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Committee meeting on jailed MPs aborted over no-shows

Opposition blasts absent pro-govt lawmakers

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: A meeting of the National Assembly's legal and legislative committee scheduled to discuss the issue of the two jailed lawmakers could not be held yesterday because four pro-government MPs, who are members of the seven-MP committee, did not attend. Opposition lawmakers accused the pro-government MPs of deliberately boycotting the meeting in a bid to prevent the panel from discussing the issue of opposition MPs Jamaan Al-Harbash and Waleed Al-Tabtabaei, who were handed jail terms along with over 60 activists for storming the Assembly building in Nov 2011.

Opposition MPs Al-Humaidi Al-Subaei, Mohammad Al-Dallal and Mohammad Hayef came to the meeting, but MPs Ahmad Al-Fadhl, Khaled Al-Shatti, Askar Al-Enezi and Talal Al-Jallal did not come. For the meeting to be legal, at least four of the seven members must be present. The committee was supposed to look into the legal issues regarding jailing Tabtabaei and Harbash although they still enjoy their parliamentary immunity, after the Assembly referred the issue to the panel following a debate last week.

The jailed MPs say putting them behind bars because of a conviction that is not final is against the constitution. Yesterday, the two MPs sent a new letter to the Assembly

speaker calling on the Assembly to allow them to attend the weekly session today and tomorrow, saying they are jailed in violation of the constitution and that their forcible absence undermines the right of voters who elected them. The two lawmakers also said that their absence from attending the session casts suspicion over the laws passed by the Assembly, claiming that the government deliberately adopted measures to arrest and imprison them.

Opposition MP Abdulkarim Al-Kandari accused the four pro-government lawmakers of deliberately abstaining from the meeting with the intention to prevent the meeting from being held and from discussing the case of

the two MPs. He said the four members should have attended the meeting and expressed their viewpoints in the panel deliberations and not abstain and obstruct the committee meeting. He said that this incident will not be allowed to pass without action. Opposition MP Adel Al-Damkhi said that the arrest and imprisonment of two MPs undermines the authority of the Assembly, because they were jailed before the final verdict.

In a related development, Assembly Speaker Marzouq Al-Ghanem said the Assembly will continue debating the Amiri address today and will try tomorrow to debate and approve a number of draft laws on which there is consensus between MPs and the government.



KUWAIT: Kuwait's Fahd Al-Hajeri (left) vies for the ball with Oman's Raed Ibrahim Saleh (right) during the 2017 Gulf Cup football match between Kuwait and Oman at the Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Stadium yesterday. — AFP

Kuwait knocked out of Gulf Cup after second loss

By Ahmad Jabr

KUWAIT: Kuwait suffered a heartbreaking loss at the hands of Oman yesterday, losing all chances to advance into the semifinals of the 23rd Gulf Cup. The Blues had also lost their opening match against Saudi Arabia on Friday. Omani Captain Ahmad Al-Muhajiri scored the only goal of the match 13 minutes into the second half. The Omanis then held on to beat Kuwait 1-0 and keep their hopes to advance past the group stage alive.

Kuwait piled on the pressure early in front of a capacity crowd at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium, but Oman stayed calm and controlled the pace by keeping the ball in the midfield. The two teams traded attacks in the first 20 minutes, after which play slowed down as players from both teams searched for an opening in the other team's defense. The first half ended with a dangerous opportunity for

Kuwait that saw a shot at the goal narrowly missing the net.

Oman pressed forward to start the second half, and their pressure yielded a penalty that midfielder Ahmad Al-Muhajiri converted. Kuwait's defense committed a mistake a minute later that could have been very costly, but Oman could not capitalize on it. Oman were dangerous until the 70th minute mark, when momentum shifted to Kuwait as they searched for an equalizer. Omani players tried to slow down the pace, and they were successful in doing so until the last five minutes of the game, when Kuwait picked up intensity and threatened the Omani goal with multiple shots that were fended off by the Oman goalkeeper and defense.

Kuwait could not take advantage of five minutes of injury time added by the referee, and the match ended with a second straight defeat for the host team, which now finds itself in a very difficult position heading into the final round of the group stage. With its win, Oman earned its first three points in the tournament, and sits in third place in Group A after Saudi Arabia in first place and the United Arab Emirates in second - both with four points. Meanwhile, Kuwait remains with zero points, knocked out from the tournament that marked its return to international competition after its two-year FIFA ban was lifted.

The footage shows Nour and Ahd approaching two Israeli soldiers before showing, kicking and slapping them while filming on mobile phones. The heavily armed soldiers do not respond in the face of what appears to be an attempt to provoke rather than seriously harm them. They then move backwards after Ahd's mother Nariman becomes involved. The Tamimi family are at the forefront of regular protests in Nabi Saleh, a frequent scene of demonstrations against Israel's occupation of the West Bank.

They say a member of the family was shot in the head with a rubber bullet during protests on Dec 15. Residents say part of the village's land was confiscated by Israeli authorities and given to a nearby Israeli settlement.

The videos of the alleged assault were widely picked up by Israeli media outlets, which often accuse Palestinian protesters of provoking the army into responses which are then filmed. — AFP

Israel extends detention of women over slap video

OFFER MILITARY COURT: An Israeli court yesterday extended the custody of three Palestinian women detained after a viral video of an alleged assault on Israeli soldiers in the occupied West Bank, the police said. They said the Ofer military court ruled that Ahd Tamimi, 17, her mother Nariman Tamimi, 43, and her cousin Nour Naji Tamimi, 21, would remain in custody until Thursday. All three women appeared in a video that went viral after it was shot on Dec 15 in the West Bank village of Nabi Saleh, near Ramallah.

Guatemala to move embassy to Jerusalem

GUATEMALA CITY: Guatemala is to move its embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, President Jimmy Morales has announced, following US President Donald Trump's controversial decision on the holy city. After speaking with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Morales messaged Guatemalans on his Facebook page Sunday, saying "one of the most important topics was the return of Guatemala's embassy to Jerusalem," from Tel Aviv where it is currently located. "For this reason I am informing you that I have given instructions to the foreign ministry that it start the necessary respective coordination to make this happen," Morales wrote.

Guatemala's leader made the announcement on Christmas Eve, three days after two-thirds of UN member states rejected Trump's decision to have the United States recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital. Netanyahu yesterday hailed the



HERZLIYA: The Guatemalan flag is seen outside a building housing the offices of the Central American nation's embassy near Tel Aviv yesterday. — AFP

decision, saying other nations would follow Washington's lead. "Other countries will recognize Jerusalem and announce the relocation of their embassies. A second country did it and I repeat it: there will be others, it's just the start and it's important," Netanyahu said in a statement.

The Palestinian foreign ministry meanwhile slammed Guatemala. "It's a shameful and illegal act that

goes totally against the wishes of church leaders in Jerusalem" and of a non-binding UN General Assembly resolution condemning the US recognition, the ministry said in a statement. In all, 128 nations voted to maintain the international consensus that Jerusalem's status can only be decided through peace negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians.

Continued on Page 11

Tunisia says UAE attack fears behind female flyer row

TUNIS: Controversial security measures taken by the United Arab Emirates against Tunisian women trying to travel to the Gulf state were prompted by fears of a terrorist attack, Tunisia said yesterday. Since Friday, Tunisian women and girls have been delayed for hours as they look to board planes for the UAE, sparking outcry in the North African nation that led to the suspension of Emirates airline flights to Tunis.

"The UAE authorities have serious security information about the possibility of terrorist attacks," Tunisian

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News in brief

Dec 31, Jan 1 official holidays

KUWAIT: The Cabinet announced yesterday that next Sunday and Monday - Dec 31, 2017 and Jan 1, 2018 - will be official holidays. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh told KUNA that ministries as well as state institutions and authorities will be off due to New Year celebrations. During its weekly meeting, the Cabinet decided that work will resume on Jan 2, 2018, affirmed Saleh.

Saudi Shiite judge killed

RIYADH: Saudi police have recovered the body of a kidnapped pro-government Shiite judge after a shootout in which a policeman and a suspected militant were killed, the interior ministry said yesterday. The remains of Judge Mohammed Al-Jirani were found on a farm in the town of Awamiya in the kingdom's Eastern Province, which has been a hotbed of protests among the Shiite minority for years. The raid took place last Tuesday and subsequent DNA tests confirmed that a body recovered was that of Sheikh Jirani, a ministry spokesman told the official Saudi Press Agency.

Bahrain convicts six to death

DUBAI: A Bahraini military court sentenced six Shiite men to death and revoked their citizenship after they were convicted on charges of forming a terrorist cell and plotting to assassinate a military official, Bahrain news agency BNA reported yesterday. The men, including one soldier, were accused of several militant attacks and of attempting to assassinate a commander of the Bahraini army, BNA said.



Ahd Tamimi, a 17-year-old prominent Palestinian campaigner, appears at a military court in the West Bank village of Betunia yesterday. — AFP

Amir receives 'Reach Out To Asia' goodwill ambassador of Qatar

Kuwaiti leader an exemplary father figure: Al-Muftah



KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received Reach Out To Asia's (ROTA) Goodwill Ambassador of Qatar Ghanim Al-Muftah. —KUNA photos



His Highness the Amir receives one of the winners.

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah received at Seif Palace yesterday Reach Out To Asia's (ROTA) Goodwill Ambassador of Qatar Ghanim Al-Muftah.

Al-Muftah, 15, said that he was honored to meet again with His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, affirming that the Kuwaiti leader is an exemplary father figure.

His Highness the Amir is a great humanitarian leader and he is also considered a prominent figure in efforts to protect the unity and solidarity of the Gulf states, added Al-Muftah.

HH the Amir also received at Seif Palace winners of the best student project company of 2017. High school students won the prize for their project that transforms food waste into organic fertilizer.

His Highness the Amir lauded the stu-

dents on their impressive feat, wishing them the best of luck in future endeavors. Acting Minister of the Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Al-Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah attended the meeting.

Separately, HH the Amir received at Seif Palace Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, escorting Moroccan Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Nasser Bourita and Morocco's Minister of Economy and Finance Mohammad Bousaid. During the reception, Minister Bourita handed a letter from Moroccan King Mohammad VI to His Highness; tackling means of fostering bilateral ties in all spheres and issues of common concern. The reception was attended by Acting Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Al-Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah. —KUNA



His Highness the Amir receives winners of best student project in 2017.

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Local

Kuwait, Saudi agree on economic diversification: Sheikh Nasser

'New Kuwait 2035' working group meets

KUWAIT: Kuwait's First Deputy Premier and Defense Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah said that Kuwait and Saudi Arabia see eye-to-eye on each other's economic diversification plans.

Sheikh Nasser made the remarks at a 'New Kuwait 2035' working group meeting on Sunday, attended by Saudi Arabia's visiting Royal Court Advisor Prince Turki bin Mohammad bin Fahad bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, a Kuwait Defense Ministry statement read. The Saudi official's attendance of the talks was a "great opportunity" to outline to Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud and Crown Prince, Premier and Defense Minister Prince Mohammad bin Salman "coordination" on the two countries' development visions, said Kuwait's deputy premier. "The future visions adopted by both countries are ambitious plans that boost their strength and unity," he said, in reference to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's 'New Kuwait 2035' vision and the 'Saudi 2030 Vision.'

After having earlier received an invitation for an official visit to Saudi Arabia from Prince Mohammad bin Salman, Sheikh Nasser said he would be briefing Saudi officials on the matter during talks with the prince.

Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah yesterday met at Seif Palace US Ambassador to Kuwait Lawrence R Silverman. According to the Defense Ministry's public relations department, both sides discussed during the meeting issues of mutual concern and ways of bolstering bilateral relations. The meeting was attended by Kuwaiti Army's Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Mohammad Al-Khoder, Ministry of Defense's Undersecretary Sheikh Ahmad Mansour Al-



KUWAIT: Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah greets Saudi Royal Court Advisor Prince Turki bin Mohammad Al-Saud. — KUNA

Ahmad Al-Sabah and Chief of US Office of Military Cooperation Brigadier-General David San Clemente. — KUNA

Kuwait Cabinet sends Caracal deal to anti-graft commission

KUWAIT: The Kuwaiti Cabinet has ordered that a recent judicial report about the Caracal military helicopter deal be taken to National Anti-Corruption Commission (NAZAHA).

The order was given during the Cabinet's customary weekly meeting yesterday, presided over by His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. The latest move came following recent instructions by His Highness the Prime Minister sending the dossier to the commission and Kuwait State Audit

Bureau (SAB) to check all relevant documents and report to the Cabinet as early as possible. Also in a local issue, the Cabinet adopted a draft decree appointing new board members of the Central Agency for Public Tenders (CAPT), Deputy Premier and State Minister for Cabinet Affairs Anas Al-Saleh said in a statement following the meeting. The ministers also congratulated His Highness the Amir, His Highness the Crown Prince and Kuwaiti people on New Year, wishing peace, security and stability worldwide. The cabinet further voiced much satisfaction with the participation of Gulf football teams in the Arabian Gulf Cup, better known as Gulf 23, held in Kuwait, and appreciated the great efforts of the organizing committee.

Meanwhile, the Kuwaiti Cabinet sharply deplored a recent planned missile attack by Yemen's Houthi militias on the Saudi capital, Riyadh, as a "heinous aggression" on the kingdom's security and stability. — KUNA

Horeca 2018 to be held from January 15 to 17

KUWAIT: The Horeca Kuwait 2018 organizing committee announced that the exhibition will be held in the period of Jan 15-17, 2018 under the auspices of Minister of Commerce and Industry and Minister of State for Youth Affairs Khaled Al-Roudhan at the Mishref International Fairgrounds. This came in a statement by the head of the committee and Leaders Group General Manager Nabila Al-Anjeri, who stressed that Roudhan's patronage adds more value to this one-of-a-kind event in Kuwait and manifests the minister's interest in activating trade and industry as well as the care given to youth issues and enhancing Kuwaiti youth role in national production, not to mention creating more job opportunities for them.

"The continued success of our exhibition emphasizes that Kuwait is ready for promising achievements in the line of hospitality,



Khaled Al-Roudhan



Nabila Al-Anjeri

especially if the government cooperates with the private sector and proper policies are set," she said. Anjeri added that business and hospitality tourism is rapidly growing in Kuwait thanks to initiatives by non-governmental bodies. "The total number of participants has so far reached more than twice as much as those taking part in Horeca's first edition," she added, noting that over 80 leading companies specializing in hospitality, food, hotel equipment, tourism, shipping and energy have so far joined Horeca 2018.

Anjeri stressed that it is one of the exhibition's aims to prove that tourism and hospital-

ity can be promoted and developed "once we have the will and sound planning". "This is annually proven with each edition of Horeca even without implementing new government policies or strategic plans to encourage tourism and business. So, what if we had such policies and plans?" she wondered.

Anjeri thanked the International fair Grounds Company and participants in the exhibition, the culinary competition and other activities, noting that sponsors are actual partners in the success achieved so far. She added that the exhibition is held through a strategic partnership between Leaders Group and the Lebanese company 'Hospitality Services', the owner of the 'Horeca' trademark in the Arab world.

"Horeca is not just an exhibition - it is rather a specialized phenomenon directly related to tourism and the hospitality sector," Anjeri said, noting that the exhibition is also a venue for catering and hotel equipment business. Over the past seven years, the exhibition has proven its ability to grow and develop despite the occasional regional economic and political crises. "This proves that Kuwait is a fertile environment for these activities once we have the needed executive decisions," she concluded.

Awqaf Minister says agenda fits into development plans

KUWAIT: Kuwait's Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Fahad Al-Afasi said yesterday that his ministry's plans are in line with the nation's development goals. Upon unveiling one of many programs the Ministry of Awqaf has in store, Al-Afasi, who is also Minister of Justice, said that the plan would be evaluated carefully within the next few

months to pinpoint any existing hurdles that could impede progress.

As a government body that deals with Islamic affairs, he pointed out that it was incumbent upon the ministry to disseminate ideologies promoting moderation and harmony, virtues that are synonymous with the Islamic faith, Al-Afasi underlined. Meanwhile, in a speech of his own, the Ministry of Awqaf's undersecretary Fareed Amadi said that strategic planning was key to overcome challenges and remain on the path to prosperity.

He spoke of knowledge as the bedrock of national development, revealing that the "Ministry of Awqaf was among the first institutions in the Arab and Islamic region to take up strategic planning." — KUNA



Audience at the ceremony. — KUNA

TV folk band performs to celebrate Gulf Cup 23

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: The Information Ministry is organizing various activities during the Gulf Cup 23 in Mubarakia, Murouj and other locations. On Sunday evening, a TV folk band performed at Mubarakia for about two hours to entertain visitors.

KTV reporter Kafiya Al-Dhafiri said Kuwait TV, as part of the Information Ministry, has been holding various activities from the start of the Gulf Cup on Dec 22 and will continue till Jan 5. "We have a live studio here in Mubarakia during the entire period to interview visitors on their opinions on the matches and reviewing the games, in addition to our media center at Sheraton Hotel," Dhafiri told Kuwait Times.

Souq Mubarakia is a very popular destination for tourists. "Tonight's activity aims to encourage tourism in Kuwait. During the Gulf Cup, many visitors arrive from GCC



countries, so the information ministry is holding entertainment activities, media events and various competitions. As Mubarakia is a traditional Kuwaiti market, it's always visited by tourists," she added.

On Sunday there were no football matches, so the event was organized especially for the players. "Not all players came, as those who will play tomorrow are training. All local TV channels and radio stations are broad-

casting the matches and entertainment activities," Dhafiri explained. "Also at Murouj, live activities are held daily and are open to the public. There are huge screens broadcasting the matches live, and on the days when there are no matches, various entertainment and musical activities are held including magic shows, performances by Kuwaiti musical bands and many others," she concluded.



KUWAIT: Photographs show TV folk band perform at Mubarakia.



Secondhand furniture stores closed

KUWAIT: On the instructions of Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Municipal Affairs Hossam Al-Roumi concerning dealing strictly with stores unlawfully occupying outdoor areas, municipality inspectors toured the secondhand furniture market in Al-Rai, where stacks of furniture are displayed outside the stores.

The municipality PR department said the inspection campaign started at 9:00

am and lasted till noon, headed by the Capital municipality manager Bader Nasser Borqobah and manager of the Capital cleanliness and road blockage department Meshaal Al-Azmi. Commenting on the campaign, Borqobah said the team had previously warned the violating stores against utilizing outdoor areas without permission but they did not respond to warnings.

Azmi stressed that the campaigns would continue to implement ministerial decision number 149/2006 pertaining the use of outdoor areas and decision number 190/2008 pertaining removing abandoned vehicles. Azmi added that the campaign resulted in closing a number of stores and confiscating 56 cu m of the displayed furniture.



KUWAIT: Municipality inspectors during the campaign at secondhand furniture market in Al-Rai.

Local

Photo of the Day



KUWAIT: A picture shows a view of Kuwait skyline. —AFP

Kuwait taps Chinese experience in youth empowerment: Al-Mutairi

YPA aims to build capacities and harness skills of youth

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The Embassy of China to Kuwait held a China-Kuwait Youth Forum on Sunday at Jumeirah Messilah Beach Hotel. "Chinese-Kuwaiti relations have quickly developed over the past years. China is aiming to promote cooperation with Kuwait in the economic and commercial fields, and to contribute to the projects of Kuwait's Silk City and islands which serve the two nations' interests," Charge d'Affaires of the Chinese Embassy in Kuwait Zahao Liang said.

During his speech, Liang pointed out that the year of 2017 was the greatest year between the two countries where the volume of trade between the two sides reached \$8.3 billion, adding that China also signed new construction contracts at a total value of \$2.8 billion.

On cultural exchange, he said that the accomplishments have been chalked up, as Kuwait has become the first Gulf state to sign an agreement with the Chinese government to set up a cultural center where China's readiness to intensify reciprocal visits with the Kuwaiti side and strengthen friendship bonds.

For his part, Kuwait's Youth Public Authority (YPA) Director General Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi, said that the authority aims to empower youth like China did and increase their contribution to state building.

Mutairi added "The YPA's strategy focuses on participatory planning and studying more than 100 success stories and experiments from around the globe."

He affirmed that the YPA benefited from the Chinese experiment in this regard as China is the world's second largest economy. "The official lauded China's administrative principles, particularly the simplification of procedures. He pointed to the Chinese experiment in selecting



KUWAIT: Kuwait's Youth Public Authority (YPA) Director General Abdulrahman Al-Mutairi addresses the China-Kuwait Youth Forum yesterday. — Photos by Joseph Shagra

national cadres and minimizing departments and sections, with the aim of boosting investment."

Al-Mutairi emphasized that YPA aims to build capacities and harness skills of youth as well as create the supportive environment for unconventional learning and thinking. He stated that the vision of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah's to transform the country into a global commercial hub prompted the authority to focus more on empowering youth and developing their skills to serve the society.



KUWAIT: Inauguration ceremony of China-Kuwait Youth Forum.

Kuwait has great tourism, cultural potential: Official

MADRID: Kuwait has huge cultural and tourism potential, Secretary-General of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) Dr Taleb Rifai expressing optimism about the Gulf country's eagerness to invest more in its tourism sector. The Kuwaiti government has recently shown growing interest in boosting tourism sector and even took several measures to use its potential to give impetus to this important sector, Rifai said in interview with KUNA, just few days before the end of his tenure. He forecast that Kuwait will prove successful in its endeavor to develop the tourism sector.

Kuwait has great capabilities and resources, especially at the cultural level, said the UNWTO official. Rifai, a former Jordanian minister, described Kuwait as a beacon of creative thinking and dialogue. In sixties and seventies of the last century, Kuwait was a hub for creative writers and artists in the region, he said, adding that this

has not changed a lot nowadays. In the Arabian Gulf level, Rifai noted that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has also increased its interest in the tourism sector considering it a new and important source of income especially after the sharp decline in oil prices. He urged the oil-rich Gulf countries to take tourism seriously as an important investment domain. On the Arab level, he pointed out that the leading Arab touristic countries, namely Egypt, Tunisia, Lebanon and Jordan have been making huge gains from tourism and beefing up national economies despite the current challenges caused by the political unrest and terrorism.

He unveiled that he plans to visit Syria shortly to get first-hand information about the situation in the country's archaeological sites, particularly in Palmyra. In this regard, he called on the international community to unite to protect historical sites in the war-torn Syria. —KUNA

55 Kuwaitis graduate from Command and Staff College in Sudan

KHARTOUM: Some 55 Kuwaiti officers on Sunday graduated from the joint command and staff college in Sudan. Speaking during a graduation ceremony, Sudanese President Omar Al-Bashir hailed the participation of many officers from sisterly countries in such training courses as a reflection of the close ranks and unity among these countries as well as the employment of available potential for mutual benefits.

Meanwhile, commander of the college Ahmad Al-Fekki congratulated the 466 graduates. He stressed that the college welcomes officers from Kuwait and other Arab and Muslim countries. He added that the graduates were granted Masters Degrees in Military Sciences at the end of the course.

Staff Lieutenant Colonel Mohammad Al-



The Kuwaiti graduates. —KUNA

Thayadi, speaking on behalf of the Kuwaiti graduates, said that the 10 month-long course included many lectures and practical trainings. —KUNA

Local

Mandoub, aide arrested for forging residency papers

Domestic helper killed in blaze

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: Residency detectives discovered forgery in official documents and found fake documents were presented to transfer an expat's sponsorship to an educational establishment in exchange of money. Tips were received about suspicions of forgery in a preliminary approval to transfer the residency of an Arab expat to an educational establishment. When investigations confirmed them, the mandoub was arrested while submitting the transaction at a labor department. He was taken to the detectives' office, where he insisted the approval was correct, but concerned authorities said it was not, proving the number mentioned belongs to another person. The mandoub then confessed to have received the papers from a female mandouba, who in turn said the mandoub was the forger. Both were sent to concerned authorities.

Killed in fire

A domestic helper was killed in a blaze due to burns and inhaling poisonous fumes. Firemen responded to a call about a fire in Sabah Al-Salem, and found the fire was in a house with smoke emanating at a high speed. Two teams were formed - one for rescue and the other to fight the fire.



KUWAIT: The gutted house in Sabah Al-Salem.



Quaid-e-Azam Day observed by Pakistani community



KUWAIT: The Embassy of Pakistan in collaboration with local Pakistan Schools, organized an event to pay tribute to Baba-e-Qoum Quaid-e-Azam Muhamad Ali Jinnah. A large audience from Pakistani community as well as other communities attended the event despite it being working day.

The event consisted of performances on national songs by Pakistani foreign students of local Pakistani schools, speeches and the personality and political struggle of the Quaid and a display of paintings/portraits made by Pakistani students. The event was applauded by the attending guests and it provided a good opportunity for the projection of the idea and culture of Pakistan.

In the end, Pakistani Ambassador to Kuwait Ghulam Dastgir, briefly highlighted the contribution made by the Quaid in the struggle for the Muslim cause in the Indian subcontinent. He also thanked the management of local Pakistani schools, representatives of media and the attending audience for making this event a huge success.



Interior Ministry holds course on security



KUWAIT: The Leaders Preparation Center at the National Security Academy celebrated the graduation of the "basics, principles, dimensions and domains of national security" course for leaders working at the Interior ministry.

By Hanan Al-Saadoun

KUWAIT: The Leaders Preparation Center at the National Security Academy celebrated the graduation of the "basics, principles, dimensions and domains of national security" course for leaders working at the interior ministry. The celebration was under the patronage of Interior Ministry Assistant Undersecretary for Education and Training Affairs Maj Gen Sheikh Faisal Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and presence

of Director General of National Security College Brig Faisal Al-Foudary.

Honored

Deputy Head of the National Guard honored the special operations battalion 67 in appreciation of their distinguished efforts during their military duties during the course of "operations in build-up areas" held in the UK, as well as sniper and close-quarters battle drills held in Kuwait. The celebration was in the presence of National Guard Secretary Lt Gen Hashim Al-Rifaa.

Citizen charged with detaining Asian expat

KUWAIT: A citizen was charged with restricting the freedom of an Asian expat in his apartment and forcing him to sign papers. The Asian told Salmiya police that he was barricaded for 17 hours by his sponsor following a dispute. He said he doesn't know what type of papers he signed.

then started crying. The officer was questioning the Iranian about a fight between him and a relative. But he objected to the questions and broke the nose of the officer. He now faces two assault charges.

Citizen being scrutinized

Waha police sent a 33-year-old citizen to state security for questioning after he was found near the gate of a military base for no apparent reason.

Wanted citizen held

A citizen, who had been wanted for a 30 month prison sentence, was recently arrested in Adnalus where reportedly withheld his own family members and threatened to kill them, said security sources. They said the policemen managed to free the family and arrest the culprit.

Man caught

A man was caught in Beirut Street in Hawally with two pieces of hashish and two joints. He was sent to the Drugs Control General Department. The suspect, a citizen, told police the drugs were for having a "good mood".

Police attacked

An Iranian who was handcuffed became enraged at a police station and head-butted an officer who was questioning him,

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Russia bars Putin critic Navalny's presidential bid

More than 30 bodies found, criminal probe into Philippine fire

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VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis waves from the balcony of St Peter's basilica during the traditional 'Urbi et Orbi' Christmas message to the city and the world yesterday in St Peter's Square. —AFP

Pope seeks peace in Jerusalem

Pontiff highlights plight of war-scarred children

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis yesterday called for peace in Jerusalem in his traditional Christmas address and highlighted the plight of children scarred by conflict, after urging the world's 1.3 billion Catholics not to ignore migrants. Addressing tens of thousands of worshippers gathered at the Vatican to hear the pontiff's fifth "Urbi et Orbi" (To the City and The World) message, Francis called for "peace for Jerusalem and for all the Holy Land."

"We see Jesus in the children of the Middle East who continue to suffer because of growing tensions between Israelis and Palestinians," he said. "Let us pray that the will to resume dialogue may prevail between the parties and that a negotiated solution can finally be reached, one that would allow the peaceful coexistence of two states within mutually agreed and internationally recognized borders."

The pontiff's plea came as fresh tensions simmered in the West Bank following President Donald Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital. Following Trump's lead, Guatemala's President Jimmy Morales said Sunday his country would move its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Trump's announcement on December 6 unleashed demonstrators and clashes,

including in Bethlehem in the Israeli-occupied West Bank where Christians marked the birth of Jesus at a midnight mass.

"May the Lord also sustain the efforts of all those in the international community inspired by good will to help that afflicted land to find, despite grave obstacles the harmony, justice and security that it has long awaited," the pope said. The pontiff also mentioned other global flashpoints such as Syria, Iraq, Yemen, South Sudan and Venezuela, after stressing that the "winds of war are blowing in our world". "Let us pray that confrontation may be overcome on the Korean peninsula and that mutual trust may increase in the interest of the world as a whole," the 81-year-old said.

Fewer tourists in Bethlehem

Earlier, celebrating midnight mass in the ancient town, Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa, apostolic administrator of the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, used his homily to lambast the wars that "the Herods of today fight every day to become greater, to occupy more space". Criticizing Trump's announcement, Pizzaballa insisted "Jerusalem is a city of peace, there is not peace if someone is excluded. Jerusalem should

include, not exclude," stressing the principle that Jerusalem is a city for both peoples and the three Abrahamic faiths.

Hundreds had gathered in the cold on Bethlehem's Manger Square to watch the annual scout parade towards the Church of the Nativity, built over the spot where tradition says Mary gave birth to Jesus. But the square was noticeably quieter following the violence between Palestinian protesters and the Israeli army in the past weeks. Twelve Palestinians have been killed since Trump's declaration, including a 19-year-old who died of his wounds on Sunday nine days after he was shot during a Gaza protest.

Israel seized east Jerusalem in the 1967 Middle East war and later annexed it, in moves never recognized by the international community. Palestinians view east Jerusalem as the capital of their future state, and interpreted Trump's statement as rejecting their right to a capital in east Jerusalem, although the Americans deny this.

First Xmas in Homs in years

Christmas decorations have meanwhile become more visible in Christian areas of Syria's capital Damascus this year. In the central Syrian city of Homs,

Christians will celebrate Christmas with great fanfare for the first time in years after the end of battles between regime and rebel forces - with processions, shows for children and even decorations among the ruins. In Iraq too, this year marks a positive turning point for the Christian community in the northern city of Mosul. Britain's Queen Elizabeth II was meanwhile due to pay tribute to the cities of London and Manchester which suffered terror attacks this year. "This Christmas, I think of London and Manchester, whose powerful identities shone through over the past 12 months in the face of appalling attacks," the 91-year-old monarch was to say in the pre-recorded televised message. London suffered two deadly terror attacks, while 22 people - including children - were killed during an attack at Manchester Arena following a performance by US singer Ariana Grande.

