacks. It is responsible for about a quarter of all acute canine intoxication cases. "Chocolate ingestion has a unique seasonal pattern which merits highlighting this risk," the researchers wrote in the Vet Record journal after scrutinizing five years worth of data on chocolate poisoning from 229 British veterinary practices. Such cases increase fourfold over Christmas compared to the rest of the year, they found, while at Easter it was double. Young dogs were more likely to eat chocolate than older ones. "Sources of chocolate included bars and boxes (often gift selections) of chocolate, Easter eggs, chocolate cake, liqueurs, chocolate rabbits, Santa Claus figurines, advent calendars, and Christmas tree decorations," the research team wrote. There was "one case involving a hot chocolate drink."



BANGALORE: This file photo taken on March 23, 2016 shows an Indian dog breeder feeding chocolate to a four-month-old Korean Dosa Mastiff puppy during a press briefing.—AFP

A garden of eggs

Reported doses were mostly small, except in one case involving "a garden of children," the team found. None of the cases were life-threatening. For dogs, the toxic element in chocolate is theobromine, with pet food maker Hills explaining on its website that while humans easily metabolise the substance, dogs process it much more slowly, "allowing it to build up to toxic levels in their system."

Darker chocolate contains more of the substance, and less than an ounce (28 grams) of dark chocolate is enough to poison a 22 kilogram dog. "If you are worried or suspect that your dog may have eaten a large quantity of chocolate... call your veterinarian immediately," the company advises. Chocolate is bad for cats too, but they are less likely to eat it. Unlike other mammals, they do not taste sweetness.—AFP

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What's On

Hilton Kuwait resort shines light on the magical festive season



Hilton Kuwait Resort treated guests and visitors to a magical tree lighting ceremony at the Song Bird Cafe to officially celebrate the start of the festive holiday season. The lighting ceremony, which has become a special annual tradition at the resort, began with Christmas carols accompanied by canapes, traditional Christmas treats and drinks. Excited guests were invited to start the countdown to Christmas by welcom-

ing the arrival of Santa Claus, who appeared bringing gifts for the children, creating a truly festive ambience.

Welcoming all to this joyful event, Florian Gruhl, Director of Operations of Hilton Kuwait Resort said: "The annual lighting of the Christmas tree at Hilton Kuwait Resort has become a wonderful tradition to mark the beginning of the Festive Season. It is a simple yet meaningful gesture to show our appreciation to our

valued guests and partners who have made 2017 a truly blessed year."

Hilton Kuwait Resort will be hosting a variety of festive promotions throughout the season. Guests and visitors can celebrate Christmas Eve on the 24th December with friends, family and colleagues with a lavish dinner buffet at Teatro, including the season's special roasted Turkey, or make merry with Christmas

Brunch on 25th December, complete with live festive music and fun activities for the kids. To ring in the New Year with style, guests can enjoy an exquisite dinner buffet at Teatro on 31st December that will be sure to add some festive sparkle to the celebrations. Those looking to continue the festivities can also gather with their loved ones to celebrate New Year's Day at a unique brunch with something for all the family.

Share the joy of the festive season at Sheraton & Four Points

As we start to countdown the last days of the year 2017, Sheraton Kuwait and Four Points by Sheraton Kuwait are thrilled to welcome all of their distinguished guests to celebrate the festive season and New Year in a family atmosphere full of fun and exclusive luxurious hospitality through its diverse restaurants that have been extensively preparing for a remarkable season's holiday dining experience with the most delicious cuisines.

Indulge in any of the specialty restaurants operating in a wide range from Sheraton Kuwait to the Avenues, one of the largest and most prestigious shopping malls in Kuwait and the region. Enjoy the delicious flavors from all over the world through the international buffet served in Al Hambra restaurant or experience the charm of the authentic Lebanese taste at Le Toubouche. For those of you who love the Persian cuisine they can treasure the most authentic grills and many other delicious appetizers at Shahrayar. Explore the spicy and exotic Indian palate at Bukhara; where the dishes are prepared with the finest Indian spices. For those looking to just sit back, relax and enjoy a very calm New Year start, can captivate their taste buds in the most tranquil atmosphere and enjoy the marvelous English Tea and savor the most deli-



cious snacks at the English Tea Lounge.

For a very unique and dazzling Festive season, you can enjoy the most bona fide delicacies of Italy at Riccardo Restaurant, the first fine dining Italian restaurant in Kuwait and a classic atmosphere hidden behind the elegant marbled filled walls of Sheraton Kuwait.

If you are looking for a comfortable, casual and down to earth festive season, the Four Points by Sheraton Kuwait has the best choices for you. Indulge in the most laid back trip across the globe with Asseef offering the most delicious international cuisine, whereas La Mamma Pizzeria serves you the best pizza in town baked in the wood fired

oven in addition to an assortment of mouth-watering appetizers from the countryside of Italy in a rustic Italian atmosphere. Pass by and see our majestic poinsettia tree adorning both hotel lobbies, perfect for memorable photos, we invite you to visit our Cake Boutique for a glimpse of our luxury collection cakes and sweets.

On this joyous occasion, Fahed Abushaar - the General Manager of Sheraton Kuwait, the General Manager of Four Points Hotel - Mounir Amer, the Executive Committee and all the associates wishes the people of Kuwait and all the residents a wonderful holiday season and a very prosperous New Year 2018.

Movenpick Hotels & Resorts VP of operations visits Kuwait

Movenpick Hotel Kuwait - Free Trade Zone recently hosted Marc Descrozaille, Vice President of Operations Middle East & Africa at Movenpick Hotels & Resorts. Along with the hotel General Manager Wajdy ElChaar, he met with Ali Haddad, Director of Hotel Operations at International Trade Holdings Co. - the hotel's owning company. Descrozaille expressed his appreciation for



the long term partnership with ITHC and thanked the hotel team for their passion and efforts towards developing and maintaining the high level of services and facilities. Wajdy ElChaar stated: "Marc's visit here in Kuwait

has been a highlight filled with inspiration and enthusiasm. We are definitely encouraged to keep implementing new experiences and continue creating the type of moments that make a Movenpick stay so special."

EDA elects office-bearers

Ernakulam District Association (EDA), Kuwait held its general body meeting on December 8, 2017 which was chaired by President Abdul Rahim. General Secretary Baburaj Palluruthy welcomed the gathering and presented the bi-annual report of the association. EDA Treasurer Jino M. Kunju presented the account for the year 2015-2017. Advisory Board Chairman Roy Yoyaki, Gen Coordinator Babu Chully and Mahila Vedi Chairperson Sheena Jeevan gave facilitations speeches.

Office-bearers were elected under the supervision of Chief Election Commissioner Sabu Paulose and Election commissioners Anil Kumar P K and Reji George. The AGM unanimously elected the following office-bearers for the year 2017-2019.

Geo Mathai - President



Satish TK - General Secretary
Balakrishnan Mallya - Treasurer
Johnson K J - General Coordinator
Mini Kishore-Mahila Vedi Chairperson
Varghese Paul, Roy Yoyaki and Saji Varghese were elected as Patron of EDA.
Babu Chully (Advisory Board Chairman) Biju M Y, Joy Manadan (Advisory Board Members) Jino M Kunju (Vice President) Babu Abraham, Anil Kumar P K (Joint

Secretaries) Jiju Paul Vithayathil (Joint Treasurer) Vishal (Joint Co-ordinator) Baburaj Palluruthy (Arts Secretary) Joseph Raphael, Romania Payton (Joint Arts Secretaries) Dhananjayan (Sports Secretary) Shojan, Francis K M (Joint Sports Secretaries) Sabu Paulose (Welfare Convener) Jomon Koikkara (Welfare Secretary) Abdul Rahim (Public Relations & Media Convener) were elected by EDA Executive Committee.

Women Tech-makers Kuwait completes second workshop

The Women Techmakers (WTM) group held a web development workshop for beginners on the period from 25 Nov till 13th of Dec, 2017 for beginners. The workshop took place at the Promenade Cultural Center in collaboration with the Information Science ClickIT club from Kuwait University, Arab Women in Computing and the Promenade Cultural Center. 50 participants fulfilled the 12-hour workshop requirements, of whom 84% were women. The attendees of the workshop were from varied backgrounds either students, IT professionals mainly engineers or computer scientists, biologists, other scientists as well as retired women successfully completed the workshop. The highlight of the workshop featured the introduction of participants to three new programming, modeling, bootstrap and web hosting at a beginners level.

Women Tech-makers mission is to drive developer success and contribute towards a healthy technology ecosystem in Kuwait. The target technologies involved include Google tech from Android, Chrome, Drive, Google Cloud platforms and APIs like Cast API, Maps API, and YouTube API. Dr. AlMeraj then highlighted that by becoming a member, both women and men have access to multiple Google and Udacity scholarships and certifications. The yearlong events by WTM were then listed these included two programming training workshops (Android study Jams for beginners), and an International Women's Day conference event and Hackathon competition on 8 March 2018. Dr. AlMeraj stressed the importance of diversity and equal representation of women in higher-level tech positions to drive

performance and innovation.

The Website Development workshop covered topics mainly on "how to be a programmer", "build your own website", "and learn the latest programming SDK" and "basic programming commands HTML, CSS and JavaScript". The event started with an introduction on the Women Techmakers / Google and Google Developer Group by Ms Latifa (KU ISC ClickIT Club member), followed by a discussion on the importance of empowering women in technology through creating a community, and prompting visibility and resources. The sessions included topics like "how to be a programmer" and "CSS" by Ms Alfaresi; "Intro to HTML and SDK" by Dr Al-Hilal; and "Intro to Javascript, bootstrap and hosting" Engr. Saqiba Sulaiman.

The speaker bio are as follows: Sundus Alfaresi is a specialist in computer science and a certified programmer from IBM and ITIL, Eng Saqiba Sulaiman is an online information systems professional with more than nine years experience in web development and management, and Dr Maryam Al-Hilal is a PhD graduate in Nutrition and Full Stack Web Developer (Python, Django, Java Script, HTML5, CSS3, Intro to Swift).

On the last day of the workshop, the participants presented their website project to the audience in the presence of the judges and three winners were announced. The judges were two external, Ms Arwa Aljaser and Mr Ayoub K, and one internal, Ms Sundus Alfaresi. Ms Arwa Aljaser is a business graduate in finance and currently working as full stack developer. She has three years' experience in web development in Python, Django, HTML, CSS, Laravel, PHP and JavaScript. She has developed three websites and worked as full time developer at "Ajar". Mr Ayoub K is the Founder and Director of Emstell Technology Consulting. He is a certified project management specialist with over 13 years of experience in Middle East, Europe and North America in implementing IT Solutions for large and small enterprises in various domains. Ayoub is active in the startup circles in Kuwait and GCC offering technical consultation and mentoring.



Announcement from Indian Embassy

The embassy of India shall remain closed on Monday, 25th December 2017 on the occasion of Christmas and also on Monday, 1st January 2018 for the New Year. However, emergency consular services will be available.