Meanwhile a tragic Christmas weekend in the Philippines was compounded yesterday by the deaths of 20 people killed in a bus collision while travelling to mass. Dozens of people were feared killed in a fire Saturday in the southern city of Davao. Thousands were displaced by floods and landslides from a storm that also killed more than 200 others on Friday.—AFP

Six killed in IS suicide attack near Afghan spy agency

KABUL: A suicide bomber killed six civilians in an attack near an Afghan intelligence agency compound in Kabul yesterday in the latest assault claimed by the Islamic State group in the capital. The attacker struck as workers were arriving at the offices of the National Directorate of Security (NDS), a week after militants stormed an NDS training center in Kabul. Interior ministry spokesman Najib Danish told AFP six civilians in a car were killed when the attacker blew himself up. "Six people were martyred and three others were wounded," Danish said. "They were hit when they were passing the area in their Toyota sedan vehicle. We still do not know the target of the attack but it happened on the main road."

The health ministry confirmed the death toll but put the number of wounded at one. An AFP reporter at the blast site said the attack happened outside the main entrance to an NDS compound. Security forces have swarmed into the area, closing off the main road leading to the building. Ambulances were seen leaving the scene, apparently taking casualties to hospitals in the city. "Our initial information shows a blast took place near an intelligence headquarters in Shash Darak neighbourhood of Kabul," deputy inte-

rior ministry spokesman Nasrat Rahimi told AFP.

The Islamic State claimed the attack in a statement via their Amaq propaganda arm. It was the latest claimed assault by the Middle Eastern group in Kabul, which in recent months has become one of the deadliest places in the war-torn country for civilians. Security in the city has been ramped up since May 31 when a massive truck bomb ripped through the diplomatic quarter, killing some 150 people and wounding around 400 others - mostly civilians.

IS has expanded its presence in Afghanistan since it first appeared in the region in 2015. It has scaled up its attacks in Kabul, including on security installations and the country's Shiite minority. Last week's attack on the intelligence training center triggered an intense hours-long gun battle which killed the two militants in an assault that was also claimed by IS.

The resurgent Taliban are also stepping up assaults on security installations. On Friday, in an attack claimed by the Taliban, a suicide bomber drove an explosives-packed Humvee into a police compound in the southern province of Kandahar, killing at least six officers and destroying a building. Afghan forces, already hard-hit by desertions and corruption, have seen casualties soar to what a US watchdog has described as "shockingly high" levels since NATO forces officially ended their combat mission in 2014 and began a training and support role. Morale has been further eroded by long-running fears that the militants have insider help - everything from infiltrators in the ranks to corrupt Afghan forces selling equipment to the Taliban. —AFP



KABUL: Afghan security personnel keep watch near the site of a suicide attack yesterday. —AFP

International

Peruvian president pardons ailing ex-leader Fujimori

Foes take to streets in protest

LIMA: Peruvian President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski pardoned former authoritarian leader Alberto Fujimori late on Sunday, triggering Christmas Eve street clashes as protesters denounced the decision as part of a crude political deal. At least two ministers in Kuczynski's cabinet who objected to the pardon told him they wanted to resign, and Kuczynski might reshuffle the cabinet as early as this week, a government source said. Two ruling party lawmakers quit his party as his political group planned next steps.

Kuczynski, a 79-year-old former Wall Street banker who vied as a candidate not to pardon Fujimori, based his decision on a medical review that found Fujimori suffered from "a progressive, degenerative and incurable disease," according to a statement from the president's office. Late on Sunday, Fujimori was taken to hospital from prison by ambulance to treat a drop in blood pressure and abnormal heart beat.

But many in Peru saw the pardon as part of a quid pro quo after Fujimori's loyalists unexpectedly saved Kuczynski from a scandal that nearly removed him from office three days earlier. "To save his own skin he cut a deal with Fujimori's supporters to infamously pardon a corrupt killer," said Veronika Mendoza, a leftist leader who competed against Kuczynski in last year's presidential election. Kuczynski's center-right government has repeatedly denied allegations that a pardon for Fujimori was part of any political negotiation.

Fujimori is a deeply divisive figure in Peru. While many consider him a corrupt dictator, others credit him with ending an economic crisis and bloody leftist insurgency during his 1990-2000 right-wing government. "He's the best president Peru ever had," said Maria Luisa Cuculiza, a friend and former minister of Fujimori, adding that he no longer had any political ambitions. "He doesn't want to return to politics. He just wants to be a good grandfather," Cuculiza told Reuters by telephone.

Kuczynski's decision clears Fujimori of convictions for human rights crimes and graft before completion of a 25-

year prison sentence, and could define the president's legacy. Police fired teargas at scores of Fujimori's opponents in downtown Lima, who waved pictures of the victims of a bloody counterinsurgency campaign during his term. Officers in riot gear stood guard at Kuczynski's house in the capital's San Isidro financial district as protesters called for the march to make its way there.

Fujimori's family and supporters cheered the pardon as a long-overdue vindication for a misunderstood hero. Holding a vigil at the hospital where Fujimori remained late on Sunday, his followers waved banners reading "Freedom for Fujimori!" But the pardon was a blow to the relatives of victims, prosecutors and human rights activists who helped put Fujimori behind bars in a lengthy judicial process that earned Peru global plaudits for fighting impunity. Kuczynski, "you've betrayed justice, democracy and victims. History will never forgive you," said Indira Huilca, a leftist lawmaker whose union leader father was shot dead in 1992 in what the Inter-American Court of Human Rights deemed an extrajudicial killing.



2 ruling party lawmakers quit in outrage

'Eternally Grateful'
Kuczynski ran for office to cap a career in finance and public administration. He has led demands in the region for democratic reforms from Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, whom he has called a "dictator", and the pardon may tarnish Kuczynski's image and expose him to accusations of hypocrisy. It could also prompt one of the biggest political realignments in Peru since Fujimori fled to his parents' homeland of Japan in 2000 as a corruption scandal brought his decade in power to an end.

Fujimori was extradited back to Peru in 2007 and later found guilty of commanding death squads that massacred civilians, bribing lawmakers and having a hand in the kidnapping of a journalist, among other crimes. Despite his downfall, the right-wing populist movement that Fujimori built has remained one of the most potent political forces in Peru. His eldest daughter, Keiko, leads the opposition



LIMA: People celebrate in favor of Peru's ex-president Alberto Fujimori on Sunday. —AFP

party Popular Force that controls Congress, while his youngest son, Kenji, has courted ties with Kuczynski's government as he challenges his sister's past decade of leadership of their father's following.

On Thursday, Kenji led a surprise defection in Popular Force that narrowly saved Kuczynski from a bid in Congress led by Kieko's followers that would have removed him from office in the wake of a graft scandal. "We're eternally grateful to you," Kenji told Kuczynski on Twitter, noting that he was speaking for Fujimori's family. In a video Kenji shared on social media, a gray-haired Fujimori, connected to tubes in hospital, was seen smiling after reading Kuczynski's announcement on a cellphone with Kenji. Kenji said Fujimori was recovering in intensive

care and would not likely go home for a few days. Before the announcement, Kuczynski summoned his cabinet and ruling party lawmakers to the presidential palace to tell them of his decision. Congressman Alberto de Belaunde announced his resignation from Kuczynski's party afterward on Twitter. Congressman Vicente Zeballos, another ruling party lawmaker, was also resigning, the El Comercio newspaper reported. As the pardon inflamed long-dormant political tension in Peru, a representative of the political arm of the Maoist-inspired rebel group Shining Path called for Kuczynski to release its historic leader. "Freedom for Dr Abimael Guzman Reinosol!" Guzman's attorney, Alfredo Crespo, wrote in a message to journalists. "Enough of hate and persecution!" —Reuters

Journalist, judge clash in Turkey newspaper trial

ISTANBUL: A judge ejected one of Turkey's most respected investigative journalists from court yesterday and ruled that he and three other suspects should remain in jail, in the controversial trial of staff from the main opposition newspaper. It was one of the angriest exchanges so far in the trial on terror charges of 17 current and former writers, cartoonists and executives from Cumhuriyet (Republic), which has raised alarm over press freedom under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The trial began on July 24, and after several conditional releases in previous hearings, four of the suspects remain behind bars. The judge ordered the four of them - investigative journalist Ahmet Sik, the paper's chairman Akin Atalay, editor-in-chief Murat Sabuncu and accountant Emre Iper - to stay in jail, defense lawyer Kemal Aytac told AFP. The next hearing will be on March 9 and take place in the Silivri prison complex, outside Istanbul, rather than the city's main courthouse where the trial has been heard until now.

'Judiciary controlled by government'

Earlier in the hearing, Sik was ordered to leave the court by the judge because of his "political" defense statement that condemned the government and claimed it treated its critics as "terrorists". "There is a judiciary controlled by the government that is translating this 'terrorist' term into preposterous accusations," Sik, who has now been in prison for 360 days, told the court. During the fraught hearing, Judge Abdurrahman Orkun Dag refused to allow Sik to continue. "That's enough! If you want to play politics, become a member of parliament... I cannot allow him to defend himself like this. Take the defendant outside!" Dag said, ordering his removal.

Angry supporters in the courtroom responded by shouting: "You are all going to be tried one day" and "Ahmet will get out, he will write again" causing the trial to be adjourned for lunch. Sik, already jailed from 2011-2012, wrote a book exposing former ties of members of the



ISTANBUL: Protestors hold placards with images of jailed journalists and words which translate as "You are not alone" during a demonstration in front of a courthouse yesterday. —AFP

Turkish elite to the movement of US-based Islamic preacher Fethullah Gulen, who Ankara accuses of being behind last year's failed coup.

'Attempt to silence'

The 17 current and former Cumhuriyet employees are charged with supporting through their coverage three organizations Turkey views as terror groups - the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), the ultra-left Revolutionary People's Liberation Party-Front (DHKP-C), and the Gulen movement. They face up to 43 years in prison if convicted. Their supporters say the charges are absurd and the daily says the trial is an attempt to silence one of the last independent newspapers in Turkey.

Cumhuriyet is fiercely critical of Erdogan and has run front page stories that have angered the president. "This trial is a symbol of the attempt to silence freedom of expression in Turkey. It is a symbol of pressure on journal-

ists," Gulendam San Karabulutlar, a defense lawyer, told AFP. Dozens of supporters gathered outside the court in Istanbul, holding signs saying "You are not alone, we are not alone", "Justice for all" and "Freedom for all journalists". Some held yesterday's issue of Cumhuriyet whose front page read: "Justice immediately".

Some of the most high-profile suspects - including political commentator Kadri Gursel - have already been released but remain charged and on trial. Dozens of journalists have been arrested in Turkey since the failed coup as part of its crackdown on alleged threats to the state. In total, more than 55,000 people have been arrested, raising concern in Western capitals. According to the P24 press freedom group, there are 170 journalists behind bars in Turkey, most of whom were arrested under the state of emergency in place since July 2016. Turkey is ranked 151st of 180 countries in the 2016 World Press Freedom index published by Reporters Without Borders (RSF). —AFP

Turkish lawyers say decree grants impunity for political violence

ANKARA: A new emergency decree in Turkey could allow vigilantes to carry out political violence with impunity against opponents of the government suspected of involvement in last year's coup attempt, Turkey's main lawyers' groups said yesterday. The government defended the emergency decree, issued on Sunday, which it said was intended to ensure that Turks who took to the streets to protect the elected government during the failed 2016 coup would not face punishment.

Turkey already granted officials immunity last year from prosecution for their official actions taken to suppress the coup. Sunday's decree extended that immunity to civilians "whether they have an official title or not, and whether they have carried out official duties or not". The lawyers' groups said the measure was vaguely-worded and could lead to violence. "People will start shooting each other in the head on the streets. How will you prevent this?" Metin Feyzioglu, the head of the Union of Turkish Bar Associations, said in a video response. "So you have brought out an article that leaves civilians killing and lynching each other unpunished and without compensation. Are you aware of what you have done Mr. President?"

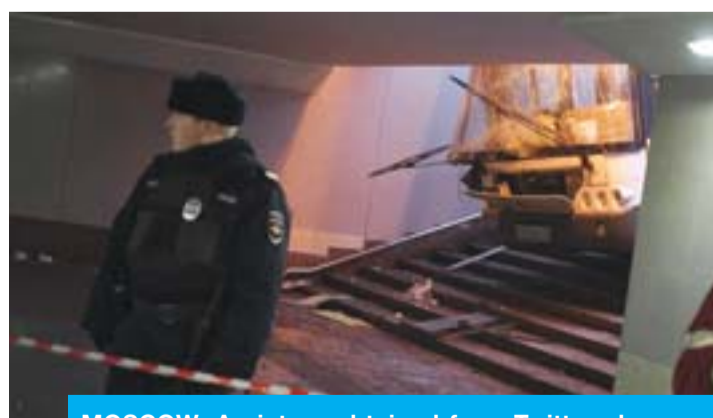
Turkey's main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) said it would appeal the decree at the constitutional court. In a rare show of opposition, Abdullah Gul, a former president and longtime ally of President Tayyip Erdogan, said the wording of the article was worrisome, adding that he hoped it would be revised to prevent problems in the future. A separate decree on Sunday dismissed 2,756 more people from their jobs, accusing them of links to terrorist organizations. Turkey has already sacked or suspended more than 150,000 police, teachers, lawyers and other professionals from their jobs in the aftermath of the coup. More than 50,000 people have been arrested.—Reuters

Four dead after bus ploughs into Moscow underpass

MOSCOW: Four people were killed yesterday when a Moscow bus ploughed into a pedestrian underpass in the west of the city, officials said. It was not immediately clear what caused the accident as authorities said they were looking into several possibilities, including a technical malfunction. Authorities did not mention terrorism as a possible cause. "Nine people are currently in the city's clinics... four people died on the spot," the Moscow city hall said in a statement on the website.

Police were also giving the figure of four killed, revised down from previous statements which said the accident caused five deaths. Footage broadcast on national television showed the bus driving onto the pavement and then down the stairs of the underpass, running over several pedestrians before coming to a stop. Moscow police said in a statement they were looking into two possible causes - the driver losing control of the vehicle and a technical problem with the bus.

"The driver of the bus began movement and then changed his trajectory, which resulted in the bus going down into the pedestrian underpass," the statement said. "The driver has been detained. Police employees are working with him," the statement said. "According to the driver, the bus was parked and suddenly began to move by itself," said a statement by the Russian Investigative Committee, which probes major crimes. "Despite his attempts to stop the bus, the braking system did not work



MOSCOW: A picture obtained from Twitter shows a view of the site where a city bus ploughed into a pedestrian underpass yesterday. —AFP

and the bus continued moving," it said. Investigators said they were questioning witnesses and plan to examine vehicle documentation and order medical examination of the driver. The accident happened around 3 pm (1200 GMT) near Moscow's Slavyansky Boulevard metro station, a prestigious residential area near one of the capital's main avenues. Sirens were blaring around the metro station, with authorities preparing to pull the bus out of the underpass, an AFP correspondent at the scene said.

The underpass and surrounding area were cordoned off and several black body bags could be seen on the pavement, partially covered with falling snow. The emergencies ministry said helicopters had been dispatched to the scene to help evacuate the victims. —AFP

From Jerusalem, Netanyahu offers Christians personal tours of Israel

JERUSALEM: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu offered to play tour guide to Christian pilgrims on Sunday in a message relayed from Jerusalem, whose recognition as Israel's capital by US President Donald Trump has split global Christian opinion. A Christmas Eve video on Twitter showed Netanyahu against the backdrop of East Jerusalem, an area laden with Jewish, Christian and Muslim shrines that Israel captured in a 1967 war and which Palestinians want as their own future capital. In the message, titled "Merry Christmas from Jerusalem, the capital of Israel!" he described Israel as a haven for its 2 percent Christian minority because, he said, "We protect the rights of everyone to worship in the holy sites behind me." Netanyahu named several Christian pilgrimage sites in Israel -

including the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in East Jerusalem's Old City - which would take visitors "in the footsteps of Jesus and the origin of our Judeo-Christian heritage."

"For those of you who come to Israel, I'm going to take a guided tour. In fact, I'll be your guide on this guided tour," Netanyahu said. This would happen Christmas next year he said, without going into the logistics. Trump's Dec 6 announcement on Jerusalem reversed decades of US policy on leaving the city's status to Israeli-Palestinian negotiation. The move angered Muslims and was rejected by most world powers.

US evangelicals who see God's hand in the modern-day return of Jews to a biblical homeland were buoyed. But Pope Francis called for the status quo in the city to be respected, and several other Christian denominations were opposed. "The international consensus strengthens our cause and imbues our people with steadfastness," Palestinian Prime Minister Rami Al-Hamdallah said at a ceremony in the occupied West Bank city of Bethlehem, traditional site of Jesus' birth. East Jerusalem, Hamdallah said, "is a Palestinian, Arab, Muslim and Christian city, and there will be no Palestinian state without Jerusalem as its capital, and without this there will be no peace in the region nor in the whole world." —Reuters

International

Trump attends Xmas Eve mass as he spends holiday in Florida

'We've got prosperity. Now we want peace'

PALM BEACH, United States: US President Donald Trump attended a Christmas Eve service in Florida Sunday night with First Lady Melania Trump, as they spend a year-end break at the president's Mar-a-Lago resort. Arriving at the Episcopal Church of Bethesda-by-the-Sea in Palm Beach around 70 miles north of Miami—the president was greeted by Reverend James R Harlan as around 100 people lined the street to watch the motorcade.

Mass began before the Trumps arrived, and Harlan had asked the congregation to put any phones and cameras away, describing them as an "intrusion."

"We're here to worship," he said. Seated in the third row, Trump listened to Harlan's sermon, which centered on the power of words. Quoting Nelson Mandela on the importance of understanding "how precious words are and how real speech is in its impact on the way people live and die," Harlan highlighted the ability of language to educate and enlighten, but also to cause harm. "Your words can have as much destructive potential as they do healing," Harlan said. "God's word is pure light." A crowd lined up to shake Trump's hand during the peace-be-with-yous-while the church's livestream cut to another angle as he stood up to take communion.

Trump, who was accompanied only by his wife Melania, departed the church after midnight local time (0500 GMT), arriving back at Mar-a-Lago shortly before 12:30am yesterday. Earlier Sunday, President Trump and the First Lady joined in the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) tradition of tracking Santa Claus, taking calls from children who wanted to know his location. "What would you like more than anything?" the president asked one child. After the child responded, Trump said: "Building blocks, that's what I've always liked too. I always loved building blocks."

"People are proud to be saying Merry Christmas again", he wrote. "I am proud to have led the charge

against the assault of our cherished and beautiful phrase. MERRY CHRISTMAS!!!!!" "We've got prosperity - now we want peace," Trump told a child named Ryan, who called the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) to check on Santa's progress.

Every year on Christmas eve NORAD purports to track the flight of Santa and his reindeer-pulled sleigh, a tradition since 1955 when a department store misprinted a phone number, sending a flood of calls to a NORAD colonel, who played along. Later in the evening, they enjoyed a Christmas Eve dinner menu which included turkey, beef tenderloin and seafood, along with side dishes such as creamy kale, popovers and mashed potatoes. Trump also took to Twitter to wish his followers a "Merry Christmas," once again lamenting what he described as an "assault" on the phrase.

Sitting in a gold chair beside first lady Melania Trump in an ornate, tapestried great room, the president enthusiastically chatted with youngsters and their parents. Reporters in the room could hear only the president's side of the conversation.

In his trademark brash style honed during a career in the New York real estate world, Trump predicted the kids would have the greatest Christmas ever. "I'll make a prediction - Santa is going to treat you well. Really well. The best he's ever treated you," he told one child from Mississippi, throwing in an invitation to come to the Oval Office sometime.

Casper from Arlington, Virginia, was a child after Trump's own heart. "Building blocks! That's what I always liked too," the president exclaimed. "I predict that Santa will bring you building blocks, so many you won't be able to use them all," he said. As for Ryan, he told Trump he wanted his grandmother to come home from the hospital. "That is great. That's better than asking for some toy or something," Trump said. —Reuters



PALM BEACH, Florida: US President Donald J Trump participates in NORAD Santa Tracker phone calls at the Mar-a-Lago resort in Palm Beach on Sunday. —AFP

Afghan political crisis deepens as ousted governor refuses to go

KABUL: Afghan President Ashraf Ghani's bid to oust one of the country's most powerful provincial governors has run into strong resistance that has deepened political uncertainty just as Washington steps up its campaign against the Taliban insurgency.

Atta Mohammad Noor, governor of the strategically important northern province of Balkh, has refused to leave office, a week after Ghani's office said the president had accepted his resignation and named a replacement. The standoff has underlined how uncertain central government control remains outside the capital and how volatile the political situation has become as maneuvering begins ahead of a presidential election scheduled for 2019.

One of a number of powerful regional leaders who command strong local loyalty while acting semi-independently of the government, Atta Noor has long sought a role on the national stage and is a potential candidate in the 2019 election. Allies have warned that unless Ghani reverses his decision, he risks civil unrest that will threaten security and allow Taliban and Islamic State militants to gain a foothold in Balkh, a major economic hub which sits on lucrative trade routes to Central Asia.

"If President Ghani does not show flexibility, he will be responsible for the consequences," said Farhad Azimi, a member of parliament from Balkh province.

However he said no side had any interest in a confrontation that would cause violence or threaten security.

Divisions

The standoff, which has alarmed Afghanistan's Western partners, has re-opened divisions that were only partially covered by the US-brokered agreement creating Ghani's unity government following a disputed presidential election in 2014.

After widespread claims of fraud by both sides in the election, Ghani was finally installed as president alongside his former rival Abdullah Abdullah from the Jamiat-i Islami party, who took the specially created post of chief executive. Atta Noor, who has built a strong regional power base as Balkh governor, has received the backing of the party, which is supported mainly by ethnic Tajiks from northern Afghanistan, many of whom still resent Ghani, an ethnic Pashtun.

"Atta Mohammad Noor is the strongest figure in Jamiat," said Bresha Rabeh, another member of parliament from Balkh. "He will not back down."

However he has clashed bitterly with his party rival Abdullah, whom he called a "serpent" whose teeth he would break. After days of silence, Abdullah confirmed yesterday that he had backed the decision to remove Atta Noor.

The dispute comes as US forces have stepped up air strikes against the Taliban and other militant groups as part of a beefed-up strategy aimed at forcing the insurgents to accept a peace settlement after 16 years of war. US commanders say the campaign has had significant success against the Taliban but the impact risks being diluted by political turmoil that has undermined public confidence in the Western-backed government.

As the turmoil has deepened, tensions between Tajiks and Pashtuns, Afghanistan's two largest ethnic groups, have intensified, undermining attempts to build national unity.

Parliamentary elections, officially scheduled for next year, are in doubt and opposition groups have stepped up pressure on the government, with former president Hamid Karzai calling for a 'loya jirga', or council of elders and political leaders. —Reuters

Queen Elizabeth hails British spirit in Christmas address after attacks, fire

SANDRINGHAM, England: Britain's Queen Elizabeth praised the resilience of London and Manchester after "appalling attacks", in a Christmas message that also paid tribute to her husband, Prince Philip, who retired from regular royal duties this year.

The "powerful identities" of the capital and the northern English city had shone through after militant attacks as well as a devastating fire that destroyed the residential tower block Grenfell Tower in London, the Queen said. The 91 year-old monarch, whose televised address is an essential part of a traditional Christmas in Britain, said it had been a privilege to visit victims of the bomb attack at a pop concert in Manchester, as she was able to witness the bravery and resilience of survivors first-hand.

On the 60th anniversary of her first televised Christmas address, Elizabeth said her reflections on the year had made her "grateful for the blessings of home and family", and praised her husband and his "unique" sense of humor. The 96-year-old prince, also known as the Duke of Edinburgh, has been at the queen's side throughout her 65 years on the throne, and has often grabbed the headlines with his off-color comments.

Elizabeth, the world's longest reigning monarch, celebrated her platinum wedding anniversary in November. Philip retired from regular royal duties over the summer having carried out more than 22,000 solo engagements. "I don't know that anyone had invented the term 'platinum' for a 70th wedding anniversary when I was born. You weren't expected to be around that long," she said.

"Even Prince Philip has decided it's time to slow down a little - having, as he economically put it, 'done his bit'. But I know his support and unique sense of humor will remain as strong as ever."

Philip has continued to make occasional appearances,

Driver rams German party headquarters in apparent suicide bid

BERLIN: A man drove a car at the entrance of the Berlin headquarters of Germany's Social Democratic Party (SPD) late on Sunday evening, lightly injuring himself, later telling police that he had intended to commit suicide.

Police said the car, which crashed through the first set of glass doors of Willy Brandt House, the SPD's headquarters, was laden with petrol canisters and gas cartridges. The building's sprinkler

system extinguished the resulting blaze. Authorities did not identify the man, in part because of a policy of limiting public communications in cases involving suicide, attempted or otherwise, saying only that he was 58 years old. A police spokeswoman said investigators had found nothing to cast doubt on the man's claim that he had been attempting to commit suicide. The incident did not appear to be an attack, she added.

It was unclear why he had chosen the SPD, which is about to start negotiations on governing for another four years in coalition with Chancellor Angela Merkel's conservatives, as his target.

The man was taken to hospital for treatment for superficial injuries to his head. Nobody else was hurt. Police launched an arson inquiry and state security services were also investigating. — Reuters



BERLIN: A car is seen in the lobby of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) headquarters after a vehicle was used to ram the building in Berlin early yesterday. —AFP



NORFOLK: Britain's Prince Charles, Prince of Wales, Britain's Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall, US actress and fiancée of Britain's Prince Harry Meghan Markle, Britain's Queen Elizabeth II, Britain's Prince Harry and Britain's Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh leave after attending the Royal Family's traditional Christmas Day church service at St Mary Magdalene Church in Sandringham, Norfolk, eastern England, yesterday. —AFP

and joined other members of the royal family at a Christmas Day church service on their country estate in Sandringham.

Also joining them for the service was Prince Harry's fiancée Meghan Markle who is spending Christmas with the royals.

The American actress wore a distinctive brown hat as she arrived alongside the Queen's grandson Harry, his elder brother William and his wife Kate. As they left, both couples briefly chatted to some well-wish-

ers who had gathered to glimpse the royals on Christmas morning.

The Queen, who missed last year's service with a heavy cold, said in her address that she was looking forward to welcoming new members into the royal family next year. As well as Markle, who will marry Harry in May, Kate is expecting a third child.

The royal Christmas broadcast dates back to King George V in 1932 when it was on the radio. It was first televised in 1957. —Reuters

Russia's election commission bars Navalny presidential bid

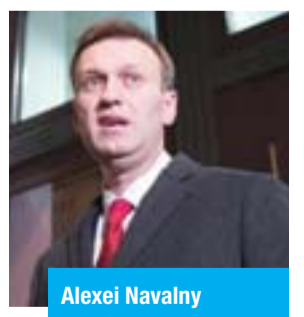
MOSCOW: Russia's Central Election Commission yesterday unanimously rejected top opposition figure Alexei Navalny's bid to run against President Vladimir Putin next year, leading him to urge a boycott of the polls.

The commission voted 12 to zero in barring Navalny from the presidential election, citing a controversial embezzlement conviction for which he received a five year suspended sentence. Navalny's crime qualifies as "serious" and therefore rids the individual of the right to stand for president," said commission member Boris Elizeyev ahead of the vote, urging the body to bar him from running. The decision prompted the 41-year-old protest leader—who maintains that the court case against him was fabricated for political reasons—to call for a boycott of the election.

"We are declaring a strike by voters. We will ask everyone to boycott these elections. We will not recognize the result," Navalny told journalists.

Navalny, who has campaigned across Russia in recent months, argued earlier in front of the commission that his conviction was lifted in the European Court of Human Rights, and that banning him from participation would make March's election illegitimate. "I assure you, a huge amount of people will not go to this election, would actively boycott this election" and hold "electoral strikes."

In a passionate speech he accused the commission of barring truly oppositional figures while allowing candidates who are not interested in fighting corruption or in conducting real campaigns. Navalny was first sentenced in 2013 on the embezzlement charges, which accused him of defrauding the Kirov regional budget of about \$270,000. The European Court of Human Rights last year quashed the ruling, saying it was unfair, and Russia's Supreme Court ordered a retrial. —AFP



Alexei Navalny

International

More than 30 bodies found after deadly Philippine fire

Govt launches criminal probe as toll rises to 37

DAVAO, Philippines: Firemen yesterday found the bodies of "around" 36 people after a deadly blaze at a shopping mall in the southern Philippines, a fire official said as the government launched a criminal investigation.

The discovery raised to 37 the confirmed death toll from the NCCC shopping mall fire in the city of Davao on Mindanao island. The Davao region chief of the Bureau of Fire Protection, Wilberto Rico Neil Kwan Tiu, told weeping relatives of the missing that he personally counted "around 36" bodies in an office lobby at the gutted mall.

City mayor Sara Duterte, a daughter of President Rodrigo Duterte, said earlier that 38 people were missing and feared dead in the fire, with one other unidentified body recovered on Sunday.

"I personally counted them before I gave the information to our honorable mayor... around 36 in number," Kwan Tiu told weeping relatives, who clutched long-stemmed white flowers as they attended a mass. "As the ground commander of this operation my deepest apology for I was not able to save them," said the fire official, who joined a search inside the building at midday.

The blaze began on Saturday, trapping call center workers of US-based market research firm SSI, which announced on its website late Sunday that 37 of its 500 employees at the top-floor office had been "lost" in the fire. Philippine authorities ordered a criminal investigation Monday as allegations surfaced of locked or non-existent fire exits at the building, which its administrators denied.

"By punishing those responsible, we can set an example to others so that hopefully there will be no repetition of those tragedies," Justice Secretary Vitaliano Aguirre said in a

statement. Mall operators denied the claims. "There is no truth to that allegation. In fact as per accounts of those who got out, they were able get out thru the fire exit," Thea Padua, the mall's public relations officer, told AFP by text message.

Rescuers criticized

Davao's fire marshal described the shopping mall on Sunday as "an enclosed space with no ventilation", though the authorities said they had yet to determine the cause of the blaze. Deadly blazes occur regularly in the Philippines,

particularly in slum areas where there are virtually no fire safety standards. Corruption and exploitation mean supposedly strict fire standards are often not enforced. Some relatives of those missing earlier criticized rescuers for what they felt was the slow pace of recovery efforts. "They seem so relaxed," said Jolita Basalan, weeping as she waited for news of her

Slow pace of recovery efforts comes under fire

29-year-old son Jonas who worked at the call center. "They are not pained because they don't have a child there. They told us to come here but no one is moving," she told AFP.

SSI said it has arranged for counselling for its employees and will support funeral arrangements and set up a fund for the bereaved. "This terrible tragedy has left us with heavy hearts. We offer our condolences and prayers to the families and loved ones of the victims," SSI chief executive Gary Laben said in a statement on its website.