TV



00:30 Project Almanac
02:15 Armageddon America
03:45 Point Break
05:40 Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope
07:45 The Viral Factor
09:50 Being Evel
11:35 Point Break
13:30 Operation Chromite
15:25 Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back
17:35 Con Air
19:35 The Last Witch Hunter
21:25 Blood Diamond
23:55 Wyrnwood: Road Of The Dead



00:50 Untamed & Uncut
01:45 Treehouse Masters
02:45 Treehouse Masters
03:45 Treehouse Masters
05:15 Treehouse Masters
06:02 Cats 101
06:49 Cats 101
07:36 Meet The Penguins
08:00 Meet The Penguins
08:25 The Wild Life Of Tim Faulkner
08:50 The Wild Life Of Tim Faulkner
09:15 Treehouse Masters
10:10 Cats 101
11:05 Wildest Islands Of Indonesia
12:00 The Wild Life Of Tim Faulkner
12:28 The Wild Life Of Tim Faulkner
12:55 Keeping Up With The Kruger
13:50 Wildest Africa
14:45 Cats 101
15:40 Wildest Islands Of Indonesia
16:35 Untamed & Uncut
17:30 Treehouse Masters
18:25 Monsters Inside Me
19:20 Alaska Monsters
20:15 Treehouse Masters
21:10 Tanked
22:05 When Turkeys Attack
23:00 Monsters Inside Me
23:55 Wildest Islands Of Indonesia



00:05 Eastenders
00:35 The Good Karma Hospital
01:25 Death In Paradise
02:20 An Inspector Calls
03:50 The Good Karma Hospital
04:40 Eastenders
05:10 Doctor Who
06:00 Doctor Who
06:50 Doctor Who
08:00 Eastenders
08:30 Eastenders
09:00 Death In Paradise
09:55 New Tricks
10:55 Doctor Who
11:45 Doctor Who
12:50 Eastenders
13:20 Death In Paradise
14:20 Doctor Who
15:15 Doctor Who
16:20 Doctor Who: The Return Of Doctor Mystero
17:25 Father Brown
18:20 Casualty
19:20 Doctor Who
20:30 Doctor Who: Twice Upon A Time
21:40 Father Brown
22:40 Call The Midwife: Christmas Special 2017



00:00 Homicide Hunter
01:00 The Eleven
02:00 Homicide Hunter
03:00 Homicide: Hours To Kill
04:00 Homicide Hunter
05:00 The Eleven
06:00 Homicide Hunter
07:00 The First 48
08:00 Nightmare In Suburbia
09:00 It Takes A Killer
09:30 It Takes A Killer
10:00 Homicide Hunter
11:00 Cold Case Files
12:00 Escaping Polygamy
13:00 Leah Remini: Scientology And The Aftermath
14:00 It Takes A Killer
14:30 It Takes A Killer
15:00 Homicide Hunter
16:00 Cold Case Files
17:00 The First 48
18:00 It Takes A Killer
18:30 It Takes A Killer
19:00 Evil Up Close
20:00 Evil Up Close
21:00 Evil Up Close
22:00 Cold Case Files
23:00 The Eleven



00:05 Michael McIntyre's Showtime
00:57 Sean Lock - Purple Van Man
01:45 Tosh.O
02:10 Russell Howard's Stand Up Central
02:35 Real Husbands Of Hollywood
03:00 The Daily Show - Global Edition
03:25 Tosh.O
03:50 Chappelle's Show
04:15 Kroll Show
04:40 Key And Peele
05:05 Important Things With Demetri Martin
05:30 Impractical Jokers
05:55 Disaster Date
06:20 Ridiculousness Arabia
06:50 Catch A Contractor
07:40 Brotherhood
08:05 Impractical Jokers
08:30 Disaster Date
08:55 Workaholics
09:20 Kroll Show
09:45 Key And Peele
10:10 Important Things With Demetri Martin
10:35 Brotherhood
11:00 Impractical Jokers
11:25 Disaster Date
11:50 Ridiculousness Arabia
12:15 Impractical Jokers
12:40 Catch A Contractor
13:30 Important Things With Demetri Martin
13:55 Friends
14:20 Friends
14:45 Workaholics
15:10 Key And Peele
15:35 Kroll Show
16:00 Comedy Central Presents Comedy 3alwagef
16:30 Impractical Jokers
16:55 Friends
17:20 Friends
17:45 Disaster Date
18:10 Ridiculousness Arabia
18:35 Punk'd (Bet)
19:00 Punk'd (Bet)
19:25 Impractical Jokers
19:50 Real Husbands Of Hollywood

20:12 Friends
20:35 Friends
21:00 The Daily Show With Trevor Noah
21:30 Real Husbands Of Hollywood
22:00 Real Husbands Of Hollywood
22:25 Real Husbands Of Hollywood
22:50 Teachers
23:15 Real Husbands Of Hollywood
23:40 The Daily Show With Trevor Noah



00:30 Ultimate Survival
01:20 North America
02:10 North America
03:00 North America
03:50 Destroyed In Seconds
04:15 Destroyed In Seconds
04:40 Destroyed In Seconds
05:05 Destroyed In Seconds
05:30 Destroyed In Seconds
05:55 Destroyed In Seconds
06:20 How It's Made
06:40 How It's Made
07:00 Destroyed In Seconds
07:25 Destroyed In Seconds
07:50 North America
08:40 How It's Made
09:05 How It's Made
09:30 Tethered
09:30 Somebody's Gotta Do It
11:10 Don't Blink
11:35 Don't Blink
12:00 Don't Blink
12:25 Don't Blink
12:50 Don't Blink
13:15 Don't Blink
13:40 The Carbonaro Effect
14:05 The Carbonaro Effect
14:30 The Carbonaro Effect
14:55 Troy
15:45 Dynamo: Live At The O2
17:00 Finding Bigfoot
17:50 Somebody's Gotta Do It
18:40 Science Of The Movies
19:30 How It's Made
19:55 How It's Made
20:20 Destroyed In Seconds
20:45 Destroyed In Seconds
21:10 Finding Bigfoot
22:00 Somebody's Gotta Do It
22:50 Don't Blink
23:15 Don't Blink
23:40 Don't Blink



00:50 American Monster
01:45 Ghost Stalkers
02:40 Paranormal Lockdown With Nick Groff
03:35 I Speak For The Dead
04:30 American Monster
05:25 Murder By Numbers
06:20 Reasonable Doubt
07:10 Who Killed Angie Dodge: Keith Morrison...
08:00 The Locator
08:25 Deadline: Crime With Tamron Hall
09:15 The Locator
09:40 The Locator
10:10 American Monster
11:05 Forbidden: Dying For Love
12:00 The Perfect Murder
12:55 Deadline: Crime With Tamron Hall
13:50 I Almost Got Away With It
14:45 American Monster
15:40 Evil Lives Here
16:35 Murder Calls
17:30 Deadline: Crime With Tamron Hall
18:25 The Locator
18:50 The Locator
19:20 I Almost Got Away With It
20:15 What Happened To Baby Lisa? People Magazine...
21:10 Murder Comes To Town
22:05 Gone
23:00 Deadline: Crime With Tamron Hall
23:55 I Speak For The Dead



00:05 Disney Mickey Mouse
00:10 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
00:35 Binny And The Ghost
01:00 Hank Zipzer
01:25 Alex & Co.
01:45 Disney Mickey Mouse
01:50 Evermoor Chronicles
02:15 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
02:40 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
03:05 Binny And The Ghost
03:30 Binny And The Ghost
03:55 Hank Zipzer
04:15 Disney Mickey Mouse
04:20 Hank Zipzer
04:45 Alex & Co.
05:10 Alex & Co.
05:35 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
06:00 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
06:25 Binny And The Ghost
06:45 Disney Mickey Mouse
06:50 Rolling With The Ronks
07:00 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug And Cat Noir
07:25 Frozen Northern Lights
07:50 Tsum Tsum Shorts
07:55 Good Luck Jessie
08:45 Frozen In Time
09:35 Tangled: The Series
10:00 The Ultimate Christmas Present
11:20 The Zhuzhus
11:35 Frozen: Magic Of The Northern Lights
11:40 Auslin & Ally
12:05 That's So Raven
12:30 That's So Raven
12:55 Frozen: Magic Of The Northern Lights
13:00 Bunk'd
13:25 Tangled: The Series
13:50 Jessie
14:15 Hotel Transylvania: The Series
14:40 K.C. Undercover
15:05 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug And Cat Noir
15:30 Bizaardvark
15:55 Elena Of Avalor
16:20 Stuck In The Middle
16:45 Liv And Maddie
17:10 Twas The Night
18:40 Jessie's Aloha...
19:30 Bob's Broken Sleigh
20:20 Duck The Halls: A Very Mickey...
20:45 Good Luck Charlie: The Road Trip Movie
22:05 The Zhuzhus
22:15 LOLirock
22:40 Evermoor Chronicles
23:05 Rolling With The Ronks
23:20 Miraculous Tales Of Ladybug And Cat Noir
23:45 LOLirock

00:15 Vampirina
01:05 The Hive
01:15 Calimero
01:30 Art Attack
01:55 Henry Hugglemonster
02:05 Loopdidoo
02:20 Henry Hugglemonster
02:35 Calimero
02:50 Henry Hugglemonster
03:05 Art Attack
03:30 The Hive
03:40 Loopdidoo
03:55 Henry Hugglemonster
04:10 Art Attack
04:35 Loopdidoo
04:50 Calimero
05:05 Art Attack
05:30 Henry Hugglemonster
05:45 Henry Hugglemonster
06:00 Art Attack
06:30 Henry Hugglemonster
06:45 Loopdidoo
07:00 Henry Hugglemonster
07:15 Calimero
07:30 Loopdidoo
07:45 Henry Hugglemonster
08:00 Bob's Broken Sleigh
08:50 Doc McStuffins
09:10 Mickey And The Roadster Racers
09:35 Sofia The First
10:00 Sofia The First: The Curse Of Princess Ivy
10:45 Minnie's Bow-Toons
11:00 Sheriff Callie's Wild West
11:25 Sheriff Callie's Wild West
11:50 The Lion Guard
12:15 The Lion Guard
12:45 Sofia The First
13:10 Sofia The First
13:40 PJ Masks
14:10 PJ Masks
14:35 Doc McStuffins
15:05 P-King Duckling
15:30 G-Ding & Bear And The Magic Map
15:55 Sofia The First
16:00 PJ Masks
16:30 Mickey And The Roadster Racers
17:00 Doc McStuffins
18:00 Minnie's Winter Bow Show
18:55 Sofia The First
19:20 Mickey And The Roadster Racers
19:45 Puppy Dog Pals
20:10 The Lion Guard
20:35 P-King Duckling
21:00 Doc McStuffins Toy Hospital
21:30 PJ Masks
22:00 Sofia The First: The Curse Of Princess Ivy
22:55 P-King Duckling
23:20 Puppy Dog Pals
23:45 Mickey And The Roadster Racers

00:20 Street Outlaws
01:05 Diesel Brothers
01:50 Supertrucks
02:35 What On Earth?
03:20 Misfit Garage
04:05 Deadliest Catch
05:35 Gold Diggers
06:00 Street Outlaws
07:15 Misfit Garage
07:45 Deadliest Catch
09:47 How Do They Do It?
10:12 Street Outlaws
10:57 Garage Rehab
11:42 Misfit Garage
12:25 How Do They Do It?
12:48 Extreme Collectors
13:10 Alaska: The Last Frontier
13:55 Alaska: The Last Frontier
14:40 Gold Diggers
15:25 Misfit Garage
16:10 Street Outlaws
17:00 How Do They Do It?
17:25 How Do They Do It?
17:50 Extreme Collectors
18:20 Container Wars
18:50 Deadliest Catch
20:35 How Do They Do It?
21:00 Gold Rush
21:50 Gold Diggers
22:40 Cooper's Treasure: The Hunt For A Secret Fortune
23:30 Misfit Garage

00:20 Street Outlaws
01:05 Diesel Brothers
01:50 Supertrucks
02:35 What On Earth?
03:20 Misfit Garage
04:05 Deadliest Catch
05:35 Gold Diggers
06:00 Street Outlaws
07:15 Misfit Garage
07:45 Deadliest Catch
09:47 How Do They Do It?
10:12 Street Outlaws
10:57 Garage Rehab
11:42 Misfit Garage
12:25 How Do They Do It?
12:48 Extreme Collectors
13:10 Alaska: The Last Frontier
13:55 Alaska: The Last Frontier
14:40 Gold Diggers
15:25 Misfit Garage
16:10 Street Outlaws
17:00 How Do They Do It?
17:25 How Do They Do It?
17:50 Extreme Collectors
18:20 Container Wars
18:50 Deadliest Catch
20:35 How Do They Do It?
21:00 Gold Rush
21:50 Gold Diggers
22:40 Cooper's Treasure: The Hunt For A Secret Fortune
23:30 Misfit Garage

00:00 Decoding The Past
01:00 UFO Files
02:00 Hangar I: The UFO Files
03:00 Hangar I: The UFO Files
03:50 Hangar I: The UFO Files
04:40 Ancient Top 10
05:30 Decoding The Past
06:20 Ancient Impossible
07:10 The Universe
08:00 UFO Files
09:00 Ancient Impossible
10:00 Ancient Discoveries
11:00 Hangar I: The UFO Files
12:00 Decoding The Past
13:00 Hangar I: The UFO Files
14:00 UFO Files
15:00 Ancient Top 10
16:00 Ancient Impossible
17:00 Ancient Discoveries
18:00 Decoding The Past
19:00 Ancient Discoveries
20:00 Clash Of Warriors
21:00 Brad Meltzer's Decoded
22:00 Ancient Aliens: The Ultimate Evidence
23:00 10 Things You Don't Know About...

00:20 Ultimate Wheels
01:10 American Pickers
02:00 Swamp People
02:50 Counting Cars
03:15 American Pickers
04:05 Time Team
05:00 Counting Cars
05:25 Counting Cars
06:00 Ultimate Wheels
06:50 American Pickers
07:40 Counting Cars
08:05 Counting Cars
08:30 Pawn Stars
08:55 Pawn Stars
09:20 Aussie Pickers
10:10 Ax Men
11:00 Ultimate Wheels
11:50 American Pickers
12:40 Counting Cars
13:05 Counting Cars
13:30 Time Team
14:20 Swamp People
15:10 Alone
16:00 American Pickers
16:50 Counting Cars
17:15 Counting Cars
17:40 Swamp People
18:30 Alone
19:20 Mountain Men Superheroes Decoded
20:10 The Wreckers
22:40 Time Team
23:30 Alone

04:40 Hollywood Medium With Tyler Henry
05:30 Celebrity Style Story
06:00 Revenge Body With Khloe Kardashian
07:00 Revenge Body With Khloe Kardashian
08:50 Hollywood Medium With Tyler Henry
11:35 Celebrity Style Story
12:05 Keeping Up With The Kardashians
23:55 Revenge Body With Khloe Kardashian

00:00 Bakers vs. Fakers
01:00 Jenny And Reza's Fabulous Food Academy
01:30 Jenny And Reza's Fabulous Food Academy
02:00 Private Chef
02:30 Private Chef
03:00 Chopped
04:00 Bakers vs. Fakers
05:00 Guy's Grocery Games
06:00 Barefoot Contessa
06:25 Barefoot Contessa
06:50 Bake With Anna Olson
07:15 The Kitchen
08:05 The Pioneer Woman
08:20 The Pioneer Woman
08:55 Siba's Table
09:25 Siba's Table
09:55 Bake With Anna Olson
10:25 Bake With Anna Olson
10:55 The Kitchen
11:45 Cooking For Real
12:10 The Pioneer Woman
12:35 The Pioneer Woman
13:00 Siba's Table
13:30 Siba's Table
14:00 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
14:30 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
15:00 Chopped
16:00 The Kitchen
17:00 Bake With Anna Olson
17:30 Bake With Anna Olson
18:00 Chopped Junior
19:00 Holiday Baking Championship
20:00 Holiday Baking Championship
21:00 Mystery Diners
21:30 Mystery Diners
22:00 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
22:30 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives
23:00 Chopped

00:10 Secrets Of Christ's Tomb
01:00 The Story Of God With Morgan Freeman
02:00 Mystery Files
03:00 Mystery Files
04:00 Living In Space
05:00 Secrets Of Christ's Tomb
05:00 Caught In The Act
06:00 Born To Ride
07:00 Locked Up Abroad
08:00 Uncensored With Michael Ware
09:00 Caught In The Act
10:00 Titanic: 20 Years Later With James Cameron
11:00 Live Free Or Die
12:00 Brain Games
12:30 What Would Happen If
13:00 Born To Ride
14:00 Uncensored With Michael Ware
15:00 Locked Up Abroad
16:00 Dian Fossey: Secrets In The Mist
17:00 The Story Of God With Morgan Freeman
18:00 Secrets Of Christ's Tomb
19:00 Locked Up Abroad
20:00 Dian Fossey: Secrets In The Mist
20:50 The Story Of God With Morgan Freeman
21:40 Secrets Of Christ's Tomb
22:30 Locked Up Abroad
23:20 Brain Games
23:45 What Would Happen If

00:20 Savage Kingdom: Uprising
01:00 Ultimate Predators GPU
01:30 Storm Cats
02:30 Caught In The Act GPU Reversions
03:45 Secret Brazil
04:40 The Naked Superhero
05:35 Storm Cats
06:30 Caught In The Act GPU Reversions
07:25 Secret Brazil
08:20 The Naked Superhero
09:15 World's Weirdest: Funny Farms
10:10 My Life Is A Zoo
11:05 Animal ER
12:00 Monster Fish: Fantastic Beasts
12:55 Future Cat
13:50 World's Deadliest
14:45 Urban Jungle
15:40 Little Monkey House
16:35 World's Weirdest Animal Faces
17:30 My Dog Ate What?
18:25 Animal ER
19:20 Urban Jungle
20:10 Little Monkey House
21:00 World's Weirdest Animal Faces
21:50 My Dog Ate What?
22:40 Animal ER
23:30 Monster Fish: Fantastic Beasts

00:12 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
00:36 Rabbits Invasion
01:24 Sanjay And Craig
02:12 Win Club
03:00 Harvey Beaks
03:48 The Loud House
04:36 Breadwinners
05:24 Get Blake
05:48 SpongeBob SquarePants
06:36 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
07:24 Rabbits Invasion
07:48 Get Blake
08:12 Harvey Beaks
08:36 Sanjay And Craig
09:00 SpongeBob SquarePants
09:24 Ruffus
10:12 Henry Danger Movie
11:00 Splitting Adam
11:36 Liar, Liar, Vampire
12:36 One Crazy Cruise
13:48 Fairy Christmas
16:12 A Tiny Odd Christmas
17:24 Lost In The West I
18:12 Lost In The West II
19:00 School Of Rock
19:24 Talia In The Kitchen
20:12 Bile
21:00 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
21:24 Sanjay And Craig
21:48 Rabbits Invasion
22:12 Breadwinners
22:36 Harvey Beaks
23:00 SpongeBob SquarePants
23:24 SpongeBob SquarePants
23:48 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles

03:30 Migue's Feasts
03:55 The Food Files
04:25 The Food Files
04:50 Eat Street
05:20 Charlie Luxton's Homes By The Sea
06:15 A Is For Apple
06:40 A Is For Apple
07:10 Stepping Out
07:35 Stepping Out
08:05 Stepping Out
08:30 Stepping Out
09:00 World's Greatest Food Markets
09:55 Lyndey Milan - Taste Of Australia
10:20 Migue's Feasts
10:50 Sinful Sweets
11:15 David Rocco's Dolce Vita
12:10 David Rocco's Dolce Vita
12:40 Places We Go
13:05 Rustic Adventures Argentina
13:35 Confucius Was A Foodie
14:30 Migue's Feasts
14:55 The Food Files
15:25 David Rocco's Dolce Vita
15:50 Eat Street
16:20 Charlie Luxton's Homes By The Sea
17:15 Christmas Cracker
18:10 Puh & Co.
18:35 Angelo's Outdoor Kitchen
19:05 David Rocco's Dolce Vita
19:30 Eat Street
20:00 Charlie Luxton's Homes By The Sea
21:00 Christmas Cracker
21:40 Puh & Co.
22:25 Angelo's Outdoor Kitchen
22:55 Places We Go
23:20 Rustic Adventures Argentina
23:50 Confucius Was A Foodie

00:10 Secrets Of Christ's Tomb
01:00 The Story Of God With Morgan Freeman
02:00 Mystery Files
03:00 Mystery Files
04:00 Living In Space
05:00 Secrets Of Christ's Tomb
05:00 Caught In The Act
06:00 Born To Ride
07:00 Locked Up Abroad
08:00 Uncensored With Michael Ware
09:00 Caught In The Act
10:00 Titanic: 20 Years Later With James Cameron
11:00 Live Free Or Die
12:00 Brain Games
12:30 What Would Happen If
13:00 Born To Ride
14:00 Uncensored With Michael Ware
15:00 Locked Up Abroad
16:00 Dian Fossey: Secrets In The Mist
17:00 The Story Of God With Morgan Freeman
18:00 Secrets Of Christ's Tomb
19:00 Locked Up Abroad
20:00 Dian Fossey: Secrets In The Mist
20:50 The Story Of God With Morgan Freeman
21:40 Secrets Of Christ's Tomb
22:30 Locked Up Abroad
23:20 Brain Games
23:45 What Would Happen If

00:20 Savage Kingdom: Uprising
01:00 Ultimate Predators GPU
01:30 Storm Cats
02:30 Caught In The Act GPU Reversions
03:45 Secret Brazil
04:40 The Naked Superhero
05:35 Storm Cats
06:30 Caught In The Act GPU Reversions
07:25 Secret Brazil
08:20 The Naked Superhero
09:15 World's Weirdest: Funny Farms
10:10 My Life Is A Zoo
11:05 Animal ER
12:00 Monster Fish: Fantastic Beasts
12:55 Future Cat
13:50 World's Deadliest
14:45 Urban Jungle
15:40 Little Monkey House
16:35 World's Weirdest Animal Faces
17:30 My Dog Ate What?
18:25 Animal ER
19:20 Urban Jungle
20:10 Little Monkey House
21:00 World's Weirdest Animal Faces
21:50 My Dog Ate What?
22:40 Animal ER
23:30 Monster Fish: Fantastic Beasts

00:12 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
00:36 Rabbits Invasion
01:24 Sanjay And Craig
02:12 Win Club
03:00 Harvey Beaks
03:48 The Loud House
04:36 Breadwinners
05:24 Get Blake
05:48 SpongeBob SquarePants
06:36 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
07:24 Rabbits Invasion
07:48 Get Blake
08:12 Harvey Beaks
08:36 Sanjay And Craig
09:00 SpongeBob SquarePants
09:24 Ruffus
10:12 Henry Danger Movie
11:00 Splitting Adam
11:36 Liar, Liar, Vampire
12:36 One Crazy Cruise
13:48 Fairy Christmas
16:12 A Tiny Odd Christmas
17:24 Lost In The West I
18:12 Lost In The West II
19:00 School Of Rock
19:24 Talia In The Kitchen
20:12 Bile
21:00 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
21:24 Sanjay And Craig
21:48 Rabbits Invasion
22:12 Breadwinners
22:36 Harvey Beaks
23:00 SpongeBob SquarePants
23:24 SpongeBob SquarePants
23:48 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles

00:15 The Preppie Connection
02:00 Meru
03:35 Big Night
05:25 Not Without My Daughter
07:25 Suffragette
09:15 Meru
11:00 Forsaken
12:40 The Shamer's Daughter
14:30 A Birder's Guide To Everything
16:10 Alex Of Venice
17:50 New York Stories
20:05 Meadowland
22:00 Masquerade
23:40 Newsies: The Broadway Musical

01:20 Vickie And The Treasure Of Gods
03:00 Beyond Beyond
04:30 The Apple & The Worm
06:00 Micropols
07:30 Phantom Boy
09:05 Fire Birds
11:00 Victor And The Secret Of Crocodile Mansion
12:10 Bunny Tales
13:30 Vickie And The Treasure Of Gods
15:10 Beyond Beyond
16:35 Turbo: A Power Rangers Movie
18:20 Victor And The Secret Of Crocodile Mansion
20:00 Ozy
21:35 Catcher: Cat City 2
23:15 Turbo: A Power Rangers Movie

01:57 Blaze And The Monster Machines
02:19 Blaze And The Monster Machines
02:41 Zack & Quack
02:52 Kid-E-Cats
02:58 Kid-E-Cats
03:04 Shimmer And Shine
03:26 Nella The Princess Knight
03:38 Paw Patrol
04:01 Little Charmers
04:13 Ben & Holly's Little Kingdom
04:24 Dora The Explorer
04:44 Max & Ruby
05:06 The Day Henry Met
05:11 Nella The Princess Knight
05:33 Shimmer And Shine
05:55 Albert
06:38 Blaze And The Monster Machines
07:00 Rusty Rivets
07:13 Paw Patrol
07:37 Dora The Explorer
08:00 Nella The Princess Knight
08:11 Kid-E-Cats
08:15 Kid-E-Cats
08:21 Bubble Guppies
08:44 Blaze And The Monster Machines
09:07 Paw Patrol
09:30 Shimmer And Shine
09:53 Nella The Princess Knight
10:14 The Day Henry Met
10:20 Paw Patrol
10:43 Rusty Rivets
11:06 Wallykazam!
11:29 Bubble Guppies
11:53 Team Umizoomi
12:15 Albert
12:59 Max & Ruby
13:22 Ben & Holly's Little Kingdom
13:45 The Day Henry Met
13:55 Blaze And The Monster Machines
14:40 Zack & Quack
14:50 Kid-E-Cats
14:55 Kid-E-Cats
15:03 Shimmer And Shine
15:25 Nella The Princess Knight
15:37 Paw Patrol
16:00 Little Charmers
16:12 Ben & Holly's Little Kingdom
16:24 Dora The Explorer
16:46 Max & Ruby
17:09 Nella The Princess Knight
17:32 Shimmer And Shine
17:54 Albert
18:38 Blaze And The Monster Machines
19:00 Rusty Rivets
19:13 Paw Patrol
19:37 Dora The Explorer
20:00 Nella The Princess Knight
20:11 Kid-E-Cats
20:15 Kid-E-Cats
20:21 Bubble Guppies
20:44 Blaze And The Monster Machines
21:07 Paw Patrol
21:30 Shimmer And Shine
21:53 Nella The Princess Knight
22:15 The Day Henry Met
22:21 Paw Patrol
22:44 Rusty Rivets
23:07 Wallykazam!
23:30 Bubble Guppies
23:53 Team Umizoomi

00:50 Chilly Christmas
02:20 A Royal Christmas
04:00 Santa Claws
05:30 Get Santa
07:15 Chilly Christmas
08:45 Ola's Frozen Adventure
09:15 Deck The Halls
10:50 A Royal Christmas
12:30 Alone For Christmas
14:00 Ola's Frozen Adventure
14:30 Coat Of Many Colors
16:00 A Miracle On Christmas Lake
18:00 Shelby: The Dog Who Saved Christmas
19:35 Christmas Trade
21:20 Alone For Christmas
22:50 Ola's Frozen Adventure
23:20 Coat Of Many Colors