The shopping mall fire compounded the Christmas misery in the south of the mainly Catholic nation, where tens of thousands were displaced by floods and landslides from a storm that also killed 240 others on Friday. In 2015 a fire



DAVAO CITY: Philippines' President Rodrigo Duterte comforting a relative of one of the victims after a fire engulfed a shopping mall in Davao City on the southern Philippine island of Mindanao. —AFP

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 nation's deadliest fire of recent times, 162 people

were killed in a huge blaze that gutted a Manila disco in 1996. With low wages but strong English-language skills, the Philippines is a popular destination for international companies to set up customer call centers. —AFP

Pakistan allows wife, mother to visit Indian sentenced to death

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan allowed the wife and mother of an Indian man convicted of spying to visit him yesterday in Islamabad, eight months after he was sentenced to death by a military court.

Kulbhushan Sudhir Jadhav, a former officer in the Indian navy, was arrested in March 2016 in the Pakistan province of Baluchistan, where there has been a long-running conflict between national security forces and militant separatists. The case has added to tensions between the nuclear-armed neighbors, who often accuse each other of violating a 2003 ceasefire along their disputed border in Kashmir, where the countries sometime engage in intense artillery duels.

Pakistan released a picture of Jadhav's mother, Avanti, and wife, Chetankul, seated at a desk and speaking to him from behind a glass window. "The mother and wife of Commander Jadhav sitting comfortably in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Pakistan. We honor our commitments," a spokesman for Pakistan's foreign office, Mohammad Faisal, said in an earlier Twitter posting when the women first arrived at the ministry in Islamabad.

India's foreign affairs office has not responded to a request for comment on the meeting. After Jadhav was sentenced to death in April, India asked the World Court for an injunction to bar the execution, arguing that he was denied diplomatic assistance during what it says was an



ISLAMABAD: The wife (second left) and mother (left) of Kulbhushan Sudhir Jadhav, an Indian national sentenced to death for spying in Pakistan, leave after meeting with Jadhav at the Foreign Ministry in Islamabad yesterday. —AFP

unfair trial. The World Court ordered Pakistan in May to delay Jadhav's execution, and said Islamabad had violated a treaty guaranteeing diplomatic assistance to foreigners accused of crimes.

Pakistan authorities say Jadhav confessed to being ordered by India's intelligence service to conduct espionage and sabotage in Baluchistan "to destabilize and wage war against Pakistan".

Baluchistan is at the center of a \$57 billion Chinese-backed "Belt and Road" development project that at first focused on Chinese companies building roads and power stations, but is now expanding to include setting up industries. In a transcript released by Pakistan of what it says is Jadhav's confession, the former naval officer says disrupting the Chinese-funded projects was a main goal of his activities. — Reuters

China calls for constructive efforts to ease Korean tensions

BEIJING: China called yesterday for all countries to make constructive efforts to ease tension after North Korea said the latest UN sanctions against it are an act of war and tantamount to a complete economic blockade.

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 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 intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM). North Korea on Sunday rejected the resolution, calling it an act of war. Speaking in Beijing, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said the resolution appropriately strengthened the sanctions but was not designed to affect ordinary people, normal economic exchanges and cooperation, or humanitarian aid.

Hua noted it also called for the use of peaceful means to resolve the issue and that all sides should take steps to reduce tension. "In the present situation, we call on all countries to exercise restraint and make proactive and constructive efforts to ease the tensions on the peninsula and appropriately resolve the issue," she told a daily news briefing. The North's old allies China and Russia both supported the latest UN sanctions. —Reuters

Controversial Duterte son resigns from Philippine govt post

DAVAO, Philippines: Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte's eldest son resigned from his local government post yesterday, citing allegations of links to drug smugglers which he denies and a bitter social media dispute with his own daughter.

Paolo Duterte told the city council of Davao, a southern port where he serves as vice-mayor, that he was resigning because of "recent unfortunate events in my life"—citing family problems and allegations of drug smuggling.

"These among others, include the maligning of my reputation in the recent name-dropping incident in the Bureau of Customs smuggling case and the very public squabble with my daughter," he said. "I take responsibility for all that has happened," the 42-year-old said in a statement later released to the press.

The president's son made headlines last week when he used the official Facebook page of the Davao vice mayor's office for an explosive-laced rant at his teenage daughter Isabelle, after she posted criticism of him on social media. Her posts were not publicly available. The vice mayor responded in a Facebook post—which was no longer publicly available yesterday—saying his daughter had "embarrassed" herself with her behavior though he did not elaborate.

Isabelle was in the media spotlight earlier this month when photos of her posing in designer gowns at the presidential palace went viral on social



Paolo Duterte

media. An opposition senator accused Paolo earlier this year of facilitating the smuggling of crystal methamphetamine worth 6.4 billion pesos (\$125 million) into the Philippines from China.

He testified in the Senate in September to deny the drug allegations, in a country that has seen thousands killed in an anti-narcotics campaign launched by his father, Harry Roque, the president's spokesman, said Monday that Paolo's resignation letter had been received but did not comment further as "the father wants to speak to the son first".

Davao mayor Sara Duterte, the president's daughter, said yesterday she did not know if her brother's resignation had been accepted. The Duterte family has controlled Davao politics for more than two decades, with the president also having served as the city's long-time mayor. —AFP

Vietnam braces for typhoon as Philippine toll rises to 230

HANOI/MANILA: Authorities in Vietnam prepared to move a million people from low-lying areas along the south coast yesterday as a typhoon approached after it battered the Philippines with floods and landslides that killed more than 230 people.

Typhoon Tembin is expected to slam into Vietnam late on Monday after bringing misery to the predominantly Christian Philippines just before Christmas.

Vietnam's disaster prevention committee said 74,000 people had been moved to safety from vulnerable areas, while authorities in 15 provinces and cities were prepared to move more than 1 million. The government ordered that oil rigs and vessels be protected and it warned that about 62,000 fishing boats should not venture out to sea.

"Vietnam must ensure the safety of its oil rigs and vessels. If necessary, close the oil rigs and evacuate workers," Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc was quoted as saying on a government website. Schools were ordered to close in the southern commercial hub of Ho Chi Minh City on Monday, a working day in Vietnam. On Sunday, Tembin hit the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea, parts of which are contested by several countries, including Vietnam and China.

No casualties were reported in outposts there. Vietnam, like the Philippines,

is regularly battered by typhoons that form over the warm waters of the Pacific and barrel westwards into land. Tembin will be the 16th major storm to hit Vietnam this year. The storms and other disasters have left 390 people dead or missing, according to official figures.

Scores missing

In the Philippines, rescue workers were still struggling to reach some remote areas hit by floods and landslides that Tembin's downpours brought, as the death toll climbed to more than 230. Scores of people are missing. The full extent of the devastation was only becoming clear as the most remote areas were being reached. Health worker Arturo Simbajon said nearly the entire coastal village of Anungan on the Zamboanga peninsula of Mindanao island had been wiped out by a barrage of broken logs, boulders and mud that swept down a river and out to sea.

"Only the mosque was left standing," Simbajon said. "People were watching the rising sea but did not expect the water to come from behind them." Manuel Luis Ochotorena, head of regional disaster agency, said he expected the death toll to rise.

"Many areas in Zamboanga peninsula are still without power and communications, some towns are cut off due to collapsed bridges, floods and landslides," he said. Tens of thousands of people on Mindanao have been displaced by the storm, which struck late on Friday. The Philippines is battered by about 20 typhoons a year and warnings are routinely issued. But disaster officials said many villagers had ignored warnings this time to get out coastal areas and move away from riverbanks. In 2013, super typhoon Haiyan killed nearly 8,000 people and left 200,000 families homeless in the central Philippines. —Reuters

China island expansion moves ahead in South China Sea

BEIJING: China's large-scale land reclamation around disputed reefs and shoals in the South China Sea is "moving ahead steadily", state media has reported, and is on track to use giant "island-builders" to transform even more of the region. Beijing claims nearly all of the sea and has been turning reefs in the Spratly and Parcel chains into islands, installing military facilities and equipment in the area where it has conflicting claims with neighbors.

"The course of construction is moving ahead steadily and a series of striking results have been achieved," according to a report that appeared Friday on Haiwainet, a website under the Communist Party's flagship newspaper the People's Daily.

The projects have "completely changed the face of the South China Sea's islands and reefs", the report said. The aggressive campaign has been a source of contention with neighboring countries. China's sweeping claims overlap with those of Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei, as well as Taiwan. During 2017 China built 290,000 square meters (29 hectares) of facilities on South China Sea reefs and islands, including underground storage, administrative buildings and large radar installations, the report said. "To improve the livelihood and work conditions of people living on the islands, and strengthen the necessary military defenses of the South China Sea within China's sovereignty, China has rationally expanded the area of its islands and reefs," it said.

The sea is believed to hold vast oil and gas deposits and \$5 trillion in annual trade passes through it. The report noted that with last month's introduction of the new super-dredger Tianjing, a "magical island building machine", and other "magical machines" soon to come, "the area of the South China Sea's islands and reefs will expand a step further". China is also building a floating nuclear power plant, the report said, to provide power for those living in the Sansha city area. —AFP

Analysis

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US' unfair democracy

Doug Jones' remarkable victory in the Alabama Senate special election on Dec 12 is the strongest sign yet that Republicans will lose seats in Congress in 2018 because of their unpopular president and extremely unpopular agenda. And yet a close reading of the Alabama result also highlights just how American democracy can thwart the will of the majority rather than serve it.

The warning signs are right there on a map of Alabama. Despite his statewide victory, Jones lost six of Alabama's seven congressional districts. That's a symptom of gerrymandering, just one of the features of the American electoral system making it very difficult for Democrats to beat Republicans.

In most democratic frameworks, the Republican Party would be facing near-certain doom in the 2018 mid-terms. The party that occupies the White House usually loses ground in mid-term elections, especially during a president's first term, as Democrats did in 2010 and 1994. This is even more true if the president is divisive, inspiring the opposing party to turn out.

Donald Trump's approval ratings have been below 40 percent for months, an unprecedented rejection for a president at this stage in his term. The tax cut bill that Republicans passed this week is the second-most unpopular proposed legislation in recorded history. The least popular was the Republican proposal earlier in the year to repeal the Affordable Care Act. This has created an electorate very hostile to the GOP. Democrats have an 11 point lead among voters for the next election, but whether Republicans will even lose control of either house of Congress remains very much an open question.

Demographic Distribution

In the House of Representatives, that's partly a reflection of demographic distribution. Democrats tend to be concentrated in cities, while Republicans are more evenly spread in conservative-leaning suburbs and rural areas. This means that even a non-partisan approach to drawing congressional district boundaries would favor Republicans. But in most states, both parties attempt to draw district lines - no matter how ridiculous they make look to the untrained eye - that favor their team. Hence the result in Alabama, where Republicans were in charge of the redistricting.

Since Republicans dominated the 2010 elections, they had the advantage of controlling more state legislatures - and therefore the redrawing of borders - during the last round of decennial redistricting. That means Democrats could fail to win the House despite getting far more votes.

Even though the Senate can't be gerrymandered, the situation for Democrats there is just as bad because the third of the Senate up for re-election in 2018 overwhelmingly consists of seats held by Democrats. Republicans held 52 of the 100 Senate seats before Jones's upset victory. They are now down to 51-49, but - as with the House - Republicans could win fewer Senate votes than Democrats and still retain their majority. That's happened before, most recently in 2016, mainly because the Senate has a rural bias: Smaller states like Wyoming, Idaho, and Nebraska each get the same two senators as populous California. In order to control the Senate, Democrats must win races in states that go consistently Republican in presidential elections.

Randomness

Then there is the randomness of which third of the 100 Senate seats are up for grabs in any given election cycle. The 2018 Senate map is especially favorable to Republicans. Democrats have to defend 23 seats to Republicans' 10. Democrats must hold seats in 10 states Trump carried, including conservative bastions Indiana, West Virginia, and North Dakota. While political conditions will favor Democrats overall in 2018, it wouldn't be shocking if the Democrats failed to hold one or two of these seats.

Of the 10 Republican Senate seats that will be on the ballot, there are limited opportunities for Democratic pickups: Nevada, being a swing state, is likely the strongest. Arizona is historically conservative and Republican, but with a large and growing Latino population - and the very real possibility that Republicans will nominate a brash extremist candidate similar to Moore - it might offer the Democrats their other real chance. But finding a third seat for them to win would be nearly impossible: The remaining Republican seats are in overwhelmingly Republican southern and western states such as Mississippi and Wyoming.

Jones' win, of course, changes everything. The Democrats can now gain control of the Senate by just winning in Arizona and Nevada and holding all of their seats. New York Times data analyst Nate Cohn thinks the Alabama result moves Democrats' chances of winning the Senate from a long-shot to a toss-up. Still, the fact that it took an incredibly unlikely win in Alabama to even make the Senate a toss-up in a year in which voters are almost certain to overwhelmingly prefer the Democratic Party is remarkable. If Democrats win the national House and Senate popular votes by a modest margin, they're out of luck - and out of power.

That highlights another problem with American democracy: The ability of a party that wins through undemocratic mechanisms to reify its own power for decades. —Reuters

Cartoon for the Soul



With dollar peg, Lebanon risks currency hit

With fixed exchange rates and some of the world's worst debt and balance-of-payment ratios, Lebanon risks serious economic crisis next year should worsening relations with Gulf states choke off the capital flows sustaining its currency's dollar peg. Lebanon's ability to dodge financial disaster has for years confounded critics, whose warnings of debt defaults, balance of payments crises and a collapse of the pound currency, have all come to naught.

What could change that equation is the foreign policy shift in Saudi Arabia, whose new Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has thrust Beirut back into a regional power struggle between the Sunni monarchy in Riyadh and Shiite Iran. One sign of the shifting political sands was the shock resignation last month of Prime Minister Saad Al-Hariri, widely seen as under pressure from Saudi Arabia - which along with its Gulf allies opposes the Iran-backed group Hezbollah's role in Hariri's coalition government.

Hariri has since rescinded his resignation. But the tumult has re-focused the attention of many economists and analysts on the frailties of an economy reliant on remittances, an external funding deficit of about 20 percent of gross domestic product and government debt of 150 percent of GDP, according to the IMF. These metrics are far worse than in other countries with the same B-rating from Fitch. The point around which all this could unravel is Lebanon's currency, which is pegged at a rate of 1,500 per dollar. While most developing countries have now adopted floating currencies, pegs remain the norm in the Middle East. But Lebanon's currency peg, unlike those of oil-rich Gulf states, is not backed by huge financial firepower. Instead, the country relies on deposit inflows to Lebanese banks from its diaspora, which vastly outnumber the 4 million Lebanese at home, to fund the government and maintain central bank defenses.

"The crisis is behind us for a while but in the medium term, Lebanon has difficult macro fundamentals as it needs to keep attracting deposits to sustain the currency peg,"

said Jean-Michel Saliba, a strategist at Bank of America Merrill Lynch. "Lebanon has been resilient for a very long time but that doesn't mean the resilience will last."

With a pegged currency, authorities must hold sufficient dollar buffers to maintain faith in the exchange rate, while ensuring steady inflows to keep coffers topped up. During November's turmoil, some Lebanese rushed for dollars: data shows central bank foreign assets fell by \$1.6 billion last month, with traders citing interventions to sup-

port the pound. Governor Riad Salameh, in office since 1993, declined to comment on the matter of interventions. But he told Reuters the peg had a "cost". Salameh has a comfortable \$43 billion in reserves. He can also point to how the central bank maintained stability in other crises, including the 2006 conflict with Israel, the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Al-Hariri and Syria's civil war.



Peg is both a strength and a weakness

port the pound.

The reliance on overseas citizens is a strength as well as weakness. On one hand, diaspora money is known to be "stickier" than foreign stock and bond investments. The downside is that remittances comprise 16 percent of Lebanon's GDP, according to World Bank data, well above most emerging economies. What's more, around two-thirds of this comes from the Gulf and could be at risk

from tensions between Beirut and Riyadh. Hariri has identified Gulf sanctions as a major threat. "They have enough reserves but those are being fed by remittance inflows. If things get worse in the Middle East, you don't know if this money will still come in," said Societe Generale strategist Regis Chatellier, warning a peg collapse would send foreign debt ratios "through the roof". "Lebanon, for me, is the credit to watch next year. This is an economy with a similar debt-to-GDP to Japan but with a huge current account deficit," he added.

The peg too is both a strength and a weakness. As long as it is in place and deemed trustworthy, Lebanese expats will be happy to channel savings to high-interest bank accounts at home and locals willing to hold pounds. Steady deposit growth has allowed banks to fund the government, while the central bank also leverages this cash: it offers banks attractive interest rates and exchange rates for dollar deposits.

But if inflows dwindle, say if Gulf-based Lebanese are forced home, doubts may grow over the peg's stability, prompting citizens to buy dollars. Toby Iles, Fitch director for Middle East and Africa sovereigns, says the central bank could cope with some level of dollar demand, as reserves are equivalent to 60 percent of bank deposits.

While noting that big deposit outflows are rare in Lebanon, Iles warned: "Extensive outflows caused by a very large political shock becomes a stress scenario which could undermine confidence in the peg." Lebanese bonds reflect the vulnerability, trading as though their credit rating was a notch or two below their actual score, BAML's Saliba said. He and others urge Lebanon to act quickly to cut spending and raise revenues so it can reduce its deficit.

"In the long run, it's not sustainable what we are doing. You cannot borrow forever. You can't run a fiscal deficit as big as it is today in Lebanon forever," said Fadi Osseiran, executive director of Blom Bank in Beirut. "If confidence in the central bank goes, the long-term becomes short (term)

5 conclusions from Barca's Clasico cruise

Barcelona further tightened their vice-like grip on the La Liga title by sweeping aside eternal rivals Real Madrid 3-0 on Saturday to leave the European champions 14 points adrift down in fourth place. Luis Suarez, Lionel Messi and Aleix Vidal were on target for the visitors in the second half as Madrid paid for not taking their chances when on top before the break. Here, AFP Sports looks at five conclusions to draw from El Clasico:

Title decided

The day before Santa Claus comes to Spain, Barca already have what they most wanted for Christmas. Not only did they leave Madrid trailing, but defeats for Atletico Madrid and Valencia this weekend mean they now lead La Liga by nine points. Ernesto Valverde's men are unbeaten in 25 games, stretching back to their previous visit to the Santiago Bernabeu when they were outclassed as Real wrapped up a 5-1 aggregate win in the Spanish Super Cup. Back then, Real seemed all-conquering after a first La Liga and Champions League double for 59 years, whilst Barca were reeling from the loss of Neymar to Paris Saint-Germain. However, thanks to Valverde's shrewd management, the Catalans have bounced back in incredible style, dropping only six points in their opening 17 league games while their rivals have floundered.

Madrid need fresh legs

Real have paid a heavy price for not building from a position of strength as they cashed in rather than splashing out in the transfer market in the summer. Alvaro Morata, James Rodriguez and Pepe all left, whilst Real failed to get their premier target as Kylian Mbappe chose to join Neymar at PSG. Missing out on Mbappe could prove even more costly when Madrid face PSG in the last 16 of the Champions League. However, Real don't

just need a refreshment up front to offer back up to the ageing duo of Cristiano Ronaldo and Karim Benzema, now both in their ninth season in Madrid. The hosts faded physically in the second half as the toil of playing in six competitions this season has become increasingly apparent in recent months.

Barca defence for real

The key to Valverde's rejuvenation of Barca has been an unusual one for the Catalans. Unlike the sparkling football shown by Pep Guardiola or Luis Enrique's treble winning sides in the past decade, Barca have built from the back. Goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen has been in outstanding form, but Neymar's departure has also allowed Valverde to play an extra midfielder to offer more protection to the back four. Barca have conceded just eight goals in their 25-game unbeaten run, registering 18 clean sheets.

Spotlight finally falls on Zidane

"Tomorrow they are going to hammer me," recognized Zidane after his decision to surprisingly start Mateo Kovacic instead of a host of other attacking options such as Gareth Bale, Isco or Marco Asensio backfired. Zidane has enjoyed an almost flawless record during his first two years in charge, winning eight trophies including back-to-back Champions Leagues. However, his heaviest defeat as a senior coach means his judgement is finally beginning to be questioned. And that pressure will only intensify unless he can mastermind a way past free-spending PSG come the new year.

A very Messi Christmas

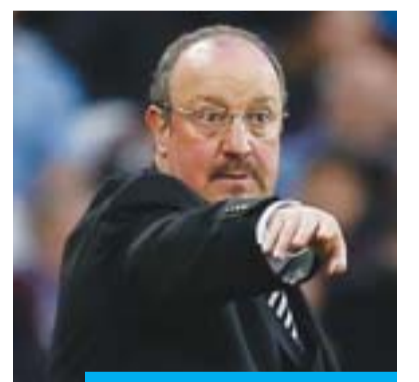
Ronaldo has hogged the headlines in the past month after picking up his fifth Ballon d'Or to move level with Messi in their personal battle to be declared the best player of their generation. The Portuguese was rewarded for his remarkable goalscoring streak towards the end of last season's Champions League with 10 goals from the quarter-finals on as Madrid were crowned champions of Spain and Europe. However, in terms of consistent performances in 2017, Messi has been in a world of his own and rounded off the year with another goal and assist. —AFP

You can always rely on Benitez to turn crisis around

Two months without a victory, four consecutive defeats and constant headlines surrounding a possible takeover - that would be enough to test any top flight manager. Newcastle United had endured a nightmare run of form going nine Premier League games without a win before Saturday's 3-2 victory at West Ham United. The last victory came against Crystal Palace on Oct 21 and the former Liverpool manager must have been wondering if he had lost his magic touch.

But you can never write off the European Cup winner and despite the turmoil surrounding Newcastle, on and off the pitch, Benitez has a habit of delivering when it matters the most. The Spanish coach has a proven track record when it comes to managing at the highest level and he has a habit of getting the best out of his players. For all the talk of a possible takeover with Amanda Staveley hoping to persuade Mike Ashley to sell Newcastle to her Dubai-based PCP Capital Partners Middle Eastern investment fund, Benitez has somehow managed to transform his squad at just the right time.

You cannot underestimate the importance of being out of the bottom three on Christmas Day and Newcastle supporters will be optimistic that the second half of the campaign will provide a lot more optimism. The way Newcastle responded to going behind so early in the game demonstrated the spirit and determination that Benitez has installed in his players and they thoroughly deserved to come away with all three



Rafael Benitez

points at London Stadium. Newcastle are clearly lacking two or three quality players who would help take the club onto another level, but they have individuals who are prepared to give everything for the shirt and none more so than their influential captain Jamaal Lascelles who was outstanding at the heart of the defense. West Ham were full of optimism after new manager David Moyes looked to have turned their season around with impressive wins over Chelsea and Stoke City and are a major threat with the pace of Michail Antonio and the rejuvenated Marko Arnautovic in the Hammers attack.

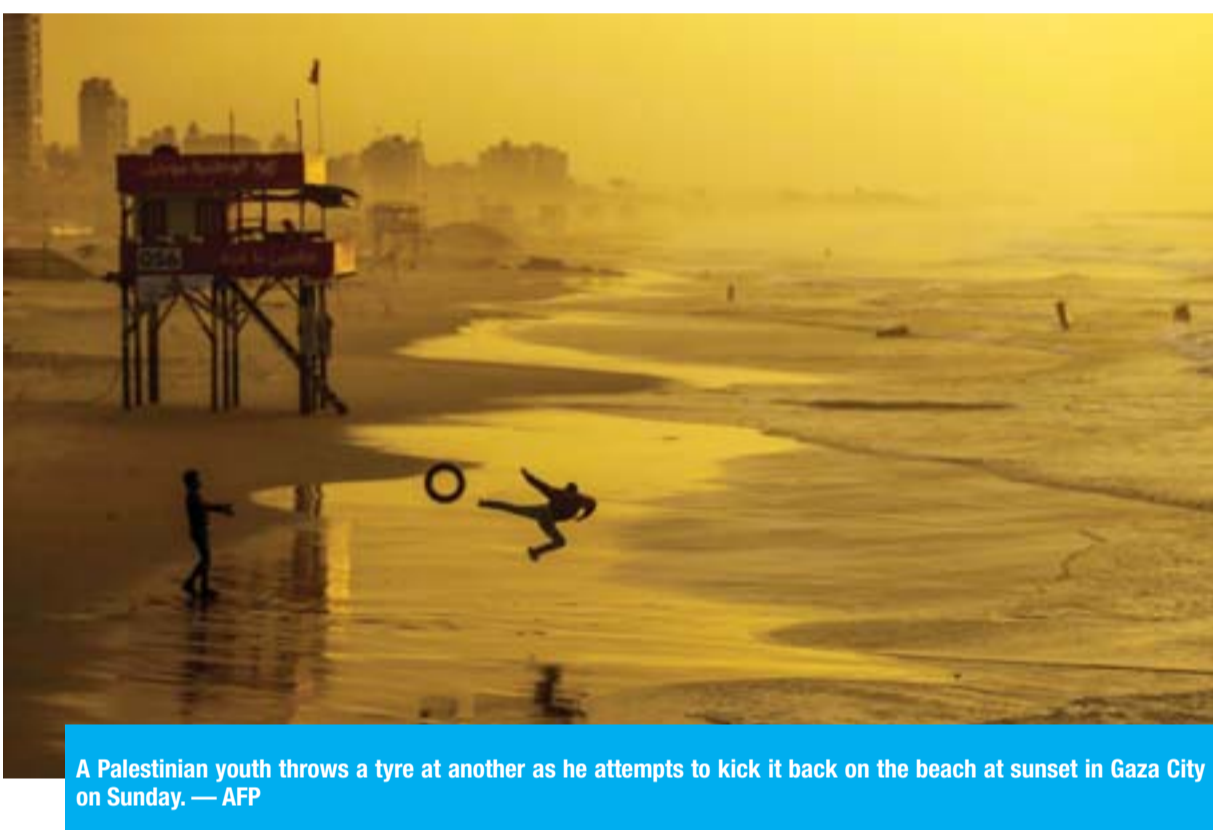
But Benitez clearly did his homework on how to stop them and worked hard on causing problems on the counterattack and it proved to be the major difference. It remains to be seen how a possible takeover will affect Benitez and his long-term future, but one thing is certain - Newcastle have a manager who will give them every chance of achieving success. For all the teams involved at the bottom of the table, the January transfer window could prove to be the difference for Newcastle and Benitez will be praying he can get in the players to help him achieve his dream of challenging in the top half once again. —Reuters



This photo taken on Dec 23, 2017 shows artists working on the construction site of a 80-m-long snow sculpture for the Vasaloppet China ski festival in Changchun in China's northeastern Jilin province. The ski festival starts on Jan 4, 2018. — AFP



This photo taken on Sunday shows seagulls flying over the beach at Zhanqiao Bridge in Qinghai in China's eastern Shandong province. — AFP



A Palestinian youth throws a tyre at another as he attempts to kick it back on the beach at sunset in Gaza City on Sunday. — AFP



A picture taken yesterday shows a murmuration of starlings in the sky over agricultural fields near Beit Shean in the Jordan Valley. — AFP

Guatemala to move embassy...

Continued from Page 1

Only eight countries stood with the United States in voting no to the resolution held in the UN General Assembly, among them Guatemala and fellow Central American country Honduras. Guatemala and Honduras are both reliant on US funding to improve security in their gang-ridden territories. The two nations are, along with El Salvador, in what is known as the Northern Triangle of Central America. Violence, corruption and poverty have made them the main source of illegal migration to the United States, which is giving them \$750 million to provide better conditions at home.

Morales, like Trump, was a television entertainer with no real political experience before becoming president of Guatemala in 2016. On Friday, Morales foreshadowed the decision he was to make regarding Jerusalem, as he

defended his government's vote at the UN backing the United States. "Guatemala is historically pro-Israeli," he told a news conference in Guatemala City. "In 70 years of relations, Israel has been our ally," he said. "We have a Christian way of thinking that, as well as the politics of it, has us believing that Israel is our ally and we must support it."

Morales's position has become fragile in recent months because of allegations of corruption against him being investigated by a special UN-backed body working with Guatemalan prosecutors. The United States ambassador to the UN, Nikki Haley, had said her country would "take names" of the states opposing its position, and Trump threatened to cut funding to countries "that take our money and then vote against us".

Several significant US allies abstained from the UN vote, among them Australia, Canada, Mexico and Poland. Others, such as Britain, France, Germany and South Korea were among the nations denouncing any unilateral decision to view Jerusalem as Israel's capital. The eight countries on the US side of the vote were: Guatemala, Honduras, Israel, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Palau and Togo. — AFP

Tunisia says UAE attack fears behind...

Continued from Page 1

presidency spokeswoman Saida Garrach told Shems FM radio. The information indicates that with militants returning from Syria and Iraq, there is "a possibility of a terrorist attack involving either Tunisian women or women carrying a Tunisian passport", Garrach said, suggesting that they could be using false identities. UAE carrier Emirates has received "clear instructions" to deny Tunisian women access to its planes, she added.

Passengers said the only explanation they were given by airline staff was that women holding Tunisian passports were not authorized to travel to the UAE. The Tunisian authorities said they had been forced to intervene several times in the past few days to help their

nationals in Tunis as well as in Abu Dhabi and Beirut. In response Tunisia on Sunday halted Emirates flights between Tunis and Dubai.

Tunisia President Beji Caid Essebsi, in a statement, called for the rights of Tunisian women not to be violated "whatever the justification". But he also instructed his foreign minister, Khemaies Jhinaoui, to "work to overcome these problems as quickly as possible to preserve fraternal relations and cooperation" with the Emiratis. Jhinaoui told a local radio station the UAE should apologize for the travel ban, which he said its authorities had not informed Tunisia about.

UAE Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Anwar Gargash on Sunday blamed the delays on "security information that necessitated taking specific procedures". "We highly value Tunisian women and respect them," he said on Twitter. But Tunisian official Garrach insisted that while her country could understand the UAE's concerns, it cannot "accept the way Tunisian women have been treated". Tunisian rights groups have condemned the UAE measures as "discriminatory and racist". — Agencies

Kuwait Times

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Sports

Federer, Nadal shine as rivals hobble into 2018

Defied time to sweep this year's Grand Slams

PARIS: Written off as dead men walking, Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal defied time to sweep the Grand Slams in 2017 while the injury curse which dogged their rivals looks set to be the new year's early storyline. Evergreen Federer, who will turn 37 in 2018, took his majors tally to 19 with a fifth Australian Open title, which was secured by a five-set triumph over Nadal, and a record eighth Wimbledon with a stroll past a tearful Marin Cilic. Nadal, 32 in June next year, was not to be outdone, claiming a 10th French Open, a third US Open crown and the year-ending world number one spot. Federer finished the year at number two in the world, having started at 16, and a season-leading seven titles-including three Masters at Indian Wells, Miami and Shanghai-despite having skipped the entire clay court season.

"It's been an amazing year for me," said Federer who had missed the last six months of the 2016 season through injury. Nadal added two Masters titles at Monte Carlo and Madrid to his triumphs at Roland Garros and Flushing Meadows, finishing the campaign with six trophies. The 16-time Grand Slam champion also secured the year-ending top ranking for a fourth time. "I never would have imagined I would end up as number one at the end of the season again," said the Spaniard. "It wasn't one of my goals going into the season-far from it. After returning from a difficult period in my career and battling through injuries, this wasn't on my mind."