00:50 Chilly Christmas
02:20 A Royal Christmas
04:00 Santa Claws
05:30 Get Santa
07:15 Chilly Christmas
08:45 Ola's Frozen Adventure
09:15 Deck The Halls
10:50 A Royal Christmas
12:30 Alone For Christmas
14:00 Ola's Frozen Adventure
14:30 Coat Of Many Colors
16:00 A Miracle On Christmas Lake
18:00 Shelby: The Dog Who Saved Christmas
19:35 Christmas Trade
21:20 Alone For Christmas
22:50 Ola's Frozen Adventure
23:20 Coat Of Many Colors

01:00 Tank Girl
02:50 Love The Coopers
04:40 Christmas Eve
06:20 Big Momma's House
08:00 Holiday Joy
09:45 Yoga Hosers
11:20 Love The Coopers
13:15 Big Momma's House
15:00 Murder Of A Cat
16:45 Big Momma's House 2
18:30 A Date With Miss Fortune
20:15 The To Do List
22:00 Hector And The Search For Happiness

00:15 The Preppie Connection
02:00 Meru
03:35 Big Night
05:25 Not Without My Daughter
07:25 Suffragette
09:15 Meru
11:00 Forsaken
12:40 The Shamer's Daughter
14:30 A Birder's Guide To Everything
16:10 Alex Of Venice
17:50 New York Stories
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07:30 Phantom Boy
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11:00 Victor And The Secret Of Crocodile Mansion
12:10 Bunny Tales
13:30 Vickie And The Treasure Of Gods
15:10 Beyond Beyond
16:35 Turbo: A Power Rangers Movie
18:20 Victor And The Secret Of Crocodile Mansion
20:00 Ozy
21:35 Catcher: Cat City 2
23:15 Turbo: A Power Rangers Movie

00:15 Love And Other Drugs
02:10 The Lovely Bones
04:25 Krampus
06:05 Baby's Day Out

07:45 The Invention Of Lying
09:25 Nacho Libre
11:00 Before We Go
12:40 Rocky Balboa
14:25 Man In The Moon
16:05 The Invention Of Lying
17:45 Die Hard
20:00 Ride Along
21:45 Along 2
23:30 Straight Outta Compton

00:40 Strip The Cosmos
01:30 Strip The Cosmos
02:20 Strip The Cosmos
03:10 Strip The Cosmos
04:00 Mythbusters
04:48 Mythbusters
05:36 Mythbusters
06:24 Mythbusters
07:12 Mythbusters
08:00 How Do They Do It?
08:26 The Big Brain Theory
09:14 Mythbusters
10:02 Strip The Cosmos
10:50 How Do They Do It?
11:14 Food Factory USA
11:38 Gamechangers: Inventing The World
12:26 The Big Brain Theory
13:14 Mythbusters
14:02 How Do They Do It?
14:26 Food Factory USA
14:50 Strip The Cosmos
15:38 The Big Brain Theory
16:26 Gamechangers: Inventing The World
17:14 Mythbusters
18:02 Strip The Cosmos
18:50 The Big Brain Theory
19:40 Mythbusters
20:30 X-Machines
21:20 How Do They Do It?
21:45 Food Factory USA
22:10 Strip The Cosmos
23:00 X-Machines
23:50 The Big Brain Theory

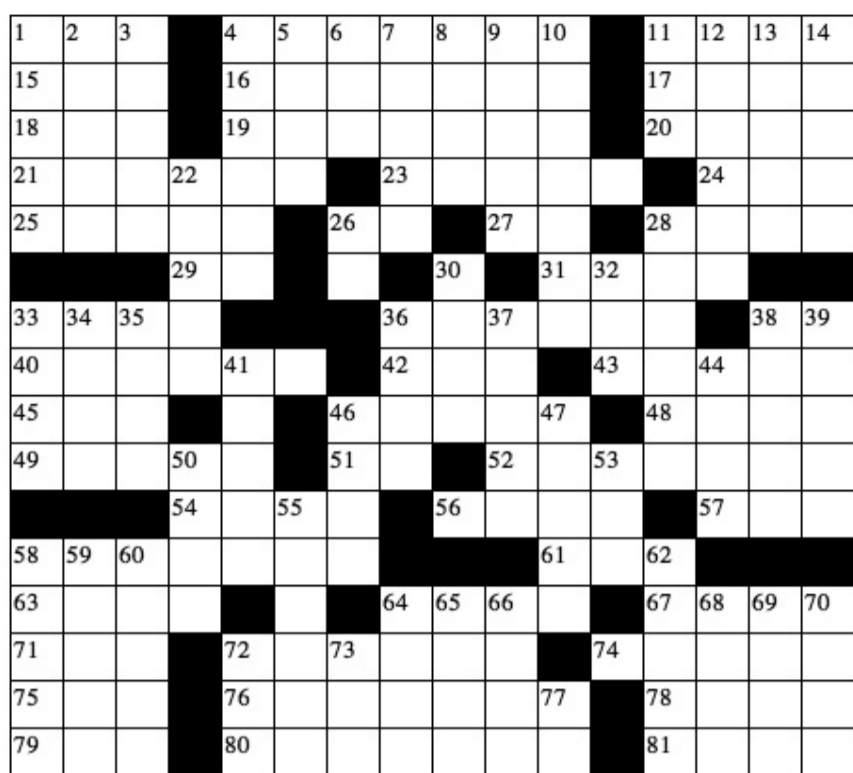
01:15 Dr. T And The Women
03:15 What Just Happened
05:00 The Dead Girl
06:45 Ironclad
08:45 View From The Top
10:15 Tale Of Tales
12:45 How To Lose Friends & Alienate People
14:45 Dr. T And The Women
16:45 Hurricane Season
18:30 Meskada
20:00 Toast
21:45 Tomorrowland
23:45 Christmas Truce

00:00 Black Box
01:00 Black Box
02:00 Cougar Town
02:30 Cougar Town
03:00 The Fashion Fund
04:00 Project Runway All Stars
05:00 House Of DVF
06:00 Black Box
07:00 Black Box
08:00 Cougar Town
08:30 Cougar Town
09:00 The Fashion Fund
10:00 Project Runway All Stars
11:00 House Of DVF
12:00 Black Box
13:00 Black Box
14:00 Cougar Town
14:30 Cougar Town
15:00 The Fashion Fund
16:00 Project Runway All Stars
17:00 House Of DVF
18:00 Devious Maids
19:00 Devious Maids
20:00 Wedding Band
21:00 The Fashion Fund
22:00 Project Runway All Stars
23:00 House Of DVF

00:20 Meet The Putmans
01:05 Hair Goddess
01:50 Extreme Cheapskates
02:35 Outtaughtered: Busby Quints
03:20 Little People, Big World
04:05 Toddlers & Tiaras
04:50 Dare To Wear
05:35 Say Yes To The Dress UK
06:00 Obsessive Compulsive Cleaners
06:45 Meet The Putmans
07:30 Big & Little
08:15 Little People, Big World
09:00 Cake Boss
09:25 Toddlers & Tiaras
10:10 Obsessive Compulsive Cleaners
10:55 Too Ugly For Love?
11:40 Meet The Putmans
12:25 The Spouse Who
13:10 The Boy Who Wants His Leg Cut Off
13:55 Toddlers & Tiaras
14:40 Little People, Big World
15:25 Too Ugly For Love?
16:10 Love At First Swipe
16:35 Cake Boss
17:00 Say Yes To The Dress UK
17:50 Obsessive Compulsive Cleaners
18:50 Dare To Wear
19:40 Say Yes To The Dress UK
20:10 Cake Boss
20:35 Cake Boss
21:00 Big & Little
21:50 Suddenly Rich
22:40 Born

Stars

CROSSWORD 1793



ACROSS

- 1. The law enforcement agency in the Justice Department.
4. Something contrived to meet an urgent need or emergency.
11. Of or relating to near the ear.
15. An electrically charged particle.
16. Singing popular songs accompanied by a recording of an orchestra (usually in bars or nightclubs).
17. The basic unit of money in Uruguay.
18. Being five more than ninety.
19. Continuing forever or indefinitely.
20. Indicating the most important performer or role.
21. A card game for 2 players.
23. Cubes of meat marinated and cooked on a skewer usually with vegetables.
24. The network in the reticular formation that serves an alerting or arousal function.
25. English theoretical physicist who applied relativity theory to quantum mechanics and predicted the existence of antimatter and the positron (1902-1984).
27. A soft white precious univalent metallic element having the highest electrical and thermal conductivity of any metal.
29. A gonadotropic hormone that is secreted by the anterior pituitary.
31. The United Nations agency concerned with civil aviation.
33. Norwegian mathematician (1802-1829).
40. A member of the Finno-Ugric-speaking people living in eastern European Russia.
42. A unit of electrical resistance equal to the resistance between two points on a conductor when a potential difference of one volt between them produces a current of one ampere.
43. A coffee cake flavored with orange rind and raisins and almonds.
45. A hotel providing overnight lodging for travelers.
48. A platform raised above the surrounding level to give prominence to the person on it.
49. The event of dying or departure from life.
51. A soft silvery metallic element of the alkali earth group.
52. Any of the radiating leaflike spore-producing structures on the underside of the cap of a mushroom or similar fungus.
54. An officer who acts as military assistant to a more senior officer.
56. A school teaching mechanical and industrial arts and the applied sciences.
57. An extension at the end and at right angles to the main building.
58. The father of your father or mother.
61. Nut of any of several trees of the genus Corylus.
63. Scottish writer of rustic verse (1770-1835).
67. Any culture medium that uses agar as the gelling agent.
71. A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.
74. Small tropical American tree bearing edible plumlike fruit.
75. Game in which matchsticks are arranged in rows and players alternately remove one or more of them.
76. Soviet cosmonaut who in 1961 was the first person to travel in space (1934-1968).
78. A flat device with narrow pointed teeth on one edge.
79. (Irish) Mother of the ancient Irish gods.
80. Genus of beetles whose grubs feed mainly on roots of plants.
81. On or toward the lee.

DOWN

- 1. (of a number) Having a fixed and unchanging value.
2. Italian lawn bowling (played on a long narrow dirt court).
3. (trademark) An alloy of iron and nickel having a low coefficient of thermal expansion.
4. Preliminary drawing for later elaboration.
5. United States poet and critic (1899-1979).
6. A metal-bearing mineral valuable enough to be mined.
7. A kind of heavy jacket ('windcheater' is a British term).
8. Not present.
9. Jordan's port.
10. Relating to or occurring or living in or frequenting the open ocean.
11. (Roman mythology) Goddess of abundance and fertility.
12. Type genus of the Tetraonidae.
13. (Old Testament) The second patriarch.
14. An island in the Mediterranean.
22. A large gathering of people intended to arouse enthusiasm.
26. Being ten more than one hundred ninety.
28. The face or front of a building.
30. An ancient Hebrew unit of dry measure equal to about a bushel.
32. A compartment in front of a motor vehicle where driver sits.
34. Consisting of or made up of bone.
35. An inactive volcano in Sicily.
36. A member of the Siouan people formerly living in Iowa and Minnesota and Missouri.
37. The boy whose upbringing was described by Jean-Jacques Rousseau.
38. An ability that has been acquired by training.
39. (botany) Especially of leaves.
41. Any of various small plant-sucking insects.
44. A large bundle bound for storage or transport.
46. In bed.
47. Genus of tropical plants with creeping rootstocks and small umbellate flowers.
50. The taste experience when a savoury condiment is taken into the mouth.
53. A unit of conductance equal to the reciprocal of an ohm.
55. A native of ancient Troy.
59. Small Old World songbird with a reddish breast.
60. Small terrestrial lizard of warm regions of the Old World.
62. An indehiscent fruit derived from a single ovary having one or many seeds within a fleshy wall or pericarp.
64. Winning all or all but one of the tricks in bridge.
65. A genus of Mustelidae.
66. (aeronautical) Pertaining to the tail section of a plane.
68. A correctional institution used to detain persons who are in the lawful custody of the government (either accused persons awaiting trial or convicted persons serving a sentence).
69. The highest level or degree attainable.
70. Any loose flowing garment.
72. Title for a civil or military leader (especially in Turkey).
73. Gone by.
77. A silvery soft waxy metallic element of the alkali metal group.

Yesterday's Solution

Grid for Yesterday's Solution crossword puzzle with letters filled in.

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

An emphasis on close relationships is important to you at this time. If you want, you could arrange a get-together of past friends and have a mini-reunion at your place or perhaps a nearby restaurant. You will have fun gathering pictures to show off to your friends or you could have people send pictures ahead so that everyone will have some insight into the progress of everyone else's life.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

You should be feeling quite healthy and natural. Everything points to your taking the initiative in some project this day. This could mean helping or rounding up people to help in a soup kitchen at this time of year...



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Giving a lecture or teaching a class is where your energies are best spent this today. A class in computer skills or some other technical education is popular. Ideas and thoughts will have greater meaning and form as you teach.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

There is a decision to change some habit or situation at this time: every detail is considered. Then, every possible path to the end result or change is detected as every step is planned. Finally, when the change is completed, you make new plans for the next progress and growth spurt.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

You may feel a strong need to be in total control of many situations that come to your attention. Being assertive never hurts unless you become too domineering. Remember, others have their opinions too—you may need to listen to their points of view.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Everyone will be talking about your attitude. Your positive viewpoint about things is admirable. You truly take problems as valued lessons that they represent, rather than as perceived obstacles.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

You could be looking to add some color to your life—allowing your rather unique and unusual qualities to surface. Perhaps you will look through the newspapers to find a special sale, entertainment or opportunity.



Scorpio (October 23-November 21)

This morning's planetary energies indicate positive results from a new project. Until the noon meal, your family members may find you creating an herb garden or learning how to play the piano.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

This is the time of year you seem to enjoy the most. Time just slows a bit and you can sit back and enjoy the lights or the quiet that comes with the holiday.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

The emotions that you have just now or the way that you feel at this time should be very clear. You may have insight about a friend or family member and you turn the corner from confusion to empathy.



Aquarius (January 20- February 18)

It should be a breeze for you to do any kind of work that requires discipline or organization. There may be some very serious or meditative moments and you may find yourself in a methodical mood.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

The accent is on recreation today. If you have kids and you work, you know this is a good day to plan some time with family and enjoy a fun time with the young people.

Wordsearch Puzzle

Fantasy World 1

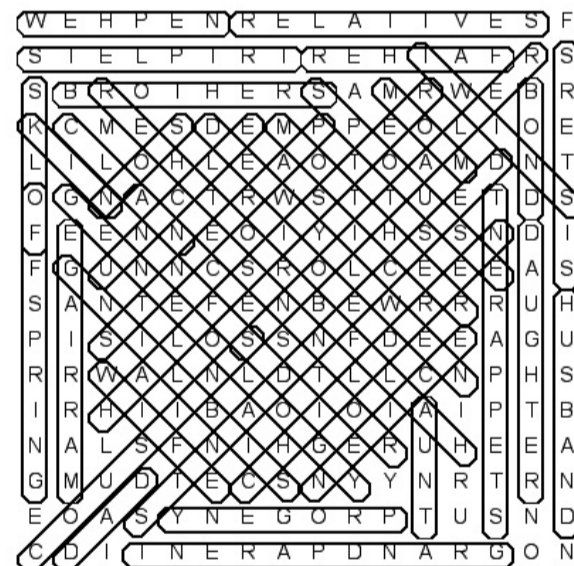
Find and circle all of the words that are hidden in the grid. The remaining 17 letters spell the name of a popular fantasy book series.

Wordsearch grid with letters F, T, H, G, O, L, D, H, T, E, R, G, O, E, E, etc.

- ALE BATTLE CASTLE CENTAUR CHALICE CROSSBOW CROWN DAGGER DRAWBRIDGE DUNGEON
ELVES FARM FOREST GIANTS GNOMES GOLD GUARDS HERO PEDDLER HORSE INN
LANCE MACE MAGIC MINSTREL MOAT OGRE PEASANT PEDDLER POISON PRINCE
QUEST SERVANT SPEARS SPRITE STEW TOWER WARLOCK WEAPONS WINE WITCH

Yesterday's Solution

Family Ties



- ANCESTOR BOND BROTHERS CHILDREN CLAN COUSINS DAD DAUGHTER DESCENDANTS
FATHER FOLKS GENEALOGY GRANDPARENT HALF BROTHER HALF SISTER HUSBAND KIN MARRIAGE MOM
MOTHER NEICE NEPHEW NEWLYWED OFFSPRING PARENTS PROGENY RELATIVES SIBLING
SISTERS SON SPOUSE STEPPARENT TRIPLETS TWINS UNCLE WIFE

The hidden message is: FAMILY REUNION

Daily SuDoku

Daily Sudoku grid with numbers 2, 1, 7, 6, 9, 5, 2, 3, 5, 1, 1, 7, 3, 8, 9, 9, 7, 3, 4, 3, 1, 2, 3, 9, 5, 7, 6.

Yesterday's Solution

Yesterday's Solution Sudoku grid with numbers 2, 3, 6, 1, 4, 7, 5, 8, 9, 4, 1, 9, 5, 6, 8, 3, 7, 2, 8, 5, 7, 9, 3, 2, 4, 6, 1, 1, 9, 2, 4, 7, 6, 8, 3, 5, 5, 6, 3, 8, 2, 1, 7, 9, 4, 7, 4, 8, 3, 9, 5, 2, 1, 6, 3, 2, 5, 7, 1, 9, 6, 4, 8, 9, 8, 4, 6, 5, 3, 1, 2, 7, 6, 7, 1, 2, 8, 4, 9, 5, 3.

Lifestyle | Gossip

Gnarls Barkley to drop new album

A new Gnarls Barkley album is on the way. The American soul duo - comprised of CeeLo Green and Danger Mouse - have completed a good chunk of their first album in nine years. In an interview with DJ Booth magazine, CeeLo shared: "We have already started on a new [Gnarls Barkley] album. "We're halfway in and we have some overtures from the other projects that may not have stood the test of time, we don't know yet." Speaking about the little time they've had to work on the songs, the 43-year-old songwriter explained: "That's pretty much all the time we had to do 'St Elsewhere' because we were heating up around that time. "We were doing something recreationally." It comes after Danger Mouse said a Gnarls Barkley's reunion was derailed by the election of President Donald Trump. The 39-year-old producer - whose real name is Brian Joseph Burton - was all set to meet up with his CeeLo to set the ball rolling to make their musical comeback on January 20, the day the US Republican was voted in. However, their plans fell apart as Danger Mouse watched the events unfold on TV. He said at the time: "The last time we saw each other was the day before the election in Los Angeles. "And we were supposed to meet the next day and I was like, 'this thing will be over with by seven West Coast time. I'll see you around eight or nine or something.' I was drinking heavily on a couch by myself staring at the TV at that time. I don't even know where he was." The pair collaborated on the 2006 album 'St Elsewhere' as well as 2008's 'The Odd Couple' and although CeeLo was busy working on solo material and 'The Voice' while Danger Mouse was producing music for artists including A\$AP Rocky, CeeLo said in 2015, he was keen for them to make another record. Asked if he'd spoken to Danger Mouse at the time, he said: "I just talked to him last night. I told him, 'This is the next thing we should do'. I know he's about to do the Red Hot Chili Peppers' album. I hope he does great with that, but I said, 'Hey, I need you to be able to split your attention. We need another Gnarls album, and so do the people.'"

Payne and Ora to release For You for Fifty Shades Freed



Liam Payne and Rita Ora have recorded a song called 'For You' for 'Fifty Shades Freed'. The pair took to Twitter on Thursday night to confirm they have collaborated on a track for the third movie in the erotic thriller franchise, which will be released in January. Alongside a short clip of the classical-sounding instrumental, Liam wrote on Twitter: "Something special #ForYou coming in January...#FiftyShadesFreed @RitaOra (sic)" And the 'Anywhere' singer wrote the exact same message tagging the One Direction star on her profile. A message on the official Twitter account of the movie, reads: "The first single from the #FiftyShadesFreed soundtrack by @LiamPayne & @RitaOra coming in January. #ForYou (sic)" Earlier this week, the 'Your Song' singer, who plays the sister of lead star Christian Grey [Jamie Dornan], Mia Grey, in the saga and Liam, both shared a picture of them looking glam on their social media channels on Wednesday night with the movie's name as the hashtag. They both captioned the post: "#FiftyShadesFreed (sic)" The photo sent fans into meltdown guessing whether they have recorded a soundtrack for the third installment in the franchise. Liam, 24, follows in the footsteps of his former bandmate Zayn Malik - who quit One Direction in 2015 - after he released 'I Don't Wanna Live Forever' with Taylor Swift for the last movie, 'Fifty Shades Darker'. Liam's girlfriend Cheryl Tweedy - with whom he has eight-month-old son Bear - will no doubt be envious of her beau working with the 'Lonely Together' singer as in 2015, when they were both judges on 'The X Factor', the former Girls Aloud star said she'd love to jump into the studio with Rita. At the time, she said: "I miss working with the girls in the band, so would love to work with Rita now on something. I know it'd be great. She's so funny."

Remy Ma has witnessed the rise of a 'dope female rapper movement'

Remy Ma feels 2017 has seen the rise of a "dope female rapper movement". The 37-year-old hip-hop artist feels that female rappers are now afforded more respect than ever before, with the likes of Cardi B and Nicki Minaj having emerged over recent years - but she also feels she's contributed to the trend, too. Remy said: "I feel like I was able to help push forward this dope female rapper movement [in 2017]. "I think people just started really appreciating that there's so many of us and that we're so talented in many different ways. Neither myself nor Cardi nor Kim nor any other female is single-handedly responsible for the emergence of more females in the rap industry. "Everybody contributed. When we start to think that one person is the end-all be-all machine behind everything, that's when we get all the back-and-forth." Remy was released from prison in 2014 after serving a six-year jail sentence following her conviction of assault, illegal weapon possession and attempted coercion. Remy released her latest album, 'Plata O Plomo', earlier this year and she's thankful for having been given a second chance. Speaking to Entertainment Weekly, the rapper - who released her debut album, 'There's Something About Remy: Based on a True Story', in 2006 - shared: "A lot of people don't get a first chance in this industry. "To get a second chance and be successful at it? It's a wonderful thing. I count my blessings every day. If 2018 is anywhere as near as good 2017 was, I don't know how I'm going to contain myself."



Gallagher denies Oasis reunion after calling truce with Noel

Liam Gallagher has denied rumors of an Oasis reunion after he called a "truce" with his brother and rival Noel Gallagher. The 45-year-old musician and his older brother have been at loggerheads since the 'Wonderwall' hitmakers went their separate ways in 2009 and have barely spoken to one another since. But after Liam posted a cryptic tweet earlier this week in which he sent good wishes to a mysterious "NG" and wished them a happy Christmas, rumors of reunion have skyrocketed. However, the 'Wall of Glass' rocker insists there's no chance of the band getting back together, and the pair have simply called for a cease fire with their taunts. Speaking to Australian newspaper The Age, he said: "God no, no. Oasis isn't getting back together, not at all. I'm doing my thing, [Noel's] doing his thing and that is the end of it. "It's still the same - it's just that I've called a truce on it and he's called a truce on it and no more sl***ing." It comes after Liam took to Twitter on Tuesday to hint that he may once again be on speaking terms with his 50-year-old sibling. He wrote: "I wanna say Happy Xmas to team NG it's been a great year thanks for everything looking forward to seeing you tomorrow AS YOU WERE LG x (sic)" And that's not all, as Liam has even claimed Noel has "reached out" to him, suggesting they have buried the hatchet once and for all. When one fan tweeted: ".....Team who? Your not going to have a meltdown on here come Christmas day are you Liam when NG doesnt reach out to you. (sic)" Liam responded: "He's already reached out." The comment has sparked new rumors of an Oasis reunion, although both Liam and Noel have previously claimed the chances are unlikely. Holy Mountain' singer Noel recently claimed he would never walk on stage with the 'Some Might Say' hitmakers ever again, because of the amount of grief he and his family has received online.