Nadal will go into the new season without his uncle Toni who has been his coach since childhood. But one thing will be familiar-his career-long battle with knee injuries. He was forced to withdraw after just one round at the World Tour Finals and has already pulled out of an exhibition tournament in the United Arab Emirates from December 28-30.

Injury permitting, Nadal will now start 2018 as top

seed in Brisbane from next weekend with the Australian Open due to get underway on January 15. The Spaniard is not the only A-listener under an injury cloud. Former world number one Andy Murray and fellow three-time major winner Stan Wawrinka have not played since Wimbledon-Murray suffered a hip injury while Wawrinka required two knee operations.

Murray has delayed his departure to Australia while Swiss star Wawrinka joined Nadal in pulling out of the UAE event. Novak Djokovic will play in Abu Dhabi as the former world number one and 12-time Grand Slam winner makes his return having last played at Wimbledon where he picked up a season-ending wrist injury. Djokovic is now ranked 12 in the world, Murray is at 16 while Wawrinka starts 2018 at nine. "I wouldn't be surprised if 2018 worked out for them as well like it worked out for me and Rafa," predicted Federer. The new year could also see the highly-regarded Alexander Zverev make a Slam breakthrough after a 2017 which saw him win five titles.

Nadal still battling knee injuries

However, the beanpole German had a roller-coaster year at the Slams-a last-16 spot at Wimbledon punctuated by a first-round loss in Australia, a second-round exit in New York and a third-round defeat to Nadal in Australia. On the women's circuit, Serena Williams started the year with an Open-era record 23rd Slam triumph in Melbourne. The achievement was made even more remarkable when the American star revealed she had won the title while pregnant.

Baby talk

Williams, who hasn't played since her Australian Open win, married boyfriend and Reddit founder Alexis Ohanian in November, two months after the couple celebrated the birth of their baby daughter in September. In Williams's absence, a power vacuum in the women's



SHANGHAI: This file photo taken on October 15, 2017 shows first-placed Roger Federer of Switzerland and second-placed Rafael Nadal of Spain reacting as they hold their trophies after the men's singles final match at the Shanghai Masters tennis tournament. — AFP

game opened up as Jelena Ostapenko and Sloane Stephens became two of the most unlikely champions at the Slams. Ostapenko, a 100-1 outsider, became Latvia's first ever Grand Slam champion at Roland Garros, claiming her first career title in the process.

At Flushing Meadows, Stephens won the US Open, just six weeks after seeing her world ranking slip to 957. In between, Garbine Muguruza won a second major at Wimbledon. Muguruza was one of five women-Williams, Halep, Angelique Kerber and Karolina Pliskova were the others-to have a spell at

world number one. Halep was to end 2017 on top but the popular Romanian, who has yet to win a major, faces a challenge to stay there next year especially with Maria Sharapova and Victoria Azarenka lurking.

Five-time Slam winner Sharapova returned from a 15-month doping ban in April and ended the year at 59 in the world. Azarenka, a two-time Australian Open champion, only played two events in 2017 after taking time away to give birth to a baby son. Her late season plans were thwarted by a lengthy custody battle over the youngster. — AFP

American youngsters making their mark ahead of Ryder Cup

PARIS: The rising generation of Americans dominated the 2017 season after Spaniard Sergio Garcia's memorable Masters triumph, laying down a marker ahead of next year's Ryder Cup in Paris. Brooks Koepka, 27, claimed the US Open title, before Jordan Spieth's third major crown at the British Open and his fellow 24-year-old Justin Thomas' breakthrough victory at the USPGA Championship.

Add in world number one Dustin Johnson, and United States Ryder Cup captain Jim Furyk has a formidable team more than capable of repeating October's Presidents Cup thrashing of the Internationals. The US are the favourites to retain the trophy come next September at Golf National, but they haven't won on European soil since 1993 at The Belfry.

"We have 25 years of scars to overcome," Furyk said in Paris in October. "I don't want (them) going in there being overconfident that they are the greatest team. I want them going in with a chip on their shoulder that they have some-

thing to prove." Europe's stars had a mixed season, although 37-year-old Garcia produced the year's stand-out moment by finally ending his wait for a major title by edging out Justin Rose in a thrilling Masters play-off back in April.

Garcia's compatriot Jon Rahm stole a few headlines by rising to world number four in his first full season as a professional, but four-time major winner Rory McIlroy was plagued by injuries and loss of form as he failed to win an event for the first year since 2008. American players received most of the plaudits for their major-winning exploits, but Europeans like Tyrrell Hatton, Rafael Cabrera Bello and Paul Casey slid slightly under the radar to finish 2017 inside the world's top 20. "You tell me a time where there's been 11 Europeans in the top 21 in the world," said Europe's Ryder Cup skipper Thomas Bjorn. "It might have happened but it's not something that you see very often. So that's a very strong European team."

Tiger's back, again

A year that began with a failed attempted injury comeback from Tiger Woods, ended with the 14-time major champion starting another return. The 41-year-old pulled out of February's Dubai Desert Classic with a back injury, but after surgery and an appearance as a Presidents Cup vice-captain, he produced a promising performance in the Bahamas earlier this month.

"I knew I was going to be able to play all four rounds, that wasn't going to be an issue," said Woods, who also missed all of the 2015-16 season with back trouble, after finishing tied-ninth at the Hero



Jordan Spieth

World Challenge. "I was still scratchy with my irons. I drove it pretty good all week, made some good putts." The chances of Woods adding to his major tally-and reviving his bid to chase down Jack Nicklaus' all-time record of 18 titles-will become clearer when he returns to Augusta National for the Masters, where he has 11 top-five finishes including four green jackets. A first major triumph since the 2008 US Open may seem a long way off but Woods could still be a force to be reckoned with if fully fit-he won five PGA Tour titles and reclaimed the world number one spot in 2013 when he last managed a full season.

Thompson heartbreak sparks change

Lexi Thompson suffered an agonizing loss in the first women's major of the year at the ANA Inspiration in April, as she was handed a four-stroke penalty with

only six holes remaining after a TV viewer spotted an infringement from the third round. Golf's authorities finally changed the rules at the end of the year to stop viewers from calling in from home to alert referees to possible penalties. American Thompson still only lost to South Korea's Ryu So-yeon in a play-off, so she would have won a second major title under the new rules even if the mistake was noticed, as she would not have been given the additional two-shot penalty for signing the wrong scorecard. It was an unsavory moment reminiscent of the 2016 men's US Open, when Dustin Johnson was forced to play the closing holes of his victory not knowing whether or not he would be hit with a penalty at the end of the tournament. The 22-year-old Thompson finished 2017 in style, though, going four matches unbeaten as the US retained the Solheim Cup. —AFP

Ajer plans to seize leading role with Celtic

GLASGOW: Kristoffer Ajer is determined to make the most of his chance at Celtic after the Norwegian defender helped the Scottish champions keep successive clean sheets for the first time since November. Ajer, 19, was signed by fellow countryman Ronny Deila from Norwegian side Start in 2016, but found his chances at Celtic limited and was sent out on loan to Kilmarnock for the second half of last season. After returning to the Glasgow giants in the summer, Ajer was behind Dedryck Boyata, Jozo Simunovic and Nir Bitton in the queue for a starting place in the centre of Celtic's defence.

However, the Norway Under-21 international has featured four times for Celtic in December and shone as Brendan Rodgers' side recorded a 2-0 win over Partick and a 3-0 thrashing of Aberdeen, which moved them eight points clear at the top of the

Scottish Premiership. Ajer would love to hold on to his place and end the year on a high as Celtic prepare to face Dundee at Dens Park on Tuesday before hosting Rangers in the Old Firm derby next Saturday.

"2017 has been my best year in terms of improvement," Ajer said. "When I came here I was a young boy and now I feel I am coping well with how the boss wants me to play and how the team is playing. It feels really good to play games here for Celtic. The manager believes in everyone, he believes in me and that is a really good feeling. Celtic is a massive club and there are so many good players here and they are performing well in every game. You just have to train hard every day and when you get your chance you have to take it."

Celtic manager Rodgers revealed he believed the Norwegian's loan move to Kilmarnock had been the making of him. "This is a boy that when I came in last year was 18, 6ft 5in but just needed some men's football," he said. "We sent him to Kilmarnock and he was taught very well by Lee McCulloch and Lee Clark, and when he came back in the summer he was a man. He was physically developed and he played in some of the Champions League



Kristoffer Ajer

games early on. "He is fast, he can carry the ball and you see how he wins his aerial challenges as well so he is a big prospect for us." Rangers will be hoping for a boost before Saturday's Old Firm derby when they host Motherwell tomorrow. The Ibrox club went down 2-1 to Kilmarnock at the

weekend as they lost for the second successive match to sit 11 points behind the Hoops in third place. Elsewhere, Hearts host Hibernian in the Edinburgh derby with the Jambos hoping to close the gap with their rivals to just two points with a win at Tynecastle. —AFP

Might Bite has star appeal in King George

LONDON: Nicky Henderson's Might Bite, a dramatic last-fence faller at Kempton 12 months ago, is favorite to make amends in the King George VI Chase today. Blessed with Hollywood star looks, Might Bite was cruising ten lengths clear only to come a cropper in the Grade One novices' chase at this meeting in 2016. That 'F' on his form figures has been followed by four '1's featuring top grade wins at both Cheltenham and Aintree.

Ridden by Nico de Boinville, the 11-8 market leader faces seven rivals as he seeks to add his name to the Boxing Day showpiece's illustrious roll of honor numbering the likes of Desert Orchid, five-time winner Kauto Star and the mighty Arkle. Henderson, who has won the King George twice with Long Run, describes Might Bite as "one of the best-looking horses" he's ever set eyes upon. "But just because you're good-looking doesn't mean you're brilliant," he told The Guardian.

Reflecting on Might Bite's mishap at Kempton last season, Britain's champion trainer told the newspaper it was "a horrible fall. It was probably unnecessary but there you go - these things happen". "He's incredibly talented, jumps for fun and has such a high cruising speed that no one else can go the gallop and maintain it," de Boinville told Ireland's Sunday Independent. The opposition is headed by Bristol de Mai, the Nigel Twiston-Davies-trained grey who won Haydock's Belfair Chase in a procession and who will pick up a \$1 million (\$1.36m) bonus if he adds this and the Gold Cup at Cheltenham in March.

'Almighty clobbering'

Also out to deny Might Bite are last year's stylish winner Thistlecrack who disappointed on his warm-up, in-form Fox Norton, and Henderson's second runner, Whisper. Might Bite's stablemate entered King George calculations on the strength of his eye-catching second, beaten by only a neck, in the Ladbrokes Trophy Chase, formerly the Hennessy, at Newbury at the start of the month.

With his regular jockey Davy Russell unable to take the ride due to commitments in Ireland it is Aidan Coleman who will be in the saddle. Whisper is a best-priced 9-1 to get the better of Might Bite at the third attempt. The pair first met at Cheltenham, where in one of the finishes of the season Whisper went down by just a nose in the RSA Novices Chase with Might Bite throwing away a 12-length advantage when veering sharply to the right and slowing to a trot after the last fence. Their paths crossed again at Aintree, with Might Bite making all to beat his stablemate by two lengths.

Whisper's presence is in part due to the 12lb rise in the weights for his fine Newbury run last time out. "He's (the handicapper) given him the most almighty clobbering. It was brutal enough getting a bruised eye being beaten in the race, but then he got a left hook from the handicapper as well," said his trainer. With Whisper meeting Might Bite on level terms today, Henderson feels his hand was forced. —AFP

Sports

Banged up hand not a barrier for captain Smith

Coach Lehmann to step down after Ashes

MELBOURNE: Getting whacked on the hand by a Cameron Bancroft shot would not keep Steve Smith from the Boxing Day test against England, the Australia captain said yesterday. Smith was struck on the right hand by a Bancroft shot while standing at the back of the batting nets at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Sunday ahead of the fourth test in the series.

The 28-year-old said he had been in pain on Sunday and again yesterday when he was batting during training but it would not affect him when he leads his side out today as they continue their push for a series whitewash. "It was a little bit sore today playing a few different shots" he told reporters. "But I'll be able to deal with it and I'll get on with it. "Maybe I'll just have to use a bit more of my top hand throughout the game, a bit less wristy. "I copped a few (on the right hand) in the nets in Perth and a few more in the game. It just seems to be whenever you're getting hit in a spot - it just continually gets hit."

Australia have already regained the Ashes after an innings and 41-run victory in the third test in Perth last week gave them an unassailable 3-0 lead in the five-match series. Smith said that Bancroft had apologized profusely for the incident. "I didn't give him much (initially). He kept coming up ... it's all good, accidents happen," Smith said. The Australians had been forced to make one change from the side that hammered England in Perth to seal the series with Mitchell Starc ruled out due to a heel injury and replaced by Jackson Bird.

While Starc had been instrumental in regaining the

trophy with his express pace, late swing and aggression, Bird was more than capable of stepping into fill his shoes, Smith said, even if the pitch was not expected to be overly helpful to the bowlers. "It looks pretty flat. It doesn't look like there will be great deal of sideways movement, maybe a bit of reverse swing as the game goes on," he said. "Hopefully we can get the ball reversing and hopefully there's a little bit of spin for Nath (Nathan Lyon). "We've been able to get results here in the last couple of years. We're going to have work hard, first-innings runs are going to be crucial again. "We've now got an opportunity to keep winning. That's been my message to the boys, don't worry about 5-0 at this stage. "You've got to win this one first."

Lehmann to step down as coach

Meanwhile, Darren Lehmann will step down as Australia coach after the 2019 Ashes series in England, he told Fox Sports yesterday. The 47-year-old, who took the job in 2013, will lead Australia's World Cup defence in England before they attempt to win an away Ashes series for the first time since 2001. "That will be it," Lehmann said. "It will be a case of too much time, too much travel.

"I've really enjoyed the role and am loving it," added Lehmann, who played 27 tests and 117 one-day internationals for Australia as a prolific middle-order batsman. "We'll just get to that point and work out what we do from there." Australia clinched the current series against England last week with victory by an innings and 41 runs in the third test in Perth. —Reuters



PERTH: Australian captain Steve Smith celebrates after reaching his 200 on day three of the third Ashes cricket Test match at the WACA ground. — AFP



Push for a series whitewash



Lamborghini Kuwait organizes first ever BullRun

KUWAIT: Lamborghini Kuwait, represented by Fouad Alghanim & Sons Automotive Company, organizes the first Lamborghini BullRun. The BullRun, organized by Lamborghini Kuwait, is a Lamborghini recognized event where Lamborghini owners are able to gather and enjoy a drive together in an official Lamborghini convoy and an event that is open to all Lamborghini Kuwait customers. BullRun 1 participants all gathered at the Company's service center and the Run to Dhahran Complex started at 4:00 PM, under the guidance and support of the Lamborghini Kuwait team and the Ministry of Interior with local Police

escorting the convoy throughout the Run. As is the norm with Lamborghini events (such as BullRun, Bulls & Coffee), the whole experience always proves to be unforgettable, for both the vehicle owners and avid fans who are always astonished by a gathering of so many Lamborghinis. "We always look forward to events that bring us closer to our customers in a casual setting, which allows our customers and Lamborghini Kuwait to show off the brand and the cars. It brings us great pleasure to see so many people passionate about Lamborghinis and to witness the gathering of all the beautiful Lamborghinis in such an event," said Tarek AlShafie, Fouad Alghanim & Sons Automotive Company Dealer Principal and General Manager.

The range of Lamborghini vehicles is ever-growing, with the latest additions to the Lamborghini family being: the breathtaking Aventador S; the Aventador S Roadster; the track-focused and record-breaking Huracan Performante; as well as the soon to be available Lamborghini Urus - the world's first Super Sport Utility Vehicle.

sights on being fully fit for the first Test against India, starting in Cape Town on January 5. "I'd rather feel good and play no cricket rather than play and not feel good," he said. Du Plessis admitted that a selection dilemma would be eased if he didn't play. "It gives someone else an opportunity to play, which was quite a headache in the first place." Fast bowler Dale Steyn, who is making a comeback after more than a year out of action with a broken shoulder, is another doubt, with Du Plessis saying he would not be rushed back into action. "With Dale, in terms of the amount of overs he's bowled leading up to the first Test I think it's important to assess how ready he is to bowl at full intensity," said Du Plessis.

"We want him to be 100 percent. If he we feel he isn't quite there, there's still time to get him ready between now and the first Test against India." Du Plessis said that a stand-in captain would have to be chosen if he didn't play. He didn't offer an opinion but the choice probably rests between AB de Villiers, who captained the side when he last played Test cricket in January 2016, and opening batsman Dean Elgar, who was captain in the first Test in England earlier this year when Du Plessis had returned home for the birth of his first child.—AFP

Shooting range opens at Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Heritage Village

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The Shooting range at Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Heritage Village opened on Saturday in the presence of the Amiri Diwan Advisor Mohammad Daifallah Sharar and the Secretary General of Kuwait and Arab shooting Federations Obaid Mnahi Al-Osaimi. Sharar said he was happy to meet officials from the Kuwait Shooting Sport Club to open the shooting range at Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Heritage Village. He went on to add that the range will be open to village visitors, who always enjoyed being here these past five years.

Advisor Sharar thanked KSSC officials for their efforts in introducing the sport to local youth and training them on different types of shooting techniques. On his part, Secretary General Al-Osaimi said "we are honored to open the shooting range at the village, and it is a range that was built at the invitation of Advisor Sharar for the sixth year running. Al-Osaimi said there will be competitions and prizes for the winners. Al-Osaimi thanked HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber



Al-Sabah and HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad for their continued support. He also thanked the higher committee of Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad heritage village headed by Advisor Mohammad Sharar. Competitions at the range will be on Fridays from 1:00 pm - 6:00 pm, at the rate of competition each hour, while prizes will be given to the top three winners.

Meanwhile President of Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federations Eng Duaj Khalaf Al-Otaibi lauded the efforts of KSSC board

members in preparing the club's branch at Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad heritage village in Salmi. He also lauded the support of advisor at the Amiri Diwan Mohammad Sharar and village officials for providing all facilities necessary to open the ranges as scheduled. This is the sixth year in which the sport of shooting participates within the sports and social activities at the village, and is witnessing continued success, becoming the destinations of Kuwaitis and visitors due to its cultural, social and sports activities.



Du Plessis doubtful for Zimbabwe Test

PORT ELIZABETH: Captain Faf du Plessis is a doubt to start South Africa's one-off day-night Test against Zimbabwe, starting at St George's Park today. Du Plessis has not played since suffering a back injury during a one-day international against Bangladesh in October. He said he was still feeling some discomfort and would only play if he felt he was fully fit and that his progress had been slowed by a virus he picked up a week ago.

"The professionals say that if there is still pain in the disc it's a little bit dangerous so that's why we're seeing how it works today," the 33-year-old said. "Last week I would have said my chances were 80-20, right now it is about 60-40." Du Plessis acknowledged that the match against Zimbabwe was a stepping stone towards a "big summer" which includes three Tests against India and four against Australia.

He hinted strongly that he was setting his

Curran to debut for England in Melbourne Test

MELBOURNE: Young paceman Tom Curran will make his Test debut in England's only change for the fourth Ashes Test against Australia starting in Melbourne today. The Surrey 22-year-old fast bowler replaces injured Craig Overton, who succumbed to a rib injury when the tourists relinquished the Ashes to the Australians in last week's third Perth Test. Curran has played three Twenty20s and a one-day international and

was not originally chosen in England's Ashes touring squad. But he got his chance when Steve Finn left the tour early with knee cartilage problems and now has a Test opportunity following Overton's injury setback. Captain Joe Root said he was backing Curran to make the most of his opportunity in the showpiece Boxing Day Test before huge crowds.

"Tom offers a lot and is a real competitor," Root told reporters when announcing the team on Monday. "He has that real sort of work ethic and the way he goes about things is very similar to Craig (Overton) actually. "The way he gets involved in the contest and you know he is going to get involved in absolutely everything. He's also very skilful and hopefully he can have a really good week here." Curran won the Test nod ahead of Mark Wood and Jake Ball.

Wood is nearing full fitness after touring with the England Lions, while Ball struggled in his only Test appearance on tour in Brisbane. "It wasn't an easy decision," Root said. "We certainly had a little while thinking about it on this surface and these conditions. For the balance of this team I think Tom is the best option." Curran took 24 wickets in nine first-class matches during the 2017 English County season at an average of 34. South African-born Curran played for England in the tour game against a Cricket Australia XI in Perth on December 10, where he took five match wickets and made an unbeaten 77. Apart from Curran's selection, under-fire senior players Alastair Cook and Stuart Broad held their team spots, while out-of-form Moeen Ali was preferred to young leg-spinner Mason Crane as the sole spinner.—Agencies

Sports

Klopp tells Liverpool to focus on Euro ambitions

Salah determined to win with club

LIVERPOOL: Jurgen Klopp has urged Liverpool to stay motivated to reach their target of a place in next season's Champions League by the end of the season. Klopp has acknowledged ahead of Liverpool's clash with bottom side Swansea at Anfield today that a Premier League title challenge is beyond them given they trail leaders Manchester City by 20 points. But the German believes there is still plenty for the fourth placed Reds to play for and they should not get complacent just because City are so far ahead.

"We have to qualify for the Champions League. We have to finish as high as possible," Klopp said. "It looks like we could be second, third or fourth this year, that's a fantastic situation. Not the dream but a fantastic situation. That's what we are working on and for this we have to improve in all departments. This year, I don't think that anyone apart from Manchester City and maybe Manchester United are thinking too much about how they can win the league. In a very difficult league, performance-wise we are really consistent so far. If we stay consistent and avoid our mistakes, mistakes like in the 3-3 draw with Arsenal, we will win much more games than we lose or draw. As it was and so it will be against Swansea, we have to perform first of all and then we have to see how the other team can react."

Even though Swansea are at the foot of the table, Klopp does not want his players to assume the result will be a foregone conclusion. "They are under pressure and that's clear because they fight for the league, 100 per cent, and that will not change before Boxing Day," Klopp added. "But we will be ready and we will perform, if possible, like against Arsenal but avoid the mistakes we made. I don't really remember the game from last year, to be honest. I

remember that we lost it. But that's not the plan!"

Step by step

Klopp confirmed Liverpool will be without captain Jordan Henderson after he limped out of their 3-3 draw with Arsenal last Friday. Defender Joel Matip could be fit enough to feature after he recently returning to training following a muscle injury while striker Daniel Sturridge has recovered from illness. Alberto Moreno (ankle) and Nathaniel Clyne (back) remain on the sidelines. Swansea caretaker manager Leon Britton will take charge of his second game following the sacking of Paul Clement last week. Britton is a modern-day Swansea great with more than 500 appearances to his name, and guided the club to a 1-1 draw in his first match against Crystal Palace. A match against free-scoring Liverpool at Anfield, however, will present a somewhat more difficult prospect for the South Wales club.

Swansea striker Jordan Ayew admits the draw against Palace, in which he scored, has helped them take at least some confidence into the trip to Merseyside. "We all have a job to do. I think we responded well," Ayew said. "We will take it day by day and see what happens in the future. We will do our best to get something out of the game against Liverpool. We will build step by step and things will get better. It is important for us to get a good result." Swansea will give a fitness test to striker Wilfried Bony (hamstring) and midfielder Leroy Fer (back), who both missed the game against Palace.

Egyptian forward Mohamed Salah said yesterday he hopes he can help Liverpool end a five-year wait for silverware after making a blistering start to life at Anfield. The 25-year-old-who joined from Italian club Roma in the

“We have to finish as high as possible”



LONDON: Arsenal's Czech goalkeeper Petr Cech (L) saves a Liverpool's Egyptian midfielder Mohamed Salah pass during the English Premier League football match between Arsenal and Liverpool at the Emirates Stadium. — AFP

close season-has scored 21 goals in all competitions for Jurgen Klopp's side and is joint-top of the Premier League scorers' charts with Tottenham Hotspur's Harry Kane. "I want to win titles here, I came here to win titles-to win something for the club, for us, for the fans," he told Sky

Sports News. "I love to win something here. We are working hard every day to win something. I am sure we are going to win something this year." Salah has formed a key part of Liverpool's 'fab four' attacking line-up alongside Philippe Coutinho, Roberto Firmino and Sadio Mane.

Pochettino urges Spurs to block top four talk

LONDON: Mauricio Pochettino insists Tottenham cannot allow themselves to be distracted by the fluctuating form of their nearest rivals as they step up their bid for a top four spot. Pochettino's side welcome Southampton to Wembley after a round of weekend matches that strengthened the position of the north London club.

A comfortable 3-0 victory at Burnley moved Spurs up to fifth place, one point behind Liverpool in fourth, as Jurgen Klopp's side were held by Arsenal and Chelsea and Manchester United both drew. The contest to fill the places behind runaway leaders Manchester City is expected to go to the wire and after an inconsistent campaign, Pochettino will hope his side can enter the New Year on the back of a winning run.

"We cannot think about another club. We need to keep the momentum, to try to win again, to be consistent," Pochettino said. "If we want to fight to the end for big things, we must try to be consistent. But I'm sure the team is focused. The team is in a good way. It

was so important to believe again and to smile again by winning at Burnley, after the defeat at Manchester City. "I think we need to focus on the challenge of Southampton. We cannot think about second, first, third or top four. I think the most important thing is the next game." The central importance of Harry Kane to Spurs' cause was reinforced by the striker's hat-trick at Burnley that took his tally to 36 goals in the calendar year, matching Alan Shearer's 22-year-old Premier League record. The England forward, 24, now has 93 Premier League goals to his name, but Pochettino admits Kane will have to maintain that consistency if he is to beat Shearer's record of 260 Premier League goals.

'Massive respect'

"The record of Alan is fantastic. He was a fantastic player. Harry is doing so well. But Alan as consistent for more than 10 years," he said. "You need to show massive respect for that, because he did some amazing work. Now Harry is doing well. We hope that continues, because to have a player like Harry Kane is fantastic. I hope and wish that every season he scores 15 or more than 15. "I think he can still improve. He is 24. Players arrive at their best when they are 27, 28, 29. "It depends on how professional you are. If Harry Kane can keep that mentality every day and never changes that mentality, then he can play for as long as he wants. But he can still



BURNLEY: Tottenham Hotspur's English striker Harry Kane celebrates after scoring his, and Tottenham's third goal during the English Premier League football match between Burnley and Tottenham Hotspur at Turf Moor. — AFP

improve." Southampton face Spurs on the back of a 1-1 home draw with Huddersfield which was overshadowed by a clash between Saints striker Charlie Austin and Town keeper Jonas Loss. Huddersfield manager David Wagner claimed the forward allowed his boot to connect with Loss's head and Austin has been charged with violent conduct by the Football Association. Austin also picked up a hamstring injury in the game that is likely to keep him for at least two

weeks, depriving Saints of the in-form goalscorer for the trip to Wembley.

Virgil van Dijk is also likely to be missing after the centre-back - a target for Manchester City and Liverpool - was left out for the Huddersfield clash that left Southampton in 13th place. "There is a lot of speculation about him," said Saints boss Mauricio Pellegrino. "I cannot control this but I have to think about the next game. We train tomorrow and then decide if he can play." — AFP

Morata return boosts spluttering Chelsea

LONDON: Alvaro Morata's return will be welcomed by Antonio Conte but the Chelsea manager knows his side face Brighton at Stamford Bridge with their Premier League title defense all but over. Morata was forced to sit out the visit to Everton on Saturday while he served a one-match suspension and in his absence, the Blues lacked the firepower to break down Sam Allardyce's side in a goalless draw.

That led to Conte being forced to defend his decision not to replace the Spaniard with a conventional target man. Chelsea goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois was among those who appeared to question Conte's approach after a result that, combined with Manchester City's defeat of Bournemouth, left them 16 points behind the leaders at the halfway stage of the season.

"I think we could have had more shots on target but we didn't have a big guy up front despite lots of crosses into the box," said Courtois, after a game in which Chelsea failed to turn their territorial dominance into goals. The onus will

again be on third placed Chelsea to take the initiative against a Brighton side who ended a run of seven games without a win with a timely victory over Watford.

Morata's return will undoubtedly help, but Conte's decision to overlook Michy Batshuayi until late in the game at Everton will be taken as another indicator of the coach's lack of trust in the Belgian international. Forward reinforcements will clearly be at the top of Conte's wish-list for the January transfer window, with Chelsea still involved in three over competitions, even if their Premier League challenge has been reduced to ensuring a top four finish.

Testing campaign

Conte had predicted this would be a testing campaign even before the start of the season because of the club's return to European football. And the evidence of the opening half of the campaign has justified Conte's standpoint, even if his side have shown flashes of the outstanding form that took them to the title last year. Brighton will travel to London with renewed belief after moving towards mid-table following the win against Watford.

Pascal Gross's second half goal - Brighton's first from open play in over 10 and a half hours - secured the points at a time when it looked as though the newly promoted side were set for another afternoon of frustration. Seagulls manager Chris Hughton admitted the result was exactly what his side needed before fac-



LONDON: Chelsea's Spanish striker Alvaro Morata (L) celebrates scoring the team's second goal, with teammates during the English League Cup quarter-final football match between Chelsea and Bournemouth at Stamford Bridge Stadium. —AFP

ing the champions. "It's one that we needed," he said. "We've got Chelsea on Boxing Day and there won't be too many that fancy us or expect us to get anything there.

"With that being the case in particular, it was important that we picked up something and that allows us to go into that Chelsea game with a little bit more confidence. "We need to make sure that

in the games where we know we have a better chance of getting something, that we put in performances like we did today. "It was a good all-round performance and we certainly need to take that on." Shane Duffy sat out the Watford game while serving a one-match suspension but is expected to return to the starting line-up in place of Connor Goldson. — AFP

Mata expects strong response from angry United

MANCHESTER: Manchester United midfielder Juan Mata admits his team-mates are furious after dropping two points at Leicester City, but he hopes they can channel that frustration into a strong response against Burnley today. Jose Mourinho's side were stunned by a late goal from 10-man Leicester in a 2-2 draw that saw United fall a staggering 13 points behind leaders Manchester City at the halfway stage of the campaign.

Mourinho angrily spoke of missing "joke chances" and "childish" errors from his players after Saturday's draw. But Mata, who scored both United goals in an excellent personal display, hopes his side responds positively to the frustration of the evening at the King Power Stadium. "You have to keep going. It's Christmas time, you play every two or three days obviously," Mata said. "Now we feel frustrated and angry but we need to keep going and, from tomorrow, rest and think about the next game and have the will of finishing the next game with a much better feeling."