Cheryl Tweedy registers new track



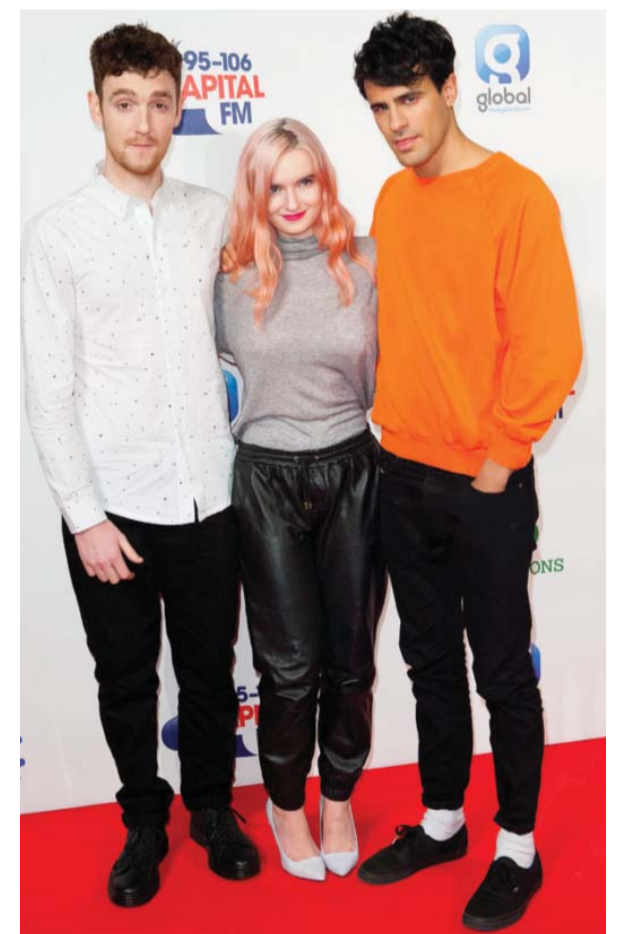
Cheryl Tweedy has registered a new track ahead of her music comeback. The 34-year-old singer is listed as a performer on the tune, 'That's My Song', with her Girls Aloud bandmate said to be down as one of the writers alongside Triple 8 band member Iain James, who appeared in the group with Cheryl's friend Kimberley Walsh's husband Justin Scott. A source close to the 'Call My Name' hitmaker told The Sun Online: "Cheryl is back in the studio and music is her main priority for 2018." Music producer Fred Ball is also listed as working on the song. In October, Nicola confirmed she had been penning tracks for her pal. She told BANG Showbiz: "I'm writing for Cheryl, and also for myself, so hopefully those songs are good enough to make it out into the world." Cheryl took some time out when she was pregnant with her and boyfriend Liam Payne's son Bear, who is now eight months old. Earlier this month, the brunette beauty confirmed she had been in the studio with Nicola and producers Team Salut. She took to Twitter to reply to the Afrobeat trio - made up of GKP, Mista Wood and T.I.M - after they thanked her for making their "year" at the session. Team Salut wrote on Twitter: "Today's session has been the highlight of our year @NicolaRoberts @CherylOfficial saaaafe quick maths (sic)" Cheryl replied: "thank you for a great session you guys are amazing.. quick maths (sic)" In 2014, she became the first British female solo artist to have five number one singles. Cheryl's last album, 'Only Human', dropped in 2014, and spawned a titular single as well as 'Crazy Stupid Love' and 'I Don't Care'. Her debut album '3 Words' was released in 2009 and featured a single of the same name alongside will.i.am. This comes just days after Liam teased fans he is to release a soundtrack song for the 'Fifty Shades Freed' movie alongside Rita Ora.

Walsh has asked Sheeran to pen songs for Westlife

Louis Walsh has spoken to Ed Sheeran about penning songs for Westlife's comeback album. The 'Flying Without Wings' group's manager is determined to make Shane Filan, Mark Feehily, Nicky Byrne and Kian Egan's music popular again, and has called upon some of the industry's biggest stars to get involved, including the 'Shape of You' hitmaker and 'X Factor' alumni James Arthur. The 65-year-old Irishman told The Sun newspaper: "I've already spoken to people about writing songs for them. Two in particular are Ed Sheeran and James Arthur. I've talked to both of them already. "I want to give them notice to write some really good songs." It comes after Louis said a Westlife reunion will happen - but without Brian McFadden. The 'X Factor' judge wants the "Fab Four", Shane, Mark, Nicky and Kian to be involved in any reformation, not the 37-year-old singer - who left the band in 2004 to pursue solo projects - despite Brian saying "never say never" to rejoining his former bandmates in the future. Louis said recently: "Brian won't be involved, it will be the Fab Four. Totally. "The four of them just see them themselves as Westlife." The entertainment professional said he wants it to be just the four of them because they'll be "happy", and said it's more convenient considering three of them all live in the same town. When asked if Brian begged to be included, Louis replied: "No, I prefer a happy band and four happy people. "They all know each other, they all respect each other. "Three of them live in the same town in Sligo, so it makes more sense." It comes after Shane said a reunion "could happen" in the future. The 38-year-old singer gets asked if the band will get back together all the time and his honest answer was that he "doesn't know," but he'll never say never.



Clean Bandit are being cautious with their money



Clean Bandit are being cautious with their money despite their chart success. The electronic music group - which consists of Grace Chatto, and brothers Jack and Luke Patterson - have enjoyed some impressive chart success over recent years, with hits such as 'Rather Be' and 'Rockabye', but Grace has admitted she is still struggling to buy herself a one-bedroom flat in London. She said: "We haven't earned that much cash yet. I hope to buy a flat soon, but the music industry try isn't what it was. "Having three No.1s doesn't get you that far with the way things are, especially in London." Clean Bandit have previously worked with a host of well-known acts, including the likes of Anne-Marie, Louisa Johnson and Sean Paul. And Grace has revealed she's keen to work with Anne-Marie again in the near future. She told the Daily Star newspaper: "We always have 'Should've Known Better', a beautiful song. Anne-Marie's voice sounds great. "We made it before 'Rockabye' and it's called 'Should've Known Better' - it is completely different. It is much more stripped back in the verses and more fast, almost drum'n'bass feel, in the chorus." Meanwhile, Grace recently revealed that the group's upcoming album will be "more serious" than their debut effort. Despite this, she promised that their next release will still have a "dancey" sound. She explained: "I think the first album was a lot more light-hearted. While our second album, with the lyrics anyway, are more serious. "Some of them are about breaking up, like 'I Miss You' and 'Tears', which will both be on the album. The music is still quite dancey."

Lifestyle | Gossip

Efron happy to be a musical guy **Renner up for Hawkeye standalone movie**



Zac Efron is happy to be known as a "musical guy". The 30-year-old actor shot to fame in the 'High School Musical' franchise as well as starring in the movie adaptation of 'Hairspray' but although Efron loves the superhero genre, he admitted he is a "different kind of guy". When asked if he is eyeing a role in a superhero movie, Efron told Collider: "Not yet. In the superhero world, I think you got to earn those suits so to speak. I'm happy to be in musicals. I'm the musical guy. "I'm a different kind of guy. There's no suits or masks involved and I'm not fighting crime but we are flying around and we are telling people really important messages and being brave." Efron is currently starring alongside Hugh Jackman, 49, and Zendaya, 21, in Michael Gracey's new musical movie 'The Greatest Showman'. The film tells the story of P.T. Barnum - an American showman, politician, and businessman remembered for promoting celebrated hoaxes and for founding the Barnum & Bailey Circus - who rose from nothing to create a spectacle that became a worldwide sensation. Jackman stars as the ring master and recently revealed he went against doctor's orders to sing at his audition - just a day after he underwent a skin cancer operation on his nose. He said: "I thought there's about a one in 10 chance this movie happens. But we're going for it. My doctor had said, 'Do not sing, you've just had 80 stitches in your nose. They really could split apart, you could get an infection', which I'd had before in a similar operation. "So I was like, 'Don't worry I'm not going to risk that, I'm just going to speak it and someone else will sing it.' But the emotion of the song and the moment took over me."



Jeremy Renner is up for a Hawkeye standalone movie but wants to do it sooner rather than later. The 46-year-old actor has portrayed master archer Clint Barton aka Hawkeye in three Marvel Cinematic Universe movies so far - as well as a brief cameo in 'Thor' - and is set to reprise the role in 'Avengers: Infinity War' and 'Avengers 4'. As one of the few Avengers without a standalone movie, Renner has admitted he's keen to take title billing but he doesn't want to do it in "50s in tights". Speaking to South China Morning Post newspaper, Renner said: "It would be a wonderful thing. Just don't wait too long! I don't want to be in my 50s in tights." 'Avengers: Infinity War' will see the hero squad - Iron Man (Robert Downey Jr.), Captain America (Chris Evans), Thor (Chris Hemsworth), The Hulk (Mark Ruffalo), Scarlet Witch (Elizabeth Olsen), Vision (Paul Bettany), Black Widow (Scarlett Johansson) and Hawkeye (Renner) - join forces with the Guardians of the Galaxy to save the Earth. The two teams will have to work together to fight intergalactic tyrant Thanos, with some help from newcomers Spider-Man (Tom Holland), Black Panther (Chadwick Boseman) and the screen debut of Captain Marvel (Brie Larson). Although a standalone Hawkeye movie hasn't been announced yet, Marvel Studios boss Kevin Feige confirmed there will be 20 more films in the MCU. In an interview with Vanity Fair, Feige said: "Marvel is 22 movies in and we've got another 20 movies on the docket that are completely different from anything that's come before - intentionally. "Avengers 4' will bring things you've never seen in superhero films: a finale. There will be two distinct periods. Everything before 'Avengers 4' and everything after. I know it will not be in ways people are expecting. Everything after." 'Avengers 4' will be the last outing for Evans, Downey Jr, Hemsworth, Johansson, Ruffalo and Renner as their contracts are ending.

Kelly Marie Tran:
Rian Johnson is perfect new Star Wars trilogy

Kelly Marie Tran thinks Rian Johnson is the "perfect person" to helm a new 'Star Wars' trilogy. The 43-year-old filmmaker took control of the eighth installment of the hit sci-fi franchise, 'The Last Jedi', and was recently announced to be creating a new trilogy outside of the current Skywalker saga. Now Tran, who stars as newcomer Rose Tico in the latest movie, said she cannot think of a better person to helm the new trilogy and she is excited to see what Johnson does. Speaking to 'Entertainment Tonight', Tran said: "I think that Rian isn't afraid to do something that's different and I think that's really hard with something that has been established and something that people love so much. ['The Last Jedi'] really feels like it's a standalone film, if that makes any sense. There are great action sequences, there are great characters - but every single character has an arc, every character [has] some sort of a mental, physical or emotional challenge that they're going through, and it's pretty incredible to kind of see what he's done with it. I think that there's not a more perfect person to make something new in that universe and I can't wait to see that new trilogy." 'The Last Jedi' sees the return of 'Star Wars' legends Mark Hamill as Jedi Master Luke Skywalker and Carrie Fisher as General Leia Organa.

Hamill had 'fundamental differences' with Johnson



Mark Hamill has claimed he had "fundamental differences" with Rian Johnson whilst filming 'Star Wars: The Last Jedi'. The 66-year-old actor has been starring as Luke Skywalker for 40 years, and has revealed he was unhappy with the direction the director took his character in during the recently released eighth installment of the sci-fi franchise as Luke seemingly "gives up", something which Mark doesn't believe a Jedi would ever do. Speaking about his role in the new movie, Mark said: "I said to Rian, 'Jedis don't give up.' I mean, even if he had a problem, he would maybe take a year to try and regroup. But if he made a mistake, he would try and right that wrong. So, right there we had a fundamental difference, but it's not my story anymore. It's somebody else's story - and Rian needed me to be a certain way to make the ending effective. That's the crux of my problem. Luke would never say that. I'm sorry." Mark went on to state that 73-year-old franchise creator George Lucas - who sold the franchise to Disney along with production company Lucasfilm in 2012 - would have handled Luke's story in a different way, and said he no longer feels like the role is "his Luke Skywalker" any more. He added: "Well, in this version, see I'm talking about the George Lucas Star Wars. This is the next generation of Star Wars, so I almost had to think of Luke as another character. Maybe he's Jake Skywalker. He's not my Luke Skywalker, but I had to do what Rian wanted me to do because it serves the story well." The star "still hasn't accepted" the changes Rian, 44, made to Luke's character, but insists he still believes the director was the "exact man" the franchise needed to helm the project. In an interview uploaded to YouTube by user Jar Jar Abrams, Mark said: "But listen, I still haven't accepted it completely. But it's only a movie. I hope people like it. I hope they don't get upset, and I came to really believe that Rian was the exact man that they need for this job."