"We got a point but it feels like a defeat because we were so close to winning, had chances to kill the game and they were with one less player." Mata put United 2-1 ahead with a superbly-taken free-kick and revealed afterwards that his goal celebration was a dedication to Indian children with whom his charitable foundation Common Goal works. "It was because when the kids from the Oscar Foundation-one of the foundations we work with-came to Old Trafford to visit me they asked if I could do this kind of 'namaste' celebration for them," explained Mata.—AFP

Live		Matches on TV (Local Timings)	
ARABIAN GULF CUP			
Yemen v Bahrain	MBC Pro Sports 1 HD	KTV Sport HD	17:30
Iraq v Qatar	Dubai Sports 1 HD	Kuwait TV Sport Plus	20:00
ITALIAN CUP			
Lazio v Fiorentina	beIN SPORTS		23:00
ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE			
Tottenham Hotspur v Southampton	beIN SPORTS HD 2		15:30
Chelsea v Brighton & Hove Albion	beIN SPORTS HD 1		18:00
Manchester United v Burnley	beIN SPORTS HD 2		18:00
Watford v Leicester City	beIN SPORTS HD 5		18:00
West Bromwich Albion v Everton	beIN SPORTS HD 7		18:00
Huddersfield Town v Stoke City	beIN SPORTS HD 8		18:00
Bournemouth v West Ham United	beIN SPORTS HD 9		18:00
Liverpool v Swansea City	beIN SPORTS HD 2		20:30

13 Federer, Nadal shine as rivals hobble into 2018



14 Banged up hand not a barrier for captain Smith



15 Klopp tells Liverpool to focus on Euro ambitions



KUWAIT: Emirates' Fares Saadi (R) vies for the ball with Saudi's Mukhtar Fallatah during the 2017 Gulf Cup of Nations football match between UAE and Saudi Arabia at the Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Stadium. — AFP

Saudi, UAE scoreless in Group A action

Saudi stay on top on goal difference

By Ahmad Jabr

KUWAIT: Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates played to a goalless draw in their Group A match of the 23rd Gulf Cup yesterday at Jaber Al-Ahmad International Stadium. Both teams played cautiously at the start of the game, with no real scoring opportunities in the first 30 minutes. The play mainly centered in the midfield throughout the first half. The first scoring chance came after eight minutes when a UAE shot missed its target. UAE kept

pressing in the following 10 minutes, but all of their attacks presented no real danger to the Saudi goal. Momentum shifted to Saudi Arabia after the 30-minute mark, whose first real scoring chance came when a shot towards the goal was blocked by the UAE goalkeeper. Saudi kept up the pressure briefly but they could not capitalize on their momentum as the game went scoreless into half-time.

The pace of play quickened at the start of the second half, with UAE having two missed scoring chances in the first 10 minutes. The UAE goalkeep-

er was once again called into action with a great save in the 53rd minute. UAE immediately took advantage of Saudi's offensive play and jumped into a counterattack that saw a shot only narrowly miss the target. Three minutes later, a wayward shot by the Saudi midfielder went flying above the post. As the game passed the hour mark, Saudi Arabia started pressing intensely and had several opportunities to score including a free kick that narrowly went above the post, and a cross into the penalty area that was caught by the UAE goalkeeper

before it could reach the eager Saudi attackers.

The pace slowed down considerably in the final 10 minutes, with play constantly dipping back to center-field. UAE had one final chance on goal in injury time which missed its target, before the referee blew the final whistle. With this result, both teams are now at four points, with Saudi Arabia leading the group in goal difference. On Thursday, Saudi Arabia plays its final match against Oman, while the UAE squares off against the host country Kuwait. The game was played before a crowd of 47,566.

Saints, Rams, Chiefs, Panthers clinch playoff spots

WASHINGTON: Drew Brees reached an NFL milestone and threw a touchdown after a rear-aided interception to power the New Orleans Saints into the NFL playoffs Sunday by beating Atlanta 23-13. The Los Angeles Rams, Kansas City Chiefs and Carolina Panthers also won to clinch post-season berths on the penultimate weekend of the 2017 NFL campaign.

New England, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Minnesota and Jacksonville had already secured playoff berths, which leaves three wildcard spots up for grabs next Sunday before the playoffs begin in January. Brees, who turns 39 next month, completed 21-of-28 passes for 239 yards to spark the Saints, becoming the fastest quarterback in NFL history to surpass 70,000 career passing yards in the process.

Brees joined retired stars Peyton Manning and Brett Favre in reaching the milestone with a 12-yard screen pass to Mark Ingram during the first quarter, reaching the mark

in 248 games to 258 for Manning and 293 for Favre. With 70,200 career passing yards, Brees could crack Manning's all-time passing yardage mark of 71,940 next season. But the play of the game belonged to Saints rookie cornerback Marshon Lattimore, who found a unique way to pickoff an interception while face down on the field, what was dubbed the "butt pick."

Matt Ryan's throw popped into the air before falling onto the rear of prone Lattimore. After the ball landed on his backside, Lattimore reached back with his hands, brought his legs up to his rear to keep the ball from falling onto the field and rolled over to complete his fifth interception of the season, with some help from teammate Marcus Williams. Brees threw a 54-yard touchdown pass to Ted Ginn Jr three plays later.

"That was a huge swing, for them to be in position to get points before the half, and then we got the big play," Saints coach Sean Payton said. "Our defense was magnificent. It was the difference in the game. We came up with some key stops." The Saints (11-4) snapped a three-season playoff drought but remained deadlocked atop the NFC South division with Carolina after the Panthers edged Tampa Bay 22-19.

New Orleans can clinch the division crown next week by winning at Tampa Bay or having Carolina lose at Atlanta. The Saints swept two games with Carolina this season to earn a tie-breaker edge. Atlanta (9-6) can clinch the last NFC playoff spot by beating Carolina but a loss

would open the door for the Seattle Seahawks (9-6), who eliminated host Dallas 21-12 to stay in contention before facing Arizona next Sunday.

Dallas rusher Ezekiel Elliott, back from a six-game suspension over a domestic violence issue, was not given the ball late near the goal line and the Cowboys did not score, crushing victory and playoff hopes. The Seahawks were the first team since the 1966 Philadelphia Eagles to win a game with more penalty yards than total yardage.

Gurley leads Rams' victory

Rams rusher Todd Gurley became the first player since Herschel Walker of Dallas in 1986 to run for more than 100 yards and have more than 150 receiving yards in a game, scoring two touchdowns as Los Angeles clinched the NFC West title by beating host Tennessee 27-23. Gurley ran 21 times for 115 yards while catching 10 passes for 158 yards and touchdowns of 3 and 80 yards.

Rams quarterback Jared Goff completed 22 of 38 passes for 301 yards and four touchdowns, including the game-winning 14-yarder to Cooper Kupp with 11:51 to play. The Rams (11-4) took their first division title since 2003 and first playoff berth since 2004, both when the team was based in St. Louis. They last won a division title in Los Angeles in 1985. Chiefs quarterback Alex Smith completed 25 of 39 passes for 304 yards and a touchdown to power host Kansas City over Miami 29-13 to secure the AFC West division crown. —AFP



NEW ORLEANS: Michael Thomas #13 of the New Orleans Saints signals first down against the Atlanta Falcons at Mercedes-Benz Superdome. —AFP

Business

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 26, 2017

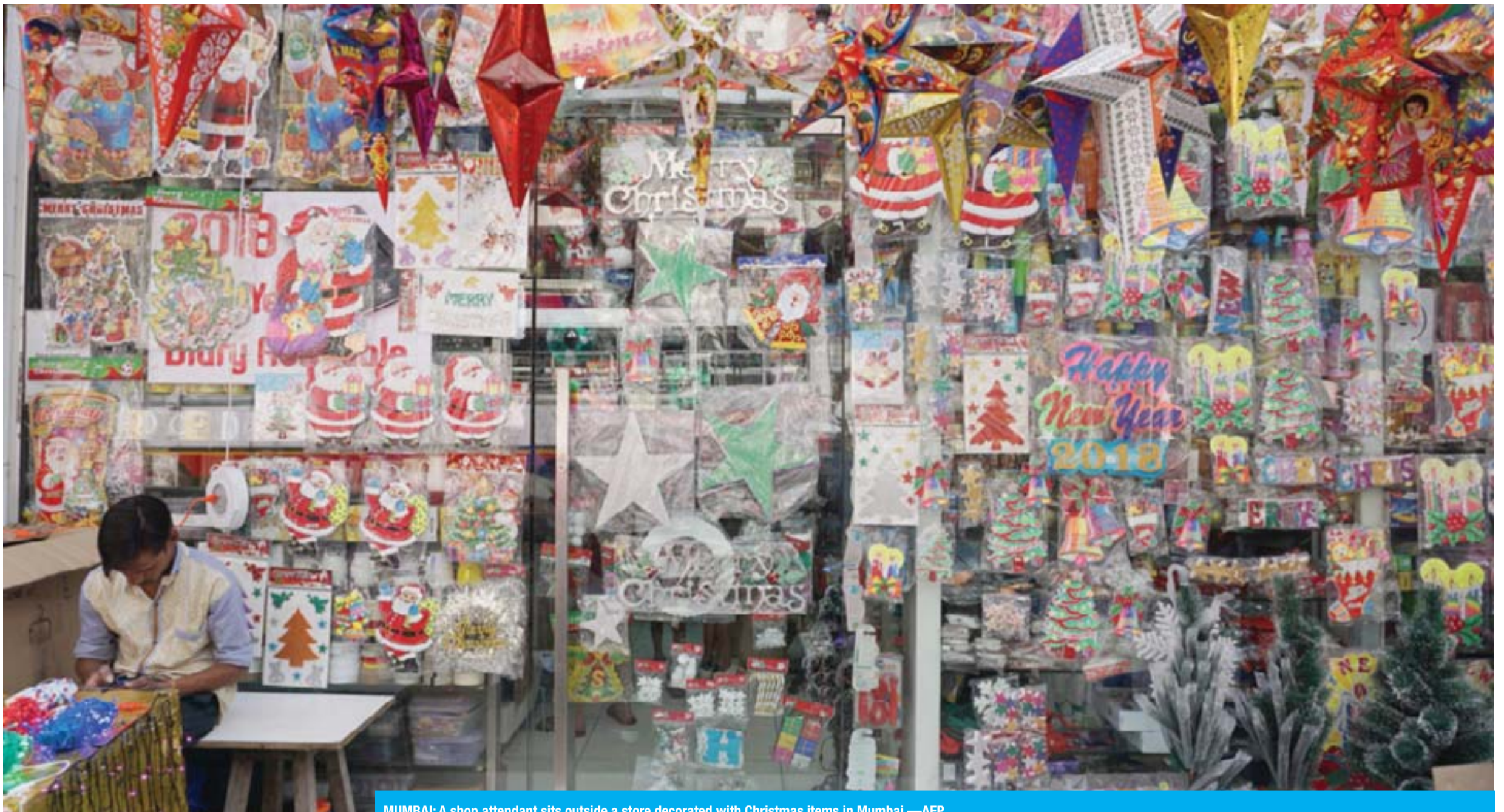
18 Tokyo stocks edge up at the close



19 Lexus LC 500 grabs attention for design excellence



21 NBK remains largest contributor in Kuwait



MUMBAI: A shop attendant sits outside a store decorated with Christmas items in Mumbai.—AFP

Israel regulator seeks to ban bitcoin

Bitcoin plunged by 30% to below \$12,000

JERUSALEM: Israel's markets regulator said yesterday he will propose regulation to ban companies based on bitcoin and other digital currencies from trading on the Tel Aviv Stock Exchange (TASE). Shmuel Hauser, the chairman of the Israel Securities Authority (ISA), told the Calcalist business conference he will bring the proposal to the ISA board next week. If approved, it would be subject to a public hearing and then the TASE bylaws would need to be amended.

"If we have a company that their main business is digital currencies we would not allow it. If already listed, its trading will be suspended," Hauser said, adding the ISA must find the appropriate regulation for such companies. Bitcoin plunged by 30 percent to below \$12,000 on Friday as investors dumped the cryptocurrency after its sharp rise to nearly \$20,000. It recouped some losses to trade above \$14,000 on the Bitstamp platform, down 9 percent

on the day.

"We feel that the prices of bitcoin behave like bubbles and we don't want investors to be subject to that volatility and uncertainty," Hauser said. "There is an importance to signal to the market where things are... Investors should know where we stand."

Earlier this month, Hauser had said bitcoin-based companies would not be included in TASE indexes and that there was a need for a suitable regulatory framework for such instruments given that the global market value of all digital currencies grew in 2017 to \$300 billion from \$18 billion. The proposal will likely be the last for Hauser,

who will step down next month after 6-1/2 years as ISA chief. "But once it's on its way it will continue to be pursued," said Hauser, who will be replaced by Anat Guetta. He said he hopes she will promote easing capital gains taxes and focus on regulatory enforcement.—Reuters

“ Trading will be suspended ”



ITALY: This file photo shows the logo Bitcoin in Rovereto, northern Italy.—AFP

Ineos starts testing UK's Forties North Sea oil pipeline after repairs

LONDON: Britain's Forties oil and gas pipeline, one of the biggest in the North Sea, is being tested following repairs and full flows should resume in early January, its operator Ineos said yesterday. The closure of the pipeline since Dec 11 has pushed oil prices

above \$65 a barrel in recent weeks, their highest level since mid-2015.

Forties plays an important role in the global market as it is the biggest of the five North Sea crude streams underpinning Brent, a benchmark for oil trading in Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Asia. "The repair of the pipeline ... is now mechanically complete and pressure testing is well under way," Ineos said in a statement. "A small number of customers are now sending oil and gas through the pipeline at low rates as part of a coordinated plan that allows Ineos to carefully control the flow and pressure in the system".

The system, which carries about 450,000 barrels per day of crude to Britain, along with a third of the country's total offshore natural gas output, was shut down after a crack was

found. Ineos said the oil and gas processing facility Kinneil should restart in the next 24 hours. "Based on current estimates the company expects to bring the pipeline and Kinneil progressively back to normal rates early in the new year," Ineos said.

Ineos was forced to declare force majeure on deliveries of Forties crude oil, natural gas and condensate, suspending its contractual obligations to customers by citing circumstances beyond its control. This is believed to be the first force majeure on a major North Sea production stream in decades. Ineos didn't say when it expected to lift the force majeure. Ineos, a privately-owned chemicals company based in Switzerland, bought the pipeline system from BP in late October.—Reuters



Tokyo stocks edge up at the close in quite trading

Small-caps bring down the market

TOKYO: Tokyo stocks closed slightly higher yesterday in quiet trading, with investors sidelined by the Christmas holiday. The benchmark Nikkei 225 index edged up 0.16 percent, or 36.42 points, to end at 22,939.18, while the broader Topix index was up 0.16 percent, or 2.85 points, at 1,831.93. "Trading is very thin in holiday mode with a lack of foreign investors," said Toshikazu Horiuchi, a broker at IwaiCosmo Securities. "Players are feeling a sense of achievement after the US tax cut was finally completed," Horiuchi said.

President Donald Trump brought forward a bill signing originally slated for January to fulfil a promise to deliver tax cuts by Christmas. US stocks repeatedly set records earlier in the month in anticipation of the measure, but began to sag last week as the proposal cleared the final hurdles in Washington. In Tokyo share trading, Toyota was flat at 7,282 yen, while Nissan rose 0.67 percent to 1,128 yen.

“Trading is very thin in holiday mode”

Panasonic gained 0.39 percent to 1,674.5 yen, while Sony dipped 0.02 percent to 5,191 yen.

Banks were lower, with Sumitomo Mitsui Financial dropping 1.17 percent to 4,917 yen and Mitsubishi UFJ falling 0.72 percent to 839.8 yen. The yen changed hands at 113.25 yen in Asian trade, compared with 113.28 yen in New York late Friday.

Chinese stocks ended down on Monday as the sell-off in small-caps dragged down the market, dealers said.

The benchmark Shanghai Composite Index lost 0.50 percent, or 16.60 points, to 3,280.46. The Shenzhen Composite Index, which tracks stocks on China's second exchange, fell 0.93 percent, or 17.67 points, to 1,883.89. "Small-caps brought down the market amid lingering year-end worries," said Li Daxiao, an analyst with Yingda Securities. Hong Kong's stock market was closed for a public holiday along with most Asian markets. —AFP



TOKYO: A man looks at an electronic stock board of a securities firm in Tokyo yesterday. — AP

UPAC signs KD 50.1 million Loan Facility Agreement

KUWAIT: United Projects for Aviation Services Company (UPAC), a leading commercial real estate and facilities management company, is pleased to announce the signing of a five-year KD 50.1 million loan facility agreement with two of Kuwait's leading commercial banks, Gulf Bank Kuwait and Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK), to finance its investment in Abu Dhabi's Reem Mall.

Nadia Akil, UPAC Chief Executive Officer said, "We are extremely proud to have signed this facility with Gulf Bank and ABK. This not only marks a key turning point in the progression of the project, bringing it a step closer to successful completion, but it also marks a key turning point for UPAC's growth strategy and diversification as one of the largest and first projects of its kind outside of Kuwait."

Adding, "UPAC's solid financial position and sound reputation no doubt facilitated the success and closure of this agreement, as it supports our future expansion plans in the commercial real estate market, to include Abu Dhabi's Reem Mall. I would like to extend my gratitude to Gulf Bank Kuwait and ABK for their trust in our capabilities and supporting our plans in Abu Dhabi."

Upon completion, Reem Mall will offer 2.9 million square feet of retail, leisure, dining and entertainment on Abu Dhabi's Reem Island. Comprising 450 stores housing local and international brands, 85 of which will be Food and Beverage outlets, as well as a range of family-focused entertainment and edutainment anchors, Reem Mall will be a unique addition to Abu Dhabi's family leisure attractions. The project is being developed by Al Farwaniya Property Developments, a partnership between Agility, UPAC, and National Real Estate Company (NREC).

Reem Mall is set to feature Majid Al Futtaim Ventures' range of world class entertainment offerings as part of landmark collaboration including Snow Park Abu Dhabi - the region's first standalone, themed indoor snowpark - the award-



Nadia Akil

winning VOX Cinemas, including large-format IMAX screens, the exclusive fine dining experience of Theatre by Rhodes and the children-focused VOX Kids. VOX Cinemas will be fused with Magic Planet, the region's largest network of family entertainment centres.

"Leasing for Reem Mall is progressing well and negotiations are underway with leading retail groups. We are proud to have executed agreements with prominent retailers that include Landmark, Dubai Holding Group, Majid Al Futtaim and others, bringing many of the top international and local brands including Vox cinemas, Magic Planet, Carrefour, Centrepoint, Max, New Look, and Snow Park Abu Dhabi," she said.

In November, Agility, UPAC, and NREC, the consortium behind Reem Mall announced that financing for the \$1.2 billion project was completed through the signing a seven-year credit facility agreement for \$457 million with regional and international banks. In addition, last month, Reem Mall appointed Itinera Ghantoot as lead contractor for the project. Itinera Ghantoot is a joint venture between Itinera, one of Italy's largest construction companies, and Ghantoot, one of the UAE's leading builders, which has extensive experience in Abu Dhabi and the United Arab Emirates.

She concluded, "At UPAC, we aim to diversify our portfolio further with our investment in Reem Mall, and in the future of Abu Dhabi as a strong and viable tourist destination. Abu Dhabi has grown to become a world-class tourist destination, offering a wide range of cultural events, exhibitions and museums."

Al Farwaniya Property Development - a partnership between Kuwaiti firms National Real Estate Company (NREC) and United Projects for Aviation Services Company Al Farwaniya Property Development - a partnership between Kuwaiti firms National Real Estate Company (NREC) and United Projects for Aviation Services Company (UPAC).

Home security startup Blink says bought by Amazon

SAN FRANCISCO: Blink on Friday put out word that online retail giant Amazon has bought the startup specializing in wireless home security cameras. "We'll continue to operate under the Amazon umbrella," Blink said in a blog post. "It's Day 1 for us at Amazon, and we're looking forward to seeing what we can deliver to our customers together."

The US startup last week added video doorbell priced at \$99 to its home security system offerings. Financial terms of the acquisition were not disclosed, and Amazon did not reply to an AFP inquiry. Amazon recently stretched its delivery arm inside homes with the debut of a smart lock and camera combination that also signaled a move into home security.

"Amazon Key," available to members of the internet giant's Prime subscription service in an array of US cities, was pitched as a secure and trackable way for packages to be delivered inside homes when people aren't there. Each Key kit includes an



Amazon Cloud Cam synced to the internet and a smart door lock from either Yale or Kwikset. Prices for kits start at \$250, according to Seattle-based Amazon.

Prime members with the service can use a smartphone application to track packages and then watch deliveries happening or review video of in-home drop-offs, the company said. Key allows someone making a delivery to request access to the recipient's home, with Amazon checking to make sure the proper driver is at the right location at the intended time before unlocking doors, according to a description of the service.

A Cloud Cam providing a view of the inside entryway goes into action when doors are unlocked, recording a delivery. Delivery people will not be given access codes, as unlocking doors will be done via the internet. Amazon said it is working on partnerships with professional service providers such as cleaners, pet sitters, and dog walkers to allow Key to be used to allow them access into houses as desired by customers.

US retail giant and staunch Amazon rival Walmart late this year began testing its own in-home delivery in collaboration with a company specializing in smart cameras, doorbells, and locks. Expanding into home security opened a new competitive front with Google's parent company Alphabet, owner of Nest Labs which has a line of new products aimed at that market. —AFP

ABK trains employees on importance of 'Customer Protection'

KUWAIT: Al-Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) recently announced its success in training the majority of its employees through e-learning courses to increase the awareness of the Bank's 'Customer Protection Manual' which is aimed at protecting the Bank's customers. The Head of the Complaints and Customer Protection Unit at ABK, Ali Bulamad, stated that the manual to protect customers includes an important set of instructions that complements the directives and guidelines issued by the Central Bank of Kuwait.

ABK has further updated and developed new policies, procedures, internal controls and principles that comply with the requirements in the manual, and the training is to activate these controls and to put them into practice for both the employees and customers' awareness. The lectures and workshops that will be presented in the coming period represent a continuation of ABK's efforts to create a new cultural and professional environment, and to reiterate the importance of customer protection.

The manual contains a set of general principles aimed at enhancing the protection of banking customers and creating an environment suitable for the preservation of their rights, which is compliant with the instructions and controls of the regulatory bodies, particularly the Central Bank of Kuwait.



EXCHANGE RATES

Al-Muzaini Exchange Co.		Dollarco Exchange Co. Ltd		Bahrain Exchange Company		Asia				
ASIAN COUNTRIES		GOLD		CURRENCY		Arab				
Japanese Yen	2.673	20 Gram	260.520	British Pound	0.398750	0.406250	Bahraini Dinar	0.796269	0.804769	
Indian Rupees	4.731	10 Gram	133.180	Czech Korune	0.005916	0.015216	Egyptian Pound	0.014736	0.020454	
Pakistani Rupees	2.759	5 Gram	67.430	Danish Krone	0.044122	0.049122	Iranian Rial	0.000084	0.000085	
Srilankan Rupees	1.977			Euro	0.353231	0.360730	Iraqi Dinar	0.000186	0.000246	
Nepali Rupees	2.962			Georgian Lari	0.134844	0.134844	Jordanian Dinar	0.422401	0.431401	
Singapore Dollar	227.030			Hungarian 0.001059	0.001249	0.001249	Kuwaiti Dinar	1.000000	1.000000	
Hongkong Dollar	38.727			Norwegian Krone	0.032287	0.037487	Lebanese Pound	0.000151	0.000251	
Bangladesh Taka	3.635			Romanian Leu	0.064785	0.081635	Moroccan Dirhams	0.022130	0.046130	
Philippine Peso	6.040			Russian ruble	0.005174	0.005174	Omani Riyal	0.0780045	0.785725	
Thai Baht	9.267			Slovakia	0.009023	0.019023	Qatar Riyal	0.078863	0.083603	
GCC COUNTRIES		Rate for Transfer		Australasia		America				
Saudi Riyal	80.787	US Dollar	302.400	Australian Dollar	0.225122	0.237122	Canadian Dollar	0.232367	0.241367	
Qatari Riyal	83.207	Canadian Dollar	238.470	New Zealand Dollar	0.206130	0.215630	US Dollars	0.298650	0.303070	
Omani Riyal	786.772	Sterling Pound	405.520					US Dollars Mint	0.299150	0.303070
Bahraini Dinar	804.440	Euro	360.265							
UAE Dirham	82.482	Swiss Frank	300.405							
ARAB COUNTRIES		Bahrain Dinar	802.595							
Egyptian Pound - Cash	20.160	UAE Dirhams	82.725							
Egyptian Pound - Transfer	16.943	Qatari Riyals	83.545							
Yemen Riyal/for 1000	1.216	Saudi Riyals	81.500							
Tunisian Dinar	123.570	Jordanian Dinar	427.795							
Jordanian Dinar	426.950	Egyptian Pound	17.077							
Lebanese Lira/for 1000	2.018	Sri Lankan Rupees	1.978							
Syrian Lira	0.000	Indian Rupees	4.723							
Morocco Dirham	32.836	Pakistani Rupees	2.740							
EUROPEAN & AMERICAN COUNTRIES		Bangladesh Taka	3.668							
US Dollar Transfer	302.750	Philippines Peso	6.018							
Euro	362.090	Cyprus pound	17.995							
Sterling Pound	407.800	Japanese Yen	3.670							

Business

Lexus LC 500 grabs attention for design excellence

Coupe defines new era for global luxury brand



Within a year of its launch LC 500, the luxury coupe from Lexus has grabbed attention again becoming a finalist among 2018 Motor Trend Car of the Year. For Lexus it has been a journey that began with the LFA that culminated in the LC 500, the pinnacle of Lexus inspiration and vision, cutting edge technology, daring design, master

craftsmanship, exhilarating performance. The LC 500 is the first ever luxury automobile to feature a 10-speed automatic transmission. Powered by high-revving 5.0-liter V8 engine, the luxury coupe is also the first Lexus to use the brand's all-new, premium rear-wheel-drive luxury platform, which promises enhanced dynamic

capability and performance. Earlier the LC had grabbed two awards for design excellence on its debut at the 2016 North American International Auto Show (NAIAS). The provocative, athletic flagship car bagged the 2016 EyesOn Design Award for Design Excellence in the Production Car category and for Interior Design. The

design of the LC 500 shares many of the key elements, proportions and visual dynamism of the LF-LC concept car. The challenge for Lexus designers was to work in conjunction with the engineers to find new ways to redefine the Lexus design style with dynamic design and advanced technology.

Panasonic launches large capacity commercial refrigerator in Kuwait

KUWAIT CITY: Panasonic Marketing Middle East & Africa (PMMAF), in collaboration with its local partner Easa Husain Al-Yousifi & Sons Co., is pleased to announce the launch of a brand new large capacity commercial refrigerator exclusively for the Kuwaiti market. The energy saving inverter K series model boasts advanced cooling performance, and is designed to provide reliable food storage solutions for the country's booming food and beverage industry. The K series, available in 1087 L and 1343 L capacities, is unique with its beautiful combination of design and technology.

It offers generous storage space for food and beverage of all sizes, thanks to its minimized space for the cooling fan and refrigeration unit. Built with auto-closing door, the appliance provides high airtightness, helping keep food fresh for longer. Boosting its high-usability quality is the ergonomic design handle for easy grip, stainless internal cabinet, as well as anti-bacterial treated handle, shelves and door packing. For easy maintenance and cleaning, swing up front grill, detachable condenser filter and refrigeration unit, refrigerant charge port and stain-resistant surface door are included.

Yasuhiro Shibata, Director - Panasonic Cold Chain Business Division said, "The launch of the commercial K series refrigerator is a testament to our commitment of bringing the innovative Panasonic technology to vital sectors such as the booming local F&B market in Kuwait. This appliance has been engineered with innovative features that will raise the bar on food storage for the commercial sector. With Kuwait's world food



capital vision 2030 in place, we are happy to be a part of this, offering cutting edge products and solutions to businesses, helping them provide their customers with high-quality products."

Wael Deeb, General Manager of the electronics department at Easa Husain Al-Yousifi commented, "The Kuwaiti F&B market is booming and a high-quality product like this with advanced features will certainly appeal to our discerning consumers in Kuwait. Businesses are always on the lookout for innovative solutions to help them grow and deliver the best possible services to their customers: Panasonic certainly has the expertise in developing

these breakthrough products."

Complementing the K series' well-thought design is its unmatched Japanese technology for an efficient and reliable performance. It has an advanced cooling system that guarantees food freshness and helps prevent bacteria from growing, thus delaying the risks of any food spoilage. It is also equipped with Panasonic's patented intelligent ECONAVI sensing technology that guarantees optimum energy savings of up to 40 percent. The ECONAVI sensors detect lighting conditions, frequency of door opening, as well as internal and external temperature levels, and adjust the refrigerator's internal temperature accord-

ingly for greater energy saving.

In addition to this intelligent feature, it is engineered with inverter compressor, automatic frame heater and an automatic condensing fan speed control to further increase its energy efficiency capability. The product unveiling took place recently at the Best Al-Yousifi Electronics showroom in Shuwaikh and was attended by PMMAF representatives from the Cold Chain Business Division - Yasuhiro Shibata, Director (Overseas); Hidenori Oya, Chief Engineer; Mitsuhiro Maeda, Chief Engineer and Mikihiko Obayashi, Chief (Overseas), in addition to the press and media agencies.

NBK Walkathon winners begin new journey with Renault Koleos, Megane



Abdulmohsen Abdulaziz Al Babtain Co., authorized agent of Renault in the State of Kuwait recently presented Ibrahim Dsousy and Dan Solo with the latest models of Renault Koleos and Renault Megane respectively at the Renault showroom in Al-Rai. Ibrahim Dsousy was excited to receive the Renault Koleos, a powerful and refined SUV that is finely tuned with the Middle Eastern

requirements backed by a local product range. The vehicle was specifically designed after having undergone extensive road testing in real-world conditions over several million kilometers during its course of development.

Dan Solo was the lucky winner who received the Renault Megane, a C Seda, which is a popular choice in this market where dynamic compact saloon cars remain

the preferred choice among many, the Renault Megane accommodates customers who enjoy success with a distinct social appeal, and brings with it record breaking roominess. Renault Al Babtain will continue to participate in driving Kuwait's community initiatives forward through its commitment to encourage a healthier and better lifestyle.

For Rent

In a Luxurious and Privileged Compound at Abou Halifa Region Facing the National Park and the Sea

Great opportunity for living space close to the sea, 1 out of 22 available

Duplex & Triplex Villas	3/4 Bedrooms + 3/4 Bathrooms +Big Salon + Separate pool All Master Bathrooms is Marble
Volleyball Court / Basketball Court / Hotel Lobby Pools + Jacuzzi / Billiard / 213 Car Parking Areas	

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6 6 8 0 4 2 2 2

Business

Dollar steady but its funding costs soar

TOKYO: The dollar was little changed against other major currencies yesterday in holiday-thinned trading while the cost of swapping the yen for the dollar jumped as banks scrambled to raise dollars for the year-end period.

ditures (PCE) price index excluding volatile food and energy prices, rose 0.1 percent in November for an annual increase of 1.5 percent, accelerating from 1.4 percent in October.

"2017 was the year when the dollar couldn't rise even as the dollar short-term interest rates rose," said Minor Uchida, chief currency analyst at the Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi UFJ.

will be the dollar," he added. "The dollar hit this year's high against the yen and also against a basket of major currencies on Jan. 3 and I expect a similar pattern next year as well."

The euro was also little changed at \$1.1850, having slipped a tad on Friday after Catalan separatists won a regional election, deepening Spain's political crisis in a sharp rebuke to Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy and European Union leaders who backed him.

major currency pairs including the euro/dollar and the dollar/yen, according to the Thomson Reuters FX Volume Heatmap.

On the other hand, the discount for buying the yen at future dates widened sharply as non-U.S. banks, which typically buys dollars now with sell-back contract at a future date, scrambled to procure greenbacks for the year-end.

the year-end. The one-week forward discount starting from Wednesday jumped to 0.23 yen from around 0.04 yen in the middle of last week.

"Because foreign banks are away and few market players are eager to offer dollars, the forward market is very thin," said a currency trader at a major Japanese bank.

Daily Kuwait Stock Exchange Report. Monday 25 December 2017. Index: Price index, Weighted Index, KXS 15. Trades: Security, High, Low, Volume, Value (KD), Trades, Last, Change. Includes various market categories like Basic Materials, Industrials, Consumer Goods, etc.

National Bank of Kuwait Financial Markets Daily Report. At 02:00 PM Previous Day. Includes a line chart showing market trends.

Global Stock Indices. Table with columns: Index, Previous Close, Last Price, Change, Daily Performance %, Yearly Performance %. Includes Dow Jones, NASDAQ, S&P 500, etc.

MENA Stock Indices. Table with columns: Index, Previous Close, Last Price, Change, Daily Performance %, Yearly Performance %. Includes Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, etc.

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, Emiratis 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 %. Includes Kuwait Oil, Brent, West Texas, Gold, Silver.

Business

NBK remains largest contributor in Kuwait

NBK encourages educational, professional development



KUWAIT: National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) pioneered its corporate social responsibility programs in 2017, maintaining its position as the largest contributor to the Kuwait community in the private sector. "NBK has a long tradition of supporting social and community oriented activities in the country," said Manal Al-Mattar, NBK Public Relations Assistant General Manager. "We believe that our people are our most valuable resource and to that end we've implemented numerous professional development and training programs to encourage the education and professional development of Kuwait's youth," added Al-Mattar.

Health care

NBK's social initiatives and programs included the opening of Stem Cell Therapy Unit, the new state-of-the-art cancer wing for NBK Children's Hospital. This new center is the largest corporate social responsibility donation of KD 7 million in Kuwait and will expand the hospital's ability to treat children with cancer and blood diseases.

During 2017, NBK launched a fun activity program for children at NBK's Children Specialty Hospital and Stem Cell Therapy Unit. The program extends all over the year and includes a library corner, storytelling sessions, fun events and a movie night activity that are organized occasionally. Children at the hospital will have the chance to choose their favorite story to read or a cartoon movie to watch with their family and friends. NBK has provided a display screen, entertainment facilities, variety of different and various books and other supplies for children to enjoy the whole program.

'I Dream To Be' Initiative

For the fourth year in a row, NBK continued to implement the first-of-its-kind 'I Dream To Be' program for children in Kuwait hospitals facing life-threatening conditions. The effort helps children realize their 'dreams' in order to promote their emotional and psychological wellbeing and helps them fight their illnesses.

Healing book

As part of the Bank's commitment to support children battling against cancer, NBK introduced a short story book named "Abdallah Wins." The book tells the story of a young boy battling a life threatening illness and how he works to overcome this challenge.

BACCH, KACCH

NBK works closely with the Kuwait Association for the Care of Children in Hospital (KACCH) and Bayt Abdullah for the Care of Children in Hospice (BACCH) to maximize its reach to children in need and to give top priority to sick children with life-threatening illnesses. In 2016,



NBK organized and supported a children's carnival at Bayt Abdullah Children's Hospice, an initiative which included entertainment and activities for resident children.

Supporting women's health issues

NBK takes a leading role in Kuwait society to support and raise awareness about women's health issues. In 2016, the bank encouraged women's health through the important 'Be Aware' breast cancer awareness program. As part of the initiative, NBK provided for discounted mammograms and wellness check-ups for female employees at local hospitals, distributed pink ribbon awareness pins to staff



Manal Al-Mattar

“Our people are our most valuable resource”

and also offered daily tips and information via NBK social media.

HR, educational initiatives

Largest employer in the private sector
In 2017, as part of its commitment to providing job opportunities to new graduates, NBK actively recruited more than 258 skilled graduates and young talents.

Training programs

Every year, NBK assesses the need for professional development of the youth of Kuwait, a core commitment of the bank. NBK invests in Kuwait's youth at every lev-

el, offering professional training as well as growth opportunities to further instill professional skill sets and contribute to the development, long term stability and growth of the national economy.

In 2017, NBK organized training programs including NBK academy, Shabab training program and summer internship program, in addition to professional programs in collaboration with world class universities.

Support education

As part of this strategy, NBK honored outstanding high school graduates of public schools for the school year 2016-2017. The bank expressed its appreciation to these students for their hard work through cash rewards and more importantly, professional training opportunities to encourage them to always work hard and excel.

KU universities fair

NBK was the main sponsor and organizer of the KU Universities Fair for the second consecutive year. Organized by KU's student affairs, the fair featured more than 50 educational institutes including public and private universities and colleges, Ministry of Higher Education, National Guard and all the military academies. Exhibitors met with graduates during the fair to help them choose among all the available academic disciplines, learn more about how to register and provide academic consultancies.

Al-Shaheed Park

As part of its social responsibility, NBK sponsored Al-Shaheed park's cultural events during the year in order to support cultural and heritage activities and encourage Kuwait's youth to develop community responsibility and engagement.

Schools, universities

During the school year, NBK hosted several groups of visiting school and university students in Kuwait on field visits to learn about the banking industry and day-to-day operations of various departments.



During 2017, NBK sponsored the activities of PAAET. NBK takes this opportunity to work in coordination with various educational institutions with the aim of supporting students successfully transition to the workforce.

Employee volunteering

National Bank of Kuwait organized many volunteer and charity initiatives during 2017. Employees organized volunteer groups to distribute Iftar meals during the month of Ramadan, they also took the initiative to organize the cleaning of Kuwait's beaches during summer months and the cleaning of public spaces. NBK staff also donated blood for the Kuwait Blood Bank



and distributed water to low income laborers during the summer. The staff also donated new clothes to families in need and organized other initiatives and activities aimed at supporting Kuwait's lower income communities.

Social care

In 2017, NBK implemented a series of philanthropic missions and social welfare programs as part of the humanitarian dimension of its corporate social responsi-

bility. NBK continues to be a leader in social welfare programs in Kuwait as part of its deeply-rooted commitment to Kuwait's society and its corporate social responsibility program.

NBK continued its commitment and support for educational institutions, non-governmental organizations, charity groups, health care and professional institutions as well as with other social welfare programs in first-of-their-kind partnerships for the development of Kuwait such as KRCS, Bayt Abdullah for Children's Hospice and LOYAC, KALD, Jidariyat and center 21.

NBK is the Humanitarian strategic partner for the Kuwait Red Crescent Society

for its social support and initiatives with the society. In 2017, the bank supported KRCS initiative to help fund the education of children of low-income families in Kuwait.

Health initiatives

Annual Walkathon

NBK organizes an annual walkathon aiming at supporting health and raising awareness for outdoor practices. During this year, More than nine thousand contestants participated in NBK's Walkathon culminated with a prize giving ceremony where NBK awarded the top 100 participants, and gave away many valuable prizes that exceeded KD 35,000.

Do good deeds in Ramadan

For more than two decades, NBK has provided charitable, social and philanthropic programs during the Holy Month of Ramadan. Among its most prominent and successful Ramadan programs is the 'Do Good Deeds in Ramadan' initiative. Comprised of a series of activities and events aimed at encouraging community engagement and charity in Kuwait, Do Good Deeds exemplifies NBK's efforts to serve as a role model and community leader.



Technology

Eric Schmidt stepping down as chair of Alphabet board

Sundar Pichai promoted to chief of Google

SAN FRANCISCO: Google's parent company Alphabet on Thursday announced that Eric Schmidt will step down as chairman, remaining on the board but shifting into a role as a technical advisor. "In recent years, I've been spending a lot of my time on science and technology issues, and philanthropy, and I plan to expand that work," Schmidt said in a release.

Schmidt's stint as executive chairman is to end at a regularly-scheduled board meeting next month, according to Alphabet. Google founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin recruited the proven businessman and skilled software engineer as chief executive in 2001, bringing a mature hand to the helm of the then three-year-old internet search company.

Schmidt, Page, and Brin were considered a power triumvirate in control of Google. Page replaced Schmidt as chief executive a decade later, but Schmidt remained at the head of the board of directors. "Eric has provided us with business and engineering expertise and a clear vision about the future of technology," Alphabet chief Page said in a release. "Continuing his 17 years of service to the company, he'll now be helping us as a technical advisor on science and technology issues."

About two years ago, Google unveiled a surprise corporate overhaul, forming a new parent company

dubbed Alphabet to include internet search and a handful of independent companies. Page became chief executive at Alphabet, a holding company for the tech giant's search products and "other bets" such as Waymo self-driving car unit; Nest smart home gad-



Schmidt plans on expanding his work

ets, and Google Fiber internet service.

Sundar Pichai was promoted to chief of Google, which includes leading online video-sharing service YouTube. Eric Schmidt went from being executive chairman at Google to having the same role at Alphabet. "Larry, Sergey, Sundar and I all believe that

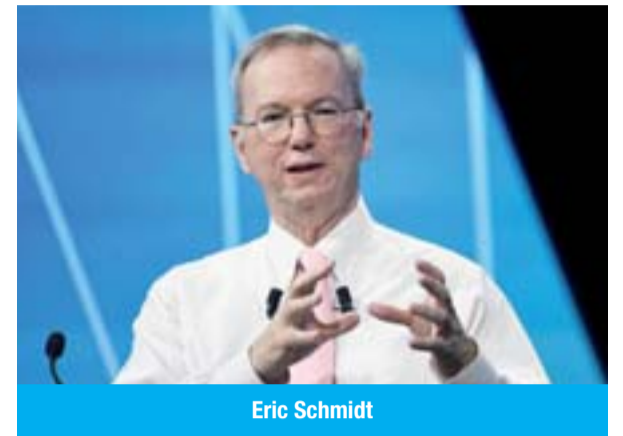
the time is right in Alphabet's evolution for this transition," Schmidt said. "The Alphabet structure is working well, and Google and the Other Bets are thriving."

Poaching people

During his tenure, Schmidt wound up at the center of a civil suit in US federal court over an "anti-poaching" agreement involving tech giants Apple, Google, Intel and Adobe. The long-running case alleged that major tech companies in Silicon Valley had secret agreements not to hire each other's employees, in a move to keep salaries under control. The lawsuit, which led to a \$415 million settlement, alleged that the late Apple chief Steve Jobs, Google chairman Schmidt and other tech executives were part of the conspiracy.

Other companies in the lawsuit which reached earlier settlements included eBay, Lucasfilm, Pixar and Intuit. Schmidt served for a few years on the Apple board of directors, but left there in 2009 as iPhone maker's rivalry with Android-backer Google intensified. Schmidt ranks among the world's richest people. A Forbes real-time tracker on Thursday pegged his net worth at \$13.8 billion, with most of that held in the form of Alphabet shares.

Schmidt was listed as a donor and advisor to the winning campaign by Barack Obama to become US



Eric Schmidt

president in 2008. His philanthropic endeavors include the Schmidt Family Foundation established with his wife and focus on challenges such as climate change and protecting the environment. Schmidt is also known to speak out on technology issues, expressing concerns about matters such as online spying and barriers to the free-flow of data.—AFP

China has shut down 13,000 websites since 2015

BEIJING: China has shut down or revoked the licenses of 13,000 websites since 2015 for violating the country's internet rules, state media reported Sunday. The news comes as the Communist country continues to strengthen its already tight regulation of the internet, a move which critics say has picked up pace since President Xi Jinping came to power in 2012.

Platforms have also closed nearly 10 million internet accounts for "violating service protocol", the official news agency said Sunday, likely referring to social media accounts. "These moves have a powerful deterrent effect," Xinhua quoted Wang Shengjun, vice chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC), as saying.

Despite being home to the world's largest number of internet users, a 2015 report by US think tank Freedom House found that the country had the most restrictive online use policies of 65 nations it studied, ranking below Iran and Syria. This year alone, it has enacted new rules requiring foreign tech companies to store user data inside the country, imposed fresh content restrictions, and made it increasingly difficult to use software tools that allow users to circumvent censors.

Google, Facebook, Twitter and The New York Times are all blocked in China, among countless other foreign websites. Beijing strictly defends what it calls "cyber sovereignty" and maintains that its various forms of web censorship—collectively known as "The Great Firewall"—are necessary for protecting its national security.

Within China, websites must register with authorities and are responsible for "ensuring the legality of any information" posted on their platforms, according to regulations in force since 2000. When their content runs afoul of authorities, they can be shutdown or fined.

One way to bypass the strictly controlled domestic internet is by using a virtual private network (VPN) which can allow users to access the unfiltered global internet. But here too authorities have cracked down. Earlier this week, Wu Xiangyang from the southern Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region was sentenced to five and a half years in prison for selling a VPN service on Alibaba's Taobao and other marketplaces.—AFP

Google VP vows 'vigilance' after US net neutrality rollback

GENEVA: Google's vice president Vint Cerf voiced concern Thursday about a US move to roll back "net neutrality" rules for internet access, and vowed to be on the lookout for any "serious side effects". Cerf, considered one of the fathers of the internet, also said he believed that the decision to overturn the rules requiring internet providers to treat all traffic equally was not the last word in the matter.

Several lawsuits are expected to try to block the change, and a political shift in Washington could also lead to a reinstatement of the rules, Cerf told journalists on the sidelines of an annual conference on internet governance in Geneva. "I don't know yet what is likely to happen," he said, "but if the neutrality rules are never reinstated, then the speculation is that consumer interests will be harmed."

The US Federal Communications Commission adopted this month a proposal by its Republican-appointed chairman Ajit Pai to scrap rules adopted in 2015, which he said were "heavy handed" and discouraged investment and innovation. Critics say that without the rules, broadband providers could change how the internet works by possibly blocking or throttling services or websites for competitive reasons.

Cerf said that one "extreme example" of what could happen without the rules is an internet that resembles "cable television, where... services vary depending upon ability to pay." While such a scenario was "pure speculation," he said, "in the absence of those rules in place, many of us, including me, will be very vigilant to watch whether there are any serious side effects."

Cerf, who co-invented the protocols used online, also addressed the current bitcoin bonanza, warning that the appetite for the volatile virtual currency, whose value has skyrocketed, "bears some similarity" to the Dutch "tulip craze" in the 17th century. Before that bubble burst in 1637, exotic tulips were considered the ultimate luxury accessory and status symbol, with people mortgaging houses and selling businesses just to buy a bulb.

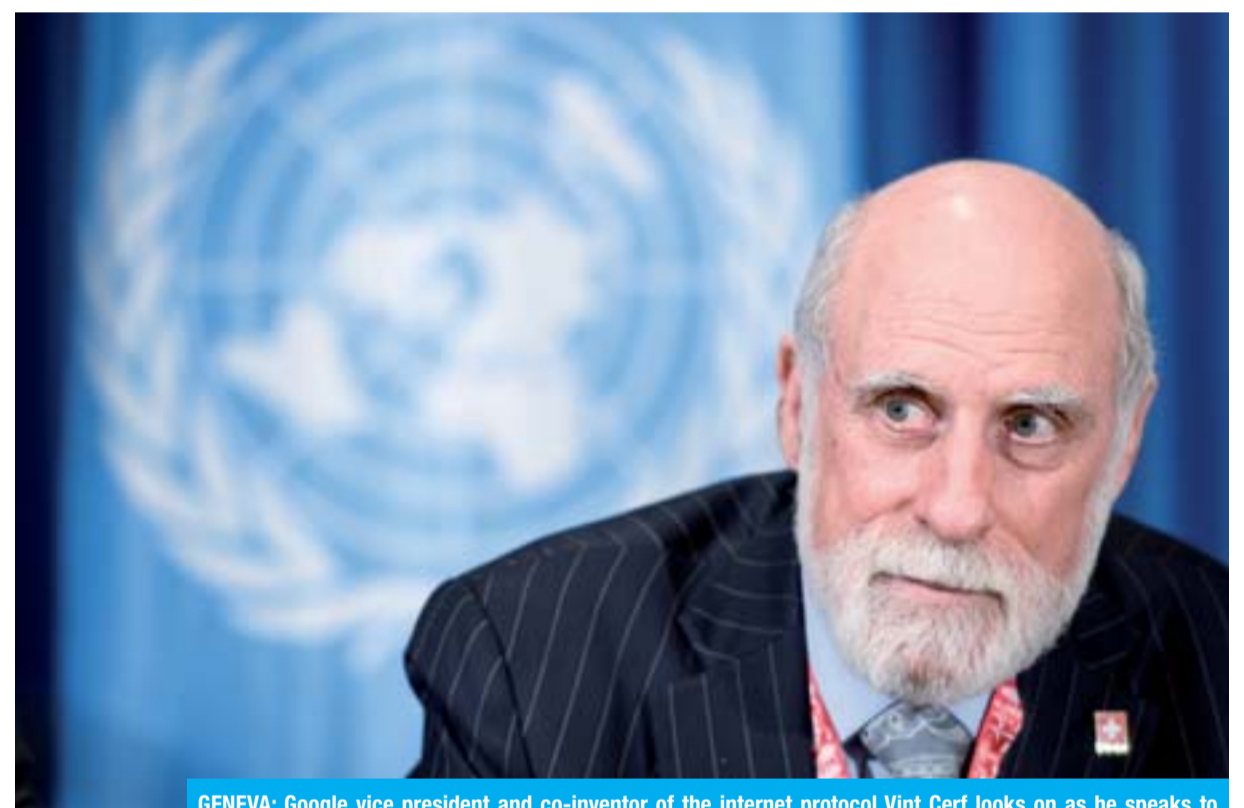
SpaceX launches 10 more satellites for Iridium

LOS ANGELES: SpaceX on Friday blasted off a re-used Falcon 9 rocket carrying 10 satellites into orbit, its fourth launch toward a \$3 billion upgrade to Virginia-based Iridium's mobile, voice and data network. The rocket, part of which had flown on a previous Iridium launch in June, lit up the night sky as it launched from Vandenberg Air Force Base at 5:27 pm, just after sunset. Friday's payload, known as Iridium 4, brings to 40 the number of new Iridium satellites now in orbit.

A total of 81 are expected by the time the launches are complete for the global project, known as Iridium NEXT. SpaceX will launch 75 of the 81 satellites. "Iridium NEXT will replace the world's largest commercial satellite network of low-Earth orbit satellites in what will be one of the largest 'tech upgrades' in history," said a company statement. Some of the satellites are designed to help track ships and aircraft in real time. SpaceX did not attempt to land the first stage of its rocket after launch, as has become its common practice.—AFP

China jails VPN owner for over five years

BEIJING: A Virtual Private Network (VPN) seller in southern China has been sentenced to five and a half years in prison, official media reported Wednesday, one of the most severe sentences yet for helping users evade the country's "Great Firewall". The sentence comes as authorities clamp down on tools for circumventing the severe restrictions on China's



GENEVA: Google vice president and co-inventor of the internet protocol Vint Cerf looks on as he speaks to reporters on the sidelines of the annual Internet Governance Forum at the United Nations Offices in Geneva.—AFP

Cerf also cautioned that the "blockchain" technology that underpins cryptocurrencies was not optimal in areas where there is a very high rate of transactions. "It certainly does not have the character of a system for keeping track of... billions of transactions a day," he said. "Blockchain is not a solution to everything, and it is certainly not pixie dust that you sprinkle on something and suddenly it causes a miracle," he said, though he acknowledged it is "a potentially useful technology for some things."

Notes on paper

Despite being a high-ranking Google executive, Cerf is not as enamored with technology as one might expect. During Thursday's press conference, he scribbled notes on paper, acknowledging that "for me, this is like a plug-in

extra memory." A few years ago, he sounded the alarm over the danger that all the documents and images saved on digital devices might one day become unreadable, plunging the world into a "digital Dark Age".

"I am still very worried about digital preservation," he said Thursday. Pointing to the old floppy disks full of data in his basement, he warned that when you save information digitally, there is no guarantee that there will be readers or the software needed to retrieve it in the future. "I'm thinking in 100-year, 500-year terms here," he said.

"If our world is increasingly manifesting in digital form, and if we want our descendants to know something about our world, we are going to have to figure out how to make sure the digital information is still retrievable and understandable.—AFP



LOMPOC: The SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket launches from the Space Launch Complex 4 at Vandenberg Air Force Base in Lompoc, California.—AFP

internet, which prevents users from visiting a large number of sites, including Google, Twitter and Facebook.

VPNs allow internet users to reach censored content by filtering web traffic through servers around the world but China has cracked down on them. Wu Xiangyang from the south Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region received the sentence along with a 500,000 yuan fine, after being prosecuted by the Guangxi Pingnan County People's Procuratorate.

Wu "illegally profited" from setting up VPN servers and selling software "without obtaining relevant business licenses", a news website managed by the Supreme People's Procuratorate—the national prosecuting authority—reported Wednesday. Wu also

opened an online store on Taobao, the shopping platform of e-commerce giant Alibaba, and a "Fangou VPN" website to rent or sell VPN software and hardware routers, reaching a sales volume of nearly 800,000 yuan, it said.

China's Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) announced in January that it would ban the use of unlicensed providers of VPN services. In September, 26-year-old Deng Jiewei was sentenced to nine months in jail with a 5,000 yuan fine for selling VPN softwares from October 2015 to 2016. Tech giants Apple and Amazon, too, have moved to limit their customers' access to the tools in China in what has been seen as a voluntary move to get ahead of the impending crackdown.—AFP



NICE: A picture shows the first submarine autonomous drone called 'Bubble' during a diving to run some tests in the Mediterranean sea off the coast of Nice, southern France.—AFP

Health

Nepal's last known dancing bears rescued



RAUTAHAT, Nepal: These handout photos released by World Animal Protection show rescued bears being transported from a police station in Nepal's southern Rautahat district to the Parsa Wildlife Reserve. —AFP photos

KATHMANDU: Nepali authorities have rescued the country's last known "dancing bears", officials said Sunday, ending the medieval tradition of abuse of the beasts for entertainment. The Himalayan nation banned performing bears back in 1973 but the illegal practice—a traditional occupation for some street performer communities—lingered on in parts of its southern region. Police and animal charities said they spent more than a year hunting the captors of the sloth bears before they were traced to the Rautahat district near the border with India on Tuesday.

"We received information that they were in our area and managed to rescue the bears," district police chief Yagya Binod Pokharel told AFP. Dancing bears are captured and bought as cubs and taught to dance on

their hind legs. Their snouts are pierced with a heated rod so they can be controlled by the tug of a rope or chain. Animal activists said the rescued bears — 19-year-old male Rangila and Sridevi, a 17-year-old female—showed signs of trauma such as covering, pacing and paw-sucking.

"We are thrilled that the last two known Nepali dancing bears have been rescued from their lifetime of suffering... our hard effort and dedication has helped to bring an end to this illegal tradition in Nepal," said Manoj Gautam of the Jane Goodall Institute of Nepal, which worked with the police and World Animal Protection to rescue them. The bears were located by tracking the owners' mobile phones. The bears are being cared for by the Parsa Wildlife Reserve, Nepal's

largest such reserve.

Dancing bears on the Indian subcontinent date back to the 13th century, when trainers belonging to the Muslim Qalandar tribe enjoyed royal patronage and performed before the rich and powerful. In neighboring India, the practice came to an end in 2012, decades after an official ban in 1972. Sloth bears, a critically endangered species, are found in India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bhutan. But shrinking habitats and rampant poaching have reduced their numbers, according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature. The IUCN has put them on its red list of threatened species and their total estimated population is 20,000. They can grow up to 1.8 meters (six feet) tall and weigh up to 140 kilograms (310 pounds).—AFP

E. coli outbreak in Canada, women at higher risk

OTTAWA: Canada's public health agency warned of an E. coli outbreak linked to romaine lettuce that has mainly affected women, and has been linked to at least one death. The number of cases under investigation doubled in the past month to 40, the agency said, adding that "there appears to be an ongoing risk" of infection. Individuals who became ill were between the ages of four and 85 years of age, and most (73 percent) were female. Sixteen people have been hospitalized.

They reported having eaten romaine lettuce at home, as well as in prepared salads from grocery stores, restaurants and fast food chains, before symptoms arose. The contamination has now also spread to five eastern provinces, including Quebec and Ontario. In a statement, the public health agency urged consumers to "consider consuming other types of lettuce, instead of romaine lettuce, until more is known about the outbreak and the cause of the contamination." "These illnesses indicate that contaminated romaine lettuce may still be on the market," it added. —AFP

Two tomatoes a day may keep lung disease at bay: Study

PARIS: Adults who ate more than two tomatoes a day had a slower rate of natural lung function decline, with ex-smokers seeming to benefit most of all, scientists said. Similar benefits, they said, were observed for people who ate more than three portions of fresh fruit a day, especially apples. "This study shows that diet might help repair lung damage in people who have stopped smoking," study co-author Vanessa Garcia-Larsen of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in Baltimore said in a statement.

"It also suggests that a diet rich in fruits can slow down the lung's natural ageing process even if you have never smoked." In the study published in the European Respiratory Journal, researchers analyzed data from 680 people in Germany, England and Norway who signed up for a health survey in 2002. Participants answered a questionnaire and underwent two types of lung-function tests at the start, then again 10 years later. —AFP

CLINIC PAGE



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What's On

NBK organizes events for kids at NBK's Specialty Hospital and Stem Cell Unit



Continuing its monthly activities at the Children's Specialty Hospital and the Stem Cell Therapy Unit, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) carried out "My Creative Meal" and "winter cookies" events to support children while they get their treatment. The two initiatives come as part of a fun activity program that extends all year long and includes a library, a reading corner, storytelling sessions, activities for the medical staff such as the "nurse of the month", interactive expression day, fun

events and a movie night activity that are organized occasionally.

These activities gave the children the opportunity to create their breakfast in a healthy exciting way and to encourage the children to enjoy eating healthy food. Each kid created his own meal and designed his cookies. Doctors and nurses participated in both events and shared happy moments with their young patients. Also, a doctoral committee from the hospital chose the best performing nurse for the

month of December to be honored by NBK, as part of this annual program that aims at encouraging team work and dedication. The fun activity program is a part of NBK's social responsibility towards children and keenness to support them while they get their treatment. NBK has provided a display screen, entertainment facilities, variety of different and various books and other supplies for children to enjoy the whole program.

NBK's initiative reflects the bank's high sense of duty

and responsibility towards the community and helping those in need. It is a well rooted tradition that has been carried out by NBK each year in its efforts to continuously have an active role in Kuwait's society. It's worth mentioning that NBK's Stem Cell Therapy Unit is the first children's bone marrow transplant center in Kuwait. The new center is the largest corporate social responsibility donation in Kuwait and will expand the hospital's ability to treat children with cancer and blood diseases.

Ring in 2018 at Marina Hotel!

Marina Hotel Kuwait welcomes you to the most festive and memorable New Year's Eve with enchanting moments for children and adults of all ages. With holiday-themed dinner and New Year celebrations, everyone will feel the magic of this special night this year.

Both restaurants at the hotel, Six Palms and Atlantis will be featuring seasonal décor and musical entertainment to make sure you have a charming never-ending night with your family and friends. At Marina Hotel, you can never go wrong in your choice as it offers the perfect venue under the twinkling lights and the cool breeze of the Arabian coast. The specially prepared buffet menus this season has something for everyone, and features a good selection of holiday specialties apart from host of other delicious and mouth-watering choices at only KD 28 per guest. To make this night even more exciting, the hotel invites its guests to spend the night with their loved ones with a fascinating New Year room package of one night stay inclusive of buffet breakfast and buffet dinner at the Six Palms restaurant or Atlantis restaurant for two persons starting from KD 170. Delight yourself in a lavish experience and visit Marina Hotel Kuwait for the fun and festivities.

LOYAC dance team at Gulf Cup



LAPA's dancing team recently took part in the inauguration of the GCC Soccer Championship 2017 at Jaber Stadium on Friday, December 22. 38 LAPA dancers joined a professional French dancer with whom

they had cooperated in previous years during which French dance instructors played a great role in developing Kuwaiti dancers' performance. Speaking on the occasion, the head of LAPA's dancing department, Teni Matian expressed her

joy over taking part in such a historical activity adding that this would be the second largest project presented by LAPA's dancing department in a month following the remarkable success achieved by the five-day FAD festival.

Al Mulla Exchange wraps up 2017 in style with concert

Al Mulla Exchange provided an evening of magnificent treat to music lovers by hosting famous Filipino band Truefaith at the American International School, Maidan Hawally on December 22nd and 23rd 2017. This was the 153rd and 154th event organized by Al Mulla Exchange, the leading exchange company in Kuwait. The Chief Guest for the first day was Vice Consul Charleson Hermosura Charge d' Affaires and for the second day it was Acting Labor Attache Ms Lily Pearl Guerrero from the Embassy of The Philippines. There was a total of 4000 ardent music lovers in attendance for the



two day concert. Truefaith band was formed in 1991 at the Philippines. They have become one of the Philippines' most popular and accomplished bands. The band took its name from New Order's 1987 hit single "True Faith", revealing the group's new wave origins. Under the Viva Records label, the band has 13 best-selling albums. Their music is best described as a blend of jazz, folk, pop and rock music.

The artists, as expected, took the audience on a rollicking ride of musical wave, belting out the best of their repertoire, getting the gallery to sway and dance. Talking to the media about the event, Mr. Praveen Singh, Divisional General Manager of Al Mulla Exchange said the Filipino community is among the most valued customers, whose support and trust have played a great role in the success of the company.

"The Filipinos are lovers of art and music, and receive such events with a lot of excitement. This is our humble way of expressing our gratitude to the community."

He added that this is the season of festivals, and we thought of adding to the festive mood with a quality show that people

of all age groups and segments of the society can enjoy. It was a delight to the packed audience when Philippine Airlines announced 3 free return tickets to Philippines, there were some lucky winners also announced to the surprise of the crowd assembled there.

Celebrating Uzbek culture



The ambassador of Uzbekistan Dr Bakhromjon Alove organized a cultural program along with the cooperation of National Council for art, culture and letter at the Abdullhussein Abduredha Theater. The Uzbek artist enthralled the Audience for more than an hour with their superb performance at a packed hall. The highlight of the event was the performance of violin and flute artists who won the hearts of both Kuwaitis and expatriates and was awarded with thunderous applause and a standing ovation that lasted for almost five minutes.