Nick Jonas dreams of winning an Oscar

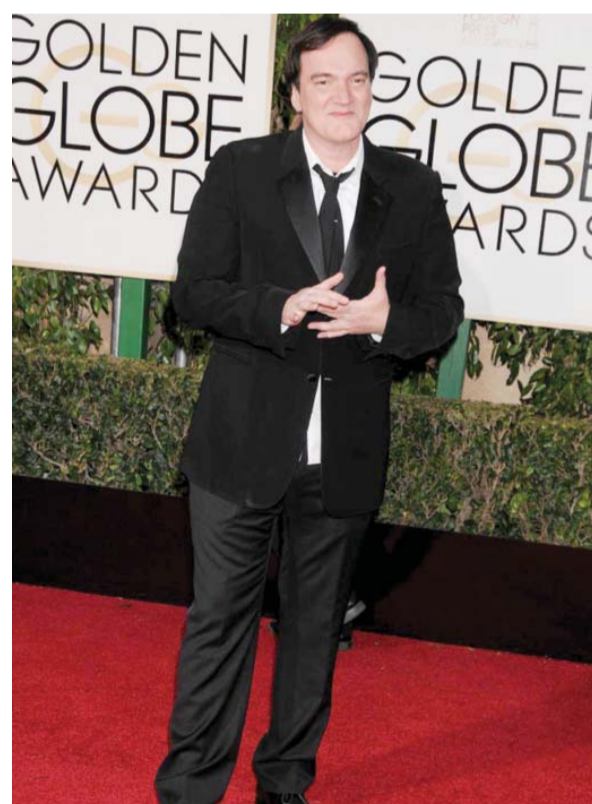


Nick Jonas dreams of winning an Oscar. The 25-year-old star is focusing on his acting at the moment and leaving his pop ambitions for now and can currently be seen in 'Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle' and he has also been cast in Doug Liman's sci-fi thriller 'Chaos Walking'. Nick admits he does have ambitions of taking home a prize from the Academy Awards but his main focus is finding parts he is passionate about. When asked if he would ever want to win an Oscar, Jonas said: "Winning an Oscar? Nah. I have no interest. I'm kidding. Yeah, I mean that'd be amazing. I think right now, for me, it's about finding projects that I'm passionate about. Things that help me grow and working with great creative teams. Those awards season movies are hard to come by. I think it's just about staying prudent, finding great stuff and trying to grow." In the new 'Jumanji' sequel, Jonas stars alongside Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, Kevin Hart, Karen Gillan and Jack Black in the Jake Kasdan-directed action movie. Unlike the original 1995 Robin Williams-starring movie, the new film follows four high school teenagers who discover an old video game console and are transported into the game's jungle setting, becoming the adult avatars they chose. The four must work together to survive in the jungle and beat the game in order to return to the real world or they will be stuck forever. And Jonas said he joined the film because he "fell in love with all these characters" when reading the script. Speaking exclusively to BANG Showbiz, Jonas said: "I was obviously a huge fan of the original. Robin Williams' performance is brilliant. The film as a whole is one of my favorites so to be able to be part of something like this that has a legacy like that, is something special."



Tarantino's Star Trek adds a writer

Quentin Tarantino's 'Star Trek' movie has hired Mark L. Smith to write the script. Paramount is said to have signed Smith up to the role after he took part in a writer's room with the Hollywood director, who recently shared his idea for the next Starship Enterprise story with J.J. Abrams. According to Deadline, Paramount and Abrams have become huge fans of Smith after he penned World War II thriller 'Overlord'. Smith was said to be in consideration for the screenwriting duty after Tarantino recently spent several hours discussing plot ideas with him, 'Godzilla vs. Kong' writer Lindsey Beer, and 'Iron Man 3' scribe Drew Pearce. Tarantino is keen to direct the project and was recently said to have insisted on an R rating, which Paramount and Abrams have agreed on. His movies have mostly been R rated - which means at least a 15 certificate in the UK - due to their use of extreme profanity and violence. Smith is due to work on the script while Tarantino focuses on his next motion picture, a film about Charles Manson, which he had begun work on before the cult leader died in November this year. Margot Robbie and Jennifer Lawrence are among the actresses he is said to have approached to play Sharon Tate, the pregnant wife of director Roman Polanski who was stabbed to death by members of the Manson Family commune in August 1969. Tom Cruise, Leonardo DiCaprio and Brad Pitt are all said to have been in discussions for two male lead roles.



Rian Johnson responds to Star Wars: The Last Jedi backlash

Rian Johnson has hit back at criticism of 'Star Wars: The Last Jedi'. The 44-year-old filmmaker's effort has divided opinions among fans, but Johnson has insisted it's important to move the franchise "forward". Asked on Twitter whether it's good that the movie is so "polarizing", he wrote on the micro-blogging website: "The goal is never to divide or make people upset, but I do think the conversations that are happening were going to have to happen at some point if sw is going to grow, move forward and stay vital. (sic)" 'The Last Jedi' sees the return of 'Star Wars' legends Mark Hamill as Jedi Master Luke Skywalker and the late Carrie Fisher as General Leia Organa. The new movie marks Fisher's last outing as the iconic character from the original trilogy after she passed away last December. Although the actress had shot all the scenes for 'The Last Jedi' before her death, Johnson was unsure about whether to change the movie's plot follow-

ing her passing, because she would no longer be able to be part of 'Episode IX'. Speaking to Entertainment Weekly, Johnson said: "That was the very first conversation I had with Lucasfilm head Kathleen Kennedy after we came back, after New Year's. I kind of looked through the footage. That was the very first question. "I felt really strongly that what we have here is so beautiful and the way that the character develops, the way it's paid off, and not only that, the horror of trying to manufacture something that - I don't even know what it would have been, but something for the end of this movie that leaves it in a place where the transition is easier, the idea of, 'Oh God, how would you fake something like that and how would it not be terrible? "Given that we have a beautiful, complete performance from her that I think audiences deserve to see, and I think it will mean a lot for them, that ray of hope from Leia."—Bang Showbiz



Lifestyle | Features



Pedestrians walk past a Christmas tree in central Belgrade on December 23, 2017. —AFP

No holiday cheer for Belgrade's 83,000-euro Christmas tree

An artificial Christmas tree in the center of Belgrade has been getting more jeers than cheers this holiday season—given that its reported price tag of 83,000 euros would make it one of the most expensive in the world. The 18-metre tall (59-feet) tree, decorated with 200 red plastic ornaments and 40 candlewick red-gold ribbons, stands in the main pedestrian zone in Serbia's capital and has sparked a furious public reaction and accusations of corruption.

"In the city budget for this and next year there are a lot of scandalous things, and the Christmas tree is only the tip of the iceberg," Nikola Jovanovic, from the opposition People's Party, told Beta news agency. Jovanovic said the tree was just one example of financial abuse by city authorities after the investigative website Pistaljka revealed the cost of almost 10 million dinars (83,000 euros \$98,000). Belgrade Mayor Sinisa Mali, a close ally of Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic, initially

refused to talk to reporters about the tree, but later said he was going to cancel the contract—which Pistaljka reported had been signed three days after the tree was installed. "I was surprised with the amount. We have been working completely transparently and publicly for three and a half years. We did not hide anything," Mali told reporters. The revelation about the tree's cost has led to the public prosecutor's office launching a probe into the case but that hasn't quelled the outrage, with many mocking the price.

"Believe it or not: the city of Belgrade paid whooping 83,000 EUR for its Christmas tree!!! No, it does not boil eggs, it does not clean the house, and frankly it looks like crap," Marko Knezic complained on Twitter. "Such a tree would be a reason for stormy protests anywhere in a normal world," Uros Stojiljkovic wrote on Facebook. The opposition Democratic Party (DS) also spoke out against the cost and invited

Belgraders to leave "wishes" worth 83,000 euros near the pricey tree. "We want cheaper Christmas trees," read one message. "I want to visit Thailand," someone else wrote, while another requested a "raincoat XL size for my dog". All of the messages had the hashtag #83000wishes. The tree was purchased from a company that has been renting New Year lighting to the city of Belgrade for years for very high prices, according to local media reports.

The city authorities, controlled by the ruling Serbian Progressive Party, have regularly been criticized for installing the festive lighting in early autumn and leaving it on display until February. But in the end the Christmas tree jeers have produced a little bit of cheer. The company has agreed to cancel this year's contract for the tree and said it will donate the proceeds to Belgrade "to contribute to New Year decorations for the capital". —AFP



People take part in an Ugly Christmas Sweater Run in The Vondelpark in Amsterdam.



A dog named Noel in Christmas costume is hugged by his owner during the Christmas charity event "Tokyo Santa Run".



A man dressed as Santa Claus poses with a dolphin on December 22, 2017 at the theme park of Marineland in Antibes, southeastern France. — AFP photos

MODERN-DAY AMBER 'KLONDIKES' THRIVE IN TROUBLED UKRAINE



A photo shows jewelry made with amber in an amber shop in Rivne, northwestern Ukraine. — AFP photos



A man looks at religious icons made with amber in an amber shop in Rivne, northwestern Ukraine.

Volodymyr Korkosh steps on the accelerator and his jeep lurches forward, jumping through deep water-filled ditches. "We often come too late by just two to three minutes," the police officer shouts in disappointment. His unit carries out daily raids on the outskirts of the village of Kryvytsya and nearby settlements in northwestern Ukraine's Rivne region, aimed at catching locals red-handed mining amber illegally. Once a scenic forest area, the site has been turned into a moonscape with wet marshy sand on the surface and man-made, funnel-like pits scattered for hundreds of meters around, evidence of work by hundreds of illicit prospectors.

“

When we arrive, the mining at least stops

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This site, which locals call a "Klondike" in reference to a 19th-century gold rush in Canada, is one of a number of amber fields in Ukraine, which has the world's second-largest reserves of amber—some 15,000 tons—after Russia, according to the country's state geology committee. Amber is the translucent resin of trees which fossilized over millions of years and ranges in color from pale yellow to deep brown. It is used as a gemstone in jewelry making. But as prices for amber have quadrupled in recent years, fuelled by demand from China, Ukraine has suffered from an illegal mining crisis.

'Environmental disaster'

Legal mining in Ukraine produced just four tons of the mineral in 2015, according to the most recent available figures, while unlawful methods of amber extraction have reaped 120 to 300 tons annually in recent years, said the geology committee. "The state suffers missed financial opportunities that are huge. In addition, we can already

talk about an environmental disaster," it said in a written comment to AFP. Prospecting for amber involves applying high-pressure water to the ground. That loosens the amber, which then floats to the surface, but also erodes the fertile top soil to the point that trees can no longer grow there.

Amber poachers have also cleared huge plots of forest in order to ease access to amber-rich sites. Illegal prospectors admit they cause damage but say the work is the only way to make ends meet in a deprived region. "Some people there live below the poverty line," Oleg, a 28-year-old miner, who wanted to give only his first name, told AFP. "I was constantly scared, but the adrenaline and the taste of the first big money blocked that fear," he said, having recently spent four months mining amber in his native northwestern Zhytomyr region, which neighbors Rivne. Agreeing to be filmed only with his back to the camera and the hood of his grey sweatshirt over his head, the former assistant manager in a Kiev-based trade company said his monthly salary was about 6,000 hryvnia (\$220, 187 euros), but at the Klondike he managed to earn \$300 in the first five days.

Working in groups of five to 10 people, the miners use powerful homemade pumps and thick hoses to funnel water to a depth of 10 meters (33 feet) in the ground, wash out a dirty mixture of clay, sand and stones and then finally sift from it the coveted gems. As soon as prospectors get information about an approaching police car, it takes just a few minutes for them to turn off the equipment and vanish.

Racing the miners

Korkosh leads a team of some 200 police officers brought in to reinforce the Rivne regional police since March but they don't often manage to detain the amber hunters, who work in remote areas. "We raid the sites of illegal mining and document the crimes. When we arrive, the mining at least stops," Korkosh told AFP, as he stood near a freshly dug abandoned pit, minutes after once again arriving too late to make an arrest. Amber can fetch as much as \$20-\$30 per gram, depending on quality, said Sergiy Martyniuk, a deputy director of Burshtyn Ukraine (Ukrainian Amber), the only state-owned amber production company. — AFP

Paris truffle find hailed as boon for urban gardeners

French gourmets were celebrating Friday after a wild truffle was discovered for what experts said was the first time ever in Paris. The discovery in a hotel roof garden in the shadow of the Eiffel Tower comes as prices for the aromatic fungus have doubled to more than 5,000 euros (\$6,000) a kilo. Coming just before Christmas, when truffles are used to flavor such seasonal dishes as foie gras and chestnut soup, it raises the hope of an undreamt-of windfall for the new wave of urban gardeners colonizing city roofs.

"The discovery of this wild truffle is a wonderful example of how roof gardens and green roofs have a huge potential for urban biodiversity," said the Museum of Natural History in the French capital, which revealed the find. It also raised the question of whether the micro-climates roof gardens foster might be particularly favorable for truffles, the museum added.

The black "tuber brumale", which tends to grow in the same regions as its more highly-prized cousin, the Perigord black truffle, was found at the base of a hornbeam tree on the roof of the Mercure Paris Centre Tour Eiffel hotel by Frederic Madre, a researcher from the museum's centre of ecology and conservation.

He told AFP that he felt a "great surge of joy" when he found the truffle but immediately began to wonder how it could have grown so far north. He said he had to resist the temptation to taste the fungus, which weighed 21 grams, before handing it over for analysis. The museum's mushroom expert Professor Marc-Andre Selosse said the truffle usually only grows in a Mediterranean climate, but that the soil and exposure of roof of the hotel had managed to replicate that. "What is remarkable is that it takes two spores coming together for a truffle to grow. This shows that it could happen

again and that it might be possible to cultivate truffles on Paris roofs," he added. Madre is a co-founder of the Topager startup which was responsible for putting organic gardens on the top of several major buildings in Paris.

City of roof gardens

It plans to add another to the roof of the Opera Bastille. A 600-square-metre (6,450-square-foot) roof garden above the Pullman Paris Tour Eiffel hotel, around the corner from where the truffle was discovered, already supplies that hotel with honey, herbs, salad leaves and some of its vegetables and eggs, with chickens fed on its kitchen leftovers. Deeply-flavored truffles are usually hunted down and dug out of the ground using dogs or specially trained pigs. The variety found in Paris is said by experts to be stronger and muskier than the classic black Perigord truffle



A handout picture released by the press service of the French National Museum of Natural History shows a wild truffle, Tuber brumale, found on the green roof of an hotel in Paris. — AFP

found in the warmer climes of southern France, Italy, Spain and Croatia.

It has a light garlicky aroma and a much more pronounced peppery flavor than the sweeter Perigord and Italian white truffles. Although cheaper to buy than its grander cousins, the tuber brumale is preferred by many chefs to flavor sauces, rustic sausage and potato dishes and carpaccios of scallops. Experts from the museum and mushroom specialists from the French Institute of Evolution and Biodiversity are now trying to work out how the truffle got onto the roof, "and if this is a good sign of the health of the Paris ecosystem." The French capital is making a major push towards urban gardening, aiming to have 100 hectares of roof gardens in the next two years, a third of which will be used to grow herbs, vegetables and hops to flavor beer. — AFP



Buddhist nuns set off on a month-long bicycle journey on the outskirts of Kathmandu. — AFP photos



Buddhist nuns prepare for a month-long bicycle journey.

'Kung fu nuns' on bikes swap maroon robes for lycra leggings



A Buddhist nun (center) prepares for a month-long bicycle journey on the outskirts of Kathmandu.

About 200 "Kung fu nuns" kicked off a month-long journey from Nepal through India on Saturday, swapping their flowing maroon robes for lycra leggings to raise awareness about human trafficking and gender equality. The Buddhist nuns are trained in martial arts and frequently organize pilgrimages and cycling trips to promote gender equality. "We are starting our fifth cycle yatra (pilgrimage) today and our main mission is about increasing awareness about female empowerment, the environment and human trafficking," nun Yeshe Lhamo told AFP.

Each year thousands of women and children across South Asia are lured into cities and across borders with promises of lucrative jobs but are instead sold into modern-day slavery. Nepal has seen an upswing in the number of cases of trafficking since a devastating earthquake in 2015 left thousands homeless. The country's human rights commission estimated that there

were about 23,200 cases of trafficking or attempted trafficking last year. The nuns said they came across several cases of trafficking while volunteering in relief efforts for earthquake victims.

"That's how we had this idea of going on this cycle yatra to all the remote places and telling people we are

everything. They are not useless, they are not things to sell," said 23-year-old nun Jigme Konchok Lhamo. The nuns will cover a 3,000-kilometre route from the hills of Nepal's capital Kathmandu, peddling through south India to Delhi and then to Darjeeling. — AFP



Buddhist nuns prepare for a month-long bicycle journey.

In rubble of Aleppo souk, tablecloth shop makes solitary comeback



A picture shows 62-year-old Mohammad Shawash sitting outside his textile shop amid the destruction in the old city of Aleppo. — AFP photos

It used to be one of the most vibrant marketplaces in the Syrian city of Aleppo, but today, the bombed-out streets of Khan Al-Harir are home to a solitary shop selling tablecloths. Mohammad Shawash's partly restored storefront stands amid a sea of smashed concrete and debris-laden roads. The 62-year-old with a snow-white beard and glasses decided to return to the historic souk five months ago to reopen the shop he had managed for years. "I cried when I first came back. I found total destruction all around me. The stores were destroyed, the streets covered in rubble and rocks, and the buildings collapsed," he told AFP. "So I repaired it myself, to prove to the whole world that Aleppo's Old City still has a soul." Khan Al-Harir, or the Silk Market, lies in the celebrated Old City of central Aleppo, a UNESCO world heritage site. Its historic covered market was the largest in the world, with some 4,000 shops and 40 caravanserais in a labyrinth of alleyways selling everything from home ware to artisanal products. For four years, the Old City was on the front line of battles between government troops in the city's west and rebels in the east. But a blistering, Russian-backed offensive saw Syria's army retake swathes of the country, and in December 2016 the government declared it was once more in control of the whole of Aleppo.

'I lost myself'

Much of the Old City remains scarred by fighting, but part of the Souk Al-Jumruk marketplace reopened last month. Other shopkeepers have slowly begun returning to assess the damage. Shawash, a native of

Khan Al-Harir, was one of them. "I was raised here and I used to open my shop from 7:00am until late at night. I knew everyone around me," he said. "The streets were full of passers-by, stalls, restaurants and people selling clothes, carpets and furniture. But now there is no one." When he returned earlier this year to check on his shop, he found a wall had collapsed, the goods were either gone or burned, and the streets were eerily empty.

"It's not just about losing money or stock. I lost my neighbors, I lost my people, I lost myself." For a week, Shawash piled bricks, cement, and stone in a small wheelbarrow and navigated it through the ravaged streets to repair his shop by hand. "I would arrive completely exhausted, because the streets are narrow and there was rubble everywhere, which meant cars couldn't get through," he said. He has since resumed his daily ritual, laying out multicolored plastic tablecloths and mats for display, many of them still wrapped in protective plastic.

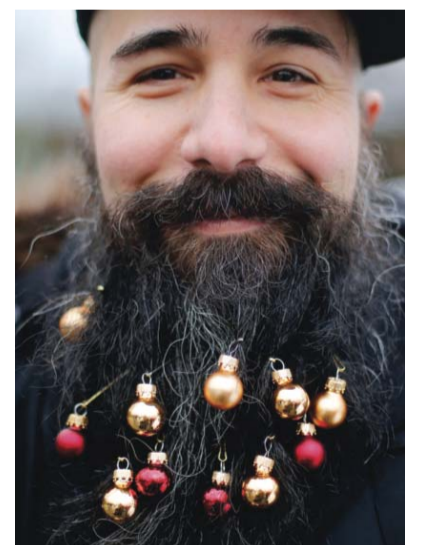
Shawash then sits down on a plastic chair and waits for customers, his prayer beads in hand. For hours no one stops, so he packs up his goods, locks the metal door, and heads home. With a dearth of customers, he said he was barely making enough "to buy a falafel sandwich". "Before the war, I used to sell between 50,000 and 70,000 pounds (\$1,000 and \$1,500, depending on the exchange rate) worth of goods," he said. Shawash insisted Aleppo's young people must return to rebuild their city. "Aleppo is the symbol of civilization," he said. "I'm proud to be the first one to reopen my shop in this souk, but I hope that life returns to the market." —AFP



Christmas ornaments hang from a tree set up on the Waterfront in Washington, DC December 23, 2017. — AFP



A man dressed as Santa Claus waves to people as he rides in the sidecar of a motorcycle, ahead of the motorcade of Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Apostolic Administrator of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, while crossing through an Israeli checkpoint in the controversial separation barrier to attend Christmas eve celebrations in the West Bank city of Bethlehem yesterday. — AFP photos



Motorcyclist Giuseppe shows his beard decorated with small Christmas balls yesterday at a biker's meeting near Lake Hengstey in Hagen, western Germany. The bikers always meet on Christmas Eve for coffee, cocoa and a chat.

What's for Christmas? \$300,000 in marijuana, says elderly couple

An elderly American couple's Christmas plans went up in smoke after they were caught by police with a giant stash of pot—which they said they planned to give as gifts. Patrick Jiron, 80, and his wife Barbara, 70, went on a cross-country road trip from California to Vermont to visit friends and family and brought with them a dizzying 60 pounds (27 kg) of marijuana, according to the York News-Times. They told police in Nebraska-

where they were detained about midway through their trip—that the approximately \$336,000 worth of pot were intended as Christmas presents, the newspaper said.

Police allegedly had pulled over the couple on Tuesday for traffic violations, and smelled a pungent odor emanating from their pickup truck. Patrick Jiron was arrested and charged with possession of marijuana with intent to deliver and having no drug tax stamp, according to the news-

paper, which said he had been released after posting 10 percent of his \$100,000 bond. Barbara Jiron was cited, but was not jailed due to unspecified medical conditions, the newspaper reported. Pot is illegal in Nebraska, even though a handful of states, including California and Nebraska's neighbor Colorado, have legalized the drug for recreational use. Vermont is among 29 states that have legalized marijuana for medical use. — AFP

Lifestyle

MONDAY, DECEMBER 25, 2017



People dressed as (from left) Batman, Santa Claus, Iron Man and Superman walk at the presidential palace in Abidjan on December 23, 2017, during a Christmas event organized by the Children of Africa Foundation. The event, organized by Ivory Coast's first lady and president of the Children of Africa Foundation, welcomed 3000 children from Abidjan and Agboville. — AFP

Mosul celebrates first post-IS Christmas

Frenchman invents lemony oysters in time for holidays



Jeffrey Dubault, oyster farmer and founder of the company "So'ooH", poses with a box of flavoured oysters in Marennes, southwestern France. — AP photos

A French seafood farmer is proposing lemon-flavored oysters this holiday season, a delicacy he perfected after four years of trial-and-error experiments in his garage. Jeffrey Dubault, 29, also offers oysters flavored with shallots, another perennial accompaniment usually served finely chopped and floating in vinegar. "It was pretty discouraging at first when I had to throw out 90 percent," the lanky oyster farmer says, a baseball cap shielding his blue eyes. "Now I have a 95-percent success rate."



A box of "So'ooH" flavoured oysters in Marennes, southwestern France.

The process, which Dubault has patented, involves plunging the oysters into a tank of sea water laced with lemon extract for between two and 12 hours. The oysters naturally pump the water through sieve-like gills, becoming impregnated with the flavor. The technique may seem simple but "there are 16 steps to the process, and if any one of them isn't done correctly the result is failure," says

Dubault, who farms some 40 tons of the bivalves each year off Marennes, France's oyster capital on the west coast.

'Chocolate? No way!'

Dubault, who says he got the idea from customers at his market stall constantly asking him to throw in a lemon along with their purchase, began marketing the pre-flavored oysters in October and has found buyers from Belgium to Hong Kong. He won recognition for his invention at a seafood trade fair in Brussels last April when he said Chinese visitors congratulated him, saying they had been attempting a similar feat for seven years. The nod in Brussels encouraged Dubault to set up his company, called So'ooH, to market the novelty. Targeting Asian clients, he has created a ginger version, while oysters flavored with muscatel, the sweet fortified wine, are aimed at the Italian palate. Next year he plans to add grapefruit and mirabelle plum to his flavor menu, Dubault says, while truffle and pepper versions will follow for the next end-of-year holidays. "People have asked me to add chocolate, but I say no way!" he exclaims. Of all his customers, the French are the hardest to win over, he says, calling them "purists". But he is hopeful, having recently signed on with a major supermarket chain. "People eat flavored yoghurts and drink flavored water, so why not oysters?" he asks. Then there are his raspberry-flavored oysters, aimed at young people. It is a future-looking strategy, since the average age of oyster lovers "is fairly advanced", he says. — AFP

Hymns filled a church in Iraq's second city Mosul yesterday as worshippers celebrated Christmas for the first time in four years after the end of jihadist rule. Tens of thousands of Christians fled northern Iraqi towns in 2014 as the Islamic State group seized Mosul and swathes of the surrounding Nineveh province. But Iraqi forces expelled the jihadists from the city this year after months of battle, allowing Christians to return to pray at Saint Paul's church.

Yesterday morning, the patriarch of Iraq's Chaldean Catholic Church, Patriarch Louis

Raphael Sako, called on dozens to pray for "peace and stability in Mosul, Iraq and the world". Muslims, as well as local and military officials, stood with Christian worshippers amid the candles and Christmas trees. On the church's walls, white sheets covered up window frames blasted empty in the war. Armored vehicles sat outside the church, where the portrait of a Christian killed under IS rule was displayed as a reminder of the city's grim recent history.

Farqad Malko, a Christian woman in the congregation, said celebrating the mass on Christmas

Eve was "important to relaunch Christian life" in the city. She is one of the few to have returned to the area after Iraqi forces defeated IS in the city in July. She said she was determined "to work and go to church in Mosul". The jihadists' defeat is a massive turnaround for an organization that once ruled over millions of people in a territory as big as Italy encompassing large parts of Syria and nearly a third of Iraq. This month Prime Minister Haider Al-Abadi declared victory in the three-year campaign backed by a US-led coalition to expel IS from Iraq. — AFP



Syrians dressed in Santa Claus outfits roam the streets of the capital Damascus on the back of a decorated vehicle for Christmas eve celebrations. — AFP photos