TV

AM MOVIES ACTION
01:40 The Last Witch Hunter
03:30 Star Wars: Episode v - The Empire Strikes Back

ANIMAL PLANET HD
00:50 Untamed & Uncut
01:45 Trechouse Masters
02:40 America's Cutest...

BBC FIRST
00:15 Stella: Christmas Special 2016
01:30 Maigret
03:10 Call The Midwife: Christmas Special 2017

crime & investigation network
00:00 Crimes That Shook Britain
01:00 Britain's Darkest Taboos
02:00 It Takes A Killer

COMEDY CENTRAL
00:05 Graves
00:35 Nightcap
00:55 Michael McIntyre's Showtime
01:50 Tosh.0

Discovery Family
19:25 Impractical Jokers
19:50 Real Husbands Of Hollywood

00:05 Don't Blink
00:30 Don't Blink
00:55 Don't Blink
01:20 The Carbonaro Effect

ID
00:50 Murder By Numbers
01:45 The Real Story With Maria Elena Salinas
02:40 Deadline: Crime With Tamron Hall

Disney HD
00:05 Disney Mickey Mouse
00:10 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch

00:05 Disney Mickey Mouse
00:10 Sabrina Secrets Of A Teenage Witch
00:35 Binnie And The Ghost

Disney Junior
00:10 Unbugable
00:15 PJ Masks

00:10 Unbugable
00:15 PJ Masks
00:40 Loopdidoo
00:55 Henry Hugglemonster

Racers
09:35 Sofia The First
10:00 Bob's Broken Sleigh

Discovery Channel HD
00:20 Street Outlaws
01:05 Gold Rush
01:50 Gold Diggers

Disney II
06:25 Supa Strikas
06:50 Marvel's Spider-Man

EHD
00:50 So Cosmo
01:50 So Cosmo
02:50 Celebrity Style Story

08:00 Botched
09:00 Botched
09:55 Botched
12:40 Hollywood Medium With Tyler Henry

00:00 Restaurant: Impossible
01:00 Mystery Diners
01:30 Mystery Diners
02:00 Diners, Drive-Ins And Dives

ibv CHOICE
00:10 Chopping Block
01:00 Emmerdale

00:10 Chopping Block
01:00 Emmerdale
02:30 Victoria Christmas Special

00:00 Stan Lee's Superhumans
01:00 Ancient Discoveries
02:00 Clash Of Warriors

NAT GEO people HD
00:45 Migue'l's Feasts
01:10 Carnivl Eats
01:40 Fish Of The Day

02:05 Fish Of The Day
02:35 What's For Sale?
03:00 What's For Sale?
03:30 Valentine Warner Eats Scandinavia

00:00 Building Wild
06:00 Fish Tank Kings
07:00 Bad Trip
08:00 Air Crash Investigation

NAT GEO WILD HD
00:20 Future Cat
01:10 World's Deadliest

00:12 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
00:36 Rabbids Invasion
01:00 Rabbids Invasion

nick HD
00:12 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
00:36 Rabbids Invasion

00:12 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
00:36 Rabbids Invasion
01:00 Rabbids Invasion

nick Jr
00:17 Shimmer And Shine
01:02 Max & Ruby

00:17 Shimmer And Shine
01:02 Max & Ruby
01:25 Ben & Holly's Little Kingdom

00:17 Shimmer And Shine
01:02 Max & Ruby
01:25 Ben & Holly's Little Kingdom

AM MOVIES HD FAMILY
00:50 Shelby: The Dog Who Saved Christmas

AM MOVIES HD COMEDY
00:00 Screwed
01:50 Tommy Boy

AM MOVIES HD FESTIVAL
02:00 Alex Of Venice
03:30 New York Stories

08:45 The Bostrolls
10:25 Die Hard
12:40 Ride Along

DISCOVERY SCIENCE
00:40 Mythbusters
01:30 How Do They Do It?

STAR MOVIES HD
01:30 Bad Santa
03:00 Tomorrowland

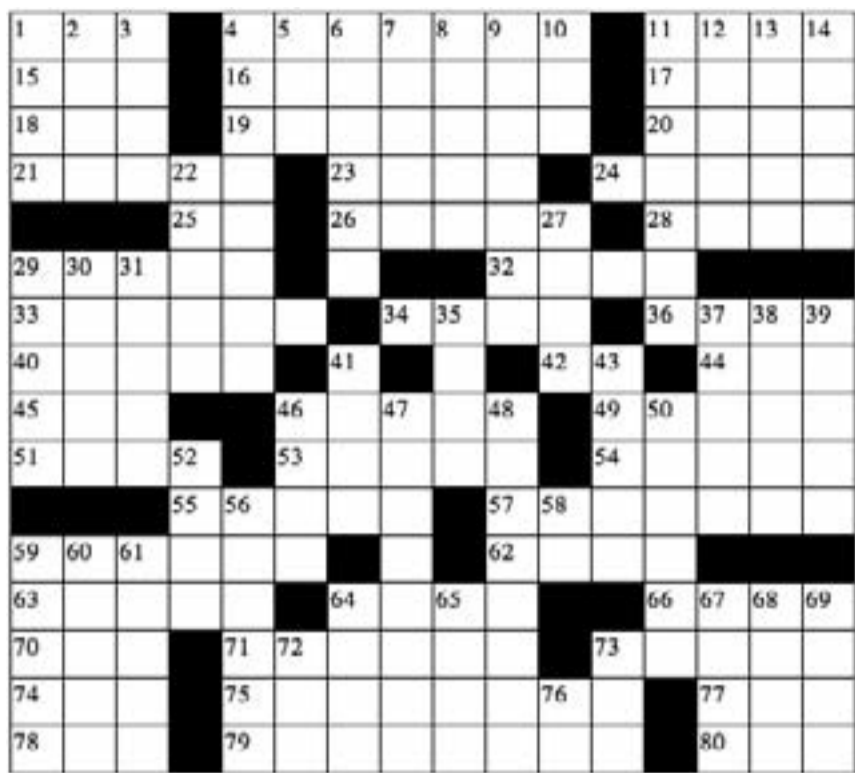
STAR WORLD HD
00:00 Devious Maids
01:00 Devious Maids

TLC
00:20 Big & Little
01:05 Suddenly Rich

travel CHANNEL
00:00 King Tut: Mysteries At The Museum
01:00 Expedition Unknown

Stars

CROSSWORD 1794



ACROSS

1. (Irish) Mother of the ancient Irish gods.
4. A state in the southeastern United States on the Gulf of Mexico.
11. An Egyptian descended from the ancient Egyptians.
15. A number of sheets of paper fastened together along one edge.
16. Relating to or near the pylorus.
17. A particular geographical region of indefinite boundary (usually serving some special purpose or distinguished by its people or culture or geography).
18. An agency of the United Nations affiliated with the World Bank.
19. Move the upper body backwards and down.
20. Fastener consisting of a resinous composition that is plastic when warm.
21. A constitutional monarchy on the western part of the islands of Samoa in the South Pacific.
23. Small ornamental ladies' bag for small articles.
24. Small tropical American tree bearing edible plumlike fruit.
25. The district occupied entirely by the city of Washington.
26. A public dance hall for dancing to recorded popular music.
28. Chief port of Yemen.
29. United States playwright (born in 1947).
32. Someone who copies the words or behavior of another.
33. Of or relating to abasia (inability to walk).
34. A very young child (birth to 1 year) who has not yet begun to walk or talk.
36. Studies intended to provide general knowledge and intellectual skills (rather than occupational or professional skills).
40. English theoretical physicist who applied relativity theory to quantum mechanics and predicted the existence of antimatter and the positron (1902-1984).
42. A heavy odorless colorless gas formed during respiration and by the decomposition of organic substances.
44. A constellation in the southern hemisphere near Telescopium and Norma.
45. A flat wing-shaped process or winglike part of an organism.
49. Large dark-striped tropical food and game fish related to remoras.
51. The officer below the master on a commercial ship.
53. An island republic on Nauru Island.
54. A clique that seeks power usually through intrigue.
55. Apartment consisting of a series of connected rooms used as a living unit (as in a hotel).
57. Situated away from the axis of any body or part.
59. German states who as chancellor of West Germany worked to reduce tensions with eastern Europe (1913-1992).
62. Avatar of Vishnu.
63. A barrier constructed to contain the flow or water or to keep out the sea.
66. A block of solid substance (such as soap or wax).
70. Title for a civil or military leader (especially in Turkey).
71. Scientific instrument that provides a flashing light synchronized with the periodic movement of an object.
74. Of or relating to or characteristic of Thailand of its people.
75. A cut of pork ribs with much of the meat trimmed off.
77. American prizefighter who won the world heavyweight championship three

- times (born in 1942).
78. An extension at the end and at right angles to the main building.
79. Segmented worms.
80. Having undesirable or negative qualities.

DOWN

1. Type genus of the Apidae.
2. A quantity of no importance.
3. (Old Testament) In Judeo-Christian mythology.
4. Having uncoordinated muscular movements, symptomatic of a CNS disorder.
5. A strong solution of sodium or potassium hydroxide.
6. Type genus of the Alcedinidae.
7. Important food fish of the Nile and other rivers of Africa and Asia Minor.
8. Type genus of the Ariidae.
9. (British) A minicar used as a taxicab.
10. (informal) Of the highest quality.
11. Dried bark of the cascara buckthorn used as a laxative.
12. (Greek mythology) One of the mountain nymphs.
13. The state prevailing during the absence of war.
14. A sharp hooked claw especially on a bird of prey.
22. A port city of south central Ukraine on an arm of the Black Sea.
27. An organization of countries formed in 1961 to agree on a common policy for the sale of petroleum.
30. A promontory in northern Morocco opposite the Rock of Gibraltar.
31. French revolutionary leader (born in Switzerland) who was a leader in overthrowing the Girondists and was stabbed to death in his bath by Charlotte Corday (1743-1793).
35. The sixth month of the civil year.
37. Spiritual leader of a Jewish congregation.
38. Of the nature of or undergoing an experiment.
39. A river that rises in central Germany and flows north to join the Elbe River.
41. A fraudulent business scheme.
43. English scholastic philosopher and assumed author of Occam's Razor (1285-1349).
46. A person regarded as arrogant and annoying.
47. A mountain in the Black Hills of South Dakota.
48. Italian violin maker and grandson of Andrea Guarneri (1687?-1745).
50. A city of southeastern Mexico.
52. Bulky grayish-brown eagle with a short wedge-shaped white tail.
56. A port city of south central Ukraine on an arm of the Black Sea.
58. A soft silvery metallic element of the alkali earth group.
60. Belonging to or befitting a supreme ruler.
61. A means of serving.
64. A port city in northwestern Algeria and the country's 2nd largest city.
65. Norwegian mathematician (1802-1829).
67. An Arabic speaking person who lives in Arabia or North Africa.
68. Tree bearing large brown nuts containing e.g. caffeine.
69. A town in north central Oklahoma.
72. Administration of a nutritionally adequate solution through a catheter into the vena cava.
73. A loose sleeveless outer garment made from aba cloth.
76. A state in the Rocky Mountains.

STAR TRACK



Aries (March 21-April 19)

You may be working especially hard to get things and people organized as a sense of ambition and achievement takes hold. Work, accomplishment and ambition are all things that mean a lot to you. Projects or the recent quandaries in the workplace may come to your mind. New ideas could come together and present future possibilities. This is a good time to make lists, plan and create a presentation for next year. This day ends on a hopeful note. There is also recognition for some of your creative ideas. Your friends have three important roles to play in your life: fun, support and harmony. Pay attention to your friends they can launch you toward new spiritual awareness or artistic expression. Charm and romance are strong tonight.



Taurus (April 20-May 20)

You will enjoy this time immensely. You will be jumping from one project to another. New opportunities are opening and this is a good time to secure them for yourself. In doing this, you probably will find that you spend a huge amount of effort and energy trying to balance all of your commitments. People look at you for answers and guidance and you are pleased with the end results. At this time, you may have to take on more responsibilities in the home and you may want to open up more to relatives; this is an ideal time for strong support. There are open channels of communication between you and your colleagues. Using your time and energy effectively now will pay dividends later, bringing good times to everyone.



Gemini (May 21-June 20)

Understanding and being sensitive to the needs of others is a wonderful prerequisite to having a special time with someone you love. Great feelings are in the air and you should feel a super sense of support and harmony with all that you meet. Some will find you most persuasive and almost charismatic in the way you communicate. Things are very natural for self-expression and work particularly well with your particular ideas and thoughts. Expect a good conversation with those that you love. You may want to open up more to relatives, since this is an ideal time for gaining and giving others a good support system. Someone younger than yourself may look to you for answers to questions that are important to that person.



Cancer (June 21-July 22)

This is a day when you take some time to review some sort of revised contract or business deal before work begins again. You find yourself filled with extra energy for planning improvements. The motivation to improve areas of your life is strong. You may find yourself being put to good use by your friends later today. If you are working, it is because a co-worker needs a day with family. You may be in a position to help others and you enjoy serving others when you are needed. On your way home this evening you might stop to visit someone that has no family to check on him or her. A rare sound of laughter and friendship fills the air and ends your day in a peaceful way. Tonight you may spend a great deal of time preparing for the next holiday.



Leo (July 23-August 22)

Relationships with other people and refinement are two of the keys to find satisfaction now. Anything that is harmonious and beautiful is very enjoyable to you—the lack of these two elements can be emotionally upsetting. You should find this a good time for getting in touch with your inner self—to truly understand who and what you are. You shouldn't be disappointed in what you discover and should find your emotions in particular, or the feelings of those around you, very clear. This is a very nice time. Taking in a movie or reading a good book will please you a great deal—as it may be a good way to allow yourself to escape from day-to-day realities. Everyone needs a well-deserved break to rejuvenate and recharge the emotional batteries.



Virgo (August 23-September 22)

Your creative and intuitive talents are what may be leading you today. Some may see you as a bit eccentric because of your rather unique approach to things. Good nutrition is something you embody and teach. You may find yourself feeding some good alternatives to fast-food products to the young people in your family. All in all, you should benefit from whatever activities are at hand. New solutions or something very inventive is due to develop. Later today, you may enjoy some form of entertainment with others. You find some time to combine your efforts with the efforts of others to complete some type of family project. Stay away from games of chance. Tonight there is just enough time to organize your mind or self for the working world.



Libra (September 23-October 22)

Career decisions will be coming up soon and you may want to spend some time in talking with friends or family members about what to expect with the choices you might want to make. This is a time when you may choose to wave your holiday time and push the limit in your professional field. You want to be the best you can possibly be. This may also mean that it is time to make plans to put in your name for a job change that you have been thinking about for some time. You do not settle for something simply because it could make you money; there are many more aspects to be considered as far as you are concerned. You must feel right about it at the gut level, or you know it is not right for you. Let your conscience be your guide.



Scorpio (October 23-November 19)

Those around you may see you as especially witty and eccentric at this time. You may find some new answers to old questions or have breakthroughs in regard to your living situation or life's state of affairs. Others appreciate and admire your independence and unique qualities. You may find that you are more organized than before—able to reach new levels of self-discipline. This is a good day for sharing, serving, chatting about the past and thinking over future ideas. This can be a smooth time during which events seem to arrange themselves to a joyful time. Many different individuals agree to pull together to accomplish a common goal. This may be a future vacation, a family business or a weekend campout. Relationships are highlighted.



Sagittarius (November 22-December 21)

This will be the kind of a day that we all long for, easy going and calm—with everything running smoothly. Ideas and interaction with seniors in your family may have your attention part of this day. Working with the flow of what is needed should not be hard to do. There could be some circumstances that force you to reorganize and be more frugal. This should all work out to everyone's benefit. Your ingenious persona is apparent as you weed out some difficulty. The day may not be totally without challenges, but your wittiness is just what is needed. Additionally, this is a time when your powers of creativity are strong. Home is likely to be the center of activities this evening. You share snacks and light refreshment with games and laughter.



Capricorn (December 22-January 19)

You feel inspired about a personal project and may find the urge to complete a project you started some time ago. Perhaps you have attempted an art project or you decided to begin a building project—perhaps additional storage units for your home. If you have your vacation now or your work has closed until the new year begins, this is, indeed a good time to paint, build or generally catch up on the things you had previously put aside. This is a time when you can put your practical insights into words. Communication is enhanced. You can expect a sense of support from those around you. You may find it easy to bring a group together with words that move others. This may mean some community or neighborhood get-together.



Aquarius (January 20-February 18)

There are plenty of personal chores to be done this day and you swing into action without hesitation. You may find your work moving along faster when you promise a movie or some other form of entertainment to those that pitch in and help. There is talk of school and continued education. Before you know it you may be planning a shopping trip for new school clothes. You will be getting some psychic insights; recognize them for what they are and write them down each time they come to you. This will allow you to have a reference for later when you compare notes or just have fun reading how the sleeping mind works. You will soon be able to find the connection to your psychic insights. Early evening brings about time to relax to music.



Pisces (February 19-March 20)

You may be able to converse with an elder member of your family this morning. Where there may have been some difficulty in the past, a new understanding is now possible. Understanding others and spending time to lend a helping hand is commendable and endears you to many. Everything conspires to reveal you at your most elegant, particularly in social encounters. Thank-you notes and letters to friends occupy some of your time this afternoon. You also give some thought to trying your hand at writing a story. You want to put story to paper and endeavor to become published. Whatever the subject, get started! Perhaps some sort of outline could be the first step toward writing at this time. A college writing course might be considered.

Wordsearch Puzzle

Fantasy World 2

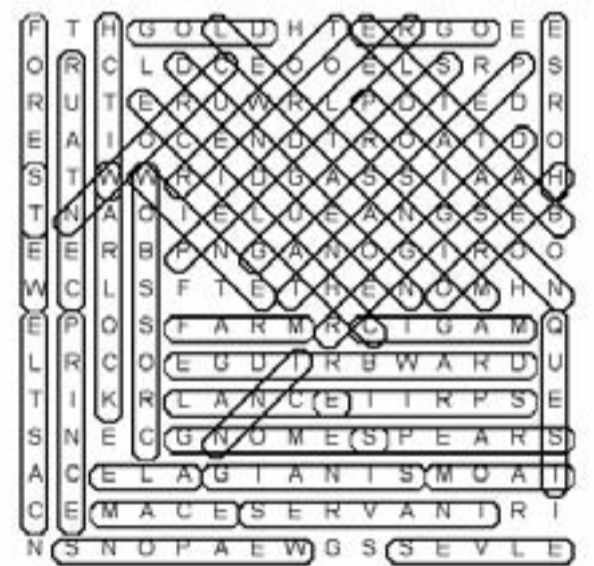
Find and circle all of the words that are hidden in the grid. The remaining 29 letters spell the name of a popular fantasy book.



- | | | | |
|--------------|------------|-----------|---------|
| ARCHERS | DWARF | LORDS | SPELL |
| ARMOR | ELF | MAGIC | SWORD |
| ARROWS | EVIL | MARKET | THRONE |
| AXE | FAERIES | MINOTAUR | TROLL |
| BARD | GOBLET | MOUNTAINS | UNICORN |
| BLACKSMITH | GOLD COINS | PALACE | VILLAGE |
| BOW | GOOD | POTION | WAGON |
| COURT | HEADSMAN | PRINCESS | WAND |
| CRYSTAL BALL | KING | SHIELD | WIZARD |
| DRAGON | KNIGHT | SILVER | WRAITH |

Yesterday's Solution

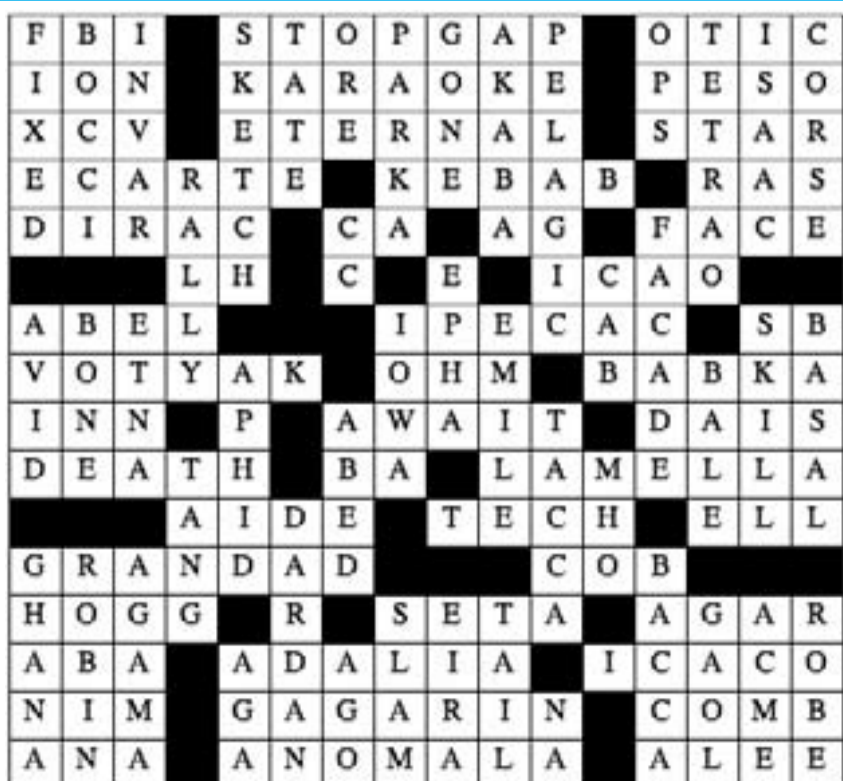
Fantasy World 1



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

The hidden message is: THE LORD OF THE RINGS

Yesterday's Solution



Daily SuDoku

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

Yesterday's Solution

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

Pick perfect produce



Tips to help you select the best fruits and vegetables

By JESSICA MILCETICH
McClatchy-Tribune

Farmers' markets and grocery store produce aisles are jammed with juicy fruits and crunchy vegetables just waiting to jump into our baskets, especially in the summer. But it can be confusing trying to select the ripest produce — even for self-proclaimed foodies.

So, we turned to the experts — chefs, cookbook authors and restaurant owners — to give us their hot tips on picking the best produce available.

Marjorie Druker, chef and owner of the New England Soup Factory in Boston, suggests shopping at farmers' markets.

"Local tastes better because it's coming from a smaller farm where they're growing less and maybe they've got some tricks up their sleeves about when is the perfect time to pick it," Druker says.

"Iron Chef" Cat Cora has another simple suggestion: "Ask questions." Find out where the crops came from, how long ago they were harvested and how they were grown (all-natural, organic, with pesticides, etc.).

And Amelia Saltsman, author of "The Santa Monica Farmers' Market Cookbook: Seasonal Foods, Simple Recipes and Stories from the Market and Farm," says to use all five senses. Look for ugly spots, a sign the fruit is going bad. Most produce should be somewhat soft to the touch — and many have a scent when ripe. Some have specific sounds indicating ripeness like crisp, snapping green beans. And for taste, many vendors will allow you to sample the produce.

Use our guide to some common fruits and vegetables to figure out what's in season, what to look for and what to avoid — plus how to store your fresh items once you've gotten them home.

Fruit guide

AVOCADOS

(Often thought to be a vegetable, the avocado is considered a fruit because of its pit.)

- **In season:** All year long.
- **What you want:** Yields to touch when ripe, can be placed in a brown paper bag with a banana to speed ripening time.
- **Avoid:** No matter the variety, avoid brightly colored skins and rock hard fruits.

- **Store:** Needs to ripen on counter, and then it can be refrigerated for several days.

BERRIES

- **In season:** Blueberries, spring and summer; strawberries, peak in spring and summer; raspberries, all varieties at their peak in the summer.
- **What you want:** Blueberries should be firm and plump, with deep coloring. Strawberries should be bright red in color with bright green tops.

- **Avoid:** Blueberries that are green or mushy. Strawberries that are mushy or have soft spots and dull green tops. Raspberries that are mushy; broken berries in stained containers are a sign of over-ripening.
- **Store:** Blueberries can be stored without washing in the refrigerator for five to six days; strawberries and raspberries can be stored without washing in the fridge for one to two days.

CHERRIES

- **In season:** From June to September.
- **What you want:** Plump and firm fruit with shiny deep-colored skin for their variety (red, purple, yellow) and crisp green stems.
- **Avoid:** Brittle stems; soft, dull cherries are signs of over-maturity.
- **Store:** Very durable, but need to be refrigerated quickly and can be kept in a bowl for a few days.

KIWIS

- **In season:** All year long.
- **What you want:** Apply gentle pressure with thumb and forefinger, fruit should yield slightly.
- **Avoid:** Very soft, shriveled fruit or those with damp spots.
- **Store:** To ripen, place in a paper bag. Refrigerate ripe kiwi.

MANGOS

- **In season:** All year long, depending on variety.
- **What you want:** Heavy for their size with firm skin; smell around stem for slight aroma.
- **Avoid:** Those with many black spots.
- **Store:** If the fruit is green at purchase, it will ripen in two to five days on the counter, then refrigerate for up to four days.

MELONS

- **In season:** Cantaloupes, June to November; watermelon, May to September; honeydew, late July to August.
- **What you want:** Cantaloupes should be heavy for their size with a thick, netted rind; they should give slightly to the touch. To test a watermelon, smack the fruit and listen for a "thunk"; also look for a buttery color on the patch where the melon was on the ground. Honeydew should have firm skin with a warm color and be heavy for its size.
- **Avoid:** In general, avoid melons that slush when shaken or have soft or brown spots.
- **Store:** Keep on the counter while whole; refrigerate cut fruit.

ORANGES

- **In season:** All year long, with peak from October through April.
- **What you want:** Firm and heavy in hand; if you scratch the rind with your finger, it should have a heady citrus scent.
- **Avoid:** Skin with dark blemishes is a sign of decay; avoid spongy fruit as well.
- **Store:** Refrigerate for up to two weeks.

PEACHES/NECTARINES

- **In season:** The warm summer months.
- **What you want:** Rich yellow color at stem and firm flesh with an aromatic smell.
- **Avoid:** Bruises or green fruit, a sign they're under-ripe.
- **Store:** Ask grower if they should be left on the counter to ripen further or eaten right away.

PEARS

- **In season:** Different varieties are at their peak throughout the year.
- **What you want:** Each variety differs, but in general look for warm skin color.
- **Avoid:** Any fruit with bruises or blemishes on the skin.
- **Store:** Ripen in a cool place or a paper bag to speed the process; once ripe store in the refrigerator for two to three days.

PINEAPPLE

- **In season:** Peak from March to June.
- **What you want:** Pull out leaves from top — the easier they come out the riper the fruit; smell at base should be sweet.
- **Avoid:** Those with dry brown leaves or dull yellow color.
- **Store:** Refrigerate cut pineapple in tightly wrapped plastic for up to three days.

PLUMS

- **In season:** California plums are available from June to September.
- **What you want:** Plump, firm fruit with good coloring.
- **Avoid:** Overly hard or soft plums.
- **Store:** Ripen at room temperature, then can be refrigerated four to five days.

TOMATOES

- (Scientifically speaking, tomatoes are the fruit of a flowering plant.)
- **In season:** All year long, with peak from July to October.
 - **What you want:** Should be heavy in your hand and fully colored.
 - **Avoid:** Pale or spotted tomatoes.
 - **Store:** Ripen at room temperature and don't refrigerate.

Vegetable guide

ARTICHOKES

- **In season:** All year long, with peak from March to May.
- **What you want:** Plumpness, globe shape, with compact, green scales.
- **Avoid:** Brown on scales or gray-black discoloration, as well as woody looking vegetables.
- **Store:** Refrigerate for up to a week.

ASPARAGUS

- **In season:** November through July, with peak season from March to June.
- **What you want:** Firm, plump, medium green spears with compact heads; squeeze the bunch to hear a squeak.
- **Avoid:** Tips that are wet, slimy or smelly.
- **Store:** Remove an inch from the bottom, wrap in damp paper towels and place in crisper; will keep for two to three days.

BROCCOLI

- **In season:** All year long, with peak from October to April.
- **What you want:** Stalk should look juicy and fresh; heads should be compact and fresh.
- **Avoid:** Dry, fibrous stalks; yellowed heads.
- **Store:** Refrigerate in an airtight bag for four days.

CORN

- **In season:** Depends on source — California, Florida, New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania corn all have different peaks.
- **What you want:** Silks should be moist and fresh looking, and the ear should feel full the entire length; peeling back the husk should reveal plump kernels.
- **Avoid:** Dry or brown silks or tightly packed kernels.
- **Store:** Will keep longer if it's still wrapped in the husk and refrigerated.

CUCUMBERS

- **In season:** Summer.
- **What you want:** Good green coloring and firmness for entire length.
- **What you want:** Dull or yellow color, withered ends.
- **Store:** Refrigerator in crisper for one week.

EGGPLANT

- **In season:** Available all year round, but the summer is the best time to get locally grown crops.
- **What you want:** No matter what variety, look for a solid color without green around the stem. It should have firm, smooth skin and be heavy for its size.
- **Avoid:** Poor coloring, soft or shriveled skin.
- **Store:** Unwrapped about four days in refrigerator.

GREEN BEANS

- **In season:** All year long, with peak in the summer.
- **What you want:** Should have a crisp, juicy snap when broken, with brightly colored, smooth skin.
- **Avoid:** Limp beans and those that don't snap cleanly, as well as those with mushy tips.
- **Store:** Wash beans and then place in a sealed plastic container in refrigerator for four to five days.

LETTUCE

- **In season:** All year long, depending on variety.
- **What you want:** Should be heavy for its size with fresh-looking leaves.
- **Avoid:** Leaves that are browning or wilting.
- **Store:** Don't wash it until just before you use it, and it will keep in the refrigerator for a few days.

MUSHROOMS

- **In season:** Depends on the variety.
- **What you want:** Firm, fleshy caps.
- **Avoid:** Spots or a darkened or shriveled appearance.
- **Store:** Will keep longer when stored whole; keep in paper bag, not plastic.

ONIONS

- **In season:** All year long, depending on variety.
- **What you want:** Firm with a shiny, thin skin.
- **Avoid:** Green sunburn spots; blemishes; immature onions, which look wet and have soft necks; or onions that have sprouted.
- **Store:** In loosely woven basket in cool, dry area.

PEPPERS (BELL)

- **In season:** Peak from May through August.
- **Look:** Deep colors, firm skin with glossy sheen.
- **Avoid:** Pale colors with soft flesh.
- **Store:** Refrigerate for three to four days. Red peppers will spoil faster than green ones.

SUMMER SQUASH

- **In season:** Different varieties are available throughout the year, but yellow and green squash are summer crops.
- **What you want:** Rind should be hard, firm and shiny for the yellow and green varieties; color variations do not affect ripeness.
- **Avoid:** Soft or wrinkly ones with flabby skin.
- **Store:** Can store in crisper for about a week.

SOURCES: "THE FIELD GUIDE TO PRODUCE," "THE SANTA MONICA FARMERS' MARKET COOKBOOK," WWW.HOWSTUFFWORKS.COM, HOMECOOKING.ABOUT.COM

IMAGES FROM ARTVILLE

Lifestyle | Gossip

Dua Lipa can't get enough of Cardi B

Dua Lipa can't get enough of rapper Cardi B. The 'New Rules' singer has revealed she is addicted to listening to the star's song 'Bodak Yellow' and scrolling through her Instagram, because she loves how real she is. The brunette beauty told the Daily Star newspaper: "I think I am in love with her. 'I'm so obsessed with Cardi B I do nothing but sit and watch her Instagram videos...' 'I think she's brilliant. I love it! She has so much truth and I'm like: 'Preach it, girl!' 'The song is just so good it has style to it, it's catchy, it's so great. 'It's one of those songs that makes you feel in charge.' And the 22-year-old pop star is also a big fan of Bajan beauty Rihanna, especially her rapping lines in N.E.R.D's comeback single 'Lemon'. She said: "It's so good." Dua is not the only British star to be into the 'Motorsport' hitmaker. MNEK said recently he's desperate to spit some lines on a Cardi B track. The 23-year-old producer and songwriter has worked on tracks for the likes of Zara Larsson and Anne-Marie, but he's set his sights on performing a hook on a track by the rising rap star. He has even offered to perform at her forthcoming wedding with her Migos star fiance Offset. MNEK - whose real name is Uzochi 'Uzo' Emenike - tweeted Cardi: "i now know all the words to 'Bodak Yellow' your verse on 'No Limit' AND 'Motorsport'. I'm stannnggggg, can i sing a hook for you? or at your wedding idk.... in any case.... lmk @iamcardib (sic)" The 'Never Forget You' hitmaker may be in with a chance as the 'Motorsport' star said she is "taking her time" with her debut album. Cardi - whose real name is Belcalis Almanzar - has written a whole host of songs but wants to make sure they are top notch before letting any of them make the final cut. Giving an update on her first record, Cardi wrote on Twitter last month: "I have a lot of pressure on me. I have songs stashed up. I just don't think they qualified for my album. Sometimes i think is ready sometimes i think it's not so i'm going to take my time till it's right. (sic)"

Stormzy: I don't want to be on a pedestal

Stormzy doesn't want to put himself on a "pedestal". The 24-year-old grime artist has recently emerged as one of the UK's biggest music stars, but Stormzy - whose real name is Michael Owuo - is determined to stay in touch with his roots. The London-born musician - who has members of the public starring in his video for 'Blinded By Your Grace Pt.2' - explained: "In the video we've got the local community, and a lot of supporters who came down, which is so important for me." Stormzy is intent on staying in touch with his community and was thrilled to have the public appear alongside him in the distinctive-looking video. He said: "I never want to be this artist who's on this pedestal, where I'm so over there, and so famous, with ten security guards around me that you can't get to me, I was like 'nah man', I would love to keep that same essence no matter what I'm doing. "If I can bring people together, like my supporters for this, and everyone can come together and we all sing - I was like 'that will be beautiful.'" Meanwhile, Stormzy previously insisted he deserves the same level of respect afforded to artists such as Frank Ocean or an Adele. Of his debut album 'Gang Signs & Prayer', he said: "This album is good, this is incredible, this is heartfelt, this has been put together so well, so strategically, so neatly, so creatively - so respect me the same way you're going to respect a Frank Ocean or an Adele." Stormzy's 'Blinded By Your Grace Pt.2' music video was created in partnership of Nokia's #UniteFor campaign, bringing people together in disconnected and divided times.

**Snoop Dogg to record gospel record**

Snoop Dogg wants to record gospel music. The 46-year-old star has already covered the genres rap, hip-hop, and reggae and is planning to try something new in 2018. He told Billboard: "I have always wanted to try Gospel. This may surprise some people but all I gotta say is get ready for some good for your soul music in 2018! Ya know I'm always cookin' up something. I'll have some new projects for y'all in the New Year." Snoop also spoke about his recent music video for 'My Last Name', which was a tribute to his wife Shante Broadus. He said: "Boss Lady has held me down since day one. She's always there for me and our beautiful kids. This video was just a visual tribute of the love we've shared for decades." While Snoop revealed he would love to collaborate with Sade, he has also been hugely impressed by up and coming rapper STIX. He said: "I've been rocking with rapper out of Watts, California, called STIX. He's hungry, talented, and has hit the road with me for a few shows and tours the past year. He is really at the top of his game. STIX hustles and is definitely someone to keep an eye on. Lots of exciting things come up for him." Meanwhile, Snoop announced his 16th studio album, 'Make America Crip Again', in October. Explaining his album title, Snoop said: "Certain people feel like we should make America 'great again,' but that time they're referring to always takes me back to separation and segregation, so I'd rather make America Crip again. "What I mean by that is, in my lifetime, that's when young black men in impoverished areas came together to help their communities and to take care of their own because society basically left them for dead."

MacFarlane's 'surreal' Grammy nomination

Seth MacFarlane says it is "surreal" to be competing against Bob Dylan for a Grammy award. The Hollywood star and 'Family Guy' creator has been nominated for his 'In Full Swing' album and he is thrilled with his nomination, even though he finds it overwhelming. He told Billboard: "We're busting our asses, and we're really taking this as seriously as we possibly can and really trying to make something great. So, it's intimidating but it's also validating because we do feel good about the work. We do feel like we've really, really killed ourselves to make this everything that it could possibly be." And Seth admitted it would be validating if he and his producing partner Joel McNeely picked up the prize.

He said: "It would be doubly validating. It's fantastic to be nominated, and if I go my whole life without ever winning, I still have these nominations and that's more than I ever could have hoped for. But it would be massively validating. "We travel halfway across the globe to do these things [the album was recorded at Abbey Road Studios in London], and spend all this time casting these musicians and working through these arrangements and really kind of creating each song as its own little storytelling piece. So, on the one hand, I would be flabbergasted and overjoyed, but on the other hand, part of me says, 'Well, yeah, we put the work in, we've worked as hard as anybody when they do something like this. It's not like because I come out of television that I'm giving 50 percent. We're just trying to bring it in every way that we can.'"

Gallagher doesn't want to be a 'stadium rocker'

Noel Gallagher doesn't need to be a "stadium rocker" at his age. The 50-year-old musician believes he has "conquered the world enough" and has proved his ability on stage over the years, but since hitting the big milestone he has changed his ways and thinks being a crowd pleaser at his age is "undignified". He said: "I don't need to be a stadium rocker anymore - I did it when I was in my twenties and thirties and forties, and I was good at it. I don't particularly want to be a stadium rocker when I'm 50. I think it's undignified. "I've conquered the world enough, I've got enough money. In fact, I've got too much money. Do you want some? I'll send you some. How much do you want? I don't need any more glory." The 'Wonderwall' hitmaker quit Oasis in 2009 after he was embroiled in a spat with his brother and band mate Liam Gallagher backstage at a concert, but the star has admitted he has no plans to reunite with the group, and the thought of joining forces with the band again "doesn't enter [his] thoughts" at all. He said: "I know that people will not let it go, alright?. I'm not saying you, I just mean people in general. "It doesn't enter my thoughts at all." Although Noel has silenced any speculation of him returning to Oasis, he is "flattered" people continue to ask him because it makes him realize he was "something of real worth". He told Music Feeds Online: "I mean, it's quite flattering in a way because it means that you did something of real worth. But you know, I did it. I'm done with it."

**Girls Aloud fan Nadine Coyle**

Nadine Coyle is Girls Aloud's "biggest fan". The 'Go To Work' hitmaker may not have much of a relationship with most of her former bandmates, but she'd still love to get back on stage with Cheryl Tweedy, Kimberley Walsh, Nicola Roberts and her friend Sarah Harding at some point in the future. She said: "A reunion would be great. I love Girls Aloud. I'm their biggest fan." The 32-year-old star - who has three-year-old daughter Anaiya with partner Jason Bell - made her pop comeback this year and not only is she excited to be back, she thinks it was important to take a break from the spotlight so she had more "life experience" to write about. She said: "It was very exciting [to come back]. It was so, so exciting. It's such a release because you've been working on this music for such a long time and then when it comes it you're like 'oh thank goodness' so it feels great. "I took maybe a year off where I didn't do much singing at all. But you gain more life experiences and you write about it. You have to go away and come back, I think." The 'Biology' singer has previously claimed that tensions arose in the group - which was formed on TV talent show 'Popstars: The Rivals' in 2002 - when she was given more lead vocal parts on their hit songs. She said: "It was fine at the start but there's always politics in any band. "It just happened that I always got more vocals than everybody else, so in terms of people wanting their voice heard, that wasn't happening. And it made people, very bitter. They didn't like that ... So yeah there was [a divide]. We're all very, very different characters."

Paul Weller slams Band Aid track

Paul Weller thinks 'Do They Know It's Christmas' is "shocking". The 59-year-old singer was one of several artists who lent their vocals to Bob Geldof and Midge Ure's Band Aid single in 1984 - which raised money for famine relief in Ethiopia - and though he agrees the idea behind the track was worthwhile, he doesn't like the finished song. He said: "You couldn't argue with what Geldof was trying to achieve, but the music was shocking wasn't it? It sounded like the 'Doctor Who' theme." And the former Jam frontman felt very out of place recording the song, which was the biggest-selling UK single of all time until 1997, alongside big name pop stars of the time, including U2, Duran Duran, and the late George Michael. He added in a recent interview: "Recording that whole Band Aid single was alien to me. Everyone else involved was like a proper 80s pop star so I just felt like a fish out of water." Bob is unlikely to be upset by Paul's comments as he's previously admitted he thinks the song is one of the "worst" in history and he dreads hearing it every year. He said of the track: "I am responsible for two of the worst songs in history. "The other one is 'We Are The World'. Any day soon, I will go to the supermarket, head to the meat counter and it will be playing. Every Christmas." And the Boomtown Rats singer can't even escape it at home because he always gets carol singers at his door singing the song alongside traditional favorites such as 'O Come All Ye Faithful' or 'Away in a Manger'. He said: "They think 'Do They Know It's Christmas' is as old as 'Silent Night'. Sometimes I think that's wild because I wrote it. "Or else I am thinking how much I want them to stop because they are doing it really badly."

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Paul Bettany wraps filming on 'Avengers: Infinity War'

Paul Bettany has wrapped up filming 'Avengers: Infinity War'. The 46-year-old actor stars as Vision in the Marvel Cinematic Universe and is set to reprise his role in the highly anticipated third installment in the 'Avengers' franchise. Alongside a behind-the-scenes video from the film set, Bettany wrote on Instagram: "That's a Wrap on me - The Vision. I'll be seeing you all in May. X (sic)" As well as starring in the new 'Avengers' movie, Bettany was also recently added to the cast of the much-anticipated 'Star Wars' spin-off movie 'Solo: A Star Wars Story'. The film, which is set for release in 2018, centers on a young Han Solo, who is one of the central characters in the money-spinning sci-fi franchise. Teasing the new movie, Bettany recently described the project as a "gangster" film, while he also hailed director Ron Howard, saying he's "so brilliant". Bettany explained: "It's Han Solo's story, and of course his story would be a caper. On one level it's a gangster movie. That's really interesting, because it's within the canon but really different. It's Han Solo! His [Howard] staging ability is so brilliant. I think he went in and he was like a laser, working out what needed to be done when he looked at the footage. And then, as things moved on, everybody felt so secure with him. And they gave him more. He reshot a lot more than was originally intended."

Lorde cancels Israel show after pressure



New Zealand singer Lorde has cancelled a planned show in Israel after facing pressure from supporters of a boycott of the Jewish state over its occupation of Palestinian territory. The 21-year-old, who enjoyed phenomenal success while still a teenager, announced last week a Tel Aviv performance in June as part of a tour. After criticism from international and New Zealand activists, Lorde announced on Sunday she was cancelling the performance in Israel. "I've received an overwhelming number of messages & letters and have had a lot of discussions with people holding many views, and I think the right decision at this time is to cancel the show," Lorde wrote in a statement distributed by Naranjah, the Israeli promoters of her Tel Aviv show. "I'm not too proud to admit I didn't make the right call on this one," she said of the initial decision to perform in Israel. "I'm truly sorry to reverse my commitment to come play for you. I hope one day we can all dance." In a statement to AFP, Naranjah said: "We forgive Lorde and wish her a successful tour in Russia and the US." The movement behind the pressure on Lorde is known as BDS-Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions-and says it is inspired by the campaign that targeted South Africa's apartheid regime and is seeking an end to Israel's occupation of the West Bank. In July, BDS activists failed to get Radiohead to call off its show in Tel Aviv despite heavy pressure from artists such as Pink Floyd's Roger Waters and director Ken Loach. Israel sees BDS as a strategic threat and accuses it of anti-Semitism-a claim activists firmly deny, calling it an attempt to discredit them. A few politically active musicians have called off shows in Israel over the past years, including Lauryn Hill and Elvis Costello.

Efron says Jackman cannot calm down



Hugh Jackman is "very hard to calm down", according to Zac Efron. The 30-year-old Hollywood hunk - who appears alongside the 'X-Men' star in the new movie musical 'The Greatest Showman' - says his co-star is as "perfect as it gets". Speaking to news.com.au, Efron said: "When he sings, if he wants to hold a note, if it's like 'Today...' he'll naturally sing, 'TODAAAAAAAAY'." "He has this natural vibrato that's very hard to calm down. He admits it's hard to calm down from years of being on Broadway." "Other than that, he's as perfect as it gets." The new movie - which is helmed by Michael Gracey - follows the true story of P.T. Barnum, an American showman, politician, and businessman remembered for promoting celebrated hoaxes and for founding the Barnum & Bailey Circus. Efron and Jackman appear alongside 'Spider-Man: Homecoming' star Zendaya in the movie. And the 21-year-old actress has hailed Jackman's positive approach to life. She said: "He's very terrible at being a negative person, he just can't do it. I don't think there's a negative bone in his body." Meanwhile, Jackman - who stars as the ring master in the film - 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."

Margot Robbie loves an 'underdog story'



Margot Robbie was eager to star in 'I, Tonya' because she loves an "underdog story". The 27-year-old actress plays the role of former American figure skater Tonya Harding in the Craig Gillespie-directed movie, and Margot has revealed why she was so keen to star in the film. She explained: "I love gangster films 'cause I love the underdog story. I love watching someone rise up, despite their circumstances. It's always something I feel like I can get behind. And she felt like an underdog, to me." The movie tells the story of Tonya and Jeff Gillooly, who hired a man to break the leg of Nancy Kerrigan - Tonya's competitor - at the National Figure Skating Championship in 1994. The incident ended Tonya's career, but Margot said she admires her character's "rebelliousness". The Australian star told Collider: "She had this scrappiness and rebelliousness that is obviously fun, but she was also, in my eyes, really misunderstood. I could see this bravado and this defiance was really just covering a lot of hurt and a lack of love. "There were so many elements to her that I needed to explore. And then, of course, once I started looking at the online footage, I couldn't believe what she'd gone through and how harshly she was punished." Margot expressed some sympathy with Tonya, who pleaded guilty to hindering the prosecution following the attack on her rival. Margot said: "She was chasing the American dream and was just about to get it, and the whole thing came tumbling down. "Skating was her one safe place in the world, and that was taken away from her. I don't care if you think she did it or not, I don't think she deserved that punishment."

Pitch Perfect 3 director explains absence of male stars



Pitch Perfect 3 left out its male character because it was "time to make a fresh start". Adam Devine, Ben Platt and Skylar Astin have no role in the third movie in the franchise and director Trish Sie believes it was important for the female characters to move on from them. She told The Hollywood Reporter: "When I came aboard, the version of the script that was in play already had those decisions made. And maybe I could have fought hard to bring them back if I really disagreed with that decision, but I didn't, because there was some scheduling stuff involved-Ben Platt is busy winning awards on Broadway [for 'Dear Evan Hansen'] - but I think the main purpose was these girls are moving on with their life. Maybe they'll get back to these guys at some point. A lot of people don't end up with their college boyfriend and we wanted it to be about them and their independence and finding their way in the world and moving ahead alone. And it just felt like it was time to make a fresh start." And Trish hopes the third film in the series - which stars Anna Kendrick and Rebel Wilson - will not be its last. She said: "I mean, of course that's above my pay grade and I have no idea and am not the one making the decisions but as far as I am concerned, I would see these movies on and on and on until they start sucking. I think whether it's these women in the next stage of life or it's a new group of women going through these things, I think there are endless ways to chart the course of the girls' lives and a woman's life. There's so many archetypal scenes in these movies that, to me, if you get the right chemistry-and this cast of course has amazing chemistry and that's why it works-so if you were to do a reboot you'd have to spend a lot of time making the chemistry right. But assuming you can get that-singing, dancing, laughing, solving problems together, unlikely heroes, band of misfits-that stuff is sort of timeless and wonderful and, as far as I am concerned, I would watch it over and over and over again."

Dominic Cooper embraces stunt work

Dominic Cooper loves doing his own stunts. The 39-year-old actor stars as Special Boat Service officer John Stratton in 'Stratton', which is based on a series of books by former SBS officer Duncan Falconer, and he rejected having a body double to take part in the action scenes himself, and though he almost had an accident, he enjoyed the adrenaline rush they brought. He said: "I loved doing the stunts. If you trust the stunt team and you invest in the stunts and believe they are believable. These were all very specific and well researched. Leaping from driving car into a bus - nearly went wrong - but was good. "It gives you the adrenaline to move onto the new scene. I was very privileged to be playing people who are looking out for the country." Dominic is now looking ahead to the upcoming 'Mamma Mia!' sequel, and is delighted all the original cast will be returning - though he thinks the years have taken their toll since the original was released in 2008. He told BANG Showbiz: "'Mamma Mia 2' is in the works we are all dancing. All the original cast are returning. We are all there. All a bit baggy around the gills. We are all a bit more sunburnt." And the British star is also kept busy with his TV show 'Preacher' and hopes it continues to run for some time. He said: "It's great fun and that TV show has so much scope. I hope they do because it has been so daring so far and the wealth of disgust and intrigue that we have left to show on the screen. I think it will be real shame not to let everyone see that."



'Avengers: Infinity War will be a cinematic event'

'Avengers: Infinity War will be a "cinematic event". Star Karen Gillan - who plays Nebula in the Marvel 'Guardians of the Galaxy' and 'Avengers' movies - is excited for fans to see the upcoming film and insists they will be blown away. She told The Hollywood Reporter: "I mean, this is so vague but genuinely this is going to be more than a movie, it's going to be like a cinematic event. Anyone who is a Marvel fan and knows stuff from 10 years ago will see it become relevant in this. It's like everything that you've known about Marvel is building to this movie." Karen also revealed that the atmosphere on set was one of the best she ever experienced. She told Collider: "I don't know how chaotic it is. It's just an extremely long shoot with so many characters. Logistically, it must be a challenge for them to schedule it. I guess that's where the chaos comes from. But, it's so much fun. In terms of atmosphere on set, it's one of the best I've ever experienced. Everybody is just having a really good time, at least of what I've seen. They've set a really nice tone for the environment, so I'm having a good time." Meanwhile, Karen co-stars with The Rock in the 'Jumanji' reboot and she is a huge fan of his comedic abilities. She said: "He's so inspiring. I've never met anyone that works harder than him. I mean he is one of the biggest actors in the world while running this empire and he has a family and maintains his body. I'm just like, 'How do you do that?' We had a great relationship. We were laughing a lot. I just think he's one of my favorite comedic actors now, like I love his dry delivery. It's, like, crazy." — Bang Showbiz





One of the world's largest nativity scene, accommodating 778 figures in a huge cabinet is pictured in the Austrian village of Christkindl ("Christ Child"). — AFP photos



The silhouette of the Pilgrim Church (Wallfahrtskirche) is seen in the village of Christkindl.



A wax figure of the Christ child is seen at an altar of the Pilgrim Church (Wallfahrtskirche) in the village of Christkindl.

'CHRIST CHILD', AUSTRIA'S CHRISTMAS VILLAGE

Traditionally in Austria, and elsewhere in Europe, it's not Santa who gives out the gifts but the "Christkindl" ("Christ Child"). And in the village actually called Christkindl, it's busy right now. Every Christmas period the small village sets up a temporary post office to stamp almost two million Christmas cards with a special postmark, and using a different design every day. "When you consider the number of inhabitants it's certainly a record, particularly seeing as this happens over just six weeks," says Eva Poetzl from the local tourism office.

“The post office of Christkindl is the only way to give a personal gift”

Post transports them here to be stamped, including from abroad," Poetzl told AFP. Gerhard Eismayr, one of several thousand people who make the pilgrimage to Christkindl to get his greetings cards stamped in person, said it's a worthwhile experience. "If I want to give my friends and acquaintances something very personal, there is only one way: the post office of Christkindl," the pensioner from nearby Wels told AFP.

“It says I'm making the effort for you to do something personal and nice... a postcard with a stamp from here.”

"Either people bring the letters themselves or, more usually, a special service by the Austrian

Children from all over the world also write to the "Christ Child" and their letters are even

answered—provided the kids include a self-addressed and stamped envelope.

Miracle

The special post office in Christkindl has been running since 1950 but the fame of the northern Austrian village on top of a hill dates back to the 17th century. In the winter of 1691, one Ferdinand Sertl placed a small Christ Child in a niche he had cut in a pine tree and prayed to be relieved on his epilepsy. His prayers were answered. Word spread and soon afterwards today's Baroque church was built on the site, with the original tree trunk visible in the altar. Nearby meanwhile is a musical, mechanical Nativity scene of 300 wooden Biblical figures tottering around thanks to a unique contraption of bicycle chains, shafts and gear wheels. And that's not even the village's only Nativity scene. Christkindl's second one is one of the world's largest, accommodating 778 figures in a huge cabinet. — AFP



Details from one of the world's largest nativity scene, accommodating 778 figures in a huge cabinet are pictured.



Visitors look at one of the world's largest nativity scene, accommodating 778 figures in a huge cabinet in the Austrian village of Christkindl.



A wax figure of the Christ child is seen at an altar of the Pilgrim Church (Wallfahrtskirche).



Martina Prinz of the Austrian Post shows this year's collection of Christmas post stamps and marks at the post office in the village of Christkindl.



Ferdinand Jakob looks at a moving, mechanical Nativity scene of 300 wooden Biblical figures tottering around thanks to a unique contraption of bicycle chains, shafts and gear wheels in the village of Christkindl.



A post office worker stamps envelopes with Christmas postmarks.



A tourist looks at the Pilgrim Church (Wallfahrtskirche) in the village of Christkindl.



A woman walks by a village sign in Steyr Christkindl, Austria.



Visitors buy Christmas post stamps and send letters at a post office in the village of Christkindl.



Visitors buy Christmas post stamps and send letters at a post office in the village of Christkindl.



People walking through an arcade in Al-Mubarakiya Souk in Kuwait City. — AFP photos



A butcher cutting meat in a shop in Al-Mubarakiya Souk.

Al-Mubarakiya Souk in Kuwait City



A man carves pieces of shawarma to serve at a restaurant in Al-Mubarakiya Souk.



Women sitting at a table in a small restaurant in Al-Mubarakiya Souk in Kuwait City.



A baker retrieving finished bread from an oven in a restaurant kitchen in Al-Mubarakiya Souk.



A shopkeeper piles ice next to frozen fish on display in a fish market at Al-Mubarakiya Souk.



A baker preparing dough for flat bread in a restaurant kitchen in Al-Mubarakiya Souk.



Bakers preparing flat bread dough in a restaurant kitchen in Al-Mubarakiya Souk.



Bakers preparing dough for flat bread in a restaurant kitchen in Al-Mubarakiya Souk.



A view of a date shop in Al-Mubarakiya Souk in Kuwait City.



A shopkeeper sitting next to his merchandise of dates outside his shop in Al-Mubarakiya Souk.



People watch a football match on a big screen in the square outside Al-Mubarakiya Souk.

Lifestyle

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 26, 2017



Kosovar children dressed as angels pray prior to the Christmas mass eve, marking the birth of Jesus Christ, on December 24, 2017 at the Mother Teresa cathedral in Pristina. — AFP

Jerusalem tensions cast shadow over Holy Land Christmas

Where's Santa? US-Canadian military command track St Nick



US President Donald J Trump and the First Lady Melania Trump participate in NORAD Santa Tracker phone calls at the Mar-a-Lago resort in Palm Beach, Florida on December 24, 2017. — AFP

It's the question every good little girl and boy asks on Christmas Eve: When is Santa coming? As it has done every year since the 1950s, a Canadian and American defense agency tracked the jolly old man's path around the globe in his reindeer-powered sleigh. A 3-D, interactive website at www.noradsanta.org showed Santa on his delivery route, allowing users to click and learn more about the various cities along the way.

The Santa tracker presented by the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) dates to 1955, when a Colorado newspaper advertisement printed a phone number to connect children with St Nick but mistakenly directed them to the hotline for the military nerve center. To avoid disappointing the little ones, NORAD's director of operations at the time, Colonel Harry Shoup, ordered his staff to check the radar to see where Santa might be and update the children on his location. President Donald Trump joined in the NORAD tradition on Sunday, answering the phone from his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida. "What would you like more than anything?" the president asked one child. "Building blocks, that's what I've always liked too. I always loved building blocks," Trump said after the child responded. Another asked help for his hospitalized grandmother. "So you want your grandma to get out of the hospital? That's what your wish is? That's great. That's better than asking for some toy or something," Trump said. "Your grandma's gonna be good, okay, she's gonna be good." First Lady Melania Trump also took calls: "How

are you? Merry Christmas. Are you tracking Santa? Do you know where he is right now?" she asked. "As soon as you go to sleep, Santa will be there." When not spreading holiday cheer, NORAD conducts aerospace and maritime control and warning operations-including monitoring for missile launches from North Korea, something that may have been on Santa's mind as he passed over the country's capital Pyongyang.

"NORAD radars have sensed movement near the North Pole. It appears that the elves have finished loading Santa's sleigh and Santa has lifted off! Even loaded with all the gifts and goodies, Santa's sleigh seems to be moving lightning fast," the website said in a video clip at the launch of Santa's global journey. As of 1100 GMT, Santa had made his way back to the North Pole, having left more than 7.2 billion gifts in his wake. Volunteers manning the NORAD phone line included military members in uniform. One soldier completed his look with a camouflage Santa hat, according to photos on the website's Twitter account.

The Santa tracker "has become a magical tradition for generations of families everywhere," General Lori Robinson, commander of the US Northern Command and NORAD, told Politico. "While certainly a reminder that we have the watch defending North America, our ultimate goal is to provide goodwill and cheer during the holiday season." Volunteers are armed with a 14-page handbook detailing the "tracking operation," Politico reported. — AFP

Palestinian scouts played drums and bagpipes at Christmas celebrations in Bethlehem on Sunday, but many tourists stayed away with tensions still simmering following Washington's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital. The December 6 announcement by US President Donald Trump unleashed demonstrations and clashes, including in Bethlehem in the Israeli-occupied West Bank where Christians will mark the birth of Jesus at a midnight mass. On Bethlehem's Manger Square, hundreds of Palestinians and tourists gathered in the cold near a huge nativity scene and Christmas tree to watch the annual scout parade.

They took pictures as a marching band made its way through the square towards the Church of the Nativity, built over the spot where tradition says Mary gave birth to Jesus. The square usually throngs with tourists on Christmas Eve, but clashes between Palestinian protesters and the Israeli army in the past weeks have kept people away this year. Twelve Palestinians have been killed since Trump's declaration, including a 19-year-old who died of his wounds on Sunday nine days after he was shot during a Gaza protest. Sami Khoury, who runs the Visit Palestine online tourism portal, said many visitors had cancelled their Christmas trips. "There weren't even that many Palestinians, let alone tourists" at the celebration, he said, blaming Trump's decision for ruining the atmosphere. "It doesn't feel like Christmas." In the square, South Korean Joon Hong, 35, said he was not religious but wanted to experience the Christmas atmosphere. "People look happy and ready for Christmas. It looks good," he said. Nahil Banura, a Christian woman from Beit Sahur, near Bethlehem, said Trump's decision had made the run-up to Christmas "miserable". "People are only going out to vent," she said. Perhaps as few as 50,000 Palestinian Christians make up just around two percent of the predominantly Muslim population of the West Bank and east Jerusalem. Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa, apostolic administrator of the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, visited the Church of the Nativity Sunday afternoon. He said last week that "dozens" of foreign visitors had cancelled their Christmas trips after Trump's announcement.

But Israel's tourism ministry has said Christmas preparations have not been affected, and it expects a 20 percent increase in the number of Christian pilgrims this year compared with 2016. An Israeli police spokesman said that extra units would be deployed in Jerusalem and at the crossings to Bethlehem to ease the travel and access for the "thousands of tourists and visitors". And the Israeli army officer in charge of the Bethlehem area said that while tensions had been high in the area following the Jerusalem announcement, he did not expect trouble on Christmas.

"We've reinforced our troops, and are ready for any scenario," Lieutenant Colonel Benny Meir told AFP. Israel seized east Jerusalem in the 1967 Middle East war and later annexed it, in moves never recognized by the international community. Palestinians view east Jerusalem as the capital of their future state, and interpreted Trump's statement as rejecting their right to a capital in east Jerusalem, although the Americans deny this.



People take part in the Christmas Eve celebrations at the Manger Square outside the Church of the Nativity in the town of Bethlehem in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. — AFP photos

Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas said Trump's announcement "encouraged the illegal disconnection between the holy cities of Bethlehem and Jerusalem... for the first time in over 2,000 years of Christianity". Mitri Raheb, pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church in Bethlehem, told AFP on Sunday that Christmas this year is a "mix of sadness and joy" because of the US decision on Jerusalem, which he called "the beating heart of Palestine."

Christmas in Mosul

In neighboring Egypt, Coptic Christians who celebrate Christmas on January 6 saw a church in Giza attacked by a mob following Muslim prayers on Friday, the latest in some 20 such incidents in 2017. Hundreds entered the church, chanting slogans calling for its demolition, destroying furniture

and attacking worshippers before security forces restored order. Christmas decorations have meanwhile become more visible in Christian areas of the Syrian capital Damascus this year.

In the central city of Homs, Christians will celebrate Christmas with great fanfare for the first time in years after the end of battles between regime and rebel forces, with processions, shows for children and even decorations among the ruins. In Iraq too, this year marks a positive turning point for the Christian community in the northern city of Mosul. Hymns filled a Mosul church on Sunday as worshippers celebrated Christmas for the first time in four years after the city's recapture from the Islamic State group in July. Muslims stood alongside Christian worshippers amid the candles and Christmas trees at St Paul's Church. — AFP



A man takes a selfie at the Manger Square outside the Church of the Nativity as people gather for Christmas Eve celebrations in the town of Bethlehem. — AFP